

# Bolling: Building boom must include minorities, women

Joyce Ferriabough Bolling Sunday, March 26, 2017  
Boston Herald

As the Bay State's building boom continues to reshape our city and our commonwealth, I believe that every developer who applies for a permit should be required, or otherwise strictly encouraged, to hire minorities and women — not just to serve as members of their workforce, but to provide expertise as subcontractors, architects, engineers and brokers.

Why? Because it will go a long way toward leveling out a still uneven playing field in that industry, put a dent in unemployment — especially in communities where unemployment runs twice the city and state average — and help small and neighborhood businesses thrive.

There are many ways it can be done. If there's a will, there's a way.

Tax incentives have always been a helpful encouragement. Another approach would be negotiating joint ventures, or apprenticeship opportunities for young people.

Unfortunately, a strong and consistent call for promoting and fostering a climate of fairness and equality is not enough.

Not even community development corporations should get a pass from hiring minority and women contractors. Although they've always been trusted to do just that, some organizations, like the NAACP, feel they should work harder when it comes to hiring more contractors of color and to ensuring more opportunities for minorities.

In Roxbury's Dudley Square, some developers may feel they've hit pay dirt. It's one of the few areas in the city where land and rent are still affordable, though not by much. One of my neighbors calls it, "strategic sleight of hand" when some developers hitch their wagons to the city's economic boom while touting their project as "compatible with the neighborhood" yet offer mostly market-rate housing in a community that can least afford it.

To add insult to injury — many don't have one person of color on their team, don't do business with minority businesses nor do they feel compelled to hire local workers.

In her first term in office, City Councilor Ayanna Pressley has made the city's Boston Residents Jobs Policy more transparent by requiring that numbers be posted online. And, to their credit, the city has been more aggressive in monitoring and pushing for

results. Pressley is now working to make procurement opportunities more transparent to expand business opportunities.

We are fortunate to have community activists like Rodney Singleton, Jed Hresko, Priscilla Flint, and Brother Lo, among others, keeping watch. Our get-it-done mayor, Martin J. Walsh, has already moved a couple of big projects in communities of color, including the Tremont Crossing project, which had been languishing for more than a decade. Also underway are a \$45 million Roxbury development by Cruz construction that will also provide housing for seniors and Madison Park CDC just announced a project that touts homeownership opportunities.

But there's still a lot of catching up to do when it comes to including minorities in the many major downtown developments where the real boom is unfolding.

Some folks seem to have not gotten the message that diversity on their projects in a majority minority city is not only smart but good business.