

Business owners learn about Connect NC bond

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

\$348,572,613.

That's how much the state will spend in the Piedmont-Triad area alone on the Connect NC bond project. Last week, the Office of Historically Underutilized Businesses (HUB) hosted a small business and contractors forum to let entrepreneurs in the area know how they can get a piece of the pie worth more than \$300 million.

Along with the job fair, the event held inside the Donald J. Reaves Student Activities Center on the campus of Winston-Salem State University also featured a panel discussion on how small and minority business owners can get involved with the estimated \$2 billion bond project. Approved by voters across the state, Connect NC is an investment designed to strengthen the state's education system, parks and recreation, safety and water and sewer projects.

The projects listed in the bond will impact 76 counties in the state.

At the local level, the bond will bring needed improvements to the campuses of Winston-Salem State University (WSSU), Forsyth Technical Community College (FTCC), and UNC School of the Arts. According to a list of projects, WSSU will receive new \$50,000 science building, while FTCC and the School of the Arts

will receive improvements estimated to cost more than \$5 million a piece.

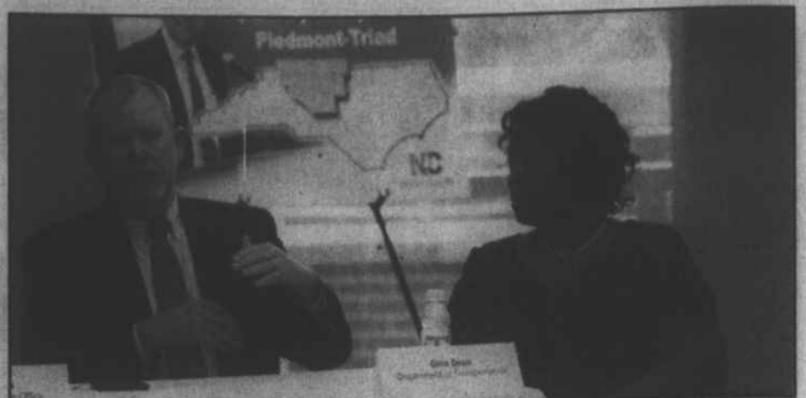
During the panel discussion, HUB Director Dennis M. English Jr. said, with major construction on the horizon, area contractor readiness is critical. English said in many cases a lot of firms have stepped back from pursuing state-funded projects because there's too much paper work, or simply because they did not know how to bid on projects. He said, "This forum is designed to take those worries away."

"Our main priority here today is to engage with cabinet level agencies. Through technical assistance and capacity building support, we're here to help businesses get where they need to be," English said.

"We want to create more leverage so that minority and small business owners don't feel like they're out here by themselves."

The open panel, which featured also general and residential contractors, representatives from state construction office and the department of transportation, also provided business owners with growth strategies, and ways to identify new customers outside of the bond project.

Nesmith Construction operations manager Maurice McNeal said one of the things that works best in the general contracting industry is building relationships with potential clients. McNeal encouraged



NC Department of Transportation project manager Brett Abernathy talks about ways small business owners can bid for projects included in the Connect NC bond project.

contractors to start off with smaller contracts to build working relationships. He noted, most of the time when it comes to the interview process, clients are going to select the people who they know.

"You may be able to come in as fresh face and win a project but, 8 out of 10 times they are going to go with the people they know and like," continued McNeal. "Start with a small project, do a good job and your quality of work will sell its self."

He also told business owners to go after projects that are in their areas. McNeal said he doesn't take jobs that are more than a couple of hours drive. He said when you have a small business you could spend your whole day driving to one meeting, which is a waste of time and money.

"It's tempting to take jobs in different parts of the state but you have to focus on one area," McNeal said.

Outside of construction, the state is also seeking small businesses to help complete other aspects of the projects, including asphalt resurfacing, road widening,

concrete work and landscaping just to name a few. N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Project Manager Brett Abernathy said contracts for small business are limited to those estimated projects under \$500,000.

Abernathy said although they are smaller projects, one advantage is that they do not require a general contracting license. He said the NCDOT also offers "as needed" contracts that can range between \$5,000 and \$50,000.

After the forum, a number of small business owners said they learned a lot about the process of bidding for state funded projects. Tammy Watson, business director for Tamco Construction Site Management, a locally owned start-up company that specializes in erosion control, said after listening to the experts on the panel she is more informed about how to get her business off the ground.

"I look at my number and I think the things I've learned here today are going to earn me millions," smiled Watson. "The panel provided me with a lot of information to position my company well."

Police Department, Dash offer free movie

SPECIAL TO
THE CHRONICLE

The Winston-Salem Dash and the Winston-Salem Police Department are teaming up for a free Movie Night at BB&T Ballpark on Saturday, Oct. 22.

Gates open at 5 p.m. and the hit Disney movie Zootopia begins at 6:30 p.m.

An animated film that features the voices

of Jason Bateman, Bonnie Hunt and many other Hollywood stars, Zootopia follows the journeys of a rabbit police officer and a red fox con artist, who try to expose a conspiracy regarding the disappearance of various civilians in the city of Zootopia.

"This is a great opportunity for the community and members of the police department to come

together and improve our relationship, while enjoying a fun-filled evening and a movie," said Chief Barry D. Rountree of the Winston-Salem Police Department.

"Every movie night at BB&T Ballpark has been special, but this one means even more," Dash President Geoff Lassiter said. "We invite the community to take part in a great evening of friendship

and fun." Prior to the start of the movie, members from various districts of the Winston-Salem Police Department will showcase their police cars, motorcycles and bike patrol bicycles, along with their rescue and hazardous device vehicles.

Members of the K-9 unit will be on hand, too. While admission is free to the public, attendees are encouraged to make a donation of cash, blankets or canned goods to support the Winston-Salem Police Foundation, a non-profit, independent organization dedicated to enhancing the capacity of the Winston-Salem Police Department to be more effective in improving public safety.

The Foundation focuses on community

outreach, funding and raising resources to assist the Police Department in making Winston-Salem a safer place to live, work and enjoy life. More information on the organization is available at wspolicefoundation.org, where a donation to the Foundation also can be made.

Parking is free of charge, and concession stands will be open for fans to purchase food and beverages.

Admission in the Kids Zone will also be free, and the concourse will feature several free carnival games around the ballpark. Should inclement weather hit the Winston-Salem area on Oct. 22, the make-up date is Sunday, Oct. 23, with gates opening at 4 p.m. and the movie starting at 5:30 p.m.



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