

**BERKS COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
(WDB)**

**7:30 a.m.
December 11, 2020**

Meeting Summary

Members Present (via MS Teams Meeting)

Ms. Jenny Batista
Ms. Auria Bradley
Ms. Ashley Chambers
Mr. William Dorward
Mr. Michael Fischetti
Ms. Kristi Gage-Linderman
Mr. Robert Harrop
Ms. Carole Homolash
Ms. Peggy Kershner
Mr. Thomas McKeon
Mr. Thomas McNelis
Mr. Scott Mengle
Mr. James Nichols
Mr. Mark Pinkasavage
Ms. Jennie Rodriguez-Priest
Mr. Michael Rowley
Mr. Russell Showers
Ms. Karyn Troxell
Mr. David Turner
Mr. Barry Unger
Dr. Anne Zayaitz

Members Absent

Ms. Debra Antol
Mr. John DeVere
Ms. Marianne Egolf
Mr. Lewis McCoy
Mr. Pablo Tejada

Staff and Guests Present (via MS Teams Meeting)

Mr. Daniel Fogarty	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. John Moser	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Megan Noll	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Matika Palmer	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Patricia Spencer	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. Rory Stevenson	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Helen Amole	PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator
Ms. Amber Columbo	PA CareerLink® Berks County Youth Program Director
Ms. Marybeth Ferguson	Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO)
Mr. Larry Melf	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Ms. Heather Berger	County of Berks Information Systems Staff

All Board members and guests participated in the meeting via the Microsoft Teams virtual meeting or teleconference call-in option. The meeting was called to order by Ms. Gage-Linderman at 7:34 a.m. Mr. Fogarty announced that the meeting was being streamed for the public via YouTube through the County website and was being recorded for minutes purposes only and that recording would be deleted. An attendance roll call was taken, and a quorum was present.

Mr. Fogarty introduced the Consent Agenda items on behalf of the Chair and asked if any item should be moved for later discussion prior to the vote:

- Approval of Previous Meeting's Minutes (September 18, 2020)
- Approve Revised WDB Incentive Policy (One Stop Oversight Committee recommendation)
- Approve PA CareerLink® Berks County Certification (Executive Committee recommendation)
- Approval of Final Negotiated PY2020 and PY2021 Performance Goals (Executive Committee recommendation)
- 2nd Year Renewal of Greater Reading Advanced Manufacturing Skills Gap Study Contract – not to exceed \$94,189 (Finance Committee recommendation)
- Approve Updated Sector Priorities (PPP Committee recommendation)
- Approve Post Pandemic Vision and Goals for Recovery (PPP & Youth Committee recommendation)

On behalf of the Chair, Mr. Fogarty moved to accept the Consent Agenda items. There being no objections, the consent agenda was adopted.

Ms. Gage-Linderman introduced the Executive Committee report and expressed her gratitude on behalf of the Board to Dr. Anne Zayaitz and Mr. Thomas McKeon for their valuable participation on the Board. She noted that Mr. McKeon has been a member of the Board since 1999. Both members announced their retirements effective December 31, 2020.

Mr. Moser introduced Ms. Matika Palmer, who joined the WDB staff as our Fiscal Coordinator at the end of October, 2020. Mr. Moser noted that Ms. Palmer will be assisting him in monitoring and assisting Ms. Noll as fiscal backup.

Referring to the PY 2020 First Quarter Title I Performance Outcomes report recently received, Mr. Moser stated that both he and Mr. Melf (EDSI) think the numbers were miscalculated and he would be going back to the State and requesting that the numbers be reviewed.

Mr. Moser introduced Mr. Rowley and Mr. Harrop who were appointed in September by the Chairperson to an ad hoc subcommittee to review the WDB's Bylaws. Mr. Rowley explained that new language was proposed under **Section 2.03 Length of Term** specifying that "*A member may be re-appointed for more than one term with a maximum of five 3-year terms, and no more than three consecutive 3-year terms without a one year rotation off the board, beginning on or after July 1, 2015*". Mr. Harrop added that this provision would offer an opportunity to bring new people to the Board.

New language recommended to **Section 3.01 Designation of Officers** clarified that the Secretary and the Treasurer shall be elected by the membership of the WDB but are not required to be members of the WDB and may be chosen from employees of the WDB. Language recommended detailing the duties of the WDB Secretary and the WDB Treasurer has also been added.

Mr. Moser noted that Article IV - Committees, Subsection i. was amended to *The frequency of committee meetings will be determined as necessary to complete the task(s) of the committee.* In addition, Subsection j. was amended to *Committee meetings may occur by conference call or any other means acceptable to the members of the committee.*

Other language amended in Sections 5.02 and 5.03 allows for attendance and voting by electronic means.

Mr. Fogarty commented that the County Solicitor's office has accepted the revised language in the By-Laws. Mr. Turner moved to adopt the revised By-Laws; Mr. Dorward seconded the motion and all members approved.

Mr. Harrop commented that the Executive Committee recommended that Mr. Fogarty be nominated as WDB Secretary and that Ms. Noll be nominated as WDB Treasurer.

Ms. Gage-Linderman asked if there were any other nominations to be brought before the Board for Treasurer. There being none, Mr. Pinkasavage moved for adoption of Ms. Noll's nomination; Ms. Bradley seconded the motion and all members approved.

Ms. Gage-Linderman asked if there were any other nominations to be brought before the Board for Secretary. There being none, Mr. Dorward moved for adoption of Mr. Fogarty's nomination; Ms. Batista seconded and all members approved. Mr. Fogarty said that his new and added role as Board Secretary would not preclude any assistance from Ms. Spencer.

Ms. Noll commented on the Finance Committee report stating that expenditures were slightly lower as would be expected due to the pandemic.

The One Stop Oversight Committee Report was introduced. Mr. Moser commented on the closing of the physical CareerLink to the public before Thanksgiving reflecting the Governor's latest guidance. He said customers were no longer able to have in-person appointments. Between 10-12 staff at a time appropriately spaced throughout the building were permitted. Virtual services will continue through January 15, 2021 when the WDB management team and CareerLink Administrator would review local circumstances and determine if any adjustments to CareerLink access would be in order.

Ms. Kershner commented that the staff did a great job handling rapid response sessions for 110 permanently laid off employees from Sun Rich Foods. Three sessions were held in Spanish for 103 attendees; one session was held in English for 7 attendees. Mr. Fogarty said that the facility was constructed between 10-12 years ago and staffed with predominantly Spanish speak-

ing employees who could walk to work. He added that to ensure customer and staff safety, an outdoor informational event was held and that Mr. Shirk and his Team heard from several employers interested in employing this workforce.

Many other topics covered in this committee meeting were summarized in the report submitted to members ahead of the Board meeting.

The Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) Committee report was introduced by Mr. McKeon. Mr. McKeon was the founding Chair of this committee along with Ms. Homolash. Mr. McKeon commented on the full-page ad in the Reading Eagle recognizing NDEAM (National Disability Employment Awareness Month) and the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Mr. McNelis and Threshold Rehabilitation Services, Inc. were recognized for funding this full-page ad.

The Committee began discussions on changing the name of the committee from Diversity, **Equality** and Inclusion to Diversity, **Equity** and Inclusion. The proposed name change was presented to and discussed by the Executive Committee which has taken the request under consideration. Ms. Homolash added that she appreciated the opportunity to continue the discussion on the proposed name change.

Ms. Homolash commented that it was a privilege and honor to work with Mr. McKeon and wished him a happy and healthy retirement.

Ms. Gage-Linderman commented that this committee does a great job and is way ahead of other areas in Pennsylvania. Mr. McKeon added that the committee is energized every time it meets and includes many HR professionals who care deeply about providing greater employment opportunities for all Berks County residents. Every member contributes his/her unique talents.

The Youth Committee is now chaired by Ms. Batista. Mr. Fogarty commended Mr. Stevenson who has done a great job staffing the Youth and Training Committees. Mr. Fogarty added that the Policy, Planning and Priorities (PPP) Committee's work included two items approved in the Consent Agenda (Updated Sector Priorities and Post Pandemic Vision and Goals for Recovery). He added that most of the Board's work is completed through the Committees and the Board members dedication is very appreciated. He said that local and regional plans are due to the State by April 2, 2021 and the PPP Committee will meet monthly to achieve that deadline.

Ms. Gage-Linderman commented that the Chairs of each Committee comprise both the Executive and Finance Committees and work together to achieve the goals set forth by the Board for each year. Mr. Fogarty said the Board exists to bring together expertise in many areas which is an appropriate introduction of Mr. Rowley to open up the market intelligence discussion.

Mr. Rowley began by asking all partners to contribute. He asked, "what are we hearing and seeing"? "What are you struggling with?" "Timing is everything even with additional pandemic restrictions." He commented that we need to operate with new technology. Younger people operate much more efficiently with technology.

Ms. Gage-Linderman said that technology helps to move our thinking “outside the box”.

Ms. Batista commented that the times are certainly difficult. You want to hire the level you are accustomed to, while it is not possible to interview everyone virtually. Even despite the circumstances, she added that her company is still getting good quality candidates.

Mr. McKeon said he attended a national conference of economic development professionals and it will be impossible for employers to obtain all the talent they need. Some employers will have to take from others. He said North Point is our latest business development site and the trend in growing logistics establishments will continue. Dollar General is now starting employees at \$19.25/hour at its distribution center near Bethel, PA.

Ms. Gage-Linderman commented that all employers are seeing the need to increase wages and benefits packages.

Mr. Showers noted that higher wages are being advertised, even for seasonal holiday help.

Mr. Rowley asked, “how are you preparing for 2021?”

Mr. Turner commented that 4,000 new jobs were created in our region. Even though the Governor vetoed liability protection for employers, we are still seeing more manufacturing and more data centers coming in. He added that data centers use energy but do not create more jobs. He said big box distribution centers bring in jobs.

Mr. Rowley asked, “what does construction look like?”

Mr. Unger commented, “get PPP (Paycheck Protection Program) taxes squared away”.

Mr. Rowley said that it has not yet been determined if PPP expenses will be deductible. He said we have new tax laws but are not told how to submit them.

Mr. Unger replied that new construction continues and that things are certainly not being held up. Construction is plugging along as well as it can.

Mr. Rowley said that all members should feel comfortable reaching out to others between meetings and to share experiences. Some may need help in certain situations. He added that he would be happy to participate in future discussions.

Mr. Fogarty thanked Mr. Rowley for facilitating and thanked the members for participating in this very important and helpful discussion with fellow members.

Mr. Fogarty referred to his COO report. With conditions in the local labor markets evolving so rapidly, Mr. Fogarty sent an interim report to the Board in November.

The local labor market continued a steady recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic through October as the seasonally adjusted local unemployment rate declined to 7.0%. The number of employed Berks County residents is back up to 207,500, only 200 less than a year ago.

A lack of available entry-level workers continues, and wages are on the rise.

VF Outlet in West Reading will be permanently closing on Christmas Eve 2020 and Fulton Bank announced it will be closing two Berks County branches in early January, 2021.

Mr. Fogarty reported on the distribution of \$38 million Berks County received in CARES Act funding to assist local businesses and organizations.

He added that the local labor market pandemic recovery is a “V” so far. (*A V-shaped recovery is characterized by a quick and sustained recovery in measures of economic performance after a sharp economic decline.*)

Mr. Dorward and Mr. Pinkasavage expressed their condolences to the family of Ryan Helms whose untimely death was a shock. Mr. Helms worked as a Business Manager for Local I.B.E.W. 743.

Mr. Pinkasavage stated that 80 applications were received for the IBEW Local 743’s registered apprenticeship program for electricians in November and a larger class than normal was put together. He added that many applicants are having difficulty passing the math test and are disqualified from consideration.

Mr. Dorward commented that sheet metal workers need math, both trigonometry and algebra, to qualify for apprenticeships.

Dr. Zayaitz asked how can higher ed help? She has decided to remain on the PPP committee and will continue to lend her expertise to the Board. She added that virtual learning is not helping students with STEM areas.

Mr. Fogarty asked Ms. Berger if there was any public comment. There was no public comment reported. Mr. Fogarty thanked Ms. Berger for her assistance with the meeting.

Ms. Gage-Linderman thanked Dr. Zayaitz and Mr. McKeon again for their service.

Meetings for 2021 will continue to be virtual going forward. The next quarterly meeting will be held on March 19, 2021 at 7:30 a.m.

Ms. Gage-Linderman concluded the meeting by wishing members to have a safe, happy and healthy holiday and adjourned the meeting at 8:54 a.m.