



# City of Somerville Job Creation & Retention Trust Monthly Meeting

Anika Van Eaton, Managing  
Trustee  
Vickie Choitz, Managing Trustee

*Trustees*  
Thomas Bent  
Silvana Dinka  
Jim Hachey  
Jacob Luria  
Wilfred Mbah  
Rachel Nadkarni  
Rand Wilson

## Meeting Minutes

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**Location:** Online via Zoom Meeting  
**Date:** September 24, 2024  
**Time:** 6:30 PM

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### 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 6:44 pm. Quorum established with 5 trustees in attendance. R Wilson and J Hachey joined after attendance was taken.*

*W Blackmer: House rules about technology delivered.*

#### 1. Review and Approval of August 27<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes

- Motion: T Bent makes motion to approve August 27<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes. V Choitz seconds the motion.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 5-0.

#### 2. Review Received and Estimated Linkage Fees for 2024

*W Blackmer: We have not received additional linkage fees since the last meeting. The Trust's balance of uncommitted contributions made by commercial development is approximately \$7,000. There are still several projects that we are expecting funds from in the near future.*

#### 4<sup>1</sup>. Update Re: Post-Secondary Success Program

*W Blackmer: Also shared in the memo was an update regarding the Post-Secondary Success Program. In July, the JCRT voted to "obligate \$100,000 to the Post-Secondary Success 'Year 13' Program to create a student emergency fund and fund workshops and work-based learning opportunities."*

*With regards to the student emergency fund, the Post-Secondary Success team is planning to partner with 4-year institutions to disburse up to \$20,000 for eligible participants. Students will receive a maximum of \$2,499.75 per semester for a maximum of 2 semesters not to exceed \$4,999.50. We will not need to issue an RFP for this since we will be working with 4-year institutions in amounts below the \$10,000 threshold.*

*T Bent: Are there restrictions on what classes the students are taking?*

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<sup>1</sup> Since there were not 6 or more board members present at this point in the meeting, we took items out of order and went to agenda item 4 next in the hopes that additional board members would join later in the meeting.

*W Blackmer: No, there are not restrictions on what classes students are taking. A good portion of the funds is actually expected to expenses like room and board since many tuition fees have been covered by Federal and State Financial Aid.*

*R Nadkarni: The Post-Secondary Success Team has been working on criteria to make sure that the students receiving the funds do fulfill their commitment to attend classes and complete the semester.*

*A Van Eaton: As someone who works for an organization that supports post-secondary students with financial aid and college affordability, I am excited to hear we will be able to cover costs beyond just the tuition bill because those costs can really interrupt and individual's college journey.*

## **5. Update from Industry-Specific RFP Subcommittee**

*W Blackmer: Two weeks ago, the application window closed for the Industry-Specific Job Training RFP. Last week, the subcommittee met to review the four proposals we received.*

- *MassHire's Pre-Apprenticeship Construction and Building Maintenance (PACMAN) training*
- *Just A Start IT and Biomedical Adult Career Trainings*
- *Per Scholas IT Trainings*
- *Mass CultivatED CORI Expungement Services and Training for Cannabis Industry*

*For reference, Just A Start, Per Scholas, and Mass CultivatED have all received funds from the JCRT in the past. This is the second straight RFP where we received proposals that exceeded the total amount of funds available. The Trust had obligated \$250,000 to this RFP, but the total ask above is ~\$380,000.00. The subcommittee felt that we got quality proposals that exceeded \$250,000.00. While we still have questions on the individual proposals it is worth discussing whether the Trust would consider reappropriating some of the other funds that the Trust has set aside for related purposes in order to distribute more than \$250,000 for industry-specific trainings.*

*A Van Eaton: Did the groups that we funded in the past request the same funding they received before?*

*W Blackmer:*

- *Just A Start's proposal was right around the same budget as what they've received in the past.*
- *Interestingly Per Scholas's budget ask was about half of what it was in the last grant agreement. They are proposing a smaller cohort size and are additionally leveraging funds from the Commonwealth Corporation's Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund to cover the provision of stipends for their learners.*
- *Mass CultivatED's budget is up by about \$10,000. They are proposing to support more Somerville residents through the education component of their training than last time.*

*R Nadkarni: It's great to see that Mass CultivatED applied under this RFP.*

*W Blackmer: Yes, one follow up question I have for them is that last time they offered a standard program for 10 residents, but this time it appears they are proposing different numbers of participants going through different version of the program, so I want to better understand this.*

*V Choitz: What is the training component for the MassCultivatED program?*

*W Blackmer: They have a 3-pronged approach. CORI expungement and legal services are provided through a partnership with Greater Boston Legal Services. The education component is a certificate program at a*

community college and to become a state certified “responsible vendor”. The third part is an internship placement at a job site with the hopes that some individuals will move onto full-time employment at their internship site afterwards.

*T Bent: I think the subcommittee was leaning toward not funding them, is that correct?*

*W Blackmer: That was the proposal that we had the most questions about and seemed like it might be the weakest of the four. I think we were on the fence about reaching out to ask more questions until we determined if the Trust might have more than \$250,000 to spend on industry-specific trainings.*

*W Blackmer: Some of these proposed trainings do address some of our other priority areas. One example is the Post-Secondary Success Program which the Trust obligated \$100,000 to. The staff in that program have expressed interest in committing some of this budget toward work-based learning opportunities, so these trainings could align nicely with this priority as well.*

*The other funds that come to mind are the \$400,000 set aside for the Good Municipal Jobs Training Program that we have been unable to make progress on for a little while. One thing that we discussed in the subcommittee is that MassHire’s pre-apprenticeship construction and building maintenance proposal achieves some of the same goals we are trying to achieve in the Good Municipal Jobs Training Program; individuals are getting paid experience in the trades and they also have the opportunity to get a driver’s license with that program. This puts them on the path for some of the entry-level Department of Public Works or trades jobs that we were planning to target with the Good Municipal Jobs Training Program.*

*T Bent: I really liked this proposal and it does line up well with the goals of the Good Municipal Jobs Training program. It includes OSHA certifications. I think the thought process was that we could move funding in order to fund that full program, Just A Start, and Per Scholas, is that correct William?*

*W Blackmer: Yes, the question really comes down to the \$250,000. With \$250,000 we could fund the MassHire training and either part of the Just A Start training or the full Per Scholas training. I think the overall quality of the proposals was showing that if we are able to direct more funding toward industry trainings, then it may be worth following up with all the proposers*

*R Wilson: I think it is important to have a coherent Good Municipal Jobs Training come out of the JCRT. We can meet some of the goals of this program with other initiatives, but I feel strongly that we want to respond to the union for municipal employees and others at City Hall and partner with them and training groups in the community to establish a pipeline to good municipal jobs for residents.*

*R Nadkarni: My understanding is that the PACMAN training prepares individuals on the early side of their career and are in the exploratory phase of determining what they want to specialize in.*

*V Choitz: What is missing from PACMAN that we want to see in Good Municipal Jobs training? Is it union involvement? Is it more of a focus on preparing Somerville residents for municipal jobs? Can we work with MassHire to negotiate the contract and work in some of these aspects?*

*W Blackmer: The current status of the Good Municipal Jobs Training program is that there are ongoing negotiations between the union and the City that represent some of the jobs we are trying to target with this training. I think one hope is that the negotiations will result in increased job quality for jobs that have been very difficult to recruit for. There are also parts of the negotiation related to opportunities for incumbent staff and how that is handled within the union. That is the update I have regarding what is holding up the program.*

*I think it's worth bringing some of these questions Vickie raised to the proposers of the PACMAN program. I don't think their proposal explicitly calls out the City as an employer partner. I think we could work with whoever is providing the job search component of that program to really consider City jobs and do some matchmaking by identifying City jobs that graduates would be eligible for. I think one goal is that a certain number of graduates end up entering an apprenticeship program with Winn Companies. I want to better understand how many graduates they are hoping to go this route versus employment with other employers.*

*V Choitz: How much would it cost to fund PACMAN, Per Scholas, and Just A Start. If we can negotiate to get the PACMAN program closer to the Good Municipal Jobs Training Program would we feel comfortable reallocating just a portion of the \$400,000 to support PACMAN?*

*W Blackmer: An approximate cost for those 3 programs is about \$321,000, so we'd be looking for \$70,000 in addition to the \$250,000 from the RFP. We've had preliminary conversations with the Post-Secondary team and they seem comfortable with committing \$20,000 toward opportunities like PACMAN, especially if we can reserve seats for students from the Post-Secondary Success program. The budget for PACMAN is approximately \$140-145,000. The Just A Start budget is approximately \$126,000. The Per Scholas budget is \$50,000.*

*V Choitz: If we are able to use \$20,000 from the Post-Secondary budget, we would just need to use \$50,000 from the Good Municipal Jobs Training budget.*

*R Nadkarni: A remaining question is what about individuals currently in municipal roles and want to better their skills? Can they participate in these programs? The PACMAN program is clearly not in competition with this because it is focusing on individuals in the early stages of their careers.*

*T Bent: I think Vickie's solution makes sense and that incumbent workers would need to be Somerville residents to benefit.*

*W Blackmer: I will talk to our finance team about our options for reallocating funds to support industry specific trainings in excess of the \$250,000 identified in the RFP, follow up with the proposers about our questions, and meet with the subcommittee to hopefully put forward distribution recommendations for our October meeting.*

*V Choitz: When funding does eventually go out for a Good Municipal Jobs Training RFP, there may be an opportunity for MassHire to submit a proposal that builds on the success of the PACMAN training.*

### **3.<sup>2</sup> Distribution Votes**

*A Van Eaton: We now have enough board members present to loop back to agenda item 3. Tonight, we have two distribution votes on our agenda in relation to the Contextualized ESOL Request for Proposals. The memo sent to Board Members in advance of tonight's meeting gives background on this RFP, the proposals received, and the subcommittees distribution recommendations.*

*The first recommendation is to distribute \$450,000 to SCALE for their ESOL Level I, Contextualized ESOL/Early Childhood Education, Contextualized ESOL/Certified Nursing Assistant, Bridge to Post-Secondary and Workforce Pathways, and Paraeducator training programs.*

*The second recommendation is to distribute \$300,000 to BHCC for their Beginner ESOL (SPL pre-1-3) and Upper level ESOL (SPL 2-4) courses. The first half of this grant (\$150,000) would be for the Fall 2024 semester and the second \$150,000 would be for the second Spring 2025 semester contingent upon successful implementation of contextualized curricula.*

*Does the Board have any questions regarding these recommendations before we entertain a motion on these votes?*

- a. Vote to distribute \$450,000 to SCALE for recommended Contextualized ESOL programs.
  - Motion: T Bent makes motion. S Dinka seconds the motion.
  - Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 7-0.
- b. Vote to distribute \$300,000 to BHCC for recommended Contextualized programs, the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of which is contingent upon successful implementation of contextualized curricula.
  - Motion: T Bent makes. V Choitz seconds the motion.
  - Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 7-0.

### **6. Review 2024 Investment Priorities**

*A Van Eaton: To review, votes were taken tonight to distribute funds to SCALE and BHCC in relation to Priority #1.*

*R Nadkarni: Related to Priority #2 and the hiring of the Wage Theft role, Law is wrapping up review of the job description and we are hoping that this will be complete in the next few weeks.*

*A Van Eaton: For Priority #3, the Post-Secondary Program, William shared the update that the first \$20,000 of their budget will be spent on student emergency funds partnering directly with colleges. For Priority #4, on creating an exploratory program with Somerville High Center for Career and Technical Education, we had determined that an investment is not needed at this time. For Priority #5, we had a good conversation tonight on proposals received for the Industry-Specific Job Training RFP and we will hopefully have distribution recommendations from the subcommittee at our October meeting.*

### **7. Annual Meeting Plan**

*A Van Eaton: Each Fall, the JCRT releases an Annual Report to share out on the Trust's funding, investments, and outcomes of the JCRT programming over the last year. We also hold an annual meeting to present this report and ask for input from the community on setting JCRT priorities for the upcoming year. My plan is to bring a draft*

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<sup>2</sup> This item was taken out of order because enough members were present to pass a funding distribution vote.

*of the annual report and a draft agenda for the annual meeting to our next JCRT meeting in October before we hold an annual meeting in November.*

*A Van Eaton: We need to discuss dates for the October meeting and the annual meeting. Does October 22<sup>nd</sup> work for the October meeting?*

-- Members expressed that this date appears to work--

*A Van Eaton: November 19<sup>th</sup> is our proposed date for the annual meeting. Both meetings are proposed for 6:30PM and locations are "to be determined."*

-- Members expressed that this date appears to work --

*R Wilson: We need to do a better job in alerting the public of the annual meeting*

## **8. Report Back and Discussion on Job Training Scholarship and Professional Development Fund for Workforce Development Practitioners**

*W Blackmer: Before jumping into this last agenda item, I wanted to mention that I will work in the coming weeks on scheduling time for the Financial Literacy subcommittee to meet and work on finalizing that RFP.*

*The last item before adjournment is to report back on JCRT funds that we've been struggling to expend.*

*In Spring 2023, the JCRT made a grant to Somerville Community Corporation to administer a Job Training Scholarship Fund for Somerville residents. The purpose of this fund was to provide financial assistance to Somerville residents with lower levels of income to participate in credentialed job training programs. Ultimately, SCC had trouble administering this fund because they did not have the cash flow necessary to front the funds to residents (of up to \$5,000 per applicant) and then wait for the City to reimburse them. Their grant agreement ended in June 2024 and a balance of \$53,040 remains in this fund and the Trust should determine what to do with this balance. For example, should we look to rerelease this RFP and seek another organization to administer this fund? Do we still think that this fund is relevant and needed?*

*R Nadkarni: We talked earlier about trying to find around \$50,000 to be able to fund 3 of the job training proposals we received. This program has reached conclusion and was challenging to administer, so we should consider reallocating the remaining balance to industry trainings. Then, we also would not have to dip into the \$400,000 set aside for the Good Municipal Jobs Training.*

*V Choitz: I recall that the Scholarship fund idea was proposed by City Councilors several years ago, so I'm sort of agree with Rachel. We should really step back and rethink the Job Training Scholarship Fund money and how we can best use it to meet our current priorities.*

*T Bent: I agree with funding good programs that are ready to go.*

*W Blackmer: I will need to discuss with my finance team about what is possible in terms of making awards to industry training more than \$250,000 and explaining how these programs meet other priorities that we have already put funding towards.*

*W Blackmer: I had a second fund on here to discuss but given the time and the number of projects we have in the works, I think it would be best to revisit discussion on the Professional Development Fund for Workforce Development Practitioners at a later meeting. To tie up tonight's conversation, the purpose of the public meeting is also to get the public's input on conversations like this. I am interested to hear where the public thinks remaining funds would be best spent.*

*V Choitz: The public meeting will also be a good opportunity to share out any current funding opportunities that are available.*

## **9. Adjournment**

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

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

Meeting Materials:

- Meeting Notice and Agenda (9/24/2024)
- draft Meeting Minutes for 8/27/2024
- Received and Estimated Linkage Fees 2024
- September 2024 JCRT Memo
- JCRT Investment Priority Tracker

APPROVED: 10/22/2024