

The Columbus Dispatch

Franklin County Commissioners hold inclusion plan to get NAACP input

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Franklin County commissioners were prepared Tuesday to pass a plan to build a new jail and morgue for their jail and morgue construction projects.

But commissioners agreed to table the plan for a week after the Columbus NAACP and two other pro-diversity organizations complained that they weren't consulted.

"I can't speak to why we were not contacted about their diversity and inclusion plan," Nana Watson, president of the NAACP's Columbus chapter, said. "We were very disappointed. The community needs to have input prior to, not afterward."

Commissioners were prepared to adopt a plan that would start the process of ensuring minorities were included in constructing the new jail and morgue.

It's illegal to set aside a certain amount of a public project for minorities. So, commissioners developed the the 47-page inclusion plan as a guide for hiring in procurement, contracting and workforce to build the jail and morgue.

Commissioners passed a five-year, quarter-cent sales tax in 2013 to raise \$205 million for the construction project.

“This is a result of our inability to put goals in these (construction) documents,” Commission President John O’Grady said. “It’s more of a statement of policy, a statement of values.”

It’s also the first time Franklin County created such an inclusion and diversity document.

Minorities for the purpose of the commissioners’ new construction inclusion and diversity plan include socially and economically disadvantaged individuals — including the locally economically disadvantaged, minorities, women and people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender — or companies they own.

“Something’s not quite right here,” said Al Washington, head of the Coalition of Community Organizations, an umbrella group supporting minority inclusion. “You need to engage the affected population.”

The plan also calls for Franklin County to buy software to track how many minorities are hired, to create a new web page so that participants can view information, and to issue monthly status reports.

The commissioners tabled the resolution despite a plea from County Administrator Kenneth Wilson that any delay could do harm.

“Our intent is to be more inclusive,” Wilson said. The plan expresses “our intent to reach heights that haven’t been reached as far as inclusiveness.”



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