

IVDA plans review of affirmative action policy

■ Norton's redevelopment agency believes it is time to examine its requirement that contractors hire minority and women-owned companies.

By **MICHAEL DIAMOND**
Sun Business Writer

In the wake of a controversial construction contract it awarded two weeks ago, the Inland Valley Development Agency today is expected to begin reviewing its affirmative action policy for contractors.

While board members say it's unlikely the agency will abandon its written commitment to hiring goals for minority- and women-owned companies, Loma Linda Mayor Robert Christman said changes in the policy are needed.

"It seemed like there were so

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many subtleties and inconsistencies in the documents placed before us," said Christman, an IVDA member.

Christman was referring to a \$3 million contract awarded to J. Murrey Construction of Redlands to renovate four buildings for TRW Inc. at former Norton Air Force Base.

J. Murrey Construction submitted the lowest bid, but officials who reviewed it said the company failed to meet the IVDA's affirmative action policy and recommended that the contract be awarded to Norco-based Gorham Co. Inc., whose bid was \$280,000 more.

The board awarded J. Murrey Construction the project anyway, pointing to the company's self-evaluation that contended it

WHERE TO GO

The Inland Valley Development Agency meets at 4 p.m. at Loma Linda City Hall, 25541 Barton Road.

made a good faith effort to meet the standards.

"I have a problem with government paying substantially more — in this case 15 percent more — than they have to for the same level of service," Christman said.

The policy says companies bidding for projects worth more than \$10,000 must try to have a subcontracting team comprised of 15 percent minority-owned and 5 percent women-owned businesses.

"I'm not specifically opposed

to (affirmative action policies), but I'm opposed to what we have now," Christman said.

Other board members are supporting the policy. San Bernardino Councilwoman Valerie Pope-Ludlum said the rules increase opportunity and guard against abuse.

"I think it's a good policy," Pope-Ludlum said. "You go out and make a concerted effort to find certified companies."

The IVDA staff has recommended that the board form a committee to review the policy with Wes Jefferson, director of San Bernardino County's contract compliance office, and Ernie Wilson, the city of San Bernardino's affirmative action officer.

Whether the IVDA, a joint powers authority comprised of the county and three cities, is required by law to comply with the

state's minority and women participation goals is unclear.

Edward Pilot, an attorney with Sabo & Green, which represents the IVDA, said: "There's nothing mandated by state law ... that says they have to do any of this."

But attorney Marc Levine, who represents Gorham Co., disagreed, saying the IVDA was bound by the law: "There's no doubt about it."

Nonetheless, the IVDA in July 1993 adopted a policy modeled after guidelines used by San Bernardino County.

Since then, it has awarded only a handful of contracts worth more than \$10,000. The largest was a \$7 million contract for road construction awarded to Match Corp., a Colton-based company that qualified by showing a good faith effort was made to meet the goals, said Bill Bopf, the IVDA's executive director.