

Viking stadium construction puts parking over people

Written by Commentary by Ralph Wyman, Minnesota Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance/HIRE Core Team

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More than a year has passed since the Minnesota State Legislature passed a plan to build the Minnesota Vikings a new football stadium. At that time HIRE Minnesota said in these pages, "If all the right steps are taken, hundreds of people of color will obtain jobs."

Today it looks like the Minnesota Sports Facilities Authority is about to stumble. Big time.

HIRE Minnesota, a community-based coalition, has fought for years to increase accountability, transparency and results from major public agencies that spend our taxes. The Minnesota Sports Facilities Authority (MSFA) is managing the Vikings stadium project, an investment of \$975 million over the next few years.

As the MSFA finalizes plans for this mega-complex, the agency is suggesting it can throw a few hundred thousand dollars towards workforce development and think they can achieve "a lasting legacy of a larger minority and woman construction workforce."

We know from recent experience that big goals can be met so the construction workforce reflects the face of our community. But we know it takes commitment, a real investment, and an active and engaged public.

The MSFA indicated initial commitment to a diverse workforce by issuing a request for proposals to assist the major contractors on the project in meeting state goals of 32 percent for people of color and 6 percent for women. Community partners including outreach agencies, public and nonprofit training centers, and advocacy and faith groups have joined together in an innovative partnership that could help the MSFA, Mortenson Construction (the prime contractor) and its subcontractors meet these achievable goals.

The good news is that last month, the MSFA indicated it will negotiate with these community partners. The bad news is, the money they claim is available for workforce development and

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placement is just one-quarter of what experienced trainers and agencies believe is needed to create the workforce the MSFA acknowledges it needs.

If the MSFA and the Vikings were planning to install steel and concrete that was 25 percent of the strength the engineers said was required, anyone could predict the result: a flimsy, substandard stadium.

Likewise, underinvesting in the stadium workforce will result in underachieving workforce goals. We've seen this playbook way to many times before, and we cannot accept it again.

Budgets say much more than words do about what matters. The MSFA is in final negotiations right now on a side deal to invest \$65 million in just one parking ramp and green space adjacent to the new stadium. That's 92 *times* as much as they propose to invest in training and placing workers.

If money talks, right now it's saying "parking over people."

It's not too late to fix this. HIRE Minnesota is calling on MSFA Chair Michele Kelm-Helgen and the MSFA board to invest wisely and adequately in developing the diverse workforce that can and must build this stadium. If the MSFA truly wants to leave a "lasting legacy" in addressing racial hiring disparities in our community, they must invest in a strong, community-based plan to achieve equitable hiring goals.

They need to hear from all of us - right now - about making a real investment of public dollars to ensure women and people of color can obtain these well paying jobs. Please join HIRE Minnesota at the next MSFA public meeting at 9 a.m., Friday, August 23 at the Metrodome offices to call for MSFA to commit to building the People's Stadium with workers from all of our neighborhoods.