

Babies

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Hill Park, NE 37th Avenue and Ainsworth. The free event will feature: 15-minute massages, henna, baby wearing demonstrations and more.

African American Babies are at a Higher Risk of Death

At the moment, Black and Native American babies born in Multnomah County, Oregon, are twice as likely to die in their first year as White babies. But that's not all. Black babies are almost twice as likely to be born underweight as White babies. They are more than two and a half times as likely to have a teen mom. And they are less likely to be breastfed, a known protective factor.

"We need women of color to be doulas in

our community," Monroe says. "If we can find a way for the state to pay for doulas, then this would make a great difference."

If Portland's African American and Native American babies were a country, they would rank 49th in the world for infant mortality, sandwiched between Martinique and Bahrain. The United States as a whole ranks at number 34, right behind Cuba. But it's not just babies who are at risk, it's also mothers. A 2010 report by Amnesty International, 'Deadly Delivery' noted that the USA is a more dangerous place for women to give birth than 49 other countries. And African American women are four times more likely to die in childbirth than White moms.

Black and Native American babies born in Multnomah County, Oregon, are twice as likely to die in their first year as White babies

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Utilities

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increases, budget expenditures and financial plans.

Saltzman's office manages the Bureau of Environmental Services, which handles sewer services. The water bureau's administrator David Shaff did not return a request for comment by press time.

Mayor Adams Communications Director

Amy Ruiz, said Adams is supportive of the matter. Currently, it is Adams' office that reviews rate and policy changes and makes recommendations to the council for approval.

During the 2004 city council race, candidate Adams wrote that the decision of utility rates shouldn't be decided in a single

commissioner's office.

"Because of the specialization of their services, their size and complexity, a single Commissioner-in-Charge and the five members of the City Council cannot adequately provide oversight to the City's \$1.4 billion utility operations," he wrote. "Much like the State Public Utility Commission, I propose

appointing a seven-member City of Portland Utility Board (folks with expertise on utility and environmental issues) that would be empowered with some independent operational authority over the Water and Environmental Services bureaus, unless overruled by a vote of the Portland City Council."

Construction

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to the draft study, prepared by BBC Consulting of Colorado, which at first downplayed evidence of discrimination in how the city pays construction companies to build local infrastructure.

BBC's study, which took two years to complete and is the first such analysis since 1995, is actually two separate studies looking at how construction contracts were awarded from 2004-2009 – one evaluating the city's practices, the other focusing on the Portland Development Commission.

Four 'Immediate Actions' Proposed

Blackwood said in revamping the disparity study, Commissioner Fish – placed in charge of the process by Mayor Adams – focused on immediate, easy-to-implement action items as well as requiring suggestions for longer-term programs and policies before the end of next year.

The commissioners' resolution requires these four items be undertaken immediately:

— Better outreach by the city to minority and women-owned businesses, including quarterly events, more online notifications of available contracts, and more assistance in outreach for general contractors;

— An effort at forecasting upcoming opportunities that includes closer communication between city staff and under-served communities of contractors;

— Fazing out the Sheltered Market Program currently used to serve minority, women and emerging small businesses and graduating all companies out of it as soon as possible; and creating "an improved and strengthened program to replace it;"

— Raising the limit on job bond requirements now included in the "Contractor Prequalification Program" from \$200,000 to \$250,000, and requiring the city's chief

procurement officer to sign off on all pre-qualification requests.

Public Criticism

Blackwood said that a high tide of comments from the National Association of Minority Contractors of Oregon, the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs, and the minority Chambers of Commerce, underscored BBC's heavy reliance on statistics that, critics said, minimized the generations-old issue of city dollars going to primarily white-owned construction companies for taxpayer-funded projects.

Released in early April, the draft study results were put out for public comment for a month – during which the city heard an

nesses hired to help on the study. Her job was collecting community testimony about local companies' experiences in trying to win city contracts for public works projects.

"I interviewed a number of people in the Portland metropolitan area, and there actually was in my view clear discrimination found," she said.

"However working with the numbers, BBC – it all depends on your compilation of them, what you're pulling together and what you look at, to come up with the percentages and the numbers that they did," Burch said.

"No question there was quite a lot of criticism of the methodology," Blackwood said.

'Walk Down the Street'

'As far as I'm concerned, the best gang-prevention program is a job'

--James Posey

earful about BBC's conclusion that Portland is doing a good job in awarding construction contracts to women and minority businesses.

"From 2004 to 2009 the City of Portland awarded \$900 million in contracts," said Tony Jones, executive director of the Metropolitan Contractor Improvement Partnership. "Only \$26 million went to minorities, 2.91 percent; to African Americans, .48 percent," he said. "One would think that with \$900 million you could do a lot of good."

Local consultant Faye Burch runs one of the four women and minority-owned busi-

Burch, who has worked closely with the construction industry for decades, says all you have to do is walk down the street to see the long-term impact of city contracting policies.

"Let's take Williams Avenue, for example," she said. "That was predominantly a Black business district. From Left Bank all the way up Williams Avenue, that business district has been stripped from that community, it has not been replaced with any Black ownership, there has not been any participation by any businesses that wanted to participate on those projects.

"Builders created their own wealth, took

it back to their communities while at the same time stripping our community," she says. "I look at some of the gyms up and down Martin Luther King, all the housing, all the projects that we were not able to participate in, have public dollars associated with them."

"When African Americans and other minorities approach lending institutions – the traditional approaches to getting capital, to getting work – you're always shut down, you don't have collateral, you have credit issues that preclude you. You didn't get the job because you weren't low bid – there's always an institutional reason why you are excluded.

"And then when AA and other minorities tried to get engaged and wanted to buy property or redevelop their own property on Williams Avenue, they were shut down by the institutions," Jones said. "That's why the term is 'institutional racism' – because when we try to walk through the path we're told to walk through, we don't get that opportunity."

Business owner James Posey, who has agitated city officials on the issue for almost 30 years, says the very foundations of the Black community are at stake.

"I don't think you can ignore the issues about the gentrification, the issues around employment, the housing – all these issues converge when you're talking about the absence of economic equity for minorities in our city," he said.

"As far as I'm concerned, the best gang-prevention program is a job – but there is no vehicle in place to be sure they incentivize an individual such as myself who is dedicated to hiring young people and putting them in the workforce in a productive way," Posey said.