



**MINORITY, WOMEN, DISADVANTAGED & EVANSTON BUSINESS ENTERPRISE (M/W/D/EBE) DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, May 17, 2023  
6:00 P.M.  
Meeting Minutes

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councilmember Bobby Burns, Councilmember Kristian Harris, Councilmember Devon Reid, Angela Pennisi, Ernest Noy, Rachel Williams, Michael McLean

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Jared Davis, Bonaventure Fandohan, Kemone Hendricks

**STAFF PRESENT:** Treasurer; Tammi Nunez, Purchasing Manager; John Gonzalez, Purchasing Specialist; Nathan Norman, Workforce Development Manager; Stephanie Mendoza, City Clerk; Paul Zalmezak, Economic Development Manager

**GUEST:** Peter Braithwaite, Northwestern University; Travis Centers, RiseKit; Wissam Akra, Tough Leaf

**PRESIDING MEMBER:** Councilmember Bobby Burns

**1. Declaration of a Quorum**

With a quorum present, Councilmember (CM) Burns called the meeting to order.

**2. Approval of Minutes**

Councilmember Harris motioned to approve the April 19, 2023, minutes. Seconded by E. Noy. All voted in favor of approving minutes unanimously.

**3. Guest Introduction**

**A. Wissam Akra (Tough Leaf)**

Third party business that matches contractors with minority businesses. Allows general contractors to find qualified minority, woman and disadvantaged subcontractors in order to meet M/W/DBE compliance goals.

**B. RiseKit Platform Representative**

Provides a community partnership management platform for job seekers, community organizations, employers/recruiters, and government agencies.

**4. Staff Reports**

**A. M/W/EBE and LEP Tracking Report**

Councilmember Reid motioned to hold reporting for the next meeting on June 21, 2023. Seconded by councilmember Harris. All voted in favor unanimously.

**5. New Business**

**A. Tough Leaf – Presentation**

Wissam Akra, CEO and Co-Founder of Tough Leaf presented. His services allow Contractors/Developers to find and hire firms that are M/W/DBE to meet compliance goals. Tough Leaf provides a list of vetted diverse firms that are qualified and are ready to bid on projects. Diverse firms get access to opportunities based on their qualifications. They also get access to capacity building services such as: Insurance, Bonding, Financing, Benefits, Staffing and more. Data is updated weekly by aggregating data from agencies such as Department of Labor and Dun & Bradstreet. Services are free for Cities to use if all city projects use their services. In addition to construction/ development projects, other projects covered include engineering services, supply requisitions, facility services and many others.

**B. RiseKit Platform – Presentation**

Travis Centers, Vice President, Community Development presented. His organization is currently working with Nathan Norman who is the Workforce Development Managers for the City of Evanston. RiseKit allows job seekers from underserved communities to find and stay on a fulfilling career pathway by connecting community organizations and employers. Riskkit and the City of Evanston have a scheduled launch for the third week of June.

**6. Old Business**

**A. M/W/D/EBE Certification for Local business, Certification Process - Discussion**

Peter Braithwaite from Northwestern University discussed the idea of the City of Evanston allowing local businesses to Self-Declare as a Woman, Minority or Disadvantaged Business Enterprise with government identification and without having to provide actual certification for City lead projects. Self-Declaring will allow for a smoother process and better tracking. The database would be accessible to the public including residents seeking services from specific business groups. A. Pennisi suggested having a disclaimer for using any of the data.

**B. Anchor Procurement NLC Update**

The memorandum of understanding has been signed. NLC should be issuing the grant funds by the week of May 22<sup>nd</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup>, which have been delayed due to staffing issues on their end. The next cohort call is scheduled for July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

**C. MWEBE Committee Work Plan Updates**

**Goal #1: Position Evanston’s MWEBE Committee as a leader in MWEBE advocacy in Evanston.**

Committee A. Pennisi has reached out to other municipalities for info and is still waiting to hear back. Group No. 1 will work with Peter Braithwaite and Clerk Mendoza regarding the Self-Declaring of businesses as the data will be useful and in line with their goal. Group No. 1 will also like to request a survey from the local community businesses at the June 13<sup>th</sup>, MWDEBE Contracting Fair.

**Goal #2: Increase local firms that provide goods and services the city needs.**

Group No. 2 will also work/ further discuss the MWDEBE Self-Declare database process with Peter Braithwaite and Clerk Stephanie Mendoza. Group No. 2 is looking for feedback through a survey at the June 13<sup>th</sup>, MWDEBE Contracting Fair. Group No. 2 will also review the model presented by Tough Leaf for their project.

**Goal #3: Increase local contractors that work as general contractors and subcontractors on major projects in Evanston.**

Group No. 3 is experiencing difficulties with access to good data, other groups will share. Group No. 3 suggests that Risekit have a table at the June 13<sup>th</sup>, MWDEBE Contracting Fair.

**7. Other Business**

**8. Adjournment**

Councilmember Burns motioned the meeting be adjourned, motion carried unanimously. Meeting ended at 8:24 P.M.