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Officials wrestle with tracking minority hiring for stimulus projects

By **STEVE BRANDT**, Star Tribune

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Louis King Jr. was eating breakfast in downtown Minneapolis late last month and noticed no minority faces among workers on a street project.

King, president of Summit Academy OIC, walked 20 blocks of the project on Marquette and 2nd avenues. He said one woman and no people of color were among the 74 street construction workers he saw.

He was back downtown Tuesday, marching with about 75 construction trades students from the North Side school and two dozen supporters. They packed a City Council committee discussion of which agencies are responsible for monitoring hiring and contracting goals for the federally funded, \$32 million project.

They're also pushing for federal stimulus funds to help minority and female workers and firms. "They know there's public scrutiny," King said afterward at a rally.

State figures show the main contractor, Shafer Contracting, reported a workforce that is 7 percent minority, with a goal of 11 percent. It was 5 percent female, with a goal of 6 percent.

So far just 2 percent of the project is subcontracted to disadvantaged firms, typically those with minority or female owners, with a goal



Elizabeth Flores, Star Tribune

Michael Jones, right, a student at Summit Academy OIC joined other students in a rally in front of the Federal Courthouse. The students marched to encourage the City of Minneapolis to utilize its Public Work's projects as an economic stimulus tool to address poverty and unemployment and to protest the city's minority hiring practices.

Critics say federal projects are behind on minority hires, but one official said there probably won't be enough female and minority contractors to go around.

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of 17 percent, Shafer reported.

But Wanda Kirkpatrick, director of equal opportunity for the Metropolitan Council, said that's with less than half of the construction done. She said that contractors who can document good faith in achieving their subbing goals are not required to meet them.

Although the city contracted for the work, the federal money flows through the Met Council. It oversees compliance with disadvantaged-business goals, while the state Department of Human Rights oversees hiring goals. Meanwhile, the city also monitors compliance.

"There's been total confusion from government entities regarding how this is handled," said Council Member Elizabeth Glidden.

The council's Transportation and Public Works Committee approved Glidden's request that city staff report June 2 on handling compliance on such projects. Chair Sandra Colvin Roy said it's important to clarify the issue before stimulus money increases.

Kirkpatrick said there probably won't be enough female and minority contractors to go around for all the stimulus work.

But Alex Tittle, education director for Summit, said the school had almost 220 construction trades graduates last year. Their placement rate

fell from 70 to 55 percent as the economy tanked, he said.

King said the city's Civil Rights Department failed to properly oversee the street project. Michael Jordan, the department's director, said it will have a method for monitoring compliance in the future, regardless of the agency handling the dollars.

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