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City withholds payment from contractor at Wainwright Park

By **Melissa TabEEK**, *Special to the Reporter*

Feb. 22, 2012

A New Hampshire company hired to oversee renovations to a Dorchester park is facing punitive sanctions from the city of Boston for its failure to hire city and minority residents for construction jobs.

The park — formerly known as Cronin/Wainwright Park and nestled between Codman Square and the St. Mark's Area— was recently renamed Dr. Rev. William Loesch Park, in honor of a local resident and civic activist. Rev. Loesch is one of the people who noticed that the contracting crews working on \$925,000 rehab of the park seemed to be made up mainly of out-of-state workers.

The general contractor, Sunshine Paving, has been working on the site since last fall on a rehabilitation project that is due to be complete by June. Once complete, the renovated park will have new play equipment and chain link fences, revamped playing fields, a new benches.

Brooke Woodson, the director of the Boston Resident Job Policy Office, confirmed this week that three lump payments totaling \$355,000 have been withheld from Sunshine Paving. Woodson said that the New Hampshire-based contractor was also called in for a "corrective action meeting" to get them to change their behavior.

"We have some significant concerns about the hiring practices on that project," said Woodson. "[Sunshine Paving] were surprised because they thought it applied to only new hires, but we informed them that it applies to all workers on the project and we informed them that they entered into a contract."

Rev. William Loesch, who lives nearby, said he noticed right away that Sunshine Paving had not hired residents or minorities.

"I immediately saw that there was something wrong. Every time I looked it was white males and the license plates were always from somewhere else," said Loesch.

The 1983 ordinance that established the Boston Residents Job Policy states the any construction project funded in whole or part by city or federal funds, or on which the city has been a signatory on, shall comply by employing 50 percent Boston residents, 25 percent minorities, and 10 percent females.

If not corrected to the city's satisfaction, the company could be barred from winning future city contracts and could be fined, according to Woodson. So far, the contractor has only agreed to hire one new Boston resident, an outcome that Woodson said is "not going to satisfy us."

"We're looking for full, best faith efforts through the end of this project and we'll continue to push for that," Woodson said, adding that the practice of withholding payments has been effective in his experience.

At Large Boston City Councilor Ayanna Pressley believes that this is an important step for the city to take as well, to ensure that those best faith efforts are met by contractors.

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"I think it's the right thing. That sends a very strong message and ultimately that results in greater enforcement because it's a deterrent from not meeting the guidelines," said Pressley.

Woodson said that he hopes that work will resume on the site in the coming weeks. He said that the city has not issued a stop-work order and said that the lack of activity on the job was due to a seasonal schedule. The owner of Sunshine Paving could not be reached for comment and a company representative reached this week declined to speak about the matter.

Managing Editor Bill Forry contributed to this report.



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