



PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, March 18, 2009

8:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

Lawrence, MA 01840

Members Present: Peter Matthews, Michael Sweeney, Charles LoPiano, Robert LeBlanc, Karen Sawyer Mike Lynch, Shirley Callan

Members Absent: Pedro Arce, Sal Lupoli

Staff Present: Fred Carberry, Betty Kirk, Deborah Andrews, Augustine Ambe

Guests Present: Arthur Chilingirian, Amy Weatherbee

1. Approval of Minutes of 1/21/09

Peter Matthews called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and called for a motion to approve the minutes of the 1/21/09 meeting.

Motion by Shirley Callan seconded by Karen Sawyer to approve the minutes of the January 21, 2009 meeting as submitted. Motion passed.

2. Update on High Performing WIB Initiative

Fred Carberry said that we have submitted our application for Round 2 of the High Performing WIB Initiative on time. He said that he has had communication with the state providing some clarifications. Our proposal is with the High Performing WIB Review Committee and we should hear something by the end of March.

3. Update on UI Services being performed at ValleyWorks Career Center

Arthur Chilingirian reported on the UI customers being served at both the Lawrence and Haverhill Centers. He said that he broke down the figures by month and that the volume of clients has increased. Chili said that the funding for the security guard will end this month and stated that he had been very helpful with crowd control and worked well with staff. Chili said that based on

the January rates there are only two other communities in the Commonwealth with higher unemployment rates.

Bob LeBlanc asked if the numbers are generated by census tract or skill level. He said that would be helpful to determine how deep the unemployment goes.

Chili said that they just report on the city/town and workforce area. They did generate another report on industry sectors but this was a work intensive report that was done by hand.

Chili said that the state has hired additional staff for their call centers and we are looking to increase staff by two for walk in clients. Currently, we have five full time staff in Lawrence and two full time staff in Haverhill.

Peter Matthews wondered how many claimants want training as opposed to those who just want a check.

Chili explained that initially claimants were mandated to use a career center or they would be penalized.

Discussion followed on taking away the requirement with Mike Lynch explaining that this created issues and clogged the system. The federal government is re-instituting that requirement.

Fred Carberry noted that it is difficult to judge how many claimants are sincerely interested in work since the underground economy in our region is strong.

Chili said that the Career Center has evolved from serving primarily blue collar workers to white collar high paid workers. We are trying to look at transferable skills and trying to figure out what training to offer based on what employers will be looking for in the future.

Bob LeBlanc said that there has to be a linkage and at the end of the day an opportunity for a job.

Peter Matthews said that he feels that, at some point, businesses will begin to hire and, from his perspective, in his business if lower level employees come with basic skills, are dependable and ethical, dress and speak appropriately he can train them.

Chili also said that older workers from the finance sector with no computer skills are competing with younger workers for jobs. He then mentioned a recent job fair with 19 companies participating and over 800 job seekers. They will be following up with companies to see how many jobs have been filled.

4. Update on ITA Requirements

Fred Carberry said that we are looking at loosening up the requirements for ITAs to open the way to more vendors.

Betty Kirk went over the Title I Adult and Dislocated Workers Core, Intensive, and Training Services stating that the eligibility definition was changed from unemployed to underemployed and the time from one year to two years. Also deleted was the customized training under the list of "not recommended for funding."

There was a lengthy discussion on the funding caps for the ITA and training support to be for two years. Mike Sweeney asked if people were bumping into this cap and how eligibility is determined. Amy answered this question and Mike wondered if we raise the cap if vendors will raise their fee. Mike Lynch suggested watching the vendors for a year and revisiting the cap annually. No one objected to Bob LeBlanc's recommendation to raising the cap to \$15,000.

Shirley Callan talked about stimulus money being used to fund summer training in GED and high level ESL and the short window to get things up and running. She spoke about working with the career center in the past. This came up after she had a discussion with DESE regarding the possibility of doing this. There was discussion on opening up classes to people outside of Methuen with Bob LeBlanc stating that he would like to see 100% outreach to Methuen residents before opening classes to outside individuals. Peter Matthews said that this discussion is really under the later agenda item on the stimulus bill.

The VWCC is also recommending removing the educational cap on Dislocated Workers. The staff is required to document marketability and inability to obtain employment with current skills, and as such with the economic downturn, there are individuals' with Master's degrees that are no longer marketable.

Betty continued stating that they do not recommend raising performance standards at this time. We are looking to renegotiate WIA standards. Bob LeBlanc said that he doesn't like lowering standards and if vendors can't meet minimum performance requirements and market conditions are adversely affecting them, then they need to track them and report on that.

Chili said that he sat on the Performance Team at the time when the economy was good and they pushed the levels up.

Betty said that the Support Services Policy will be addressed later in the agenda.

Betty continued stating that the Current WIA Entered Employment rate for Low Income Adults is 76%; wage required is \$9.41. For WIA Dislocated Workers: 84% entered employment rate and the wage requirement is \$16.35. The eligibility for ITA providers currently is an 80% completion rate, a 75% entered employment

rate, and an average wage per hour of \$8.75. Fred Carberry asked about reducing the unemployment rate and discussion followed on the different rates.

Motion by Robert LeBlanc to accept the ITA changes as written with the following amendments: increase the ITA cap to \$15,000 and increase the average wage per hour to \$10.00. Mike Sweeney seconded the motion and motion passed.

5. Support Services Policy Change

Amy Weatherbee reported that through monitoring they learned that they could expand services for youth through follow-up services. The Youth Council has reviewed the changes to this policy at their past two meetings and voted to recommend approval. Amy said that what they have basically done in make the policy uniform by expanding the language.

Motion by Robert LeBlanc seconded by Chick LoPiano to accept the Support Services Policy as presented. Motion passed.

6. Update on Stimulus Bill

Fred Carberry reported that we have just received notice of the allocation which is around \$3M. Funding is available through 6/30/2010. Fred said that we need to spend the money quickly and wisely. Funds will be available by April 19th and the period of performance can date back to when the bill was signed 2/17/09.

Amy talked about the WIA money coinciding with the Stimulus money. Bob LeBlanc asked about staff. There was discussion on how much money is dedicated to training. Peter asked how the breakdown of the allocation should be spent and Fred said that it is up to us to be prudent.

Amy said that we have training money that is unspent. Staff are overwhelmed with trade customers having a 70-100 active caseload. We can use stimulus money for training and the WIA allocation for admin.

Peter Matthews spoke about reporting to the full board at the April meeting and said that we need to meet again to digest this. Shirley Callan said that we need a plan in place as soon as possible. After discussion it was agreed to meet on the Stimulus budget on Friday, April 10, 2009 at 8:30 a.m.

Fred Carberry said that the Youth Council has met and made their recommendation for the summer youth program with \$1.3M of Stimulus funds targeted for this.

Amy said that we are recommending that the ValleyWorks Career Center be approved as the lead operator of the WIA Youth Summer Employment activities; approve ValleyWorks to hire up immediately a Summer Youth Coordinator and

Summer Career Counselors as needed based on the final allocation and projected enrollments; agree that DGA do an emergency/unique property procurement to find space for staff; approved the methodology for the program with a three pronged approach (worksites for public/not-for-profit/state/local and municipalities sites; competitively procure for work and learning sites (mini-RFP); and agreements with municipalities on projects to hire supervisors with Stimulus funds to support kids.

Amy also noted that youth cannot be put in a position where an individual has been laid off and also the fact that we will need union concurrence for any agency/municipality where there is a union.

Peter Matthews said that it would be wonderful to place kids in the private sector first and then the municipalities second. Mike Sweeney agreed and said that this could serve as an entrée with private industry to establish relationships and pull them in for further engagement.

There was discussion on eligibility and Amy said that they must meet WIA eligibility standards. Peter said that he would be glad to get 2 or 3 youth and then have a pool to draw from in the future.

Mike Sweeney said that we need to consider working with Joe Bevilacqua to initiate a one half day conference for small business in the Merrimack Valley to make them aware of this and ask for their participation. Peter Matthews said that he could host 50-60 participants at his facility and Chili said that he can accommodate them at the Career Center. It was agreed that over the next week they would firm up a date and plan. Deborah Andrews suggested doing more than one. Mike Sweeney said perhaps another one in the other end of the region such as Salisbury.

Chick LoPiano expressed interest and asked about the wage and the hours of work as well as the number of supervisors per participants.

Amy said there is an \$8 minimum per hour and the number of hours would be worked out. This is an opportunity to do almost anything and the push is to spend this money effectively and offer youth a meaningful job experience.

Mike Sweeney then spoke about a recent conference call with Secretary Bump during which he emphasized the union issue. He feels that the state is trying not to engage this issue. There is a potential for this to be ugly with youth working and folks being laid off. He feels that the state needs to be on record and they need to aggressively address this issue. He said that he would like this committee to send a letter weighing in on this matter.

Motion by Mike Sweeney to authorize the committee to draft a letter to either the Governor or Secretary of Labor Bump regarding the union issue as it relates to the stimulus funds and circulate it to committee members. Once the committee concurs, to then send the letter out. Motion passed.

7. OSY Youth RFP

Amy explained that there is approximately \$144,000 available for Out-of-School Youth Educational and Occupational Skills money. The Youth Council voted to recommend approval of procuring for FY2009-2010 targeting out-of-school youth.

Motion by Chick LoPiano seconded by Mike Sweeney to approve the recommendation for an RFP for Out-of-School Youth Educational and Occupational Skills. Motion passed.

8. Other Business

• Green Jobs Grant

Fred Carberry reported that the Green Jobs Grant was a partnership with American Training and that we have not heard back on funding to date.

• Ex-Offenders Re-entry Grant

Fred then said that he has heard that we are being funded for the Ex-Offenders Re-entry Grant and that an official announcement will be forth coming.

9. Adjourn

Having no further business Chick LoPiano made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by Mike Sweeney. Motion passed and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell

Recorder