



# MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

## Annual Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, November 9, 2022

7:30 am

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

### **MEMBERS PRESENT:**

John Bruno, Kemelin Domenech, Mark Forman, Evelyn Friedman, Andrew Herlihy, Jeff Linehan, Joselyn Marte, Carol Riemer, Robert Westcott, Calvin Williams, Juan Yepez

### **MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Joseph Bevilacqua, Ann Marie Borgesi, Christian Brennan, Ron Contrado, Marko Duffy, Lane Glenn, Robin Hynds, John Lavoie, Maureen Lynch, Rosa Muñoz, Fred Shaheen, Ellen Weinhold

### **STAFF PRESENT:**

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

### **GUESTS PRESENT:**

Dawn Beati, Robin Dion, Allison Dolan-Wilson, Mike McCarthy, Linda Rohrer

#### **I. Call to Order**

A quorum being present, Chairman Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 8:07 a.m.

#### **II. Welcome and Introductions**

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

#### **III. Approval of the June 21, 2022, minutes (vote required)**

Chairman Yepez called for a motion on the minutes of the June 21, 2022, quarterly meeting.

**Motion by Cal Williams, seconded by John Bruno to approve the minutes of the June 21, 2022, meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **IV. Report of Chair**

Juan said welcome and thank you for attending. I'd like to welcome our new Interim Executive Director, Frank Bonet. As you may know, Frank was previously the Human Resources Director for the cities of Lawrence and Chelsea, and the previous Chief of Staff for Mayor De Peña. He comes with over 30 years of workforce, labor, and human resource experience.

Workforce Board staff were busy (and continue to be busy) planning their move. The Workforce Board staff, as you know, are in their new location. The completion of the entire move to this location at One Union Street will come to fruition with the delivery of the staff's office furniture on November 30, 2022. It's a beautiful space and if you'd like, the staff is available to give you a tour.

On September 30, 2022, the Workforce Board staff sent the Fiscal Year 2023 Local Operating Plan for the Lower Merrimack Valley Workforce Development Area to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Career Services. The document was completed on behalf of the City of Lawrence, the MassHire Merrimack Valley Career Center and the staff of the Workforce Board and approved by the Planning Committee.

A two-day MassForward convening session took place at the DCU Center (Worcester) on September 14 and 15, 2022. The conference included a celebration of partnerships and success stories and included shared information and engagement in dialogue across partnership, sharing best and promising practices. The Workforce Board and Career Center staff and I attended and represented well.

October 24, 2022, Director Bonet was invited by Lawrence Mayor De Peña, to meet with Puerto Rico Governor Pedro Pierlusi at the Fortaleza in San Juan, PR, to discuss concerns of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the Merrimack Valley. Discussion included delays in PR residents receiving the new birth certificate for work related document submission, such as I-9s and obtaining Massachusetts Real IDs for work purposes. Additional discussions included communicating with the island higher educational facilities in disbursing resident's educational transcripts rapidly for proof of education for work related purposes. There is currently a 9.4% unemployment rate for Puerto Ricans in the Merrimack Valley.

On November 3, 2022, the House and Senate leaders indicated they had reached an agreement on the long-awaited Economic Development Bill. This \$3.8B bill also serves as the vehicle to close out FY22. It does not include any of the permanent tax rebates, cuts, and reforms included in the bills passed by both chambers earlier this summer. Instead, it limits the spending in the legislation to "one-time only" investments.

This bill is over two hundred pages, so we are still reviewing it (and so are many of our partners) but in terms of the big picture:

The \$3.8B bill will spend down what remains of the FY22 surplus and \$500M in ARPA funds. It will leave roughly \$1.75B in ARPA funds for the next Administration/Legislative session.

In terms of breaking down the \$3.8B, the legislation includes \$1.4 billion for the human services sector (\$350M for financially-strained hospitals, \$225M for provider and worker rate increases, \$200M for ongoing COVID-19 response, and \$195M for nursing facilities and rest homes); \$540M to support clean energy and climate resilience programs (including the electric vehicle rebates that were created, but not funded, in this year's climate bill), and \$409.5M to support affordable housing, among other investments.

There is a lot to digest in the bill and Frank will share some details in his report.

Additionally, in coming months, we intend to review, and possibly update, the board's by-laws and procedures.

Juan asked if there were any questions and there were none.

## **V. Reports of Committee Chairs**

### **i. Planning and Career Center Committee**

In Ann Marie Borgesí's absence, Juan Yepez said that last month we introduced the MMVWB FY23 Annual Plan with some numbers that were highlighted. Final updates were made, and the plan was signed by Mayor De Peña and submitted to Massachusetts Department of Career Services.

The budget summary was introduced, voted on by the planning committee, and approved by Mayor De Peña. As of September 2022, seventeen-point fifty-six (17.56%) percent of the budget had been expended.

WIOA Training Funds. To date:

- WIOA Youth – 1 ITA processed; 1 Group Program Contract with the YMCA pending; training funds available = \$273K
- WIOA Adult – 6 ITA's processed; 2 Group Program Contracts in place with LARE; training funds available = \$173K
- WIOA Dislocated Worker – 5 ITA's processed; training funds available = \$386K

Director Bonet has been in contact with the MVRTA (now called MEVA). They have buses that will be retired from service. Frank reached out to MEVA to obtain (as a donation to MassHire MV) a 15 passenger ADA outfitted bus to retrofit with appropriate and needed technology to take Career Center and Workforce Board services to the 15 communities we serve in the Merrimack Valley. Frank is writing a proposal and plan. The timeline for roll out is TBD. Discussions have been initiated with Linda Rohrer at the Career Center.

MassHire DCS and our partners have planned a six-state, 2-day New England Regional Virtual Job Fair with different industry themes each day:

- Tuesday, November 15th 10:00am – 2:00pm (Healthcare, Education, Hospitality, Other)
- Wednesday, November 16th from 10:00am – 2:00pm (Manufacturing, Construction, Transportation/Warehousing, Engineering, Other)

For more information regarding this event, contact Linda Rohrer. Please share this information with whomever can use it, as was indicated in our last Planning Committee meeting, the recent employment reports indicate that there are more jobs than there are job seekers.

This is the first time that the MMVWB and the Career Center can recall where jobs have been harder to fill than ever. However, the upside is that the unemployment rates in the Merrimack Valley have steadily been decreasing from the numbers seen during the height of COVID. In actuality, the Career Center is working to fill 14 vacancies in their offices. Three of those vacancies are new to this year's budget.

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

**ii. Youth Committee**

Cal Williams said we continue to work with local employers to provide area youth with the opportunity to gain invaluable work experience through the YouthWorks Cycle 1 – Summer Experience program and DESE Connecting Activities Initiative. The work done by our Connecting Activities team during the school year 2021- 2022 enabled eligible youth to work during the summer. Youth were eager and determined to work hard to create better opportunities for themselves as well as to help their families. We placed over 265 youth in service project based, subsidized jobs, and virtual project-based learning opportunities. Our partner host and worksite supervisors provided our participants with much needed guidance and mentoring as we return to in person programming after COVID-19.

We just started our YouthWorks Cycle 2 Year-Round program. This funding from the Commonwealth Corporation will allow us to place over 150 youth in meaningful after school opportunities.

We are happy to report that this funding is allowing us to strengthen our collaboration with Lawrence General Hospital. 22 young adults currently attending Greater Lawrence Technical School, Haverhill High School, Lawrence High School, and Merrimack College are completing their internship requirements to connect classroom learning to the world of work. We will share success stories about our participants on our MassHire MVWB website and Facebook pages.

We would like to inform you that the Workforce Board and Career Center staff worked together to put out a WIOA youth group training program RFP. The RFP was granted to YMCA of Greater Haverhill. Ten eligible in-school youth will be enrolled and receive WIOA services from the YMCA of Greater Haverhill staff while being case-managed by Career Center staff. We will report more at our next board meeting.

To conclude, we want to thank our youth services organizations, school staff, and employer partners for helping us recruit youth for our youth programs and initiatives. Because of their continued collaboration and commitment, many of our youth are making informed decisions about their lives, careers, and work. Special thanks to our Youth Services Specialists for their dedication and commitment to serving and guiding our local youth.

For more information on our youth programming, please visit [MassHireMVWB.org](https://MassHireMVWB.org). Unless there are questions, that concludes my presentation.

**iii. Nominating Committee**

Jeff Linehan would like to put before the board a nomination for membership for Alex Eberhardt, President of the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce. Based on discussion at the last meeting where we talked about expanding the board, we'll have representation from the Haverhill Chamber of Commerce. We are waiting for Mayor De Peña's approval of the nomination of Alfred Denesowicz from Metal Tronics.

Jeff asked if there were any additional nominations from the floor and there were none.

**Motion by Andrew Herlihy seconded by Bob Westcott to accept Alex Eberhardt as a nomination to the MassHire MVWB. Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **iv. Finance Report**

Bob Westcott said he's sorry there aren't more private businesses here today. The MMVWB has too much money, much of which rolled in during the COVID years. There are a lot of people who are receiving government support during COVID, and if they take a job, they'll lose the benefits. We have an on-ramp for assistance, but no off-ramp. It's exacerbated a problem that's been going on for a long time. Every year there is a new crop of young people leaving high school or graduating that should be looking for jobs and there are fewer of them, and they are harder to reach. Private businesses need to get more involved with the planning committee and the Board. We need some fresh ideas and ways to approach this. We want to spend the money and get people trained. Jobs are changing quickly. It's not simply new products – it's new ways of working and we need to prepare people to do profitable work under these new circumstances. The opportunities are out there. There are plenty of jobs available. We need to create new taxpayers. We need to reach out to young people that we can't reach right now. There are ideas that have worked in other parts of the country under workforce boards, and we should look at these ideas and make proposals. We need to get people back to work and a great many people have not received any vocational training and we need to fill that gap. There are a lot of jobs available. If we don't, the jobs won't get done and the businesses will leave. It's not a matter of having the Workforce Board go through the steps that the laws require because we do that. We must do something innovative.

Bob said that with Juan's assistance and others on the Board, he will reach out to private businesses owners to see if they can be more involved. They have great ideas and human resources within their organizations. We would like to see some innovative ideas for where this money can be spent. The investments we make are not in products or buildings, it's in people and we need people to invest in. We need to reach out and get more people involved in thinking up ways to get young people in the door and looking for work.

Jocelyn Marte asked if the issue is that there are a lot of jobs for youth or is it more about training and Bob said that there has been a trend in the past 30 or 40 years of keeping people from growing up. People need to earn their way and work. We don't have another model where you can raise a generation of young people without working.

Jocelyn said that the new generation sees things differently and we cannot continue to do what we do and expect the same results. We need to do more outreach to organizations that work with youth. Businesses can have good ideas, but ultimately the issue is that the youth are not coming, and we need to work with the people who know what's going on.

Juan said that he doesn't feel that it is just a youth issue. It's an issue that employers are having across the board in different ages and generations, and he knows Linda Rohrer, her team and Northern Essex Community College (NECC) are working tirelessly trying to bring people in for training and job placement. It's a big problem, not just in the Merrimack Valley, but across the state and the country. His company currently has 20 temps because they can't find employees to fill those roles. It's more than just one group and working together with the Career Center, it's something that we can overcome. He agreed with Bob that we need more participation from other businesses in our region. We are open to listening and getting ideas and opinions to make this the most successful Career Center and Workforce Board in the state and it's going to take time and hard work.

Evelyn Friedman asked for reference to this in the budget and Bob said that we're not spending our training dollars. A lot of money rolled in from last year, and we've lost training sources and you need training organizations to send people to and spend the money.

Frank said that we put out Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for youth training programs and we received a limited number of effective proposals from training vendors. We have the money to spend on training, but we don't have the organizations applying for our RFPs to provide training. We have provided feedback to vendors whose bids were not selected.

Evelyn asked for example, if a person wanted commercial driver training, the training isn't available, and Frank said not so much commercial training, but people are not applying for training and added to what Bob said earlier that this is the first time that there have been more jobs than people. Observation and discussions show that there are a lot of people receiving benefits for housing, food, childcare, MassHealth etc., this adds up and if you're not offering money that people can substantiate letting those benefits go, you won't get people to apply.

Allison Dolan-Wilson said there are so many specifications with how you can spend the money. Take advanced manufacturing for example, you can spend all the money in the world in developing a training program, but the seats aren't getting filled. The reason we aren't seeing training vendors submit for RFPs is because it's good money after bad. Allow them to spend some of the money on smart marketing campaigns to understand the types of industries that are in the Merrimack Valley. There are over 20,000 jobs in our area in light and advanced manufacturing. We can create 100 more training programs, and no one fills them because people don't understand what the jobs are and that they don't all require a bachelor's degree.

Jeff Linehan asked if we have to return funds that we don't spend, and Tracy said that it depends where the money is coming from and the plan for FY23 is to spend all of the funding that ends on June 30<sup>th</sup>.

Cal asked if the Massachusetts Workforce Association (MWA) is still active and Frank said yes, he met with them yesterday and the MWA has concerns with Commonwealth Corporation about funding restrictions and collaboration. There is a new administration starting in January and Lieutenant Governor Driscoll was involved with the workforce board in the Salem area and is very knowledgeable. We believe she will continue to be a friend of the workforce boards and we are planning to discuss the relationship between the workforce boards and Commonwealth Corporation.

Evelyn said if businesses were to get more involved, it may be good to have youth visit them, so they understand what the businesses are and what the training needs are, and Bob said that a program that interested him was done in California where youth determined the businesses they wanted to listen to. Hundreds of youth attended this convention and those business owners wanted to return the next year because they learned from the youth how to explain their work to them. The youth designed the program. Most kids have an outlook that the programs and the laws we work under aren't designed for them. If businesses are talking one language and young people want to hear a different language, we're trying to reach an audience who isn't listening.

Cal asked if we have thought about having a business forum to talk about where we are and where we need to go, and Frank said that we talked about this at the last planning meeting and we're looking for new ways to approach new generations and their way of thinking and how to attract them to jobs.

Jeff asked if Lawrence has a master plan and Frank said that our 4-year local plan expired in 2021 and we're looking forward to creating a new 4-year plan. Jeff said when you go out and sell the city and tell employers to move here, it's an easier sell when you have something in writing.

**V. Election of Officers (vote required)**

Chairman Yepez said that each year at our annual meeting, we vote to elect or re-elect our officers for the coming year. We are open to nominations.

**Motion by Andrew Herlihy to close nominations and Carol Riemer seconded the motion.**

Chairman Yepez called for a motion to keep the current slate of officers; they are:

- Chair: Juan Yepez
- Vice Chair & Planning Committee Chair: Ann Marie Borges
- Treasurer: Robert Wescott
- Clerk and Nominating Committee Chair: Jeff Linehan
- Youth Committee Chair: Calvin Williams

**Motion by Andrew Herlihy to re-elect the current officers and Carol Reimer seconded the motion.**

**Motion passed unanimously.**

**VI. Report of Interim Executive Director**

Frank said thank you for being here making me feel welcome. He thanked any veterans present for their service to this country and their time away from family. I am glad to be working alongside a group of professional staff and board members in continuing the mission and vision of the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board.

Masshire MVWB member, Mr. Joseph Bevilacqua, who knows my work, and I've known his work, has asked me to inform the board of what I look forward to doing in this role. Although he is not present today, I'd like to provide that to you.

This board and all its staff, including the Career Center, is one of the more important organizations in the Merrimack Valley and even in the northeast as we are partnered with other workforce boards in individual and group efforts. So, I would have to say that one of my most urgent and important tasks is to communicate and meet with all representatives of the cities and towns of the Merrimack Valley to hear the concerns, ideas, and requests that they may have of this organization.

As recommended by Mr. Lane Glenn, I will continue in meeting with MV company officials, in their respective work sites, to view their industry and labor for us to put together a future to collaborate the best means in assisting in training and/or filling of their most pressing labor needs.

Additionally, I have been meeting with some of our partners, and will continue to do so to ensure smooth operation and support. I have also been meeting with organizations that have not won bids for specific programs to assist them in their future proposals. Many of those organizations are new or rising and are as important as the larger more successful organizations that support the Merrimack Valley.

In conclusion to today's brief, the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board's 4-Year WIOA Local Plan (2018 – 2021) requires an update. This is a task that the team intends to bring forward to the Planning Committee and others in the coming months.

I provided my curriculum vitae to the board in an email. However, if you have any questions or recommendations, please contact me at any time.

To provide additional information on Chairman Yezpe's brief, the bill at the house and senate includes the following for Workforce Development Initiatives:

- A comprehensive study of Commonwealth Corporation and MassHire (see below)
- A scholarship program for MA students attending MA colleges and pursuing degrees in high demand fields (mentions regional market blueprints) (Pages 48-49)
- A pilot program to mitigate cliff effects which has been pushed forward by Springfield Works and the Economic Development Council of Western MA (Pages 85-86)
- A grant program through the Department of Education to increase the nursing workforce talent pipeline and improve career pathways for the nursing profession (Page 88)
- Creation of a Cybersecurity Center to enhance the conditions for economic growth through outreach to the cybersecurity industry cluster in the commonwealth and to foster cybersecurity resiliency through communication, collaboration and outreach with state agencies, municipalities, educational institutions, and private partners (Pages 114-115)
- \$150M for grants to support and stabilize the early education and care workforce and address varied operational costs at state childcare programs supervised by the department of early education and care (Pages 186-187).

For costs associated with a study performed by the executive office of labor and workforce development on the effectiveness of career services and workforce development grant programs administered through the executive office, including the Commonwealth Corporation and MassHire; provided, that said study shall include, but not be limited to, the following information: (i) status of grants awarded under the program; (ii) the number and names of educational and eligible service providers receiving grants; (iii) the number of participants receiving services under each grant; (iv) the number of participants placed in employment under each grant; (v) the salary and benefits that participants receive after placement for each grant; (vi) the average salary and benefits of participants in each program prior to participation; (vii) the cost per participant for each grant; (viii) job retention or promotion rates 1 year after training ends; (ix) job retention or promotion rates 3 years after training ends; (x) cost effectiveness of each program, including savings from public assistance and estimates of future tax contributions for participants; (xi) the number of grants awarded and money given to programs separated by region; (xii) the number of grants awarded and money given to programs separated by primary industry sector; (xiii) demographic information of participants for each grant program, including age, gender, race, ethnicity, educational attainment level, employment status prior to participation, disability status, income level and use of public assistance; and (xiv) review of the grant application process and timeline for dispersing grants to vendors or applicants; and provided further, that the results of said study shall be reported to the joint committee on economic development and emerging technologies, the joint committee on labor and workforce development and the house and senate committees on ways and means not later than June 16, 2023.

Frank will share more information with the Board as he receives it. He asked if there were any questions and there were none.



Juan said that he is looking forward to working with Governor-Elect Healey's team and Lt. Governor-Elect Driscoll. It's exciting to see that the state will be run by almost all women and Juan said that he is hoping to bring more jobs to the region.

## **VII. Other Business**

Andrew said that there is something that the Board may want to consider weighing in on. Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School needs upgrades and they are looking at building a new school or rehabbing the existing school. Discussions are happening right now. There is a public hearing on Saturday. They are soliciting public feedback and are hearing from the city and towns they serve. If they build a new school, that presents an opportunity to increase vocational training capacity. They are hearing fiscal concerns from towns about costs and future obligations, which are legitimate. But Andrew isn't sure they are hearing from businesses and the other side of the story. If they plan to go through a multi-million-dollar effort and keep the school the same size, Haverhill may have an issue. This is a regional issue and there are a lot of different pieces, and this will be going on for many months.

Juan thanked Andrew for bringing this to the Board's attention and said that we'll reach out to see how we can participate as area business owners.

Linda addressed the training enrollment issue, and said she agrees with Jocelyn that we can't keep doing the same thing and expect different results. We have been doing the same thing, social media, reaching out to customers, etc., but we are also doing things that are different. We are planning a training fair where we will bring in all the training vendors that are approved in the region to use WIOA funds. We are publicizing this event and will have a similar event in Haverhill. We are connecting counselors to community business organizations to help with referring their customers to the Career Center and training. In addition, we are looking for a marketing consultant and we hope to have someone who is familiar with the region to look at what we're doing and help find other strategies. Linda is open to suggestions and ideas.

Juan said that an ongoing issue is trying to find more training centers. When we do find them, they are not local and then we have transportation issues. Lawrence Boys & Girls Club is sponsoring 20 – 25 youth to get driver's licenses. For some training centers, the number of people in a training program doesn't justify opening and renting a center here. Can we work something out with those training centers and use the new MMVWB conference room or other space? It would allow youth and others to get training locally.

Mark Forman asked if we could take some of the funds that we are not using to develop a training room, whether it's this or another space. Juan asked and Tracy said there would be a lot of considerations and we can discuss them at the planning meeting. Frank said that he and Tracy will review the rules and laws and come back to the Board. Juan said that if we can't, maybe we can propose to the Commonwealth Corporation a request to allow an exception as a trial. If it's successful here, they may amend this in other areas.

Jocelyn said that there are many adult programs in the city that have a lot of people, for example, GED programs. She suggested that while people are getting their GED that we create a group training program and encourage these people to continue other training.

Allison said that NECC also has space and there are spaces to offer training, but there are qualifications to be on the list to provide training and Linda said that Commonwealth Corporation doesn't control training

and there is room as long as you are in the guidelines to be an eligible training provider. Linda said that she's been an advocate to develop integrated training programs, but we have to have vendors willing to provide the vocational component and Jocelyn said we need to bring them to the table.

Cal said that we have to have labor represented on the Board as well as they have registered training programs.

Linda said that we also need to have more private sector representation on the Board. If we're going to develop training, it needs to be based on what the business needs are in our region and Juan agreed and said that we need more attendance from the business community.

Mark Forman suggested that we reach out to temporary agencies. His company employs temporary employees, and they always have enough people to fill the jobs. These are the people who have access to a lot of companies, and we may want to ask a couple of agencies to participate on the Board.

Juan thanked the group for sharing their opinions in trying to make this a successful Career Center and Workforce Board. He asked if there were any other questions and there were none.

**VIII. Adjournment (vote required)**

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

**Call Williams made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Evelyn Friedman. Motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Lynda Buote*

Recorder