

## Portland considers minority oversight for contract review panels

by Nathalie Weinstein

Published: December 9th, 2009



Roy Jay, president of the Alliance of Minority Chambers

Despite good-faith efforts of the past 25 years, the city of Portland says it is still inconsistent in its efforts to include minorities in its contractor evaluation and selection processes.

That's why **Portland City Council** next week will vote whether to approve a resolution submitted by Commissioner **Randy Leonard** that would require the inclusion of at least one minority evaluator on all panels that review and award city contracts not based on low bids.

According to the resolution, Portland's **Alliance of Minority Chambers** will work with organizations such as the **Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs** to provide city bureaus with recommendations for minority experts to serve on contract review and award panels.

"Think of this as a jury pool," said **Roy Jay**, president of the Alliance of Minority Chambers. "You agree to serve. It won't guarantee anybody any contracts, but it will put minorities at the table instead of under it."

But **Maurice Rahming** and **Faye Burch**, president and vice president of the **National Association of Minority Contractors Oregon**, respectively, have concerns about the city's choice of the alliance to vet candidates to sit on the review panels.

"I think the alliance is a good organization," Rahming said. "But as the city tries to solve problems in fair contracting, it makes sense to contact the people that have their boots on the ground and not go with an association, that to my knowledge, doesn't have as strong of a contractor base or membership as other groups."

"There are a lot of people that should have been involved in the development of this resolution that were not," Burch said. "The people who stand to benefit from this are the people who are actually bidding on those projects."

Jay said that if the resolution passes, his group will set up a Web site where parties interested in sitting on the contract panels can register their qualifications. The alliance will then make a list of qualified candidates from those applications, and the city will make a final decision on candidates from that list.

"I want to clarify that these people are not going to be all members of the chambers," Jay said. "People will be harvested from the chambers and the entire business community. This also does not circumvent us from recommending people that aren't people of color, like small business owners."

President of OAME Jorge Guerra said he is keeping an eye on the process, which he hopes will lead to a broader range of people becoming involved in the contract review process.

"Portland is a small city," Guerra said. "I can go to several meetings in a day and see the same people at all of those meetings. We want to try and invite those people who are not active to participate."

Still, Rahming said that working with a group more contractor-based like NAMCO or OAME, rather than the alliance, could have sped up the process of compiling a list of qualified candidates.

"We had a conversation about this resolution with the city, but I don't know how they made the decision to choose the alliance," Rahming said. "It might take a while for them to find out what the issues are out there with contracting. I'm not opposed to minority oversight, but I'd like to see an oversight committee involved in contracting."

The resolution states that NAMCO, OAME and other minority-based business associations will be consulted to provide lists of qualified candidates. But until the resolution is passed, it remains to be seen what the alliance's vetting process will entail.

City Council will vote on the issue at its meeting on Wednesday. If it passes, the **Portland Development Commission** plans to implement a similar program that would extend to development contracts, according to John Jackley, director of communications and business equity for the PDC.