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Alameda County
Supervisor Keith Carson, Fifth District

For Immediate Release
PRESS RELEASE

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It's All About Access



Back row (left to right): Geoffrey Pete, Arthur Washington, Keith Carson, Scott Haggerty
Front row: (left to right): Jeannie Chang, Susan Muranishi, Pat O'Connell

Efforts to make contracting in Alameda County equitable and accessible have recently taken a giant step forward; on July 16th the County released their contracting data from the past three years, which outlined how many contracts go to locally owned, women owned and minority owned businesses. In addition, on July 15th in the Snow Building at the Oakland Zoo the County kicked off the Contracting Bonding Assistance Program (CBAP), an innovative effort designed to help small local contractors and minority-owned business receive bonding which is essential to their success.

The Contracting Bonding Assistance program is sponsored by Alameda County's Office of Risk Management, it aims to help small contractors enhance their credit worthiness while minimizing risk and increasing their number of bids on County projects. The program will be administered by Merriwether & Williams Insurance Services.

This new program offers classes, one-on-one consultation, and other business services to assist small contractors in efforts to help them qualify for and participate in County projects. The initiative also works in close collaboration with agencies responsible for certifying small, local and emerging businesses. Ingrid

Merriwether, President and CEO of Merriwether & Williams Insurance Services, called the CBAP “a paradigm shift,” one that “eliminates barriers” for small businesses that otherwise cannot qualify for bid bonds. Small local contractors that qualify for the CBAP will get assistance designed to help them get their first bond, make bids, and work on County projects.

The Program will help make Alameda County “the clear leader in leveling the playing field so that everyone has access to jobs,” Supervisor Keith Carson told to a large crowd gathered for the CBAP launch. “We still have a way to go,” Supervisor Carson stated, but the bonding assistance program “is a great start.”

The information released at the July 16th meeting of the Procurement and Contracting Committee compared the County contracts awarded from July 2000 – June 2003 to those awarded from July 2006- June 2009 broken down by gender and ethnicity. Also highlighted were the policy changes that have been implemented since the delivery of the Availability Study by Mason Tillman in 2004, and the recommendations put forward by the County’s Executive Steering Group and the Committee’s Community Advisory Group.

Successes included an increase in the percentage of contracts going to Minority Owned Businesses (MBE) and Small, Local and Emerging Businesses (SLEB) which jumped from 10.45% to 38.05%. Specifically noteworthy was the increase in contacts over \$500,000 awarded to SLEB’s and MBE’s going from 6.84% to 38.88%.

On the policy side, it was shown that the County is exceeding their goals in the SLEB program, and is using the Elations system which will notify sub contractors that they have been listed by a prime contractor on a County bid. This is significant because prime contractors, have in the past listed sub contractors on their bid documents (without notifying the subs) and then not used them nor paid them on the job. The County is also utilizing a computer program to track payments to insure that sub contractors are paid promptly.

Yet, not all the news was good, for example while construction contracts for African American Males increased by 50% going from \$1.8 Million to \$2.7 Million, the actual percentage of construction contracts going to African American Males was about 2.8% while the number of construction contracts that went to firms owned by white males was still close to 51%. Many in our communities have been working on this issue of equity in contracting for years. While the Contracting Bonding Assistance Program and the Procurement and Contracting Committee show progress, in the County’s process we have yet to achieve all of our goals. It has been said by many, it is a marathon not a sprint, at least at this point we are all in the race.

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