

Supervisors endorse apprenticeship program for public works projects

By Anne Ternus-Bellamy

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WOODLAND — Contractors bidding on major county public works projects will be required to participate in joint labor-management apprenticeship programs under a plan approved by county supervisors on Tuesday.

The move means businesses bidding on public works projects valued at more than \$750,000 will have to partner with labor unions in developing training programs aimed at elevating craftsmanship among local workers.

That could reduce the available pool of contractors for major projects, according to Assistant County Administrator Mindi Nunes, but supervisors decided the social benefits outweighed any potential costs.

The board voted 4-1 in favor of the plan with Supervisor Matt Rexroad of Woodland opposed.

Prior to the vote, supervisors heard from a number of people who spoke in favor of apprenticeship programs and the benefits they provide to veterans, former inmates, immigrants and young people who want to enter a trade out of high school.

Dixon Vice Mayor Jerry Castanon, a field representative for the carpenters union, said the apprenticeship program, which would provide both professional training and medical benefits, is particularly valuable to returning veterans.

“For our brave young men and women,” Castanon said, “it allows them to transition to civilian life ... to work locally and have a career.”

Echoing his comments was former Air Force engineer Scott Vanderpool.

“With the union, they teach you proper ways of doing things,” Vanderpool said, something he noted he was used to in the military.

“From day one they instill safety as key,” he added, along with working hard, looking out for everyone on the job and being able to go home to loved ones at night.

Other veterans also spoke of their ability to transition into good local jobs with benefits thanks to the skills they picked up through apprenticeships.

Journeyman carpenter Alexander Hampton noted that his story “is a little different” in that he entered an apprenticeship program upon release from prison.

“I was given the opportunity to seek work, which was great,” he said. “You can change your life through this program.”

And several immigrants spoke of their ability to create a good life thanks to apprenticeships, including West Sacramento resident Carlos Valdez, who said, “I was able to raise my family with a decent wage (and) become a member of the middle class.”

The problem many run into is a lack of such apprenticeships locally, according to Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis.

Provenza said he’d recently spoken to a young constituent who was driving to the Bay Area every day to participate in an apprenticeship program and noted that while this young man was able to do that, not everybody would have the means to do so.

“Unemployment in this county is too high,” Provenza added. “If you look at our county seal, it says ‘Education, Agriculture and Industry,’ (but) we sometimes forget the education component.”

Supervisor Don Saylor, also from Davis, agreed, saying, “We have an obligation to invest not just in our buildings, but in our people. It’s time we did.”

According to county staff, there are nearly 1,100 licensed contractors in Yolo County, a number of whom already participate in joint apprenticeship programs. Among them, according to the Northern California Carpenters Regional Council, are Clark Pacific, Teichert & Son and Broward Bros. Inc.

Major projects underway that already have a joint apprenticeship component include the new courthouse in Woodland, the Davis-Woodland Wastewater Treatment Plant, the Pioneer Bridge and others.

Under the plan approved Tuesday, all bidders on public works projects in excess of \$750,000 would have to participate in a state of California Division of Apprenticeship Standards-approved joint labor and management apprenticeship program.

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