



GREATER LOWELL WORKFORCE BOARD

107 Merrimack St
Lowell, MA 01852
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MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board
December 16th, 2021
Zoom Meeting 8:00-9:15 AM

Call to Order: 8:04 AM

Presiding Officer: Ray Wrobel, Chair

Attendees: Kimberly Bodkin, Judy Burke, John Kovach, Stephanie Cronin, Karen Frederick, Beth Goguen, Jonathan DaSilva, Jill Davis, Maureen Fitzpatrick, Yovanie Baez-Rose, Charlene Jancsy, Stephanie Lee, Cynthia Smith, Maureen Kriff, Michele LaGrega, Nancy Ludwig, Elizabeth McKiernan, John Palmieri, Beverly Woods, Ray Wrobel. *Quorum present.*

Staff: Peter Farkas, Katy Gentile, Meelynn Wong, Cathy Sturtevant, Beatriz Sierra, Jay Green, Nancy Gagnon, Shaun McCarthy, Shannon Norton

Presenters & Guests: Daisy Patel, Mike St. Bernard, Erika Irby, Genesis Otero, Siobhan Sheehan, Christina Shanahan

I. Welcome & Introductions

Chair Wrobel welcomed the group and provided an overview of the agenda. He highlighted that the Board would vote on approving the region's FY'22 Annual Plan which includes the budget and service level goals for employers and jobseekers. He also welcomed Yovani Baez-Rose, Director of Economic Development for City of Lowell, to the Board.

II. Approval of September 23, 2021 Minutes

Chair Wrobel requested review of the September 23, 2021, minutes. With no comments or questions and a quorum present, Chair Wrobel requested a motion to accept the September 23, 2021, minutes. Motion made by Stephanie Cronin; seconded by Maureen Fitzpatrick. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Vote: Unanimous.

III. Presentations: Impact of Connecting Activities & WIOA Youth

Peter Farkas highlighted some of the youth programs that operate through the Workforce Board, WIOA and Connecting Activities. The four presenters were involved with a variety of programs. One was an intern at Enterprise Bank, while another participated in Skills Build in Hopkinton, a Thermo Fisher employee will talk about the successful program they run with interns. Lastly, a teacher at Shawsheen Valley Technical High School, will talk about his experience working on the teacher externship program put on by DESE.

IV. New Local Strategic Plan

Meelynn Wong talked about the local strategic plan. The plan covers 3.5 years starting with January 1, 2022, running all the way until end of year June 30, 2025. The plan focuses on key operation

principals of WIOA and guides the Board through the ever changing economic and political landscape.

The overall philosophy being that skilled workers are critical to our region and our businesses remain competitive in the Commonwealth. While the economy is improving, the region continues to face challenges that need to be addressed: long term affect COVID-19 has on the workforce supply and business demand. Equity and the ability for all populations to be able to go back to access work. Long term unemployed/underemployed workers continue to struggle to obtain employment or underemployed. Skills gaps to many industries remain and suffer from a shortfall of qualified workers. The priority's action plan going forward will be to align the workforce and business demands while trying to serve all job seekers. Be an advocate and resource for development activities. Create and leverage partnerships to raise funding for resources. All the while keeping a strong board and career center operations.

The priority industries for the GLWB are: Advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare and Social Assistance, Education, Professional, Technical and Scientific (IT) and Construction.

V. MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board Director Report

Peter Farkas provided an overview of the current unemployment rates. The last 4-5 months have improved from 5 -5.5%. Lowell is at 4.9%% and Dunstable is at the low end still hovering at 3.2%.

Peter Farkas provided an overview of job postings in Greater Lowell in the last 30 days. Between November 16th and December 15th, there were 4,400 job openings in the Greater Lowell area. In this same area, 7,500 people remain unemployed. Industries with the most open jobs are, Manufacturing, Healthcare, Retail, Technical/Scientific, Food Services, Education Services, and Transportation & Warehousing.

Additional funding coming to the workforce development system will be state budget and Covid relief money. There are now 104 million dollars toward funding for upskilling in the Commonwealth that will come from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Commonwealth FY 2022 Budget. This money will go until December 31, 2024. Millions of dollars coming to the Board in coming years in addition to core funding.

Peter also discussed new regional roles, called Market Makers, that will help employers connect to training pipelines. The mission of these Market Maker positions will be to connect businesses with training grant opportunities and partners with training providers to better meet employers' skill needs.

Lastly, Mr. Farkas provided an overview of upcoming events and meetings.

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. Motion made by Maureen Fitzpatrick; seconded by Stephanie Cronin. The meeting adjourned at 9:12 AM.