



MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, April 26, 2022

7:30 am

Lawrence Public Library

51 Lawrence Street

1st Floor Auditorium

Lawrence, MA 01841

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Edward Bartkiewicz, Joe Bevilacqua, John Bruno, Mark Forman, Lane Glenn, Andrew Herlihy, Jeff Linehan, Joselyn Marte, Carol Riemer, Bob Wescott, Juan Yopez

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Christian Brennan, Ann Marie Borgesi, Ron Contrado, Marko Duffy, Evelyn Friedman, Robin Hynds, Supt. John Lavoie, Supt. Maureen Lynch, Rosa Muñoz, Fred Shaheen, Ellen Weinhold, Calvin Williams

STAFF PRESENT:

Pedro Beato, Lynda Buote, Robin Del Negro, Varsha Gandhi, Cristy Gomez, Yeang Leng, Valerie Luque, Tracy Myszkowski, Mike Paglia, Corina Ruiz

GUESTS PRESENT:

Dawn Beati, Frank Bonet, Mayor Brian De Peña, Allison Dolan-Wilson, Linda Rohrer, Octavien Spanner

I. Call to Order

A quorum being present, Chairman Juan Yopez called the meeting to order at 7:45 a.m.

II. Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Yopez welcomed everyone to today's meeting. It's nice to see everyone in person and exciting things are happening at the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board (MMVWB) and the Career Center. Juan recognized our new Chief Elected Official, Mayor Brian De Peña, City of Lawrence. He's joined today by his advisor Octavien Spanner, and Mayor De Peña would like to say a few words.

Mayor De Peña thanked everyone for attending and said that he can't stay for the full meeting as he has other obligations this morning. He said it's a great moment to move the city of Lawrence forward. He is glad to see a remarkable representation of women at today's meeting. The mayor's office is open to assist the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board (MMVWB) and we have his support. As a businessman and past Board member, he understands that this work is important to the communities we serve.

Juan thanked Mayor De Peña for attending today. Mayor De Peña was interested in attending our previous meetings, but he has had a tight schedule in his first six months in office and we're glad he was able to come today before his day's schedule begins.

III. Approval of the January 25, 2022, minutes (vote required)

Chairman Yopez called for a motion on the minutes of the January 25, 2022, quarterly meeting.

Motion by Joe Bevilacqua, seconded by Bob Westcott to approve the minutes of the January 25, 2022, meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. Report of Chair

Juan recognized our new Chief Elected Official, Mayor of the City of Lawrence, Brian De Peña. We look forward to working with you now and in the years ahead as we continue to provide innovative and effective workforce development programs in the City of Lawrence and throughout the Merrimack Valley.

Juan said that we have had a busy last four weeks at the MMVWB. Brian Norris officially retired on April 13, 2022. Juan thanked Brian for his commitment to NAMC and his work at the MMVWB for the last year. Mayor De Peña has placed Pedro Beato as the MMVWB Interim Executive Director. Juan welcomed Pedro and told him that we look forward to working with him.

As reported at our last meeting, the Career Center and the MMVWB staff were busy planning their office moves. The Career Center completed their move and are now located at 420 Common Street, across from the Lawrence Post Office. It's a beautiful space on the second floor and I'm sure that Linda Rohrer will welcome anyone interested in a tour. The MMVWB is still working with Mayor De Peña to finalize the move to One Union Street, which we hope will happen in the coming weeks.

MassHire Department of Career Services (MDCS) conducted its' FY22 System Certification and Annual Program Monitoring of the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board (MMVWB) from February 7 – 16, 2022. The MDCS Systems Certification Review is conducted to ensure that the necessary processes, procedures, and policies were in place and effectively utilized by staff. The MMVWB Systems were certified. We would like to thank Julie Moran, our Field Management Officer for her assistance during this process. The Workforce Board submitted the FY22-24 MassHire Merrimack Valley Certification Packet to the State. The packet included our By-Laws, a new CEO Agreement signed by Mayor De Peña, our Board Matrix, and our High-Performance Workforce Board Qualifications.

In the 4th quarter, Board and Career Center staff will be working on the Local Annual Operating Plan for FY23.

Lastly, I invite you all to attend the FutureSkills Regional Upskilling Roadshow hosted by The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, MassHire Career Centers and Workforce Boards and Commonwealth Corporation. At this event, you will have the opportunity to engage with your Workforce Board and Market Makers to learn how to participate in workforce programs and access available funding. The goal is to help connect employers to new and existing workforce supports from the Commonwealth. This event will be held Tuesday, May 3rd at 11:00 am at Northern Essex Community College, Lawrence Campus. Employers can register by visiting mass.gov/futureskills-roadshows. Juan asked if there were any questions and there were none.

V. Reports of Committee Chairs

i. Planning and Career Center Committee

Chairman Yopez provided the following report in Ann Marie Borgesi's absence. He said that the committee met on March 22nd and the performance results reviewed show that the Career Center continues to be significantly behind our targets for WIOA Adult, WIOA Dislocated Worker, and WIOA Youth. We will create a plan to address these shortfalls when developing the Local Operating Plan for FY23 in the 4th quarter, along with Board staff.

Due to Brian's departure, we postponed our April 19th committee meeting. We hope to schedule our May meeting in person at the Career Center to be able to tour their new office space.

This committee looks forward to working with Pedro Beato, our new Interim Executive Director and wish him great success in his new role.

ii. Youth Committee

Robin Del Negro provided the following report in Calvin William's absence. She said that this quarter, we are happy to report the following:

Connecting Activities (CA) youth program staff continue to work closely with area high schools to implement School to Career activities. The Collaborative for Regional Educational Services and Training, also known as CREST, joined our initiative as a new partner school to provide educational services to our area youth.

High school students from Haverhill High School and Triton Regional High School started the enrollment process for the High School Senior Internship Education Program. This project provides work-based learning experiences in the field of education to highly motivated high school seniors in good academic standing while supporting their school and community-based partners. Students will earn stipend payments of \$14.25 per hour for up to 150 hours.

In addition, we signed a MOU with the Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce to help us reach out to their members and inform them about our youth initiatives and programs and learn about our career development education opportunities. Employer partners are a crucial component of our youth programs as they assist youth in the development of the employability skills our youth need to reach their workforce related goals.

Commonwealth Corporation released the YouthWorks Request for Responses. A significant change this year is the age range for young adults from 14-24 to 14-25 years old. The allocation for our region will allow us to place 429 youth in service project-based learning, subsidized employment, and virtual project-based learning opportunities starting in July 2022 until May 2023. We are working to enroll 275 youth this summer.

In an effort to recruit employers and young adults, our Youth Services Specialists have created marketing and recruitment flyers, presentations, and videos. Please visit our website to get a glimpse of their hard work. Also, please visit our Facebook page to read about our young adults' experiences who are currently participating in the Year Round programs.

We highly encourage you to partner with us this summer to provide our area youth with a meaningful YouthWorks summer experience. If you are interested in hosting a youth, please email us at mvyouth@masshiremvwb.org. Robin asked if there were any questions and there were none.

iii. Nominating Committee

Jeff Linehan informed the group that John Person, our Board member representing Mass Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) has left the Board. John's replacement should be announced at the next meeting.

Jeff asked if anyone has any contacts at Amazon who would be interested in joining the Board to please let him know. It would be great to have representation from Amazon on our Board servicing this area.

iv. Finance Report

Bob Wescott said the budget is over \$12 million dollars, the largest budget we've had, and yet coming off the COVID-19 pandemic in some ways we seem to be competing with the government to fulfill our purposes. People have gotten used to COVID support dollars and that has disrupted the normal flow where kids grow up, go through school, get a job, and build a career. There are a lot of young people leaving school, either graduating or dropping out and it's become more difficult to get them to come to us for the services we continuously think of new ways to provide. With a larger budget, our challenge is larger, and we must make great use of that money. Tracy Myszkowski, our Chief Financial Officer, does a phenomenal job. The problem is how do we apply this money properly. We need more people on the Planning Committee and on the Board who are active and whose businesses are still here. Small businesses were decimated during COVID. Hopefully they will recover and can provide jobs for young people who need skills. We have a challenge, and we need the smartest people to help us. If you know of any business owners who are interested in participating on the Planning Committee, please let us know.

V. Report of Interim Executive Director

Pedro Beato said that he is very excited to be in this position as a businessman for the last 27 years in the city, he feels he has a very good connection with the citizens of Lawrence, and he feels he can do a great job. His first priority is to develop a 3-year workforce development framework for the Board. The reason behind developing a 3-year plan as opposed to a 5-year plan is to develop a result-driven plan based on actual data.

The after-effects of the COVID pandemic intelligence provided by employers will give us better insight into the needs and demands of the employment market. This coupled with President Biden's economic recovery plan will assist us in identifying training programs and prepare our new hires with the necessary skills that are in high demand.

The reality is that too many families in the Merrimack Valley are struggling to make ends meet and many parents are worried about the economic future of their children. Black, Latino American immigrants and women have never been welcomed as full participants in the economy, therefore requiring immediate adjustments and pragmatic approaches. We need to shift away from the conventional way of doing business and introduce creative ways to not only prepare but also attract new recruits. To achieve this goal, Pedro will be working very closely with municipal officials, our state and federal legislative representatives, industry leaders and community stakeholders to define a plan. Internally, he will make recommendations to the Board concerning innovative approaches and prepare the MMVWB staff to implement and execute the plan. He kindly asks for the Board's support. He is new to the job; however, he is a seasoned entrepreneur with a wealth of experience and connections to fulfill this job. He

welcomes suggestions and he is looking forward to a productive working relationship with all of you. He will have more details at the next meeting.

VI. Other Business

Juan asked Octavien Spanner, Mayor De Peña's Senior Advisor to say a few words. Octavien introduced Frank Bonet, Chief of Staff to Mayor De Peña who is in attendance today. Octavien said that the work the MMVWB does for the city and the other municipalities it serves is very important and efforts have been made, but this administration believes it has not been aggressive or creative enough at attracting industries that can create employment for our community. We have a wealth of talent, and we have a college in the city. The resources are there, however, we are challenged by how we are going to attract and train to better to prepare our new recruits. The mayor has been meeting with community stakeholders in the private sector, non-profits, and local investors. He has also been meeting with other investors that are looking at Lawrence as a potential place for doing business.

Octavien said the first issue that we have is knowing whether or not the city prepared. We are looking internally at how we provide services. We haven't got to that standard yet internally. The work between different departments, our relationship with state and US representatives, defining a plan, what direction we are going, is the plan feasible, especially after the pandemic. We have other challenges; Lawrence is not at the stage that we want, and progress is slow. We're going to make progress and we're going to look at every detail. That's what we have been doing over the last six months. The mayor's campaign slogan was "Now it's the People's Turn" which means now it is your responsibility to participate in the decision-making process. As Bob mentioned there is a disconnect in understanding and it's important as Jeff mentioned, that we connect with industry leaders like Amazon and other creative thinkers we can bring to the table to work with us.

The administration is proud of the work and efforts of NECC and the Board to change dynamics to get positive results. We're going to be working very closely with the Board as it is necessary to better prepare our residents to fill jobs at places like Amazon. Mayor De Peña will be meeting with Mayor Wu of Boston and Mayor Siddiqui of Cambridge. He has met with Mayor Fiorentini, and he will meet with leaders in Andover, North Andover and Dracut. Lawrence has had its fair share with responsibilities with complex matters that impact the Merrimack Valley. We're dealing with homelessness and low-income housing. The mayor believes we should change that dynamic and focus on market rate and workforce housing. The more houses we build the more challenges we will have with student/teacher ratio. We're asking other community leaders to assume their responsibility as well. Lawrence has had a bad rap but it's the cornerstone and has created many jobs and served many people. Octavien feels the MV Chamber is doing a great job, but we should be more aggressive in advocating for our interests. We have to bring our concerns to our state leaders and let them know that our region needs their support. Lawrence is one of six communities in the state that has not been able to pull our head above ground. The wealth should be spread out in a more balanced way.

Octavien said that the Board has the support of the mayor's office, and he has an open-door policy. They are happy to broadcast any initiatives that you would like to share with the community.

Juan said that although we have the largest funding we've ever had, we have more challenges than we've had in the past and it starts with youth. We all have a responsibility to try to improve that. He praised the staff at the Career Center and the Workforce Board for the programs they provide

and the work they do, but we have had some challenges due to COVID and prior to COVID in getting the right programs in place for youth and in getting the message out. We look forward to working with the city, the mayor, Pedro, local business owners, and all the communities we serve. We have to network and make sure the message is out there and we're asking everyone to do their part.

Lane Glenn said that we share the mayor's vision. A lot of progress has been made in recent years in some important ways. There is a lot of work still to be done and for us to propel some of these things will require some regional heft. There is a lack of representation from other communities here today. Unfortunately, there are more people who leave this city for low paying jobs than people who come to this city for higher paying jobs. One of the objectives of this Board and NECC is to reverse this trend. Transportation is one of those issues and we need help from all communities at the table. There are other things we need to tackle like refreshing the labor blueprint post-COVID. We need to make a concerted effort to get those municipalities back in the room. Amesbury, Newburyport, and Methuen could have a stronger presence here and when it comes time to pitch something to the state or the federal delegation, having those communities behind us will be very important.

Juan agreed with Lane and said that falls on the Board. For many years, the majority of the folks in this room have been from Lawrence. We need Amesbury, Newburyport, Andover, North Andover, and our other communities to get involved. We need to attract folks to stay here for higher paying jobs as opposed to leaving for lower paying jobs. We have many great companies and a lot of talented people in Lawrence. It's important to be able to create those jobs and keep them here.

Jocelyn Marte said that serving out of school youth and providing training for them has always been a challenge. Young people who were incarcerated, who receive their HiSET/GED have challenges entering training programs. They cannot enroll in programs if they don't have a clean CORI. We have funding but if we don't create programs for youth who really need access to training and it's problematic. How can we get the people who work with youth to the table to help serve them and get them enrolled in training? There are a lot of out of school youth in Lawrence and Haverhill. It's great to have funding, but we're not serving the youth who need it. It's not making any sense and we keep doing the same thing and expecting different outcomes.

Juan agreed that we are not fixing the problem and we need to get other organizations involved and we will actively work on this to reach more youth in the community. The state is willing to listen when we have changes that make sense. We need to look at how we can incorporate youth with criminal records into programs.

Jocelyn said that we want youth to continue to make good choices, but they don't have access to training that will lead to a sustaining wage and that's what they need.

Joe Bevilacqua said that the MV Chamber has had a tremendous working relationship in a very short time with Mayor De Peña and he is focused on business and jobs. The Chamber has set up a number of meetings with the mayor and he has jumped to meet with these individuals. There is a cross section of jobs throughout the Merrimack Valley and we want to make sure we are reaching these individuals and create that career ladder climb. The reality is that although companies may not be located in Lawrence, many workers live in Lawrence and work in surrounding towns. He suggested that we invite the new director of the MVRTA to a Board meeting to talk about tying population centers with job locations.

Joe said that we don't tie education and workforce development together well. We need to make sure, in a positive way, that superintendents and educators realize that their job is not only to provide youth with a diploma at the end of 12 years, but to prepare them for a career.

We need to step up our social media coverage to reach youth and businesses. We need to promote and talk about the positive activities that we do, for example promoting the YouthWorks Summer Experience.

The Chamber is talking to unions about apprenticeship programs. He suggested a meeting with the unions to talk about apprenticeships.

The Chamber is holding a breakfast with the mayors and town managers on 5/23 and regional representation is important. The Chamber is also holding an upcoming breakfast program with the Secretary of Labor.

For the first time, we are looking at Lawrence in a different way and talking about tourism and hospitality. The mayor is willing to talk about these and other new ideas. When we look at how the world has changed since the pandemic, there are opportunities, and the mayors and town managers are willing to work together because they all have the same issues.

Juan said he will talk with Pedro, Octavien and the mayor. We need to get other town managers and mayors involved. They have the same issues we have. We have plenty of programs and we need to do a better job with social media

Bob pointed out that Haverhill is represented here today with Andrew Herlihy in attendance. Bob asked Octavien what the number one priority is for the mayor and Octavien said it's to drive the economy. It's not only the mayor's responsibility, private and non-profit sectors and everyone needs to participate to attract investment. The mayor's office met with James Carras, from Carras Community Investment, Inc. and Harvard and Tufts professor. Mr. Carras and the Kennedy School of Government provided a presentation to the City Council, and they are currently interviewing organizations and companies in the area to work on the mayor's prosperity plan for Lawrence.

Linda Rohrer said that we need more occupational training providers and training programs. It's a process to become a training provider for us to be able to use the money. One of the issues for young people with CORI records, is that the training programs are offered at the technical high schools, and they have very strict CORI requirements. We can't send a person with a record to those programs. Linda is hoping we can tackle this issue and increase the training capacity in our area.

Juan asked if the list of providers is a federal list and a state list. Linda said it's a state list and a regional list. Could we reach out to other training facilities in Massachusetts who might have successful programs and ask them to put a satellite training office here in Lawrence? This works hand in hand with the mayor's plan to bring new business into the community. Juan asked Corina and Pedro to see how we can encourage training programs from other parts of the state to open an office here. Jocelyn added that an issue with trade training would be the use of machinery for training. Juan asked Andrew if he or Mayor Fiorentini can ask the Superintendent of Whittier if they

can allow after-hours training programs. Andrew said that Secretary Acosta and Superintendent Lynch are attending the MV Chamber event next week and maybe this issue can be addressed then.

Jocelyn said that maybe for now, these youth can participate in apprenticeship programs if they can't go to the technical high schools for training programs.

Allison Dolan-Wilson said that she's participating on the LEADS project that include representatives from Gemline, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission and UMass Lowell. They group is looking at issues that include training programs not being filled, companies that need employees and employees who need jobs. Things they are considering include: Do you know what exists? What is out there? What industries exists? There is so much money coming into training, and we need to recruit, educate, and market. One of the other groups is comprised of Lawrence folks working on bringing people into Lawrence. Allison will suggest that they connect with the mayor's office.

Juan agreed and said we need to educate business owners and communicate with the community and let them know what assistance and programs are available.

Allison added that if the workforce understands what's available, and are educated by area programs, they could be hired by companies who see what we have here and may want to bring their companies here.

Juan asked if there were any additional questions and there were none. He thanked everyone for today's productive and informative meeting. He said he will do a better job working closely with the Board, Workforce Board staff, and the Career Center to make sure we get the message out. He's looking forward to working with Lawrence city officials to help encourage other town mayors and managers to attend our meetings so we can share with them what we need and offer help to them.

VII. Adjournment (vote required)

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

Bob Wescott made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Jocelyn Marte. Motion passed, and meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynda Buote

Recorder