



MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

Haffner's Corporate Office
2 International Way
Lawrence, MA 01843

ANNUAL MEETING

Minutes
Tuesday, October 23, 2018
7:30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ann Marie Borgesi, Joseph Bevilacqua, Eileen Burns, Karen Conard, Ron Contrado, Lane Glenn, Andrew Herlihy, Joselyn Marte, Rosa Muñoz, Bob Westcott, Cal Williams, Juan Yopez

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Edward Bartkiewicz, Francisco Brea, Christian Brennan, Michael Fiato, Evelyn Friedman, Supt. Maureen Lynch, Jeff Linehan, Fred Shaheen, Ellen Weinhold, Stanley Usovich, Supt. John Lavoie, Marianne Paley-Nadel, Carol Riemer

GUESTS PRESENT:

Courtney Inferrere, Linda Rohrer

STAFF PRESENT:

Abel Vargas, Susan Almono, Brian Norris, Corina Ruiz

1. Call to Order

A quorum being present, Juan Yopez called the meeting to order at 8:04 a.m.

2. Welcome & Introductions

Courtney Inferrere welcomed everyone to Haffners, a family owned business. She has been with the company for 24 years. The family wanted to grow so in 2015 they sold the company to another family owned business, Energy North Group. The company has grown much since the acquisition, expanding into New Hampshire in 2017 and landing 30,000 new customers. Most of their labor force comes from the Merrimack Valley.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the July 19, 2018 meeting.

Chairman Yopez asked for a motion on the minutes of the July 19, 2018 board meeting.

Motion by Cal Williams to approve the minutes of the July 19, 2018 meeting as submitted. Karen Conard seconded the motion and motion passed unanimously.

4. Report of Chair

Chair Yopez gave an update on the Colombia Gas events as his report. As many of you know, on September 13

three communities in our region were ravaged by an unforeseen tragedy. Over pressurized gas lines owned by Columbia Gas fed into the homes of thousands resulting in damaged appliances, major fires, explosions and even a loss of life. Though the response to the relief efforts is not a core function of this board, it is important for us to be conscious of the conditions our customers and employers are subject to. As the chair of this board, I feel it is important that I give you an update of what has transpired.

Immediately after the incident, over 8,000 families were evacuated from their neighborhoods and a series of assessments and other precautionary tasks were administered. Soon after, residents were allowed to reenter their homes with active electricity.

Since then, the ongoing response has brought a significant amount of distress and discomfort to many in the region. Families with young children, senior citizens, and other vulnerable populations have all suffered. We as a board are not exempt from exposure to this tragedy. Staff members of both the Workforce Board and Career Center were as affected as the customers we serve.

Mayor Rivera and Town Managers, Flannagan and Maylor, along with Governor Baker have been at the helm of the response providing amazing leadership. Nonprofits and other organizations have been crucial in providing residents relief along the way. Though it has only been 5 weeks, over 80% of the total 48 miles of pipe have been replaced as have over 60% of service lines into homes.

The WIB and the Career Center have also been a significant contributor to this effort. Working with Secretary Acosta, we were able to extend unemployment benefits to customers in the affected area. Our career center hosted 3 separate job fairs to support response operations. In total, over 180 came through the door and over 70 were hired for positions as Laborers, Linguists, Customer Service Reps, or Security Staff. This is a true testament that when the community needs the support, the WIB and Career Center are here to provide support.

5. Guest Speaker: Stephen Michon, FutureWorks

Abel Vargas presented Stephen Michon.

Mr. Michon presented and discussed the employer facing initiative and what role the Workforce Board played in it. Mr. Michon said that most of his work is in workforce and economic development. He became involved in Lawrence with Derek Mitchell from the Lawrence Partnership on a pro-bono basis. The Partnership asked him to do a research and that's how the employer facing initiative was created.

To view Mr. Michon's presentation click on the following link: [Employer Facing Initiative](#).

There was discussion on the WIBs role. Bob Wescott asked who would be controlling the metrics. Mr. Michon said the WIBs are doing great things but should provide the backbone.

Sister Eileen asked how the initiative is being embedded. The Board is already involved with the super regions and how is this related. She wondered if the Board has the capacity to do this.

Abel said the WIBs created a regional blueprint and sees this initiative differently. This is building an eco-system and would not replace the work of any other group.

Juan asked who would be doing what, how much time does the Board need to invest and if there's a cost. If the WIB is going to be the backbone, we will need funding for it.

Lane Glenn explained the Lawrence Partnership training consortium. One of their principle is to not start something someone else is doing and not taking the credit. It's a training consortium to find out what are the training needs. A couple of years ago the Partnership did some intense survey of employers in Lawrence to determine the need. Not surprising, they identified need in healthcare, manufacturing and mid-level management. Knowing this information and not worrying who was going to get the money, the consortium sought resources for those three things. In the end, they secured a couple of hundred dollars to purchase equipment for a mechatronics program at Greater Lawrence Technical School. A couple of hundred dollars were used for mid-level management training and a group of Healthcare employers that put together the Hire First and Train program. The idea was that no individual entity, could have done those things the way it happened without the group coming together. The though behind this Employer Facing Initiative is the same but in a larger scale and not specific to Lawrence.

Abel added that the role of the WIB is to have these discussions and more broadly discuss the impact we can have. We would have to build capacity internally to be able to handle this. We don't want to recreate things but want the partners of this coalition to understand their role. At the WIB we do programmatic but more broadly the policy discussion should be part of the WIBs role.

Juan asked how much time on a weekly basis is expected and Abel said it depends. Juan said he wants to make sure it doesn't take time from other programs that we have.

Karen Conard said the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission created a five-year economic development strategy and that many of the folks at the table participated in it. Out of that comes a bunch of opportunities to which the coalition is trying to do. Our agency is eligible for economic development money and if it's of interest, perhaps we can work with the WIB and partner up to request a grant to get this going. Karen added that she just wants to make sure the MVPC is matched or in-kind on opportunities from those other funders you seek to get funds from.

Ann Marie said she is part of the coalition and that they all had the same concerns. If we as a Board want to make a difference, this is the opportunity. As it currently stands, the WIB is separated.

Cal Williams asked if the business plan focus on young adults and Stephen Michon said it made sense to start with them, but he would like to see youth and adults.

Chairman Yopez said that the Board would give Mr. Michon and Abel time to work out logistics and report back.

6. Reports of Committee Chairs

- ***Planning/ Career Center Committee***

There was no Planning/Career Center Committee report.

- ***Youth Committee***

Chairman Williams said this has been a very productive and rewarding year for our Merrimack Valley youth programming. Between July 1st and September 30th, we spent most of our efforts developing our young workforce by teaching them employability skills and providing subsidized employment opportunities through our Bridging the Opportunity Gap, YouthWorks, and Mass Housing programs. These programs allowed us to place 239 income eligible youth. A total of 242 youth attended the Signal Success Workshops. Signal Success is a comprehensive curriculum designed by our funder, Commonwealth Corporation and tested by education

and workforce development partners to help young people develop essential skills for future success. Youth receive systematic instruction in core employability skills while engaging in meaningful future planning.

Hats off to the approximately 80 area employers that hosted at least one youth and also provided them with supervision and mentoring. Our summer programs provided a great opportunity for youth who would otherwise will not have a summer job. They make a big difference in a young person's future. We all know that a youth with some work experience will most likely graduate from high school and pursue a career.

In addition, with funding received from MassDevelopment, Inc.- Amp It Up! Program, we provided externship opportunities to three Haverhill and Lawrence High Schools STEM teachers. These teachers were placed at a local advanced manufacturing employer. The purpose was to build partnerships between industry professionals and teachers, integrate industry applications into STEM course content, and expand awareness of advanced manufacturing careers. After spending two days at an advanced manufacturing facility, teachers developed lesson plans to be utilized in school curricula with their STEM students during the 2018-2019 school year.

During the year ahead, we will continue to form partnerships and reinforce relationships between the workforce development partners, employers, school districts, and community-based organizations. These partnerships will allow us to reach out to our area youth. We hope to grow our college and career readiness resources, unsubsidized employment and internship opportunities, especially in the STEM field, to link classroom learning to the world of work.

We will continue to align our youth programs: Bridging the Opportunity Gap, Connecting Activities, WIOA Youth, and YouthWorks to achieve intensive programming and a seamless continuum of services that will keep youth engaged in education and career planning. In addition, we will help youth develop employability skills through career immersion opportunities and will continue to show them the educational steps needed to pursue their career and employment goals.

- ***Nominating Committee***

Karen Conard said there's a potential new member that was recommended to Mayor Rivera, Robin Hynds, VP of Care Continuum and Network Development at Lawrence General Hospital to the Board.

Sister Eileen asked how many members there are, and Juan said about 25.

- ***Finance Report***

Bob Wescott said were lucky to have NECC as the OSCC Operator because they are waiting to be reimbursed because we are awaiting funding. A small organization would not have been able to take this hit and be flexible – we made the right decision when electing NECC as the OSCC Operator.

7. Election of Officers (vote required)

Chairman Yepez said that he would like to offer the same slate of officers for election as last year. MVWIB Chair, Juan Yepez; MVWIB Treasurer, Bob Wescott; Youth Committee Chair, Calvin Williams; MVWIB Clerk and Nominating Committee Chair, Karen Conard. He asked for a motion.

Andrew Herlihy made a motion to approve the election of Juan Yepez, Chair; Bob Wescott, Treasurer; Calvin Williams, Youth Committee Chair; Karen Conard, Clerk and Nominating Committee Chair. Ann Marie seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Juan said that he's working closely with Abel to fill the MVWIB Vice Chair and Planning/Career Committee Chair vacancy by the next quarterly meeting.

8. Report of Executive Director

Interim Executive Director, Abel Vargas, thanked everyone for the discussion earlier about the Employer Facing Coalition. He said the WIB is focusing in creating a 4-year plan that is consistent with the regional blueprint.

Abel said that during our summer youthworks program, many of the young people in subsidized employment are going to work at non-profits. For next year, he wants to see more private sector employers involved so the youth can get a real career exploration.

Abel said that when he started working for the City of Lawrence as Economic Development Director, he visited every business in Lawrence. Abel said he plans to do the same now just because the conversations with employers will be different. We want to make sure employers know what resources are available to them through the workforce system.

Abel highlighted that jobs in the region are being created. In 2007 there were 131,000 jobs and this year there were 146,000. In Lawrence alone, there were 23,274 jobs back in 2007 and today there are 29,243. That is 6,000 new jobs in Lawrence. Lawrence still has the highest unemployment rate and household income in the state. Part of the conversation we want to start having is that there's a skills gap but in addition to that, there's a gap in accessibility. The average income for someone is \$1,000 but their household expenses are about \$3,000. The jobs being created in the City are not going to residents but to folks outside. We need to have quality conversations with employers, so they can take better advantage of the workforce within the City.

Juan thanked Abel for bringing up good statistics. Juan said there are new higher-end apartments, but many folks are not from Lawrence. We need to find a way to make them stay in the City and as a board we are committed to that.

9. Other Business

Susan Almono reminded everyone of the MassHire Brand Launch happening November 15, 2018 at 10am in at 255 Essex Street. Secretary Acosta will be present as the career center and workforce board officially change their name to MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board and MassHire Merrimack Valley Career Center.

10. Adjournment

Having no further business Cal Williams made a motion to adjourn and Ron Contrado seconded the motion. Motion passed, and meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Corina Ruiz

Recorder