



Anika Van Eaton, Managing  
Trustee  
Vickie Choitz, Managing Trustee

# City of Somerville Job Creation & Retention Trust Monthly 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:** February 4, 2025

**Time:** 6:30 PM

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### Attendance

- Trustees: Thomas Bent, 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 6:34pm. Quorum established with 6 trustees in attendance.*

*W Blackmer: House rules about technology delivered.*

#### 1. Review and Approval of past meeting minutes

- a. Vote to approve October 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting minutes
- b. Vote to approve November 19<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes

Motion: T Bent makes motion to approve October 22<sup>nd</sup> and November 19<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes. S Dinka seconds the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 6-0.

#### 2. JCRT Board Reappointment Process

*W Blackmer: In early December the Mayor's Office emailed letters to Board and Commission Members outlining the administration's new reappointment process which is beginning to go into effect this month. This will be a staggered, multi-year process and seeks to increase opportunities for all community members to participate, including those who are underrepresented. Rollout occurring in alphabetical order by Board name and since our Board is officially the 'Municipal Job Creation and Retention Trust' it will be a while before our Board is reached. I'll be in touch with individual Board members about when their current term is set to expire.*

#### 3. Review Received and Estimated Linkage Fees for 2025

*W Blackmer: Since we last reviewed these funds we have received final payment from a couple of properties. Some funds were also released back into the available pot as 2024 grants concluded. The current balance sits at around \$200,000 with a few projects expected to make payment in 2025. At this time, we aren't projected to receive any funds in 2026 or 2027.*

#### 4. Annual Meeting Recap

*A Van Eaton: Back on November 19<sup>th</sup> we held our annual meeting to present on the JCRT and gather feedback from the community. William shared materials including the meeting recording and written comment. What stood out for Board members from that conversation and also upon reviewing materials?*

*R Nadkarni: Several participants mentioned the importance of “durable skills.” We also heard about the importance of programs that build confidence for job seekers.*

*T Bent: The meeting had a pretty good turnout. It was worthwhile hearing how participants have benefited. It’s important to think about how to support participants after they complete training.*

*J Hachey: I was happy to see the participation and that the meeting showcased the important work that this board is doing.*

*A Van Eaton: Something else we heard was that there may be a need for a bridge program or a pre-training program. Some individuals who could benefit from training may need extra support before they are ready to start a training program.*

*S Dinka: It would be good to have more program participants in the meetings and them sharing their experience of participating in the program. We are mostly hearing from organizations that are running programs or are interested in running programs.*

*T Bent: The CTE program at the high school reaches out and tracks participant successes for 1-2 years after they graduate. Maybe J Hachey can share a copy of surveys that CTE sends to graduates.*

## **5. Review of Active Programs and Obligations**

*A Van Eaton: With public feedback in mind, it would be good to think through what the Board wants to focus on in the coming year. W Blackmer has prepared a list of active programs as well as the obligations that the Board has made that have not yet resulted in an actual program. We will review this list and can consider if there are obligations that we want to revisit.*

*W Blackmer: Blue represents active programs ordered by expiration date. Programs scheduled to wrap up in June are the City’s Post-Secondary Success Program, the Bunker Hill Community College-led Somerville English Language Learning Project and the Trauma & Resilient Somerville training. Programs ending later in 2025 include the Contextualized ESOL programs at SCALE and Clean Energy and IT programs at Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology. A few industry specific programs will continue into 2026: Just A Start’s Adult Career Training Programs, Per Scholas’ IT Training Programs, and MassHire’s Youth PACMAN training. We also continue to run the Professional Development Fund for Workforce Development and Adult Education Professionals.*

*S Dinka: Who is running the Professional Development Fund and when does that program end*

*A Van Eaton: This program does not have an end date. We did not grant an organization to manage this fund; it is managed by City staff, namely W Blackmer.*

*J Hachey: Is \$57,760 the current balance?*

*W Blackmer: Yes, this fund has \$57,760 remaining out of an initial \$60,000. We have just had a few applications for this fund. Funds went to East Somerville Main Streets for staff to attend a professional development conference and class.*

*S Dinka: How are we advertising this program?*

*W Blackmer: It has been advertised on our website and has been shared via email and in-person with relevant organizations. I will reshare the program information and criteria with Board members and am open to any feedback.*

*A Van Eaton: W Blackmer also circulated a memo with the Board that further discusses some updates on active programs, obligations, and related City of Somerville initiatives.*

*W Blackmer: Since the program's first cohort of students in June 2023, the Post-Secondary Success Programs has supported 67 low-income Somerville Public Schools students in transitioning to post-secondary opportunities including career opportunities, job training programs, and 2- and 4- year colleges. Funding for this program from the American Rescue Plan Act is ending in June 2025.*

*R Nadkarni: I work closely with the Post-Secondary Success Coaches and we have been seeing great success with the program and receiving very positive feedback from participants. Students are achieving their goals and milestones and are benefitting from coaches helping them navigate. We are facing a challenge regarding continuity for the program. Staff are funded by ARPA until the end of June 2025. We will not receive a decision about whether these staff will be funded by the general fund until June. This poses challenges since coaches need to start working with students a few months before the semester ends and if students are enrolled, it is critical for them to get support between June and September to determine their post-secondary steps. The JCRT previously obligated \$100,000 to the program, \$25,000 of which has gone to meet critical student needs and prevent students from having to suspend their education due to financial constraints. If we want to enroll a third cohort of students from this year's graduating class, we need to determine how these positions will be funded through the fall. The memo proposes for the use of \$65,000 obligated to this program to be spent on City staff positions to fund these coaches into the Fall.*

*A Van Eaton: I thought that we were already funding the coach salaries.*

*T Bent: If they are not funded in the general fund, how long will the \$65,000 cover these salaries?*

*R Nadkarni: This depends on salary raises and the ongoing compensation study, but it should cover salaries from July 1 through approximately Thanksgiving 2025. This gives students and staff more clarity about the duration of the program.*

*S Dinka: I support continuing services to low-income students.*

*T Bent: I would make a motion.*

*W Blackmer: I am glad to hear support from the Board. I need to confirm which next steps are needed and whether the Board needs to take a vote at next month's meeting, or if the language of the previous vote allows us to move forward without an additional vote.*

*R Nadkarni: I would be abstaining from a vote on this topic given that this is a program that our department runs.*

*A Van Eaton: The Trust obligated \$400,000 to a Good Municipal Jobs training program that would prepare Somerville residents for entry-level roles in the Department of Public Works. We have been waiting for the resolution of the union contract negotiations to resume work on this priority. A contract was recently signed with this union and in the coming weeks, City staff will be meeting with colleagues closer to the agreement to learn more about how this agreement may impact the details of a Good Municipal Job Training Program.*

*W Blackmer: There are some pieces in the signed contract that talk about training opportunities and ways that incumbent workers could be on track to move up within the City workforce. Though wages are increasing because of the contract, it is still challenging for the City to compete with wages offered by private companies in similar industries, such as utilities. Additionally, there are some resources available for employees to upskill however some questions remain around whether this training would happen outside of typical work hours and whether they still may be other barriers or obstacles to incumbent workers taking advantage of these offerings.*

*A Van Eaton: Thanks, does it make sense to reconvene this subcommittee?*

*W Blackmer: Yes. We currently have Rand, Vickie, and Tom as members of this subcommittee.*

*A Van Eaton: Another obligation the Board has made that was discussed in the memo is Job Quality Human Resources Training for Somerville small businesses and entrepreneurs: The Trust obligated \$81,000 for this priority but our RFP a few years ago did not result in any favorable responses. The Economic Development Division is soon launching a limited technical assistance (TA) program for Somerville small businesses funded by the Urban Agenda Grant Program from Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development. The selection of vendors and scope of upcoming workshops is still being finalized and it is possible that some of the potential TA providers may be able to provide coaching on human resources and other related topics that can support job quality improvement.*

*T Bent: Is this a separate grant, and for how much?*

*W Blackmer: Yes, this is a \$100,000 grant from the state called the Urban Agenda Grant. We will be paying attention to the performance of these TA providers and if they do key on topics such as human resources for small businesses, then we will want to make sure these providers are on our contact list if we do release a future RFP on this topic.*

*R Nadkarni: This program will have both workshop format and 1-on-1 sessions. There will probably be a mix of in-person and virtual sessions. We will let the Board know when we have more information on these sessions.*

*A Van Eaton: Last on the memo, the Trust obligated \$300,000 to the Childcare Career Advancement Initiative. We did not receive any responses to this request for proposals (RFP) and at the same time, there have been some ARPA and state funds available to support similar goals. The memo W Blackmer shared highlights situations faced by family childcare providers.*

*W Blackmer: The City's Economic Development Division has been collaborating with the City's Childcare Access Team, SomerPromise, and we have learned that one type of business that has had trouble accessing state resources and continues to need support are family childcare centers, also known as "home-based daycares." They have recognized that there is a particular*

*need for a training to support existing and aspiring childcare providers with Pediatric CPR training. This is an essential license for providers and needs to be completed annually. They have asked for the Board to consider using a small portion of \$300,000 to fund multilingual CPR training for these providers.*

*S Dinka: Do we know how many home daycares are existing here in our City and can all of them benefit from this type of program?*

*W Blackmer: I believe the Childcare Access Team knows of between 20-30 home-based daycares in Somerville and most are very small with 1 or 2 staff members. We need to get more information on the cost of these services, but it is a relatively low cost. Our idea was to focus on family childcare centers, but other providers in Somerville might be able to participate in this type of training.*

*T Bent: Would this be a group or cohort training, or 1-on-1 training? Group training will probably bring down the overall cost significantly. I'm wondering if there are ways we can partner with Somerville High on this training.*

*R Nadkarni: A cohort training would work nicely because these providers are almost by definition Somerville residents which fits the definition of the JCRT and the SomerPromise team is already convening a working group for family childcare centers that includes about half of the providers. They are meeting to discuss professional development resources and share techniques with each other. This group is a natural audience for this type of training and offering this training may encourage more providers to participate in the working group.*

*T Bent: Could the training utilize trained teachers from the high school and utilize school facilities?*

*J Hachey: Yes, there may be ways to collaborate but to my knowledge we do not currently have staff trained to deliver CPR training in languages other than English.*

*W Blackmer: The SomerPromise Team has identified a couple of potential multilingual trainers.*

## **6. Discussion of Future Spending Priorities**

*A Van Eaton: We should continue forward with the Good Municipal Jobs Training Program and reconvene the subcommittee. For Childcare Career Advancement, I think that we should support CPR training and other ways to support family childcare centers. I would potentially be interested in us discussing reobligating some of these funds to a pre-training or bridge program which might include job networking and social capital building, or putting funds not needed for CPR back into the main account.*

*The Board should also look at the expiration dates for some of the programs that we are already funding, particularly around contextualized ESOL and industry-specific trainings and consider the timing of releasing requests for proposals that align with the beginning of the fall semester.*

*T Bent: We should also determine if participants completing the programs that we have funded need continued support or training to reach their career goals. Separately, I'd like to see the results of the City's Urban Agenda Grant to determine how this may inform the Trust's \$81,000 obligation to Job Quality Human Resources Training for Somerville small businesses and entrepreneurs.*

*R Nadkarni: There is also a very short turnaround on the Urban Agenda Grant, so we may still want the option to spend JCRT funds on similar programs for small businesses in the future. I've also been considering if the JCRT should try to begin awarding more 2- and 3-year grants to build in more longevity for our programming so that participants can benefit for more than a single semester. For example, maybe we consider funding 15 students for 2 years of ESOL versus 50 students for one semester of ESOL.*

*Also, in addition to the ARPA funding cliff, Somerville Community Corporation is currently receiving funds partially from grants and partially from community benefits raised in Union Square for their First Source Jobs program. They are in the last couple of years of that commitment so they are potentially approaching a funding cliff, and we should keep an eye on this program. It has been quite successful and teaches some of the durable skills for job seekers that we discussed at the Annual Meeting.*

*J Hachey: I agree in trying to secure funding for programs for more than one year or more than one session, however I do think that some of the programs are successful as a one year commitment.*

*S Dinka: We want to make sure that this money is benefitting residents of Somerville and it is great if we also support Somerville trainers and teachers to deliver these trainings.*

*J Hachey: We have a staff that is a bilingual paraprofessional who may be able to support this work.*

## **7. Subcommittee Updates**

*A Van Eaton: The contextualized ESOL subcommittee includes Anika, Vickie, Tom and Silvana.*

*W Blackmer: I recommend that subcommittee reconvenes this Spring as our current ESOL programs that we are funding wrap up.*

*A Van Eaton: William will schedule the Good Municipal Jobs Subcommittee to meet. I don't think the Childcare Career Advancement Subcommittee needs to meet. We will wait for more information on the CPR proposal. Then, some of those remaining funds might be reobligated.*

*J Hachey: Can I be added to the Good Municipal Jobs subcommittee and the industry-specific job training subcommittees?*

*W Blackmer: Yes. I think the Industry Specific Subcommittee should meet in the Spring as well. The Mental Health training is currently happening and so that committee does not need to meet. Financial Literacy is the last obligation we have a subcommittee for and that one includes Councilor Mbah, Rachel, Silvana, and Anika.*

*R Nadkarni: I suggest this group meets in a month or two. I think we could consider whether this funding can help address durable skills such as growth mindset, and communication alongside digital literacy.*

*W Blackmer: Yes, we can discuss in the subcommittee. This topic is the least detailed at the moment and we need to discuss the request for proposals and potential audience or audiences for this training.*

## **8. Adjournment**

Motion: T Bent makes motion to adjourn. J Hachey seconds the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 5-0.

## **Meeting Materials:**

- 2/4 Mtg Notice and Agenda
- draft 10/22/24 Mtg Minutes
- draft 11/19/24 Mtg Minutes
- Reappointment Appreciation Letter
- JCRT Received and Estimated Linkage Fees
- JCRT Investment Priority Tracker
- January JCRT Memo Re: Active Programs, Obligations, and Related City Updates
- Subcommittee Member Roster

*Approved: 3/25/2025*