MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

Straumann
60 Minuteman Road
Andover, MA 01810

QUARTERLY MEETING

Minutes
Tuesday, April 23, 2019
7:30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:
Edward Bartkiewicz, Joseph Bevilacqua, Francisco Brea, Christian Brennan, Ann Marie Borgesi, Eileen Burns, Karen Conard, Ron Contrado, Evelyn Friedman, Andrew Herlihy, Jeff Linehan, Joselyn Marte, Rosa Muñoz, Bob Westcott, Cal Williams, Juan Yepez

MEMBERS ABSENT:
Michael Fiato, Lane Glenn, Gail Griffin, Robin Hynds, Supt. John Lavoie, Supt. Maureen Lynch, Marianne Paley-Nadel, Carol Riemer, Fred Shaheen, Ellen Weinhold

GUESTS PRESENT:
Doug Fogg, Eric Nelson, Shirley Lusty, Linda Rohrer, Julie Moran, George Moriarty

STAFF PRESENT:
Abel Vargas, Susan Almono, Cristy Gomez, Robin DelNegro, Michael Paglia, Corina Ruiz

1. Call to Order
A quorum being present, Chairman Yepez called the meeting to order at 8:04 a.m.

2. Welcome & Introductions
Chairman Yepez thanked everyone and thanked Doug Fogg, VP of Operations at Straumann for hosting our meeting.

Doug Fogg welcomed everyone to Straumann. Mr. Fogg presented a PowerPoint presentation.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the January 22, 2019 meeting (vote required)
Chairman Yepez called for a motion on the minutes of the January 22, 2019 board meeting.

Motion by Francisco Brea, seconded by Karen Conard to approve the minutes of the January 22, 2019 meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

4. <u>Report of Chair</u>

Chairman Yepez said that despite the government shutdown our services will not be disrupted. Our organization funding has been committed and is in hand.

Some of the legislative funding priorities is increased funding for career centers. Lower statewide unemployment has prompted the State to limit increases in allocations to the support of job seekers. The Mass Workforce Board Association, through its members, have recommended additional funding citing continued skills gap and inability of employers to fill their jobs. Legislative priorities related to youth is summer youthworks funding to continue to serve youth with summer employment with the minimum wage increase. Other areas are Connecting Activities, Workforce Competitive Trust Fund and Learn to Earn. The region is seeing a record low unemployment, Lawrence has an unemployment rate of under 5% at 4.6%. The lowest level it's been in the last 20 years. Despite the increase of the minimum wage to $12/hour, the region is yet to see a significant negative impact in terms of job losses.

- **Election MMVWB Vice Chair and Planning/Career Center Committee Chair (vote required)**

Juan Yepez said the Executive team got together and nominated Ann Marie Borgesi to be the MMVWB Vice Chair and Planning/CC Comm Chair.

Chairman Yepez called for a motion to elect Ann Marie Borgesi as MMVWB Vice Chair and Planning/Career Center Committee Chair.

Motion by Karen Conard, seconded by Eddie Bartkiewicz, to elect Ann Marie Borgesi as MMVWB Vice Chair and Planning/Career Center Committee Chair. Motion passed unanimously.

- **Affirmation of Executive Director's Appointment (vote required)**

Juan Yepez said he would like to recommend the appointment of Abel Vargas as the MMVWB Executive Director. The MMVWB Executive Committee met on January 9th, 2019 and determined Mr. Vargas is well suited to meet the challenges of the job and lead the organization in the right direction.

As a new Executive Director, Mr. Vargas has demonstrated an ability to quickly understand and apply the necessary subject matter expertise at a high level. This is demonstrated by leading the effort to complete the WIOA 4-year annual plan. Mr. Vargas has also taken the lead in several other initiatives while still providing supervision to his staff. These initiatives include securing CNC Machining Training in the region, integrating the workforce system in delivering staffing support to businesses affected by the gas explosions and implementing the Northeast Regional Labor Market Blueprint alongside MassHire Northshore and Greater Lowell.

Through his prior role as the Economic Development Director for the City of Lawrence, Mr. Vargas has developed strong working relationships with area employers. He also served as the lead and convener of multiple cross organizational efforts to advance numerous city priorities. The ability to bring stakeholders to the table in addressing systems wide problems is crucial to driving impactful and innovative workforce interventions. Mr. Vargas has shown to be able to work through complex problems and draw from resources needed to deliver on desired outcomes.

Chairman Yepez called for a motion to appoint Abel Vargas as the MMVWB Executive Director.

Motion by John Lavoie, seconded by Karen Conard, to appoint Abel Vargas as MMVWB Executive Director. Motion passed unanimously.

5. Reports of Committee Chairs

- ***Planning/ Career Center Committee***

Ann Marie Borgesi said the planning/career center committee met and discussed the annual plan 1 page summary in the packets. These are high level economic indicators. Everything looks positive; the unemployment number is low and there's new job creation. Ann Marie mentioned some of the key strategies the Board will focus on in the next four years, including the creation of industry clusters for the Business Service Representatives. Some of the areas that will continue to be supported is occupational training programs in priority industries.

To view the economic indicators handout, please click the following link: Annual Plan 1 Page Summary.

To view the MassHire MVWB 4-Year WIOA Plan Draft, please click the following link: MassHire MVWB 4-Year WIOA Plan Draft.

Ann Marie presented the performance report where it shows where we are at against annual plan goal. We are halfway through the year. In some categories we are close to the 50% goal and we are a bit behind on employers served. The team at MassHire Merrimack Valley does have a plan on how they are going to catch up and get to where they need to be before the end of the fiscal year. There was delay in funding at staff was a bit hesitant to enroll customers. That funding has been received and we are moving full steam ahead.

To view the performance report handouts, please click the following link: Performance Reports 12.31.18.

Included in your packets is a detail list of grants and what activities we are working against and the progress made with those grants.

To view the grants report handout, please click the following link: Grant Activity Update 1.7.19.

Ann Marie said the Planning/Career Center Committee voted to approve the MassHire MVWB 4-Year WIOA Annual Plan and ask the full board to vote to fully reinforce that.

Abel added that the plan before is in draft format and that anyone who has feedback can do so before February 3rd since the plan is due February 4th. Any comments or feedback can be sent directly to Abel at avargas@masshiremvwb.org.

Chairman Juan called for a motion to approve the MassHire MVWB 4-Year WIOA Annual Plan.

Motion by Bob Wescott, seconded by John Lavoie to approve the MassHire MVWB 4-Year WIOA Annual Plan. Sister Eileen abstained. Motion passed.

- ***Youth Committee***

In the absence of Chairman Williams, Abel Vargas presented. Abel said there are several programs administered for youth. Through WIOA youth funding, there will be 15 work experience slots available for youth who are interested in Medical Assistant and Pharmacy Tech programs. Youth in this group will be provided with a subsidized work experience.

A challenge we faced this quarter was the departure of our full time Youth Counselor, Jessy Abramson. Jessy has accepted a position as the Work-based Learning Coordinator for the Lawrence Public Schools. We hope to

continue to work closely with Jessy as she is invested and knows about our youth programming. Please help us and share the job posting with your network.

- ***Nominating Committee***

Karen Conard said the committee moves forward with the nomination of Marko Duffy, President & CEO of Marathon Manufacturing Solutions. In addition to that organization, he was the former Acting Chair of the Merrimack Valley YMCA and Lawrence Branch Y.

Karen called for a motion to consider Marko Duffy, President & CEO of Marathon Manufacturing Solutions, as a Director of the MMVWB.

Motion by Fred Shaheen, seconded by Rosa Muñoz, to appoint Marko Duffy, President & CEO of Marathon Manufacturing Solutions, as a Director of the MMVWB. Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Yepez said that if they know of anyone who they would like to recommend, please let Karen or Abel know.

- ***Finance Report***

Bob Wescott said that Tracy, MMVWB Fiscal Director, is really a grants administrator. Often time we lose sight of the amount of activity the WB has accrued through good management. There are a lot of grant activities. We have been seeking outside grants for specific services. Yes, we continue to have State and Federal funding, but the other outside funding put us in a different area. It also makes our management and accounting more complex. Part of what we are attempting to do, is bring the information provided in the handout, in a different format so the Board can learn from. More information will come so when Directors look at it, it will mean something.

To view the Budget Reports Mr. Wescott presented, please click on the following links: Budget Reports thru 12.31.18.

6. Report of Executive Director

Abel Vargas said he wants his presentation to be a discussion.

Mr. Vargas said that not only has the region seen an increase in population but also in total number of jobs. The greatest increase in jobs came from Healthcare and Social Services, Construction and Education Services.

Abel talked about goals and other things we want to focus on. He said that a lot of it is already being done but we want to be more visible and have active participation.

Mr. Vargas said we rely on LMI to lead us but that it shouldn't take us 18 months to react to ideas. We need to continue to train in industries in demand. Mr. Vargas explained how Metro North allocates their WIOA ITA funding. We should be asking folks to give us briefing of their industries and then come in-house with the Business Service Representatives to ensure our trainings are aligned with the employer needs.

We have the opportunity to do so much more with youth. Currently we have the Summer YouthWorks and Connecting Activities, but we need to better understand what the high schools are doing. Most of the youth that participate in the Summer YouthWorks program are placed in non-profit and municipal jobs. Our goal is to place these youth in the private sector.

Mr. Vargas also said that to be on top of our goal, we need to have conversations with economic development partners. We need to have an idea of what they are doing.

Eddie Bartkiewicz suggested to have the Business Service Representative and Rapid Response Team present at a Board meeting as this was found useful in other regions. He added that on the youth side, many youths don't know what they want to do. Eddie suggested having other venues such as construction and partnering with the local unions.

Abel said that's a great suggestion and that the Greater Lawrence Tech School has a program in partnership with Lawrence High School where students are bused to GLTS to be exposed to 250 hours of career exploration. They have 3 programs to choose from. This is a pilot program with 40 students who are in their freshmen and junior year of high school. The hope is to increase the number of students for next year and have 9 programs to choose from.

Susan Almono talked about the SkillsBuild program in Hopkinton, where we have partnered with the union to provide a 6-week classroom and hands-on pre-apprenticeship training program in the summer, designed to prepare young adults for a career in the building trades. Susan said we are doing career exploration and career pathways though a WIOA signal for success pilot. Susan mentioned the grant received from US DOL where the career center will provide workshops to court involved youth. The MMVWB is also talking to GLTS about a landscaping training.

Juan Yepez said we need help in reaching out to youth and get them into programs. We lack getting them and need ideas.

Joselyn Marte said she has many students who would benefit from workforce development services, but they either don't speak English or don't meet the TABE scores. Abel added that the Board voted to set the required test score to receive training at a 6.9. This can be revisited but we need to ensure that they will be able to complete training. Juan added that it used to be 8.

Mr. Vargas talked about the efforts to study best practices around bilingual manufacturing floors. The premise being that if language is a barrier for employment, and businesses need help, is there steps employers can take to leverage the Spanish speaking workforce without disrupting operations. He said our biggest problem is ESOL.

Susan said that when we look at employer needs, they want people to have at least a high school diploma or HiSet. She said that we should also keep in mind if we want folks to get a minimum wage job.

Eddie asked what is being done with folks who don't meet the math and reading levels.

Sister Eileen said that we should establish tiers. She said that NDEC can have CNAs pass the test with lower levels. We have a one size fit all and that does not work.

Ann Marie said GLFHC has wrap around services, but it is costly to employers. A particular student could not pass her MA certification exam and GLFHC supported her by paying for her to take the exam three times.

John Lavoie said that GLTS has ESL instructors for all of their classes and that we should continue to education programing that includes training with academics or ESL.

Abel wondered if any other regions are facing the same problems and Eddie said that Boston put a training together with ESL, but Boston is big. He suggested teaching people the language of the industry.

Sister Eileen said that often time these people are knowledgeable, but they lack confidence. Abel added that we do see that, and success cannot be defined at the same level.

Eddie expressed how much he liked the dialog they just had. A presentation followed by discussion.

John Lavoie said that having diverse opportunities benefits the customer and how important it is to train in what interest them, that will dictate how successful they are.

Robin Hynds said they experience the same in healthcare. Making people understand that healthcare continues to grow and that it is beyond CNAs and nurses. There are also IT, facilities, etc. There is definitely a huge need for bilingual nurses.

Joselyn Marte said this was great meeting. Juan added that he and Able had spoken about changing the way meetings are conducted.

Rosa Muñoz said that one of the challenges that keeps employees at MultiGrains from moving up is the language barrier. It is important to continue this conversation. Abel asked if the company would allow training during work time and Rosa said they would consider it.

Susan Almono said we can look at WTF to have ESL training. Ann Marie mentioned that GLFHC does not qualify to receive funding from the WTF because they are self-paid and don't contribute.

John said that this discussion needs to happen at the state level and that there needs to be funding for continued education. Discussion followed.

Eddie suggested having Rebekah Lashman present at a meeting to discuss what programs are available to employers.

9. <u>Other Business</u>

No other business.

10. <u>Adjournment</u>

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

John Lavoie made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Karen Conard. Motion passed, and meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Corina Ruiz

Recorder