



**PLANNING/CAREER CENTER COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes**

Tuesday, October 18, 2016

8:00 a.m.

439 South Union Street

Lawrence, MA 01843

Members Present: Juan Yepez, Chairman
Rosalin Acosta, Ron Contrado, Dennis DiZoglio, Andrew Herlihy

Members Absent: Mike Munday, Abel Vargas, Bob Westcott

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Susan Almono, Mary Kivell

Others: Amy Weatherbee

I. Approval of Minutes of September 20, 2016

A quorum being present, Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m. Juan then called for a motion on the minutes of the September 20, 2016 meeting. Rafael said that there were a couple of typos which Mary Kivell explained.

Motion by Dennis DiZoglio, seconded by Ron Contrado, to approve the minutes of the September 20, 2016 meeting with the revisions as presented. Motion passed.

II. Performance Summary as of September 30, 2016

Rafael Abislaiman reported that there are no surprises in the Performance Summary other than a reduced number of employers contacted. The new number is more accurate. Juan mentioned that we discussed this at the last meeting. Rafael said it was due to changes at the state level on how employer numbers are to be calculated. Amy Weatherbee added that as of July 1, 2016, the state business services unit made adjustments on to how services are counted. Transition info and training went out in August but there were a few misinterpretations. She said that the current adjusted numbers are more accurate. Juan asked if we needed to make additional changes now and Amy said that we should wait until the state issues another count.

Rosalin mentioned that it looks like there are still issues with the youth training numbers. Juan said that we approved lowering academic requirements for youth group training but that

the vendor chosen is having trouble recruiting for the program. He wondered whether they would be paid for the whole contract. Rafael said that he expects the vendor will recruit additional participants and if necessary the contract will be adjusted. He also noted that lots of organizations are having difficulty recruiting youth. He said that Lawrence has one of the highest disconnected youth numbers even after Lawrence Public School's efforts to bring youth back to school. Though we have trouble recruiting for some youth, our Summer Youth Employment efforts had great results with over 300 youth participating. Amy also mentioned that they have ten (10) youth in ITAs and have connected with Youth Build to create an additional pipeline. Apart from Youth Build participants, we have also had a referral from Lawrence High School. We are doing a better job of getting the word out.

Rafael mentioned that the WIOA Youth definition was expanded to include people who are up to age twenty-four (24). We should have better numbers with this eligibility expansion. He said that the career center staff are doing a better job of identifying young adults for programs.

III. Budget Update as of September 30, 2016

Rafael said that there are no surprises in the budget and explained that listed personnel costs are above budget due to Summer Youth salary disbursements and that they will even out. The accruals are principally related to group training and anticipated moving costs and the holdover costs for staying here.

Our discretionary fund will be used to cover charter-related staff payouts as necessary. He also said that discretionary funds will not cover the cost of our retirement plans. He said that 20% of salaries annually go to our defined benefit plan with most employees paying 11% and we as an organization paying the other 9%. In other State or municipal organizations they may pay as little as 5%.

Dennis DiZoglio stated that when contributions went up to 11%, most people thought it would be sufficient to cover costs. His organization, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, does not contribute the 9% that MVWIB/VWCC contributes. It's retirement plan just relies on each individual's 11% contribution.

Juan said that 11% won't cover increasing retirement costs. There was discussion on how someone who began working in the '70s making \$6,000 per year had a retirement based on that person's top three earning years. Dennis said that now had been changed to the five highest years. Rosalin said that most companies no longer have defined benefit plans. Rafael said the public sector retirements will be a growing problem nationally. He continued by stating that it is difficult to understand Massachusetts current budget shortfalls when there is simultaneously low unemployment. The state says there is unexpectedly low sales tax revenues. Employed people are not making as much or spending less.

Amy mentioned that the dislocated worker funds are 50% expended.

IV. Career Center Activities Report

Career Center Director Amy Weatherbee said that as part of a monthly update highlighting career center activities she would be presenting updates on various activities. This month she provided a Partner's Update. She said that partners are a critical element in the WIOA regulation changes. ValleyWorks has a long history of working with partner agencies, both on-site and in a variety of community settings. The following is a listing of current partners co-located at ValleyWorks Career Center Lawrence site. The first is Job Corps, a DOL program through the Shriver Job Corps in Devens. It is an alternative training option for out of school youth. Currently Adams & Associates is supporting the Shriver Job Corps located at Devens, MA. A full time Job Corps staff member is on site. That staff member coordinates out of office time with our membership desk. The next partner is Northern Essex Community College supported through a statewide grant, the NECC houses a "Navigator" position at VWCC, to recruit and support VWCC customers with questions about NECC programs. The Navigator is scheduled to be on site, two days a week. Staff and Membership Desk staff make customer appointments to see the Navigator. Amy said that she recently moved the Navigator to another spot with more visibility.

Amy continued stating that we have had a partnership with Greater Lawrence Family Health Center (GLFHC) for over three and one half years. They provide an Outreach and Enrollment Assistance Customer Representative. The representative provides support to VWCC customers with questions about health insurance and signing up for the MA Health Connector system. They are on site one day a week and the Membership Desk can make appointments. The next partner is Veteran Affairs Supporting Housing (VASH) who provides information to Veterans on housing support from the VA. Access is available to both VWCC members and the community at large. The VASH staff member is on site one day a week.

The DESE Representative is for referrals to area ABE program (LPS-Adult) and provides a tester on site who tests for both ABE and ESOL levels. The DESE Representative is on site two days a week. Also, co-located at the ValleyWorks Career Center in Haverhill is a DESE Representative assigned by our Haverhill DESE – Career Pathway Partner, Community Action, Inc. (CAI).

Amy said that as part of the education and training provided by the Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (NAMC) we are promoting information sessions to MASS MEP and hosting a local STEPP program to offer information on manufacturing and heavy equipment training programs to customers. A NAMC pipeline with NECC on math tutoring has two cycles on Monday and Friday and eight people are currently signed up with five attending. The cycle is for three weeks for those who need math improvement.

Rosalin asked how successful the partnership has been with NECC? Amy said that over the past five years we have had many referrals and provided information on each other's programs. She spoke about a dislocated worker state program that provides generous training funding of \$10-\$16k per person. VWCC is currently working with ninety Polartec dislocated

workers and it is setting up a communication system with NECC. Juan asked if everyone pays for the space at ValleyWorks. Rafael said most do but not all pay for space.

There was discussion on the lack of traffic flow at the Haverhill Career Center at Northern Essex Community College's (NECC) main campus. Andrew Herlihy said that moving the center closer to downtown would probably generate more traffic. Amy said that in the past there was a robust center downtown but the landlord raised the rent and we had a funding reduction. Amy said that she needs to rotate managers to the NECC site for a week at a time and they have all observed the lack of foot traffic. Also, there is no space for career center seminars in Haverhill, only for workshops.

Amy suggested a tour of the Lawrence career center at the next meeting. Rosalin said that we can see what is being done and look at best practices across the state to see who may be doing things better. Rafael mentioned that Hampden County does a good job but they have a competitive career center with 30 WIB employees and about three or four times as much non-WIOA money. They are involved with activities such as jail sited job training and child care teacher assistant training. The Boston PIC is also highly successful in private sector funded youth programs. But though it has had a lot more WIA and WIOA Youth Category money, Boston WIOA youth numbers have been lower than ours in both real and percentage terms. Rafael also said that a lot of our training is not funded by WIOA. We have non-formula manufacturing, heavy equipment, health care and EPA training solicited by the MVWIB. We just don't yet have the multiples enjoyed by the Hampden County WIB.

Amy said that best practices are discussed at the partner's meetings and that they include Demand Driven 2.0. She also mention that our new career center will have multiple floors. She noted that the Franklin Career Center has 2 floors, Lowell has 4 and Worcester 3. Rafael stated that all of Worcester is now on the fourth floor of a new down town site but that it is easy to get lost in it.

Amy said that she would arrange a tour of the career center for the next meeting. At the conclusion of Amy's career center activities report she left the meeting as the next item on the agenda was the Career Center RFP.

V. Site RFP & WOIA Update

Rafael Abislaiman said that the career center RFP will hopefully be issued by the end of the week. He said that he is awaiting additional input from the executive committee. Rafael stated that he had used Hampden County's RFP as a model for ours. It attempts to create a more contractual relationship with the career center. This may minimize a historically antagonistic relationship with the WIB. It also highlights the WIB's statutory role in regional workforce development.

Rafael stated that there continue to be contradictions in the overall system and RFP expectations. For example, the state is now stating that we can't discriminate when serving people in need of long term training and services. We can't discriminate but we must also manage how we spend money. If we as a WIB set a \$6k cap on individual training, that

necessarily involves limiting training time because teachers don't work for free. If we increase the \$6K cap, that necessarily results in us training fewer people. So we inevitably have to balance training time against number of people trained and make related decisions.

Another issue in the career center RFP is the dynamic of moving municipal employees into a municipal building. The City spent and is spending millions of dollars to purchase and rehab the City Hall Annex. We will occupy approximately one half of the 237-255 Essex Street building with three quarters of the first floor and then less on the second, third and fourth floors on the 255 Essex Street side. So we are asking any bidder who submits a proposal to indemnify the city with \$2M if they want to move the career center from Annex. Changing our building site may also double our moving costs. Juan said that this could be a disadvantage for a bidder to bid on the site. Most leases contain wording that if funding changes they can reduce the space. Rafael stated that downsizing the size of the site is possible and mentioned in the RFP.

Rafael said that two-thirds of the staff are municipal employees and one third are state. The new operator cannot lay off more than 30% of current municipal staff in the first year. We have a \$1M reserve to pay accrued vacation and sick day benefits that the City is liable to pay as our employer. A larger lay-off number would cause more disruption to career center services and drain our \$1M reserve.

There was discussion on past attempts to have other communities contribute to WIB and Career Center costs. The idea of moving the lead to another city failed in the past. Dennis said that there should be enough federal money to make the system work. Rosalin wondered what would happen to ValleyWorks if they did not receive the award. Rafael answered that some form of ValleyWorks would continue, with or without the same name.

Susan Almono mentioned that there are national vendors competing for career centers and they may bid here. Rafael said that last time LARE/American Training bid. We expect all RFP responses to occur in mid-January and bidders must also submit an earlier mandatory letter of intent to bid. The review committee will consist of the executive committee and representatives of the state department of DTA, ABE (Adult Learning), Mass Rehab, and an Elder representative. There will also be about three more private sector appointment from the Board.

Rafael also said that under new WIOA regulations we are required to serve customers from DTA, Mass Rehab, and DMH. The average Joe who is out of work is less of a priority. Our RFP will try to raise them and the private sector as priorities. It leans towards average people who just need help finding a job and to private sector employers but not to the exclusion of our needy citizens. Dennis asked who would be the lead operator for the existing career center and Rafael said Amy Weatherbee. The maximum layoff would be 30% if a new vendor took over and Amy need not be laid off because she works hard and knows a lot about the system.

Juan wondered why the city would want to continue accruing retirement liability. Rafael said that the WIB will still be the oversight agent policy developer if another vendor is selected.

Another vendor's selection may change our fiscal tracking requirements because we wouldn't be tracking staff payments. He said that if anyone wants a copy of the RFP they can go to the City of Lawrence website. He also invited other suggestions on how to strengthen career center activities in Haverhill.

VI. Other Business

There was no other business.

VII. Adjourn

Having no further business Andy Herlihy made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by Rosalin Acosta, and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell,

Recorder