

# Women and minorities getting their slice of the pie

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A growing Greenville made room this week at the business table for women and other local minority-owned businesses to contribute to and profit from the city's journey upward and outward.

The first of three events organized by the City of Greenville Minority and Women Business Enterprise (MWBE) program was held Wednesday at City Hall, aimed at increasing economic opportunities for all local firms.

The annual Mix-N-Meet allowed those in charge of purchases and contracting with the City of Greenville, Greenville Utilities Commission, and East Carolina University to interact with about 35 local minority and women business owners and contract vendors. The interactions introduced attendees to the diversity of quality goods and services in the marketplace and helped vendors learn how to pursue a business relationship with government.

"Having a diverse set of vendors contracting with the City of Greenville is the key to increasing the economic opportunities for all of our local firms," Ferdinand Rouse, MWBE Coordinator said. "The city is dedicated to making sure that contract opportunities are available for business owners regardless of who they are. These events will help expose our small, minority- and women-owned businesses to available projects and opportunities, and educate them on some of the decisions and conversations currently being had at the state level."

Diversity in the city's business relationships provides advantages on several levels, Rouse said.

"The more diverse our vendor base is, it increases our chance to attain better products and services at better costs, maximizing our taxpayers' dollars while allowing more people to have a piece of the pie," Rouse said. "It's part of the city's policy of economic inclusion. I want to actually transcend the city's participation goals for women and minority contracted firms."

Jen Patten of the Frank Blume general contracting and construction management company of Winston-Salem talked with the small business owners about opportunities it has in the local area's education and senior living sectors. The company currently has a couple of projects going on at East Carolina University, Patten said.

"We're required to reach minority contracting goals for state projects, but our company goal is to have 20-percent minority participation on every job we do," Patten said. "We think it's important to bring everybody to the table, and it's personally exciting to me to be part of giving women and minorities those equal opportunities."

Among the city contractors and project partners who attended the event to meet women and minority business owners were representatives of N.C. Department of Transportation, The Opportunities Industrialization Center, DevelopUs performance improvement, Pitt County Family Development Corporation, Tahill technical services, Thalle Construction Company, Frank Blume Construction, Copy Pro and Nikken Wellness Services.

Another vendor, Minerva Freeman of the Pitt County Family Development Corporation, provides women-owned businesses with training on cultural diversity, board development, customer service and connecting with community resources.

“An event like this gives us a chance to network and develop business relationships with potential clients,” Freeman said. “When young people see women and other minorities in leadership positions, they understand what they can achieve.”

Adrian Atkinson and Jenine Stevenson of the N.C. Department of Transportation were there to let women and minority business owners know of other events they will host with the city, including one on April 25 with the Governor’s Historically Underutilized Businesses Advisory Committee and another on May 22 to educate potential contractors about Disadvantaged Business Enterprise certification and resources for businesses interested in working with the department.

“We’re showing minority-owned businesses that there are a lot of opportunities awaiting them once they are certified, and we’ll help them to get that certification,” Atkinson said. “We’re not just sending firms out there and hoping they can do the business. We’re making sure they understand what opportunities are available and how we can support them in the community.”

For more information about the remaining events coming up to promote women and minority business opportunities with Greenville and its contractors, contact Ferdinand Rouse at (252) 329-4462 or [frouse@greenvillenc.gov](mailto:frouse@greenvillenc.gov).