



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

Location: Online via Zoom Meeting
Date: March 12, 2024
Time: 6:30 PM

Attendance

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

Meeting Minutes

- A Van Eaton: Meeting called to order at 6:35 pm. Quorum established with 5 trustees in attendance. S Dinka and R Nadkarni joined after attendance was called.
- W Blackmer: House rules about technology delivered.

1. Review and Approval of January 16th meeting minutes

- Motion: V Choitz makes motion to approve January 16th meeting minutes as presented. S Dinka seconds the motion.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 6-0. R Nadkarni was not present for this vote.

2. Nominations and vote on JCRT co-managing trustee

A Van Eaton: With Colleen Moran stepping down, we have a need to fill a Co-Managing Trustee to work alongside me. I would like to open the floor to nominations.

- Motion: A Van Eaton makes motion to nominate V Choitz as Co-Managing Trustee of the JCRT. T Bent seconds the motion.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 6-0. R Nadkarni was not present for this vote.

A Van Eaton: Welcome back and thank you Vickie.

3. Updates from Mental Health and Good Municipal Jobs Training subcommittees

A Van Eaton: The Mental Health subcommittee has finalized an RFP that will be released tomorrow! We are seeking an organization to provide Mental Health, Resilience, Trauma, and Trauma-Informed Approaches Training for staff of social service providers. This training will support the staff who provide direct support to residents receiving job training, adult education, and other social services. Applications for the RFP will be due May 13th at 12pm. We are hoping for the first cohort of social service providers to participate in the training this Fall. Thank you, William for your work on putting together this RFP.

W Blackmer: Before releasing the Good Municipal Jobs Training RFP, I have been advised to hold a meeting with several City departments to brief them on this program. I'm working on scheduling that meeting now and will keep the subcommittee and Board updated.

V Choitz: Was this advice given in the spirit that the City departments were excited about this opportunity or were they hesitant or apprehensive about this RFP?

W Blackmer: There is not one single perception. This training looks to target several jobs where there are several parties involved with the job quality of these positions, including the union(s), human resources, and the Mayor's Office. Holding a meeting altogether is to make sure we are all on the same page and not stepping on one another's toes. I'm curious to hear in that meeting if I can get more information on any concerns. Some City representatives I have spoken to have expressed excitement for the program. We need to make sure that this initiative would be rolled out in alignment with other efforts and conversations that are occurring.

V Choitz: Transparency and extra communication is important.

R Wilson: I spoke about this idea with folks from the Somerville Municipal Employees Association (SMEA) and there was excitement about building pathways for residents to get better jobs and jobs with the City. One question might be whether existing City employees would be eligible for this program in addition to recent high school grads.

T Bent: I don't see the issue with this because if somebody moves up to another position, this creates a vacancy and keeps the training pipeline flowing. It can address people newly getting into the field and anybody who wants to move up.

R Wilson: It would be good if we could offer the training to prospective and existing City employees.

V Choitz: Two other resources incumbent workers could be made aware of is the Training Scholarship Fund. The other would be if the City has education and or professional development funds for employees. The training want to work with people in a cohort whereas the incumbent seeking individual training support. Job training programs might workers might be

R Nadkarni: Yes, we are seeking to understand the existing resources and how this program may interlace with them.

R Wilson: Are we still planning a bidder's conference?

W Blackmer: Yes, no date has been set yet, but the subcommittee can meet to discuss the format of the bidder's conference.

J Hachey: Can I attend the next subcommittee meeting?

W Blackmer: It's not yet scheduled, and we do have 3 board members already on the subcommittee, so deliberations with four members would not be permitted. I'm happy to keep the full board abreast on updates.

R Nadkarni: We may be able to hold this as a special meeting. We can check regarding parameters for this.

J Hachey: Receiving updates to the whole board is fine.

V Choitz: Do we have an RFP release date?

W Blackmer: Not yet.

4. Review Received and Estimated Linkage Fees for 2024

W Blackmer: No new linkage fees have been received since our January meeting. The Trust currently has \$1.1M in uncommitted funds.

T Bent: Do we know what's coming down the pike in 2025? I'm concerned about a slowdown and there are a lot of vacancies in the newly built developments.

W Blackmer: Most projects that will pay us in 2024 are "second half" linkage payments. These are projects we are actively seeing progress on. We're expecting 2025 to be slower year because we aren't seeing those new construction starts happening. It's important to look at the arrival of funds and consider this when making funding decisions.

R Nadkarni: We feel confident that the projects shown on this list will be paying us in 2024 or the beginning of 2025. They will contribute approximately \$2.7M. Beyond that, we are waiting on more favorable market conditions to spur new commercial starts.

R Wilson: A bit of a rhetorical question but are we training for positions that align with the uses that these buildings will have? 12 of 14 are listed as "lab".

T Bent: It's a great point, we have funded Just A Start's biomedical careers training, be it a small cohort, but it is important to make sure our RFPs are aligning with business needs.

R Nadkarni: I serve on the Biosafety Committee and there is a great range of subcontractors that contribute to the life sciences sector in Somerville. For example, Triumvirate helps with waste disposal and logistics of material handling. I also recently visited Ultragenyx at 100 Chestnut. There is a wide range of skills and jobs in the industry. This company researches rare disease. Early-stage Research & Development happens in Somerville, but they have a lot of biomanufacturing jobs in Bedford, MA, accessible from Somerville and well-paying. It's encouraging that there is a need for lab techs and scientists, but also for other types of workers to fill "non-bench", life science jobs.

5. Review 2024 Investment Priorities

A Van Eaton: We should request a labor market information presentation for an upcoming meeting.

2024 Investment priorities were finalized last meeting. William prepared slides reminding us of the Top 3 Priorities: 1) Contextualized ESOL, 2) Worker Rights Training, and 3) The Year 13 Program. I'm curious to hear how board members are thinking about tonight's spending given a projected slowdown in arrival of funds in 2025.

T Bent: This is a big topic that may need its own dedicated meeting. I know that the Trust wants to encourage companies like Triumvirate to become more involved in the Trust.

V Choitz: It would be helpful to have some sort of overall document summarizing what we've funded, where we've been, what we're currently funding, and where we are headed in terms of our priorities. This would be helpful in a future meeting. We aren't in an emergency right now, so I don't feel we need to rush to make investments like we did at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, but people do still need training and quality jobs. We should continue to make investments with the money we have and that our pace of getting funds out should be about as fast as we can keep up with. It looks like we should enter 2025 with money from 2024 for the Trust to spend in 2025. It does seem like it needs a bigger conversation.

W Blackmer: For the top 2024 priority, Contextualized ESOL, we had pretty robust offerings from 2022-2023 led by the Bunker Hill ESOL project partnership and Somerville Center for Adult Learning Experiences (SCALE). Both met or exceeded enrollment goals, had strong completion rates, and significant numbers that continued their learning re-enrolling in ESOL, community college, or a job training program. The Trust invested about \$750,000 to achieve this.

In meeting materials, we shared a draft of the "to be hired" City position of Worker Empowerment Specialist. This slide gives an overview of the primary goals and objectives of that position: figuring out the landscape of worker's rights training in Somerville, working on curriculum development and delivery of programming alongside community partners, and then expanding to educate businesses and manager about worker's rights and how to avoid potential violations.

Third is the Year 13 Program. Currently ARPA is funding a post-secondary success coaching program through the end of 2024. We have invited these coaches to report on the program's successes in the next meeting.

T Bent: For contextualized ESOL, SCALE's cost per student is almost double that of Bunker Hill. Why?

W Blackmer: SCALE's program offers both ESOL and adult basic education high school equivalency. SCALE is offering a broader array of programming.

V Choitz: Did any Bunker Hill students access student financial aid?

W Blackmer: To my knowledge, no, but this is worth exploring for the future.

T Bent: I'm interested in hearing from SCALE and Bunker Hill about how they think the program went and what improvements could be made and if there are ways for the two of them to collaborate more closely.

A Van Eaton: It would be helpful to have the reports from both organizations for the next meeting. Ultimately, we want to decide if we want to release an RFP again and in what amount.

A Van Eaton: Moving to the Worker Employment Specialist draft job description, the City is open to receiving feedback on this. Vickie made a comment in that chat that she'd like to see more focus on business practices that can support job quality, not just federal and state regulations.

R Wilson: Procurement is an important tool to improve job quality. Could this staff role look at City contracts and make sure the City is procuring from subcontractors complying with the law?

T Bent: Will this go out via RFP or is the Worker Employment Specialist a City position?

R Nadkarni: It would be a City position with a 3-year contract. Funded on the general fund.

A Van Eaton: My feedback is that this should be a permanent position. Other feedback can be emailed to William. Once the person is hired into this position, the Trust should revisit this and see if it can play a supplementary role funding programming to support the work of the staff position.

A Van Eaton: Are there any questions regarding the third priority, the Year 13 Program?

V Choitz: Would we support a Year 13 program on our own in 2024 that runs parallel to the City's post-secondary support Coaches, or would we add to the current program to increase its capacity, or would we wait for ARPA funding to run out and then save our investment for continuing the program into 2025? These are the paths forward I am considering.

T Bent: Before deciding I really want to hear how the program has been going this year.

R Nadkarni: These coach roles currently sit in the economic development team and collaborate closely with Somerville High School staff. The staff roles and material support for the coaches is funded through 2024. The team can give you a much more in-depth look at the results of the program when they come to the next meeting. We have been advocating for these staff roles being carried onto the general fund, but it's being looked at in the midst of many priorities. Bit by bit it will become clearer what the ask from the JCRT will be.

6. Discuss Upcoming Meeting Dates: 4/9 and 5/14

A majority of the board indicated they are available for the two stated meeting dates.

7. Additional Items not reasonably anticipated by the Chair

None

8. Adjournment

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

Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 7-0 to adjourn.

Meeting Materials:

- Meeting Notice and Agenda (3/12/2024)
- draft Meeting Minutes for 1/16/2024
- Received and Estimated Linkage Fees 2024
- JCRT Investment Priority Tracker 2024
- JCRT Top Investment Priorities 2024 ppt
- draft Worker Empowerment Specialist job description

Approved 4.9.2024