



# City of Somerville Job Creation & Retention Trust Monthly Meeting

*Trustees*  
Thomas Bent  
Vickie Choitz  
Silvana Dinka  
Jim Hachey  
Wilfred Mbah  
Rachel Nadkarni  
Rand Wilson

## Meeting Minutes

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**Location:** Online via Zoom Meeting  
**Date:** January 16, 2024  
**Time:** 6:00 PM

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### Attendance

- Trustees: Thomas Bent, Vickie Choitz, Silvana Dinka, Jim Hachey, Wilfred Mbah, Rachel Nadkarni, Anika Van Eaton and Rand Wilson
- Economic Development Staff: William Blackmer

### Meeting Minutes

- A Van Eaton: Meeting called to order at 6:03 pm. Quorum established with 7 trustees in attendance. S Dinka joined after attendance was called.
- W Blackmer: House rules about technology delivered.

#### 1. Review and Approval of September 20<sup>th</sup> and November 1<sup>st</sup> meeting minutes

- Motion: V Choitz makes motion to approve September 20<sup>th</sup> and November 1<sup>st</sup> meeting minutes as presented. T Bent seconds the motion.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 5-0. Abstentions from J Hachey and R Wilson

#### 2. Board Membership Update

*A Van Eaton: We have two new members joining the Board: Jim Hachey, the Director of Career and Technical Education at Somerville High School, and Will Mbah, City Councilor.*

*--Each board member introduces themselves and their seat on the board--*

*A Van Eaton: We had a Board Member, Colleen Moran, step down at the end of last year. We are seeking nominations for a co-managing trustee to work alongside me, Anika. Please reach out to me if you are interested in learning more about what this entails. We will be voting on a new co-managing trustee at the next meeting. We will also be recruiting applicants to fill Colleen's Somerville business representative seat. The application for the open seat will be shared with all of you once it is available.*

*W Blackmer: As we fill this vacancy, I ask for the Board to keep in mind the representation of our Board. If there are voices or viewpoints you feel are missing from the Board this should be kept in mind as we share out this vacancy widely. There will be an open application period and then they a short list of candidates will be recommended after review and interview from the Appointments Advisory Committee who will recommend finalists to the Mayor for approval. It will be a little bit of time before we have someone in the position. I will be in-touch with the Board once the vacancy is formally posted.*

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

*W Blackmer: In 2023, the Trust received almost \$1.7M inputs from the jobs linkage fee. There's potential for the Trust to receive up to \$2.7M in 2024, but this is just an estimate. We feel confident that funds from the 2 highlighted projects (100 Chestnut and 20-50 Prospect) will be received in the next few months. The remaining 2024 funds are expected to arrive in the latter half of the calendar year.*

*R Nadkarni: We expect that inflows will peak in 2024 and that there will be less funds coming in 2025. There's been a slowdown in new starts for large commercial buildings. Several permitted projects are looking for lead tenants before moving forward with construction. Long-term outlook is great, but in 2025 our expectations for linkage are relatively low. It is important to consider this as we look at priorities for this year.*

*W Blackmer: Currently unobligated funds that the Trust has is approximately \$1.1M.*

*W Mbah: How do these funds get allocated?*

*W Blackmer: These numbers represent inputs or contributions from developers that are calculated based on square footage of new, large commercial builds in Somerville. Regarding allocations, we will look at 2022-2023 priorities and allocations shortly. Part of tonight's meeting will be the Board determining 2024 priorities based on feedback from the public in November 2023 and from providers and employers.*

*W Mbah: Why do you think there is a slowdown in new construction of large commercial buildings?*

*R Nadkarni: Between 2018-2022 lots of funding went into the life sciences sector, both pre-COVID and in response to COVID. Funding is playing out more slowly now and the supply of lab space in the region is now in excess of the current demand.*

*V Choitz: I want to underscore R Nadkarni's note about possibly spreading out the funds that we have into 2025 and 2026 to make sure we have the funds for reinvestments or renewals of successful programs and ensure there is not a cliff "drop off" in services if linkage contributions are coming in more slowly.*

*T Bent: On the construction side, many projects have been put on-hold. There is also competition from other municipalities. Developers are sometimes building where construction costs are lower. Many of the commercial buildings under construction in Somerville do not have committed tenants.*

#### **4. Review status of 2022-2023 Investment Priorities**

*A Van Eaton: Every year we vote in ranking projects to prioritize for the coming year. We have used this document to guide and track our progress. We have some updates on the 2022-2023 Investment list before we transition to discuss the 2024 Priorities.*

*W Blackmer: Two updates to share tonight are that the Somerville Good Municipal Jobs Training Subcommittee will meet this month to plan for a bidder's conference and the release of this RFP. As a reminder, the Trust has obligated \$400,000 to this priority. The Mental Health Resilience and Trauma Training Subcommittee will also meet this month to prepare for the release of that RFP.*

#### **5. Revisit tentative ranking and revote of 2024 Investment Priorities**

*A Van Eaton: As a reminder, the Board met in the Fall to discuss ideas for our 2024 priorities and did a preliminary vote. We then presented this tentative list and received public feedback during our annual meeting in November. W Blackmer compiled feedback and ideas gathered at the November meeting and shared them in a*

*memo to the Board in advance of tonight's meeting. We are here today to revisit the priority list and finalize the Board's 2024 Priorities.*

*Before we do our individual rankings, I want to open the floor to see if Board members have reflections to share, points to discuss, or questions to ask. On the "2024 JCRT Investment Ranking" document on the main tab, the green box represents projects that are underway where we are in the process of paying grantees. The blue box shows projects that we have obligated funds to already, but no award has been issued yet. Below that we have the list of 10 priorities we will be ranking for our 2024 priorities.*

*R Nadkarni: I'd like the Board to consider the idea when crafting our RFPs to consider more of an "open call" to encourage providers to submit program ideas that we may not have anticipated. Also, in relation to Priority A: Development of a Worker's Rights Curriculum and Train the trainer training--- the City Council allocated funding for a position focused on wage theft during the last budget cycle. The position is still being developed but our hope is that this position will deliver worker rights training aimed at both the workforce and the employers. This position might be another pathway to fund and address this priority as well.*

*V Choitz: It's great news to hear the City is investing in a position related to wage theft and worker rights training. We should keep an eye on this development. Also, our priorities for funding do follow the Talent Equity Playbook, our strategic plan for workforce development. The strategies are: "Building a coordinated system of education and training services", "Positioning Somerville as a national leader in employee engagement practices", "Promoting experiential learning like apprenticeships and internships", and "Developing resiliency responses to the future of work. I'd like the Board to keep these in mind when ranking investments so we can deliver on a balanced portfolio of programming.*

*I like Rachel's idea of opening up the RFP process to be more inclusive of ideas we are hearing from the field, but we need to at the same time balance these ideas with the 4 talent equity playbook strategies.*

*R Nadkarni: Other comments I heard were about programs we are already funding and if there is a way to keep the momentum of these programs going while also adding in new programming this funding round.*

*R Wilson: If there is the possibility of addressing our wage theft and worker rights priorities with non-JCRT funds, I'd be in favor of determining other uses for those dedicated funds.*

*W Mbah: How do we measure a successful program?*

*A Van Eaton: Each grant includes metrics that the grantees need to report on to us. This includes enrollment numbers, program completion rates, rate of job placement etc. This is aggregated by W Blackmer and shared with the Board when we are considering renewals of funding.*

*T Bent: It sounds like the City's approach with their new wage theft position might address Ideas A and B. Rachel, would the new position be offering assistance to small businesses too?*

*R Nadkarni: Yes, that is one of the goals. We have been working on determining the scope of this job. I would welcome input from the Trust or a committee of the Trust on this moving forward. The City is funding the staff role, but there may be other costs for running the program (I.e. renting space, food for meetings, supports for participants, etc.)*

*A Van Eaton: I think this is a good topic to continue discussing with the full Board.*

*R Nadkarni: Hopefully I will have enough information in time for our next meeting to report back to the full Board.*

*A Van Eaton: V Choitz commented in the chat that a staff person is usually the most expensive component in these types of programs. An investment from the JCRT would be much smaller than what we've been contemplating investing in this work.*

*S Dinka: I think it was mentioned that financial literacy is going very well. Financial and digital literacy are closely connected. Are these programs working in parallel, or where do they overlap with each other? I feel they are both important.*

*R Nadkarni: Through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Program the City has funded the Digital Bridge Initiative focused on digital literacy, but funding for this work is tied to ARPA and will be wrapping up in 2024. This is federal funding that has supported innovative programs, but there will be a funding cliff in 2024, so there is a lot of potential for collaboration between the JCRT and the individuals who have been running those programs that are addressing similar priorities.*

*A Van Eaton: Thanks, Rachel. To clarify, the ideas on our list that have been receiving ARPA funding include Digital Literacy, the Year 13 Post-secondary support program, and Financial Literacy as well.*

*R Nadkarni: And ESOL has received some funding as well.*

*W Blackmer: With ARPA the City has been piloting skill building for employees of Somerville businesses (i.e. ESOL). Some funds will be available for coaching and entrepreneurship training for residents. This speaks to Silvana's question – some programs do end up addressing multiple funding priorities on our list.*

*A Van Eaton: The spreadsheet for voting has a tab for each Board member. Each tab lists all 10 funding ideas and the ranking we awarded it in September. We have a column to provide our January ranking and then these numbers will be aggregated to determine our combined 2024 final rankings.*

*V Choitz: In light of this great new information on the worker rights training possibly being overseen by a City position, I want to propose that if we still see these types of programs as a priority, we still rank them high even though the JCRT would not be responsible for supplying the entirety of the funding.*

*R Nadkarni: I like your approach Vickie.*

*R Nadkarni: I have a question regarding Idea J: "Mental Health Resilience, Trauma, training for staff of Adult Education and Workforce Development Organizations." Are we thinking that including it on this list is increasing the current funding that is already committed to this priority?*

*A Van Eaton: Yes, by ranking Idea J high on the list, this would indicate we are interested in investing beyond the \$100,000 that is already committed to this Priority from our 2022-2023 list.*

*A Van Eaton: Okay, has everyone finished voting?*

*--All Board members indicate they have finished voting--*

*A Van Eaton: The rankings are as follows – 1) Contextualized ESOL, 2) Worker’s Rights Training, 3) Year 13 Program for recent SHS graduates, 4) Funding to create an exploratory program using the CTE program in conjunction with contextual ESL, 5) Industry Specific training emphasizing climate forward goals, 6) Digital Literacy, 7) Benefits Specialist Case Manager focusing on workers experiencing job loss, 8) Mental Health, Resilience and Trauma Training for Staff of Adult Education and Workforce Development organizations, 9) Financial Literacy, 10) Job Quality and HR for small businesses and entrepreneurs. Thank you, everyone including the attendees of our public meeting! We will have this as a touchstone for our work in the coming year.*

#### **6. Vote to accept 2024 Investment Priority Ranking**

Motion: R Wilson makes motion to accept 2024 Investment Priority Ranking. S Dinka seconds the motion.

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

#### **7. Scheduling February Meeting**

After discussion, the second Tuesday of each month at 6:30PM appears to work for all Board members. W Blackmer will be in touch with an invite.

#### **8. Additional Items not reasonably anticipated by the Chair**

None

#### **8. Adjournment**

Motion: T Bent makes motion to adjourn. R Nadkarni seconds the motion.

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

Meeting Materials:

- Meeting Notice and Agenda (1/16/2024)
- draft Meeting Minutes (for 9/20/2023 and 11/1/2023)
- Received and Estimated Linkage Fees
- JCRT Investment Priority Tracker 2022-2023
- December 2023 Memo re: November 1 Public Comments
- 2024 JCRT Investment Ranking

*Approved: 3/12/2024*