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National Harbor is the 'Super Bowl' for contractors

By Liza Gutierrez | Staff Writer

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Companies, minority or otherwise, must navigate multiple screening levels to earn consideration for a project at National Harbor.

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They must demonstrate a specific expertise and experience, and show that they have the financial capacity, staff, equipment and lines of credit to do the work, said Ron Adolph of the TAC Cos. Then they must compete on price, he said.

“National Harbor and the Gaylord hotel have a who’s who of general contractors and major contractors. You’re competing with the best in town,” Adolph said.

This competitive environment is like going from a high school to college football team — “it’s another speed,” he said.

“We’re in the Super Bowl down here.”

Some small companies have partnered with larger ones on joint ventures. And small companies have come together as a consortium, although that is not “an easy situation,” Adolph said.

It’s tough for a group of small companies to piece together a \$30 million bid and compete against a company such as Miller and Long of Bethesda — a nationally recognized concrete construction firm — with its extensive capacity, he said. “Those consortiums have had some hard times.”

The 300-acre waterfront property will be undergoing development for 15 to 20 years, and the different components include development and now operations, for both National Harbor and Gaylord, said spokeswoman Rocell R. Viniard. Contracts for operations are typically one-year deals that can be renewed, she said.

The development teams award construction bids, and the operations teams put contracts in place for ongoing projects such as painting, landscaping, security and janitorial services, said Kent Digby of developer The Peterson Cos. “There is a true distinction.”

Companies grow all the time, so if one didn’t win a bid two years ago but is twice the size now, it can return for another try, he said. National Harbor is happy to work with small firms — “we just want very high-quality small companies that perform well,” Digby said.

Depending on a company’s capabilities, one contract may be awarded for work covering two buildings, or two separate contracts may be offered, Viniard said.

Digby advises that small companies “don’t make the mistake of bidding more than you can do well.”

Viniard said she could not estimate the total number of contracts that will be awarded for work at National Harbor.

“It’s so hard to really determine that because there are so many companies out there, and we have so many buildings under construction,” she said.

Digby also highlighted the opportunities that will be available from retailers who are responsible for their own space and may need contractors for flooring, wallpaper, window washing and other projects. If there are 100 retail tenants, then there are 100 additional opportunities for work there, he said.

“There’s a misperception that National Harbor/Peterson Companies is doing all the hiring for this entire project, and



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that's not the case," Viniard said.

Whenever a new hotel or new retailer is announced, that should throw up a flag that it may need a contractor to handle work on its site, she said.