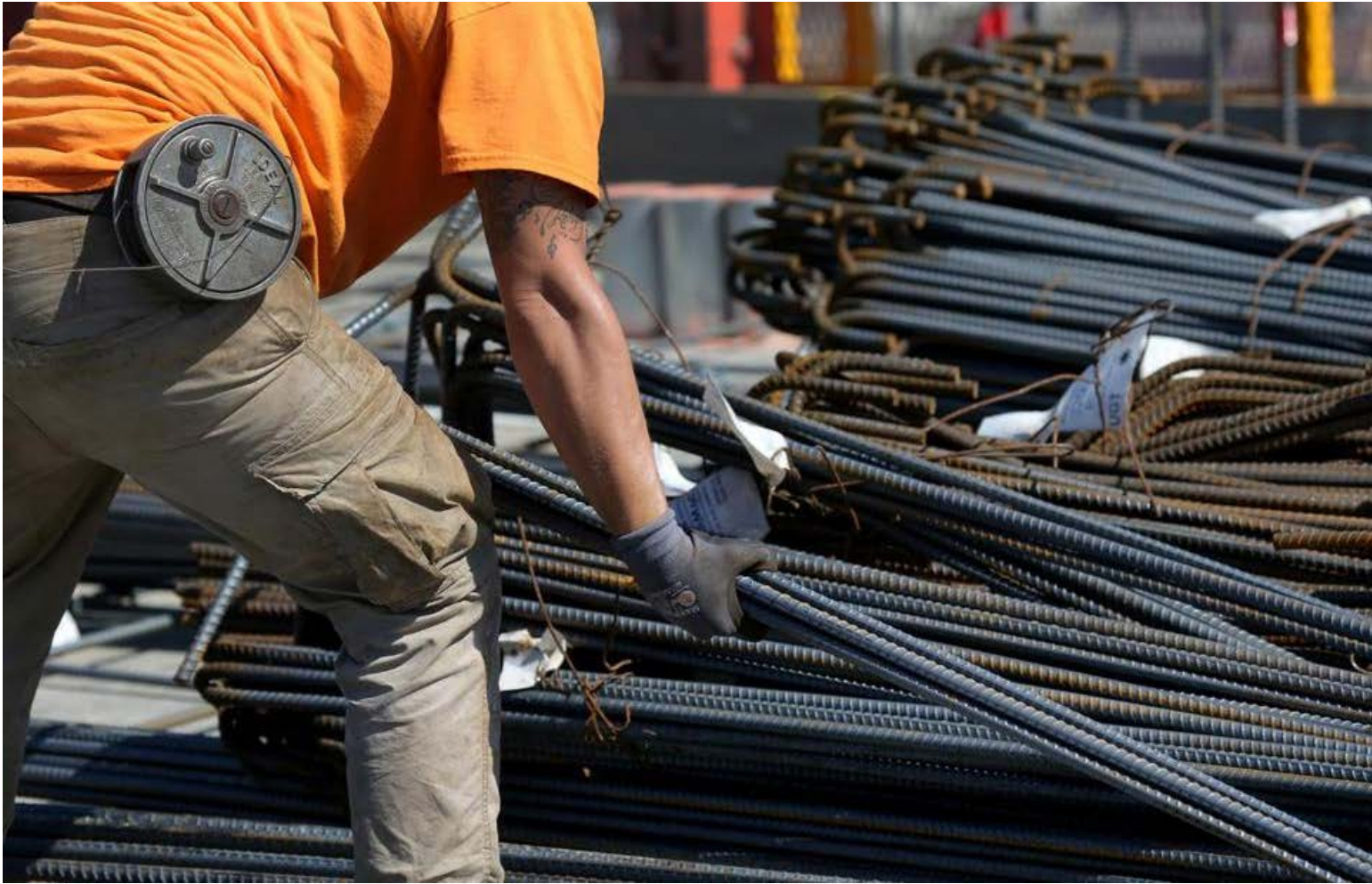


Likely developer of key Winthrop Square site hasn't in past met hiring goals

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When building Millennium Tower, developer Millennium Partners fell short of Boston’s diversity goals for hiring.

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

GLOBE STAFF JUNE 07, 2017

As they lobby to build a skyscraper at Boston’s Winthrop Square, development company executives

and city leaders have touted pledges by the developer to create unprecedented job and investment opportunities for city residents, minorities, and women.

But on previous projects, Millennium Partners has never come close to reaching some of the ambitious goals outlined for Winthrop Square, where a 775-foot skyscraper would replace a shuttered city-owned parking garage.

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In fact, few companies have in recent years, city records show.

Some elected officials and worker advocates are raising doubts about whether Millennium can achieve the lofty goals on this signature project, and whether the city is prepared to take action if the company falls short.

“Millennium does not have a good track record of achieving diversity and inclusion hiring goals in the past, so the notion is that now there will be an extraordinary turnaround?” asked City Councilor Tito Jackson, who is running for mayor.



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Millennium Tower, in 2015 before completion. Its developer says it will work harder on hiring goals if it gets the Winthrop Square project.

More Winthrop Square coverage

A signed memorandum of understanding between the city and Millennium Partners says the company will try to reach various diversity and inclusion goals. The city could impose fines and other penalties on the developer — under existing municipal law — if it fails to reach certain goals, but the city has rarely taken such steps.

At a recent City Council hearing, Millennium principal Joe Larkin acknowledged the company had

fallen short of diversity and inclusion goals on past developments in Boston, but he vowed to do better on the Winthrop Square project, which has stirred controversy because the building would cast new shadows on Boston Common and the Public Garden.

“We will do better,” Larkin said. “We will do better with higher standards across the board here. Our company evolves like everything, like the city of Boston evolves.”

Officials in the Walsh administration are also optimistic. They say that while they are not afraid to penalize Millennium or other developers, if needed, their aim is to work with the companies to get them to comply willingly.

“We fully expect Millennium to do what they say they are going to do,” John Barros, Boston’s chief of economic development, said at a recent City Council hearing.

In an interview, Barros said city officials are encouraged by early meetings with Millennium and the company’s plan for reaching the goals, which may include incentives for subcontractors that meet the goals and penalties for those that don’t.

He said city officials would play an active role, meeting regularly with the developer and keeping a close eye on its progress.

Millennium and its general contractor, Suffolk Construction, would also be held accountable by public pressure, because data about its progress toward the goals would be available.

“We understand that without the proper oversight and constant participation in this project, these are difficult benchmarks to reach,” he said.

One of the main goals for the Winthrop Square project is that 51 percent of the construction work-hours on the project go to Boston residents, with 40 percent going to



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minorities, and 12 percent to women.

(Officials estimate the project will create about 2,950 construction jobs.)

But over the past five years, only six construction projects out of 418 citywide that involved at least 1,000 hours of work met all three of those standards, and all six were relatively small.

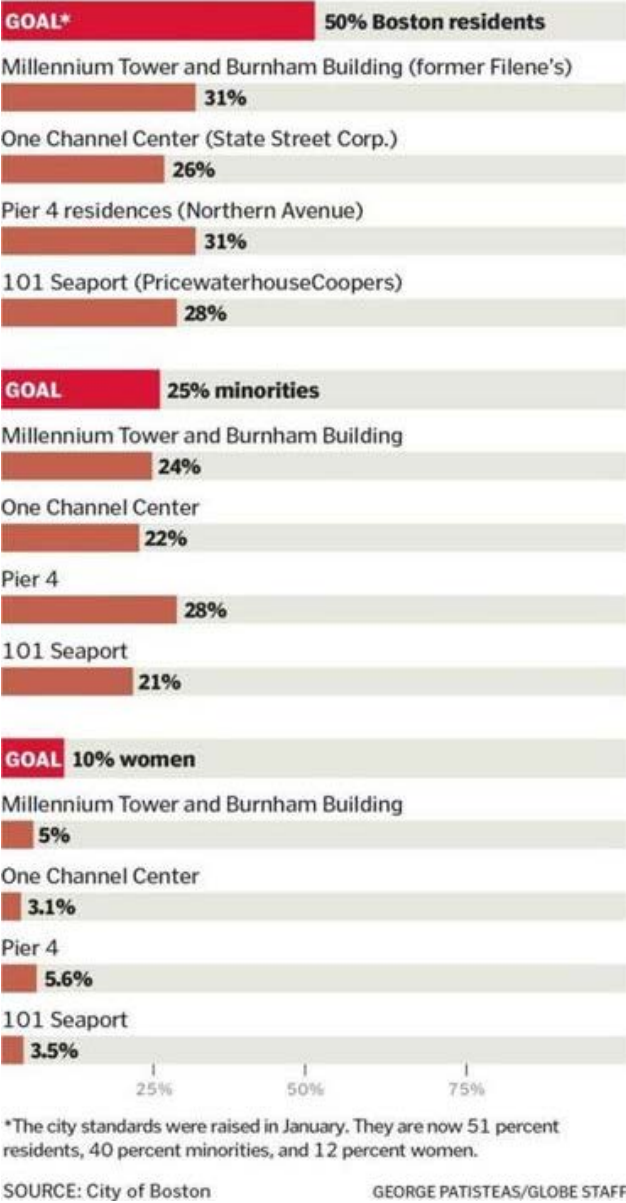
Most projects fell far short of the goals. None of the 20 largest projects in the past five years have met even one of the three hiring standards.

And until January, the city's benchmarks were lower. Yet on the vast majority of projects, the companies fell shy of those lower standards.

Millennium and Suffolk Construction's work to build a 60-story tower and restore a building at the former Filene's site in Downtown Crossing fell short of the goals for that development: Residents accounted for 31 percent of the work-hours, minorities for 24 percent, and women for 5 percent.

Priscilla Flint-Banks, cofounder of the Black Economic Justice Institute and chairwoman of the Boston Jobs Coalition, expressed doubt that goals for the Winthrop Square project — and others around the city — will be met unless City Hall starts penalizing companies that fall short.

Hiring on major construction projects



“These contractors for the past 25 or 30 years have been getting a slap on the wrist,” she said. “There needs to be some accountability.”

Penalties, though, are just a means to an end, Flint-Banks said. “What we want them to do is to hire our people, so we can stay in this city.”

Construction work can offer people in disadvantaged communities a path out of poverty, officials say. Boston-area workers make about \$66,000 per year, or nearly \$32 per hour, on average, according to data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Suffolk Construction said in a prepared statement that “everything and anything is on the table to ensure this project is successful.”

Still, it added:

“It is important to note that in the end, the trades and the labor unions provide us with the workers — it is their pool of resources, not ours, that will ultimately enable us to meet the hiring goals on a project.”

Other goals of the Winthrop Square agreement, some of which city officials said have never been attempted by a private developer in Boston, include:

- Creating smaller bid packages to encourage minority- and women-owned construction companies to participate.
- Offering minorities and minority-owned businesses opportunities to invest in the project.
- Providing training for minorities, women, and youth.

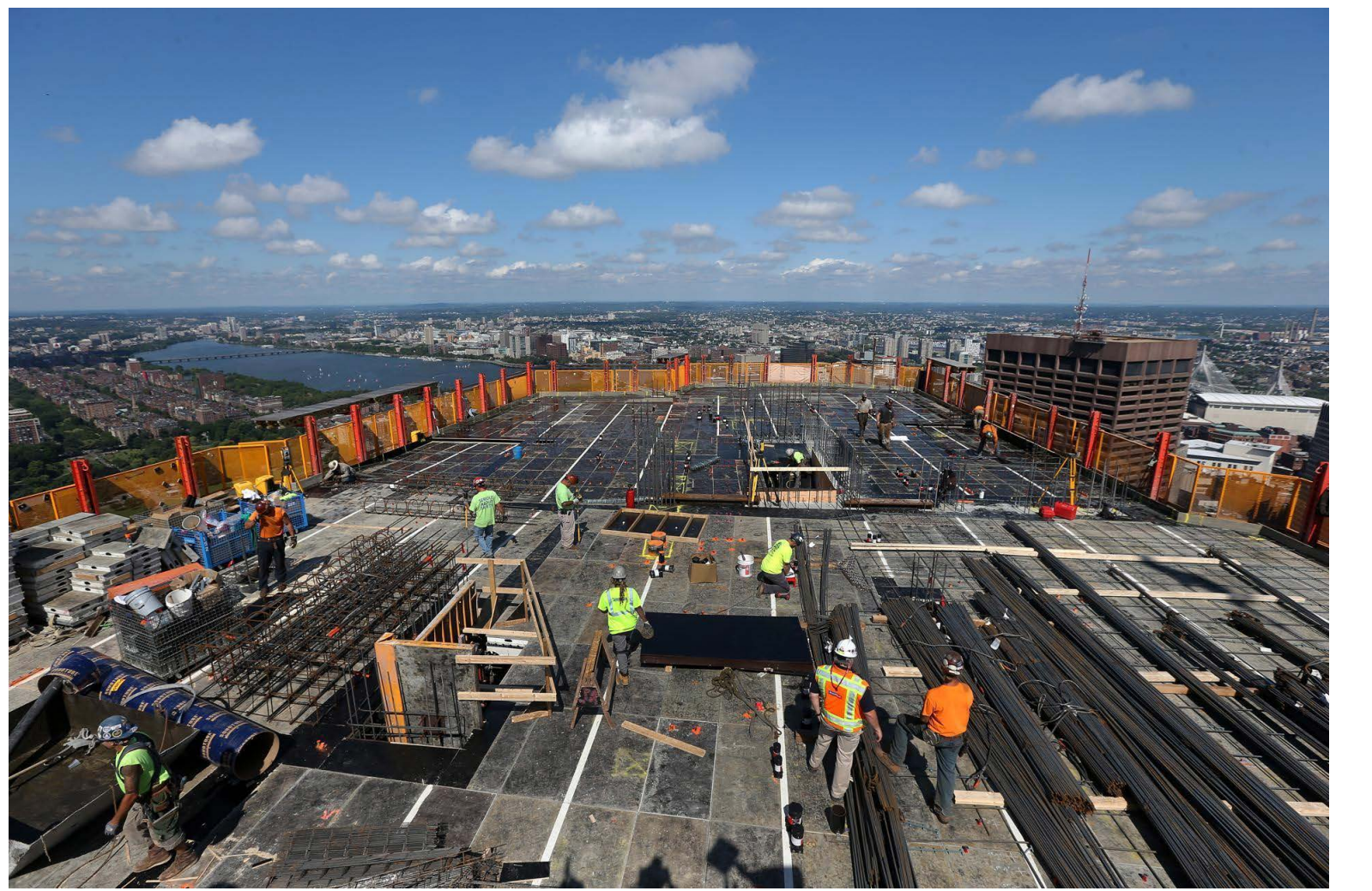
The project needs further approval, including from state lawmakers, who would have to in effect



HANDEL ARCHITECTS

Millennium Partners' proposal for the site of the Winthrop Square Garage.

exempt it from rules to protect Boston Common and the Public Garden from shadows cast by tall buildings.



DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

The construction force for Millennium Tower (in 2015) was 24 percent minority and 5 percent women.

Susan Moir, director of research at the Labor Resource Center at the University of Massachusetts Boston, said the agreement itself represents progress, and its goals are attainable — but only if officials follow the latest research on best practices for recruiting women and minorities.

“Implementation is a steep uphill process,” she said. “It’s going to take a lot of work to happen.”



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Millennium Partners aims to build a high-rise complex on the site of the city’s Winthrop Square Garage in downtown Boston.

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