



MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 28, 2025
7:30 a.m.

One Union Street, Suite 202
Lawrence, MA 01840

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Joe Bevilacqua, Beth Goguen, Andrew Herlihy, Billy Lang, John Lavoie, Vilma Martinez-Dominguez, Nardy Vega, Ellen Weinhold, Cal Williams, Juan Yepez

MEMBERS ABSENT:

John Bruno, Lisa Crutchfield, Wilson DeLos Santos, Kemelin Domenech, Lane Glenn, Maureen Lynch, Carol Riemer

STAFF PRESENT:

Frank Bonet, Lynda Buote, Varsha Gandhi, Yvette Garcia, Cristy Gomez, Ana Gonzalez, Yeang Leng, Cecelia Lunde, Valerie Luque, Tracy Myszkowski, Corina Ossers, Matt Robert, Erykah Santiago, Abby Seripais

GUESTS PRESENT:

James Henderson, Eric Nelson, Alison Dolan Wilson

I. Call to Order

A quorum being present, Chairman Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 7:41 a.m.

II. Welcome and Introductions

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

III. Approval of the October 22, 2024, Annual Meeting minutes (vote required)

Chairman Yepez called for a motion on the minutes of the October 22, 2024, Annual Meeting.

Motion made by Cal Williams, seconded by Joe Bevilacqua to approve the minutes of the October 22, 2024, Annual Meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. Report of Chair

Chairman Yepez said thank you for joining us today. I would like to extend my best wishes for the New Year to the board members I have not had the pleasure of seeing since last year.

As previously communicated by Frank in an email a few weeks ago, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was not reauthorized when Congress passed the stopgap funding bill. It remains unclear whether the 119th Congress will address WIOA funding in 2025. This uncertainty places our workforce system at a pivotal moment as we consider future strategies.

A bipartisan effort to modernize the nation's workforce development legislation has not succeeded, resulting in community colleges missing opportunities for increased funding and the ability to enhance short-term job training programs.

The Stronger Workforce for America Act would have provided community colleges with automatic eligibility to form training contracts with local workforce development agencies, introduced a new federal grant, and protected several existing programs from potential budget cuts in the forthcoming fiscal year.

The supporters of the bill were hopeful that the bipartisan legislation aimed at reauthorizing WIOA would receive Congressional approval before the conclusion of the year, as it was included in a larger spending package designed to finance the government.

However, following Republican objections to the omnibus spending bill just more than a day before the deadline for a government shutdown, legislators altered their strategy. They decided to pursue a more straightforward continuing resolution to sustain government funding until mid-March, which excluded the reauthorization of WIOA.

One of the primary benefits for community colleges under the Stronger Workforce Act was the automatic qualification of their training programs for federal WIOA grants. Both the Massachusetts Workforce Association and the National Workforce Association are actively advocating for the reauthorization of this act. Frank and Joe will be participating in this year's National Workforce Association Forum in Washington, D.C., where they may gather further information regarding the potential reauthorization. Frank and I will keep you updated on any developments as they arise.

Some of you may be aware that the Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (NAMC) has been in the process of selecting a new Executive Director. An offer has been extended, and we are optimistic that the new Director will join us soon. Once the offer is accepted, we will share the name with you. As you know, Frank serves on the NAMC board as an ex-officio member of the MVWB, and our budget allocates funding for certain programs and salaries, which is why we are notifying our board members today.

Furthermore, Frank has been in discussions with MEVA regarding the donation of a 12-passenger van to the workforce board. MEVA is currently operating their 2015 vans but plans to retire them once the new low-floor vans from MassDOT, which have faced significant delays, arrive. Unfortunately, the delivery timeline continues to be pushed back. The 2015 vans are all 12-passenger (non-CDL) cutaway models.

Finally, the Workforce Board is currently conducting the FY25 Program Monitoring of the Merrimack Valley Career Center and the Field Management and Oversight division of the Commonwealth's DCS will be conducting their annual review of the Merrimack Valley Workforce Board starting February 10th. We will keep you posted on the outcome of these audits. This concludes my report.

V. Reports of Committee Chairs

i. Planning and Career Center Committee

Vilma Martinez-Dominguez said I would like to share some key figures regarding the board's FY25 plan and its performance.

As of December 31, 2024, the board, in collaboration with the Career Center and DCS, has achieved 63% of its target for assisting job seekers, having supported 4,972 individuals out of a goal of 7,846. The majority of these individuals are unemployed job seekers and unemployment claimants, numbering 4,580 and 3,401, respectively.

Furthermore, 62% of employers have been engaged, with a target of serving 1,450 by June 2025; currently, we have reached 906, which represents 62% of our objective. The participation rate for WIOA Adult participants stands at 58% as of December 31, 2024. The average wage placement for these participants is \$19.94 per hour, currently exceeding our expectations by 5%.

The WIOA Dislocated Worker category is experiencing significant growth. As of December 31, 2024, we have reached 100% of our total participant goal, even though we are only halfway through our FY25 budget. Notably, at least 45% of these participants are new, which accounts for 86% of the board's planned services. The average hourly wage placement for WIOA Dislocated Workers is \$64.68, representing 323% of our target, with an unexpected increase of \$24.68. However, this category also shows the highest program exit rate among all WIOA categories, at 189%. A potential vote by the planning committee could take place if additional funds are necessary for a growing number of dislocated customers.

WIOA Youth participation is progressing steadily, currently at 44% of the plan, with 36% being new participants.

In terms of customer demographics, there is a nearly even distribution between males and females (2,382 to 2,560, respectively). The predominant age group served is between 22 and 45 years old (2,399), followed by those aged 55 and over, totaling 1,390. The majority of individuals served possess a high school diploma or GED, as well as bachelor's degrees (1,573 and 1,159, respectively). Encouragingly, 42% of the clients we projected to gain employment have successfully entered the workforce, and the total hourly wages across all groups stand at \$40.21.

This concludes my report. Thank you.

ii. Youth Committee

Cal Williams said good morning and Happy New Year to all. Our youth workforce programs are divided by those that occur during the school year and those that take place in the summer, with the exception of WIOA Youth programs which are year-round. We have made good progress in all the school year programs since the annual meeting in October.

Connecting Activities staff continue to assist students, administrators and guidance counselors at local high schools through school to career opportunities. The goal of connecting activities is for youth to gain better understanding of career pathways, work opportunities, and learn about the essential skills to meet employer's expectations.

Since November, the youth team has enrolled 115 youth into our YouthWorks Year-Round program. We will be a pilot site for the YouthWorks Learning Management System that will be the new platform for the required Signal Success component. Our participation will be essential as Commonwealth

Corporation works to finalize the platform that will enhance the ability to deliver consistent, engaging, and accessible Signal Success training content to our youth. The team will monitor youth progress and provide them with support to ensure successful completion.

Our team has enrolled a total of 12 youth in the WIOA Out of School CyberWarrior Foundation program and 8 youth in the WIOA In School Haverhill YMCA of North Shore program. Three youth have dropped out due to personal reasons and sports related commitments. There are 2 additional youth in the pipeline for the WIOA In School Haverhill YMCA program.

The WIOA Youth program performance as of December 31st, 2024, is as follows:

Our Fiscal Year 2025 planned participants goal is 102 and we are currently at 44% of plan, with 13 carry-ins and 32 new participants.

The Career Center has enrolled 11 WIOA youth through individual training accounts. That constitutes 13% of the 88 planned goal. The workforce board has enrolled 20 youth in group programs; that being 53% of the 38 planned goal.

We are thrilled to welcome back Yvette Garcia to the youth team. Yvette has transitioned to the Youth Services Specialist position but will continue to manage the Workforce Board social media for now.

Lastly, we are planning the “Workforce Connection: Empowering Youth and Employers” event. The purpose of this event is to showcase our youth programs, initiatives, and services. We aim to align our programs to provide our youth with a seamless continuum of services.

Unless there are questions, that concludes my presentation.

iii. Nominating Committee

Billy Lang said welcome to our inaugural quarterly meeting for the calendar year.

This board is predominantly comprised of business leaders, with a significant majority of its members hailing from the business sector. The CEO has requested that the board assess potential nominees and submit the chosen candidate for his approval. The responsibility for selecting businesses rests with this board, providing a valuable opportunity to recommend a nominee.

Today, we are considering Mr. Frank Amato for nomination. Mr. Amato is currently serving as a business agent with Local 12 Plumbers & Gasfitters. Previously, he has held roles as the Director of Recruitment & Organizing and as the President of the Merrimack Valley Building Trades Union. He also serves on the advisory boards of Shawsheen Tech, Minuteman Tech, Greater Lowell Tech, Greater Lawrence Tech, and Northeastern Tech. His resume is included in your packets for review. He was planning to be here today but was called away on business.

Mr. Amato has expressed a strong interest in the Merrimack Valley Workforce Board, and his expertise presents an opportunity for the board and its workforce staff to leverage valuable insights, data, and guidance in the trade and apprenticeship sectors. Furthermore, Frank brings a wealth of networking connections and possesses a comprehensive understanding of the Board’s strategic direction and fiduciary responsibilities.

With this nomination, I would like to request the chair to entertain a motion for this nomination and to forward affirmative votes to the CEO of the board.

Additionally, we are expanding the nominating committee and would appreciate any volunteers or suggestions for a member from the chair. Our objective is to enhance board membership by incorporating more representatives from small businesses, aiming at least 51% of our members coming from this sector, although we are open to exceeding this goal.

Chairman Yopez called for a motion to nominate Frank Amato for MMVWB membership.

That concludes my report. Thank you.

Motion made by Joe Bevilacqua, seconded by Cal Williams to nominate Frank Amato for MMVWB membership. Motion passed unanimously.

iv. Finance Report

As the position of Finance Chair is vacant, Frank said we extend a warm welcome to our inaugural quarterly meeting for the calendar year.

- The essential points regarding the board's quarterly reports are outlined below:
- As of December 31, 2024, the investment of FY25 WIOA Funds in training totals \$512,263, reflecting an increase of \$42,981 since our previous board meeting.
- The investment of FY25 Non-WIOA Funds in training as of December 31, 2024, stands at \$188,065.
- By December 31, 2024, the board utilized 34.68% of its total budget, while NECC has utilized 41.26%, and through November, DCS has utilized 26.61% of their respective budgets.
- The total expenditure on Customer Training amounts to 45.14% of the budget, resulting in a remaining balance of \$1,481,803. Much of this expenditure has been allocated to Youth Wages & Stipends (\$509K) and WIOA Individual Training (\$250K).

Key highlights of the FY25 budget as of December 31, 2024, include:

- A reduction in funding from the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) for the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) amounting to \$13,771 for the NECC portion.
- An allocation of \$1,500 received for the Mass Tech Collaborative (MTC) in Advanced Manufacturing, with the MMVWB portion being \$75 and the NECC portion totaling \$1,425.
- Decreased funding for Youthworks in the amount of \$2,697.27. MMVWB portion decreased by \$1,078, Training portion decreased by \$1,619.27
- Received additional funds for Adult Community Learning Services in the amount of \$2,490.23. MMVWB portion is \$124, NECC portion is \$2,366.23
- Received additional funding for MASSABILITY in the amount of \$5,059.46. MMVWB portion is \$253, NECC portion is \$4,806.46. MassAbility empowers people with disabilities to live life on their own terms. This state program and services expand possibilities in careers and training for disabled individuals.
- Received additional funding for Career Pathways in the amount of \$3,320.29 for MMVWB portion.
- Received additional funding for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Upskilling Navigator in the amount of \$23,876.76. MMVWB portion is \$1,194, NECC portion is \$22,682.76.
- Decreased funding for GE Workforce Development Initiative in the amount of \$13,396 for Customer Training portion.

Additionally, the board is going to procure for WIOA Group Training in March 2025.

This concludes the budget summary.

Alison Dolan Wilson said can you share more about Advanced Manufacturing and Frank said we received \$1,500 from the Advanced Tech Collaborative. Of that, \$75.00 will go to the MMVWB and \$1,425.00 will go to NECC. Alison said is it to offer training or to pay for people going to manufacturing training and Frank said yes, for advanced manufacturing. We're working with MassTech, NAMC, etc. Alison said is there a list and Frank said we can get you the list.

VII. Report of the Executive Director

Frank said good news – Helfrich Brothers has entered contract with Mass Clean Energy to move forward with the Helfrich Welding Academy! We will be partnering with them to create a full implementation plan to launch a welding academy that provides students in the Merrimack Valley with the skills necessary to attain placement in Climate-Critical priority occupations. I thank our Program Manager Abby Seripais and Deputy Director Corina Ossers who have been instrumental in guiding and assisting Helfrich. More to come as we move along in the coming months as this seems to be a long-term partnership with potential huge funding in the future.

The current OSCC contract will conclude at the end of June 2025, and in compliance with MGL 30b, a new Request for Proposal (RFP) has been issued for the renewal of services, and we have received letters of commitment. We are waiting on the timeline for submission of RFP from the respondents. A review team will be composed of board members and partners. That list will go out next week, at the earliest opportunity.

The boards social media has been on a roll, thanks to board staff Yvette Garcia. Yvette is also assisting the Career Center a couple of media projects. If you have not had the time to view our social media, please take time and let us know what you would like for us to include in those communications. Yvette can provide you with the medias addresses so you can search and enjoy.

On Wednesday, the Governor released the Commonwealth's H.1 Budget Proposal. Governor's FY26 Budget Recommendation:

- Career Center One-Stop Line Item: \$8,253,620
- YouthWorks Line Item: \$15,740,000
- School-to-Career Connecting Activities: \$6,531,266

This concludes my report. Thank you.

VIII. OSCC Operator RFP – Volunteers Needed for Review/Evaluation

Frank said we have not received any board member volunteers. I will send out letters requesting volunteers by Friday.

IX. Open Meeting Law – Expiration of the temporary provision of allowing public bodies to hold meetings remotely without a quorum physically present at a meeting location – March 31, 2025.

Frank said as of March 31, 2025, Open Meeting Law's temporary provision allowing public bodies to hold meetings remotely without a quorum physically present expires on March 31, 2025. Therefore, our public meetings including the Quarterly meetings, Planning/Career Center Committee meetings

and Youth Committee meetings will be held in person effective April 1, 2025. If the Open Meeting Law provision is extended, we will notify the MMVWB.

X. Other Business

Vilma said the Greater Lawrence Community Action Council (GLCAC) received a one-time digital literacy grant. We provide a computer class as part of our adult education services that will offer an upper level of digital literacy. We are partnering with Lawrence Community Works for referrals for this service and their Asset Management Program. We also have two vacancies at GLCAC that I'd like to share. We're looking for a Workforce Community Coordinator and Financial Coordinator with a tax background. If you know of anyone who may be interested, please check our website.

Frank said DESE has asked me to be part of their adult and community learning services DESE program quality review. I think there is one for GLCAC and NECC. They will send me more information and I'll provide a report to the Board.

Adjournment (vote required)

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

Motion made by Joe Bevilacqua to adjourn, seconded by Cal Williams. Motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynda Buete

Recorder