



**Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School**  
**115 Amesbury Line Road**  
**Haverhill, MA**

**QUARTERLY MEETING**

**Minutes**  
**Tuesday, May 6, 2014**  
**7:30 AM**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Edward Bartkiewicz, Joseph Bevilacqua, Christine Bradshaw, Melissa Cerasuolo, Ron Contrado, Supt. William DeRosa, Evelyn Friedman, Susan Jepson, Supt. John Lavoie, Peter Matthews, George Noel, Donna Rivera, Nancy Tariot, Abel Vargas, Bob Westcott, Cal Williams, Ray Wrobel, Juan Yepez

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Sven Amirian, Francisco Brea, Brian DePena, Atty. Wendy Estrella, Joe Gangi, Jr., Dr. Lane Glenn, Gary Hale, Robert Ingala, Steve Kfoury, Atty. Robert LeBlanc, Jeff Linehan, Michael Munday, Alberto Nunez, Ann Ormond, Cindy Phelan, Steve Salvo, Lester Schindel, Jeff Sheehy, Michael Strem, Stanley Usovicz

**GUESTS PRESENT:**

Mayor Daniel Rivera, Michael Bevilacqua, Dale Hollingshead, Dennis Marcella

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Rafael Abislaiman, Cristy Gomez, Odanis Hernandez, Mary Kivell, Brian Norris, Corina Ruiz

**1. Call to Order & Welcome**

A quorum being present, Joseph Bevilacqua called the meeting to order 7:45 a.m.

**2. Approval of Minutes of March 12, 2014**

Chairman Bevilacqua asked for a motion on the minutes of the March 12, 2014 quarterly board meeting.

**Motion by Cal Williams to approve the minutes of the March 12, 2014 meeting as submitted. Bob Westcott seconded the motion and motion passed unanimously.**

**3. Report of Executive Director**

**• By-law Revisions**

Joseph Bevilacqua called on Executive Director Rafael Abislaiman to present his report first because Ralph is called to another meeting on Long Term Unemployment. Rafael said that this is the first time in four years that he's leaving a Board meeting early and noted that Mayor Rivera is definitely interested in the work that the WIB is doing because this is the second quarterly meeting in a row that he has attended. Rafael then referred to the revised By-laws which were included in the meeting packets. He said that there are a few changes to make the bylaws better match with

WIA law and with the way things truly operate. He explained that WIA mandates a partnership between a volunteer board and the Mayor. The WIB proposes and the Mayor approves or rejects. He then asked if board members had any questions or concerns with the changes. There were no questions.

**Motion by Cal Williams, seconded by Peter Matthews, to approve the By-law revisions as submitted. Motion passed.**

Joe then said that Mayor Rivera is interested in putting people back to work and called on him to say a few words.

Mayor of Lawrence and MVWIB Chief Elected Official Daniel Rivera stated that his administration is focused on increasing the number of jobs available in Lawrence and increasing the number of Lawrencians who are working. He thanked Rafael, Joe and the staff for their work and said that Rafael is leaving to attend a conference on long term unemployment at MIT and he is pleased that our executive director will be attending. We want to make the WIB a great place with the guidance and support of the board.

Rafael then referred to a handout listing MA Wagner-Peyser 90% fund allocations for Fiscal Year 2015 by region. He noted that these are federal funds and that the trend for our dislocated workers allocation is downward toward 9<sup>th</sup> place. Unemployed people cease to be counted in official numbers once they are off unemployment. He said that we need to work to get customers working quickly and even temporarily or our numbers will continue to go down. A better indication of actual employment is the workforce participation rate that tracks the number of people with jobs.

Bob Westcott asked if the WIB does anything for folks still off of UI and Rafael said that we work with anyone wanting services. He said that with automation, robotics and other trends, in 10 to 20 years there may be increasingly fewer jobs to be had.

#### **4. Report of Chair**

Joseph Bevilacqua mentioned being invited to a meeting with Congressman Tierney and Senator Warren on this issue and cited the fact that education plays a major role. He spoke about apprenticeships as an opportunity to showcase talents that hopefully lead to jobs. This major issue ties education and workforce development together. Joe said that the United Way and other social service programs are increasingly involved in job training. He said that the idea of volunteerism as a way to keep folks on a work regimen is another way to approach getting folks back into a job.

Joe then thanked Superintendent DeRosa and Whittier for hosting today's board meeting and called on the superintendent for his remarks.

#### **5. Presentation: Superintendent William DeRosa, Whittier Regional Vocational High School**

Superintendent DeRosa welcomed the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board to Whittier stating that this is a great opportunity to showcase their accomplishments as well as an opportunity for students to learn new skills and meet potential employers. He said that this year Whittier Tech reached a milestone by celebrating their 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with this year's senior class marking their 40<sup>th</sup> commencement.

Superintendent DeRosa said that he was proud to report that for the 8<sup>th</sup> consecutive year Whittier has had a 100% pass rate on the MCAS exam. He said that they have become stronger academically and stronger in their career and technical areas and are increasingly meeting Greater Merrimack Valley employer demands.

He continued stating that they recently expanded Machine Technology with an additional staff member and received approval for a hospitality program as a component of Culinary Arts. They also have a 98.2% graduation rate compared to the state average of 85%. The superintendent said that their dropout rate is 0.4% compared to the state average of 2.2%. He said that their students are staying in school and completing the programs within 4 years and gaining both college and career readiness skills.

Whittier has a 93% positive placement rate for its graduating senior class; 70% of those students identify as going on to 2 or 4 year colleges, or to specialized technical schools. The remaining 23% identify as being employed in their field of study or in the military. Supt. DeRosa said that in addition to preparing their students to be college and career ready, they have maintained a high cooperative education rate. To date, Whittier has 207 students successfully placed in business and industry during the school year and many of those placements will become permanent employment opportunities for the students.

The newest initiative at Whittier is a push toward 1:1 technology. It is their aggressive goal to have an iPad for all entering freshman and grade 10 students. Staff has transitioned to Apple Mac Books and whiteboard technology which are all iPad compatible. He also said that their commitment to community service continues to grow citing the example of the rebuilding of the toll house for the Rocks Village Bridge project. The school has also provided catering services to numerous community and senior centers, like the annual St. Patrick's Day Luncheon in the town of Salisbury.

Supt. DeRosa said that they have established an Interact Club through the Haverhill Rotary and those students are actively engaged in community meals in Haverhill. Additionally, they have provided Adirondack chairs for the Merrimack Valley Hospice, Boys and Girls Club of Lower Merrimack Valley and Career Resources to raise money in auctions.

## **6. Reports of Committee Chairs**

### **• *Planning Committee***

Planning Committee Chair Peter Matthews said that this past Quarter, all Planning Committee members present agreed to the following changes in MVWIB's Individual Training Account Policy. They:

1. Raised the Adult and Dislocated Worker Individual Training Account (ITA) cap to \$6K from \$4,500;
2. Lowered the Adult and Dislocated Worker minimum academic test threshold from 7.9 to 6.9 with joint agreement required by both the VWCC and MVWIB Executive Directors for individual levels below 6.9;
3. Gave preference to individuals who live or worked in our region but removed the obligation that veterans be the only exception to in-region residency, now it is preferred but not mandatory that people live in the region. WIA funding is federal and because enrollment has become difficult, we can accept U.S Citizens and legal residents from out of the region;
4. Made it so an outstanding ABE/ESOL student who is endorsed by a WIA Title II education provider may be enrolled with slightly lower academic credentials. Outstanding is defined as someone making rapid progress and having an excellent class attendance record;

Peter said that these four changes were made to increase the number of people they can enroll into WIA funded training. Many better educated clients were rejecting IT-related training because at \$4,500 per training, they needed to pay a substantial portion of course training costs out of pocket. Less expensive courses are generally used by people with lower academic skills and, unfortunately, many lower skilled people cannot afford to be in training because their UI payments are too low or because they wait till the last moment to train. The reduction of time people can be on UI obliged many to return to work rather than be trained for better jobs. This situation has made it difficult for ValleyWorks to enroll people.

Peter said that those difficulties were compounded by the first quarter sequester when we didn't have the WIA money to train customers. That got them off to a slow start. They lost the first quarter due to sequestration and must reach their numbers in  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the time. ValleyWorks staff have also been assisting people to use the new automated UI-On line system. That sometimes takes longer than when staff were just in-putting information for clients.

Many of the people who are visiting the Career Center just want to get their benefits and are not applying for training. Individuals who have many weeks of UI and who get a good sized check are sometimes not in a hurry to get a job and seek training only toward the end of their UI period. Because the UI period was reduced in length, many people just had to go back to work without any training.

Federally and in various States, folks are exploring ways to encourage people to work even if they are collecting UI. There is real concern that businesses are not finding skilled workers and that long-term unemployment further softens foundational skills. There's also a growing realization that education needs to be better aligned with workforce development and that we need to begin talking to kids earlier about the value of work. Peter said that as a society, we must do a much better job of ensuring that there are jobs available and that folks are ready for them. That isn't easy because, as an extreme example, a few businesses who got together to develop common training programs were sued for collusion.

WIA Title I deals with workforce training and WIA Title II deals largely with ESOL and remedial education. We need to look for ways to leverage Title II programs with our Title I programming to more effectively serve lower income people and help them gain higher incomes. We want to use WIA Title I to help people prepare for specific jobs and should be working to appropriately compliment WIA Title II programs so that they can succeed with their ESOL and ABE efforts.

Peter continued stating that for example, if we more clearly show and remind people of what is needed to enroll into Title I programs, more students may work harder and their outcomes may improve in Title II programs. If both systems are seen as doing the same things, then some students may postpone doing what it takes to move forward. Now we often have a separate, two silo system with very little productive and clear connections between the two and with mutually unclear and overlapping responsibilities. Our Title I resources do not match the problem. We should coordinate its use with higher education, K to 12 education and Title II programs to help more people get jobs quickly.

The devil is in the details. We must change to match current problems and help customers with low- and mid-level skills get jobs as quickly as possible. We must find better ways of matching resources to people who really want to use the opportunities offered by education and training.

We must also facilitate improvements at ValleyWorks and help find ways to better match today's situation.

Peter then said that he wanted to report that during this past quarter, the Planning Committee also voted to support Haverhill's efforts to keep the Southwick Company in Haverhill and dissuade them from moving to North Carolina. Southwick currently employs about 200 people. If it stays it plans to grow to about 400 employees. The city has asked if the WIB would go on record as supporting Southwick staying in Haverhill by promoting a budget where State Workforce Training Funds and some of our WIA dollars would be used to help train Southwick employees. Any support would be contingent on them staying and we passed a motion to that effect.

On yet another subject, Peter said that he is glad to say that ValleyWorks will be installed into a larger and much more attractive site at Northern Essex's Haverhill campus in about a month and a half. We will be paying 60% less per square foot than we were paying at our downtown Haverhill site and will have utilities included to boot. In downtown Haverhill we paid 60% more per square foot and separately paid for all utilities. At Northern Essex we will have a partner that has thousands of students interested in building careers through training and education. The Planning Committee thinks this is a win-win-win situation for all parties concerned – the MVWIB, the College, and students who are looking for a good job.

Peter concluded his remarks by stating that there's been movement toward short and long-term clarity as to our Lawrence career center and WIB office location. Rafael is helping to read and weigh proposals. The question the City and we face is whether to wait and be part of newly rebuilt downtown space or to use other sites that are a little further away from downtown. Because of the costs involved, we would prefer not to move twice within the next three years but we need to help weigh a great many factors, including our regional nature and our desire to help the City of Lawrence, which has held liability for our workforce development funding for about two generations.

Susan Jepson said that she wanted to relay a success story of the Advanced Manufacturing Program. Her client, a mature worker, went through the cycle in Lowell and was hired at age 63 and is no longer a client. She knows that MVWIB is part of that Advanced Manufacturing Program.

Joe mentioned the Mayor's support of a training program for Flo Serve and said that with the retirement boom coming we need ways to remain competitive in manufacturing.

- ***Youth Council***

Youth Council Chair Cal Williams began his report stating that this quarter we partnered with the Lawrence Family Development Charter School and provided resources for a Future City Competition and an Annual Engineering Celebration. The Lawrence Family Development Charter School project had five teams to participate in the Future City Competition. The teams designed a virtual City and Transportation system. The process involved a great many STEM processes or activities that have to do with Science, Technology Engineering and Math. The project placed major emphasis on research and engineering ideas to support youth teams' understanding of energy efficient future cities. By participating in these activities students learned about clean renewable energy for transportation, wind and solar powered buildings, and hydropower plans. The project gave students the opportunity to explore science in and outside the classroom. Thirteen youth learned about careers in science, technology, engineering, and math by building a virtual city and by understanding the concepts behind how to build it right.

Cal continued stating that the MVWIB and ValleyWorks Career Center have submitted an application to Commonwealth Corporation for Summer YouthWorks funding. The Merrimack Valley YouthWorks program will provide summer employment to at least 309 youth. Subsidized job enrollment goals are 185 kids in Lawrence, 93 in Haverhill and 31 in Methuen.

The Lawrence YouthWorks project will be coordinated with Mayor Daniel Rivera's Summer Employment Initiative for Youth. A collaboration of the Mayor's office, Greater Lawrence Community Action Council, Inc., the Lawrence Boys Club and the MVWIB, the Mayor's initiative is expected to provide significant additional support and employment opportunities for youth in the private and public sectors. Mayor Rivera has made economic development and jobs for Lawrence residents a top priority in his administration. The Mayor's goal is to double the number of Lawrence youth employed this summer. The MVWIB is urging new and traditional worksite partners to consider directly employing or providing a donation to partially or fully subsidize an additional youth for each youth that is fully funded through YouthWorks.

We hope to create a workable balance that meets youths' and employers' summer employment needs, and acknowledges the long term value provided by both past and future employer partners. Youth learn through their summer work experience. Business Service Representative Susan Ingham at ValleyWorks and WIB staff are currently reaching out to businesses for summer jobs.

Cal said that we highly encourage board members to be part of this program by becoming a worksite, hiring a youth directly, supporting the funding of a youth at your worksite, or providing a donation that will support additional youth employment in the City. Statistics show that Youth employment experience is critical to future success.

All subsidized Youth program participants may work up to 25 hours per week at \$8.00 per hour for six to seven weeks. 20% of the summer youth must be considered at high risk. 62 youth will be enrolled in this category. The required barriers include homelessness, being in state custody, performing below grade level, or being court involved.

Staff will be available in the schools to assist with the paperwork. Applications are due on May 16<sup>th</sup> and there will be a lottery drawing on May 30<sup>th</sup> with notification by letter. All youth program participants will take part in fifteen hours of a work-readiness training using the structured curriculum developed by Commonwealth Corporation's *Signaling Success*. Up to ten hours of the curriculum will be front loaded prior to the start of the employment period; the remaining five hours of the optional material will be delivered in a mid-season and end-of-season workshops. Jobs will begin July 7<sup>th</sup> and last for six to seven weeks.

Cal said that we will ensure that the 2014 YouthWorks program is integrated into the region's overall youth employment strategy and coordinate with all other youth and young adult programming funded through or by the MVWIB which includes WIA, Pathways, Connecting Activities, and BOG programming. Eligible youth enrolled in these programs will be prioritized for enrollment to explore opportunities through Merrimack Valley YouthWorks. Cal then extended an invitation to the Mayor to attend a Youth Council meeting noting that they are held on the second Wednesday of the month.

## **7. Other Business**

Joe Bevilacqua said that there will be a quarterly meeting of the State WIB Board which he co-chairs on June 26<sup>th</sup> at Sal's Riverwalk with a special guest speaker on Washington policies that impact us and best practices. He invited members to attend.

Mayor Rivera then addressed the board and said that the youth we are talking about for summer jobs are 14-21 and 185 positions are free. He said that there is so much need and if businesses contribute \$1,550 for one student, we will give them another at no cost. They would be getting 2 for 1. The Mayor asked folks to consider this option which will help youth develop important soft skills.

Eddie Bartkeiwicz said that is a good point on soft skills as that is something all employees need in order to succeed. He mentioned that it is difficult for some folks coming from a job they may have had for several years and who do not have the soft skills necessary today. Mr. Bartkeiwicz said that the Lawrence Career Center is helping clients gain those skills. Eddie said that you can't just place someone in an apprenticeship and the process we should be working on is teaching soft skills. That is what they are doing at ValleyWorks.

Joe Bevilacqua then urged everyone to support and participate in the Summer Youth Program. He thanked Whittier students and staff for hosting today's meeting.

**8. Adjournment**

**Having no further business Ray Wrobel made a motion to adjourn and Ron Contrado seconded the motion. Motion passed and meeting was adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Mary Kivell*

Recorder