



**Executive Committee and Chief Elected Officials
Meeting Minutes**

**The Workforce Connection Board,
Workforce Board for Boone, Winnebago, and Stephenson Counties**

Meeting: May 4, 2021

Time: 8:00 am

Location: Zoom Video Conference

CEO Members Present (4): Joseph Chiarelli; William Hadley; Kevin Catlin for Karl Johnson; Thomas McNamara;

CEO Members Absent (0): None

Executive Committee Members Present (10): Ben Bernsten; Scott Bloomquist; Karen Brown; Michelle Cassaro; Pamela Fettes; Bob Guirl; Vanessa Hughes; Amy Ott; Frank Rotello; Craig Steege;

Exec. Comm, Members Absent (0): None

Board Staff Present: Dr. Lisa Bly-Jones; Chris Connors; Cathy Cornelius; Mike Johnson; Amanda Sink; Dan White;

Partner Staff Present: Ted Duckett; Courtney Geiger; Karen McDonald, Dr. Amanda Smith; Jeff Zeal

Guests: Brian Volbright, Dairy Farmers of America

1. **Executive Committee Call to Order:** Board Chair Frank Rotello presided and called the Executive Committee to order at 8:02 am.

CEO Call to Order: Mayor McNamara called the CEO meeting to order at 8:03 am.

2. **Executive Committee Roll Call:** A roll call was taken and a quorum was present.

CEO Roll Call: A roll call was taken and a quorum was present.

3. **Approval of February 2, 2021 Meeting Minutes– Action Item:**

- **TWC Executive Committee**

Motion:	Steege	Second:	Bloomquist	Approved
---------	--------	---------	------------	----------
- **Chief Elected Officials**

Motion:	Winnebago	Second:	Stephenson	Approved
---------	-----------	---------	------------	----------

4. **Employer and Participant Spotlight**

- **Employer Spotlight:** Brian Volbright with Dairy Farmers of America (DFA) at the Belvidere plant where they make 30 million gallons of ice cream annually spoke to the committee and CEOs about his experience working through The Workforce Connection to get training for his employees. He said that they are struggling to find and retain machine maintenance operators and found out about the business services available through The Workforce Connection from Growth Dimensions, Boone County's Economic Development agency. They worked with Rock Valley College to provide Integrated Systems training for their maintenance staff and OSHA Training for their leadership and management. The Integrated Systems training helps with retention, showing that the company is invested in the employees and adds value to the workplace. The OSHA training improves safety at the plant. Because the company was bankrupt one year ago, there was no budget for training and through working with The Workforce Connection, they were able to receive a 50% reimbursement of their training costs through the Incumbent Worker Training funds. They will continue to work with the Business Service Team to address issues such as the retirement gap they are up against in the near future. Lisa Bly-Jones commented that he may benefit from Job Profiling and they will have further conversations. Frank Rotello added that he's happy to hear about the collaboration that took place to get DFA the training they needed.
- **Individual Spotlight:** The spotlight video featured Devontae who is enrolled in the Boone & Winnebago Elevate Youth Program as recommended by his probation officer. He is participating in a Work Experience and likes his job and has perfect attendance. He says he's tired but he is happy to be working and attending school instead of just hanging out on the streets.

5. **Committee Updates:**

- **Finance-**Amy Ott, committee chair, reviewed the March 2021 Finance Report Summary with the group. She also reported the audit of Agreed Upon Procedures was completed. There were no fiscal finding and few minor programmatic findings that have since been corrected. The Finance Committee is waiting for notification on the Program Year 2021 Formula Fund allocations so the Preliminary Budget can be reviewed for approval.
- **Operations Management Council-**Ben Bernsten, committee chair, reported that the One-Stop Center continues to serve customers and participants through a hybrid model of in-person and virtual services. They continue to explore and use new technology to connect with people where they are.
- **Youth Council-**Scott Bloomquist, council chair, reported that the committee is working to address the issue of the impact of COVID on youth education. Many youth have chosen to go to work full time while schools are on remote learning and may not return in the fall. The Employability Skills youth need is also a topic of discussion. Skills such as advocating for themselves and the ability to discern fact from fiction in the workplace. Amy Ott asked what The Workforce Connection Board could do to help youth who want to reengage? Scott responded that the workforce will have to patient with educators. There are many unknowns with how we need to do school. Schools are funding on summer learning to reengage kids. There will need to be a restart of fundamental skills. We will see if the slide is real or if it is perceived. Lisa Bly-Jones added that deepening engagement with employers will be important to get these youth back into education. Mayor McNamara asked if the American Rescue Plan dollars will be allocated to prepare students socially and emotionally to learn. Scott responded that if kids are not socially and emotionally prepared, they will not learn. There are a lot of equity components that go into that as well. Money is not the issue in meeting the student's needs. The barriers are a shortage of counselors and social workers, and the lack flexibility with state and federal funds measuring on PARC scores. School accountability needs to be local and not controlled by the state.
- **Performance and Accountability Committee-**Bob Guirl, committee chair, reported that the committee had their first look at the Forland & Wheeler Report. The full report will be presented to the committee in June and then to the Board in September. This will provide a really good insight into the effectiveness

of our programs. The report analyzed 3000 individuals and the outcomes from enrolled services received. It showed that 80% gained employment with 12 month post training. The committee is also discussing how to help youth make the connection from secondary school to the workforce through designed pathways of training to increase employability skills.

- **Pathways to Careers**-Pamela Fettes, committee chair, shared that Todd Wells, a board member, shared Bourne & Koch's Talent Pipeline Learning Management System, a risk assessment tool that helps them identify gaps in their workforce. The committee also learned about the ICAPS certificate program that is available through the Adult Education Program at Rock Valley College. This program provides additional support to student who may struggled in the past. Frank Rotello added that he thought the Bourne & Koch approach could be a model for companies throughout our region.
- **Employer & Public Engagement**-Craig Steege and Vanessa Hughes, committee co-chairs, reported that the committee focus lately has been on a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system for business engagement. Salesforce will help the business team manage their work and alleviate duplicate contacts to business by multiple business team members. The committee is also looking at updates to the website. They found that the website is mobile friendly and has a lot of good content. They are looking at the bounce rate or the time each user stays on the site. An Employability Certificate is being looked at as a service to career seekers and could be developed as a fee for service to employers. The committee received a report from Einar Forsman, who serves on a committee for the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board (IWIB), on the work they are doing in that committee related to Business outreach and coordination. Craig commented that it was good to hear that we are tracking on the same initiatives as the IWIB.

6. **Regional Workforce Plan Update:**

Dr. Lisa Bly-Jones prefaced the topic by informing the group that the committee work is tied to the Regional Workforce Plan. Amanda Sink, Strategic Initiatives Manager, presented the 5 goals of the Regional Workforce Plan and then highlighted some of the strategic initiatives that are in process or planned around each goal and the status of those initiatives. She highlighted Board Member, Todd Wells as an Industry champion for sharing Bourn & Koch's Learning Management System that they use to track their employee training plan with the Pathways to Careers Committee to demonstrate Bourn & Koch's commitment to provide intentional pathways for their workers. This system also helps the company identify skill gaps and retirement cliffs. She also shared the efforts to address Building a Business Case for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and additional grants and workforce efforts, noting that The Workforce Connection in collaboration with other community organizations is the lead applicant for the Kellogg Racial Equity 2030 grant and the outcome should be known at the end of May. Many of grants that have been applied for address workforce issues that don't fall under WIOA and allow for flexible spending. Lastly she showed all the ways The Workforce Connection is positioned in Local/Regional, State and National conversations. Frank Rotello comments that this is a living, dynamic document and using the new technology of the Envision platform to track and implement the plan helps staff, board members, committees and partners working as a team.

7. **Chief Elected Officials Reports**

Boone County: Kevin Catlin reported that the county is working to increase transportation to the RVC Tech Center that is slated to open in fall 2021. They are working with new elected officials across the county to educating them on key priorities. They are working with AAR to attract candidates for the new positions they have available due to their recent expansion. The County is completing an Asset Map for businesses using grant funds received from various sources. It will be called Compass.

Stephenson County: Chairman Hadley reported that he is hearing from a lot of companies that can fill their open positions and he recommended that they may want to look at hiring returning citizens who complete a job readiness program through probation. He worked with Tom Cunningham, Director of the Stephenson County Probation Office to set up a hiring event for one of the companies looking to hire 100 people.

Recently The Workforce Connection, Freeport office, worked with a job candidate for an open position with the Highway Department on his resume and interview skills. His resume was excellent and he was hired.

Winnebago County: Chairman Chiarelli reported that they've been working on Project Sawgrass, a \$40 million development deal on I-39 and are on the final stage of the agreement. This project will bring hundreds of jobs to the county. They just completed their first Pace Equity finance deal with the City of Rockford. This project assesses property and gives developers and landowners the opportunity to improve their property with clean energy. The project total was \$6 million with Winnebago County contributing \$1.5 million to the project. This will create more jobs for energy efficiency. They are working with the City of Rockford and the States Attorney on an action plan to combat crime and position the entire county for economic growth. These initiatives are all done in partnership with stakeholders.

City of Rockford: Mayor McNamara shared that the AAR received a contract from United Airlines for the maintenance of 737 airplanes. This will create 250 new jobs. The city and AAR are working with legislators and asking the Governor to earmark \$5.2 million for The Workforce Connection to provide assistance with training and recruitment. He reported that Amazon has just leased 140k sf of space on the NW side and this will bring 200 jobs to Rockford. Ingersoll will build the Magellan Telescope, the world's largest telescope and broke ground on a 40k sf development for this project. The new city council was sworn in and the city received the new property tax rate information. The assessed property values have increased 6.3% and the tax rate has decreased 16% since 2017 and is the lowest it's been in a decade at 2.789%. The city expects to receive \$54 million in American Rescue Plan dollars and will know definitively on May 11, 2021. However, the city has a projected \$48 million dollar deficit for 2020 and 2021 and the money will mostly be used to offset this deficit. The city is working on a Public Safety initiative using a holistic approach for youth crime prevention and intervention and will work with schools and the families of these youth. Partnering with the county, the city is working to bring back the re-entry initiative that was previously funded using only grant funds and now they are planning to fund this initiative to make it a priority and to keep it going when grant funds are no longer available. The city is also collaborating with the county and state's attorney to secure 2 or 3 major crime prosecutors to insure that repeat violent offenders are a prosecuted appropriately and held accountable. He also announced that the Rockford Promise Program now has 160 students enrolled. This program promises deserving Rockford Public School graduates full-tuition scholarships.

8. Chairman's Remarks:

Frank Rotello shared that a Human Resources committee has been established and is chaired by Karen Brown. This committee will be a future asset to the organization as it grows. They will review policies and procedures to ensure that the organization is operating efficiently. The board officers are now meeting on a regular basis along with Dr. Lisa Bly-Jones, Executive Director to discuss the organizations work at a high level. These meetings bring perspective and help to connect the committee work. The One-Stop Operator Request for Proposal resulted in 3 respondents. A review committee was established. Karen Brown, Pamela Fettes and Frank along with Dan White for financial analysis reviewed the proposals using a review tool to score each proposal. The process will be finalized and brought to the June 1, 2021 TWC Board meeting for approval. The Stephenson county Youth services proposal will also be brought to that meeting for approval.

9. Executive Director Report:

Dr. Lisa Bly-Jones provided a written report to executive committee and chief elected officials. She did add that we continue to advance the work of the organization as a 501(c) 3 and quasi-government. The Workforce Connection's strength is workforce development. TWC has the ability to convene and bring organizations together and support employers, such as AAR, and has the funds to support the work. TWC was written into the governor's budget to receive \$2,600,000 to assist AAR with their workforce efforts. Going forward there will be more emphasis on Employer Engagement with a focus on the tough conversations about wages and job quality. With the lack of people entering into training, we will redirect funds to support employers in upskilling and retaining their current workers. Each organization has their specific mission and focus and no one organization can do it all; so it is important that we work together.

- 10. **Member Comments/Announcements:**
Craig Steege thanked the Chief Elected Officials for their updates.
- 11. **Public Comment:** None
- 12. **Adjournment:** A motion to adjourn was made at 9:31 am.

TWC Executive Committee Motion: Ott Second: Steege Approved
CEO Board Motion: Stephenson Second: Winnebago Approved

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Cornelius

Date: July 22, 2021

ITEMS INCLUDED IN THE MEETING PACKET
Agenda May 4, 2021
Executive Committee / CEO Meeting Minutes February 2, 2021
March 2021 Finance Report
Regional Workforce Plan Update Slides
