



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

Location: Hybrid: Online via Zoom Meeting AND In-Person at Central Library Auditorium
(79 Highland Ave, Somerville, MA 02143)

Date: October 22, 2024

Time: 6:30 PM

Attendance

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

Meeting Minutes

A Van Eaton: Meeting called to order at 6:37 pm. Quorum established with 7 trustees in attendance.
W Blackmer: House rules about technology delivered.

1. Review and Approval of September 24th meeting minutes

- Motion: T Bent makes motion to approve September 24th 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 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.

T Bent: Do we have predictions yet for 2025?

W Blackmer: We are not projecting that any projects not on this list will contribute in 2024 and 2025. Some of those projected to arrive in 2024 may instead arrive in 2025.

3. Report back from Industry-Specific Job Training Subcommittee

A Van Eaton: At the last Board meeting, the industry-specific job training subcommittee reported on the 3 proposals that they had been excited about and the Board discussed the possibility of reappropriating some other funds set aside for similar purposes in order to distribute more than \$250,000 to industry-specific trainings. This was thoroughly summarized in a memo distributed in advance of the meeting.
After the last Board meeting, William met with Post-Secondary Success Team and the Finance Director who "okayed" the approach outlined in the October memo. The Post-Secondary Success Program will spend up to \$20,000 of their budget on industry-specific job trainings.

4. "Re-obligation Vote"

A Van Eaton: This leads into the first vote on tonight's agenda:

- A. *“re-obligation” vote of the \$53,040 balance in the Job Training Scholarship fund to fund industry-specific job training programs for Somerville residents. Our grant agreement with SCC to administer this fund expired in June 2024. Re-obligating these funds will allow for the JCRT to take all three subsequent distribution votes on tonight’s agenda. Are there any questions or comments before we entertain a motion on the “re-obligation” vote?*

W Mbah: Are some of these industry-specific programs renewals, or are they new programs?

A Van Eaton: The PACMAN program is new to the JCRT and we have not funded it yet.

The other programs have been funded before, but they had to reapply through the same competitive process.

- Motion: R Nadkarni makes motion to re-obligate \$53,040 from the Job Training Scholarship Fund to fund industry-specific job training programs for Somerville residents. J. Hachey seconds the motion.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 7-0.

5. Distribution Votes

A Van Eaton: The next 3 votes will be on the recommendations made by the industry specific job training subcommittee.

- A. *To distribute \$142,427.93 to MassHire Metro North Workforce Board for the youth PACMAN program. Are there any questions or comments before we entertain a motion on this distribution vote?*

- Motion: V Choitz makes motion to distribute \$142,427.93 to Mass Hire Metro North Workforce Board for the youth PACMAN program. T Bent seconds the motion.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 7-0.

- B. *The next recommendation is to vote to distribute \$125,565 to Just A Start for Adult Career Training Programs. Are there any questions or comments before we entertain a motion on this distribution vote?*

- Motion: T Bent makes motion to distribute \$125,565 to Just A Start for Adult Career Training Programs. J Hachey seconds the motion.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 7-0.

- C. *The final Vote is to distribute \$50,000 to Per Scholas Greater Boston for IT Training Programs. Are there any questions or comments before we entertain a motion on this distribution vote?*

- Motion: W Mbah makes motion to distribute \$50,000 to Per Scholas Greater Boston for IT Training Programs. S Dinka seconds the motion.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 7-0.

6. Review 2024 Investment Priorities

W Blackmer: With regards to our 2024 Investment Priorities:

- *Priority 1: I am working on grant agreements to distribute funds to SCALE and BHCC in line with distribution votes from last month’s JCRT meeting.*
- *Priority 3: The next ~\$15-20K of the \$100K that the Trust obligated to the Post-Secondary program will support industry specific job trainings.*
- *Priority 5: Three distribution votes were on tonight’s agenda. We voted to fund Mass Hire Metro North Workforce Board, Just A Start, and Per Scholas to provide industry specific job training.*
- *Priority 9: I will reach out to schedule the first subcommittee meeting for Board members that expressed in helping draft an RFP for the \$250,000 that the Board committed to Financial Literacy.*
- *Currently Obligated Funds: We voted on re-obligating the funds remaining in the Job Training Scholarship Fund.*

W Mbah: Do we have any data on how tuition-free community college has impacted the demand from residents for training programs like the ones funded by the JCRT?

W Blackmer: I don't have specific data on this. Anecdotally I've heard from our Post-Secondary Success Coaches that students are considering tuition-free community college programs when making decisions about their post-secondary paths. Some students may be more likely to go the route of a free training program or tuition-free community college versus paying for similar programs at 2- and 4-year institutions that are not part of the tuition-free program. Many people are enrolling in tuition-free community college, but I think it is too early to tell how this impacts the overall landscape.

V Choitz: Many of the programs the JCRT is funding are not in direct competition with tuition-free community college. Our programs are often filling service gaps.

R Nadkarni: There are also some gaps in the tuition-free community college. Not every community college class is covered under the program. Students also need to have health insurance to qualify for the program and some students do not qualify for MassHealth.

W Blackmer: Yes, certificate and ESOL programs at the community colleges are not covered under the tuition-free college program. Only if students are taking credit-bearing courses towards a 2- or 4-year degree.

V Choitz: Do we have an update on Priority #2 and the hiring of a Workplace Empowerment Specialist?

R Nadkarni: We have made some progress with the legal review of the position. We are however dealing with an HR backlog. This is one of 3 positions on my team that we are trying to fill, for example. An exciting update is that we decided on this being a permanent staff position. The goal is still to have this person supporting worker's rights and working with businesses to make sure they understand their responsibilities to workers.

7. Annual Meeting Plan

A Van Eaton: Our next Trust meeting will be the annual public meeting on November 19th. It will be held in a hybrid format at the Tufts Administration Building on Holland St and on Zoom. Board members are strongly encouraged to attend in-person.

Our draft agenda for the meeting is as follows:

- 1. Who is the Job Creation and Retention Trust Board?*
- 2. What is jobs linkage funding? /Current funding picture*
- 3. Investment prioritization process*
- 4. Overview of past years' investments*
- 5. Current Obligations*
- 6. Clarifying Questions*
- 7. Community Priority Discussion and Public Feedback*

- 2 Focus Questions

- 1. Which past, current, or planned investment do you most support and why?*
- 2. What is missing/what would you change from our investment list?*

W Mbah: What was the methodology that you used for last year's meeting?

A Van Eaton: Last year the Board had drafted a priority list prior to the annual meeting and then sought feedback during the meeting. This year, we have not drafted a priority list in advance so we will present on what we have funded and solicit feedback.

R Nadkarni: In the conversation around the current funding picture, we may want to gauge how conservative the public views we should be with upcoming spending given the unknown timeline of receiving funds after the Trust receives payment from projects underway. We may also want to see how the public feels about investing in continuing

programs that are currently funded for additional years to have some guaranteed continuity of priority services for multiple years to come.

W Mbah: We should get comprehensive feedback on how these programs are doing and make sure that people know these programs and successes exist.

W Blackmer: I am working on an annual report that will capture much of the themes we are discussing here. For the public meeting, it will be helpful to show a longer view of the work that the Trust has been doing since its beginning. It's important to also mention funding timelines so that the public can advocate for the programs that they want to see continue beyond September 2025, for example.

The Annual report has a similar format to last year and includes background information on the Trust, funds received, and program highlights from this year. It also tracks progress made on both the 2022-23 and 2024 Priority Lists through June of 2024. We have a section on outcomes from the 2023-2024 job training and ESOL programs that we funded, a list of other programs funded, administration on the membership of the Board, and an acknowledgment section.

I'm working on finalizing multilingual invites and working on logistics for the meeting and the meeting space.

V Choitz: Can we create a bar chart that shows how much we have received and how much we think we are going to get divided by color? It should show how much we spent, how much has been obligated, and how much we have to available to spend.

R Nadkarni: S Dinka asked a question in the chat about whether we have data to compare which programs have been most successful. It made me curious about whether the Trust has ever set strong metrics across all programs. It could be great to reach back out to participants over the past 5 years and get their feedback, especially during a year when we might not have as much we are able to spend.

W Blackmer: Each program has its own metrics and grantees are paid based on their performance in meeting those metrics. It is a little bit difficult to compare metrics across programs because programs have different goals and are training for different industries. In recent proposals we have also been asking for grantees to reflect on their past metrics and talk about areas for improvement.

A Van Eaton: It would also be interesting to learn more about challenges and successes with stipend distribution overtime and learn about the State's model for distributing stipends.

R Nadkarni: There is interest for this Trust and the Affordable Housing Trust to make payments directly to residents. It is a long process, but it may be worth exploring a proposal to amend state legislation to allow us to pilot something like this.

T Bent: It would be interesting to see more data tracking participants over the years and see how they have moved up the employment ladder after participating in JCRT-funded programs.

A Van Eaton: This is good food for thought. We have a good plan in place for our annual meeting. We'll connect over the next few weeks to discuss speaking roles and who is presenting which slides for the annual meeting.

R Nadkarni: William and I are recruiting some extra assistance to help with Zoom and in-person meeting logistics for the annual meeting.

8. Adjournment

Motion: W Mbah makes motion to adjourn. T Bent seconds the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 6-0 to adjourn. R Nadkarni had to leave the meeting before adjournment.

Meeting Materials:

- Meeting Notice and Agenda (10/22/2024)
- draft Meeting Minutes for 9/24/2024
- Received and Estimated Linkage Fees 2024
- October 2024 JCRT Memo
- JCRT Investment Priority Tracker

Approved 2/4/2025