



MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

Annual Meeting

Salvatore's Event & Conference Center
354 Merrimack Street
Lawrence, MA 01843

Minutes

Tuesday, October 26, 2021
7:30am

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Christian Brennan, Ann Marie Borgesi, Ron Contrado, Evelyn Friedman, Andrew Herlihy, Robin Hynds, Supt. John Lavoie, Jeff Linehan, Joselyn Marte, Rosa Muñoz, Carol Riemer, Fred Shaheen, Bob Westcott, Juan Yopez

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Joseph Bevilacqua, John Bruno, Marko Duffy, Lane Glenn, Supt. Maureen Lynch, John Person, Ellen Weinhold, Cal Williams

STAFF PRESENT:

Corina Ruiz, Varsha Gandhi, Brian Norris, Tracy Myszkowski, Cristy Gomez, Mike Paglia, Yevette Garcia, Yeang Leng

GUESTS PRESENT: Allison Dolan-Wilson, Mariah Germosen, Esther Albuquerque, George Ramirez

I. Call to Order

A quorum being present, Chairman Juan Yopez called the meeting to order at 7:47 a.m.

II. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Yopez welcomed everyone to the first in person meeting since the January 2020 meeting.

III. Approval of the September 8th, 2021 minutes (vote required)

Chairman Yopez called for a motion on the minutes of the September 8th, 2021 board meeting.

Motion by Bob Wescott, seconded by John Lavoie to approve the minutes of the September 8th, 2021 meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. Report of Chair

Chairman Yopez said I'd like to thank all our Board Members for your participation and support in what has been an eventful year for the Board, Board staff, and the Career Center.

In the middle of the covid-19 pandemic we appointed a new Executive Director, Brian Norris, and welcomed a new Chief Elected Official, Kendrys Vasquez. Both got off to a fast start addressing urgent issues.

We faced and solved a funding crisis at the Career Center - not a lack of funds, but a severe arrears in reimbursements from the Workforce Board to the Career Center due to procedural issues. We formed a fiscal task force including members from the Board staff and from Northern Essex staff that met every 2 weeks to bring the arrears to a current status as of the end of the fiscal year on June 30th.

At the same time, beginning in January we kicked off a WIOA mandated procurement process to select an Operator/Service Provider for the Career Center for the 4-year period beginning on July 1, 2021. That fair and open procurement process attracted 3 serious responses and resulted in the selection of Northern Essex Community College as the Operator/Service Provider.

Throughout the 1st half of calendar year 2021, Board staff also dealt with a number of non-routine projects:

- Update to the Regional Blueprint – a joint effort among MassHire Merrimack Valley, Greater Lowell, and North Shore Workforce Boards.
 - In the next quarter, this regional partnership will begin a bottom-up approach toward development of a new Regional Blueprint. We hope that many of our Board Members will participate in the blueprint development process.
- Completion of FY 21 Career Center and Workforce Board Annual Monitoring.
- Completion of MMVWB One-Stop Career Center Certification
- Completed a new 4-year WIOA plan.
- Negotiated and signed a new Operator/Service Provider umbrella contract with Northern Essex Community College.
- Completed a new FY 2022 Workforce Board/Career Center Integrated Plan; we'll hear more on this from the Planning and Career Center Committee chair and from the Executive Director

The 4th quarter of calendar year 2021 will see no letup to the number and urgency of projects.

- Upon final approval of the Integrated Plan, the joint board staff/career center operator fiscal task force has reconvened. Key issues are:
 - Significant increase in funding must be carefully managed
 - Staff turnover has caused an upset to previously improved fiscal processes
- Increased funding will require a headcount increase to Board staff, and reorganization of existing staff's roles and responsibilities.
 - Including revisions to outdated personnel and pay policies.

- Procurement process to secure new office space for Board staff and One Stop Career Center.

Juan concluded saying he is sure members have many questions, most of which he thinks will be answered by the committee and Executive Director reports next on the agenda, but he'd be pleased to answer any questions they have right now.

V. Guest Speaker: George A. Ramirez, Lawrence Partnership

George thanked the Board for having him. He said he joined the Lawrence Partnership (LP) in the summer of 2021.

George said that ESOL/Manufacturing, apprenticeships, and CTI programs are critically important. The trades add so much value.

He explained how in the last months, he has reorganized LP's resources into three buckets: community engagement, emerging leaders, and inclusive economic development.

When it comes to community engagement, the LP plays an important role in shaping the economy, creating jobs and enhancing life for the people in Lawrence. Always guided by a people-first strategy, the Partnership develops and implements initiatives that support small businesses, foster leadership and grow the workforce.

Emerging leaders focuses on Lawrence's rich talent. We have so many smart, hard-working people who are striving to do well and do good. Through networking and training, the Partnership is helping develop an emerging network of bold leaders who will prosper by growing their businesses and creating solutions to assist others in the community. An example is the Cafecitos Series, which focuses on professional advancement of Latina leaders across different industries.

The Lawrence Partnership believes the strongest economy is one that benefits the whole community. One where local businesses compete in regional and global markets; where local service providers meet the needs of their community; where the retail sector is vibrant; and where the labor force is diverse and supported. George briefly talked about the Test Kitchen, Venture Loan Fund and Technical Assistance Grants.

VI. Reports of Committee Chairs

i. Planning and Career Center Committee

Thank you to the Board for delegating FY 2022 Integrated Plan approval to the Planning/Career Center Committee. On September 27 we met as a committee and approved the plan. We are pleased to announce that total funding for Fiscal Year 2022 will increase by about 34% to \$10,038K, up from \$7,516 in FY21.

We approved a corresponding increase of 22% in combined headcount, from 55 to 67 staff members.

The headline performance metric tied to the Plan is 6,300 job seekers served. This will be up significantly from FY20, but slightly less than FY21. FY21 included the rapid rebound in employment after the initial

covid-19 shock but for reasons we still don't understand, job seekers are not yet flocking to the Career Centers.

The large increase in funding combined with the mystery of "where are the job seekers?" will demand that we become creative in developing more, more popular, and more rewarding training programs to job seekers and employers alike. Our committee looks forward to participating in regular discussions with the Workforce Board, Workforce Board staff, Career Center staff, and Community Organizations to determine how best to deploy these funds.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that Mariah Germosen was promoted to the position of Career Center Assistant Director. Please join me in wishing Mariah great success in her new role!

ii. Youth Committee

Chairman Yopez asked Yevette Garcia to present the Youth Committee report on behalf of Cal Williams.

Despite COVID-19, we continued to provide our local youth with opportunities during the 2020-2021 school year and 2021 summer. Through our DESE Connecting Activities initiative, we provided students from our local high schools' virtual career development education services in order to link their virtual classroom learning to careers and work-related opportunities.

During the school year, our youth generated over \$500,000.00 in unsubsidized wages. This is proof that our youth programs are helping youth attain the employability skills needed to obtain and retain a job. In addition, students participated in virtual job shadows, job placements, and college visits.

This past Summer, over 225 youths participated in service project-based learning, meaningful work, and virtual project-based learning related to health-wellness and social media. These youth received stipends, wages, and incentives for completing the different program components.

Under the guidance of the Commonwealth Corporation, youth participated in interactive Live Signal Success workshops and completed online modules to learn about work readiness, developing employability skills, and careers. Supplementing Signal Success, the Massachusetts Work Based Learning Plan and program rubrics were used to set and measure individual youths' attainment of their work readiness, employment, and projects goals.

Due to our youths' great performance on the job, staff guidance, and job coaching, employers like Beach Pizza, Coco Ray, The Artisan Chef Manufacturing Company, ultimately hired our youth after the program. Additionally, other employer partners offered jobs to youth, but they didn't accept the positions since they were pursuing secondary education. As part of our program match requirement, I am happy to report that our youth generated over \$200,000.00 in unsubsidized wages during the summer.

During late Spring, we recruited six local high school teachers and five employers from the STEM field to participate in the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Summer Teacher's Externship program. The Teacher Externship Program is designed for selected academic and technical teachers who deliver instruction to students enrolled in districts that receive Perkins funding. Teachers who completed the process received a \$7,000.00 stipend for this experience. Based on the externship experience, the teachers will develop lesson plans to be shared with their students during the 21-22 school year.

For fiscal year 2022, we received level funding from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to carry out our Connecting Activities Initiative. Our staff will continue to work closely with our school districts, staff, and students to expand career development education opportunities to enhance students' knowledge about post-secondary education and the world of work. In particular, we're increasing employer involvement, supporting the development of Career Innovation Pathways, and maintaining higher levels of student participation.

Also, MassHire MVWB received YouthWorks Year-Round funding to provide services to 59 youth. We partnered with Groundwork Lawrence, Haverhill and Lawrence High Schools, Methuen Arlington Neighborhood, Inc., and Youth Development Organization for this program.

We would like to inform you that the Workforce Board and Career Center staff are working together to put out a WIOA youth group training program RFP. We are currently evaluating employers' workforce needs to identify an appropriate training program that is aligned to our Blueprint. We will release this RFP in the weeks ahead.

To conclude, we want to thank our youth servicing organizations, school staff, and employer partners for helping us recruit our youth for our youth programs and initiatives. Because of their continued collaboration and commitment, many of our youth are making informed decisions about their lives, careers, and work.

Let's continue these partnerships to provide our youth with the resources and opportunities they need to make better career and workforce decisions.

Please visit our social media platforms to learn more about our youth staff and programs.

iii. Nominating Committee

Jeff Linehan said we're still waiting to hear back from Mayor Vasquez on Mark Forman's appointment to the Board of Directors. He is also working with Andrew Herlihy to get a representative from Amazon.

iv. Finance Report

Bob said that this a busy operation and this is an opportunity for members to influence what happens with government funds. He welcomes more private business to the Board and invites those interested in joining the Planning/Career Center Committee to speak to Anne Marie.

We've seen big increases in funding and reiterates to spread the word to private businesses to join the Board.

VII. Election of Officers (vote required)

Brian said he did not receive any inquiries from members showing interest in being a Board Officer.

Chairman Yopez called for a motion to keep the current slate of officers; they are:

- Chair: Juan Yopez
- Vice Chair & Planning Committee Chair: Ann Marie Borgesi
- Treasurer: Robert Wescott
- Clerk and Nominating Committee Chair: Jeff Linehan
- Youth Committee Chair: Calvin Williams

Motion by Chris Brennan, second by John Lavoie to keep the current slate of officers. Motion passed unanimously.

VIII. Report of Executive Director

Brian said that although it's been less than 2 months since our last meeting, it seems like a lot has happened. The Workforce Board/One Stop Career Center Integrated Budget was completed and signed by all parties and ended up just as we reported last time.

Allocation of Funds	TOTAL FY'22 Planned Funds		TOTAL FY'21 Planned Funds		FY'22 Increase/(Decrease)	
Workforce Board	\$2,076,518.83	20.69%	\$1,436,959.81	19.12%	\$639,559.02	44.51%
Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium	\$143,612.86	1.43%	\$107,686.23	1.43%	\$35,926.63	33.36%
Department of Career Services	\$1,524,387.93	15.19%	\$1,284,349.43	17.09%	\$240,038.50	18.69%
Northern Essex Community College	\$3,511,081.88	34.98%	\$2,286,461.07	30.42%	\$1,224,620.81	53.56%
Customer Training	\$2,692,883.63	26.83%	\$2,351,210.66	31.28%	\$341,672.97	14.53%
Customer Supportive Services Funds	\$89,044.90	0.89%	\$49,527.05	0.66%	\$39,517.85	79.79%
Total	\$10,037,530.03	100%	\$7,516,194.25	100%	\$2,521,335.78	33.55%

Highlights are:

- 34% increase in overall funding from \$7.5 million to \$10 million. This total includes:
 - A 16% increase in training funds from \$2.4 million to \$2.8 million
 - A 45% increase in Workforce Board funds from \$1.5 million to \$2.2 million
 - A 54% increase in NECC-OSCC funds from \$2.3 million to \$3.5 million
 - And a 19% increase in DCS funds from \$1.3 million to \$1.5 million

- 22% increase in overall headcount from 55 to 67 staff members. The increase in headcount is detailed within the budget and recruitment and hiring are happening right now. As Ann Marie reported, the Career Center appointed a new Assistant Director and is recruiting for other positions. The Workforce Board will add an Office Manager, a Grants Accountant, and an IT Director. We are reviewing staffing needs within the Youth department and expect to realign duties to support the increase in Youth department funding.

We need to procure new office space by the end of January, so we met with Mayor Vasquez earlier this month to initiate our search. Step one is to determine square footage and configuration requirements. The Career Center is working with Northern Essex Community College to explore office space options within the NECC campus in downtown Lawrence. While we remain open to the possibility of a shared space, we expect to publicize the formal procurement process early in November.

My staff and I have big expectations for FY 2022. The increase in funding will enable us to develop new and ambitious workforce development programs. We've already begun new programs in manufacturing and in healthcare.

In Manufacturing:

1. The Virtual Manufacturing Training Program is an experimental, Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium managed effort to help covid related unemployed workers learn several fundamental manufacturing skills using a 100% on-line, self-paced learning program

offered by Tooling U. The “experiment” here is to learn if such “virtual learning” will deliver the skills valued by manufacturers. Across the Northeast region we’ve signed up 31 candidates – one has already completed the program and been hired.

2. We are in the final approval stages for a new “enhanced English for Speakers of Other Languages” manufacturing training program. This Commonwealth Corporation funded program will target local residents who are interested in manufacturing careers but whose English language skills are below the “normal” minimum test level of 8th grade. The program will be delivered at Greater Lawrence Technical High School and will include a 2-week intensive “manufacturing-contextualized” English language immersion. This will be followed by a 400-hour, hands-on course in Precision Machining. The machining instructors will be assisted by ESOL Paraprofessionals at the point of instruction.
3. In November we will begin recruitment for a “regular” 400-hour manufacturing training program to be held at Whittier Technical High School

In Healthcare:

1. We have begun a training partnership called the Northeast Healthcare Hub. This CommCorp funded program will target un- and underemployed candidates for training as Certified Nursing Assistants and Medical Assistants. The program will also seek to build career pathway training into the program such that when a candidate graduates and gains employment, we will offer continued training support to enable that person to gain higher level jobs along the nursing pathway. We will also offer this “career pathway” training support to existing incumbent workers at our partnered Healthcare providers. We have funding to support a combined 15 CNAs and MAs over 2 years and have already enrolled 4 candidates.
2. We are in the planning process to begin a “Behavioral Health Care” training programs and are still in discussions with our employer partners to define the specifics.

As most of you are aware, every industry sector seems to be struggling to find willing and able employees. In addition to manufacturing and healthcare, we’ve had discussions about School bus drivers (7D licenses), truck drivers (CDL-A and CDL-B licenses), plus construction trades, early education, and IT including coding and cyber security. Luckily, we seem to have adequate funding and we look forward to working with you and with our employer and academic partners to develop innovative and effective workforce development programs. FY 22 will be an exciting year!

IX. Other Business

No other business.

X. Adjournment (vote required)

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

Chris Brennan made a motion to adjourn, seconded by John Lavoie. Motion passed, and meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Corina Ruiz

Recorder