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## **Berks County Workforce Development Board**

**WDB Meeting Minutes (via MS Teams)**

**June 21, 2024 7:30A.M. – 9:00A.M.**

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### **Members Present**

Jenny Batista (Vice-Chairperson)  
William Dorward  
Michael Stauffer  
Kris Houck  
Dr. Karen Campbell  
Ashley Chambers  
Kim Baskett  
Kristi Gage-Linderman  
Robert Harrop  
Peggy Kershner  
Deb Millman  
Deb Antol  
Mark Pinkasavage  
Patricia Shermot  
Barry Unger  
Mike Fischetti  
Karyn Troxell  
Ryan Breisch  
Alexia Pursley  
Dayana Groff  
Christy Pisker

### **Members Absent**

Marianne Brown Egolf  
Auria Bradley  
John DeVere  
Crystal Houser

### **WDB Staff Present**

Daniel Fogarty  
Amber Columbo  
Megan Noll  
Rory Stevenson  
Alycia Arters

### **Guests Present**

Nicholas Shirk	PA CareerLink® Site Administrator
Tristin Prostovich	PA CareerLink® Berks County Youth Program Director
David Genero	EQUUS Workforce Solutions – Regional Director
Robert Kerecz	PA CareerLink® Berks County Employment Services Team Supervisor
Andre Hardy	Educational Data Systems Inc. – Regional Director
Yanimer Serrano	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Rapid Response Coordinator
Mike Dopkin	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Assistant Regional Director
MaryBeth Williams	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Regional Director
Nathaniel Beckham	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Trade Act Navigator
Pamela Menet	County of Berks - Director of Community & Economic Development

This meeting was held via Microsoft Teams on June 21, 2024. Mr. Fogarty conducted a roll call and confirmed that a quorum was present. Our WDB Acting Chairperson, Jenny Batista, called the meeting to order at 7:34 a.m.

Ms. Batista informed the members that in this virtual environment, she has asked Mr. Fogarty to help her facilitate the meeting. Mr. Fogarty announced that the meeting was being recorded for minute purposes only and that the recording would be deleted after their completion. Board members were asked to state their names when commenting, making, or seconding any motion to assist staff in taking the minutes.

## **I. Consent Agenda**

Mr. Fogarty referred to the consent agenda with a reminder that all associated documents were provided the previous week to allow time for members to review them. He then asked members if any items were to be moved from the consent agenda for further discussion. There being no such requests, objections, or abstentions, the following items were adopted:

- *Approval of Previous Meeting's Minutes from March 22, 2024*
- *Approval of Minor Administrative Changes to the WDB Incentive Policy, ITA Policy, One-Stop Holiday Policy, Outreach Policy, Residency Considerations Policy, Data Security policy, WIOA Registration Policy, and Self-Sufficiency Policy, as recommended by the One-Stop Oversight Committee.*
- *Approval of the Revised Procurement Policy as recommended by the Finance Committee.*
- *Approval of Minor Administrative Changes to the WDB Workforce System of Record Policy and Equal Opportunity and Complaint Processing Policy as recommended by the Executive Committee.*
- *Approval for the PY 2024 one-year exception to the Paid Work Experience Policy's Employer of Record requirement for EQUUS as recommended by the Executive Committee.*
- *Approval to add targeted healthcare occupational training and the revised WDB Employment Retention/ Layoff Aversion Strategy (2024 – 2029) as recommended by the Training & Industry Partnership (IP) Committee.*

## **II. Executive Committee Report**

Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB) Vice-chairperson, Jenny Batista began her Executive Committee report by announcing that, due to his transfer back to Ohio with his employer First Entergy, our WDB Chairperson David Turner has left the WDB. Ms. Batista thanked David for his service to the WDB and wished him well back in his home state. Ms. Batista then welcomed two new board members, Dr. Michael Stauffer from Berks Career & Technology Center, and Ms. Christy Pisker from Glen-Gery. Ms. Batista noted that Dr. Stauffer is no stranger to the work of the WDB as he has been an active non-Board member of our Training & Industry Partnership committee. Ms. Batista welcomed back and congratulated Ms. Pisker on her new Human Resources leadership role at Glen-Gery. As of today's meeting, all WDB vacancies have been filled.

Ms. Batista then invited Mr. Fogarty to provide some details of additional WDB membership changes with the beginning of the new program year on July 1. Mr. Fogarty began by reporting that we will be losing three of our most experienced members of the WDB and Executive Committee – John DeVere, Bob Harrop, and Kristi Gage-Linderman. Mr. DeVere was not present for this his final WDB meeting, but Mr. Fogarty recognized John for over twenty-five years of service and effective leadership here at the WDB and its predecessor entities. Mr. Harrop, a former WIB Chairperson, will be leaving the WDB on 7/31/2024 with his upcoming retirement from leading all Human Resources activities at East Penn Manufacturing, the County's largest employer. Bob thanked the WDB members for their time and commitment for decades of effective work we have done together and complimented his colleagues on being a "very effective board" and we have great leadership to take us forward. Now it's time for Bob to get in some more golf and travel. Ms. Gage-Linderman, our most recent past chairperson, expressed her gratitude for the cooperation and commitment of the WDB members and she looks forward to staying in touch with her WDB colleagues and staff.

Ms. Deb Antol and Ms. Auria Bradley will also be leaving the WDB when their current terms end on 6/30/2024. Mr. Fogarty extended his thanks to Deb and Auria for their energetic service over multiple terms and many years. Ms. Antol shared that it's been a great 10 years on the WDB. Mr. Fogarty was pleased to report that Mr. Nic Thomas from Gage Personnel and Ms. Cindy Line from Reading Area Community College have been appointed to the WDB by the County Board of Commissioners effective July 1, 2024. Mr. Fogarty offered his thanks to Ms. Marianne Brown-Egolf and Dr. Karen Campbell for accepting reappointment to new three-years terms on the WDB.

Lastly, Mr. Fogarty reminded all members that the WDB Officer Elections are scheduled for the September 20, 2024, meeting for terms beginning January 1, 2025. For more information, or to express interest in standing for election as an officer, members may contact Dan, prior to September 1, 2024, if possible.

Mr. Fogarty and WDB Assistant Director Amber Columbo next updated the WDB on our PY2023 WIOA Q3 Local Performance, year to date. Unfortunately, we still are not performing well enough to earn our coveted “green checkmark” which would signal we are meeting negotiated goals. Our WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker programs have performed solidly this year; however, all five metrics for our WIOA Title I Youth program remain below targets. As a result, our overall performance for PY2023 remains below acceptable levels and is now unlikely to recover by the end of PY2023 on June 30, 2024. Dan acknowledged that the drop in our Youth Employment Rate (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter) was somewhat expected because of Dan’s direction to our youth contractor, two years ago at the end of PY2021, to carefully review and exit any youth program participants who were not actively engaged with the program as we emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, despite noteworthy assistance from the WDB’s staff, our youth contractor has struggled throughout the year to meet locally established contractual program goals. We will continue to monitor our contractor’s performance through the remainder of PY2023 to determine what actions might be taken during the first quarter of PY 2024 to address these performance shortfalls. Dan noted that the Commonwealth is on track to meet our statewide performance with the U.S. Department of Labor.

### **III. Finance Committee Report**

Ms. Batista invited Ms. Noll to comment on the Finance Committee report. Ms. Noll began by introducing our new WDB Fiscal Coordinator, Alycia Arters, who joined the WDB Staff on April 3<sup>rd</sup> to assist with the fiscal monitoring of the WDB subcontractors.

Referring to the PY 2023 Budget V. Expenditure Report through April 2024, Ms. Noll reported that year-to-date expenditures are slightly lower than expected due to gaps in employment for vacant contractor positions. This will lead to higher-than-normal WIOA carry-over.

Ms. Noll next presented the proposed PY 2024 budget for consideration which includes the following:

- 3% increase in PY 24 WIOA Formula Funds (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth)
- \$375,000 - Transfer from WIOA Dislocated Worker to WIOA Adult.
- \$1,111,088 - Board Operations which includes estimated costs for the relocation of the WDB Office to the County of Berks – South Campus location in early calendar year 2025.
- \$300,000 – Future WIOA Program(s) Request for Proposal(s) (RFP)
- \$150,000 – Increased \$60,000 for Emerging Workforce Study

Patricia Shermot moved to approve the PY 2024 proposed budget as revised, and Kristi Gage-Linderman seconded the motion. All members approved the PY 2024 revised budget, but Ms. Kershner abstained from voting due to her organization receiving funds through the approved WDB budget.

### **IV. One Stop Oversight Committee Report**

Ms. Kershner referred the members to the PY 2023 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter ‘By the Numbers’ Report and briefly reviewed the following results:

- Foot Traffic – 19,739 Total Visits
- Welcome Orientations – 1,097 Total Attendees
- Individual Businesses Served – 615 Total
- Virtual Services – 3,875 Estimated Total

Next, Ms. Kershner reviewed the “impressive-impressive” results of the Spring 2024 Job Fair held at the Double Tree in Reading on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024:

- 1,752 job seekers in attendance
- 118 employers, community agencies, and/or training providers participated.
- The job fair participation from 118 employers/vendors was the highest in the history of the PA CareerLink® Berks County and the 6<sup>th</sup> highest attendance from 1,752 job seekers.

Ms. Columbo complimented our new PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator Nick Shirk, for the excellent job he has been doing since assuming this important role at the beginning of April 2024. Ms. Kershner echoed the positive changes Nick is bringing to the CareerLink. Mr. Harrop expressed his continued high satisfaction with the excellent service that East Penn Manufacturing consistently receives from the entire PA CareerLink® Berks County team.

## **V. Training & Industry Partnership (IP) Committee Report**

In the absence of the Training & Industry (T&IP) chairperson, Mr. DeVere, Mr. Fogarty provided an update on our progress in reviewing and submitting petitions to add selected occupations to our local 2024 High Priority Occupation (HPO) List. Mr. Fogarty commended Mr. Stevenson for his crucial leadership role in working with our colleagues in the five other local WDBs constituting the consequential Southeast (SE) PA planning region to submit cooperative petitions for high priority occupations, this was split up across the region by sector. Mr. Stevenson noted appreciative feedback received from L&I's Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA) that our SE workforce development planning region leads the Commonwealth in coordinating petitions each year and they would like to see more local planning regions adopt such an effective approach to this annual process.

Mr. Stevenson reported that the WDB has obligated \$102,000, or 58%, of the \$175,000 Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) budget for PY2023 and has expended \$78,000 of the \$102,000 obligated. Mr. Fogarty explained that the demand for Incumbent Worker Training unexpectedly softened following the addition of \$75,000 to the IWT budget in December 2023. These impactful funds have supported 11 local employers who submitted successful applications for reimbursement of significant costs incurred for high end technical training for over 250 employed registered apprentices and other incumbent workers.

## **VI. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee Report**

Ms. Chambers presented the new title for the DEI employer guide discussed in previous meetings as the *Building an Inclusive Workforce Guide*, to be a helpful guide for employers to understand accommodations, retention of employees with disabilities, and identify local resources. Ms. Chambers noted that a final draft of this guide was completed in May 2024 to which committee members have submitted a few additional recommendations, including the addition of employer testimonials from our 2023 symposium. The finished guide is planned to be released to employers in July 2024. Ms. Millman asked if the guide would be distributed to WDB members and Ms. Chambers responded affirmatively.

## **VII. Youth Committee Report**

On behalf of Ms. Batista, Ms. Columbo began the Youth Committee report by informing the WDB of the upcoming Disconnected Young Adult Event at the PA CareerLink® on June 27, 2024. This event is designed for 17–24-year-olds and is being hosted by our WIOA Youth provider through a Statewide Activity grant award. Outreach efforts for the event have included postcard distribution to approximately half of our local 18 school districts to be sent to their seniors who might be graduating without a good career plan. Outreach communications for the event have been coordinated with BARTA bus transportation. Additional postcards were provided to the County of Berks Adult Probation Office (APO), with whom we have engaged through our Youth Reentry grant, to help connect with 18–24-year-old young adults who might benefit from attending the event or more extensive services offered under the grant.

Mr. Fogarty advised that our Young Adult contractor is now in the final year of their competitively procured contract period and a new Request for Proposal (RFP) will be issued in the upcoming year. He noted

that Ms. Columbo and Ms. Noll have been providing extensive technical assistance to our current contractor to help them meet our performance and fiscal compliance expectations.

### **VIII. Planning Committee Report**

WDB Planning Committee Chairperson Ms. Deb Millman shared highlights of discussions from the committee's April 4, 2024, meeting as detailed in the minutes from that meeting. Ms. Millman then reviewed the proposed update to the WDB's Industry Sector Priorities for the next five years (2024 – 2029), including the recommendation to elevate our dynamic healthcare sector to Priority A status alongside manufacturing. Ms. Millman noted that our construction sector will remain at Priority B status, while agriculture and education services will continue as our two "Priority C – Watch" industry sectors. She underscored that our local agriculture sector intersects with many other key local industry sectors and that GRCA provides significant PIDA financing to support growth and expansion in Berks County's agriculture sector. Ms. Millman reminded the WDB that approval of our sector priorities is the first step towards the development of our next 4-year plan which will be the Planning Committee's top priority project in the year ahead.

Following discussion, Mr. Robert Harrop moved to approve the WDB Industry Sector Priorities (2024 – 2029) as presented, and Barry Unger seconded the motion. All members approved the WDB Industry Sector Priorities (2024 – 2029). There were no abstentions.

### **IX. COO Report**

Mr. Fogarty then offered his Chief Operating Officer (COO) report in which he focused on the stability of our local labor marked by a historically low official unemployment rate (seasonally adjusted "SA") below 4.0% over the past 12 months. While that is certainly good news, Mr. Fogarty noted that while Berks County's number of non-farm jobs continues to recover, it remains 1.5% below our peak of 182,800 local non-farm jobs in April 2019. This has primarily been driven by our long anticipated "baby boomer" retirements. He was pleased to report that local plant closings and large layoffs (impacting more than 50 employees) have largely been avoided over the past year.

Turning to the national picture in April/May 2024, Mr. Fogarty celebrated the surge in the Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) among U.S. prime age workers (ages 25-54) which rose to 83.6% - the highest rate since 2002. He noted more good news with the share of prime age women in the workforce reaching an all-time high in May 2024. Unfortunately, much like our local circumstances, nationally workers over age 55 have not returned to the workforce in large numbers and their participation rate remains two full percentage points below pre-pandemic levels. Regionally, the Philadelphia Federal Reserve's latest "beige book" reports that economic conditions and labor markets in the "Greater-Greater Philadelphia Region" remain strong and stable.

Mr. Fogarty expressed his thanks to all Berks County WDB members (and former members) for returning their 2023 Statements of Financial Interests ahead of the Commonwealth's May 1, 2024, deadline.

Finally, Mr. Fogarty reminded members of their invitation to the upcoming June 26, 2024, semi-annual Market Intelligence Briefing from our Business Services Team (BST) via MS Teams.

### **X. Market Intelligence Discussion**

Mr. Fogarty then invited WDB members into our regular market intelligence discussion. He suggested a "discussion prompt" to kick things off, *Given the stabilized labor market at such low levels of official unemployment, might 2023-2024 come to be remembered as "the good old days" for employers and job seekers alike?* Ms. Troxell began by sharing her national and regional perspective on the warehousing sector where employers are worried a little less about recruitment as candidate flow has improved, including for several large facility start-ups across the nation that she has overseen in the past year. Many warehousing sector employers, like hers have now shifted to a stronger focus on employee retention and engagement as the competition for workers has expanded beyond distribution centers to other industry sectors such as fast food, retail, and hospitality establishments. Ms. Troxell noted that employees have a better understanding of their value in local labor markets and are often expecting more from their employers than they expected in the past. Good

