

Civil rights groups threaten to pull KCI support unless minorities get jobs

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Civil rights and minority business leaders said Tuesday that without binding commitments to hire large numbers of blacks, Latinos and women, they would withhold support for a new KCI terminal in this fall's election campaign.

The KCI Airport Consortium called on the City Council to place the selection of a terminal builder on hold until it secures a guarantee that 40 percent of subcontracting firms on the project be minority-owned and that an equal proportion of the overall workforce also be minorities.

Edgemoor Infrastructure & Real Estate, the Bethesda, Md., company selected last week by a panel of council members and city staff, was "deficient and problematic" in its plans for minority participation, said attorney Clinton Adams, a member of the group that includes leaders of the Urban League of Greater Kansas City, the NAACP Kansas City Chapter and the Black Chamber of Commerce of Greater Kansas City.

Consortium representatives said they carried no brief for the other firms that competed unsuccessfully for selection, including Burns & McDonnell and AECOM.

They emphasized that no matter who ultimately builds the \$1 billion airport project, scheduled to go to voters on Nov. 7, it must be a "transformative" economic venture that creates sustainable wealth for the city's struggling minority community — perhaps even some African American millionaires.

Without a robust role for minority construction workers, designers and other professionals, they said, the city could expect little help in getting out the vote for the ballot measure.

"I'm not motivated to mobilize an electorate that is not going to benefit in a transformative way," said Gwendolyn Grant, president and CEO of the Urban

League, adding that most of the community she represents “doesn’t give a darn about that airport.”

The consortium is scheduled to present its concerns at a Wednesday morning press conference.

The group’s comments, which came in a Tuesday afternoon meeting with The Star’s editorial board, illustrate the uncertainty that continues to surround the project, which has been beset by accusations of interest conflict and private dealings.

The council is scheduled to vote next week on Edgemoor’s proposal. Approval would authorize the city to begin negotiating a detailed memorandum of understanding with the company.

But the final outcome remains very much in doubt, with Burns & McDonnell and AECOM both continuing to make their case, and council members seeking more information about Edgemoor.

In its proposal to the city, Edgemoor said at least 20 percent of its construction subcontractors would be owned by blacks or Latinos, with 15 percent controlled by women. It promised that 15 percent of its professional services firms would be owned by minorities and 12 percent by women.

The company said the city did not require any commitments about the composition of the workforce.

Edgemoor managing director Geoffrey Stricker said in a phone interview Tuesday that the company had a “tremendous track record” of reaching diversity goals.

“We would welcome the opportunity to sit down with the group to discuss what was in our proposal,” Stricker said.