

Kiewit official confident local subcontractors can handle large portion of Milwaukee streetcar work

By: Alex Zank, alex.zank@dailyreporter.com September 9, 2016 2:26 pm

The contractor overseeing the construction of Milwaukee's downtown streetcar assured local officials Friday that the project can be built largely with the use of local subcontractors and workers.

Mike Ethier, a project manager at Kiewit Corp, made an appearance Friday before the city's Joint Committee on Downtown Streetcar Implementation at a meeting held Friday at city hall. A subsidiary of the Omaha, Neb.-based company was recently named general contractor for the \$124 million streetcar project.

Kiewit will be in charge of building the 2.1-mile downtown route that will serve as the base of the streetcar system, as well as a 0.4-mile loop taking the line to the city's lakefront.

As part of the work, the contractor will have to ensure that the project meets various goals meant to direct some of the resulting work to local residents and small and minority-owned businesses. Twenty-one percent of the spending, for instance, is to go to disadvantaged businesses. And 40 percent of the construction-labor hours are to be performed by workers who have been certified through the city's Residents Preference Program. That program aims to provide construction jobs to city residents who are either unemployed or underemployed, and is typically included on city contracts and private developments that receive more than \$1 million worth of city money.

Kiewit held its first formal meeting with local contractors on Tuesday.

"We had a good attendance," he said. "Sometimes those meetings, people aren't real interested. This project obviously is very much generating a lot of interest. So that's great."

Ethier said he hopes the interest will mean Kiewit will have more subcontractors than usual to choose from for this project. Greater participation will help to drive down bid costs.

"It was a good attendance across the board of disciplines too," he said. It's an encouraging sign, he added, because the job will require the use of a host of specialty trades.

Kiewit expects to start to solicit bid packages within the next two months. Ethier said he thinks local subcontractors will be able to handle a large part of the streetcar work.

He likewise expressed confidence that the project team will be able to ensure at least 40 percent of the contract hours go to local residents.

"It needs to be a focus on the beginning, and it's going to be for us," he said. "It is challenging, but it is absolutely necessary. These projects have to be beneficial, not just after construction but during."

Ethier noted that Kiewit has been in touch with the Milwaukee-based general contractor C.G. Schmidt, which is working with the Milwaukee office of Gilbane Building Co. on the Northwestern Mutual Tower and Commons project, which partly consists of a 32-story headquarters building being put up downtown Milwaukee.

That \$450 million project includes the same resident-hiring goal as the streetcar project. In its most recent quarterly report, Northwestern Mutual said that 44 percent of the construction hours resulting from the project so far have gone to certified resident workers.

Speaking after Friday's meeting, Ethier said that Kiewit deals with similar resident-hiring goals in the Chicago area. Although the requirements there are not as high as in Milwaukee, Kiewit almost always manages to come near or even exceed the 40-percent mark, he said.

As Kiewit prepares for construction to get underway on the streetcar project, planners are expecting to substantially complete the designs within the coming months.

John Duggan, senior vice president of the construction consulting firm The Concord Group, told the committee on Friday that the design work for the downtown route should be finished within the next 90 days. By that time, the

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