



MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

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

Quarterly Meeting

Zoom Meeting ID: 843 9806 1818

Meeting Password: 062207

Minutes

Thursday, May 27, 2021

9:00am

MEMBERS IN PARTICIPATION:

Joseph Bevilacqua, Edward Bartkiewicz, John Bruno, Ron Contrado, Cynthia Faulkner, Evelyn Friedman, Lane Glenn, Andrew Herlihy, Jeff Linehan, Supt. Maureen Lynch, Joselyn Marte, John Person, Fred Shaheen, Bob Westcott, Cal Williams, Juan Yepez

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Ann Marie Borgesi, Christian Brennan, Marko Duffy, Robin Hynds, Supt. John Lavoie, Carol Riemer, Ellen Weinhold, Rosa Muñoz,

GUESTS IN PARTICIPATION:

Michael Bevilacqua, Donna Musumeci

STAFF IN PARTICIPTION:

Corina Ruiz, Varsha Gandhi, Brian Norris, Tracy Myszkowski, Robin DelNegro, Leah Sparks, Rosmery Marzan, Rosangela Amaro

1. Call to Order

A quorum being present, Chairman Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m.

2. Welcome and roll call

Mr. Yepez welcomed everyone and asked for a roll call.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the February 23, 2021 meeting (vote required)

Chairman Yepez called for a motion on the minutes of the February 23, 2021 board meeting.

Motion by Cal Williams, seconded by Jeff Linehan to approve the minutes of the February 23, 2021 meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

4. Report of Chair

Chairman Yepez said, as we continue our transition under a new Chief Executive Official, Kendrys Vasquez, and a new Executive Director we've made significant progress since our last meeting on February 23rd, 2021. At that meeting we

voted unanimously to formalize Brian Norris as the Executive Director. At a subsequent Executive Committee meeting on March 17th, the committee accepted that recommendation and forwarded an appointment letter to Mayor Vasquez. On April 14th, Mayor Vasquez signed off on our recommendation.

Other transition issues resolved since March include:

- The Career Center annual program review, under the direction of Corina Ruiz, was successfully completed – a couple of minor findings were resolved.
- The “three-year” Career Center Certification packet was completed by Linda Rohrer April 22nd. Corina Ruiz convened a review team comprised of Planning/ Career Center Committee members, Ann Marie Borgesi, and Andrew Herlihy, and Board staff, Brian and Corina. The review team evaluated the Career Center on May 21st and Certified the Career Center for 3 years. Corina is working on finalizing the certification report to submit to Linda Rohrer and the state.
- The “conditional” approval for the composition of our Board was addressed by Jeff Linehan. Jeff submitted recommendations to appoint John Bruno as union representative and for John Person as Board Member for the Mass Rehabilitation Commission. Mayor Vasquez agreed to these appointments on March 17th and May 1st respectively. It is my pleasure to welcome John Bruno and John Person to the Board.
 - Our Board membership will require at least one more “Business” representative to gain full compliance.
- The Career Center payment arrears dating back to March 30th, 2020 were resolved as of the middle of April. Many thanks to Tracy Myszkowski and Varsha Gandhi for their excellent collaboration with Linda Rohrer and the Northern Essex Community College fiscal team of Nancy Jordan, Anthony DeGregorio, and Jeffrey Diprima. The group met formally every week to identify problems and reasons for errors and delays, and to formulate plans for smoother, timely closings. We expect current and future closings to be accurate and timely; the group will continue to meet twice a month to further improve processes and procedures.
- The Career Center Operator/Service Provider Request for Proposal (RFP) was issued on April 28th. The proposal was published in the Lawrence Eagle Tribune and the Boston Globe. Notice was also sent to several dozen potential bidders, and the RFP was available for download by all vendors with access to the City of Lawrence’s procurement processes. Bids are due by 11am on June 9th. I’d like to recognize Brian, Corina, Tracy, and Varsha, as well as Jannelvy Martinez, Procurement Officer for the City of Lawrence, for their efforts on this project,
 - We are currently assembling a Review Team to read and score the bids beginning on June 9th. Career Center Partner organizations have been invited to join the team and today I am asking for volunteers from this Board to round out the Review Team. We expect to submit a recommendation to Mayor Vasquez on June 17th and to issue our Notification of Decision on June 18th.
- A new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among all Career Center Partners is being prepared and will be circulated among the partners in early June.
- The Northeast Regional grouping of the MassHire Merrimack Valley, Greater Lowell, and North Shore Workforce Boards completed the planning stage for a new Regional Healthcare HUB. We expect to receive a contract from Commonwealth Corporation to start a regional training initiative to help increase the supply of Certified Nursing Assistants and Medical Assistants in the region. The program will also offer training assistance to incumbent CNAs and MAs to help them earn higher level nursing credentials.

Other issues noted at our last meeting concerning regulatory and governance documents are progressing. These include:

- Completion of a new agreement between the CEO and the Board.
- Completion of an update to the Board’s By-laws to comply with WIOA rules and MassHire branding.

New significant issues to be tackled over the next several weeks:

- Development of a new 4-year WIOA plan.
- Development of a new MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board Annual Plan.
- Development of a new Northeast Regional Blueprint.

Juan thanked everyone for their attention and for their help as the new WB staff continues to not just comply with regulations but helps us build the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board into a best-in-state performer.

5. Reports of Committee Chairs

i. Planning and Career Center Committee

In the absence of Chairwoman Borges, Brian Norris presented the report which included career center highlights.

Career Technical Institute (CTI) Training Programs at Whittier Vocational Technical School in Advanced Manufacturing and Welding ended on May 20th. A virtual job fair was held on May 25th for the students completing those classes along with students who are completing a Greater Lawrence CNC course. Greater Lawrence Plumbing, HVAC, Carpentry, and Biotech Lab Technician classes are ending at the beginning of June. A virtual job fair was held for these students on May 26th. A Job Readiness curriculum was delivered by a specialist for all classes – covering resumes, interviewing, and behaviors that promote job retention and advancement. We're looking forward to successful job placements from these programs.

The update on National Dislocated Worker Grants is that we are still waiting for USDOL approval of the grant which will enable us to provide intensive services to workers laid off from Southwick, Philips, and 3 M Touch Systems. To date over 220 workers from these companies have received some service at the career center. Intensive ESOL classes were created at Northern Essex Community College and Lawrence Adult Learning Center and funded through the Trade Program for Southwick workers needing to improve their English language skills. If these courses had not been developed, students needing this instruction would have been referred to programs in Woburn and Boston.

Mass Internet Connect is funded through the Cares Act and administered through the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative; it provides access to technology for people who need it for job search including internet connection subsidies, equipment, and digital literacy. MassHire Merrimack Valley Career Center ranked second in the state in number of people served through this project. 79 people were provided with Chromebooks, 10 received internet connection subsidies, and 169 received digital literacy instruction.

The Business Services team has been working with Amazon to recruit the workforce for an early summer opening of their facility in Haverhill. Most jobs will be overnight with hourly wages from \$16.45 up to \$18.45 and a good benefit package. Four recruitment sessions have been scheduled over the next couple of weeks. Also, work has been happening to recruit workers, primarily drivers, for Amazon contractors.

Staff will be returning to work on-site at both career center locations on June 28th. They will be returning based on a staggered schedule, with half of the staff working on Monday and Tuesday, all working remotely on Wednesdays, and the other half working on Thursdays and Fridays. Customers will begin to be served on-site by appointment as of July 12th. This is predicated upon having security in place to help with customer flow. A deep cleaning will be performed in the Lawrence office. PPE and policies aimed at keeping customers and safe are in place.

ii. Youth Committee

Cal Williams presented the report.

The Connecting Activities (CA) program provided the opportunity for a High School Senior interested in education to participate in DESE High School Education Intern Program (HSSEIP). This initiative was designed to prepare youth for the path to accomplished teaching. The HSSEIP partnered with Educators Rising to provide professional development sessions to help develop the key skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed for a career in the education field. These PD sessions included: Professionalism, Understanding Bias, Understanding Equity, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Formative Assessment.

Our senior at Amesbury High School, expressed that she felt the program helped her tremendously in preparing for her future as an educator. She mentioned that through the HSSEIP program, she was able to experience the time that goes into lesson planning, getting a full glimpse of the behind-the-scenes effort it takes to prepare. Miesha was able to assist in formulating curricula and noted that the program helped to guide her in “thinking on [her] feet” as far as adjusting to students’ needs in order to accommodate. When asked what she enjoyed most about the program, she said, “I liked being able to get up in front of the class. At first, I was nervous but as I got more exposure, it felt natural. It was hands-on, which I enjoyed.”

This intensive internship proved to be beneficial, adequate and preparatory for the youth who participated. From professional development to having first-hand engagement and experience in the classroom, the HSSEIP provided an extensive opportunity for youth pursuing a career in education.

Through our YouthWorks Year-Round funding, youth took virtual college courses to explore career fields. Thanks to YouthWorks, a partnerships between Commonwealth Corporation and a few vendors, we were able to enroll some area 17-21 year old youth into unique learning opportunities this spring. Participants were able to explore college level courses while also dipping their toes into entry level career exploration, through a new concept of virtual Micro Career Courses. Participants were given the opportunity to attend remote college courses in introduction to Health Care and Entrepreneurship at MT Wachusett Community College, and Information Technology with American Graphic Institute (AGI). Upon completion all participants received a stipend for their time. In addition, students who attended classes received a non-credit transferable transcript, and those who worked with AGI in IT explored web design and completed the training with a finished product- a website through Word press.

Commonwealth Corporation allocated \$1.1 M in YouthWorks Summer funding for our region. This year’s allocation will allow us to place 353 Youth into Tier 1 - Service and Project-Based Learning, Tier 2 - Early and Career-Trajectory Subsidized Employment, and Tier 3 - **Career Pathway Training and Support**. The youth application link has been posted on our website. We are always looking for employer partners to expose our Merrimack Valley youth to the world of work. Please host a youth this Summer. For more information on how you can be part of our program this summer, please contact Cristy Gómez at 978-857-5220 or at cgomez@masshiremvwb.org.

Please visit the MMVWB website and read the MV Connect Newsletter to learn more about our youth programs and initiatives.

iii. Nominating Committee

Chairman Linehan said there is no report. He will work with Brian to bring new members on Board.

iv. Finance Report

Bob Wescott said we have a terrific grants administrator. There is a lot of unspent monies which will be carried over to FY22. The Planning/Career Center Committee is discussing how to best use funding.

6. Report of Executive Director

As part of his report, Brian presented a PowerPoint presentation. A copy of the presentation is attached to minutes.

Discussion followed on challenges faced in Massachusetts with certificate programs. Employers continue to look for job seekers with a bachelor’s degree and we must find a way where both parties can come together to solve the problem. Ideally, employers should hire and then train their workforce.

Brian said that in the upcoming days a 4-Year WIOA Plan needs to be created which will be data driven.

7. Other Business

No other business.

10. Adjournment (vote required)

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

Bob Wescott made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Cal Williams. Motion passed, and meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Corina Ruiz

Recorder