

Wanted: Community Jobs Policy For San Francisco

By Joshua Arce and Utuma Belfrey

For decades, San Francisco has had a goal of using a workforce that is at least 50 percent local resident on its publicly-funded construction projects. But the city has always relied on the “good faith efforts” of contractors to deliver on this objective. Now, a report released in August of this year by Chinese for Affirmative Action and the Brightline Defense Project (“The Failure of Good Faith: Local Hiring Policy Analysis and Recommendations for San Francisco”) shows that the good faith approach has not worked.¹ In fact, based on a survey of 5.3 million job hours, the report confirms something that community advocates have known anecdotally for years.

For the seven years since 2003, the average local hire figures on city-funded construction is less than 25 percent and actually dipped below 20 percent for 2009. Clearly, say community leaders and job advocates, it is time for San Francisco to come up with a Community Jobs Policy.

The term “Community Jobs Policy” is a new one, but the concept embraces some of the distinctive characteristics of the local hiring debate in San Francisco. While perhaps the most basic aim of local hiring is to keep local dollars circulating within the local economy, the push for reform in San Francisco is driven to a large extent by a desire to break up persistent cycles of poverty by targeting specific underserved and underemployed communities for career-building blue collar and green collar job opportunities. This call for a Community Jobs Policy comes loudest from southeast San Francisco, which includes the Bayview-Hunters Point community.

Community Hiring: a Dream Deferred

In many ways, a true community-driven local hiring policy would be the realization of a dream deferred for Bayview-Hunters Point. In 1972, the San Francisco Building and Construction Trades Council, the San Francisco Contractors’ Association, and the Bayview-Hunters Point community signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), which states that 50 percent of the workers in each trade on

public works projects in the Bayview will be local residents. That MOA is often circulated at community meetings. Community leaders Espanola Jackson, Oscar James, and others who were involved in the Model Cities Program that led to the historic 1972 agreement, make sure that every public discussion about jobs in the city’s southeast sector—where unemployment runs well over 20 percent and closer to 50 percent among African Americans—acknowledges the jobs commitment made nearly 40 years ago.

Guaranteed access to apprenticeship is a critical theme at these meetings, as union apprenticeship programs are the best way to develop the skills required to excel in a construction career. A Community Jobs Policy would ensure that community members have those opportunities and community apprentices and journey level workers have jobs on San Francisco’s public works projects. The 1972 MOA also dictates that local hire must be measured by trade and not by overall project hours, as opportunities for disadvantaged communities have historically been concentrated in the lowest-paying trades, with representation in the higher-paying skilled trades proving elusive.

As San Francisco prepares to spend \$27 billion on public infrastructure projects over the next 10 years, a Community Jobs Policy can be a powerful tool to rebuild a Bayview-Hunters Point middle class that has steadily eroded since the phased shutdown of the

Hunters Point Shipyard began in the 1970s. Such a Policy would create expanded home ownership opportunities, increase spending in local commerce, improve educational facilities, and build stronger community ties.

Local Hire Concerns Create Cross-town Coalitions

Concerns over local hire have brought together community groups from Bayview-Hunters Point and Visitacion Valley with groups from Chinatown, the Mission, and South of Market.

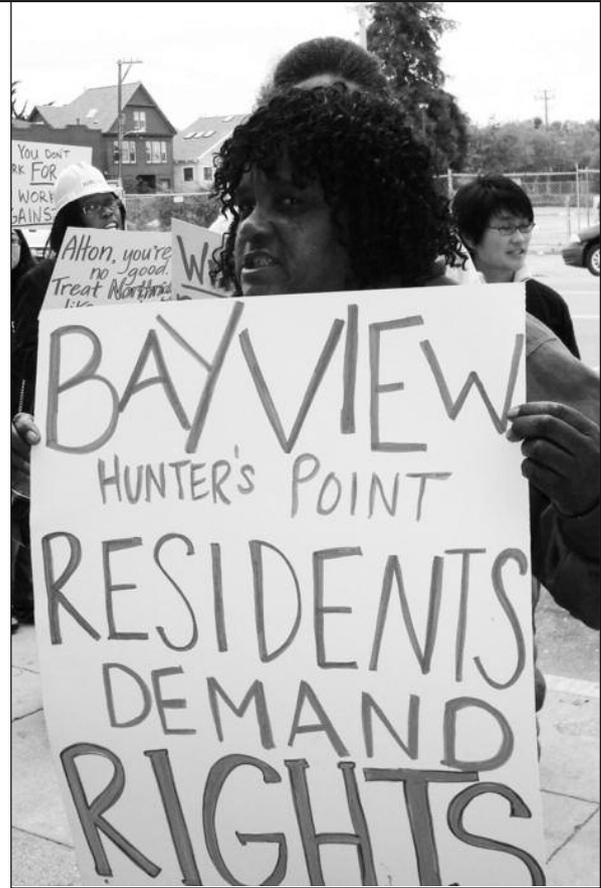
On the day that the “Good Faith” report was released, organizations representing African-American workers, such as the Southeast Jobs Coalition and the Osiris Coalition from the southeast came together with Chinese for Affirmative Action and the Chinese Progressive Association, PODER from the Mission, and the Filipino Community Center from the Excelsior district, to stand together in calling for change. Such a cross-town coalition working to advance local hiring suggests a common understanding that there is enough potential work in San Francisco to lift all boats.

There is also consensus among these organizations about the three fundamental aspects that a Community Jobs Policy must encompass: (1) Local Hiring: city-funded jobs for San Francisco residents within all construction trades; (2) Community Hiring: guaranteed opportunities for the city’s most disproportionately underserved and underrepresented neighborhoods; (3) Project Area Hiring: priority for residents on development projects in their neighborhood.

A successful Community Jobs Policy should also promote worker mobility within the city and the Bay Area to help apprentices advance to journey level status.

Call for Legislation Mandating Local Hire

The need for economic development where there is economic disparity binds San Francisco’s low-income communities and communities of color. Good union jobs with strong wages and benefits,



and safe working conditions in trades that provide honorable and exciting work must be targeted as part of San Francisco’s overall community development strategy.

In October 2010, San Francisco Supervisor John Avalos introduced legislation that would mandate—rather than promote through good faith efforts—local hiring.² Avalos’ legislation builds on a series of local hiring reforms advanced by his colleagues Supervisors Ross Mirkarimi and Sophie Maxwell, and presents the possibility of a city-wide change that mirrors the consensus of communities across the city.

And to ensure a renewed community-labor partnership in San Francisco, any new policy must encourage local hiring of union members alongside a new generation of community apprentices. ■

Endnotes

1. www.brightlinedefense.org/files/The_Failure_of_Good_Faith-CAA_and_Brightline.pdf
2. http://articles.sfgate.com/2010-10-20/bay-area/24143323_1_projects-proposal-construction-jobs

Joshua Arce is the executive director of Brightline Defense Project, a San Francisco-based civil rights advocacy non-profit focused on environmental justice and green workforce development. Utama Belfrey is a journey-level member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and currently sits on the San Francisco Hunters Point Shipyard Citizens’ Advisory Committee.

Photo:

A POWER demonstration in Bayview-Hunter’s Point.

Courtesy of People Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER).