

News & Views

Changing the Madison Landscape

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BRT East-West Route

Disadvantaged Business Enterprises Play Key Role

by Donna Collingwood

Coming in at \$65.7 million, the current Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project, East-West route, is expected to be one of the largest public works projects in the City of Madison's history.

Doing some of the heavy lifting on the project are several Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs). DBEs are independent businesses, 51% or more owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.

Overall Construction Management

Zenith Tech is the prime contractor for the project, responsible for overseeing the construction of the new bus shelters and associated roadway improvements. The project had a goal of 14 percent DBE participation, and Zenith Tech far exceeded that goal, with 25 percent DBE participation. Subcontractors Beson & Houle, Arbor Green, and Con-Cor are the DBE's on the project.

Working on a project this size can be a great opportunity for DBEs to grow their businesses, which creates an economic boost that has a ripple effect throughout the area.

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Hello UpStart!

A Free Entrepreneurship Program for Women and People of Color

Every fall and winter for ten weeks, Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF) UpStart trains cohorts of women and entrepreneurs of color about every aspect of business ownership.

The program started in 2013 and has seen significant growth over

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See Inside:

Associates in Commercial Real Estate (ACRE) host tour of Madison area developments.

Photos: Crews working on-site on the Bus Rapid Transit east-west line.

ACRE Provides Real World Learning, Opportunity

by Donna Collingwood

The [Associates in Commercial Real Estate \(ACRE\)](#) Program is an industry-supported initiative that recruits and trains individuals of color for professional careers in commercial real estate. The Milwaukee-based program was created by Professor Mark Eppli and the Marquette University College of Business in 2005. It is currently administered through Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Milwaukee in partnership with Marquette, the Milwaukee School of Engineering, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Because of City of Madison investment in the program beginning in 2020, the Milwaukee ACRE Program was opened to Madison area residents.

One of the things ACRE has been emphasizing, according to Charles Clark, Program Officer with LISC Milwaukee, is they want participants to have an investment and to work on building up their own portfolios. “If you’re from Milwaukee, you might need to go somewhere to get your first deal. You are an emerging developer, maybe get something in the north, help there, and then bring that experience back to your own community,” he advised.

ACRE is focused on the development process, with a deep dive into how to get deals, stressing relationships and partnerships for development. The program goes over the development process, more than can be learned working in the field. It includes bankers and developers among the presenters. In one case, a lending executive brought insight into what specifically lenders are looking for when reviewing applications.

ACRE Madison Program and Tour

On March 9, several Milwaukee ACRE affiliates came to Madison for an all-day event. Kaba Bah, research



Attendees visited buildings under construction.

scientist and real estate developer, was the driving force behind the ACRE event in Madison, now in its second year. Kaba served as a panelist, along with Jason Ilstrup of Downtown Madison Inc., and Matt Wachter, City of Madison Director of Planning, Community, and Economic Development.

For Kaba Bah, finding ACRE was like finding a long lost tribe. Less than 5% of real estate developers in the US are black, he said, referencing a *New York Times* article. “At ACRE we don’t have to explain ourselves, or have our guard up. You can feel the love,” he said. All the systemic barriers faced by those in the ACRE program serve as glue, creating a lifelong camaraderie, according to Kaba.

He has received positive feedback about the March 9th tour, including that it was nothing but pure joy, delight, and adventure. Personal highlights included reuniting with mentors, meeting City leadership, and seeing fellow ACRE alumni and current students.

The ACRE tour of Madison kicked off at Madison’s new Black Business Hub and included networking, a panel discussion, and a tour of several properties, some with ties to ACRE. Participants had the opportunity to see recently completed developments, a development under construction, and lots for future development.

“The Madison trip was a powerful experience for the ACRE students,” said Theo Lipscomb. “The City of Madison demonstrated their commitment and support to equitable development and affordable housing. Participants learned about the many added challenges of developing in a high growth and high cost market, particularly during a time of increased interest rates. We



ACRE participants from Madison and Milwaukee, City of Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway, and Tour organizers posed together.

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Hello UpStart! *continued*

The UpStart community is always growing. Current participants and graduates come together several times a year to connect and network, including an annual celebration dinner, allowing students to engage with each other, alumni of the program as well as instructors and other partners.

Graduates reap the benefits of the program's strong reputation in the Madison entrepreneurial community and can leverage relationships to start or expand their businesses.

See **UpStart collaborations:** www.warf.org/news/collaborations-and-collisions/

ACRE Event *continued*

met with key staff and the Mayor, saw numerous development opportunities, and learned about local planning and capital resources.”

Charles Clark was also key in making the Madison event happen. Charles noted that the ACRE Milwaukee program is 20 years old, and said that past participants bring experience, knowledge, and connections that are invaluable to program participants.

“This year they did a really good job of bringing industry folks coming back in and speaking to the class. It’s all about connections,” he said.

Participants got to hear from graduates who are developers now, and City officials. All kinds of industry people connect with ACRE program participants, according to Kaba, and a real community is developing.

“This event really helped participants understand the differences in the Milwaukee and Madison markets,” commented Norm Davis, City of Madison Department of Civil Rights. “There are opportunities in both Cities, though they vary greatly.”

Kaba Bah expressed gratitude for being part of the ACRE family, and was honored to take part in the ACRE event in Madison. “ACRE has given me so much and has opened so many doors for me over the years,” he said. “Now it’s time for me to pay it forward, by continuing to support the ACRE program and also give back to the next generation of aspiring real estate enthusiasts in our community.”

UpStart highlights include:

- Connects entrepreneurs with area professionals and other aspiring entrepreneurs
- Helps entrepreneurs gain the skills you need to launch your business
- Works with entrepreneurs to establish strategic goals and identify next steps

UpStart’s Winter 2024/Cohort 21 application period is CLOSED. The next application period will open up in spring 2024.



ACRE participants during panel session

Photo credit: Mark Fitzgerald

IMLA Diversity Equity and Inclusion Award

The City of Madison was awarded the 2023 International Municipal Lawyers Association (IMLA) DEI Award for founding and fostering the [UpStart Program](#) with the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation.

IMLA is committed to supporting members who embrace diversity as part of their core values and we are excited to provide a way to recognize the people that are leading these efforts. Diversity covers the variety of cultures, experiences, expertise and viewpoints that offer value in every community and are incorporated into the fabric of every community. Diversity encompasses age, education level, ethnicity and race, gender expression and identity, nationality, national origin, physical and mental ability, religious perspectives, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, veteran status and other human differences.

By embracing diversity, municipalities and their law departments attract and retain skilled and talented employees dedicated to excellence in providing service to the community and to their clients.

NEWS & VIEWS

Thanks for reading! Contact us with comments or ideas at dcollingwood@cityofmadison.com



Racial Equity & Social Justice Initiative