



BLACK CONTRACTORS EYEING HOLLYWOOD PARK REDEVELOPMENT

With plans now officially approved by Inglewood, African-Americans look for opportunities with project said to be worth billions.



Don Del Rio, who heads an organization committed to helping African-American contractors find new opportunities, is among those monitoring the redevelopment of Hollywood Park. (Photo by Gary McCarthy)

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INGLEWOOD — On Saturday, in the 70th running of the Hollywood Gold Cup, a horse called Rail Trip shadowed the pacemaker then burst off the final turn to win the \$700,000 first prize by a good distance.

With the City Council's July 8 approval of the redevelopment of the Hollywood Park Racetrack — a reported \$2 billion direct investment in the city — local Black contractors here and in surrounding communities are jockeying themselves into position to partner with whatever general contractor is selected to transform the 238-acre site.

The council vote came two months after the Inglewood Planning Commission unanimously approved the project and three years into a public review process that normally concludes within 18 months.

The pre-construction process has now begun into one of the largest urban infill projects in the nation that will feature retail stores, theaters, parks and homes at the corner of Century Boulevard and Prairie Avenue.

Hollywood Park Tomorrow — the construction arm of the development entity that is the Hollywood Park Land Company — is comprised of a mix of entertainment, retail, residential, office, civic, gaming and recreational uses.

Plans for the first-phase retail district call for four major retail anchors as well as streets lined with restaurants and smaller stores. Other attractions include a modern, state-of-the-art 15 screen movie theater, sidewalk cafes and fine dining restaurants.

According to Hollywood Park Tomorrow, the development is expected to create 19,000 construction and permanent jobs and contribute over \$100 million in tax increment to the city's Redevelopment Agency.

"I feel a mixture of joy and relief that the council has approved our plans to move forward," said Gerard McCallum, one of the project managers for Hollywood Park Tomorrow. "It's a major accomplishment and we wanted to take a longer amount of time and be more prudent. We had great conversations with the local community."

In an interview Tuesday with The Wave, McCallum outlined the next step in the process, which will be to have all the planning and technical drawings approved, which could take another 18 months. He added that the developers also have to give six months notice to the operators of the Hollywood Race Track and then they will go out to bid for a general contractor.

But from the design, all the way up to when the first shovels break ground, McCallum and city officials have pledged their commitment to bringing in local and minority businesses.

"That commitment is worded in the development agreement," said McCallum. "In a sense, we're lucky because this is such a huge project and we're a little ahead."

He added: "In the past, [a request for proposal] goes out today and no-one is aware and [small, local] concerns aren't qualified to respond. But we will have six months prior to breaking ground to do intensive outreach.

"That will include job fairs, local fliers, speaking to churches and local organizations. And our general contractor will be in attendance for all that. We'll gather all that info and store it in our database," McCallum said.

Councilman Danny Tabor, in whose First District Hollywood Park lies, said the city is working with local unions to put in place local labor hiring agreements for this and other developments in the city.

"The city will be reviewing documents ahead of a meeting with City Attorney Cal Saunders next week," Tabor said.

Don Del Rio, a flooring contractor who recently founded the Inglewood Contractors Association (ICA), told The Wave that his organization is partnering with Hollywood Tomorrow to try to ensure [that] an 18 to 30 percent ratio of minority and women owned businesses get onto the development.

The association, which currently has eight members, will be looking to provide training, contract procurement, construction loans, and assistance with bonding.

"It's going to be a tall order but we're calling people daily," said Del Rio. "I recently spoke to Thor Construction Inc. [based in Minnesota], which is one of the largest Black-owned construction firms in the country. The project is still down the road, but it will be here before you know it."

Founded over 30 years ago by Richard Copeland, according to its Web site, Thor Construction has reached \$150 million in company revenues.

"Thor's participation as the lead [general contractor] in the ICA consortium would enable smaller firms to capitalize on our 30-year history and be a real example of the blueprint for incremental and sustainable development as a" minority business, said Ravi Norman, Thor's chief financial officer.

Meanwhile, local business owner Wayne Spencer, of We Guard Security, whose company has provided security services for office buildings, hotels, universities and gated communities since 1982, feels upbeat.

"I feel really confident the city has done its due diligence and oversight," he said. "I think there's gonna be a decent share [on the Hollywood Park development] and we're in the drivers seat to get a good contract."

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