



MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

Remote Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Via Zoom

Meeting ID: 880 4223 0918

Meeting Password: 625509

Tuesday, June 21, 2022

9:00 am

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Joseph Bevilacqua, Ann Marie Borges, Kemelin Domenech, Lane Glenn, Andrew Herlihy, Jeff Linehan, Joselyn Marte, Carol Riemer, Fred Shaheen, Calvin Williams, Juan Yepez

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Edward Bartkiewicz, Christian Brennan, John Bruno, Ron Contrado, Marko Duffy, Evelyn Friedman, Mark Forman, Robin Hynds, John Lavoie, Maureen Lynch, Rosa Muñoz, Ellen Weinhold, Robert Westcott

STAFF PRESENT:

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

GUESTS PRESENT:

Dawn Beati, Ann Marie Casey, Allison Dolan-Wilson, Julie Moran, Linda Rohrer

I. Call to Order

A quorum being present, Chairman Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

II. Welcome and Introductions

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

III. Approval of the April 26, 2022, minutes (vote required)

Chairman Yepez called for a motion on the minutes of the April 26, 2022, quarterly meeting.

Motion by Cal Williams, seconded by Joselyn Marte to approve the minutes of the April 26, 2022, meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. Report of Chair

Juan welcomed our newest Board member, Kemelin Domenech, Area Director for the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission.

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.
- Workforce Board and Career Center staff continue to meet on a weekly basis to bring NECC reimbursements up to date. To date, February expenses have been paid and March expenses accrued.
- Workforce Board staff will be negotiating an Operator/Service Provider umbrella contract with Northern Essex Community College for FY23.
- Youth staff are diligently working to place over 200 youth in a summer job experience – we'll hear more on this from Youth Committee chair.
- The Workforce Board is procuring WIOA Youth and Adult Group Training Programming – we'll hear more on this from the Planning Committee chair.
- The City of Lawrence is procuring office space for the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board; Proposals are due June 24th

We are waiting for guidance from the State on the Local Annual Operating Plan for FY23. The Board will later vote, as in years past, on delegating the final approval of the annual plan and budget to the Planning/Career Center Committee.

The session law extension, Chapter 22 of the Acts of 2022, which allows public bodies to continue providing live public access to the deliberations of the public body, instead of holding meetings in a public place that is open and physically accessible to the public; authorizing all members of a public body to continue participating in meetings remotely expires July 15, 2022.

To comply with the Open Meeting Law's requirement that a quorum of the body and the chair be physically present at the meeting location we will resume to in person meetings after July 15th.

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

V. Special Guest: Sarah Perez, Executive Director, Federación Hispana de Comerciantes, Inc.

Juan introduced today's special guest, Sarah Perez, Executive Director at Federación Hispana de Comerciantes, Inc. Sarah said that she is concerned about the 100+ barber shops in this area and is asking for ideas from this group to help get people licensed to work in area barber shops. The shops are working with people who have the experience, but not the license. Some people come from other countries with experience and a training certificate. The training and testing for licensure is far from our area and transportation is an issue. Sarah would like to advocate for assistance for people who need access to training and testing.

Juan said that he appreciates Sarah bringing up this concern and asked Linda Rohrer about the possibility of classes and helping with certification for these folks. Linda, Sarah, her board members, and city officials met last week and discussed this topic. They will be meeting to discuss further. There is an issue in barbering in that there are careers that the state is not enthusiastic about supporting. We will check to see if there is the inability to get a training on the state list of training providers. Linda knows that in the past, this is an occupation that this local board has not been in support of. She thinks one of the reasons is that when you spend federal money on training, you are looking for someone who will work full-time and a lot of times, barbers are not working full-time or are self-employed. There are a few issues related to this and we will be meeting again. We have research work at the state level and will have more conversations at the local level about this.

Juan asked if there are any other organizations that might have funds available to work with these folks taking into consideration that it's not currently an approved training with the State and he can see it taking some time to go through that process.

Lane Glenn texted Dr. Noemi Custodia-Lora, about this and asked Linda if she knows the status of our ability if any, to validate the foreign earned credentials that Sarah mentioned. Through the college's PIÉS Latinos de NECC program, NECC works the Center for Educational Documentation out of Boston so we can validate credentials closer to home in the Lawrence area, but he doesn't know if that applies to these kinds of credentials like licensure in barbering. If Noemi gets back to him during today's meeting, he'll share the information.

Jocelyn Marte said that it wouldn't apply to this. The Center for Education Documentation validates high school and college credentials.

Lane asked if it's a matter of the person seeking licensure to demonstrate the skills or are they required to go through an entire barbering curriculum. Jocelyn said they need to go through the training and the hours.

Lane asked Linda if she remembers the outcome when this came up with the Workforce Board in the past where we had another training provider and we had an option to tap into funding. Jocelyn said that it was cosmetology training. Lane said he's referring to the mechanism for tapping into the funding. He asked Linda if she recalled where we left that at the time. Linda said that she doesn't recall the outcome and added that we have not used that program and they are not on the approved training list. That is part of the research that will be done in preparation for the next meeting.

Juan asked Linda to continue to work with the State, Pedro Beato, and the Workforce Board to see if there are other options.

Jocelyn asked if training at the vocational schools is an option as they offer barbering training for students. Juan said that we'll leave that to Linda to reach out to vocational schools. There is a good amount of work entailed in this and Linda can come back to Sarah and her team with the best route to help. Linda said that it's possible that if the state feels this is a training they want to support, the CTI program offers most trainings through the vocational schools, so this is an avenue to research.

Juan thanked Sarah for bringing this to the Board's attention and we want to see how we can help with this issue.

VI. Reports of Committee Chairs

i. Planning and Career Center Committee

Ann Marie Borgesi provided the following report. The committee met on June 14th. The performance ending May 31st should be at/around 92% of planned goals and we are slightly behind on total job seekers served and significantly behind in WIOA programs. Total entered employment saw an increase of 117 compared to previous month, which brings it to 58% of plan.

The Workforce Board will be procuring WIOA Group Training Programming. The Request for Proposals will be released today, June 21st. One of the Request for Proposals will be for WIOA In-School and Out-of-School Youth services and the other for WIOA Adult. Available funding for each RFP is \$320,000 dollars.

Workforce Board and Career Center staff provided Technical Assistance sessions on June 7th. We hope these sessions provided insight on what providers can expect in the RFPs. The PowerPoint presentations to these technical assistance webinars can be found on MMVWB website, masshiremvwb.org.

As Juan mentioned, The City of Lawrence is procuring office space for the Workforce Board and proposals are due June 24th. Carol Riemer, Bob Wescott and I will be part of the Office Space Review Team. Once all proposals are reviewed and ranked, the Committee will make a recommendation to Mayor De Peña for a new office space. We look forward to being at a new space in time for our Annual Meeting in October.

Juan asked if there were any questions for Ann Marie and there were none.

ii. Youth Committee

Cal Williams provided the following report. I am happy to report that after more than two years, we held the youth committee meeting and welcomed the following new members.

- Fermin Peralta, District Manager from Department of Youth Services, New England Region
- Tia Gerber, Director of Community Partnerships, Whittier Regional Technical High School
- Lauren Jones, Director of Career and Technical Education, Greater Lawrence Technical School
- Jessica Rintoul, Interim STEM Pathways Supervisor, Lawrence High School
- Linda Soucy, Grant Writer/Founder, Methuen Arlington Neighborhood, Inc.

Returning members:

- Michael Bevilacqua, Assistant VP, Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Brad Howell, President and CEO, Fidelity House/CRC
- Tom Raiche, Labor Liaison, Merrimack Valley Central Labor Council AFL-CIO Community
- Linda Rohrer, Executive Director, MassHire Merrimack Valley Career Center
- David Tagliaferri, Adult/TAY CM Supervisor, Massachusetts Department of Mental Health
- Ellen Weinhold, Program Coordinator from North Andover Housing Authority

Our youth department staff have been closing out our youth year-round programming and have been very busy recruiting youth as well partner employers for our 2022 YouthWorks Summer Experience Program. The Commonwealth Corporation approved our RFP application for the allocated funding of \$1.5 million to serve 429 youth during the summer and year-round as follows:

Cycle 1 – Summer will allow us to place 275 area youth in learning and subsidized work opportunities. The youth application deadline was May 9th, 2022. We are happy to report that we received over 600 applications through the Commonwealth Corporation YouthWorks database.

Cycle2 – Year-Round will start in September 2022 through May 2023. We will enroll 154 youth.

We continue to recruit partner employers. If interested in hosting a youth, please contact Cristy Gomez at cgomez@masshiremvwb.org for more information about this opportunity to assist youth develop much needed employability skills.

Our current Connecting Activities program is meeting or exceeding goals. Our region wage match for this program exceeded \$1 million.

On June 17th, we submitted to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) the 2022-2023 Connecting Activities application for \$346,800 to facilitate career development education activities to our area partner and network high school students.

We are releasing a WIOA Youth Group Training RFP today.

The youth staff hosted Youth Orientations in person and will be hosting a virtual orientation this Thursday, June 23rd for youth who have completed the application and eligibility process for the summer program.

We also hosted a Signal Success Training for our partners on Monday, June 6th. This training was facilitated by Benjamin Gross from Commonwealth Corporation. Employer partners who attended learning about the curriculum and will be able to facilitate the required 15 hours of Signal Success to their enrolled youth.

We hosted our 2022 Youthworks Employer Orientation Breakfast on Tuesday, June 7th. Twenty-seven employers attended. Pictures are posted on our website and Facebook page.

Cal commended our youth staff for negotiating the complexities of this pandemic. They are doing a tremendous job. Congratulations on a job well done.

iii. Nominating Committee

Jeff Linehan would like to submit Metal Tronics in Georgetown as a company to join our Board. They are a large company with three divisions in Massachusetts and seven in New Hampshire and Vermont. They are hiring and growing. Their biggest customer is Amazon Robotics, and this could help with connecting with Amazon. Jeff will submit the information to Pedro.

iv. Finance Report

Tracy Myszkowski provided the following report in Bob Wescott's absence. She summarized earlier discussion. We received \$1.5 million in our youthworks allocations this year. We will be serving 275 youth for the summer program and 154 youth for year-round activities.

We are releasing 2 RFPs today, one for youth programs and one for adult programs with \$320k available for each procurement.

Our space procurement is due this Friday. We hope to get some bids in and then we plan to do site tours next week and make our recommendation for new space to Mayor De Peña by June 30th.

We are working internally at the Board as well as with the Career Center on some year-end reporting activities.

We received preliminary allocations for our WIOA funding for FY23. We are up overall about 13% for our WIOA funding but we have not received guidance from the state regarding our annual plan or budget. We will be working with the Career Center to determine what to do with dislocated worker training funds. We are going to meet to talk about group training for dislocated workers.

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

V. Annual Plan – Planning Committee to act on behalf of the Board with regards to the annual plan and budget (vote required)

Juan asked for a motion to allow the Planning Committee to act on behalf of the Board with regards to the annual plan and budget. Ann Marie said that we are asking for a vote to authorize the Planning Committee to put together a draft of the Annual Plan and Budget which will be emailed to the Board for review, comments, and approval. Because the total allocation may not be available until a later time, with this vote, the Planning Committee will act on behalf of the Board to submit the final Annual Plan and budget to Mayor De Peña and MDCS.

Motion by Lane Glenn and seconded by Cal Williams to allow the Planning Committee to act on behalf of the Board with regards to the annual plan and budget. Motion pass unanimously.

VI. Report of Interim Executive Director

Pedro Beato welcomed Kemelin Domenech from the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission to the Board.

He said that over the last two months he has attended many events representing the Workforce Board. He attended the Newburyport Chamber Annual Meeting where Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development, Rosalin Acosta expressed her concern regarding unemployment and the training that some cities should promote. She mentioned Lawrence as the most suffered with the highest unemployment rate of 7.7% and the highest continuous rates in the history of Massachusetts.

He attended the FutureSkills Regional Upskilling Roadshow in Danvers. Discussion included concerns from area businesses about the low number of graduates from the vocational schools in their regions.

He participated in the Massachusetts Workforce Association (MWA) 2022 Annual Meeting where Senator Adam Hinds was in attendance. Discussion included infrastructure projects, the lack of training and jobs, and the creation of new opportunities and increasing diversity in new project initiatives.

Pedro said that his role is to motivate the Career Center to be innovative to fit the needs and help job seekers and employers overcome the current crisis. He has been working with community and business leaders so that together we can determine how we can assist them, and he has requested and shared information with them about the Career Center. He has identified the deficiencies below:

1. We need to identify the skills, and training needs of employers and industries who are moving or want to move into the Merrimack Valley and match the right job seekers.
2. We are disconnected from our job seekers and our outreach strategy is poor.
3. We need to aggressively invest in non-traditional marketing to effectively reach our targeted audience.
4. We need to be held accountable for meeting our contract and reporting obligations and this needs to happen immediately.

Pedro said he will be working diligently to close the gap on these deficiencies.

Juan asked if there were any questions. Jocelyn said that she is happy to hear Pedro's report. We need to look at the areas we have been struggling with for some time and address them in a different manner

that will be more effective. She thanked Pedro for sharing his plan for moving forward and is excited to be part of this Board to help achieve the goals we set forth.

Juan said that Pedro brings up points especially where the Lawrence unemployment rate has always doubled the State's rate and he knows that Linda and the Career Center will help, and we all need to come together and figure out how to get people employed again.

Lane linked our most recent labor blueprint from 2020 in the chat and said that he thinks it's important that this group knows about this resource. It's meant to be the primary planning document for a lot of what Pedro mentioned. It's our finger on the pulse of what our employers say is needed. The last blueprint update has pre-pandemic data and it's time to look at this again. It's important that we think regionally about this because the highest unemployment rates for decades have been in Lawrence and the jobs for Lawrencians are in both in the city and outside the city. It's important that we make sure we are tending to the relationships, the partnerships, the transportation options, the funding options, all those things that connect people from the city with jobs that may lie outside of the city. Ideally, we get to a place where we've lifted the level of education and training for people within the city to connect to the higher paying, higher skilled jobs that are also in the city. Until we get there, it's equally as important that we see representation from those cities and towns that we serve. There are a lot of communities not represented here. It's important that we restart conversations that have started and stalled around improved transportation options for workers both inside Lawrence and going back and forth to other places.

Juan agreed and has spoken with folks in Andover, North Andover, and Amesbury with regards to on-on-one meetings with Pedro to see how they and other communities can be more engaged and ask how we can assist them. We are a regional board. We represent many cities and towns and it's important to hear everyone's voice at the table. He will work with Pedro to schedule these meetings.

Lane asked if the Planning Committee's work on the Annual Plan will build on the labor blueprint. Ann Marie said yes, adding that Linda has been tied to the regional efforts.

VII. Other Business

Juan had no further business to discuss.

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 Jeff Linehan. Motion passed, and meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynda Buote

Recorder