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Workers wanted for streetcar work

By: Alex Zank, alex.zank@dailyreporter.com | January 17, 2017 3:31 pm

Local industry organizations are telling the public that now is the time to secure a seat with the crews that will be building Milwaukee's streetcar project.

WRTP/BIG STEP, a group that works to introduce Milwaukee residents to careers in construction, plans to hold a recruitment and information meeting on Jan. 26 for those interested in working on the \$124 million project. The streetcar system is initially to consist of a 2.1-mile downtown loop and 0.4-mile extension leading to the city's lakefront.

Dan Bukiewicz, president of the Milwaukee Building and Construction Trades Council, said the contractors enlisted for the streetcar project will attend the meeting later this month to discuss what sorts of workers will be needed. The Building Trades council, a union group, is working with WRTP/BIG STEP to help ensure there will be skilled trades workers for the streetcar and other projects in the city.

Bukiewicz said the project will create a strong demand for concrete, carpentry, iron and electrical workers, as well as operating engineers. That's not to say, though, that there won't be jobs for workers with specialties other than those five main trades, he added.

"We want to make sure that all opportunities are open to these people," Bukiewicz said.

Work on the streetcar got underway in 2016, beginning in the spring with the removal of utilities along the proposed system route. Later that same year, the city announced that Kiewit Infrastructure Co., a subsidiary of Omaha-Neb.-based Kiewit Corp., would oversee the streetcar's construction.

The project will have various hiring goals. Chief among them is one calling for 40 percent of the streetcar's construction-labor hours to be performed by workers who are certified through the city's Residents Preference Program, which is meant to connect unemployed or underemployed city residents with careers in construction.

Another of the project's goals calls for 21 percent of all spending on the streetcar to be awarded to businesses that have been certified as being disadvantaged.

A representative of Kiewit told city officials in September that they were confident that local subcontractors would be able to handle a large amount of the streetcar work, and that the 40-percent resident-hiring goal could be met, as well.

But the streetcar is just one of the many Milwaukee-area projects that is in need of workers. For that reason, the recruitment event later this month is meant not only to find workers for a specific project but also to build up the city's stable of skilled workers, said Tracey Griffith, director of construction initiatives with WRTP/BIG STEP.

"That's really the focus, is getting people trained and ready to work in Milwaukee," she said on Tuesday.


The meeting scheduled for Jan. 26 will be held from 8 a.m. to noon at the WRTP/BIG STEP office, 3841 W. Wisconsin Ave. The session will include information on the streetcar and other projects, on training opportunities for prospective workers and on career paths for those wishing to work in the building trades.

After the information session, qualified candidates will be interviewed to see if they would be suited for various training opportunities. An email notice from the organization states that preferences will be given to Milwaukee residents or those already certified in the Residents Preference Program.

Anyone interested in attending should register before the event by calling WRTP/BIG STEP at (414) 342-9787.

Milwaukee officials often argue the streetcar project will help spur economic development in the city, particularly in places near the route.

"I think it's going to move Milwaukee to a new phase," Bukiewicz said. "I think people will warm up to it and I think eventually (more) extensions will be needed."

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