



# MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

## Quarterly Meeting Minutes

**Tuesday, June 25, 2024**

**7:30 am**

**One Union Street, Suite 202**

**Lawrence MA 01840**

### **MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Mark Forman, Lane Glenn, Beth Goguen, Andrew Herlihy, Billy Lang, John Lavoie, Vilma Martinez-Dominguez, Carol Riemer, Ellen Weinhold, Juan Yepez

### **MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Joe Bevilacqua, John Bruno, Ron Contrado, Lisa Crutchfield, Wilson DeLos Santos, Kemelin Domenech, Alexandria Eberhardt, Maureen Lynch, Nardy Vega, Calvin Williams

### **STAFF PRESENT:**

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

### **GUESTS PRESENT:**

Ralph Carrero, Alison Dolan-Wilson, James Henderson, Eric Nelson

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

A quorum being present, Chairman Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 7:43 a.m.

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

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

#### **III. Approval of the April 23, 2024, Quarterly Meeting minutes (vote required)**

Chairman Yepez called for a motion on the minutes of the April 23, 2024, Quarterly Meeting.

**Motion made by Ellen Weinhold, seconded by Beth Goguen to approve the minutes of the April 23, 2024, Quarterly Meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **IV. Report of Chair**

Chairman Yepez said thank you for attending. I hope you all are having a great summer. Good things are occurring this quarter at MassHire. The Youth team has been very busy completing the packages for placing youth across the Merrimack Valley and beyond for this summer, you will hear more about that during the Youth Committee's report.

Meetings with Raytheon have taken place on several occasions to assist RTX with future placements.

MassHire has partnered with Helfrich Brothers on a grant to provide needed training for current and future staffing.

There was a WARN Act notification for a company located in Newburyport. Functional Coatings is laying off 73 employees in two locations (Newburyport and Seabrook, NH). The layoffs will occur from September 2024 – March 2025. Most of the employees are Spanish-speaking individuals. Frank sent notice to Mayor Sean Reardon, and Rapid Response is on this task.

Today's special guest is the newly appointed School Superintendent of the Lawrence Public Schools, Mr. Ralph Carrero. Ralph officially starts on July 8, 2024, but has transitioned himself with the school district. He is the director/superintendent of the Lawrence Family Development and Education Fund and the Lawrence Family Development Charter School in Lawrence. He is also the founding president of the school, which provides a dual language education development program to 860 students in grades K to 8. The organization has a deep commitment to the development of youth leadership, new immigrants, and adult educational and training programs. Before assuming this role, Ralph served as an education administrator for 18 years at the Greater Lawrence Technical High School, where he was the coordinator of student services. His professional career spans close to 40 years, providing services in counseling, social work, criminal justice, and education to residents in the City of Lawrence.

In 1992, Mr. Carrero became the first Latino ever elected to serve in public office in the City of Lawrence. He went on to serve three consecutive terms (eleven years) on the Lawrence School Committee. He is past president of both the Lawrence Youth Commission and the Family and Education Fund. He has served on state boards and has worked with every level of governmental body advocating and recommending policies to serve residents in the Commonwealth. Mr. Carrero will speak about the partnership with MassHire, the restructuring of the high school, and how internships and partnerships will play a role in the educational institution of Lawrence. Please help me welcome Superintendent Ralph Carrero.

**V. Guest Speaker: Newly Appointed Superintendent Ralph Carrero, Lawrence Public Schools**

Ralph Carrero said thank you for the kind introduction. We are in the process of transitioning and I'm visiting and talking with folks. As most of you know, I'm not a stranger to public education and Lawrence. It's a huge task that we're about to undertake in Lawrence. My primary goal is to set the school up to come out of receivership. One of the other tasks that is important that we're looking at is restructuring the high school. I think the time is right to address the needs of today's young people.

In today's world, when you look at high schools they talk about college programs, internships and most importantly, partnerships and aligning the state standards and curriculum and learning with those practical career technical programs. I will be looking for John Lavoie from Greater Lawrence Technical School to help me to determine how we can expand career tech for the folks in Lawrence.

Lawrence has the largest early college program around and they're doing remarkable things. The partnerships we can form with the MV Workforce Board and the MV Chamber of Commerce are going to be critical in making sure youth get valid experiences so they can stay in school. I also think that through these partnerships we can advocate and work with the Department of Education to give credit for life experiences and expand that down to high school level especially to help older youth coming into the school district understand what careers are about and help get them get into the workforce.

We should be in good shape going into the following school year. We have two new school buildings. The Oliver School will be handed over to us in February for next September and the Leonard School will be finished the following June.

This is not an easy task and I'm going to need everyone's support. I have always been a team builder. I come from the charter school system. We run the most accomplished charter school in the district. There's a lot to be said about the folks in Lawrence. I also think that my work with at-risk youth will complement the work we have ahead of us.

I hope that as we take on this endeavor, you will feel free to contact me with your thoughts, ideas and suggestions. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and I look forward to working with all of you.

John Lavoie said I am happy to hear that you want to work closely with us. I think with your leadership, together, we can do a lot more and a partnership with Lane Glenn and Northern Essex Community College can be very innovative and exciting.

Juan said thank you Ralph. I'm excited to see the changes you will make and how you'll help the youth. You've done a great job with the charter school. Congratulations and I look forward to working with you.

## **VI. Reports of Committee Chairs**

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

Vilma Martinez-Dominguez said good morning. As of May 31, 2024, the total number of job seekers served increased from 7,566 to 9,167 which represents 135% of the FY24 Annual Plan, marking a 25% increase since our last quarterly meeting.

The total number of employers served is 1,176 equating to 66% of the plan.

There are 74 WIOA Adult Total Participants, which is 68% of the FY24 Annual Plan. These numbers have increased exponentially since our last meeting.

Participants in the WIOA Dislocated Workers category have reached 98% of the FY24 Annual Plan. Dislocated workers remain the largest group receiving WIOA funds, with the average hourly wage for placements now at \$51.29, although this high increase is an average hourly wage that could have been affected by a huge placement. A report is being produced.

Participation in the WIOA Youth category is still below the FY24 annual plan, with new participants at 34%, up 54% as reported in our January meeting.

The RFP for WIOA Youth Group Services closes in May. The RFP has been reviewed and approved by the Planning Committee. The MassHire staff are negotiating contracts.

This concludes my report. Thank you.

**ii. Youth Committee**

In Cal Williams' absence, Rosangela Amaro said for YouthWorks Cycle 2, the Year-Round program ended in May. 245 area youth completed their program hours. We exceeded our program enrollment goal by 119%.

The 2023 YouthWorks Cycle 1-Summer program started by releasing the youth application link in April. We received over 770 youth applications by the deadline of May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024. We welcomed employers and partners at our Moving Forward - Employer and Partners Orientation Breakfast on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024. This event was well attended. Over 40 employers and partners learned about our youth programs, initiatives, and processes to host youth this summer and during our year-round programming. They also learned about our programs' requirements and expectations, fiscal processes, Massachusetts Child Labor Laws, and incident reporting.

Due to decreased funding, our goal this summer is to enroll 215 area YouthWorks eligible youth in meaningful service project-based learning and subsidized employment opportunities. The official start date of the program is July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

We submitted our competitive application for Fiscal Year 2025 DESE Connecting Activities funding that will allow us to continue to provide students from our area high schools with meaningful career development education to enhance their classroom learning and help them make informed post-high school career and workforce decisions.

We received four WIOA Youth proposals. One for in-school and three for out-of-school youth. Three were recommended by the review team to the planning committee and ultimately to the board.

Our team will continue to support our young adults by guiding them while facilitating career awareness, exploration, immersion opportunities, skills training, and job placements.

We welcome Ana Gonzalez Calle as the new youth team member. Ana joined our team on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024, as a Youth Services Specialist.

A special thanks to our Youth Committee members Michael Bevilacqua, Tia Gerber, and Linda Soucy for attending the Moving Forward: Employer and Partners Orientation Breakfast.

Unless there are questions, that concludes my presentation.

**iii. Nominating Committee**

Frank said Bill Lang doesn't have any nominations at this time. We need two (2) additional business members to complete the 51% of businesses required on the Board. Mayor De Peña requests that the Board send nominations to Bill Lang in preparation for a Board vote. These two additional businesses cannot be non-profits or educational organizations.

Ellen Weinhold said I sent in a submission for ServPro and Frank said I will check for that and Ellen said do you want me to reach out to the contact again and Frank said yes, please send the resume to me and Bill.

Lane Glenn asked what cities and towns must be represented and Frank said we asked area town managers, administrators and mayors from the Merrimack Valley to send representatives from their communities and they haven't. We would like someone from Newburyport and Andover. We are in discussions with Raytheon and Helfrich Bros and would like to have them join the Board. The Board can be as big as we want it to be, but we must meet the 51% business requirement.

John Lavoie asked if we have anyone from the construction sector on the Board and Frank said Bill Lang represents trades and Bill said I can reach out to contractors in the area.

Ellen said I can reach out to a construction company in Methuen and Frank and Juan said thank you.

#### **iv. Finance Report**

In Wilson DeLos Santos' absence, Frank said I would like to present the budget summary as follows. As of May 31st, the board has utilized 60% of our FY24 Integrated Budget. That's an increase of 18% from our last quarterly board meeting.

In Customer Training, the expenditure is over 71%. Our March finance report had 62%. Our current balance is \$930,902.

The total budget expenditure across all three divisions (board, career center, and DCS) stands at 61% of the annual budget plan.

As discussed during the board's last meeting, I was able to negotiate a 30% match for the collaboration with our regional partners in North Shore and Greater Lowell on Healthcare HUB, and Behavioral Health Initiatives. As you may remember the workforce boards wanted to charge a much higher match which would have made the process of maintaining the program much more involved.

We submitted our FY24-25 Youthworks Grant Application for level funding. CommCorp reduced almost \$750K+, the original benchmark for reduction was \$600,000, but it was increased to \$750K. The total number of youth served is in today's Youth Committee Report.

We closed our Request for Proposals for FY25 WIOA Youth Group Programs. There is \$550,000 funding available for approximately 6 programs. We reviewed proposals and the MassHire Workforce Board team is doing contract negotiations.

If there are no further questions, this concludes my report.

#### **VII. Report of Executive Director**

Frank said the Donohue Institute of UMASS Lowell is 30 days behind on our Regional Blueprint due to the illness of one of their top staff. I have been in contact with the Secretary's office to inform her.

In June, I visited the LHS, and we met with Raytheon RTX. We discussed the idea for creating Future/Emerging Pipelines: Nano/CHIPS and initial entry positions. We had a great conversation and a tentative plan. The LHS will await the new superintendent and discuss the idea with him. I will keep the board updated on our future collaborations.

The ESOL Advanced Manufacturing Continuation grant is coming to an end with participants set to graduate at GLTS this Thursday, June 27th. Eleven (11) participants will be graduating with their

Manufacturing Advancement Center Workforce Innovation Collaborative (MACWIC) Level 1.

Certification: This Cohort is one of three in this three-year grant. Participants were able to attend two employer tours (Straumann and Magellan) along with a small job fair (Boston Centerless, P&G Grooming, Straumann, and Helfrich Brothers Boiler Works). Next steps will be helping participants to secure employment in the field which the Career Center will be working with participants to do this with our support.

The Workforce Board conducted its FY24 Annual Program Monitoring of the Career Center from December 27- January 26, 2024. There were several findings and concerns to which the Career Center responded with a Corrective Action Plan. The Corrective Action Plan was approved by the Workforce Board and staff will monitor those items in FY25. Subsequently, the MassHire Department of Career Services (MDCS) conducted its' FY24 System Certification and Annual Program Monitoring of the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board (MMVWB) from March 4-15, 2024. The MDCS Systems Certification Review is conducted to ensure that the necessary processes, procedures, and policies are in place and effectively utilized by staff. Similar to the Board's monitoring, the findings found by the State were addressed in the Corrective Action Plan previously mentioned. The Merrimack Valley Workforce Board Systems were Certified.

Workforce Board staff are in the process of collecting signatures for the FY25 WIOA Partners Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which is due to the State no later than July 31, 2024. This 3-year MOU outlines an agreement developed and executed between the Workforce Board, with the agreement of its Chief Elected Official, and the Career Center Partners, relating to the operation of Career Center delivery of service in the Merrimack Valley workforce area. This MOU defines the roles and responsibilities of the Career Center and its Partners in striving to produce the best possible Career Center outcomes for shared customers, be they youth, adults, dislocated workers, other job seekers, or businesses.

The Career Center Certification Application, a triennial requirement is due, and I sent a few emails to board members as scoring participants. There are many questions and some non-responses. I will meet with some of you today before you leave to briefly discuss, and if necessary, we can score this as a team through a virtual meeting.

In March, a regional meeting was convened with Rapid Response, the City of Lawrence Economic Development Department, and other stakeholders to address the Steward Health situation. This continues to be a situation that concerns the Merrimack Valley. No specifics, except news that continues to come across all media.

We are pleased to welcome Ana Gonzalez to the Youth Services staff. We are happy to have her join our team.

This concludes my report. Thank you.

#### **VIII. Other Business**

Andrew Herlihy said that Haverhill Counselor John Richardson is organizing a youth workforce summit scheduled on August 16<sup>th</sup>. He will present this to the Haverhill City Council tonight. They are looking at creating a workforce hub in Haverhill to reach out to students grades 8 through 12 to identify possible passions and try to line them up with certain types of industries. I want to make sure that MassHire

Workforce Board and Career Center are somehow aware and involved and Frank and Juan said thank you.

James Henderson said our ESOL program with the migrant shelter in Methuen started this month and so far, it's been successful and we're quite pleased with the progress we have been making. I have heard from more than one source that the shelter will close in December. We still don't have access to any other shelters in this region so it's difficult to do in-person outreach, but we are making every effort to connect with these folks. We have three Haitian Creole speakers on staff at the Career Center to provide services.

Ellen asked is this the shelter at the Days Inn and James said yes. It's not confirmed, but it's what we've heard. Ellen asked where you are hearing this from, and James said from one of the people placed to do outreach and Vilma said I would say that's probably true; we have an immigration grant to help migrants with work permits. One of the biggest challenges we've had is they are moving people around. Ellen asked where they will be housed, and James said there are several people acting as host families. Challenges include childcare, transportation and language gap in terms of employment and industry safety standards and Vilma asked is this across the state and James said yes.

Vilma said the Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI) is looking to extend our contract to perhaps December, but people are not talking to each other, and they are moving migrants around and we lose contact and James said other people are gaining access to the shelters that causes confusion and work has to be undone.

Juan said thank you and it sounds like there are challenges and hurdles and I know you and your team and other partners involved are doing a great job. Thank you for this latest report.

Lane Glenn said Superintendent Lynch isn't here today, but it may be helpful for the Board to hear a brief update on Whittier Regional Vocation Technical High School. After the vote that failed for a new school, we are examining if might be useful to have a shared campus model with Northern Essex and Whittier. The central feature here is the workforce and over the next few months we are working with the Donahue Institute to build on work they have been doing on our regional labor blueprint and to expand on that and look at innovative models for how a vocational high school and a comprehensive community college might co-locate and better serve the workforce. Announcements and invitations to participate will be sent over the next few weeks. We'll get started on that in July and that will extend into December at which point, the Massachusetts school building authority is expected to act on a new letter of intent that Whittier has filed, and Frank said I've read about it and it's exciting.

**IX. Adjournment (vote required)**

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

**Motion made by Beth Goguen to adjourn, seconded by Mark Forman. Motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Lynda Buote*

Recorder