



# MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

Pursuant to Governor Baker's [Emergency Order](#) Modifying the State's Open Meeting Law issued March 12, 2020, the April 28, 2020 quarterly meeting of the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board will be held using remote participation.

## Online Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81415680180?pwd=ditycURBalVZeXg1VDNrdU5vdjdMQT09>

Meeting ID: 814 1568 0180

Meeting Password: 416490

## QUARTERLY MEETING

### Minutes

Tuesday, April 28, 2020

9:00am

#### MEMBERS IN PARTICIPATION:

Joseph Bevilacqua, Ann Marie Borgesi, Edward Bartkiewicz, Ron Contrado, Marko Duffy, Cynthia Faulkner, Lane Glenn, Gail Griffin, Andrew Herlihy, Supt. John Lavoie, Jeff Linehan, Supt. Maureen Lynch, Joselyn Marte, Rosa Muñoz, Marianne Paley-Nadel, Carol Riemer, Bob Westcott, Juan Yepez

#### MEMBERS ABSENT:

Christian Brennan, Evelyn Friedman, Robin Hynds, Fred Shaheen, Ellen Weinhold, Cal Williams

#### GUESTS IN PARTICIPATION:

Allison Dolan-Wilson, Linda Rohrer, Beth Humbred Scott Latham,

#### STAFF IN PARTICIPATION:

Abel Vargas, Susan Almono, Cristy Gomez, Michael Paglia, Corina Ruiz

#### 1. Call to Order

A quorum being present, Chairman Yepez called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

#### 2. Approval of the Minutes of the January 28, 2020 meeting (vote required)

Chairman Yepez called for a motion on the minutes of the January 28, 2020 board meeting.

**Motion by Lane Glenn, seconded by Joselyn Marte to approve the minutes of the January 28, 2020 meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.**

#### 3. Report of Executive Director

Abel Vargas provided an update on Unemployment Insurance (UI). The UI telephone line is still not working.

The Career Center deployed staff to assist with UI claims. There are some local non-profits who will be offering support to claimants.

Mr. Vargas said that on March 2019, there were 74,291 UI claims in Massachusetts since the beginning of the year. He compared that number to the 73,657 UI claims filed as of February 2020, and 102,035 UI claims filed as of March 2020.

In the Merrimack Valley, as of March 2019, there were 4,574 UI claims since the beginning of the year. That compared to 4,675 UI claims filed as of February 2020, and 6,090 UI claims filed as of March 2020.

Mr. Vargas said that despite everything that's happening, MassHire Merrimack Valley has been able to deliver services to customers.

#### **4. Career Center Update**

Linda Rohrer said that Like everyone else, the way we do business at the Career Center has been totally upended. They thought the abrupt move of our Lawrence location into temporary space last summer was a challenge, not knowing what was to come.

The Career Center moved back into 255 Essex Street from our temporary space at 78 Amesbury Street over the weekend of February 7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup>. Full operations at 255 Essex Street resumed back on February 11<sup>th</sup>.

Due to pandemic concerns, the Career Center closed its offices to the public as of March 16<sup>th</sup>, which was slightly over a month after moving back to 255 Essex Street. They began providing services mostly by telephone. Linda said that a week later, on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, she instituted a staggered staffing schedule. Each staff would be in the office 2 days per week and then working remotely 3 days per week. The schedule was staggered so that only about half of the staff would be in the office on any given day. The center operated in this manner for about a week and a half. Due to growing concerns for the safety of the staff, on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, staff were set up to work 100% remotely.

Linda said that Northern Essex provided Zoom Pro licenses for all Northern Essex Career Center staff and provided 11 laptops equipped with Windows 10 for staff that did not have appropriate equipment at home. Linda said that she cannot stress enough how helpful this was. It made it possible for the Career Center to continue to function while maintaining the safety of staff.

Mrs. Rohrer continued by saying that the Business Services Reps have reached out to over 700 businesses in the region to help them connect to resources to help them through this crisis. In addition to phone calls, staff sent out a survey to these employers asking about their needs. Helping employers through the process to make unemployment available to their workers and connecting them to the Workshare Program, which allows workers to work part time and then collect unemployment for their unworked hours. Staff has also been providing information about loan and grant programs available to businesses due to the coronavirus. They are helping to recruit workers, particularly for nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. Most of the mentioned work has been done by phone and email. The Career Center will have its first virtual recruitment on May 12<sup>th</sup> for CVS via Zoom.

Linda said that job seekers are getting assistance with filing for unemployment. Over 25 staff volunteered to be training to take UI claims and to date, 5 Career Center staff have been trained to actually take claims. Other staff have been walking people through the process to the best of their ability. services required by the Department of Unemployment Assistance is being provided so that people can maintain their unemployment benefits, such as Career Center Seminar and follow-up appointments. These services have been provided via phone, email, and YouTube.

In process is the development of a virtual Career Center Seminar to be offered through Zoom. This will allow to serve larger numbers and process will be more streamlined than what we are currently doing. Staff are also providing employment counseling by phone and started several people in training with vendors who have converted to online instruction. Staff is providing Virtual Workshops using Zoom such as Interviewing Essentials and Resume Essentials. More computer skills workshops will be added. The Resume Critiques workshop is being done by email. And lastly, the center is offering the opportunity to improve English skills through Rosetta Stone and to increase math and reading skills using the ACT/Work Keys program.

Linda said that performance through March 31<sup>st</sup> should be at 75% of annual plan.

- Served over 900 employers – 71% of annual plan
- Served over 4800 job seekers – 58% of annual plan
- For the Dislocated Worker Program – 74% of the annual goal for new enrollments
- Continue to struggle with enrollments for the Low-Income Adult and Youth Programs
  - Low-Income Adult Program at 24%
  - And Youth Program at 43% of annual goal
- Our new hire, Outreach Specialist, started work with us on March 2<sup>nd</sup>
  - Intention of this position is to have a greater presence in the community and to help boost our numbers for the Adult and Youth Programs
  - Then the pandemic – and we close the office to the public 2 weeks after her start with us
- It's been a difficult year
  - With the disruption of having to move out of our space for 6 months
  - Then we move back – and we have the coronavirus

Linda said that going forward they are preparing for when the Career Center reopens. They are purchasing supplies such as:

- Hand sanitizer
- Face masks
- Digital thermometer guns
- Acrylic protection barriers for reception areas

Linda is anticipating to again institute the staggered staffing schedule to minimize the number of people in the building at one time. She is waiting to hear Governor Baker's decision on beginning to lift the Stay at Home Advisory.

Linda concluded by saying that progress is being made on the new location for our Haverhill satellite, the Haverhill Heights building at 192 Merrimack Street. It's a beautiful space and the data, phone, and electric

lines are in and the new cubicles have been delivered and installed. The hope is to move by the end of this fiscal year.

#### **5. Workforce Board Programming Update**

Susan Almono talked about new funding opportunities, National Dislocated Worker Grant. The workforce board training programs are suspended or postponed due to Covid-19. Everything is on hold and some aspects of the trainings will be done remotely.

Susan said that the workforce board staff is working remotely. There were six staff that volunteered to help DUA with UI claims but to date, only one has been trained.

#### **6. Conversation on the Impacts of Covid-19 led by: Scott Latham, Ph.D. and Beth Humberd, Ph.D.**

Doctors Latham and Humberd led a conversation on the business impacts of the COVID crisis.

Beth said that these are uncharted waters for everyone. Data shows that 55% of the people are working remotely.

She talked about managing your people in the “current” normal.

- The great big remote work experiment. Rather than experiment, use this as a venue for new practices.
- Frequent, transparent communication – is it flowing up, down, left & right? The more you engage employees, when things change, they will buy in it more. Ensure that the communication is open.
- Ditch the visionary leadership (for now) – are you demonstrating a willingness to adapt? We need to see leaders adapt. We don’t need to see a grand vision just someone steering the boat.
- People remember how they are treated during difficult times – what will your employees, managers, colleagues & customers say? Employees will be more committed to organizations when they see fair practices.

Scott discussed how companies are navigating a recession.

- What to do now? There is research that looks at this situation.
- Get a handle on financials – what is your burn rate? You need to have financials for any type of business, and this is not referring to filing your taxes.
- Identify and focus on core business – who are your core customers? This is critical since 80% of your revenue comes for 20% of your customers.
- Avoid across the board cuts – who supports that core customer? This is a tough one, but you need to know who supports that 20% of the customers that provide your revenue. Make choices of restructuring.
- Focus on micro-pivots – can you develop small, flexible innovations that help stabilize revenue? It is critical to be flexible and creative since data shows that those type of businesses tend to make it during tough times.

Juan Yopez asked where employers can go online and hire employees. Linda Rohrer said they can go to JobQuest or contact one of the Business Service Representatives at the Career Center.

Juan said that many of the food industry workers are in a better situation now receiving regular unemployment plus the additional \$600 weekly. These are times no one has ever seen.

Scott added that the focus should be on smaller and support businesses. We are going to see chronic underemployment not unemployment in the next 18 months.

Rosa Muñoz said MultiGrains is hiring and encourages anyone to apply

Andrew Herlihy said the Board should consider amending the current Career Center performance goals and or discuss potentially significant changes in what we'll be seeing at the center over the next year.

Gail Griffin said that MRC customers are afraid to get back to work. MRC staff is trying to keep them. So far, reaching out as been positive.

Susan Almono said that the current situation shows us the need of systems thinking and resiliency. The Board will be thinking how to add that to our future workshops.

**7. Other Business**

No other business.

**8. Adjournment (vote required)**

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

**Marianne Paley-Nadel made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Gail Griffin. Motion passed, and meeting was adjourned at 10:13am.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Corina Ruiz*

Recorder