

## **Department of Procurement Services**

**2025 Budget Hearing – December 4, 2024**

**Sharla Roberts, Commissioner**

Good afternoon. My name is Sharla Roberts and I am the Chief Procurement Officer for the City of Chicago. I want to thank Mayor Brandon Johnson, Chairman Ervin, Vice-Chairman Lee, and the members of City Council for allowing me to present on behalf of the Department of Procurement Services.

As the contracting authority for the City, we are here to provide a fair, transparent, and equitable procurement process where firms of all types and sizes can participate and prosper. My goal is to establish Chicago as a best-in-class model for government contracting and economic empowerment. I want to work with you to ensure DPS becomes the example other agencies look to for best practices, innovative programming, and equitable opportunities for underrepresented communities.

My first day, I began working to make this vision a reality. I prioritized personally meeting with all our partners to understand their areas of need, as well as strengths and opportunities for improvement in the procurement process. Utilizing information from these meetings, I developed a comprehensive plan focused on the following key strategic initiatives: increased opportunities for minority and women-owned businesses, optimized customer service, streamlined processes, and cost savings strategies.

One of my top priorities is maximizing opportunities for minority and women-owned firms. We have already instituted changes resulting in more opportunities for certified firms to work on City contracts, an increase in the number of certified firms, a streamlined certification process, and increased outreach initiatives. I am personally reviewing the minority, veteran, and women-owned business goals set on each DPS issued contract, and I am working closely with other City departments on their contracts' goals. For each contract, I look closely at the number of certified firms in each area to confirm the goals set genuinely reflect the number of firms available. Utilizing this strategy, we've already added diversity goals to several contracts that previously had no stated goals and have increased goal percentages on other contracts. At the time of contract renewal, we are also assessing goals and looking at data analytics to ensure appropriate goals are established.

We are also reviewing the certification process to remove barriers of entry that impede small and diverse businesses from doing business with the City. For example, we are currently researching removing the certification fee. We are carefully evaluating requests for new contracts to ensure maximum opportunities for small and minority-owned businesses to serve as prime contractors. This includes strategically leveraging the City's SBI, MBI, and Target Market programs whenever feasible. Additionally, we recently created a fast-track certification pilot program to make the certification process more

efficient and user friendly. When this pilot is complete in the first half of 2025, we will utilize the information from it to institute overall changes to the certification review process so all firms can benefit from reduced timelines.

We are also vigorously increasing outreach to small and diverse firms so firms in all 50 wards of Chicago have the information they need to become certified and to participate in City contracts. Recently, we have concentrated outreach efforts on the City's ADCBE certification program to maximize the number of firms who can participate in the Department of Aviation's groundbreaking concessions RFP. In partnership with CDA, we have conducted nine in-person ACDBE workshops in the north, south, east, and west regions of Chicago. Further, in partnership with the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, we have conducted directed outreach to restaurants and concessionaires to ensure they are aware of the solicitation. These efforts have resulted in DPS receiving applications from ACDBE firms at a historical rate. Since joining DPS, we have received over 50 new ACDBE applications with the majority of those firms already becoming certified as ACDBEs.

I am committed to DPS becoming deeply rooted in all Chicago communities by regularly conducting outreach to small and diverse firms. These efforts will provide firms with increased awareness of opportunities for them to participate in City contracts, as well as the tools and knowledge to participate in those contracts. To further show our commitment, DPS already has four additional outreach events planned for 2025 in various aldermanic communities across Chicago. These events are planned in different regions of the City, one per quarter, to ensure each ward receives support. We look forward to working with each of you to plan further additional outreach to best serve your constituents.

This year, the City has increased payments to MBE and WBE firms. The City paid \$1.3 billion to prime contractors. Of those payments, \$600 million went to MBE and WBE firms reflecting a five percent increase from last year. By implementing new strategies including maximizing goals on City contracts, removing barriers of entry for small and diverse businesses, and increased outreach to small and diverse firms, we expect the numbers from this year to increase exponentially in the coming years. We will implement metrics to measure our success and report to you.

Another one of my priorities is providing superior support to our customers. We are unique in that we serve nearly every City department daily. I am utilizing information gathered from meeting with our partners, as well as data analytics, to timely meet requests. At the start of each year, I will meet with each department to understand their needs so we can better serve them. For example, I have already met with the Department of Water Management to determine how we can be more strategic with sourcing MBEs and WBEs and how we can create mentor protégé programs to create new opportunities for MBE and WBE firms in spaces that currently have limited MBE and WBE engagement.

Our third focus, in line with Mayor Johnson's Cut the Tape initiative, is streamlining DPS operations to reduce solicitation timelines. To further this goal, we are reviewing all of DPS's current processes and policies to update them to remove inefficiencies and to create workflows that will better assist our customers and increase transparency on contract timelines. We are also developing a robust internal training program to ensure our team works as efficiently as possible and closely examine how we can leverage current technologies to better serve the City.

Finally, I am committed to maximizing cost-saving strategies. I have reviewed current City processes and identified various measures to reduce City spending. To achieve this goal, we are utilizing the following measures: 1) aggressively negotiating with vendors to ensure the City is receiving competitive pricing; 2) incorporating language which provides the City with rebates in high-volume contracts; 3) requesting reductions in pricing during contract renewals; 4) strategic sourcing; and 5) partnering with user departments to increase the number of revenue-generating contracts the City holds.

In closing, we are committed to transformation and deeply integrating DPS into City communities so we can provide the City best-in-class service. I plan to work with you and our customers to transfer DPS into a department that will serve as a vehicle to promote generational wealth for all businesses, especially those in underserved communities. I look forward to partnering with each and every one of you as we work to continuously improve and meet Chicago's needs.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sharla Roberts  
Chief Procurement Officer