

# City ponders how to boost hiring of certain groups in construction industry

By Matt Rocheleau GLOBE STAFF APRIL 12, 2016

After years of disappointing results from an ordinance intended to increase the hiring of Boston residents, women, and minorities to construction jobs, the city of Boston is eyeing changes to make it more effective.

“We’re in the middle of a major building boom in Boston, so we want to make sure we’re creating opportunities for everyone to be included in that,” said Karilyn Crockett, the city’s director of economic policy and research.

“There’s work to do on all of these construction projects to ensure we’re providing on-ramps for residents, women, and people of color to get jobs,” she added.

A 37-year-old city ordinance, called the Boston Residents Jobs Policy, requires construction companies to demonstrate good faith efforts to guarantee that 50 percent of all hours worked go to Boston residents, 25 percent go to minorities, and 10 percent go to women. The companies must report their performance to the city.

The idea is to ensure that highly desirable building trade jobs are spread around the city’s diverse population.

“This is the city’s signature employment policy, so this is really critical,” said Crockett. “But it’s not perfect. There are some things we can fix.”

For years, the industry as a whole, and most companies individually, have failed to meet the targets for hiring residents and women.

There has been more success in recent years in meeting the goal for hiring minorities, but progress in that area has stalled. Some have also argued that the ratio of hours earmarked for minorities is seriously outdated and should be raised from 25 percent to at least 50 percent.

Advocates point out that, according to US Census data, minorities in Boston outnumber whites 53 percent to 47 percent, and women outnumber men, 52 percent to 48 percent.

Crockett said the city began its review of the policy shortly after she moved into her position at the end of the summer. In recent weeks, she said, she and her team began seeking input from other stakeholders, including developers, workers, activists, and other city departments.

The review will look at every aspect of the policy and will consider any changes that can make it stronger, she said. It will include a look at the hiring goals, how compliance is monitored, and how “good faith efforts” are defined.

She said it is too early in the process to go into specifics on what may change.

“Everything is on the table right now,” she said. “It’s a great opportunity to look at a policy that’s more than 30 years old with fresh eyes.”

Robert L. Petrucelli, president and chief executive of the Associated General Contractors, said it was too early to comment because the city hasn’t said what it plans to do.

Crockett said some internal changes have already been implemented, including improving communication between the two agencies that oversee compliance with the policy: the Boston Residents Jobs Policy Office and the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

The city is also working to create a more accessible way to display the data it collects on the progress of each developer, contractor, and subcontractor, as well as the industry as a whole, toward meeting the goals.

“If Boston is going to invest in the development of its land and downtown, then the people of this city deserve to benefit from this,” said Crockett.

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