

Minority firms take aim at change, launch nonprofit diversity program

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After months of planning and recruiting business partners, the National Association of Minority Contractors of Oregon (NAMCO) has launched its new nonprofit agency aimed at growing minority participation on construction projects in the Portland region.

In April, NAMCO announced plans to form the Metropolitan Contractor Improvement Partnership – a nonprofit collaboration between public and private construction contractors, public agencies and minority firms.



Industry partners gathered Tuesday morning to officially launch the new program, which will provide public and private contractors with independent reviews of minority participation on large construction projects throughout the region.

“MCIP is one of the most exciting things I’ve seen in years – this thing is huge,” said John Jackley, director of the business equity department at the Portland Development Commission.

The organization has already set its sights on two large upcoming construction projects – the Centennial Mills mixed-use development in Portland’s Pearl District in partnership with the PDC and the Oregon Department of Transportation’s \$30 million modernization of Highway 217 near Beaverton.

The Metropolitan Contractor Improvement Partnership will work directly with general contractors on the projects to identify opportunities for work with minority subcontractors enrolled in the partnership’s program.

“The Highway 217 project will see a contract structured differently than any ODOT contract in the past,” said ODOT director Matt Garrett, who’s working with TriMet to develop a workforce diversity plan on the project.

NAMCO members have been vocal critics of what they say is ODOT’s poor record for hiring African American subcontractors on its public contracting projects. The organization has taken ODOT to task on

the \$60 million Delta Park project under construction by Hamilton Construction Co., which has so far awarded less than 1 percent of contract dollars to African American firms.

Garrett acknowledged the controversy at Tuesday's event and promised to change the way the agency does business. But, he said, he's relying on the agency's general contractors to make the bulk of the effort in involving minority firms on ODOT projects.

"Hamilton and Delta Park may be the bellwether," Garrett said, "and we can do better."

Some of Oregon's biggest names in private and public construction contracting attended the event, including Hoffman Construction Co., Stacy and Witbeck, Walsh Construction Co., Slayden Construction, Hamilton Construction and Kiewit. They were joined by public contracting agencies TriMet, the Oregon Department of Transportation, the Portland Development Commission and the Housing Authority of Portland, among others.

"If you wanted to put together a power breakfast, this is it," Bill Bruce, a vice president of Stacy and Witbeck, said. "Everyone who can make a difference (in minority contracting) is here."

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