



# 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:** Remote via Zoom Meeting  
**Date:** January 29, 2026  
**Time:** 6:30 PM

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### Attendance

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

### Meeting Minutes

*A Van Eaton: Meeting called to order at 6:42pm. Quorum established with 5 trustees in attendance. T Bent joined shortly after attendance was taken.*

*W Blackmer delivered house rules about technology.*

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

- a. Vote to approve December 18<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes

Motion: T Bent makes motion to approve December 18<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes. J Hachey seconds the motion.

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

#### 2. Review Received and Estimated Linkage Fees for 2026

*W Blackmer: The current uncommitted balance of the Job Creation and Retention Trust Fund sits at around \$2.56M. There's approximately \$500,000 we are anticipating from 1 project that is making its second of 2 payments and will be invoiced soon. Currently, the Trust isn't projected to receive any other funds linkage payments in the next few years.*

#### 3. Updates on Active Programs and Upcoming Programs

- a. Vote to approve no-cost extension for Metro North Workforce Board Pre-Apprenticeship grant through March 31, 2026.

*W Blackmer: Regarding active programs, included in Board member meeting materials was a letter from MassHire Metro North Workforce Board requesting a 2-month no-cost extension for the Youth PACMAN training to ensure that students will be able to hit their 30-day job or apprenticeship retention milestone. This is listed as a vote on tonight's agenda.*

**b. Recent program launches**

*W Blackmer: I'm also happy to share that 4 of the programs that were awarded funds in the last Request for Proposals (RFP) round launched this month, including the Nibble Culinary Entrepreneurship Program, Asian American Civic Association's Building Maintenance Program, Bunker Hill's contextualized English language learning program, and SCALE's contextualized ESOL and certified nursing assistant program. I am meeting with several other grantees to discuss programs that are launching in the coming weeks and months. Most of the programming that has recently launched, or will be launching in the next few months, will extend into late 2027 or early 2028.*

**c. Update from Tech Goes Home**

*A Van Eaton: Unfortunately, Tech Goes Home, an awardee from our most recent RFP round, notified us last week that their organization is winding down its operations by early February. As such, they will no longer be able to deliver the Workforce Readiness for SHA Residents Program.*

*W Blackmer: As you may remember, the \$50,414.40 that was awarded to Tech Goes Home was part of the \$950,414.40 that was awarded out of the total \$1 Million that was available in the Fall 2025 RFP. Now that TGH is unable to deliver the program, this leaves a balance \$100,000 from this RFP. The path that we see moving forward would be for the Trust to consider reissuing \$100,000 in an open RFP round, but we wanted to discuss this update with the Board and take questions.*

*T Bent: Instead of reissuing an RFP, could we review the proposals that were submitted to the Fall 2025 RFP and reconsider them or consider still making an award to the organizations that were part of the TGH proposal?*

*A Van Eaton: V Choitz expressed support for this in the chat.*

*R Nadkarni: I think that reissuing the RFP makes sense since it would give the Somerville Housing Authority, who was partnering on the TGH-led proposal, an opportunity to find a new partner and potentially continue this programming. We also only have \$100,000 remaining from this RFP allocation and many of the proposals that were not funded were requesting more than \$100,000.*

*A Van Eaton: I would like us to pause on this conversation since one item later on in tonight's agenda is a strategic planning discussion about 2026. In Fall 2025, we put out a \$1 Million RFP, we got a lot of responses and made many awards. I think the Board needs to step back and consider further before reissuing a much smaller RFP of \$100,000 to see if this aligns with our overall strategy for the year. The Board is not projected to receive funds for several years and I know that concern has been expressed about this. I think it would be helpful for Board members to hold their thoughts on this topic so that we can complete the Mass Hire Metro North Workforce Board no-cost extension vote while we have a quorum of the Board members present, and then we will come back to discuss the \$100,000 that has not been spent in a broader context.*

*A Van Eaton: Going back to part a., board members received a letter from MassHire Metro North Workforce Board (MNWB) requesting a 2-month no-cost extension on the pre-apprentice program to allow for additional time for job placements.*

*W Blackmer: Danielle Osterman from MNWB has joined tonight's call to answer any questions.*

*R Nadkarni: It appears from the letter that 4 participants are on-track for placement. Once those 4 participants retain, would there be funds remaining on the contract? Would a longer extension of the grant allow for MassHire to be credited for additional placements?*

*W Blackmer: Yes, 2 participants have retained and 2 additional participants are set to retain in February. The goal is for 8 participants to retain for 30 days, so the hope with the extension is that 4 or more of the 5 participants that are actively job searching could obtain and retain jobs by the new end date, proposed as March 31, 2026. There may be a benefit to considering a later end date than March 31<sup>st</sup>.*

*T Bent: What types of companies are the graduates getting hired at?*

*D Osterman: 2 have been hired at property maintenance companies, 1 at an electrical company, and 1 at an airport service technician company.*

*T Bent: That's great. The Winter months can be a hard time for finding job opportunities in construction, so I'd support a longer extension as Rachel suggested.*

*W Blackmer: Danielle, would you like to stay with March 31<sup>st</sup> as the proposed end date, or do you want to consider a later date to give your team additional time for job placements and retentions?*

*D Osterman: If the Trust is open to granting a longer extension, MNWB would be grateful.*

*R Nadkarni: I'd like to make a motion for a no-cost extension to June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026.*

Vote to approve no-cost extension for Metro North Workforce Board Pre-Apprenticeship grant through June 30, 2026.

Motion: R Nadkarni makes motion to approve no-cost extension for Metro North Workforce Board Pre-Apprenticeship grant through June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026. T Bent seconds the motion.

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

#### **4. 2024-2025 Annual Report**

*A Van Eaton: Before we continue our conversation on the future of the JCRT, we have a looking back moment. Included in Board member meeting materials was the 2024-2025 Annual Report of the JCRT highlighting our work from July 2024 – June 2025. It will be shared with annual meeting attendees and will be posted on our webpage. Thank you, William, for all of your work on this report that celebrates the work of the JCRT. I encourage Board members to share it with their colleagues.*

#### **5. Strategic Planning Discussion**

*A Van Eaton: We will now have today's strategic planning conversation about what comes next for the Board. We know we will soon receive our last anticipated linkage payment, we have a sense of what reserves the Trust currently has and know about the funds that we recently awarded. A short-term discussion should be held about what to do with the funds that were awarded to Tech Goes Home. There are some logistical questions in the chat*

*that we will address momentarily. Big picture, we should think about our timeline for a next RFP and what may influence this decision. Some factors may include the federal and state funding landscapes for workforce development, labor market information, the new mayoral administration in Somerville and their priorities, and the timeline and role of TransMedics and other large employers. The Board will also continue to monitor the active grant programs.*

*I'd like to return to the Tech Goes Home conversation considering this bigger picture. Vickie and Jim asked in the chat, can the Board renegotiate with Somerville Housing Authority to make this project happen, considering that they were involved with the proposal?*

*W Blackmer: This question may require some further research. The application was led by Tech Goes Home and so the Board voted to make the award to Tech Goes Home. This gives me pause about the idea of transferring the award to another partner. Tech Goes Home was planning on providing the digital literacy instruction for the training which was a big component of the program. I don't think that we should necessarily assume that Somerville Housing Authority currently has the in-house expertise to still run the same program with the same budget, serving the same number of participants. I can look back and see if we do have any precedent for transferring an award to another partner on the application, but I did not see that as the go-to solution in this circumstance.*

*V Choitz: If SHA can find a new partner that delivers digital literacy, then they would maybe still be able to deliver a similar program. We did vote to award a contract to Tech Goes Home, but we were also voting to fund that type of digital literacy project. I'm interested in the precedent being researched because I do think we'd still be interested in funding this type of work.*

*T Bent: So would that require a new RFP if we were giving the money to a new partner?*

*W Blackmer: That would be what I'd be trying to research to see if we have done this in the past. Another option to consider could be reissuing the \$100,000 in a targeted RFP if the Board is very interested in funding a digital literacy program in particular. But, we should also acknowledge that there were other organizations that did apply for the RFP. It's difficult to know about the feasibility of a project when the lead organization is no longer able to participate.*

*R Nadkarni: Releasing a very targeted RFP may not be received well by our other applicants. Looking back at the other applications we received, I don't think that there was a clear ranking amongst the organizations that were not awarded and am not sure how many proposals were for \$100,000 or less. I would not want to leave out SHA from having the opportunity to put together a new partnership. Right now, I think the best option is to re-release the same RFP. Prior applicants could resubmit or tweak their previous proposals and we would also entertain new proposals.*

*D Whiteside: There is a risk in making an award without conducting another open RFP because it could be perceived as preferential selection without any basis for the award. Putting out a new RFP indicates that there is a process and opportunity for all organizations to be considered. The submissions that were made were for an RFP that was put out, voted upon, and now that process has been closed. It is cleaner for the Board to reissue a new RFP.*

*V Choitz: I'm starting to come to the same conclusion that this is the less risky approach. I do wonder whether our focus should shift to thinking about another large RFP, similar to Boston's annual RFP process. If we get into a rhythm of releasing a \$1 Million RFP each year, it reduces the burden on organizations to write proposals, and it establishes consistency. I'd be very hesitant to release an RFP for \$100,000. It is a lot of work and the Board would likely receive many applications and would have to turn down a lot of proposals.*

*T Bent: Listening to these arguments, I'd be fine holding the funds for a future larger RFP round.*

*R Nadkarni: I'm also coming around to the idea of waiting. Another consideration is what would be an appropriate time of year to release the RFP and appropriate timeline for grantees to start programs?*

*A Van Eaton: Yes, it is important for our RFP timeline to sync up with grantees and give them an appropriate amount of time to submit proposals. We just presented a vision at the annual meeting about having fewer RFPs that are more open-ended for our providers. It does not seem in line with our strategy to hastily release a relatively small RFP a few months later.*

*V Choitz: I think aligning with a fall program start has worked well for our applicants. I would lean towards a Fall 2026 start and working backwards from that to determine the RFP release timeline.*

*R Nadkarni: I think if we want to aim for a fall semester start, we need a longer runway for the entire process including review time for the Board, the signature process, recruiting, etc. I think that a spring RFP launch at the latest is needed to have programs running in the fall. But, we did also fund a lot of programs for a two-year cycle.*

*T Bent: We should also make sure we are evaluating the programs that we just funded before launching another large RFP. I think it is more realistic to think about Fall 2027 as program start dates connected to the next RFP.*

*R Nadkarni: We may want to consider releasing the RFP in late 2026 to give an appropriate timeline for all pre- and post-RFP steps.*

*A Van Eaton: I think we could be flexible about start dates. I'd be open to funding programs that started in the Summer or Fall of 2027 with the next RFP.*

*A Van Eaton: It sounds like we are moving toward the idea of releasing the next RFP at the end of 2026 for programs starting in 2027. What topics should we cover in upcoming meetings accordingly?*

*R Nadkarni: Tom mentioned this earlier, and I agree with interim reporting updates from current grantees to get a sense of how programming is going and how it has gone historically and what challenges they've faced.*

*T Bent: I'm interested in learning more about TransMedics and how we can engage them. Better understanding about their talent needs and their timeline and seeing how this may influence our RFP. I'd like to hear more about Mayor Wilson's priorities for economic development and share more about the work that the JCRT is doing with him and his team. I do also think labor market information is helpful in informing our RFP strategy.*

*R Nadkarni: It would also be great to learn more from you, Jim, about how Career and Technical Education is going at the high school and where there may be gaps the Trust could support. This could be after the City's budget process wraps up in July and once we have a better sense of what funding looks like for the coming year.*

*R Nadkarni: It may behoove us to formally "unobligate" the funds awarded to Tech Goes Home via a vote at our next Board meeting.*

## **6. 2026 Meeting Schedule**

*A Van Eaton: Next, we want to discuss potential meeting dates for February and a recurring schedule for 2026 JCRT meetings. What does everyone's availability look like for February 19<sup>th</sup> and February 23<sup>rd</sup>?*

*The group showed a slight preference for February 23<sup>rd</sup>. William will send a Doodle to confirm the date.*

*A Van Eaton: We are proposing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month at 6:30PM for the recurring monthly meeting.*

*There were no concerns raised. William will send invites for these dates and we will consider meeting again in a hybrid format as the weather improves.*

## **7. Adjournment**

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

Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 5-0. R Wilson departed before this vote was taken.

**Meeting Materials:**

- 1/29/26 Mtg Notice and Agenda
- draft 12/18/25 Mtg Minutes
- JCRT Received and Estimated Linkage Fees (1.26.26)
- JCRT Investment Priority Tracker (1.26.26)
- MNWB JCRT No-Cost Extension Request Letter
- 2024-2025 Annual Report

***Approved 2/19/2026***