



GREATER LOWELL WORKFORCE BOARD

107 Merrimack St
Lowell, MA 01852
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MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board
September 23, 2021
Zoom Meeting 8:00-9:15 AM

Call to Order: 8:03 AM

Presiding Officer: Ray Wrobel, Chair

Attendees: Kimberly Bodkin, Judy Burke, John Kovach, Stephanie Cronin, Jonathan DaSilva, Jill Davis, Maureen Fitzpatrick, Yovani 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, Amy Veillette, Shaun McCarthy, Kathy Dupont, Shannon Norton

Presenters: Kathy Dupont, Nancy Gagnon, and Amy Veillette

I. Welcome & Introductions

Chair Wrobel welcomed the group and provided an overview of the agenda. He highlighted that the Board will 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. Yovani is in the process of joining the workforce board.

II. Approval of June 24, 2021 Minutes

Chair Wrobel requested review of the June 24, 2021, minutes. With no comments or questions and a quorum present, Chair Wrobel requested a motion to accept the June 24, 2021, minutes. Motion made by Stephanie Cronin; seconded by Nancy Ludwig. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Vote: Unanimous.

III. MassHire Award Winner

Respect Award – Janet O'Brien and Kathy Dupont

Peter Farkas explained the MassHire Awards are held annually to spotlight the contributions of the workforce system staff, partners, and participants. The MassHire values include collaboration respect, reliability, ingenuity, and living MassHire. Greater Lowell has won three awards including this year and \$10,000 is awarded to the region for each win.

Shannon Norton introduced Janet O'Brien and Kathy Dupont that work in the Retention Program. Kathy Dupont explained that the Retention Grant serves low income or individuals receiving SNAP benefits and shared that it was very difficult during the pandemic. Participants are typically referred from enrolled participants in WIOA Adult, Comprehensive Integrated Employment Services (CIES), Work Participant Program (WPP), and other various grants. Services provided include two-years of job retention, supportive services, counseling and referrals. Other services provided were supplies

offered through a Walmart grant, financial literacy, assistance for utility bills, Uber/Lyft cards, and a book gifting event.

IV. Highlights of Career Center Skills Training Programs

Shannon Norton shared that the MassHire Lowell Young Adult Career Center had its grand opening and shared pictures of the ribbon cutting and space. Peter Farkas provided an overview of the Occupational Skills Training Recruitments, and explained along with core funding we have received funding through partnering with Middlesex, Nashoba Tech, and Greater Lowell Tech.

Amy Veillette provided an overview on Intake and Eligibility. Initial assessment includes meeting with individuals, collecting documentation, and doing assessments through eSkill or scheduled for a TABE – a basic reading and math test. Once accepted to a training, staff work with individuals to prepare them for the training and the subsequent job search. Some of the challenges is outreach and finding the appropriate people for the trainings. There’s monthly case management, career readiness services, job placement, follow-up services, and potential referral to the “Retention” grant.

Nancy Gagnon highlighted the National Emergency Grant. Funds from U.S. Dept. of Labor to respond to the needs of dislocated workers and communities impacted by COVID-19. 25 job seekers were served, and types of training provided included commercial driver’s license and dental assisting.

Ms. Gagnon also provided an overview of the Move to Work program funded by the Dept. of Housing and Community Development. It is a 5-year pilot program – a DHCD/MassHire partnership to provide long-term career development and support to DHCD Housing Choice Voucher holders – Section 8 Housing. Grant funds a “Career Navigator” to assist participants with developing a career pathway with the high wage jobs which looks beyond initial employment. There were 54 referrals in the first year and 9 people attended occupational skills training.

V. MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board Report

Peter Farkas provided an overview of the current unemployment rates. The last 4-5 months have remained pretty steady from 5 -5.5%. Lowell is at 6.3% and Dunstable is at the low end of 3.2%. The Federal Unemployment Benefits expired Sept. 4, 2021. Two major programs expired were the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). In Greater Lowell about 6,013 were on PEUC and 6,244 on PUA.

As a result the State put together a MA Virtual Job Fair on August 16 -20. It was the first of its kind and about 1,693 employers and 17,217 job seekers attended. In Greater Lowell there were about 68 employers and 650 jobseekers registered, with an 80% attendance rate.

Mr. Farkas provided an overview of job postings in Greater Lowell in the last 30 days. There are about 5,100 job postings that is an additional 1,300 job postings since June. The highest number of job postings by industry were in Manufacturing with 1,214 job postings, Healthcare with 622, and Retail with 561 job postings.

Mr. Farkas provided an update that the local strategic plan will expire Dec. 31, 2021 and it identifies the region’s priority industries advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare & Social Assistance,

Professional, technical, and scientific (IT), Education, and Construction. There is overlap between the 4-year plan and the Northeast Labor Market Blueprint. The Board will work on the local Strategic plan internally.

The FY'22 Annual Plan & Budget is due to the State by September 30th. The Workforce Performance & Opportunities Committee has a recommendation for career center performance goals for job seeker and employer services. An overview of the recommended FY'22 MassHire Greater Lowell Service Goals was provided.

Mr. Farkas also provided a budget overview. For FY'21 the budget was about \$5.6M and for FY'22 the Board will submit a budget of \$6.5M. Reasons for the increase include a \$275k increase in new core DOL/WIOA funding, \$330k increase in key state budget funding – Connecting Activities & Career Center Line Item, and \$400k in new competitive grants secured. A review of revenues and expenses was provided for FY'22.

Mr. Farkas explained WIOA allows for up to 100% of funds to be transferred between the low-income adult and dislocated worker programs. The request is to transfer up to \$200,000 from Adult to Dislocated Worker. The justification is to increase the amount of training dollars available to DLW that need reskilling due to COVID-19.

Chair Wrobel requested a motion to approve transfer of up to \$105,000 from WIOA Adult to the Dislocated Worker Account. Motion made by Charlene Jancsy; seconded by Maureen Kriff. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Unanimous.

Chair Wrobel requested a motion to approve the FY'22 Annual Plan including the integrated budget in the amount of \$6,569,649. Motion made by Judy Burke; seconded by Elizabeth McKiernan. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Unanimous.

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. With no other business, motion made by Stephanie Cronin; seconded by Charlene Jancsy. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Unanimous. The meeting adjourned at 9:15 AM.