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Pittsburgh Council gives first OK to prevailing wage bill

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By Rich Lord, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Pittsburgh City Council today tentatively approved legislation guaranteeing a prevailing wage to certain workers employed on future development sites supported by city subsidies.

The unanimous vote came despite concerns from developers and the city's Urban Redevelopment Authority that it would scare away hotel, grocery and office operators that might like to build in the city, but would hesitate to commit to open-ended promises to pay workers based on market averages. But a coalition of union, community, environmental and religious organizations got behind it, as the first part of a broad revamp of development policy that will bleed into next year's legislative calendar.

"I am convinced that this is a fine start," said Councilman Ricky Burgess, who added his name as the bill's eighth sponsor out of nine council members, "but I will [also] be supporting other legislation that protects workers."

The vote came after Councilman Patrick Dowd submitted 12 amendments, all of which were read, briefly discussed, and unanimously shelved. Even Mr. Dowd voted to back-burner his amendments, though he said he wants council to consider them next week.

"It's my sincerest hope that my colleagues will not lock me out," he said. "I beg you not to lock me out."

Councilman William Peduto said he spent late nights talking with developers and unions, and will introduce amendments to clarify some language in the legislation on Monday, when it could come up for a final vote.

The legislation would apply to future development projects of more than 100,000 square feet, or grocery stores of more than 30,000 square feet, that get \$100,000 or more of city grants, favorable loans, financing, infrastructure help or discounted land. Tenants of such developments would have to pay hotel, cafeteria, grocery and building service workers "prevailing wages," based on the averages paid to their peers in the city.

Rich Lord can be reached at rlord@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1542.

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