



# MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

## Quarterly Meeting Minutes

**Tuesday, June 27, 2023**

**9:00 am**

**Remote Meeting via ZOOM**

**Meeting ID: 846 211 6073**

**Passcode: 082661**

### **MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Joe Bevilacqua, Lisa Crutchfield, Kemelin Domenech, Beth Goguen, Andrew Herlihy, Ellen Weinhold, Juan Yepez

### **MEMBERS ABSENT:**

John Bruno, Ron Contrado, Mark Forman, Lane Glenn, John Lavoie, Maureen Lynch, Joselyn Marte, Carol Riemer, Fred Shaheen, Cal Williams

### **STAFF PRESENT:**

Rosangela Amaro, Frank Bonet, Lynda Buote, Robin Del Negro, Varsha Gandhi, Yeang Leng, Tracy Myszkowski, Corina Ossers

### **GUESTS PRESENT:**

James Henderson

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

A quorum being present, Chairman Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m.

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

Chairman Yepez said welcome and thank you for attending today's meeting.

#### **III. Approval of the April 25, 2023, quarterly meeting minutes (vote required)**

Chairman Yepez called for a motion on the minutes of the April 25, 2023, quarterly meeting.

**Motion by Andrew Herlihy, seconded by Joe Bevilacqua to approve the minutes of the April 25, 2023, meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **IV. Guest Speaker: James Henderson, Executive Director, MassHire MV Career Center**

James said I think you all have an idea about what the Career Center does, and I'm going to ask you to try to think about it in a slightly different way. When we think about Career Centers historically, we think about unemployment, and we think about it as a requirement. We're trying to change that. Our

mandate is to help people who are displaced, have dropped out of the workforce for other reasons or are trying to enter it. We are seen by the majority of the public as the requirement to ensure they receive their unemployment benefits. We have been making some adjustments to help change that perception both in the community and internally. Prior to my tenure, a marketing firm was engaged and the advertisements, radio spots and google ads, etc., have already started to be deployed. The main thrust is to paint a different picture of the Career Center in that we are here to help you get training and help you with career exploration. If you are a young person, we're here to help you look at alternatives available to you once you finish high school or time out of the system and what type of steps or paths you can take. The word is getting out and towards the end of August or early September we will have the hard data to see what we got out of the marketing campaign and what kind of traction we made.

In addition, we are going to try to change the effects of COVID in that we can now engage with people face to face. During COVID, there was an adaptation to the programs and the workshops were stripped down to bare-minimum. Our mission is to provide people with the tangible tools or skills they need to enter or re-enter the workforce. We are going to have a much greater emphasis on in-person workshops. I negotiated shared space with the college at the Haverhill Heights building for two or three classrooms and we can have multiple workshops going on at the same time. The workshops will be much more focused on practical takeaways for our members. We have to provide workshops required by the State. We discovered that the majority of the people signing up for our virtual workshops were not from our area. That told us that we are attractive to other career counselors to register their clients and help them through the RESEA process, and that we are not really taking care of our own folks. We're going to try to address that with forward-facing workshops. We have a fantastic new outreach coordinator who is not only doing outreach in the community but is also providing training and workshops. She has over 20 years of experience as a trainer with LARE Institute. Those are little pieces we are hoping will slowly impact and make a bigger difference.

For immediate services we plan to offer a new drop-in service in our Resource Room. One counselor or advisor will be deployed during the workday to provide immediate hands-on services, like help with a resume, writing a cover letter or applying for a job on-line. They would be coaching clients to make it more relaxed, less stressful. Clients will need to be Career Center members to access drop-in services. Notes will be recorded in MOSES and referred to the client's counselors.

The last thing we are trying to do is help our community and clients understand that we are not a training center. We refer people to training. Our goal is to help them get the best training opportunities they can. We have wonderful training partners like the Greater Lawrence Technical High School and Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School and private contractors like LARE and other agencies we cooperate with. We're trying to be the place you come to get started and to connect you to a tangible training program and we're going to case-manage you all the way through. We're going to be there for all our members because life changes and we are trying to be more service oriented. Process is important, but process with an intention so we can best serve the needs of our clients, our partners, and the interest of the Board. I feel if we're doing all those things as well as paying attention to the process that we need to do, we're going to be more of a service to the community.

Juan said that's fantastic. People might have misconceptions and we don't want people to be stressed and not come in for services. James, you mentioned that you were able to get additional space for workshops at the college. Has that always been an issue and James said in the past, the incumbent in my position may not have been asking the right questions. In Lawrence, we have the space to accommodate a hiring event, a training session, and a Career Center Seminar at the same time. In

Haverhill we have one room and that is limiting in terms of what we can offer. We have staffed-up in Haverhill and can provide more events and we intend to be running at least one in-person workshop a day in Haverhill and two in Lawrence and have the space to do that now.

Juan asked are staff still reluctant or concerned about COVID and James said we have a few cautious staff members who mask when meeting with individuals, but we don't have anyone unwilling to come into the office. We have two schedules, and one group works in-office Mondays and Tuesdays and two Wednesdays per month and work remotely on Thursdays and Fridays. The other group works the opposite schedule. The reason for that is we have hit a point where we have to double-up people in cubicles. Everyone is working half in-person and half at home. We have some staff who prefer to work in-office and so far, we have been able to accommodate that, however, when we are at full staff there will be a challenge, but we think we can accommodate it.

Ellen Weinhold asked are Job Corps services are still available and do you have a representative at the Career Center and James said yes, Job Corps services are available. We had a representative on-site previously. We have been contacted by them and have an agreement and they will be here sometime in July. We need to narrow down if they want to be on-site every day or just a presence. Another challenge we face is that we work with several organizations who want an out-station here and that could tie up several cubicles. We're trying to understand they want to be here so we can accommodate. We can't give each partner a cubicle.

Ellen asked can you please share the list of training providers that will be at your site and James said yes.

Juan said thank you James, we appreciate you sharing the changes that you've implemented and that you are trying to make the Career Center more welcoming to help more customers in the Merrimack Valley and I know that Frank will be talking about unemployment numbers that have come down and it's been a great thing to see.

Juan asked if there were any other questions or comments for James and there were none.

## **V. Report of Chair**

Juan said welcome and thank you for attending. I'd like to welcome our newest Board member, Lisa Crutchfield, Chief Human Resources Officer at Lawrence General Hospital.

Workforce Board staff have been very busy these past few months. Fiscal Staff at the Workforce Board are conducting the annual fiscal monitoring of the One-Stop Career Center Operator. They are also conducting fiscal monitoring of the Adult and Youth Group Programs at both LARE and the Haverhill YMCA.

Workforce Board and Career Center staff continue to meet on a weekly basis, and we are happy to report that NECC reimbursements are up to date. Expenses have been paid and expenses accrued.

Youth staff are diligently working to place over 260 youth in a summer job experience – we'll hear more on this from the Youth Committee chair.

The Workforce Board will be procuring WIOA Youth and Adult Group Training Programming – we'll hear more on this from the Planning/Career Center Committee chair. Frank, along with Executive Directors

from Greater Lowell and North Shore, will be presenting to Secretary Jones and the Workforce Skills Cabinet on June 28th in a Session with 6 other Regional Teams. Frank will speak more on that topic.

Staff held a Training Vendor meeting on June 1st. Training providers were presented with the MMVWB Individual Training Account Policy requirements and new training caps.

The State released the FY24 WIOA Allocations. There was an increase of 30% for the Adult and Youth categories and a 15% decrease for Dislocated Workers.

We are waiting for guidance from the State on the Local Annual Operating Plan for FY24. We anticipate having a Special Meeting in July where the Board will be presented with a draft plan and vote, as in years past, on delegating the final approval of the annual plan and budget to the Planning/Career Center Committee.

I received a letter from Mayor Brian DePeña, recommending Frank Bonet as permanent Executive Director of the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board. Frank, under his leadership at the workforce board, has worked with the Career Center and is on time with all their reports, has increased performance for most planned numbers, has created a working relationship with the Career Center under new Director James Henderson, and has implemented staff leadership training.

He is currently the lead for the North Regions Workforce Board in the Planning that will take place tomorrow with three secretaries of the Commonwealth and will present as the lead.

During his time, he has visited Town and City Managers and Mayors to gain their opinions, recommendations, and ideas to support each of the 15 cities and towns in the Merrimack Valley.

Under his leadership, his team has conducted Career Center Monitoring, ARPA Monitoring, and Fiscal Monitoring. His team has placed close to 260 "2023" Summer Youth for work.

He has for the first time in Merrimack Valley Workforce history created Workforce Board Guiding Principles. Those principles were chosen by the workforce staff as a team.

Most importantly, under his leadership has worked to decrease the unemployment rate for the entire Merrimack Valley. Merrimack Valley's unemployment rate, for May numbers, is 2.6%. Comparing that percentage to the entire Massachusetts which is currently at 2.3%. The biggest decreases were made in Lawrence, which went from 7.7% in February to 4% in May. Seven cities and towns are currently in the 1% category, while the other cities and towns are in the 3% category.

Chairman Yopez asked for a motion to appoint Frank Bonet as permanent Executive Director of the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board.

**Motion made by Joe Bevilacqua, seconded by Ellen Weinhold to appoint Frank Bonet as permanent Executive Director of the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board. Motion passed unanimously.**

Juan said congratulations Frank for a job well done. I'm looking forward to working with you and the Career Center and I'm sure you will continue to do a fabulous job in reducing the unemployment numbers in the Merrimack Valley and Frank said thank you for the vote of confidence.

Andrew said last month's employment rate for Haverhill was the lowest since 1969 and Juan said the State rate is 2.3%, the Merrimack Valley is 2.6% and Lawrence is 4%. Nice job to Frank and everyone who helped get the numbers low.

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

## **VII. Reports of Committee Chairs**

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

Juan said Ann Marie Borges has submitted her resignation and is no longer with Greater Lawrence Family Health Center and I will read the Planning/Career Center committee report.

The committee met on June 21st. The performance ending May 31st should be at/around 92% of planned goals and we are exceeding goals on total job seekers served, and total employers served. Although we continue to be behind in the number of WIOA participants in the training, I do want to recognize the staff at the Career Center, who have been doing an incredible job assessing and processing Individual Training Account packets for job seekers who lack the necessary skills needed to gain employment.

The Workforce Board will be procuring WIOA Group Training Programming. The Request for Proposals is slated to be released July 24th. One of the Requests for Proposals will be for WIOA Out-of-School Youth services and the other for WIOA Adult. Available funding for each RFP is roughly \$350,000 dollars.

Our committee lost one member, Bob Wescott. He resigned and I want to thank him for the work he did as a member of the Planning Committee. We are recruiting new members so please let me or Frank know if you are interested in learning more about the work we do.

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

### **ii. Youth Committee**

In Cal Williams's absence, Rosangela Amaro said I would like to present our highlights for this quarter: The YouthWorks Cycle 2 Year-Round program ended in May. 163 area youth successfully completed their program hours. We exceeded our program enrollment goal and paid youth over \$350,000.00 in wages, stipends, and incentives.

The 2023 YouthWorks Cycle 1 Summer program started by welcoming potential employer partners to an information session held in April and releasing the youth application link. Staff received over 550 applications from youth interested in our summer programming. An Employer Orientation Breakfast was also hosted in May. At this event, employers learned about our program requirements and expectations, fiscal processes, Massachusetts Child Labor Laws, Massachusetts Work Based Learning Plan, and incident reporting process.

The goal this Summer is to enroll 260 area youth in meaningful service project based learning and subsidized employment opportunities. As of today, staff have processed 240 youth employment packages. The official start date of the program will be July 10<sup>th</sup> but some of our youth servicing organizations will start on July 5<sup>th</sup>.

Youth staff will begin to facilitate the Commonwealth Corporation's Signal Success career and work readiness curriculum to the youth participants. These workshops will prepare youth to excel in their work assignments.

The DESE Connecting Activities High School Seniors Internship Education project ended last week. Eleven students from Triton Regional High School and one student from Haverhill High School completed the required internship hours. This project allowed them to learn more about careers in the education field. These experiences enhance their classroom learning and help them make informed post high school career decisions.

Our various youth programs express our commitment to provide high quality services to youth and young adults. Services begin with career awareness exploration and guidance; continued with support for educational attainment and opportunities for skills training and occupations. Services culminate with a good job, enrollment in post-secondary education or hopefully both, reinforcing upward movement to better jobs.

On behalf of the Youth Committee, I would like to thank our outstanding school and employer partners for supporting our youth programs for the past year and program year ahead.

Unless there are questions, that concludes my report.

### **iii. Nominating Committee**

Frank said we would like to nominate three members for appointment to the Board. Vilma Martinez-Dominguez, Chief Operations Officer at Greater Lawrence Community Action Council, Wilson DeLos Santos, Manager of Potross Financial Services LLC (representing small business) and Billy Lang, Business Representative and Organizer for IUPAT DC35. We hope that when Mayor De Peña approves their appointments, they can be nominated for committee roles at the next board meeting.

Juan asked for a motion to appoint Vilma Martinez-Dominguez, Wilson DeLos Santos and Billy Lang to the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board.

**Motion by Lisa Crutchfield, seconded by Beth Goguen to appoint Vilma Martinez-Dominguez, Wilson De Los Santos and Billy Lang to the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board. Motion passed unanimously.**

Frank said Rosa Muñoz is no longer with Multigrains Inc. and I contacted them to see if they would like to refer a replacement to the Board. If we receive any information, we will let the Board know.

### **iv. Finance Report**

Frank said the fiscal staff have been busy with fiscal monitorings with our funders and our subrecipients.

- Last month we were monitored by the Mass Department of Career Services for our WIOA and ARPA programs.
- This month we are being monitored by the Commonwealth Corporation for our YouthWorks Program.
- Last month, we conducted our fiscal monitoring of our WIOA Adult Group Programs, and we are working with our WIOA Youth Group Program Provider to schedule their fiscal monitoring in the coming weeks.

- Last month, we started our fiscal monitoring of the Career Center, and we are looking forward to wrapping that up this week.

The fiscal staff are working on FY23 year-end reporting. We have reporting from NECC and MDCS through May 2023, and they are working on getting their data to us on their June costs later next week. We are also working with our regional partners, training providers and vendors on final billings for FY23.

We just received our FY24 WIOA Allocations - \$3.1m.

- 30% increase in WIOA Youth and Adult
- 15% decrease in WIOA Dislocated Worker
- Overall WIOA increase of \$419k, or 15%

With these FY24 WIOA Allocations, and in working with the Career Center on training funds, we are planning on releasing another round of WIOA Youth and Adult Procurements, with funding for both of \$350k each. We are looking for Board member volunteers to help our staff with reading and evaluating proposals.

The timeline for this activity will be:

Proposal Review Date:	Friday, September 22, 2023
Review Team Meeting:	Tuesday, October 10, 2023
Recommendations to the MMVWB Planning Committee:	Tuesday, October 17, 2023
Planning Committee Approval:	Thursday, October 19, 2023
Recommendations to the MMVWB Board:	Friday, October 20, 2023
MMVWB Board Approval:	Tuesday, October 24, 2023

#### **VIII. Report of Executive Director**

Frank said good morning and thank you for your support, confidence, ideas, and discussions on making the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board, and Career Center important in supporting employers and residents, economically and through seeking work.

This will be a quick report, as most of this quarter's work has been supporting all the audits from DCS, CommCorp, and the Commonwealth as it relates to the funding that they provide and is used to the good work for the Merrimack Valley and its partners.

Tomorrow I will be presenting to Secretary Lauren Jones from the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development and her staff in the Workforce Skills Cabinet Regional Sessions: Planning/Blueprint Discussion. All are welcome to attend this virtual session. If you are interested, the virtual is open to our partners and board members. I have been informed that the possibility of having the Secretary of the Executive Office of Economic Development, and the Secretary of Education is a high probability. I am excited about tomorrow.

Additionally, on July 19<sup>th</sup>, the Massachusetts Workforce Association Directors will meet with Secretary Jones. It will be our second meeting and will be an opportunity to bring our goals from our vision document and more into a conversation with her and see what she is looking to learn from us. During this meeting, we will be speaking on:

- Investing in Data Systems - Issue MOSES Replacement RFP

- Make Data Public and Accessible
- Prioritize State/Local collaboration.

The Secretary has made interest on:

- How to leverage the local convening power of WBs for workforce planning - Blueprint, State Plan, etc.
- Comprehensive stakeholder engagement - who isn't at the table?
- What do we need to scale successful programs?
- Examples of deep, long-term sector partnerships locally

Additionally, I was able to attend on an invitation to the Northeast Regional Economic Development Planning Session that took place on Monday, June 5 at Northshore Community College in Lynn.

Business and community leaders, elected officials, stakeholders, and members of the public were invited to join and contribute input about economic needs and opportunities for growth within the region. EOED and the state's Economic Development Planning Council will be holding a series of these sessions on behalf of the Healey-Driscoll Administration across the state this spring and summer to gather public input about the state's economic development economic needs. The council will then craft a strategic plan to guide Massachusetts's economic development policy over the next four years.

The board's by-law revisions are underway. A review was conducted and continues to be discussed. A draft will be sent to members for ideas, recommendations, changes, and deletions to any by-law of the board. Afterward, when a conclusion on changes comes to fruition, it will be officially presented to the board, discussed, and voted on.

Finally, I want to share some information that may be of interest to you. First, some background... In the early months of the Healey-Driscoll Administration, the Workforce Skills Cabinet has identified four high-growth industries that the administration will focus on statewide while continuing to work with each of the regional workforce partnerships to support local industry and occupational needs. Life sciences, clean energy, health, and human services, and advanced manufacturing.

Governor Healey, as you may know, introduced MassTalent during remarks at the BIO International Convention attracting 18,000 registrants in Boston, MassTalent—is an initiative to connect employers to talent and people to opportunity with these high growth industries in mind.

One of the thoughts that came to many was “How is this different from FutureSkills? The administration sees MassTalent as an opportunity to brand and promote Massachusetts as a powerhouse of local and global talent. As the Commonwealth makes investments to expand opportunities, MassTalent will be used to streamline these resources, especially in collaboration with MassHire, CommCorp, and industry-based quasi-public agencies to make it easier for both job seekers and employers to navigate and by industry and occupation; is especially useful to the employer community. If you want to visit the website - <https://www.mass.gov/masstalent>.

This completes my report. Thank you.

Juan said thank you and asked can someone please share the link for Frank's presentation tomorrow so members can participate, and Frank said yes, I will send it after this meeting.

**IX. Other Business**

Juan asked if there was any other business and there was none. He said, thank you, Lisa, for joining the Board and thank you James for the Career Center information you provided today.

**X. Adjournment (vote required)**

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

**Motion by Ellen Weinhold to adjourn, seconded by Lisa Crutchfield. Motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Lynda Buote*

Recorder