

Councilors vote to strengthen city's minority contracting program

Pressley, Wu author ordinance that would add transparency to the city's contracting process

Yawu Miller | 12/27/2017, 11:29 a.m. | Bay State Banner

The Boston City Council passed an ordinance this month aimed at beefing up the city's contracting with minority and woman-owned businesses, adding teeth to an existing program.

The Equity in City of Boston Contracts Ordinance, sponsored by councilors Ayanna Pressley and Michelle Wu and passed in the council's last session of 2017, requires the city to create a supplier diversity program that would conduct active outreach to women- and minority-owned business enterprises (MWBES) regarding city needs and contracting processes.

It also requires that the city actively solicit bids from at least one women-owned business and at least one minority-owned business for contracts under \$50,000. The ordinance also directs that all requests for proposals that the city issues, as well as the evaluation process for such RFPs, include ratings of diversity and inclusion plans as key criteria. The new ordinance also creates a quarterly reporting obligation.

Pressley said the new guidelines would help align the city's spending with the administration's values.

"Every day we're having conversations about equity and opportunity," she said. "We have to ensure there is equity of opportunity. We want everybody to have full participation in this economy. But the reality is that minority businesses have too often been left behind because of a lack of transparency and lack of opportunity."

In 2016, Walsh administration officials announced new goals to increase minority participation in city contracts, including a goal that 10 to 15 percent of construction contracts under \$500,000 go to minority-owned firms and that 15 to 20 percent of architectural and engineering contracts go to minority firms. But one year later, just 2 percent of the \$700 million in city spending on contracts goes to minority-owned businesses, with just 0.5 percent going to black-owned

businesses, according to an analysis by outgoing District 7 Councilor and recent mayoral candidate Tito Jackson.

“This ordinance aligns city spending with our vision of creating equity and opportunity across our neighborhoods,” said Wu. “The \$700 million that city government spends each year represents a tremendous opportunity to invest in local MWBEs that will build wealth in our communities.”

Wu and Pressley say their ordinance would strengthen the integrity of the RFP process by increasing transparency. In the past, many contracts have gone to the same vendors year after year without adequate notification, Pressley noted.

Pressley first filed a hearing order on minority contracting in 2013, seeking greater transparency in the process.

“This has been a long road from my first hearing in 2013, but today is a huge step towards codifying equity in the City of Boston’s procurement and purchasing systems,” said Pressley. “In collaboration with my colleague, Council President Michelle Wu, we have crafted and passed an ordinance built to make a difference now and to create a system that pushes us to continue to set newer and bolder goals for inclusion. This policy is a step towards reducing wealth inequities in the city.”