



nerej

Springfield water treatment plant to go forward without project labor agreement - by Joe Camilo

March 22, 2024 - Construction Design & Engineering



Joe Camilo

I'm pleased to say that I'll be using this month's message to convey some good news. Last month, I wrote about the Springfield Water and Sewer Commission's split decision to use a union-only project labor agreement to build the \$325 million West Parish Water Treatment Plant. But as of the end of February, I can report that the project has gone out to bid without the PLA.

The commission wisely insisted that all the unions involved sign on to the PLA, and it set a February 16 deadline for them to do so because of the need to get construction of the treatment plant underway as quickly as possible. When the Regional Council of Carpenters missed the deadline, the commission announced the project would proceed using free and open competition.

The decision brings a number of benefits. The more than 82% of the Massachusetts construction workforce that chooses not to join a union can now take part in the project, as can the many open-shop companies that are pre-qualified. The commission and its ratepayers will benefit from the lower costs that accompany more competition.

The change of course is also a win for minority-owned contractors, the vast majority of whom are open shop. Earlier in the process, unions balked at a carve out in the PLA to allow non-union minority- and women-owned contractors to bid on contracts of \$1 million or less. The unions proposed a \$500,000 limit on the exception before agreeing to the \$1 million.

As the Springfield Republican wrote in an editorial, "Now, bids from all parties will carry the same weight. And minority- and women-owned contractors will not be limited to bids of under \$1 million."

ABC MA actively advocated for the project to go forward under open competition. Chapter president Greg Beeman previously sent a letter calling on commissioners to reverse their decision to build the plant using a union-only project labor agreement. He also had a commentary on the topic published in the Republican.

It's impossible to know the outcome of the political battles in which our chapter sometimes finds itself. But you can be sure that we will always fight for the rights of our members. And when the outcome is positive, as with the West Parish Water Treatment Facility, we should all take a moment to enjoy it and appreciate what ABC stands for.

Joe Camilo is the chairman of Associated Builders and Contractors Inc.-Mass. Chapter and is the vice president/general manager at Tocco Building Systems, Billerica, Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540