

Minority vendors still lag on city, county contracts

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hibited by state law to accepting the lowest qualified bid."

Among contracts valued at more than \$30,000, minority-backed firms received 2.7 percent, women 14.7.

The results, presented Tuesday by MGT of America, don't surprise Eddie Mobley, first vice president of the Metrolina Minority Contractors Association. Like the city, Mecklenburg's contracting programs is viewed with suspicion by black contractors.

"Now they have to put it in writing," Mobley said. "We see you spending money when we helped get you money, but we don't see money coming back to the black community."

Charlotte has struggled to boost minority participation with race-neutral contracting programs. A City Council committee will meet March 18 to consider whether to

install race-specific rules to its Small Business Opportunity program.

Council member Malcolm Graham said he met with Mecklenburg commissioners Darrel Williams and Parks Helms in 2001 to discuss combining contracting programs "because neither was worth a damn." Since then, Charlotte launched a race- and gender-neutral small business program.

A point of contention for contractors and politicians is the new uptown arena, a \$265 million project with a \$165 million construction bill. Through January, construction contracts for \$55.9 million were awarded, with 15 percent going to small businesses. But minority-owned companies received just 3 percent of contracts while women-owned companies got 8 percent.

Publicly-funded entities are "not even coming to us," Mobley said. "They're not

even trying. They're always saying 'we're going to help the women and the blacks. They shouldn't even say women. It's the black businesses that are getting zero.'"

Graham counters that Charlotte's moving in the right direction. The SBO program, for instance, includes seminars to help business owners navigate the bid process and spells

out a non-discrimination clause contractors are required to follow.

"If you put little money in the program, you can't expect to get 15 percent (participation) in return," Graham said. "You get what you pay for. No deposit, no return."

A race-specific program, which Charlotte scrapped in 2002 after a threatened lawsuit, should be brought back,

Mobley said.

"We know for a fact they've discriminated," he said. "We need to know that it's fair. Who's monitoring it? Nobody's monitoring it but the contractors. We need to wake up. We need to be pulling together."

Samuelson said the county, which called for the disparity study, doesn't have a timetable for possible remedies, but it's important to try.

"I'm not going to sit it on a shelf," she said. "I think there's something that should be done."

Rwanda guilty verdict

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) recently sentenced Samuel Imanishimwe, former military commander in the Rwandan armed forces, to 27 years in prison after convicting him on six counts of "genocide, crimes against humanity and serious violations of ...the Geneva Conventions," the court reported from Arusha, Tanzania.

However, it acquitted Andre Ntagerura, former minister of transport and communications, and Emmanuel Bagambiki, former prefect of Cyangugu, of similar charges.

The court was set up to try cases associated with Rwanda's 1994 genocide in which an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed over a period of about 100 days.

It found that Imanishimwe, as the commander of Karambo military camp, authorized soldiers to arrest, detain, mistreat, and execute civilians.

He was also found criminally responsible for extermination and failing to prevent or to punish his soldiers' participation in the massacre at the Gashirabowba football field on 12 April 1994.

The court acquitted Ntagerura and Bagambiki, noting that the prosecutor did not prove the allegations against them beyond a reasonable doubt.

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