

OTHER BUSINESS NEWS

City urged to promote pay, perks

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By ANDRÉA CECIL, Daily Record Business Writer

Baltimore-area elected officials should negotiate with incoming businesses to make sure low-wage workers have the income, benefits and health care to support their families, two local union leaders said yesterday.

While economic development has created work for hundreds, those jobs cannot sustain families, said Roxie Herbekian, international organizer for the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, and Fred D. Mason Jr., president of the AFL-CIO for Maryland and Washington.

“There’s something wrong with that,” Mason said. “There’s something wrong with the state, where jobs are being created and people can’t take care of themselves. We have to bargain at the bargaining table, where we have representation of rights.”



Union leaders Roxie Herbekian, left, and Fred Mason say more needs to be done to make sure the people who work at the city’s new businesses have good wages and benefits.

Both spoke at the University of Baltimore Merrick School of Business about organized labor in the Baltimore region, at a forum sponsored by the Baltimore-based [Job Opportunities Task Force](#) and the Open Society Institute-Baltimore.

About 50 people attended the event, including representatives from local unions, the city and the state and G.I. Johnson, president of the Baltimore branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Baltimore City Council President Sheila Dixon would not say whether it is feasible for the city to require incoming hospitality businesses to provide particular wages, benefits and health care because it is not mandated by law.

However, she said, the city needs to examine the issue.

“I think people need to be able to have a living wage, and hopefully with the living wage they can get the benefits that assist them with their families,” Dixon said.

When Baltimore’s hotel industry exploded in the 1980s, local unions were unprepared not only to recruit workers, but also to bargain on their behalf, Herbekian said. Today, the result is low union density, which means no pressure to increase workers’ wages, she said.

However, she added that her union has met with M.J. “Jay” Brodie, president of the Baltimore Development Corp., the city’s quasi-public economic development agency, about the proposed 750-room Hilton Hotel that would be built next to the Baltimore Convention Center north of Camden Yards. The hotel and restaurant employees union wants to ensure specific wages, benefits and health care for potential hotel workers, Herbekian said.

Brodie did not return phone calls seeking comment.

Karen Sitnick, director of the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development, said she hopes the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board will more actively work with the hotel and hospitality industry to create jobs leading to career paths at its next meeting on Dec. 20.

“It’s very reasonable that working in a very positive and proactive way, we can work with groups of employers to address their role in enhancing the employment environment,” she said. “And it’s in their best interest as well, because people will stay with them longer and become more connected to their work place and become more loyal.”

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