

**Greater Cleveland Partnership's construction survey casts wide net**

*Commission aims to catalog all projects of \$1 million or more planned for next five years, with goal of benefiting community*

**By JAY MILLER**

**4:30 am, January 5, 2014**

A long-awaited plan to ensure that large construction projects in Northeast Ohio have as broad an economic impact as possible — particularly by bringing more minorities and women into the construction industry — is taking a big step forward.

The Commission on Economic Inclusion, an arm of the Greater Cleveland Partnership, is seeking out property owners, public agencies and others to report on their long-term construction plans so that it can prepare a forecast of construction spending over the next five years. A key goal of the study is to create so-called “pre-apprenticeship” programs to train minorities and women for work in construction trades that will be in demand.

Mohr Partners Inc., a national real estate advisory firm with an office in Cleveland, has been hired to build a confidential database of construction projects of \$1 million or more that are planned or contemplated for the next half decade. Jim Robey, Mohr's Cleveland managing director, said data gathering will continue until mid-February.

The Commission on Economic Inclusion wants to create a clear picture of the anticipated demand for construction services and employment based on expectations for residential and commercial construction and renovation, as well as construction of roads, sewers, utilities and other infrastructure.

The Mohr survey team wants to catalog all projects, not just those that might adopt community benefits agreements. Such agreements commit developers and contractors to goals for hiring local residents, minorities and/or women on projects and may include pledges to support training programs designed to bring more women and minorities into the construction field. They also can specify that properties will meet green building standards and that builders will set aside land for neighborhood parks.

“We're doing a construction demand study that benefits the industry and it just happens to be that we hope to have community benefits that are included,” said Brian Hall, executive director of the inclusion commission and CEO of Innogistics LLC, a Cleveland-based logistics firm.

“We need people to participate in this demand study,” Mr. Hall said.

Projections of construction activity based on the information gathered initially will be used to right-size apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs at Cuyahoga Community College, Max Hayes High School in Cleveland and elsewhere, said Dave Wondolowski, executive secretary of the Cleveland Building and Construction Trades Council. The goal is to create a pipeline of qualified local trades people and business owners that fills the demand for new workers and to replace retiring workers.

In August 2012, Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson brought contractors, unions and property owners together to press the construction community to adopt recommendations made in a GCP-commissioned

study that found “minorities are currently under-represented in the local construction sector.”

That gathering led to an agreement unveiled last February and signed in September by 10 “project owners” to set standards designed to encourage the use of local labor and contracting firms — and in particular minority and female workers and firms — on building and infrastructure projects in the region.

The signers of that agreement, a memorandum of understanding to develop a community benefits agreement, are Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority, Dominion East Ohio Gas, Geis Cos., the Medical Center Co., MetroHealth System, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District and University Hospitals. All expect to have some level of construction underway in the next few years.

“It's up to the particular project” to create a specific agreement, said Mary Beth Levine, associate general counsel at University Hospitals. “There (would be) certain goals and guidelines established with the contractor and the labor force at the outset, depending on the project.”

The Black Contractors Association of Cleveland, the Construction Employers Association, the Cleveland Building and Construction Trades Council, Hard Hatted Women, the Hispanic Roundtable and the Urban League of Greater Cleveland also have pledged support for the community benefits concept.

### **Filling the trades pipeline**

One complaint often raised by contractors who don't meet hiring objectives is that the community lacks qualified minorities and women. That's why the Commission on Economic Inclusion is pushing for the creation of training programs for minorities to enter the construction trades.

Down the road, the memorandum of understanding contemplates more monitoring of both the success of specific projects in meeting agreed-upon goals and on a continuing effort to develop and pass on best practices for raising minority and female employment in the construction trades. Mayor Jackson long has advocated community benefits agreements on city construction projects and on privately developed projects that receive financial support from the city. Besides goals for hiring minorities and women, the city has pressed developers and contractors to hire a specified percentage of city residents and to construction buildings that meet certain energy efficiency and waste recycling standards.

“I'm pleased with where we are,” said Natoya Walker Minor, Cleveland's chief of public affairs. “With the (demand study) we should know where the demand is, by trades, so that those pre-apprenticeship programs will be based on the trade demands that come out of the study.”

### **The need for buy-in**

Still, various minority contractors remain skeptical about the willingness of developers and large contractors to sustain a commitment to diversity in hiring. Some groups representing those contractors and trades people are taking a wait-and-see attitude.

“It (minority participation) is something that is foreign to some people,” said John Todd, president of

John W. Todd & Associates and a member of the Black Contractors Association of Cleveland. “Right now, you need a document to push this. If everybody buys into it, it's great.”

Norm Edwards, president of the Cleveland-based American Center for Economic Equality, is even less convinced. Mr. Edwards said he believes companies that are held out as minority subcontractors too often are “front companies” created by existing contractors.

“All this stuff that they're doing won't lead to” growing minority contractors, Mr. Edwards said. “The white contractors don't want to share.”

Mr. Hall said the study team still is seeking to contact developers, architects, engineers, builders and others to participate in the survey.