



# GREATER LOWELL WORKFORCE BOARD

107 Merrimack St  
Lowell, MA 01852  
978.937.9816

MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board  
September 17, 2020  
Zoom Meeting

**Call to Order:** 8:03 AM

**Presiding Officer:** Ray Wrobel, Chair

**Attendees:** Kimberly Bodkin, Judy Burke, Jonathan DaSilva, Jill Davis, Maureen Fitzpatrick, Charlene Jancsy, Nancy Ludwig, Cynthia Smith, Beverly Woods, Stephanie Cronin, Beth Goguen, Erin Quinn, Betty McKiernan, Karen Frederick, Stephanie Lee. **Quorum present.**

**Staff:** Peter Farkas, Meelynn Wong, Beatriz Sierra, Jay Green, Shannon Norton, Kathleen Gentile, Cathy Sturtevant, Alexis Ciccanti, Nancy Gagnon, Tim Hovey, Madeline Colon

**Guest Speakers:** Shaun McCarthy, LZ Nunn, Latifa Phillips, Jessica Thompson, Leanne Maniscalco, James Austin

## I. Welcome

Chair Wrobel welcomed the group and introduced three guests that would talk about their experience as participants in the National Health Emergency Grant to address the Opioid Crisis and three guest speakers to discuss the "Portrait of a Graduate."

## II. Approval of June 20, 2020 Minutes

Chair Wrobel requested review of the June 20, 2020 minutes. With no comments or questions and a quorum present, Chair Wrobel requested a motion to accept the June 20, 2020 minutes. Motion made by Charlene Jancsy; seconded by Maureen Fitzpatrick. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Vote: Unanimous.

## III. Update on Grant to Address the Opioid Crisis

Mr. Farkas stated we received a 2-year National Health Emergency Dislocated Worker Grant beginning January 2019. It is \$2.1M from the U.S. Department of Labor to address the Opioid Crisis. The goal of the grant is to assist individuals that were dislocated by the opioid epidemic to re-enter the workforce. There are three staff on the project and Lowell House, Megan's House, CTI, Middlesex Sheriff's Office, and Life Connection are partners.

Recently the program was monitored by the Dept. of Labor and overall. they were happy with the program. Mr. Farkas reviewed the grant performance to date sharing there are 127 participants enrolled in the grant, 45 in disaster recovery employment (grant paying the wages at \$15/hr for participants), 44 in occupational skills training or GED/HiSET, 38 receiving support services (includes bus passes, clothing, and daycare), 28 receiving financial literacy services, and 35 obtaining full time employment. \$1.4 million of the \$2 million grant funds have been spent to date.

Ms. Ciccanti, Project Manager, introduced the three presenters speaking on their experience as participants in the grant. The first speaker shared she received the opportunity to be trained in and work as a cross-fit trainer, to receive nonprofit management training at Middlesex Community College where she wrote two successful grants, and support services including monthly bus passes, clothes, and financial literacy help fixing her credit. The second speaker shared she enrolled in Middlesex Community College for the Addiction Counseling program. She completed her training with all As and has become new a mother recently. She was a Recovery Coach at the Tewksbury Police Station, and she just received a job offer at Lowell House. The third speaker shared he was a missionary in Lynn, Massachusetts and he was released from his position. He went to Place of Promise and learned how to lead groups and enrolled in school for the Addiction Counseling program at MCC. He was very grateful about all the experience he received and the doors that opened for him because of the program. The Board members congratulated the speakers and applauded their successes.

#### **IV. Guest Speakers on “Portrait of a Graduate”**

Mr. Wrobel introduced Latifah Phillips, Chief Equity & Engagement Officer, at Lowell Public schools. Ms. Phillips spoke about the “Portrait of a Graduate,” to prepare graduates for college, career, and community. The school district is looking at how to prepare their students for the future not only academically but culturally and for the future workforce. Considering the whole community and looking at providing equitable access to robust learning experiences. In MA, 72% of all jobs require a career certificate or college degree, 1 in 4 jobs in MA requires computer science skills. This year there are over 150,000 unfilled middle skill jobs that don’t require a bachelor’s degree, and 75% of MA business leaders struggle to find qualified candidates for open positions. The school district is working to prepare a workforce that are at the entry level and ready for higher level positions. They have been collecting and analyzing data on identifying the core competency skills needed to address industry needs.

Shaun McCarthy, Initiative Director, of Working Cities Lowell provided an overview of the survey that they created and disseminated to gather information from a wide range of industries and career levels. The survey is aimed at collecting data to identify what skills and mindsets are needed from High School in order to be successful in their career. LZ Nunn, Executive Director, of Project Learn stated the survey was sent to a large audience including students and educators. They want the industry partners to be able have their future workforce come through the school system. Mr. Farkas stated he will email the survey out to everyone again and that everyone should share this. Discussion occurred around timeline on collecting data, ensuring there is diversity including ESOL and females in the workforce, and ensuring diversity in the life science industry specifically. In the December Board meeting there will be a follow-up with the Superintendent on the results of the survey data collection.

#### **V. MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board Executive Director Report**

##### MassHire Awards

Mr. Farkas shared the MassHire Awards were held virtually in July. MassHire Lowell Career Center employees Amy Veillette, Kelly Higgins, and Tim O’Connor were 2020 finalists. Greater Lowell had the most nominees in the state for a region. Kelly Higgins won for “respect” and as a

result the region received \$10,000. The Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (NAMC) involving four workforce boards, and their career centers and Voc. Techs, received the Living MassHire Award.

### Unemployment and Labor Force

Mr. Farkas reviewed the unemployment rates as of July 2021. Greater Lowell is at 15.8% compared to MA at 16.2%. MA has one of the highest rates for unemployment in the nation. Some of the reasons may be that the entertainment, hospitality, and education sectors were hit hard during COVID-19, and these industries are largely represented in MA. Reviewing the Greater Lowell unemployment rate from February through July compared to MA revealed that the rates were similar through those months. Next Mr. Farkas reviewed the labor force - which is anyone 16 or older that is working or unemployed but looking for work. In February there were 161,752 in the labor force, it dropped dramatically in April and is slowly moving back up now at 155,620 in July.

Mr. Farkas reviewed the number of continued UI claimants by industry through August 2<sup>nd</sup>. Accommodation & Food Services industry represented the highest number of continued UI claims, then Healthcare & Social Services, Admin & Support & Waste Management, Retail Trade, and then Manufacturing. Demographics of continued UI claimants were reviewed showing 58% were female - the disparity going up between male and female claimants since June.

### Renovations

In the last five months both the Career Center and Workforce Board have been going through renovations. Pictures were provided to show the final product of the renovation.

### FY'21 Budget

Mr. Farkas reviewed the FY'21 Budget. Every year the Board submits an Annual Plan to the Department of Career services that includes the budget. The Executive Committee met to approve the Annual Plan in August. Total budget as of August was \$5.6 million. The budget is fluid so it will change throughout the year. The budget last fiscal year was \$6.1 million. Some reasons for the decrease in budget include the decrease in federal funding from the Dept. of Labor, less WIOA carry-in funds, and the funds allocated towards the grant to address the opioid crises was less.

### New Grants

Mr. Farkas highlighted the Northeast Healthcare HUB grant. A new \$25,000 grant from Commonwealth Corporation. Collaborating with MassHire North Shore and Merrimack Valley Workforce Boards, the Greater Lowell Workforce Board will be coordinating with regional healthcare employers to identify healthcare industry needs.

### Upcoming meetings

- December 10<sup>th</sup>
- March 11<sup>th</sup>
- June 17<sup>th</sup>

### **VI. 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 Elizabeth McKiernan. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Unanimous. The meeting adjourned at 9:15 AM.

DRAFT