

## **Los Angeles County Supervisors Concerned about Lack of Opportunity for Minority Contractors**

*By Our Community Works*

*Dated: May 19, 2009*

*The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has ordered the review of the procedures and practices in awarding county construction contracts and the virtual exclusion of minority contractors.*

After Our Community Works (OCW) held a special meeting several weeks ago with representatives of Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas to discuss concerns pertinent to small, minority businesses, specifically contractors, the supervisor moved aggressively to address those specific issues. Evidence of his sensitivity and caring for members of the community was apparent by his swift action to present recommendations of resolve to the Board of Supervisors during the May 12th board meeting.

A review was ordered on minority pacts by the County supervisors to determine whether the county is failing to meet its goal of awarding 25% of contracts to local businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans and the disabled. Other recommendations by Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas relative to issues confronting small, minority businesses included: outreach methods to the business community; identifying obstacles to Community Business Enterprise (CBE) participation in County contracting, including entity formation issues, business credit issues, bonding and County bidding procedures and include recommended measures to resolve these obstacles; appointing or creating the position of a Director to coordinate and develop all of these programs Countywide and to assist County departments in meeting goals established by the Board.

Bill Releford, founder and president of Our Community Works, addressed the board with the question, "Why is there such disparity in our community with our local contractors doing business with the county of Los Angeles"? He pointed out the complexity of the bidding packet, inconsistencies in the county's bidding process, and quoted statistics regarding the disproportionate number of registered contractors vs. the number who actively bid on projects.

Tom Tindall, director of Internal Services, acknowledged that out of hundreds of eligible contractors registered with the county, often only a dozen successfully bid on and receive contracts. "We obviously need to do a better job of getting the word out," he said.

Other contractors and OCW teams members who spoke to the board in support of Supervisor Ridley-Thomas' recommendations were Phillip Dawkins, Jr., Robert Chelsea, Stephan Jones, and John Morris.

According to Releford, Our Community Works is confident that it's efforts to improve the status of small businesses are working. He noted that OCW has recently noticed a significant increase in the number of contractors who are now aware of and are taking advantage of resources available to them since having responded to OCW'S Bridging the Gap Between Contractors and Contract Opportunities outreach program. "After months of research and interviewing numerous contractors, we have identified specifically many of their underlying challenges and developed a program to address them," said Releford. He continued, "We have many irons in the fire that will prove extremely beneficial to our struggling contractors."

Stephan Jones, an electrician, praised the assistance of OCW in his having been awarded a contract with the county.

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Our Community Works is a 501c3 non profit focused on developing economic opportunities for our diverse community consisting of small. female, black and other minorities. It is very important that we are competitive and given equal opportunity in the current economy. Our motto is "Bridge the Gap " specifically for female and minority contractors.

Category	Construction, Government, Non Profit
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