



MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 24, 2023

7:30 am

**MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board
One Union Street, Suite 202
Lawrence, MA 01840**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Joseph Bevilacqua, John Bruno, Lane Glenn, Andrew Herlihy, Jeff Linehan, Joselyn Marte, Carol Riemer, Calvin Williams, Juan Yepez

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Ann Marie Borgezi, Christian Brennan, Ron Contrado, Kemelin Domenech, Marko Duffy, Mark Forman, Evelyn Friedman, Robin Hynds, John Lavoie, Maureen Lynch, Rosa Muñoz, Fred Shaheen, Ellen Weinhold, Robert Westcott

STAFF PRESENT:

Frank Bonet, Lynda Buote, Robin Del Negro, Varsha Gandhi, Cristy Gomez, Yeang Leng, Valerie Luque, Tracy Myszkowski, Corina Ossers, Mike Paglia

GUESTS PRESENT:

Robin Dion, Allison Dolan-Wilson, Maryanne Hamm, Mike McCarthy, Eric Nelson, Linda Rohrer

I. Call to Order

A quorum being present, Chairman Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 7:55 a.m.

II. Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Yepez welcomed and thanked everyone for attending today's meeting.

III. Approval of the November 9, 2022, minutes (vote required)

Chairman Yepez called for a motion on the minutes of the November 9, 2022, annual meeting.

Motion by Cal Williams, seconded by Joselyn Marte to approve the minutes of the November 9, 2022, meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. Report of Chair

Juan said welcome and thank you for attending today. The Workforce Board staff are fully moved into this space and will be in place 100% working from their offices effective February 10, 2023.

Governor Maura Healey has appointed the new Secretary for the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. Secretary Lauren E. Jones was appointed and sworn in last week. She has more than 17 years of experience working in local and state government, non-profits, and the private sector, with a particular focus on workforce development. As Executive Vice President of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, Jones led the organization's workforce development policy and strategy. She previously led the Massachusetts market for the non-profit Apprenti, where she worked with companies to cultivate and diversify tech talent through registered apprenticeships. She also created and led the Business Strategy Unit for Boston Mayor Marty Walsh's Office of Economic Development, supporting business attraction and employer engagement in the city of Boston. Prior to that, she held several roles in the Patrick-Murray Administration, including Communications Director for the Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development, Policy & Communications Director for former Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray, and Senior Program Manager of the Economic Development Incentive Program in the Office of Business Development.

I was informed earlier this month that Linda Rohrer, Executive Director of the MassHire MV Career Center has decided to retire from service in the coming months. The date is not finalized. She has worked for over 40 years, and we know you will join us in wishing Linda well as she soon starts a new chapter in her life. Although we all will miss her, she has worked hard her entire career and has earned the opportunity to enjoy more time with her family and friends. We wish her the best and thank her for her service. Currently, Northern Essex Community College has posted the position on its webpage. Frank has shared that link with the Massachusetts Workforce Association and other colleagues in the workforce field. I will keep the team abreast of any news and a possible replacement and hope that a fine replacement, such as Linda, is chosen.

While board directors have a responsibility to serve according to a nonprofit's mission, the organization has a responsibility to provide them with governance training and education to prepare them well for the job of board service. As many know, effective boards get education and training on their duties and responsibilities. They learn that their job starts with setting the mission and addressing strategic concerns. Board development means anything which helps this, and any board undertakes its role more effectively. I am not stating that this board is ineffective, but I can't recall a time when the workforce board provided training to become more effective. Director Bonet is preparing to review and select a training vendor for our board development training. Before he does, he will contact board members to communicate with you regarding any possible recommendations of topics that you may want to be placed on a training plan.

The MassHire Department of Career Services (MDCS) will be conducting the Annual Program Monitoring Review of the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board Area from February 6-16 for FY23. In accordance with applicable State and Federal laws, the FY23 Program review will cover Adults, Dislocated Workers, Youth, Youth Framework Services, Veterans, Re-Employment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA), Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) and Migrant Seasonal Farm Worker (MSFW).

Next week Frank and his staff will be communicating with you regarding any recommended possible changes to the by-laws, which were last updated in 2014. This is very important because nonprofit organizations are governed by an official set of rules - called bylaws. The Workforce bylaws outline

any state requirements, as well as how the board (and by extension, the people who run it, its staff) will operate at a high level. Bylaws are adopted when the nonprofit is established, and they act as the pillar that upholds the organization—every nonprofit must adhere to its unique bylaws. Bylaws are essential because they determine how decisions are made, conflicts are resolved, and risks to the workforce are avoided. When it comes to legal concerns, it's our bylaws that have the final word. I can't recall the last time the bylaws were reviewed. I recommend that we create a task group of members to review the by-laws and report to the board on recommended changes. Juan asked if there were any volunteers to participate in the task group and said that Corina and Frank will reach out for volunteers and John Bruno volunteered to be part of the task group.

Unless there are any questions, this concludes my report.

V. Reports of Committee Chairs

i. Planning and Career Center Committee

In Ann Marie Borgesí's absence, Juan Yopez said the Planning Committee met on January 17, 2023. The following MMVWB Policy Changes were discussed and approved.

- a. Support Services Policy
 - Increased General Support Services cap from \$1,000 to \$2,000 and Child Care cap from \$500 to \$1,000.
 - Increased the Child Care Daily Rate and Weekly Rate
 - The Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA) board voted unanimously to go fare-free for all local fixed routes and EZ Trans paratransit services starting March 1, 2022, for at least 2 years.
 - Increased Transportation Cost Daily Round-Trip Mileage Rate
 - Effective September 12, 2022, The Commonwealth of Massachusetts will pay for a candidate's first GED® test in each subject plus limited retakes (two retests per subject). The HiSET® exam will also be paid for by the Commonwealth at a later date (the estimated time to start HiSET® free testing is October).
- b. Needs Related Payment Policy
 - Increased the Needs Related Payment Rate from \$10.00/ per day to \$15.00/per day, or a maximum of \$50.00/per week to \$75.00/per week.
- c. Individual Training Account Policy and Process
 - Added adult education, HiSet, ESOL, and literacy activities provided in combination with job readiness or occupational skills as Allowable WIOA ITAs.
 - Increased WIOA Title I ITA cap for stand-alone occupational skills training from \$6,000 to \$7,500 and for occupational skills and education combined to \$9,000.
 - Changed the MMVWB Subsequent Eligibility Standards for ITA Providers to be more simplified and in line with the State.
 - Updated the MA Minimum Wage rate for the definition of an Underemployed Dislocated Worker. Before it read \$12.25 and now, we simplified by putting MA Minimum Wage.
 - Added the following language to the ITA Limitation section: *The Board will approve quality programs related to in-demand industries and occupations as determined by the Northeast Regional Labor Market Blueprint and updates to this document. Quality training programs must lead to industry-recognized credentials and certificates.*

Unless there are any questions, that concludes the Planning Committee's report.

ii. Youth Committee

Cal Williams said this quarter, we continue to focus on the development of new partnerships/relationships with school districts, youth servicing organizations, and employer partners. The partnerships between the MassHire MV Workforce Board, MassHire MV Career Center, school systems, and employers has allowed us to reach out to area youth to provide them with college and career readiness resources available to link students' academic knowledge to work skills and work experience. These partnerships are helping make a connection between work and learning.

Highlights of this quarter:

New partnerships: We developed a new partnership with Triton Regional High School and strengthened our partnership with Methuen High School.

Youth Programs Alignment: It is imperative for us to align our youth programs and initiatives to strengthen our partnerships to provide more comprehensive career development services as possible. This allows our youth to become aware of all the resources and opportunities for career advancement and workforce development available to them in our region. We continue to create connections among youth programs by leveraging YouthWorks Year-Round funding to co-enroll Connecting Activities eligible students. This approach allowed us to co-enroll over 100 students and provide them with stipends or wages, and incentives while enhancing their learning. Also, these students are completing 25 hours of Signal Success, the Career Readiness Curriculum developed by the Commonwealth Corporation. Students can explore careers and learn about the importance of developing employability skills. Through this alignment, students have been able to learn as much as possible about the education level, responsibilities, skills, and outlook for the careers they are considering for future employment. We agree that one of the indicators of future career success is whether youth had a job while young.

Our new collaboration with Lawrence General Hospital is providing 21 students from Greater Lawrence Technical School, Haverhill, and Lawrence High Schools the opportunity to complete their required internship hours while earning subsidized wages. These students are working as Unit Assists in Emergency Care, Mammography, Maternity, Pediatrics, Welcome Center, Distribution, IT Help desk and more.

These students were able to link their classroom learning experiences in Health Care, IT tracks and EMT courses, Medical Assisting program to meaningful subsidized employment opportunities.

At a recent presentation and interview, Brenda Leblanc from Lawrence General Hospital shared her support and pride in the participants' successes saying she was proud of the learning, initiative, and flexibility of the youth. Unit supervisors have shared their appreciation and eagerness to keep students involved, while some were able to take on some students more closely offering a mentoring relationship.

Students expressed their personal outcomes were growth in their skills sets, confirmation or change of interest in their career tracks, networking, and a wide range of experiences that impacted their view on life, understanding of the medical field, and helped them grow personally in areas of patience, communication, and relational skills.

After this experience, some students will be stepping down and focusing on their studies while others will stay with LGH as volunteers continuing to explore and gain further experience. Most are Juniors and Seniors and are actively exploring and applying to a range of college programs centered in the medical field. Some have already sent in applications for Pre-Med, while others have plans ranging from being a Paramedic, Neurosurgeon, Medical Doctor, Psychologist, Nurse and pursuing careers in Information Technology.

To increase students' awareness about careers in the legal system, students from Lawrence High School visited the Fenton Judicial Court where they toured the facility and interacted with court staff to learn more about various careers within this career field.

In addition, students from Triton Regional High School visited Northern Essex Community College – Haverhill Campus to learn about post-secondary opportunities. Students were encouraged to continue with their education, take the leap into post-secondary education and/or training.

We thank Fenton Judicial Court and Northern Essex Community College staff for welcoming our students and providing them with valuable information to help them make informed post-secondary education decisions.

In December, we finalized the contract with the YMCA of Greater Haverhill to provide WIOA In-school youth services to 10 eligible youth. The MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board and Career Center staff are providing the YMCA staff with guidance and support during their recruitment and enrollment process. The proposed program will provide comprehensive services for WIOA eligible enrolled students. The program will address the barriers our youth are facing and help them make informed educational decisions, provide them with basic training to prepare youth to work as lifeguards and in childcare settings. These youth will attain certifications, learn about financial literacy, and engage in work experience.

As we continue to align and blend all our youth programs for a seamless continuum of services to keep youth engaged in learning, work, career planning, and in taking the educational steps needed to get and keep good jobs, we collaborated with MassHire Merrimack Valley Career Center and invited graduating seniors from our local high schools to attend their Training Opportunities Fair this past December. Over 60 graduating seniors and 10 school staff attended the event.

Our partnerships and alignment of services provide continuity, build a stronger support relationship, and create more consistency and accountability. It is rewarding to see all our stakeholders involved. By blending our resources, we have been successful in providing our students with career development and workforce opportunities to create a pipeline of new workers with the academic and employability skills that our employer partners are looking for.

To learn more about our youth programs, please visit our website or contact our Youth Programs Manager, Cristy Gomez. Congratulations on a job well done.

Unless there are questions, that concludes my presentation.

iii. Nominating Committee

Jeff Linehan said he would like to nominate Angela Cleveland, Director of Community and Economic Development for the city of Amesbury. Angela was the former senior economic development partner with the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. She also chairs the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority. Angela comes highly recommended by the Mayor of Amesbury.

**Motion by Juan Yopez to nominate Angela Cleveland to the MMBWB, seconded by Joe Bevilacqua.
Motion passed unanimously.**

Jeff said that we have nominated three people to join our board and there have been delays in appointments. Nominees include Alexandria Eberhardt, President and CEO of the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce and Fred Denesowicz, Corporate Recruiter, Momentum Manufacturing Group, Georgetown. These nominations were voted on by the board and for some reason have been held up. He asked Frank for assistance or suggestions and Frank said that Mayor Brian De Peña makes the final determination for board appointments and said that the mayor has disapproved the board's three nominations. Frank is meeting with Mayor De Peña today. Jeff offered to meet with the mayor.

Lane Glenn said he can also ask Mayor De Peña about the board appointments when he meets with him. Lane said that the board needs to get better at regional representation. Other regional workforce boards have formal grievances with cities and towns regarding responsibilities. This administration is relatively new and perhaps the mayor and his staff need to find a better understanding of that role and maybe we can help with that. The other mayors and town managers across the Merrimack Valley should expect to have their nominations appointed. We should not delay their nominations, especially if they are well-qualified.

Jeff said that the people that we are nominating have credentials and there are some opportunities to have new members and he asked Frank if we can help in any way to keep things moving.

Lane said that the state has oversight, and they have every reason to expect this board to be competitive and whatever opportunity we have to help the mayor and his staff understand the role of the board, he will do that.

Frank said that he will give more of a concrete view of what the mayor wants us to do going forward in his notes.

Lane said that public boards have a strategy for nominations and the composition of a board should be representative of the cities and towns they serve. Ours is not representative geographically.

Juan said he and Frank will meet with the mayor to discuss concerns that our recommendations are being disqualified and our need to have representation of the communities that we serve.

iv. Finance Report

In Bob Wescott's absence, Frank said that as of 12/31/2022, our total budget was \$11,801.00 million. Total expenditures for the MMVWB were \$1,062.754 million, total expenditures for NECC were \$348,493.00 and total expenditures for DCS were \$394,373.00. As of 12/31/2022, we are at 40% of plan. We have received additional funds for high school internship in the amount of \$58,584.00. The customer services portion is \$53,218 and the MMVWB portion is \$5,322.00.

V. Report of Interim Executive Director

Frank said that last week he sent out both adult and youth RFPs used during the last RFPs. The discussion was surrounding the lack of organizations bidding for grants for youth groups. An update for the funding - Our current Total WIOA Youth Training Fund balance is \$266k, of which \$166k is from Individual Training and \$100k is from Group Programs.

We currently have the Haverhill YMCA Contract for \$91k already accounted for. But it's unlikely that they will spend all of this since as of our last Tuesday meeting, there are no formal enrollments in this program.

To put a dollar amount for a Youth Procurement, we will need to know how much lag the YMCA will have, and how many ITAs will be processed between now and June 30th.

Budget - As of our December 31st financial reporting, we have the following WIOA Training Funds available:

- WIOA Youth = \$266k
- WIOA Adult = \$173k
- WIOA Dislocated Worker = \$378k

Total WIOA Training Funds available = \$817k

- FY22 = \$242k
- FY23 = \$575k

As of December 31st, we have funded the following training:

- WIOA Youth – 3 ITA's; 1 In School Youth Group Program
- WIOA Adult – 6 ITA's; 2 Adult Group Programs
- WIOA Dislocated Worker – 7 ITA's

Those numbers are very low.

- The Workforce Board staff are working on the Grant Application for our upcoming Youthworks Program to serve 500 youth: 300 in the summer and 200 year-round.
- We have submitted a budget modification and financial extension request for our Southwick NDWG to the MDCS and are awaiting feedback.

Regarding the WIOA adults. It seems LARE is pretty much on target for spending down their 2 contracts.

Of the \$173k remaining for adults, we will need to work with the Career Center and determine how many ITAs they anticipate processing out of the 36 slots remaining.

We can also transfer some of our WIOA DW Training fund balance, which is currently \$378k, into the WIOA Adult Training pool/Group Program Procurement. But checking in with the Career Center to determine how many ITAs they anticipate processing out of the 76 slots remaining.

I will be meeting with city mayors, town managers, and town administrators. Several meetings have already been scheduled. I will travel to each city/town and meet with them and have asked that they bring in (if they have a person) their economic development directors/manager.

- I will be asking these leaders about their take on the MassHire Workforce Board and the MassHire Career Center.
- I will also inquire about how we (both agencies) can better serve their communities, their businesses, and their people.
- I will also ask if they have any nominations for the board. The last time the mayor and I spoke, he discussed having interviews for nominees. I will talk more with him and include a discussion of our bylaws.

I was part of a collaborative meeting with UMASS Lowell Innovative Tech Hub where UMASS is intending to request grant funding for the tech industry. Workforce Board Directors invited where the Merrimack Valley, Greater Lowell, and North Shore.

I signed a letter of support for Endicott College for grants in the health field – a federal nursing grant. Lawrence General Hospital has verbally provided their support. The Holy Family Hospital has yet to respond. The grants are in hopes of educating and/or licensing people in health-related career fields at Endicott in the hopes that hospitals within those three regions hire. Employees from those very same hospitals would be eligible as well.

I met with several businesses to gain knowledge of their products/services and to provide future support. A few of those businesses are:

- Alpha Tau (3rd floor)
- Asperger Works (Haverhill)
- Top Notch (Lawrence)

Signage for MassHire Workforce Board was ordered and should be presented to the office manager, soon, for approval. The signage will make it easier to locate MVWB in this building.

Both myself and Corina, as well as staff from the Career Center attended the MassHire Department of Career Services and Commonwealth Corporation co-hosted a FutureSkills Convening with the local MassHire areas. During this convening, attendees learned more about the FutureSkills movement, roles/responsibilities, promising practices, and upcoming guidance and policies. This was a unique opportunity to work and collaborate with our Market Maker, Upskilling Navigators, and other Career Centers in your region. The hope was for our region to gain knowledge and tools to continue and improve upon the successful implementation of FutureSkills programming including referral processes for Employers, Training Providers, and Job Seekers.

The National Association of Workforce Board (NAWB) is having its annual Forum in Washington, DC, Saturday, March 25 - Tuesday, March 28, 2023. One of our board members requested to attend but is no longer able to attend. The registration fee has been paid. Before we contact NAWB to request a refund (\$75 non-refundable admin fee), there is an option to transfer the registration to another person. In the past, other board members have attended, as well as Exec Director, Deputy Director, and Board Officers have attended in the past. If a board member would like to that this spot, we can make that possible. If not, I will attend.

Finally, in order to target youth and other generations of the work of the MV Workforce Board, and forward/share information about the Career Center and its services, we have created two new social media accounts to add to the Facebook account.

- Twitter - @MVWorkboard

- Tik Tok - @MassHire MV Workforce Board
- Linked and Instagram accounts will be forthcoming in the next few days.

Frank said that he is interested in having youth represented on the board.

Joe Bevilacqua thinks the idea of meeting with the region's mayors, town managers and town administrators is very important and offered his assistance. One of the things we need to have is flexibility and he said it would be very helpful if there was a way to have a pool of training money available to help educate and train the workforce for companies who come into our area. If we can show them that we have training money, or workforce money or grant money to help bring them here.

Frank said that there is money out there but they carry restrictions and he plans to ask Secretary Jones about this.

Alison asked Joe how the pool of training money that he mentioned is different from the Massachusetts Skills Capital Grant Program and Joe suggests that we have one source in the Merrimack Valley who is the agent, and we can offer funding to companies. Ultimately, it would be a grant program.

VI. Other Business

Frank and the board welcomed Eric Nelson, DCS Operations Manager at MassHire Merrimack Valley Career Center.

VII. Adjournment (vote required)

Having no further business, Chairman Yopez called for a motion to adjourn.

Jeff Linehan made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Cal Williams. Motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynda Buote

Recorder