



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: Remote via Zoom Meeting
Date: March 19, 2026
Time: 6:30 PM

Attendance

- Trustees: Thomas Bent, Silvana Dinka, Jim Hachey, Wilfred Mbah, 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 6:36pm. Quorum established with 7 trustees in attendance.

W Blackmer delivered house rules about technology.

1. Review and Approval of past meeting minutes

- a. Vote to approve February 19th meeting minutes

Motion: T Bent makes motion to approve February 19th meeting minutes. W Mbah seconds the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 6-0. J Hachey abstained as he was not in attendance.

A Van Eaton congratulated Rachel Nadkarni and Dana Whiteside from the City's Economic Development Division on receiving the Somerville Service Award for their critical work in bringing the global headquarters for organ transplant technology giant TransMedics Inc. to Somerville.

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 \$2.68M. 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.

R Wilson: It seems that the Trust's conservative strategy is paying off as we have a healthy balance on hand to make future investments.

3. Updates on Active Programs and Upcoming Programs

W Blackmer: This chart displays active and upcoming programs funded by the JCRT. There are currently 13 active programs. The two most recent are Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS)'s Workforce Development Pilot Program, which has initiated planning and Mass Hire Metro North Workforce Board's Pathways to STEM Careers program which is recruiting employer partners.

For upcoming programs, Somerville Community Corporation's Building Skills, Building Futures Training, and the next grant for Per Scholas are starting in April 2026.

R Wilson: I like that we are going to be funding the job quality human resources training for small businesses and entrepreneurs, an investment we have been talking about for years. If the JCRT funds a staff person to take on this work, will they be leading and carrying out those trainings, or will an organization be selected to lead this work?

R Nadkarni: Determining what programming would look like is one of the questions that we are exploring with the Mayor and City staff. The staff position would be funded by the City's general fund, not by the Trust. I am hoping to have some more information in the next month or two about how the Trust and the City can collaborate around this topic area.

R Wilson: I'd be happy to be involved in implementation discussions. The Trust may need to obligate more than \$81,000 to deliver these services.

T Bent: Would City staff be leading training, or would we be putting out a request for proposals (RFP) to find an organization to do this training?

R Nadkarni: This is part of the conversation that needs to be had. We do want to find the most effective way for the Trust's \$81,000 obligation to augment the City general fund investment to cover staff hours.

T Bent: I'd also be willing to be part of a group working on moving this initiative forward.

S Dinka: Regarding the programs that start in April 2026, where are they being promoted and do we know how many participants the programs have currently recruited?

W Blackmer: These are good questions. I have been emailing back and forth with Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) about their programs, and we are working together on finalizing details. We have not finalized the grant agreement yet. They are looking to start classes very soon, so it is a priority to have a couple more conversations with them to iron out the details. Currently, I do not have a flyer to direct residents to, but I will circulate this with the Board members when I have it. Residents should have a clear understanding of what the program is and where to sign up. The Per Scholas trainings are more established and so their April classes may in fact already be full, but I will reach out and ask about whether space is still available. I do rely on the organization receiving JCRT funding to oversee program outreach and have been thinking about using the Somerville Hub as a platform where all the funded opportunities can be listed since it is a platform that the school district already uses. In the meantime, I am happy to make connections between Board members and program managers and continue to share recruitment materials with Board members.

T Bent: In the request for proposals, are organizations asked about their outreach strategy?

W Blackmer: Yes. Some proposals go into more detail than others. I do think that program managers understand that robust outreach efforts are needed to get participants into their programs, but some partners are stronger than others in terms of executing their outreach plans and doing so far enough in advance based on when they want programs to start.

T Bent: Perhaps in the future, we should be providing a timeline of when we expect certain outreach materials to be prepared. We also want to make sure that recruitment materials are adequately describing programs that residents are signing up for. The "Building Skills, Building Futures" program title, for example, may be confusing for participants trying to understand what they will be trained in.

A Van Eaton: I would be interested in hearing the grantee's perspectives on this as well. It can be challenging for a nonprofit to plan the specifics of a program when they have not yet been awarded the funding. I think that we should work to make sure that with our next RFP we are being very transparent on when it will be released and when we will be making funding decisions. This transparent approach will be helpful for grantees as they think about the timelines of their proposed programs. This will help make the Board a better grant-making partner and have clearer timelines for programs and recruitment.

S Dinka: I agree with asking for more details in the RFP about their recruitment plan. I also have a question for Rachel about TransMedics. Are we going to have a future meeting to discuss the range of jobs that they will be hiring for? This seems like a very big opportunity for the Board.

A Van Eaton: I think that this is a good moment to transition our conversation into our next agenda item to talk about upcoming meeting topics and the timeline for the next RFP.

4. Discuss draft schedule for upcoming meeting topics and next request for proposals (RFP)

A Van Eaton: Meeting materials included a draft schedule for upcoming meeting topics and steps ahead of releasing the next RFP. For our April 16th meeting, we've invited MassHire Metro North Workforce Board (MNWB) to share a labor market information presentation. We have also confirmed that Mayor Jake Wilson will join our May 21st meeting to talk about his workforce development priorities and reflect on the Talent Equity Playbook that the JCRT has been using to guide its investment strategy. In April, we also want to select subcommittee members for the next RFP, have them review last year's RFP and think about how the presentations from MNWB and Mayor Wilson shape our next RFP.

Other ideas we have for upcoming meeting topics include hearing from Jim Hachey and Tom Bent about Somerville High School Center for Career and Technical Education (CTE) and a report on meetings with key employers. Rachel, related to Silvana's question from before, could you share more about TransMedics' timeline?

R Nadkarni: August seems to be good timing for the conversation on employers. TransMedics will need to hire 600 roles and relocate 300 existing employees to their new headquarters. They also need to complete the buildout of their new headquarters so there's still some time before they will be doing substantial hiring. They recently hired a new HR Director who is getting up to speed before they will be ready to talk with nonprofits and training providers about partnering. My hope is that by August, they will be ready to engage with outside partners.

R Wilson: Following the May 21st meeting we should revisit the Talent Equity Playbook since it is becoming outdated. In addition to meetings with employers, we should also give an opportunity for union leaders in our City to brief us on their concerns and objectives.

A Van Eaton: I think that the June 18th meeting could be a good time for the group to reflect on our April and May presentations and I thank you for bringing up these key stakeholders that we should engage.

R Nadkarni: Are we hoping to have key employers at the August 20th meeting, or are we looking for economic development staff to report back on what the primary in-demand skills are that we should be training residents on?

T Bent: I think that if we want to have employers at the meeting, this should be coordinated through the Mayor's Office as this will make employers more likely to show up. I think organizing a forum led by Mayor Wilson could be a good idea to better understand employer needs.

R Nadkarni: Maybe we should organize a smaller group to brainstorm what this event could look like. It might be hard to get a group of employers together for an evening meeting on August 20th. We may have more success

convening them during the daytime and then use the August 20th Board meeting to reflect on the daytime conversation.

A Van Eaton: I would feel comfortable with the City's Economic Development team meeting with employers and then reporting back. Logistically, it might be more feasible and may lead to more frank conversations with employers if their competitors are not in the room. I always welcome employers to come to our public meeting, but for the purpose of obtaining this information from employers, I'm not sure the Board needs to be physically present at those meetings.

W Blackmer: I was thinking similarly, Anika. One-on-one conversations with employers will result in more facetime with individual employers. In a group setting, we may have one or two employers dominate the conversation and I don't think that the RFP should be heavily shaped based on the needs of one or two specific employers.

R Wilson: While it would be great for the Board to meet directly with all major employers, I do agree that conversations with individual employers may be more effective.

T Bent: I think somebody from the Board should be present at meetings with employers so that they get a better understanding of the JCRT and how we can collaborate.

A Van Eaton: Thank you, Tom. I also welcome you bringing back your insights from the Chamber of Commerce meetings with employers on this topic. It is helpful to have multiple touchpoints with employers to learn about their talent needs.

W Mbah: When we have employers coming to job fairs are we able to match them with people that we have invested in training?

W Blackmer: Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) is usually the group that hosts citywide job fairs. I have gone to these events with the goal of helping employers connect with training providers to support the establishment of talent pipelines from trainings the JCRT funds into local jobs.

A Van Eaton: Looking back at our RFP timeline, we are looking to put together the RFP document this Fall and plan to release an RFP in January, with proposals due in April. This should give proposers enough time to put together a proposal. Then, the Board would turn around decisions by June 2027, so providers can know their funding situation ahead of the 2027-2028 academic year. If they have a program they'd want to start a little bit earlier, I think that would also be fine. The idea here is to issue a broad RFP similarly to the one we issued last year incorporating our learnings from the coming months. How does the Board feel about this proposed timeline?

T Bent: Yes, this looks fine.

S Dinka: I'm okay with this. I love it!

J Hachey: It looks good.

R Nadkarni: I want to express a huge "thank you" to William, Anika, and Vickie for putting together such a detailed rundown of what we hope to tackle in the coming year.

W Blackmer: To plan for our next meeting on April 16th, I wanted to ask what data points or questions the Board is hoping that the presentation will answer.

A Van Eaton: I'm interested in learning about in-demand and growing occupations in Somerville, the Metro North region, and the Boston area more broadly. I am also interested in wage data and post-secondary credential requirements for these jobs.

W Blackmer: You can submit additional ideas to me via email. I will be meeting with MNWB next Wednesday.

S Dinka: I'm interested in knowing which are the largest employers and which organizations in Boston and Somerville they are most connected to. I have questions for employers as well about what are the most effective ways in which they are recruiting candidates and what training programs have resulted in successful candidates for their openings.

T Bent: I'm interested to hear their take on Artificial Intelligence and how it is going to affect the workforce. Which jobs will AI impact, and will it result in the creation of new jobs?

A Van Eaton: I've been hearing concerns about AI's impact on entry-level knowledge workers and younger workers. I would be curious to hear from MNWB about unemployment demographics to confirm that we are orienting our investments toward populations who would benefit the most from our investments.

It sounds like we have a great plan for our upcoming meetings and I'd like to entertain a motion to adjourn.

5. Adjournment

Motion: S Dinka makes motion to adjourn. T Bent seconds the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 6-0. R Wilson left prior to this vote being taken.

Meeting Materials:

- 3/19/26 Mtg Notice and Agenda
- draft 2/19/26 Mtg Minutes
- JCRT Received and Estimated Linkage Fees (3.16.26)
- JCRT Investment Priority Tracker (3.16.26)
- March 2026 Memo Re: Draft Schedule for Meeting Topics and Next RFP Steps

Approved 4/16/2026