



# GREATER LOWELL WORKFORCE BOARD

107 Merrimack St  
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MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board  
March 11, 2020  
Zoom Meeting 8:00-9:15 AM

**Call to Order:** 8:05 AM

**Presiding Officer:** Ray Wrobel, Chair

**Attendees:** Kimberly Bodkin, Judy Burke, Stephanie Cronin, Jonathan DaSilva, Jill Davis, Maureen Fitzpatrick, Karen Frederick, Charlene Jancsy, Maureen Kriff, Michelle LaGrega, Stephanie Lee, Nancy Ludwig, Elizabeth McKiernan, John Palmieri, Erin Quinn, Cynthia Smith, Beverly Woods, Ray Wrobel.

**Quorum present.**

**Staff:** Peter Farkas, Katy Gentile, Meelynn Wong, Cathy Sturtevant, Beatriz Sierra, Jay Green, Alexis Ciccanti,

**Guest Speakers:** Ryan Cossette, Alexis Hood, Kelly Puffer (Youth funded program participants)

## I. Welcome

Chair Wrobel welcomed the group. He then informed the board members that we would have three guest speakers today who are here to talk about their experience participating in youth programs offered by the MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board and the MassHire Lowell Career Center. After discussing the agenda and the guest speakers, Mr. Wrobel informed the board that the minutes from the last meeting needed to be approved.

## II. Approval of Sep December 10, 2020, Minutes

Chair Wrobel requested review of the December 10, 2020, minutes. With no comments or questions and a quorum present, Chair Wrobel requested a motion to accept the December 10, 2020, minutes. Motion made by Charlene Jancsy; seconded by Nancy Ludwig. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Vote: Unanimous.

## III. Guest Speakers – Youth Programming Highlights - Participant Experiences

- Ryan Cossette, Connecting Activities, Greater Lowell Technical High School
- Alexis Hood, WIOA Youth, Middlesex Community College
- Kelly Puffer, Young Parenting Program

Peter Farkas gave a brief overview of all the youth programs offered by both the workforce board and career center. Mr. Farkas provided a breakdown of all the FY'21 youth grants which included a description of each program, the funding source, and the amount of funding. Youth programs discussed included: Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth, Connecting Activities, Summer Jobs, Shannon Community Safety Initiative (CSI), YouthWorks – Year-Round, YouthWorks – Supplemental Year-Round (carry over from summer due to COVID-19), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Young Parents Program (YPP), Pre-

Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), The Career Academy, Community Teamwork Inc./YouthBuild

Funding sources include: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Transitional Assistance, Commonwealth Corporation, City of Lowell via U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Shannon Community Safety Initiative (CSI), Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC)

All 3 youth participants/guest speakers were introduced by the MHGLWB and MHLCC staff who have provided services to them and a description of each youth program was provided. Beatriz Sierra discussed a recent video made by our employer partners to assist youth with preparing for interviews.

Each of the young people explained the services they received from the program they were enrolled in, what they are doing now and how the program helped them. Several members of the board, including Charlene Jancsy, Judy Burke, Nancy Ludwig, Maureen Fitzpatrick, Maureen Kriff and Jonathan DaSilva commented after all 3 spoke on how great of a job they did and thanked them all for sharing their stories.

## **V. Overview of the Northeast Healthcare Hub – Meelynn Wong**

Meelynn Wong of the MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board was introduced by Ray Wrobel to provide an overview and update on the Northeast Healthcare Hub Project.

Ms. Wong informed the board members that the 3 partner workforce boards include MassHire Greater Lowell, MassHire North Shore, and MassHire Merrimack Valley. The funding was provided for a planning grant to start off with. Ms. Wong detailed the goals of the planning grant:

Phase 1, through April 2021:

- Establish a Business Leadership Team (BLT), including acute care/outpatient, long term care, community health care, and home care, that, through surveys, focus groups, LMI analysis, and other methods, will assess, identify, and prioritize current industry talent needs
- Establish an educational leadership team to respond to these needs and identify and/or develop state-of-the art training responses to these needs
- Prepare a final white paper documenting this work, leading to Phase 2 - implementation of most immediate training needs agreed upon by the BLT
- Identify incumbent certified nurse assistants (CNA) and medical assistants (MA) interested in becoming nurses (Group 1).
- Identify new individuals who are interested in nursing but are in need of employment immediately in the CNA/MA occupations. (Group 2).
- (Group 1) Provide career coaching, academic assessments, and tutoring, mentoring and personal support to understand what steps they need to take to remain in their current positions while they are applying for, and eventually attending, nursing school or higher-level clinical position (LPN or RN programs).
- (Group 2) Health care employers interview new applicants and make an offer that they will hire members of this group once they pass the CNA or MA course. Once through training, the individuals begin work and start to move up the pathway toward nursing school or higher-level clinical position.

- Courses and professional development made available to both group 1 and group 2. Employers would arrange work schedules to allow for training and education scheduled in a convenient manner. Employers would also provide mentors and tutors from within their workforce to stay with the employee along the way.
- The ultimate goal of this project is to have a percentage of all project participants either in nursing school/training for higher-level clinical position or entering nursing school/training for higher-level clinical position at the end of this two-year grant.

Maureen Fitzpatrick added she fully supports this initiative as Lowell General Hospital is struggling to hire certified nurse assistants since COVID-19, as well as other positions within the hospital. Ms. Wong said that she is hearing that across the board from all employers in the healthcare industry, and the predicted shortage of trained registered nurses is an issue.

## **VI. MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board Report – Peter Farkas**

### **One-Stop Career Center Operator RFP**

Mr. Farkas explained the process for the One Stop Operator Request for Proposal (RFP). Mandated by WIOA – local workforce boards must competitively procure a career center operator not less than every 4 years. The Board went through process in March 2017. For this procurement, there are 2 options available: procurement of career center service provider & operator or bid just the operator. The Executive Committee recommended procuring solely the operator. The tentative timeline for the RFP is as follows:

- Release RFP in early April
- Recommendation to Board in late May
- Vote on recommendation at the June 17<sup>th</sup> Board meeting
- Contract for July 1<sup>st</sup>

### **Update on Grant Development**

Mr. Farkas provided an update on funding since the December meeting. Funding included \$80,000 CDBG/City of Lowell CARES Act, to provide occupational skills training and job development services to at least 7 additional dislocated workers who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 and who reside in the City of Lowell; \$155,556, through Commonwealth Corporation to provide subsidized work experiences to low-income youth, utilizing supplemental funding from summer of 2020. Placements will occur between February 2021 and June 2021 for up to 46 youth. Programming is a combination of virtual and in person work experiences and includes the purchase of laptops for the youth and a contract with Mill City Grows for a service-learning project. Additionally, through Commonwealth Corporation, the MHLCC was awarded additional funding to expand Summer YouthWorks Programming (summer of 21') to additional cities outside of Lowell: Applied for Tyngsboro and Dracut, awarded additional funding for Dracut. Funding amount is wrapped into overall funding for Summer YouthWorks which is predicted to be \$722,000 which includes the increase; \$50,000 annual funding for four years, through the Lowell Housing Authority Jobs Plus Program to assign and seasoned bilingual Career Advisor from the MHLCC to be stationed on site weekly, Monday through Friday, at North Common Village, a Lowell Housing Authority Site, to provide education, training, career readiness and employment services to low-income residents.

## State Budget

Mr. Farkas briefly reviewed the proposed Governor's budget. Most of the totals in the Governor's budget are level with pre COVID levels (FY20).

<b>Budget Priority</b>	<b>FY'20 Funding</b>	<b>FY'21 Funding</b>	<b>FY'22 Gov Budget</b>
<b>MassHire Career Centers</b> 7003-0803	\$3.96M	\$5M	\$3.96M
<b>Workforce Competitive Trust Fund</b> 1595-1075	\$7M	\$10M	\$7M
<b>Career Technical Initiative</b> 7002-1091	N/A	\$4M	\$15.3M
<b>YouthWorks/Summer Jobs</b> 7002-0012	\$15.5M	\$20M	\$16.2M
<b>Connecting Activities</b> 7027-0019	\$4.5M	\$6.4M	\$6M

Mr. Farkas also mentioned two federal initiatives:

- **Support for Small Businesses:** The American Rescue Plan increases funding for the successful Paycheck Protection Program and expands eligibility for participation in it. It also creates a \$28.6 billion Restaurant Revitalization Fund to aid restaurants and bars with 20 or fewer locations that have been hit hard by the pandemic.
- **Extension of Unemployment Benefits:** The American Rescue Plan extends access to unemployment benefits, including the PUA program that provides benefits to self-employed workers, through September 6th for workers laid off because of the pandemic.

## Greater Lowell Updates

Mr. Farkas presented on unemployment data for Greater Lowell. The current unemployment rate is 6.9% in Greater Lowell. Mr. Farkas then reviewed information concerning the labor force in Greater Lowell. The labor force includes all people aged 16 and older who are either working or actively looking for work. From February to April 2021: 18,000 individuals have dropped out of the labor force or decrease of 12%, 7,000 people have dropped out of the labor force since February alone.

Occupational Skills Training Recruitments: Mr. Farkas reviewed all the training programs that the MH Lowell Career Center and MH GLWB are recruiting for. Programs include machining, electronics, Google IT, plumbing, pharmacy tech, auto tech, and welding.

## Extension of the Workforce Board's Strategic Plan

Mr. Farkas explained that the current strategic plan covers from January 1, 2018 - June 30, 2021, and identifies the following priority industries:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Healthcare & Social Assistance
- Professional, Technical, & Scientific (IT)
- Education
- Construction

Mr. Farkas requested to extend current strategic plan through December 31, 2021, and next steps are to reconvene the Strategic Planning Committee in the early fall.

**Motion to extend the current strategic plan**

Mr. Wrobel made motion to extend the current strategic plan through December 21, 2021. Motion made by Judy Burke, seconded by Maureen Fitzpatrick. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Unanimous.

**VII. Adjourn**

Chair Wrobel thanked everyone for attending. The Chair asked if there was any other business. Seeing none, the Chair requested a motion to adjourn. With no other business, motion made by Judy Burke; seconded by Jonathan DaSilva. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Unanimous. The meeting adjourned at 9:13 AM.