
Allegheny County MBE Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Homestead Grays Room, One Smithfield Street Building
Thursday, May 19, 2011
5:00 p.m.

Advisory Committee Members in Attendance:

Kenneth Huston – President/CEO, Huston Trust, Inc.
James Johnston – Senior Business Development Specialist, Allegheny County Department of Economic Development (for Dennis Davin)
Philip La May, Deputy Director of Administration and Operations, Allegheny County Department of Public Works (for Joseph Olczak)
Glenn Loper – Senior Purchasing Agent, Allegheny County Purchasing Division (for Timothy Johnson)
M. Gayle Moss – Chair/President, MBE Advisory Committee/NAACP Pittsburgh Branch
Toni Silva – Supplier Relations Director, UPMC
Tim Stevens – Chairman, Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP)

Advisory Committee Members Absent:

Dennis Davin – Director, Allegheny County Department of Economic Development
Victor Diaz – CEO, Pittsburgh Metropolitan Area Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Mark Patrick Flaherty – Controller, Office of the Allegheny County Controller
Amy Griser – Director, Allegheny County Department of Budget and Finance
Timothy Johnson – Allegheny County Department of Administrative Services
Abass Kamara – Director of Government Affairs, Pittsburgh Penguins
Marc Little – CEO/President, Minority and Women Educational Labor Agency (MWELA)
Iftikhar Malik – President, Shawn Malik, Inc.
Joseph Olczak – Director, Allegheny County Department of Public Works
Im Sook Reinhart – President, Controls Link, Inc.

Also Present:

Ruth Byrd-Smith – Director, Allegheny County Department of M/W/DBE
Lisa Edmonds – Deputy Director, Allegheny County Department of M/W/DBE

Agenda:

- I. Open Meeting**
- II. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**
- III. Explanation of Proposed Ordinance**
- IV. New Business—Discussion of New Administration**
- V. Director's Report**
- VI. Miscellaneous**
- VII. Adjournment**

I. Open Meeting**II. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

The minutes from the January 26, 2011 meeting were reviewed and approved.

III. Explanation of Proposed Ordinance

The ordinance that Councilman William Robinson developed states that Allegheny County employees should not be part of the Advisory Committee. The ordinance had been e-mailed to the Committee for review. Tim Stevens expressed disagreement with the ordinance in a reply e-mail, and M. Gayle Moss disagreed with it as well. Due to the impending change in administration, Councilman Robinson decided to delay putting the ordinance before Council, but Ms. Moss would still like to hear the Committee members' opinions.

Toni Silva asked why Councilman Robinson developed the ordinance. When he spoke with Ms. Moss, he expressed his feeling that County employees participating in the Committee creates a conflict of interest. She made mention of the fact that Councilman Robinson has been invited to several Advisory Committee meetings to discuss the ordinance. Ms. Silva also expressed disagreement with the ordinance. A history of events leading up to the creation of the ordinance was reviewed. Philip La May stated that the Department of Public Works is glad to be part of the Committee and have the ability to provide input on M/W/DBE issues; however, it is awkward to vote on recommendations to be made to your boss. He suggested that County employees on the Committee abstain from voting when these opportunities arise. James Johnston agreed and made reference to the fact that he abstained from voting on the disparity study. Ms. Silva felt that if County employees are not going to vote on recommendations, they should at least attend the meetings. Glenn Loper understood the potential conflict but felt that there is no point in participating in the Committee if one cannot express him or herself, especially if they are attending on behalf of their immediate supervisor.

Ms. Moss wanted to make sure that everyone understands what Councilman Robinson wants to accomplish with this ordinance but again referenced the fact that it is currently on hold. Ms. Byrd-Smith suggested that the Committee members who have not yet done so review the entire M/W/DBE portion of the County's Administrative Code. Many revisions have been made over time since the County's structure has changed. Ms. Byrd-Smith gave the Committee some background on the changes that ensued over the years.

Mr. Stevens felt that it is beneficial to have County staff members available to the Committee. Ms. Moss stated that Councilman Robinson told her that he would like to see more outside people on the Committee. Mr. Stevens proposed increasing the number of Committee members from 15 to 19 to allow for the inclusion of four County employees. Also, the County

employees could abstain from any votes the Committee takes. Ms. Silva asked if the whole issue stemmed from the voting issue and Ms. Moss replied that Councilman Robinson was not specific as to his motivation for the ordinance. Ms. Byrd-Smith is unclear as to his motivation because the Advisory Committee is not a policy-making committee. It was noted that County employees on the Committee tend to attend meetings more frequently.

Mr. Stevens suggested reviewing Chapter 435 and meeting thereafter to discuss it. Ms. Moss agreed, proposing that the Committee at that time compile recommendations for revising the Chapter and having them ready for the new County Executive.

IV. New Business—Discussion of New Administration

Ms. Moss asked the Committee to be mindful of the fact that there will be a new administration coming in next year and clarification might be needed as to the issues on which the new County Executive would like the Committee to focus. She noted that she has already discussed with County Executive Dan Onorato the possibility of adding extra staff and funding to the M/W/DBE Department, particularly to increase advertisement of the Department.

V. Director's Report

Ms. Byrd-Smith updated the Committee on the events and workshops in which the M/W/DBE Department has participated and attended since the last Advisory Committee meeting. While discussing the Black History Month luncheon with the Governor that she attended, she noted that the current State budget factored in no funding for any of the State minority commissions. Ms. Byrd-Smith suggested that the Advisory Committee hold one of their upcoming meetings at Amani International Coffeehouse and Café, which participated in the press conference given to announce grant funding to the Christian Evangelistic Economic Development (CEED) to aid African entrepreneurs now living in the Pittsburgh area. Amani imports its coffee directly from Africa.

VI. Miscellaneous

Mr. Stevens asked what had been decided about requesting the disparity study and Ms. Moss replied that the Committee decided not to move forward. A discussion ensued regarding the M/W/DBE Department's efforts to track M/W/DBE spending. Ms. Moss commented that that information should be advertised. Mr. Stevens asked Ms. Byrd-Smith if she ever provided this information to the New Pittsburgh Courier and she answered no. Ms. Silva suggested posting the information online. Ms. Byrd-Smith noted that frequently there are only one or two bidders on County contracts because several years ago the turnaround time for payment was extremely slow and companies got turned off from doing business with the County. Mr. Loper thought that the M/W/DBE Department providing free BidNet subscriptions for its certified firms was helpful. Ms. Silva asked if this is the highest the numbers have been, and Ms. Byrd-Smith replied that they tend to be about the same from year to year. Ms. Byrd-Smith pointed out County funds spent with faith-based firms, African American-based nonprofits and faith-based African American-based nonprofits.

Kenneth Huston stated that he has heard many complaints from the community that they are not receiving the services that County dollars fund. Mr. Johnston offered that each County department is responsible for monitoring its nonprofits; he said that Economic Development recently stopped a contract with one company that was ineffective and began working with another company. Mr. Huston asked about the process that Economic Development used. Mr.

Johnston made reference to the fact that much of their funding is provided by HUD, which has an entire manual on monitoring. Also, the County Law Department has encouraged very specific language to be used within these contracts. Mr. Huston offered that while Allegheny County provides funding to nonprofit agencies for social services such as workforce development, Pittsburgh is ranked number 1 of 40 metropolitan cities as having the most African American working poor. He stated that CEOs of some local nonprofit agencies make six figures. Ms. Moss referenced the fact that the NAACP receives many complaints and upon close investigation many of them are not legit.

Ms. Silva wondered if customer surveys could be mandated. Ms. Byrd-Smith answered that Lisa Edmonds presents information on M/W/DBE reporting at information sessions held every year for the County's service providers. Since becoming director of the M/W/DBE Department, Ms. Byrd-Smith has strived to quantify the hard dollars, and grant dollars are now being examined. She would like to see the Department of Human Services do something with how they buy services from nonprofits and how they feed that information back to the M/W/DBE Department. Ms. Moss maintained that marketing the services of the M/W/DBE Department is key. She also noted that some people are computer-shy, so information should be advertised in other ways. Mr. Stevens made a motion for a quarterly report to be submitted to the Courier and Mr. Huston seconded the motion. Ms. Byrd-Smith said that she would get the County's Communications Department involved in deciding how to report this information.

Mr. Huston asked if the certification application process was extensive and Ms. Byrd-Smith said that the certification application requests very basic information. She explained that the paperwork is designated by federal DOT. She noted that changes have recently been made to the personal net worth cap for the business owner and gross annual receipts cap for the business.

Ms. Moss expressed concern regarding the lack of minorities involved with the Marcellus Shale project. She would like the Committee to think about action to take to try to get minorities included in the process. Mr. Huston did not like the fact that most of those working on the project are coming here from other states to do so. He noted that Marcellus Shale workers need training to perform these jobs. Ms. Silva offered that the M/W/DBE Department made available representatives at their Open House last year to educate M/W/DBEs on opportunities within the industry, but Ms. Moss felt that the job focus has shifted since then. She thought that the Committee might want to voice concern with regarding to drilling within Allegheny County. At a previous Advisory Committee meeting Mark Patrick Flaherty volunteered to draft a letter regarding the inclusion of minorities in the Marcellus Shale project on behalf of the Committee, and several Committee members thought that that he should still do so.

VII. Adjournment