



# City of Somerville Job Creation & Retention Trust Monthly Meeting

Anika Van Eaton, Managing  
Trustee  
Colleen Moran, Co-Manager

*Trustees*  
Thomas Bent  
Vickie Choitz  
Silvana Dinka  
Matthew McLaughlin  
Rachel Nadkarni  
Rand Wilson

## Meeting Minutes

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**Location:** Online via GoToWebinar Platform  
**Date:** March 1, 2023  
**Time:** 6:00 PM

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### Attendance

- Trustees: Thomas Bent, Vickie Choitz, Silvana Dinka, Matthew McLaughlin, Colleen Moran, Rachel Nadkarni, and Anika Van Eaton, and Rand Wilson
- Economic Development Staff: William Blackmer

### Meeting Minutes

- A Van Eaton: Meeting called to order at 6:04 pm. Quorum established with 7 trustees in attendance.
- W Blackmer: House rules about technology delivered.

#### 1. Review and Approval of January 19th meeting minutes

- Motion: V Choitz makes motion to approve January 19th meeting minutes. S Dinka seconds the motion.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 7-0.

#### 2. Review Received and Estimated Linkage Fees for 2023

W Blackmer: Since our last meeting we received approximately \$38,000 from the lab development at 599 Somerville Ave. The Trust currently has over \$750,000 in uncommitted funds. An additional \$1.3M is estimated to arrive within the next 3 months.

#### 3. Review Current Status of 2022-2023 Investment Priorities

W Blackmer: We continue to address the investment priorities as voted on by the Trust this past Fall. Votes are proposed in tonight's agenda in relation to Priorities 2 (the Coordination and Data Collection Staff Person, and 3 (Industry Specific Training Programs). We will also be discussing updates on the next two priorities where funding has not yet been obligated: Priorities 4 (The Good Municipal Jobs Training Initiative) and 6 (Mental Health, Resilience, and Trauma Training for Adult Education and Workforce Development Organizations).

City Staff are coordinating with internal staff working on American Rescue Plan Act Requests For Proposals (RFPs) to learn about investments being made and how they overlap with and/or complement the investments of the JCRT.

#### 4. Update from Good Municipal Jobs Training Subcommittee (Priority #4)

W Blackmer: This subcommittee (T Bent, V Choitz, and R Wilson) met last month to revisit the scope of work drafted last year. This RFP would seek organizations or partnerships of organizations to deliver integrated education and training programs in one or both of the following areas: Technical training in entry level office

skills *and* Technical training in licensing and certifications that focus on municipal trade roles.

We are seeking integrated education training programs for this RFP. An integrated education and training program is, a “service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement.”

In other words, this is a training that also encompasses literacy needs and adult education alongside industry-specific training. The subcommittee has proposed \$400,000 to be available under this RFP with the hope that this total will fund multiple proposals. Ideal proposals will also incorporate wraparound supports, career navigation support, meaningful opportunities to connect to work, support beyond job placement, and the inclusion of adequate participant stipends.

I’m curious to hear thoughts and feedback from the Board as well as anything else the subcommittee would like to share.

- V Choitz: This concept came from the public in early 2022. We met with members of the public to talk about this idea. The hope is to fill some critical vacancies in the City of Somerville, but we also need to balance that with some feedback that we have gotten from the public meeting last Fall. We are aiming to strike a balance with this scope. We’d like for individuals to look at City of Somerville jobs, but the training provider would not get penalized for placing graduates into good jobs at other employers.
- R Wilson: We want to create pathways to prepare Somerville residents to work for the City in good jobs.
- S Dinka: Do we know what kind of skills are required for these open jobs?
  - V Choitz: W Blackmer and J Mancia had done some research on this and concluded that some of the skills needed for most of these vacancies included Technical training in entry level office skills (examples: Digital literacy skills particularly in Microsoft Office, Accounts Payable, Basic Accounting Skills, and other in-demand skills) and Technical training in licensing and certifications that focus on municipal trade roles (examples: CDL licensing, Driver’s licenses, with the intent to obtain employment with this requirement, and other in-demand skills)
  - S Dinka: How are these skill levels defined, for example “basic accounting skills”? That seems more difficult to determine than whether or not an individual has a high school diploma or a driver’s license.
  - W Blackmer: That’s a good question. This draft is mentioning the skills more broadly than they would be mentioned on a specific employer’s job description. I think the goal here is that we understand that the City of Somerville is one of the employers that we are hoping graduates who could be hired with, but that there are also other employers in Somerville hiring for jobs with similar skillsets. Each of these jobs will have slightly different requirements. These are broadly the types of requirements that employers are repeatedly mentioning them. Our hope is that an awarded training provider would really work closely with human resources at key employers deeply understand their job postings and expectations. I think the intention is to prepare people for jobs at a number of different employers.
  - V Choitz: This is why we added the “Career Navigation” bullet, and “Meaningful opportunities to directly connect to work.” These require the service provider to work in partnership with the employers.

- C Moran: Are these skills listed needed for residents to enter the training, or are they the skills that residents would be trained in.
  - W Blackmer: They are the skills that we would be asking a training to provide to prepare residents for these jobs.
- A Van Eaton: Subcommittee, what would be the next steps?
  - R Wilson: Make any final tweaks to the RFP, have it approved, so that we can release the RFP.
  - T Bent: Are we assuming someone going into this program would already have a high school diploma or a GED? The subcommittee wanted to get feedback from the rest of the Board and then if the Board is comfortable enough, we would be releasing an RFP.
  - V Choitz: Another next step the subcommittee talked about was holding a bidder's meeting for providers so that they can fully understand what we are looking to fund, explain integrated education and training programs, and answer questions.
    - W Blackmer: To address T Bent and S Dinka's comments from before, this training would join a network of existing trainings already being funded by the JCRT. The Trust already funds programs from SCALE and Bunker Hill Community College supporting adult basic education and contextualized English as a second language, some of the other barriers residents may have to accessing these jobs.
      - V Choitz: And hopefully the partnership would include partners that do address these other barriers, like English as a second language and adult basic education.
  - V Choitz: For the next meeting we would need to have staff make any edits to the RFP and then vote in the next meeting on whether to obligate funds to this RFP.
    - W Blackmer: Please email me any additional feedback you have. I am also waiting to hear back from Human Resources at City of Somerville as we want them to be in agreement with any RFP we put out that names City of Somerville as an employer. If we feel good about this RFP and they are agreeable about the language that is used, we can get a vote for this on the upcoming meeting agenda.

## **5. Overview of Mental Health, Resilience, and Trauma Training for Adult Education and Workforce Development Organizations -- *seeking Subcommittee members (Priority #6)***

A Van Eaton: Our key goal here is to get a subcommittee so that we can meet and work on developing an RFP that we can bring back to the full Board. As a reminder, this would be to fund staff training and organizational coaching for adult education and workforce development programs in Somerville on trauma, trauma-informed approaches, resilience, and mental health for staff, students, and participants. The last 3 years have been brutal both for staff working with job seekers and for job seekers themselves. They have experienced illness, trauma, death in the family, and job loss. This did not originate during the pandemic, but has reached critical levels. There is interest in the field that this is support that professionals are interested in to best support their participants in an empathetic and supportive way. I'd like to be on this subcommittee, and I am looking for volunteers to join me on this subcommittee.

- S Dinka and C Moran expressed interest in joining the subcommittee and will coordinate with W Blackmer and A Van Eaton to schedule a meeting.

## 6. Obligation and Distribution Votes

A Van Eaton: The first vote proposed is, *To obligate \$42,232 to Coordination and Data Collection Staff Role to be distributed during FY24*. This is the amount calculated to cover 50% of the role for FY24. City of Somerville anticipates contributing the same amount. If this obligation is made, the Trust will have more than \$715,000 in unobligated funds.

- Motion: Made by S Dinka to obligate \$42,232 to Coordination and Data Collection Staff Role to be distributed during FY24. Seconded by T Bent.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 8-0.
- R Nadkarni: Before we move ahead, I would like to pitch to the Trust the idea of considering obligating funds for staff coordination for more than one year while the Trust has a large balance of unobligated funds with more funds due to arrive soon. I want to be sure we are building in the long-term support that the Trust needs.
  - A Van Eaton: How many years do you want to propose that the Trust obligates coordination funding for?
    - R Nadkarni: The next five years. We can calculate that number on our end.
  - V Choitz: I would support this from a job quality perspective.
- A Van Eaton: It would be helpful to have an estimate in preparation for the next meeting.

A Van Eaton: Votes B, C, and D are related to distributing funds for proposals in response to the JCRT's recent RFP for industry specific training programs and innovative programming. W Blackmer shared in advance a memo detailing the four proposals that we received.

- S Dinka: Why is the Just A Start training limited to 5 participants?
  - This is based on the current capacity that Just A Start has to serve Somerville residents. They enrolled 5 residents to begin the program in January. The good news is that they are working on building a new training center which should increase their capacity to serve Somerville residents in the coming years.
- C Moran: I appreciated the analysis that was provided about why the fourth proposal is not recommended to receive funding at this time.
- R Nadkarni: One piece we were excited about in receiving these proposals was the range of proposals that we received to this RFP by including language about innovative programming. It elicited applications from organizations that have not applied for JCRT funds in the past.
  - V Choitz: I have always thought we should document, even more thoroughly than we already are, the innovative programs that the Trust is funding, including the provision of stipends. It is innovative compared to what is going on nationwide. We may want to think at some point about hiring a consultant to do some documentation of this great work.
  - S Dinka: What was the main reason the SCC proposal was not funded?
    - A Van Eaton: This proposal budget did not put a lot of funding into the educational courses that were proposed.
    - W Blackmer: We were excited about the potential size of this training. 100 individuals is a very great number. When reviewing the budget, it was only showing \$6,000 going to the class educators; the majority of the budget proposal was going to two coordinator positions. My hope was to see a larger proportion of the budget going to the actual instruction of the training. It did not seem feasible that 100 individuals would be able to receive adequate programming given this budget. We are excited about these types of collaborative initiatives and we will reach out to SCC to talk a bit more about this proposal and make them aware of future funding, should they want to apply again with a revised proposal.

- Motion: Made by V Choitz to distribute \$126,051 to Just A Start to deliver Biomedical and IT trainings to 5 Somerville residents. Seconded by S Dinka.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 8-0.
  
- Motion: Made by C Moran to distribute \$214,000 to Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology to deliver Clean Energy and IT trainings to 15 Somerville residents. Seconded by T Bent.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 8-0.
  
- Motion: Made by A Van Eaton to distribute \$55,000 to Mass CultivatED to deliver Jail to Jobs Workforce Development Program to 10 Somerville residents. Seconded by R Wilson.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 8-0.
  
- W Blackmer: With these distributions, the Trust is now supporting 65 residents in receiving free job training this year. An improvement over the 41 we reported on in the last annual report.

#### **7. Additional items not reasonably anticipate by the Chair**

- It was determined that the Trust should be able to reach quorum at the April meeting.
  
- W Blackmer: I wanted to mention that I have scheduled to meet with the Boston Neighborhood Job Trust to discuss job trust administration and policies. I will bring back what I learn to this group.

#### **8. Adjournment**

Motion: R Wilson makes motion to adjourn. V Choitz seconds the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 8-0 to adjourn.

#### **Meeting Materials:**

- Meeting Notice and Agenda for 3.1.23
- draft Meeting Minutes for 1.19.23
- JCRT Estimated Linkage Fees 2023
- JCRT Investment Priority Tracker
- Good Municipal Jobs Training RFP draft
- Memo to JCRT regarding WFD 23.3 Funding Distribution Recommendations

Approved 5/3/2023