



**Methuen City Hall**  
**Searles Building**  
**41 Pleasant Street**  
**Methuen, MA 01844**

**QUARTERLY MEETING**

**Minutes**  
**Tuesday, April 24, 2012**  
**7:30 AM**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Joseph Bevilacqua, Fred Carberry, Ron Contrado, Paul Durant, Sr., Dr. Lane Glenn, Susan Jepson, Supt. John Lavoie, Peter Matthews, Michael Munday, George Noel, Ann Ormond, Nancy Tariot, Bob Westcott, Cal Williams, Ray Wrobel, Lester Schindel, Stanley Usovicz,

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Pedro Arce, Patrick Blanchette, Wayne Capolupo, Michael Collins, Brian DePena, Supt. William DeRosa, Steve Kfoury, James Driscoll, Atty. Wendy Estrella, Julie Gadziala, Joe Gangi, Jr., Gary Hale, Robert Ingala, Atty. Robert LeBlanc, Eric Mane, Maria Miles, Alberto Nunez, Margaret O'Neill, Kevin Page, Jason Parry, Michael Strem, Cindy Phelan, Jeff Linehan, Dahianara Moran-Liranzo, Donna Rivera, Jeff Sheehy, Evan Silverio, Steve Salvo, Len Wilson, Juan Yopez

**GUESTS PRESENT:**

Mayor Stephen Zanni, Arthur Chilingirian, Dave Souza, Gary Fountain, Ken Messina, Susan Kanoff, Ellen Weinhold, Francisco Brea, William Buckley, Linda Piergeorge for Gary Hale, Paul Grant

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Rafael Abislaiman, Barbara Zeimet, Corina Ruiz, Mary Kivell, Odanis Hernandez

**1. Call to Order**

A quorum being present, Joseph Bevilacqua called the meeting to order at 7:35 am.

**2. Approval of Minutes of January 24, 2012**

Joe then asked for a motion on the minutes of the January 24, 2012 Quarterly board meeting.

**Motion by Cal Williams to approve the minutes of the January 24, 2012 meeting as submitted and George Noel seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.**

**3. Welcome**

Joe said that Mayor Zanni knows about the WIB as a former city councilor and that he has been very active in terms of economic development issues and has begun a very aggressive economic development program. Methuen Mayor Stephen Zanni welcomed board members to the City of

Methuen and the Great Hall which was the original high school built in 1899 and finished in 1904 and that it now serves as City Hall.

Mayor Zanni said that the meeting room the board was in was the study hall and the panels on the wall that connect it to what is now the Mayor's office were originally designed to allow the school administrator to come into the room and unexpectedly check students. He said that he is pleased to support the efforts of the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment board and that the City of Methuen understands the importance of thoughtful planning to ensure our employers and workforce residents have an opportunity to grow and prosper.

Mayor Zanni said that his administration has made economic development and access to quality employment for Methuen residents a priority. This past February, William Buckley assumed the position of Economic Development Director which had been vacant for more than years. He is the point person for all the city's economic and workforce development efforts. Mayor Zanni also said that they are in the process of developing a local economic jobs council and anticipates a kick off in the coming months. The jobs council will convene local employers and business owners to develop strategies to improve the local development and growth process and identify areas of concern that city hall can address to assist local companies in growing and creating jobs within the city. In these trying economic times we must find creative ways to assist our local business community and provide the training and workforce necessary to continue to fuel the economic engine of our community.

Chairman Bevilacqua said that the WIB is committed to working with Mayor Zanni and staff is available at any point in time to partner with Methuen.

#### **4. Presentation: Rapid Response & Lavoff Aversion Activities**

Joe then introduced George Noel, Director of Dislocated Worker Programs at the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and Ken Messina., Rapid Response Program Manager stating that he wanted to mention the George once begun a program on the underground economy. It was a program intended to see who was paying attention to the needs of employees throughout the Commonwealth. Joe said it was a kind of a Don Quixote task which had never been done before and was recently reported in the Boston Globe.

George thanked the Mayor and Chairman for the opportunity to present information on the Rapid Response Program activities and initiatives with Ken Messina, Rapid Response Manager. Mr. Noel said that the Underground Economy Task Force mission has been what the Patrick and Murray administration has been about since 2007. George explained that when he first came to this position after being a business manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers the Governor wanted to encourage different departments to work with each other instead of operating in silos. One of the objectives of the task force was to try to ensure fairness; fairness for the workers, businesses and taxpayers with everyone paying their fair share and playing by the rules. He said that they are trying to work as a team and that he and Ken are working with the different stakeholders. He noted that many are familiar with the Rapid Response team and the mandated services they provide. He relayed his past experience with the Rapid Response team as a chief steward at the old Raytheon/Waltham plant and that he was impressed with what they did then and that he is even more impressed now that he works with them.

When he was reintroduced to the Rapid Response team he learned that they are working to restore, retain and create jobs. George said that there are some examples of great stories where they work with companies at risk of laying off workers. They instead help them to find other options or

alternatives. He said that they couldn't do their work without our partners at the AFL/CIO and cited their help in central Mass after a recent devastating storm event.

Ken Messina explained that the function of Rapid Response is to provide information and services for companies and employees that are affected by business transitions and to offer layoff aversion strategies. They provide direct services and act as a gateway to the One Stop System. Ken said that this is a federal program. Rapid Response offers support to saving jobs through links with economic development, incumbent worker programs, furloughs, and workshare to name a few. They also offer company match through a link with other companies that are hiring, early warning networks, and OJT programs-linking with growing companies.

Bob Westcott wondered about the employee matching with confidentiality rules and whether they provided references. He noted that often during layoffs it is the lower echelon that is laid off. George Noel said that they match for particular skills to the new employer. The new employer is able to vet the candidate through the interview process.

Ken Messina continued stating that they work on matching prior to a layoff bringing in the healthy company to see the environment, see the machinery and talk to employees, human resources and the owner. This way they are able to get a feel for the people they want to hire. George said that the key is they don't wait for the layoff. He said that the sooner Rapid Response is involved the better it is for the business and employee.

Ken spoke of layoff aversion examples like Jabil Circuits in Billerica where they placed 34 employees (17 at the first onsite job fair) prior to the layoff and 180 into new jobs later. Another company was Polaroid where matching training needs placed 36 of 40 laid off in biotech careers prior to layoff. Ken said that Necco averted closing and laying off 400 employees through linking with MOBD. Ken said that he works with a lot with the company lawyers regarding the federal law (WARN-Worker Adjustment Notification Act) and state law (MGL 151a 71a-g state plan closing law) to ensure all requirements concerning severance and unemployment insurance are understood by the customers. Ken said that other programs that Rapid Response initiates are the NEG Grants such as Solo Cup and Sunoco/Debbie's staffing. Ken said that Rapid Response works with 300 companies a year across the state.

George Noel said that their contact information is on the last page of the presentation. He said that they are available to be of any assistance necessary for businesses and employees and urged folks to take advantage of their services.

Joe Bevilacqua said that as a member of the State WIB board and the vice chair of the national board he can attest to the fact that George and Ken are well known and Massachusetts is recognized in Washington. He encouraged folks to call them to answer any questions. He noted their work with Western Electric/Lucent and Malden Mills locally. Joe spoke about the Governor's and state's efforts on economic development reverting to workforce development and addressing the interaction between agencies through the Secretary of Labor, Secretary of Economic Development and the Secretary of Education.

## **5 Reports of Committee Chairs**

- *Planning Committee*

Planning Committee Chair Peter Matthews said that he would be reviewing the Third Quarter Report which is one of the hand-outs in the meeting packet. The numbers listed are compiled by the state

based on our career center's entries into an automated data system. Some of the year-to-date numbers do not look good and we're looking for ways to significantly improve them in the fourth quarter.

Peter noted that the less than acceptable numbers may be the result of changes in the way the Commonwealth tracks the status of career center customers. In the past, some regions would hold back on exiting customers until they had found jobs and thus inflate their performance numbers. He said that he has been told, and believes, that our career center did not do that. Now, with the State's new data computer programming, any customer who does not have documented contact with career center staff within 90 days is automatically exited from the State's tracking system. More importantly, if a customer continues to have documented contact with staff, he or she is considered active and may not be exited from the newly automated system even though he or she may have gotten a job.

Our Career Center staff will be working with the state to arrive at more accurate employment numbers in the weeks ahead.

Peter asked board members to go to the Labor Exchange Program and Performance Summary in the hand-out's page 2, and see that we're ahead of plan in almost every category but for Veterans Served and Total Entered Employments, where we are within a few points of being up to speed. He said that the Employers Listing Job Orders category is 22 points lower than planned and there are fewer job orders this year than last year, but the difference in numbers may not be as great as listed because similarly named jobs may be listed fewer times than they should be. If, for example, an employer and its subsidiaries list the same job ten times, it may be counting as only once.

Peter continued to the next page, page three, with career center client characteristic numbers. Youth are sometimes categorized as people up to age 24. Here they are listed only up to age 21 and they form 10% or about 1,140 of our clients. He said that in the youth category we help more females than males and asked members to compare the youth number to the 42% or 4,777 number of clients who are 46 or older. Only 15% of all ValleyWorks clients have less than a High School or GED education. Most of our Latino customers have either a high school diploma or a GED and that fully 48% of the people seen at our career center have at least some education after high school.

Peter continued stating that only 52% of our current customers are UI claimants. Some expired their UI benefits after 99 weeks of unemployment and others have either not worked in jobs paying social security, or not worked for the past two years. Consider that some women work at home raising children and when their spouses lose their job, they both start looking for jobs.

The following page lists clients by their communities of residence. Because of its relatively high unemployment rate, the Lawrence number is almost double that of the next largest city. Its residents along with those living in Haverhill and Methuen comprise a little over 62% of total career center clients. Peter said that due to our proximity to New Hampshire, 14% of the people seen come from out-of-state. New Hampshire residents are eligible for Massachusetts unemployment if they recently worked here.

The WIA Title I Adult Program outlines services provided to people who have never worked in SSN jobs or not worked in them in the last 99 weeks. Peter said that we're ahead of planned numbers in all but three categories – New Participants, Total Exiters and Total Entered Employment. Those three categories bend all the other categories to look better than they are. As stated earlier, we're checking to see if employed adult category people are not being counted as employed because we continue to have contact with them. There's also a 3% anomaly in people's ages, perhaps due to some 16 and 17

year olds being counted in the adult category. Almost two thirds of the people in the Adult category are female and 45% of the people are under thirty. 34% of them have at least some college and 25% of them were UI claimants whose benefits ran out.

Peter said that dislocated workers are mostly people collecting unemployment. We're ahead of plan in all categories except for total exiters and total entered employments. We're here again checking whether there is an undercount because the new state automated exit system is failing to count new jobs. 79% of the people in the dislocated worker category are 40 and older and 57% of them are men.

Program numbers are not especially good. Peter said that we are behind plan for new participants, exiters and entered employments. 67% of the participants have at least a GED and that 64% of them are basic skills deficient. Because of the approved changes in our regional policy, we do not expect a significant increase in our attained High School Diploma or GED numbers but we want to see significant improvements in the other categories. Current numbers persuade many Planning Committee members to think that post-high school on-the-job training and unpaid internships provide better vehicles for youth workforce development in today's weak economy.

Peter then said that the final page outlines the planned versus actual status of our two National Emergency Grant programs. A NEG occurs when there is a large lay-off at a company, normally due to plant closure and the transplanted of jobs elsewhere, usually overseas. In both the Sonoco and Solo Cup instances, career center and state staff are working with people who previously worked as box packers and other low level jobs at those companies. Most of the people being served are receiving English as a Second Language and ABE instruction paid for by non-WIB, state funds. Our career center receives funds to case manage enrollees but the Commonwealth controls who, where and when training is provided. We only have control of 5 training enrollments in the Solo Cup grant and none in Sunoco's. Given the current unemployment rate and these customers' basic skill deficiencies, their immediate employment prospects are not good. Fortunately for the participants, both programs are expected to continue until June 2013.

- *Youth Council*

Youth Council Chair Cal Williams began his remarks stating that the Planning Committee Chair has given our current youth performance numbers. This past quarter, the Youth Council followed the progress of our Innovation Grant Fund proposal, which focuses on youth and which was submitted to the U.S Department of Labor in late March. Cal reported that 20 to 30 innovation grants will be awarded nationwide and there may be more than 1,000 applicants, so competition will be very tough. He referenced that the Executive Summary is in the meeting packets. The U.S. Department of Labor's intent in issuing the grant is to find innovative ways to better serve unemployed people with less money. Both political parties acknowledge that we will need to do more with less under some sort of revised Workforce Investment Act. Some on the right think that all of WIA needs to be shelved and that we should redesign everything from scratch. We don't know where things will end up and the best we can do is act on what we know.

The innovation RFP that we responded to offers from 2 to 12 million dollars for each selectee. In responding to the RFP, many WIBs formed consortia with other WIBs to jointly reform workforce development policies. Others got together to bring more technology into their Career Centers with the intent of expediting customer service. We decided to focus on creating a pilot program to reduce the amount of youth academic remediation provided by the workforce development system. The Executive Committee met and endorsed the idea of helping the Lawrence Public School System and its Receiver,

Jeff Riley, greatly improve performance at Lawrence High School. He said that we thought that having the only public school system under receivership would draw attention to our concept and agreed with the WIB staff's pursuit of a \$6 million grant to create a pilot career center in Lawrence High School.

Cal continued stating that the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board is a regional organization and every city and town in our area has unemployed people. Since WIA was created in 1998, and before then during the Job Training Partnership Act, about 80% of our youth training funds have been dedicated to Lawrence youth. Lawrence is our region's largest City and it has our region's greatest concentration of poverty. We can be proud of having served many young people who subsequently went on to get and hold jobs. But as was discussed at our last quarterly meeting in January, we cannot keep doing business as usual.

Cal said that as Chairman of the Youth Council and member of the Executive Committee, he believes that we must help more young people concentrate on learning in high school. The workforce development system should no longer spend the bulk of its youth workforce training funds on academic remediation. We should instead provide economically disadvantaged youth with specific, job-related skills that will help them succeed in our region's growing businesses. He said that we've all heard talk about a skills gap and much of it is accurate. Area business and employment growth is sometimes restricted because companies can't find the right people. We need to help facilitate growth in our region and help prevent jobs from being exported elsewhere.

He said that as employers, educators and civically minded citizens on a workforce investment board, we should also help make taxpayer dollars more effective in our and partner's systems. Northern Essex Community College President Lane Glenn is also concerned with these issues so the College has partnered with us in our innovation grant proposal. Cal said that not all youth go to college; some will work for a few years before they do so and some will work while they attend schools like Northern Essex. As a workforce development system, we want to be able to help economically disadvantaged youth get good jobs after they graduate from high school. He said that we cannot be an alternative to high school because we only have a small fraction of their funding and because young people's time and our tax dollars are misspent if their academic learning is delayed.

Cal continued his remarks stating that at our last quarterly meeting, Whittier Superintendent DeRosa and Mayor Fiorentini' both took issue with some of the statements made. Superintendent DeRosa took issue with how public high schools were being portrayed because Whittier does an excellent job and it too is a public school. Mayor Fiorentini stated that most Haverhill drop-outs leave school not because they know that they'll get a second chance through the workforce development system but because they couldn't get into Whittier and they want the employment-related education that Whittier provides. Both gentlemen are probably right.

Therefore, Cal said that we designed our innovation proposal to provide more contextual, vocational learning at Lawrence High School. If our proposal is successful, we will help students better see the connection between what they are learning and the real jobs they'll be pursuing in a few years. Our in-school guidance staff will help more students see the connection between their efforts in high school and good jobs in the future.

After school educational activities, perhaps some in-school curriculum adjustments, subsidized on-the-job training at various for- and non-profit worksites and other such activities will help Lawrence High provide some of the tools so successfully implemented at vocational schools like Whittier and Greater Lawrence Technical Vocational High School. Many city vocational schools now have better graduation

and college enrollment statistics than city academic high schools. Working with Northern Essex Community College President Lane Glenn and Lawrence Public School System Receiver Jeff Riley, we plan to help improve the situation of our inner city academic high schools. If we succeed, our model will be replicable elsewhere in our region and perhaps, throughout the United States. After the three year grant is over, we hope that our program will become institutionalized by Lawrence High and, even better, that Mr. Riley and others decide to help fund workforce development staff to stay in the high school so that our workforce development efforts can continue there, in high school, where most of the action should be for youth workforce development

Joe Bevilacqua said that Dr. Lane Glenn from Northern Essex is a leader on these issues and that Northern Essex is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year. Joe also said that he would like to recognize Rafael Abislaiman and the staff for putting this innovation grant together. H said that we need to try and see that Lawrence High School is providing people the proper training for students to succeed. Although this may be a long shot, we are trying to make a difference.

Rafael Abislaiman said that we know that vocational training is working at vocational high schools. They have more graduates go to college than inner city academic high schools. There is more coherence at the vocational schools and learning is perceived as having a real application in life. We want to instill that at Lawrence High School. Students should be helped and required to get to school and learn. Technical high schools are doing a tremendous job with nearly all students passing MCAS.

Superintendent Lavoie said that when Greater Lawrence Tech screens a student for admittance, the first criteria is attendance, the second discipline and the third grades. They get 300 applicants and accept 150. The superintendent said that vocational school students can learn a career and also go to college. He also said that he would like to learn more about the innovation grant and perhaps partner with the WIB on an after school program for those who may not be doing well.

Rafael said that the grant has gone in but there will be negotiations with the feds and he would like to pursue working with Greater Lawrence as an academic school consultant if possible. Dr. Lane Glenn said that what is important to come out of this initiative, whether we are funded or not, is that Ralph and his staff put together a great plan of how we can work together.

Joe Bevilacqua said that the days of working in individual silos with increasing funding are gone and we need to all work together. Joe said that there is no report from the Nominating Committee at this time. He also said that Congressman Tierney is the leader from our region in the house on WIA reauthorization and it looks like a proposal will be coming down soon. He mentioned that board member Stan Usovicz, who is now Chair of the State WIB, has been in discussion with the Congressman regarding WIA. Stan said that there will be proposals put forth by both the Senate and the House and that reconciliation will be an obstacle. He further said that workforce development is a critical element and is supported by the state.

## **6. Report of Executive Director**

WIB Executive Director Rafael Abislaiman stated that we are doing our part with 11,000 served at the Career Center. He wondered where they would go if we weren't here. He congratulated Stan Usovicz, the new chair of the Mass WIB Association. He said that he seconds what Superintendent Lavoie has said and mentioned that the technical schools have an advantage in that they can screen applicants whereas academic public high schools have to admit everyone. But Rafael said that academic high schools would have greater success with a clear and coherent curriculum that would prepare youth for either or both college and work.

Rafael then addressed a handout. The first page is the number of people served in the 16 WIB regions. The Merrimack Valley unemployment numbers are 14,754, the fourth largest in the state but it is only eighth in funding. The most unemployed are in Construction with the second highest General & Operations Managers. He directed folks to note that Home Care Aides are in the middle but there are numerous unemployed. Rafael said that we fund a lot of training in that field and we may need to hold back. He said that on the next page he listed the top fifteen categories with the highest unemployment. On the third page our region is in bold and italicized where our numbers are lower. He said that there is more detail on the next two pages where management categories and customer service reps numbers are high. It appears that construction may be coming back.

Joe mentioned an AFL/CIO apprenticeship program for carpenters and construction trades to help prepare workers when jobs come back and have them ready to go. Lane Glenn said that regarding the numbers in the home care workers, job needs are different in different parts of the state. He mentioned that in the recent past Northern Essex had to close an evening nursing course at a time that labor information indicated a nursing shortage. Dr. Glenn said that this packet tells us the unemployed and their skills but what do the employers need. He wondered if we could get information together on employer needs to make that part of the process to identify skills gaps.

Rafael said that we could probably get something together by the next quarter with some real time information on employer job openings. We have subscribed to Monster to give better industry and job postings at the Career Center. Sometimes there may be postings for sixty-two machinists but being human after working a number of years some people may take a break and go on unemployment. Bob Westcott asked about interaction with any of the commercial staffing agencies and how they make their money. Ralph said that they make their money from the employer. Joe Bevilacqua said that we have a board member from a staffing agency. He said that he recently gave a report to the state on manufacturing in the state as Chair of the Economic Development Council. The ability to know employers is critical. Joe noted that Northern Essex is in the middle of trying to address employers' needs in our region and that we will be convening a conference in the near future with an all new approach to employer needs and the unemployed and underemployed. This is the first time we had this type of information from the state who has taken a heavy hit with a two thirds reduction in staff.

Chili said that when we look at this report that comes out twice a year there is not a skills gap as CDL operators have skills. Superintendent John Lavoie said they may need to retrain in their own industries. George Noel said that this is good information but is a snapshot at a particular time. Machine shops need training and coming together in industry partnership can help address this. Susan Jepson asked a question on ethnicity and Chili said that folks were allowed to self identify and could be counted in more than one category. Susan noted the high numbers of mature workers and said that it is important that they are given consideration and opportunities to be part of training programs.

Joe then congratulated Ray Wrobel on his appointment to the Methuen Board of Health.

## **7. Adjournment**

**Having no further business Cal Williams made a motion to adjourn and Fred Carberry seconded the motion. Motion passed and meeting was adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Mary Kivell*

Recorder