



Anika Van Eaton, Managing  
Trustee  
Vickie Choitz, Co-Manager

# City of Somerville Job Creation & Retention Trust Annual Public Meeting

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

## Meeting Minutes

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**Location:** Hybrid: Online via Zoom Meeting AND In-Person at Tufts Administration Building  
(167 Holland St, Somerville, MA 02144)

**Date:** November 19, 2024

**Time:** 6:30 PM

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### 1. Welcome

*A Van Eaton: Welcome the 2024 Somerville Job Creation & Retention Trust Annual Public Meeting held on **November 19, 2024**. My name is Anika Van Eaton and I am one of the Managing Trustees of the Job Creation & Retention Trust, and I call this meeting to order at 6:42PM.*

*Tonight's meeting is being conducted both in-person and on Zoom, will be recorded, and will be a public record. Zoom attendees, we ask that you please mute your microphone when not speaking.*

*Board members to confirm they are in attendance, in alphabetical order:*

- Thomas Bent, Vickie Choitz, Silvana Dinka, Jim Hachey, Jacob Luria, Wilfred Mbah, Rachel Nadkarni, Anika Van Eaton, Rand Wilson.
- All confirmed attendance. We have a quorum.

### 2. Annual Public Meeting Presentation

*A Van Eaton: Overview of tonight's agenda:*

- Who is the Job Creation and Retention Trust Board?
- What is jobs linkage funding?/Current Funding Picture
- Investment prioritization process
- Overview of past years' investments
- Current Investments and Obligations
- Clarifying Questions
- Community Priority Discussion and Public Feedback

*The purpose of the Somerville Job Creation and Retention Trust is, "to assist in the creation and maintenance of employment and career opportunities within and near the City of Somerville for the residents of the City of Somerville."*

*The Board consists of nine trustees, three ex-officio and six appointed.*

*The three ex-officio trustees are the Mayor (or their designee), the Superintendent of Somerville Public Schools (or their designee), and the President of the City Council (or their designee).*

*The other six include two Somerville residents, two representatives of nonprofit organizations, and two Somerville business representatives*

*I will now call on each board member one-by-one to introduce themselves and what seat they represent.*

- *Tom Bent, Business Representative*
- *Vickie Choitz, Resident and Co-Managing Trustee*
- *Silvana Dinka, Resident*
- *Jacob Luria, Business Representative*
- *Jim Hachey, Superintendent's Designee*
- *Wilfred Mbah, City Council President's Designee*
- *Rachel Nadkarni, Mayor's Designee*
- *Rand Wilson, Non-Profit*
- *Anika Van Eaton, Non-Profit and Co-Managing Trustee*

*W Blackmer*: *My name is William Blackmer and I am the Workforce Development Coordinator for the City of Somerville and serve as the Staff Liaison to the JCRT.*

*Jobs Linkage Funding/Fee:*

- *Approved by City Council via a Zoning Amendment in December 2017 that is applied to commercial developments over 15,000 square feet to provide and enhance employment opportunities for Somerville residents.*
- *The fee was initially set @ \$2.46/sq ft. over 15,000 sq ft and is adjusted annually based on the CPI. The current rate is \$2.99/sq ft.*

*The JCRT Board is entrusted with managing these funds. The JCRT Declaration of Trust outlines how JCRT Funds can be used:*

- *Development and creation of Job training and skill development opportunities for Somerville residents*
- *Outreach to identify populations facing barriers to employment*
- *Tools and software to identify and assess residents' skills/match residents with available local jobs*
- *Equipment and other capital costs related to non-profit/public job training and education*
- *Seed money for new programs or organizations*
- *High school and career technical education programs*
- *Help employers improve high road business practices with innovative models such as worker-owned coops*
- *Professional development and training for non-profit and education providers*
- *Capacity building*
- *Research to determine other appropriate uses of the Trust*
- *Other programs/projects that assist in creation and maintenance of employment opportunities for Somerville residents in and near Somerville*

*To date, the JCRT Fund has generated over \$5.4 M. The displayed chart shows contributions to the JCRT by fiscal year. Since fund generation is tied to new commercial development in Somerville, you can see that the Trust received the majority of its current funds in Fiscal Year 2020, 2022, and 2023. The Trust received smaller contributions in FY19 and FY24, and the contributions were \$0 for FY 21 and FY25 to date.*

*While we are still expecting to receive approximately \$2.7M in contributions from projects in the coming year, there has been a significant slowdown in starts on new projects. As a result, the JCRT is not expecting to receive*

*additional contributions beyond that for at least the next few years.*

*V Choitz: Investment Prioritization Process-*

*Since the last annual meeting on November 1, 2023, the Board has been making investments incorporating the public input shared at that meeting. Tonight, we will give you more information on our past investments, and ongoing and future projects and invite you to give input on where we go next. At our next meeting, the JCRT will review the feedback received from tonight's meeting. The JCRT will then issue Requests for Proposals (RFPs) in accordance with community priorities. The final step is for the Trust to select successful proposals to fund.*

*The Talent Equity Playbook, published in 2018 outlines recommended strategies for workforce development in Somerville. In 2019, the JCRT adopted the Talent Equity Playbook's strategies as the framework for the prioritizing JCRT investments. The four strategies are:*

- Strategy 1: Build a coordinated system of education and training services that ensures Somerville youth and adults achieve their career goals*
- Strategy 2: Position Somerville as a national leader in employee engagement practices*
- Strategy 3: Build a full suite of experiential learning opportunities for Somerville youth and adults*
- Strategy 4: Develop resiliency responses to the "future of work"*

*T Bent:*

*Next, we will give an overview of past years' investments.*

*Slide 15 and 16 provide a zoomed-out summary of the outcomes from JCRT programs from 2020 to present.*

- We are proud to share that over 950 people have been served between adult education programming, worker's rights training, industry specific job training programs, and professional development opportunities for social service providers.*
- Additionally, the JCRT has distributed more than \$321,000 in student and resident support via COVID-19 Emergency grants to nonprofits and innovative student support stipends. These stipends provide funds for basic needs to participants to support their ability to persist through skill building opportunities.*  
*- Our innovative approach to provide financial assistance that extends beyond the cost of attendance to cover other needs, including, transportation and basic living expenses, has since been replicated by the Healey-Driscoll Administration's Workforce Skills Fund launched this fall.*

*Next, you will hear more detail about JCRT-funded programs.*

*A Van Eaton:*

*Three major investment areas for the Trust have been Adult Education, Industry-specific job training, and Wage Theft and Worker's Rights*

*The first category, adult education, provides residents with the fundamental skills needed to advance their careers and addresses three of the talent equity playbook strategies. Adult education includes:*

- Contextualized English classes for Speakers of other languages, meaning English classes that include vocabulary for specific careers.*
- Adult basic education or high school equivalency courses preparing residents to earn a high school diploma or GED*
- Digital literacy training resources*
- Stipends for participants*

*The second major category of investments has been in industry-specific job training programs. These investments support Somerville's strategies of providing a coordinated system of job training opportunities that incorporate hands-on, experiential learning. They equip residents with the skills needed to succeed in high demand occupations and industries in our area. So far, the Trust has invested in training programs for residents in:*

- Banking and Finance,*
- Building Maintenance and Clean Energy,*
- Biotechnology,*
- Information Technology,*
- and the Cannabis industry.*

*Participants in these trainings have been supported with student stipends to help cover basic needs, like childcare, reduce education costs, and address the potential income loss associated with pursuing a job training opportunity.*

*The third major category, Wage Theft and Workers' Rights, has helped participants understand their rights and protections as workers, combat wage theft, educate their peers on these topics, and receive support in navigating workplace issues.*

*This programming supports Strategy 2 of the Talent Equity Playbook: to position Somerville as a national leader in employee engagement practices.*

#### V Choitz:

##### *Current Investments:*

- The JCRT is funding the "Somerville English Language Learning Project" led by Bunker Hill College and Somerville Center for Adult Learning Experiences (SCALE's) "Creating Workforce Opportunities in Education and Healthcare." These programs are scheduled to provide Contextualized ESOL to 275 Somerville residents over the next year.*
- Another current project is Trauma & Resilient Somerville, a cohort training currently being delivered by nonprofit partner, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce. This cohort training which runs until June 2025, is assisting staff at Somerville-serving workforce development, adult education, and social service organizations in building a more trauma-informed, healing centered, and resilience-building system for customers, colleagues, and themselves.*
- The Trust also continues to invest in the Workforce Development Coordinator and Data Collection Staff position to coordinate the work of the JCRT. We have currently committed funds to this position through FY 2028.*
- The Trust has also funded the continuation of the Post-Secondary Success Program through June 2025. Since the program's first cohort of students in June 2023, it has supported 73 low-income Somerville Public Schools students in transitioning to post-secondary opportunities including career opportunities, job training programs, and 2- and 4- year colleges.*
- Recently, we awarded Just A Start, Per Scholas, and MassHire Metro North Workforce Board and their partners funds for industry-specific job training in information technology, biotechnology, and building and construction maintenance. Together, these programs will train 25 Somerville residents between 2024 and 2026.*
- And lastly, the JCRT continues to sponsor a professional development fund for adult education and workforce development practitioners serving Somerville residents.*

*Obligated but not yet awarded:*

*The Trust has also obligated funds to 4 other priorities, though no awards have been made yet:*

- *Childcare Career Advancement Initiative: \$300,000 obligated. We did not receive responses to this RFP since similar state and federal funding was available at that time.*
- *The JCRT has reserved \$400,000 for a Good Municipal Jobs Training program focused on roles in the department of public works. The timing of the program is still being developed and will involve input from the union representing DPW. We're anticipating this will follow after an updated contract is in place.*
- *Job Quality Human Resources training for Somerville small businesses and entrepreneurs: \$81,000 obligated. We did not receive any advantageous proposals to this RFP.*
- *Financial Literacy: \$250,000. Most recently obligated. JCRT is drafting an RFP for release in 2025.*

### **3. Clarifying Questions Regarding Presentation**

*V Choitz: That was a lot of information. If you have a **clarifying question** on any of the JCRT's past or current investments or obligations, please raise your hand. If you are attending on Zoom, you may use the "raise hand" button in the reaction section, or you can type your questions into the chat.*

*J Vetter: I'm a resident and it's wonderful to see that these programs exist. To what extent do any of the programs the JCRT funds focus on durable skills, or what used to be called "soft skills"?*

*V Choitz: Yes, durable skills is a component we include in all of the JCRT's requests for proposals. For example, in addition to providing industry-specific training, proposals should also include workforce readiness skills development, wraparound support services, career exploration opportunities, and student stipends. We may want to consider focusing a specific set of funding for durable skills. Our mental health training program also incorporates durable skills that help providers learn how to support participants and treat and foster respectful workplaces.*

*J Vetter: Do the RFPs have a defined list of durable skills or is durable skills just listed as a category?*

*W Blackmer: Examples are listed. Many programs we fund are working with multiple funding sources and are inherently incorporating these skills. The list is ever evolving. We provide examples and ask for proposers to list what other skills they are teaching.*

*T Bent: We are also learning from businesses about both the technical and durable skills that they are seeking in employees and new hires.*

*G Puigbo: Somerville is seeing a shift from manufacturing to life sciences and IT. I see a lot of investment centered around preparing people for jobs in these industries. But a lot of people we serve at Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) are leaving jobs in cleaning and manufacturing and they need to develop other skills, like the soft or durable skills that were mentioned. We serve over 600 families, many of which are new immigrants, and what they need right away are jobs and housing. Some of the skills we work on at SCC are resume writing, navigating the internet for a job, dressing for the*

*interview and preparing for the interview. Without funding it is going to be hard to be able to support families in attaining jobs. We are in conversations with Just A Start and in order to get into a program at Just A Start you need to have basic English skills as well as digital skills. There needs to be more support for pre-training to prepare people with the skills they need to be able to qualify for job training programs.*

V Choitz: Thank you for your suggestion. Are there any other clarifying questions before we move into public comments?

M Goldstein Gelb: Regarding the Good Municipal Jobs training. Would this training be mapping both the jobs that are available and the skills that are needed for those jobs? And is this a training for people who are not municipal employees?

V Choitz: Yes, that's the idea behind this program. Proposers would need to map out in what roles there is demand and create partnerships with the City of Somerville and the employee union to make sure that there are pathways for training participants and graduates into roles like these.

J Eshleman: Comment more than a question. Thank you JCRT for recognizing local small businesses as a vehicle for creating quality jobs for our neighbors. This addresses several SomerVision goals.

#### **4. Community Priority Discussion and Public Feedback**

V Choitz: The Trust relies on public input to inform our future investments. A couple examples of this are the recommendation to increase funding for training participant stipends and the Somerville Good Municipal Jobs Training Program. We have a couple questions that we would like for you to weigh in on.

1) Given our limited funding picture looking forward, which of the past, present, or obligated ideas are most aligned with the current and future needs of the Somerville community?

2) Are there other investment ideas that you would like for the JCRT to consider funding in the coming years?

D Wong: It is critical for us to talk about race and how we can support migrant students and their families who are potentially in danger of being thrown out of this country. Also, there are emerging Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) programs that were funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Let's support more programs that focus on racial resilience. And lastly, we need a vision and we need to buy into a vision so that we have union jobs and we are bringing together developers, builders, and nonprofits around a shared vision.

R Wilson: An early vision for the JCRT came out of the struggle for local hire. We wanted employers to commit to hiring Somerville residents and residents from surrounding communities. This was brought forth to the Board of Aldermen, but there were some concerns about the legalities of enforcing local hire. As a compromise, the Trust started funding job training programs after establishing a vision via the Talent Equity Playbook. The vision in the Playbook is a little stale now. I like the idea of rethinking the mission and vision in the playbook.

D Wong: We held a teach-in on labor, unions, and racial and economic justice. I will circulate a document from this event.

G Puigbo: Athena and Maria are joining me to speak about the Women's Empowerment Group we led at Somerville Community Corporation this past year with ARPA funding. Many of the affordable housing units we operate in Somerville are led by women who are single parents. Many of these women had become repeat clients in our job coaching program; they'd taken a job that they thought would be a good fit but had later quit due to a lack of a support system, sometimes transportation challenges, and childcare issues. We created a cohort program to address this and build a network for these women. We want to see this program continue. There is more to workforce development than just technical skills. There's a health, social, mental, and support system needed to bring somebody to a job but also to successfully retain it. Today's presentation was great regarding technical training, but I want to make sure that families that have lived here the longest, that are being displaced are supported so that they can remain here and benefit from pre- and post-training support that is holistic and not just technical.

M Kessler: I'm Director of College and Career Readiness for Somerville Public Schools. I'm here to speak about the impact and importance of the Post-Secondary Coaches from the City of Somerville. In my 11 years working for the District I've been advocating for more support for our young adults after graduating from Somerville Public Schools. The coaches have made a significant impact on the graduates they have been working with who are low-income, many being the first in their family to go to college. Students face many barriers to persisting in and completing post-secondary programs. The coaches work collaboratively with Somerville High to identify students who need support in their transition to college or other post-secondary opportunities. The coaches are filling a gap and adding capacity that the high school does not have once a student has graduated; the students they work with have much higher retention rates than their peers with similar demographics. This program has great value.

R Nadkarni: For those not familiar with the program, Regina is one of our amazing coaches helping with tonight's meeting. The other is Chadi Salamoun. The idea for this coaching program has existed for many years. COVID was a major disruption for our students. The impact of COVID enabled the launch of this program funded by ARPA for year 1 and year 2, but this funding is ending. We are trying to figure out a sustainable funding path for this program moving forward. The JCRT fund could potentially play a part in continuing the program, for context.

J Vetter: I'd love to see lots of money go to every program we've discussed. To build on my point earlier, I'd love to see increased focus on durable skills training: communication, teamwork, collaboration, growth mindset, etc. Training on how to use a particular Point-of-sale system, for example, is important, but is likely to change in the coming years. Lots of employers list human relationship skills as top priorities: relationship building, cultural competency, working with different kinds of people. The durable skills component of RFPs and trainings should be strengthened and clarified, and durable skills should be part of all funded programs. There could also be a specific funding focusing on programs that are focused on durable skills.

M Cassesso: I want to add my support for Gonzalo's comments about serving a population that is certainly dwindling in Somerville that can no longer afford to live here. Coaching and mentoring are so essential, especially for those who may not have many family supports here. As a first-generation college student, I could've benefitted from these types of programs. People are struggling to find ample quality work opportunities. Durable skills related to well-being and mental health are important. It's also essential to support residents in paying childcare, transportation, and other costs. Small businesses are also important to this City. Many are immigrant-owned and may need support with human resources, bookkeeping, and other supports to stay in business.

A Mitchell: I'm a Career Coach at SCC. In addition to learning skills job seekers need to learn how to be confident and express their feelings and strengths during interviews and in the workplace.

M Keezer: *I'm a participant in the Women's Empowerment Group and this group has worked on a lot of the skills that have been mentioned tonight. It helped me to feel empowered and improve my confidence. I came from a domestic violence experience and this group helped me identify myself as a survivor and helped me develop durable skills. You can have traditional technical skills but if you don't know how to regulate your emotions, you are not going to succeed. It's important that programs like this continue to be supported by the City of Somerville.*

M Goldstein Gelb: *I think peer to peer empowerment and collective ownership are of critical importance. There could be opportunities at the warming center for people who have formally been evicted could benefit from coaching.*

R Carey: *There are some written comments online. Jessica said to prioritize supports to mitigate impacts from the Trump administration and threats of mass deportations. Our local businesses employ beautifully diverse workers who are vital to our community. Mary said she wants to underscore durable skills and educational support for nonprofit workers supporting safety net services, housing, food security, mental health substance use disorders....high school, ESL for next steps.*

R Wilson: *Immigrants and workers will be under attack under the new administration and we need to do what we can to get ahead of this. There is a climate of fear and climate that makes it seem acceptable to be aggressive and we should be prepared for this.*

V Choitz: *Thank you. Everyone please provide your written comments to staff or board members before you leave and you can also email additional comments or feedback to [wfd@somervillema.gov](mailto:wfd@somervillema.gov) by 12:30PM on Friday December 6<sup>th</sup> and we will be sure to incorporate them into our next meeting discussion. We also will be releasing an annual report soon that provides more information on our investments and outcomes.*

## **5. Adjournment**

*A Van Eaton: Thank you all for your participation tonight.*

Meeting Materials:

- Job Creation & Retention Trust Meeting Notice & Agenda 11.19.2024
- JCRT Annual Public Meeting 2024 PPT

*Approved 2/4/2025*