
Allegheny County MWDBE Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams
November 1, 2023
10:00 AM

Advisory Committee Members in Attendance:

M. Gayle Moss – Chair, MBE Advisory Committee
James Overton – President/Principal Advisor, Overton Financial Group
Tim Stevens – Chairman, Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP)
Holly Douglas – Vice President, Cosmos Technologies, Inc
Roxanne Sewell – President, The LJS Group

Advisory Committee Members Absent:

Alberto Benzaquen – Commissioner, Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations

Advisory Committee County Liaison Members Present:

Jason Molinero – Public Works
Loren Ganoe – Human Services
Sydney Rabinovitz – Economic Development
Nancy DiNardo – Facilities Management

Advisory Committee County Liaison Members Absent:

Kelly Stockman – Purchasing

Also Present:

Lisa Edmonds – Chief Officer, Allegheny County Department of Equity and Inclusion
Damian Wiles – Deputy Director, Allegheny County Department of Equity and Inclusion
Steven Shanley – Director, Allegheny County Department of Public Works

Agenda

- I. Open Meeting**
- II. Roll Call**
- III. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (June 28, 2023)**
- IV. Chairperson Report**
 - a. New Members/Liaisons**
 - b. Member Terms**
 - c. Recommendations**
- V. DEI Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer Report**
- VI. Two Liaisons Discuss Department Procurement Process**
- VII. Desired topics for next meeting**
- VIII. Miscellaneous**
- IX. Adjournment**

I. Open Meeting

M. Gayle Moss opened the meeting.

II. Roll Call

Attendance of committee members and liaisons was taken.

III. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (June 28, 2023)

M. Gayle Moss asked the committee if all had received the minutes of the June 28, 2023, meeting, and if there were any additions or corrections to note. She then asked for all in favor, all voted aye, and the previous meeting minutes were approved.

IV. Chairperson Report

a. New Members/Liaisons

M. Gayle Moss introduced Holly Douglas as the newest committee member and asked Holly to say a few words about herself and her business.

Holly is married to **Frederick** Douglas ~~Fredrick~~, owner of Cosmos Technologies, Inc., a civil engineering firm that has been in business for 25 years. Holly has a background in environmental health and safety engineering, and oversees the Environmental Health and Safety Department for Cosmos Technologies, Inc.

Lisa Edmonds introduced Sydney Rabinovitz as the new liaison from the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development who replaced Mark Conner.

b. Member Terms

Gayle noted committee member terms are two or three years, and three members have terms expiring at the end of the year, as well as a current member whose term should have expired at the end of 2022. She stated that it is the County Executive's place to bring desired committee members before County Council for approval. The committee can also recommend members to the County Executive. It was noted that a new County Executive will be elected to serve beginning in 2024. Tim asked if a new County Executive normally cleans house or keeps most of the people in place (specifically department heads). It was noted that this is at the discretion of the County Executive.

c. Recommendations

Gayle advised that previously discussed recommendations have been sent to the County Executive's Office and there are no updates to give at this time.

V. DEI Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer Report

Lisa Edmonds updated the committee on work DEI has been doing since the last meeting. The department's Annual Open House was held on Thursday, September 28, 2023. There were

approximately 50 attendees. County Executive Rich Fitzgerald was in attendance and gave remarks alongside several other presenters, such as representatives from PennDOT, Penn State Law Clinic, and Allegheny County, including department liaison to this committee Jason Molinero. This was the first DEI Open House held in person since 2019.

DEI was represented at the Pittsburgh Hispanic Heritage Festival, presented by Pittsburgh Metropolitan Area Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, on Saturday, September 30. Information on certification and doing business with Allegheny County was provided by staff to attendees.

SHARE Pittsburgh 2023 was held October 18. The event included a guest speaker and networking opportunities for companies to meet 1 on 1 with various organizations seeking diverse suppliers. Several Allegheny County departments participated, including Equity and Inclusion, Public Works, and Purchasing & Supplies.

October 25 marked the 34th Annual GACO (Government Agency Coordination Office) Procurement Opportunities Fair. GACO works with minority and women businesses towards government contracting and certification. DEI had information at their table available for attendees.

Lisa also shared that the 3rd Quarter report of Allegheny County MWDBE Contract Commitments will be available to view on the DEI page of the County website once finalized.

DEI has onboarded three new employees. A temporary Contract Compliance Assistant and two interns are assisting with the department workload. With the Contract Compliance Specialist position remaining open, please direct anyone who may be interested in applying to the County website. The department is also working with Human Resources to post the open position on a wider range of platforms to reach a broader audience.

Tim Stevens asked whether those being hired are covered by civil service / if they will still have their jobs when a new administration comes in, as that could prevent someone from applying for a job at the current time. It was noted that top management, such as directors, may be replaced but not normally other employees. It was noted that directors are appointed and serve at the pleasure of the County Executive and thus can be removed by the County Executive. It was also noted that the Department of Human Services has civil service hiring, however, the County overall has a merit hiring process.

M. Gayle Moss thanked Lisa for her report and commended the quality of DEI's Open House.

VI. Two Liaisons Discuss Department Procurement Process

Jason Molinero shared the slideshow he presented for DEI's Open House and added that

during this meeting he will be able to dive deeper into a few items which he could not manage through PowerPoint at the Open House.

As he has previously described, the Department of Public Works has many assets they are responsible for ownership and maintenance of in regard to transportation and infrastructure throughout the County. These assets cover 500+ bridges, 400+ miles of road, the County vehicle fleet, and providing support / lending expertise to other County departments for projects, construction management, and inspections.

Jason shared the exciting news that all bidding for Public Works construction contracts has recently been moved to an electronic platform (Bonfire). Lisa Edmonds noted to the committee that this was a direct result of their recommendation to the County Executive. The committee discussed the positive effects an online platform can bring the Black and Brown business community and other avenues in which to advertise and market County bid proposals.

Jason elaborated that Bonfire is the same system that Purchasing uses, and there will continue to be other avenues to find information about projects, such as the bids and proposals page of the County website, local periodicals, and PennDOT's ECMS advertising page. Bids for County projects will only be accepted online through Bonfire. Tim Stevens asked if the listed periodicals (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and Pittsburgh Courier) could be expanded to include Soul Pitt and other LJS Publications to reach a wider audience in the Black and Brown business communities.

Holly Douglas asked if the online platform is solely for construction bids or if it will also cover consultation proposals. Jason advised that the overall intent of utilizing this platform is also to include procuring professional services. Jason also noted that for projects with state and federal funding, bidding is required to go through PennDOT ECMS, but if it is a 100% County funded project, Bonfire will be used. Jason added that any firm can bid on a project as a prime contractor, regardless of DBE certification status, but to count toward the MWDBE participation goals of the County, a firm would need DBE and/or MWDBE certification to count toward MWDBE goals. The type of certification accepted depends on the contract funding source. All US DOT funding projects in Pennsylvania require PA UCP DBE certification to count toward the DBE goals. In addition to DBE, other certifications may be accepted on contracts not funded by US DOT.

Holly asked if the Allegheny County **Construction Management and Construction Inspection (CMCI)** ~~Cyclical Monitoring for Continuous Improvement~~ requirement is the same as PennDOT. Jason advised they do follow PennDOT requirements.

Holly also asked if DPW sent project advertisements to DEI or the African American Chamber of Commerce to pass on to the minority business community. Jason asked Lisa Edmonds if DEI

had been reviewing advertisements prior to them being posted on Bonfire. She advised DEI is not sent the advertisements in advance, but the department does receive email notices of Bonfire postings, then shares them with firms certified in work codes for the project through our certification and contract compliance software. There is also an electronic posterboard on the website, so opportunities that have been posted will show to anyone coming to the website.

M. Gayle Moss asked if Jason would add the recommended publications to the list of periodicals currently used for sharing information about open projects. Jason responded that he would look into whether their timing structures align with when DPW projects would be available for public bidding. Lisa made note that DEI advertises in Soul Pitt and, as it is a quarterly publication, any open bidding opportunities would need to be timed when a publication would be in circulation. Roxanne Sewell added that in addition to Soul Pitt, Brother Ash Productions and the African American Chamber of Commerce would be good avenues of reaching a wider minority audience. Tim suggested Pittsburgh Urban Media as an additional avenue for advertising County projects to Black and Brown business communities. Gayle advised that Lisa supply a list of the suggested advertisers with contact info for DPW to reach out to.

Tim asked Jason if there is a way to ensure bid proposals are sent out as early as possible in an effort to include as many potential bidders as possible. Jason advised that they utilize SPEO for getting word out about upcoming projects, but there are multiple factors that can complicate a project's timeline.

James Overton asked if the suggestion to send project notifications to business owners had been implemented with the new online system. Lisa stated it had been implemented and noted that the most effective point is to raise awareness of the Bonfire platform through encouraging business owners to create accounts and set notifications for projects covering work codes they are certified in; doing so will ensure receipt of automatic notifications once bid proposals are announced. Gayle asked if DEI could organize an outreach workshop to show MWDBEs the process to create and Bonfire account. Lisa advised Purchasing & Supplies has a presentation that covers signing up for Bonfire, which was covered during the DEI Open House, as well as providing information at outreach events. DEI can post an announcement on the home page of the certification and compliance portal. In addition, Lisa receives daily emails from business owners looking to do business with Allegheny County, which she forwards to Purchasing for any information needed. She also noted that with DEI advertisements already in several of the recommended publications, their ad could be updated to include information about Bonfire. Roxanne asked if it was necessary for a business to have NAICS codes to create a Bonfire account. Lisa advised that it is not necessary but selecting specific codes does benefit owners so they receive relevant notifications for projects.

Roxanne asked if the committee's recommendation that DEI be involved in the formation of contracts had been implemented. Lisa stated that DEI has been working with Public Works to

ensure the availability of MWDBEs for specific projects. Gayle noted that the recommendation itself was still in the County Executive's hands.

Loren Ganoë shared an overview of the Department of Human Services with the committee. DHS serves around 200,000 people 2,000 annually, with a range of services that cover family strengthening, child welfare, homelessness, behavioral health, support for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, aging services, elder welfare, and programs for jail diversion, reentry, crisis support, and violence prevention work. The Office of Administration deals with administrative functions such as contracts and procurements, which are run directly through DHS, and not through the Department of Purchasing & Supplies. DHS also has the Office of Equity and Engagement which covers racial equity work and issues in the LGBTQ+ community. The Division of Analytics, Technology and Planning supports work across the agency. DHS has an annual budget of ~\$1.35 billion with over 1,200 staff, and contracts with 400+ service providers as the majority of programs and services are delivered through contracted service providers.

As with the Department of Public Work's presentation, all information about open solicitations is posted on the DHS Doing Business website, as well as resources for current contractors and information on how to become a DHS provider, and all responses to solicitations must be submitted through Bonfire. Advertisements for solicitations are also posted on the DHS LinkedIn page. DHS is working on a revamped version of the procurement page, hoping to launch by end of 2023/early 2024, and she will share with the committee when it is live.

Loren noted that since DHS contracts the majority of their services, and most providers are non-profit entities, the MWDBE requirements don't always apply. One that does comply with MWDBE standards is a contract DHS has for security guards, so the selected vendor subcontracts with an MWDBE to meet the requirement on that contract. DHS also has broad discretion to contract (exceptions to posting RFPs or bids if they feel there is an urgent need to directly contract with a provider). This can be helpful in dealing with smaller organizations that might not have the capacity to compete in an RFP process. In these cases, DHS can work with the organization to be directly contracted if they provide a service that meets an urgent DHS need. Whenever possible, the solicitation route is taken as it offers transparency and fairness and is helpful in meeting strategic goals, and when trying to revamp the approach to a service or program. Sometimes funding sources have requirements for solicitation of services (ex. HUD funding for housing and homelessness).

DHS has a strong process in terms of selections, scoring protocols, and evaluation committees, which often includes bringing in community members and people with lived experience to be paid for participating on RFP selection committees. DHS has also been working to make the RFP process more accessible for smaller, community-based organizations and would like to see more become providers, so they are utilizing the solicitation process to reach out to the

community and to get diverse representation on evaluation committees. There will always be more work to do but DHS makes a priority of working with small, community-based organizations and is continuously seeking improvement in that arena.

Lisa Edmonds made note that among DHS' 400+ providers, most are nonprofit. However, some are for-profit, and in the past, certified firms have contracted with DHS as service providers. She believes there is opportunity for these for-profit businesses to contract with those nonprofit organizations that receive grant funding from DHS. While some may not lend themselves to MWDBE participation, there is a lot of funding that goes out from DHS to organizations that outsource services through contracting other businesses for financial services, supplies, renovations, IT services, etc. These providers could reach out and include MWDBEs when they are looking to contract these services. DEI has participated in DHS technical assistance programs in the past and advised providers what a good faith effort looks like for including MWDBEs in any services that are being outsourced, and that they should be making that good faith effort to utilize certified MWDBE firms.

Roxanne Sewell acknowledged that through Loren's presentation, it seems that DHS does do that when they are able, and when a business does not meet the guidelines, it does not mean they won't be a good fit to do the job. She also noted that when dealing with the public like DHS does, it is a serious grassroots/community interaction which is why DHS needs the various agencies that are there to help. Loren stated that DHS works quite a bit with foundations, so they also have flexibility in connecting community partners with foundations, and it is helpful for these smaller organizations to receive the more flexible grant funding to build their infrastructure and capacity to contract with the government. DHS tries to make it as accessible as they can but some of the smaller organizations do not have the capacity, and foundation funding can be helpful in building it to a higher level, so DHS works to help make those connections with the foundation partners they work with.

VIII. Desired topics for next meeting

M. Gayle Moss noted her preference for the next meeting to be held in person. Committee members discussed a date and time for the next meeting, and agreed on **Wednesday December 13, 2023, at 11:00 AM**. Lisa Edmonds noted she would reach out to Public Works and Facilities Management to secure a location for the meeting to be held.

Lisa advised that during the next meeting, presentations would be from Economic Development and Facilities Management. Nancy DiNardo noted that she will have Kevin Halaja do the presentation, as he deals directly with the project management line. Lisa advised the committee that Economic Development does not do much contracting for their department specifically but does contract on behalf of the various authorities in which they operate as the administrative arm (ex. Redevelopment Authority of Allegheny County). An overview of their contracting process could include planning a contract to signing/execution, and if there is something else

committee members would like to have addressed, now would be the time to mention it to Sydney Rabinovitz.

IX. Miscellaneous

Tim Stevens asked for a motion for a recommendation to be sent to whoever is elected to the County Executive position to retain Lisa Edmonds in her position. M. Gayle Moss clarified that committee members, and not liaisons, are who should give input on the motion. Gayle made a motion that the committee make a recommendation to whoever comes into office after the general election to consider retaining Lisa Edmonds in the position she is in. Tim Stevens seconded, and all were in favor. Gayle also noted that she is making inroads to speak to the candidates and ask what sort of commitments they could make in that regard, and she would give an update at the next meeting.

Gayle thanked Jason and Loren and stated that the presentations provided good conversation and information, and thanked Stephen Shanley for also being in attendance.

Gayle asked Holly Douglas how she liked her first meeting. Holly stated that it was good, very interesting, and gave her a lot to think about.

Roxanne Sewell asked Gayle about a committee member recommendation she had mentioned during the last meeting, and what information she would need to provide in order to make said recommendation. Gayle advised she would need their name and information, and then it is passed on to the County Executive for review. It was noted that the vacant seats on the committee will probably remain vacant until the new County Executive takes office. Roxanne stated that she would like to make her recommendation before the end of her term on the committee so that it will be put before the new County Executive once they take office. Gayle asked if all appointed members present today were interested in remaining on the Committee when the new County Executive takes office. All noted their interest.

Tim made a motion for all committee members present aside from the chairperson, to make a recommendation that M. Gayle Moss remain as chairperson if she so desires. James Overton seconded the motion. Gayle asked for all in favor, all members agreed, and the motion passed.

X. Adjournment

M. Gayle Moss adjourned the meeting.