



PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, May 28, 2014

7:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

Lawrence, MA 01843

Members Present: Ron Contrado, Juan Yopez

Members Absent: Peter Matthews, Robert Leblanc, Michael Munday

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Barbara Zeimetz, Mary Kivell

Others: Mayor Daniel Rivera, Arthur Chilingirian

I. Approval of Minutes of March 5, 2014

A quorum being present Ron Contrado called the meeting to order at 7:25 a.m. and called for a motion on the minutes of the March 5, 2014 meeting.

Motion by Juan Yopez, seconded by Ron Contrado, to approve the minutes of the March 5, 2014 Planning Committee meeting as submitted. Motion passed.

II. Update on Summer Youth

Executive Director Rafael Abislaiman said that we will receive about 465 youth applications for 309 subsidized slots and will have about 80 or 90 employer paid or direct hire slots, depending on how we and the partners do this month. This year, employers are being encouraged to directly pay for youth and then receive complimentary subsidized youth employees. They will get two youth employees for the price of one.

Barbara Zeimetz reported that we are short on worksites and need more of them. She expects that we will get last minute worksite applications from our traditional employer partners. Staff will be calling employers. Rafael said that we are working with a May 30th cutoff date for the bulk of youth and employer site applications but will extend a couple of weeks for last minute requests from our partners.

Juan Yopez said that he has spoken with a number of employers who have expressed concern with liability if they pay for a slot. Barbara said that if a youth is working with a company in a slot paid through the WIB we, the MVWIB and the City of Lawrence, would be the employer of record and we assume the liability. If the company has more than one youth, they would just

need to complete one worksite agreement. Mayor Rivera also noted that staff visit the worksite for safety and youth are given an orientation prior to going to work. Juan said that he would pass that along to other employers and said that he may be able to take 4-6 kids.

Barbara reported that in Lawrence there are 64 males over the age of 17 and 69 females over age 17. For the entire region there are 93 females 17 and over and 105 males 17 and over. There are 309 subsidized slots for the region and over 400 correctly completed subsidized applications to date. Barbara said that the younger kids are often more difficult to place at work sites.

Mayor Rivera said that those employers who take the tough kids should be subsidized and those who take the good kids should pay. We should balance placing kids with partners who have stayed with us and which have been good sites with growing a private pay youth employment program.

Rafael said that state regulations require all subsidized youth to include family wage information such as information on eligibility for reduced cost lunches as part of their application. Twenty percent have to meet other documented eligibility requirements such as court involvement. These requirements are not required for jobs paid for by private sector. Private sector paid youth will however need to provide citizenship or work authorization info and meet guardian and health check requirements if under 18 or 16.

The Boys & Girls Club recently submitted forms for 14-16 year olds on private sector application forms and are redoing them on YouthWorks forms. The Mayor said to get back to them and ask them for the additional information on forms that are needed and he was sure they would make it right. Rafael also said that from our board Mike Strem, Ron Contrado, and Juan Yopez would most likely be taking summer youth. He also reported that the Youth Development Organization will be taking 15/15 and it looks like the Lawrence Public Schools will be taking 30.

III. Update on Space Lease

Rafael Abislaiman said that we will be moving into new space in Haverhill at Northern Essex Community College this Friday. Lawrence DPW has agreed to send trucks for the surplus furniture as we are going from about 26 employees to 7 employees at the Haverhill site. Rafael said that there will be an official grand opening in 3-4 weeks. One problem we may encounter may be parking. College security may ticket folks who park in undesignated spots. There is currently little to no signage and it may be difficult for folks to locate the Career Center.

Juan Yopez asked if we could request a 60 day window before the parking enforcement begins. Rafael said that parking is free but they would just need to go to the right area to not be subject to ticketing. Chili said that signage is the issue and folks need something to direct them. The Mayor stated that signs are cheap and easy to get. Mayor Rivera suggested going

to Kinko's getting signs made and just putting them in the ground. He said he would speak to NECC President Glenn if it became an issue.

Rafael said that before we downsized 40% of our clients went to the Haverhill Career Center. Rafael and Chili said that they feel that it is a win/win to be located at the College.

Rafael stated that the proposals for Lawrence space have been rejected for various reasons and that the RFP will be reissued. The Mayor said that his administration sees the best fit for space as being downtown but the RFP resulted in no acceptable bids for locations on Essex Street, Common Street or Methuen Street. It will be reissued with the hope of securing bidders on those streets and closer to downtown. The RFP may also have been confusing as it was for five city agencies with different options for bidding.

There was discussion on the current lease for the WIB and Career Center. Rafael explained that it expired last year and stated that unless we renew there is a clause on the old lease agreement that increases our monthly rent by 50%. The Mayor suggested negotiating a suitable agreement with Ozzy Properties pending completion of the RFP process and said that he would have Abel Vargas contact Ozzy Properties.

IV. ESOL/Pathways and Other New Non-WIA Initiatives

Rafael said that staff is reviewing several ESOL program proposals submitted to the state. They will fund a variety of ESOL Pathway programs in the region. We review the proposals in cooperation with the Commonwealth.

Barbara Zeimetz said that the only surprise is that the Lawrence Adult Learning Center didn't submit a Pathways grant. The International Institute, Methuen Adult Learning Center, CAC Haverhill, Notre Dame and Northern Essex Community College all submitted proposals and are all current providers.

Rafael said that a Connecting Activities proposal will soon be submitted by MVWIB to DESE. He mentioned that a Federal request for training proposal to counter H1B visas is out and stated that the MVWIB had unsuccessfully applied for this funding twice in the past. The numbers of people who may be eligible for H1B job training don't correspond to the unemployed demographics in this area. He said that most H1B jobs are high end and that we will not be submitting a solo grant but may partner with another entity. A new H1B proposal is due June 19th. Rafael said that the only successful grant in Massachusetts that he know of went to Quinsigamond Community College in Worcester. Boston unsuccessfully applied in the past.

Rafael said that an important change to ESOL in this region is Mayor Rivera's clear interest in strengthening Lawrence ESOL services. He believes that Lawrence has the greatest need so its service providers should become the best providers in the State and experts in meeting those needs. It is a worthy goal and the MVWIB is participating in carrying it out. We need to prioritize ESOL among folks who need it. Rafael referenced his experience with ESOL students

who are most often working and attending classes either before or after work in either A.M. or P.M. classes. The state changed program criteria and emphasized retention a few years ago. They expect most people who start class in September to stay around until May but this isn't always the case. Sometimes work and family obligations get in the way. We need to help people see that learning English is important to future progress at work and in the community.

Mayor Rivera said that we all understand the reasons why ESOL instruction fails but what we need to focus on is how to make it work. He said that the 8th grade bar is a barrier to folks who may only need factory floor/assembly line English and not everyone needs an associate degree for these jobs. Rafael said that there are fewer jobs for low income people and we have to try to help them move up to the next step.

Mayor Rivera spoke about the 19-20 year old from the Dominican Republic who needs to get a job ASAP. He said that what they need is workplace English to get into work and then later they may be able to go on and further their education. Barbara Zeimetz said that there is a huge difference between someone who went to school in the DR and can move very quickly and someone with no education. We have targeted those with some education.

Barbara spoke about a project that worked with physicians coming in who needed basic English literacy or some math which was successful. The Mayor said that we know all the problems but they are not insurmountable. Barbara said that everyone doesn't need the same type of ESOL classes. Illiterate people need a different type of English class than people who read their own language.

Barbara said that ESOL language proficiency, reading and basic math have been taught the same way for the last twenty years and folks are very resistant to change. The Mayor again said that we need to focus on those who need only the basics to get into floor job and not use the 8th grade measure when it isn't needed for the job.

The Mayor spoke about visiting several Lawrence businesses that employ workers who do not have 8th grade reading skills. Discussion followed on how in the past the military was a path to employment. Barbara asked how many folks get into those jobs without education and without knowing people who can refer them into them. She said that employers tell us who they need to hire. Juan Yopez said that many of the jobs may need referrals but each larger company such as New Balance may have different corporate hiring policies. Mayor Rivera said that we can't have ESOL training programs just taking people who are at the 8th grade level. Why do you need an 8th grade level for a floor job that requires a 3rd grade education? Barbara asked what makes an employer hire people with a 3rd grade education if someone with an eighth grade education is unemployed.

Rafael said that the MVWIB developed a different perspective over the last four years. Our assumption is that unemployment amongst Hispanics who are graduating from high school is very high, especially for young recent grads. 80% of 2012 high school graduates nationwide attended college but only 30% will graduate with any sort of degree after six years. We need

to stop wasting money and find ways to get more jobs for high school grads. We know many folks with high school diplomas who can't find jobs.

Mayor Rivera said that is a good policy for WIB workforce training but not for ESOL classes. We were talking about ESOL and his opinion is that the 8th grade level ESOL is too high when all that is needed is basic job skill ESOL. Rafael agreed and said that most available resources are focused on the lower level classes right now but more support is needed. We also need to find ways to raise learning English in people's list of priorities.

Mayor Rivera said that ESOL classes must do a better job of teaching young non-English speaking young people English basics that will help them get jobs because people without jobs are more likely to commit crimes. We know what the problems are, we need ways to fix them.

Chili spoke about NEG grants for laid off DEB staff and Solo employees who were trade eligible because their jobs went overseas. It took two years to get them through three levels of full-time ESOL and job training and most ended up getting low-level jobs in health care. He said that the youth that come into the Career Center are mostly English-speaking drop outs with 3rd or 4th grade academic testing levels and they don't want to go back to school.

Chili said that what we need is more work force development vendors to offer training programs. Mayor Rivera said that if you put someone with 3rd grade ability in front of a lathe and someone trains them they can operate it. We need ESOL courses focused on the needs of lower level factory-type jobs. Chili said that in the past companies had bilingual supervisors on the floor and Mayor Rivera said that they all do today.

Chili then spoke about an ESOL food processing training for SPL 3-7 limited English speakers and the difficulty he has had for a month recruiting participants. He said that he only has 5 recruited for 24 slots. The program is for 60 hours of ESOL provided by NECC with us providing the workshops. Juan suggested we should perhaps be recruiting at churches and the Mayor asked for information to send to Spanish radio and TV.

V. Adjourn

Having no further business Juan Yopez made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ron Contrado seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell,

Recorder