

COUNTY OF ULSTER

Office of Employment and Training

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Patrick K. Ryan, Ulster County
Executive

Tomasine Oliphant, Director

Ulster County Workforce Development Board Meeting (via Zoom) May 12, 2020 Minutes

MEMBERS PRESENT – John Eickman, Angela Patella, Chris Marx, Janet Knott, Eugene Knudsen, James Ferraro, Frank Falatyn, Anthony Mignone, Michael Berg, Stephen Casa, Michael Iapocce, Sean Mahoney, Tammy Gillon,

MEMBERS EXCUSED - Tony Marmo, Paul Cassel

MEMBERS ABSENT - Heidi Rosborough, Lisa Berger

ALSO PRESENT – Tomasine Oliphant, OET Director/WDB Director, Cynthia Baran, OET Deputy Fiscal Director, Faith Golden, OET, Janet Rigaux, OET, Lisa Snyder, OET

The meeting was called to order at 3:47 pm by Sean Mahoney WDB Chair. There was a quorum.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Sean asked for a motion to approve the February 11th minutes. Motion by Michael Berg. Seconded by John Eickman. All in favor – none opposed. Minutes approved.

2. FINANCIAL REPORT: Cynthia Baran, OET Deputy Director

Cindy went over financials. We are a bit under expended in staff wages - \$60,000. With the COVID crisis, everything is closed; many employers not hiring and training facilities not operating. Hopefully, the state will allow us to carry over more into next year and we will not be penalized for under expending, but no word on that yet. We are also under expended in youth funds. We are looking at trying to purchase some new laptops and auxiliary equipment. OET is looking to set up workstations in the training room and each staff member will need a laptop. We have a quote from IS for \$30,000. This should be approved. We are also looking to order plexiglass partitions. Sean stated that OET is doing an extraordinary job keeping up during the crisis.

3. DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Tomasine Oliphant, Director

Tomasine advised that she is working closely with other WDB Directors across the state regarding sharing ideas on reopening, trainings, and guidance from DOL. Staff updates: Cindy will be retiring at the end of the month. Her last day will be May 29th. The board members warmly congratulated Cindy on her retirement and thanked her for her years of service and hard work. Faith Golden will be stepping into the Deputy Director's spot starting June 1st. Faith was welcomed by the board. Faith stated that she is very excited to begin and has been trained by Cindy for the past two weeks. She will continue training until Cindy leaves.

Tomasine updated the board on the staffing situation with some operating remotely at home and some days in the office. We are in constant contact with U/I participants and working hard with U/I claims. Tomasine is in communication with DOL and will be discussing re-opening plans next week. We are sharing ideas, and one idea is to put workshops on ZOOM and on the website so people have access. In addition, we are looking into different remote training opportunities. Albany CanCode will be launching a digital literacy program in our area. It is a 20-person co-hort for training in computer technology. We are also looking into Coursera which is now free to local governments. This will help upscale the workforce.

We have received OTDA funding, but no guidance re: SYEP. We need to find out parameters for operating the SYEP Program. We have pulled together an Ad Hoc Committee to work on what we will be able to offer: possibly stipends, etc. We want to offer a variety of tasks to youth.

Tomasine stated that we are looking into ordering plexiglass partitions that are portable and can be moved around to different workstations. Workstations will be in the computer room or training room. More guidance is needed from DOL regarding this. Once we come up with a plan, we can share with the board. The focus is on keeping staff and customers safe, and Tomasine welcomes any suggestions the board may have. One suggestion made was to use real glass instead of plexiglass.

Eugene suggested a U/I survey – local needs assessment. Tomasine advised the board about the UCEDA/WDB meeting coming up, and that would be the best way to structure that survey.

Tomasine brought a Resolution to the Board today that would give her discretion to override current policy due to the current circumstances surrounding COVID-19 pandemic and the CARES ACT. As things change, we will need to respond as quickly and effectively as possible due to the COVID circumstance. Once the crisis stabilizes, we will recess. OET will let the board know what action was taken at the next meeting. Sean asked for a motion to approve the resolution. Motion made by Anthony Mignone. Seconded by Michael Berg. All in favor; none opposed. Resolution approved.

The UCWDB/UCEDA meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 9th at 3:30. There will be an in-depth discussion of workforce needs. Tomasine is also chairing the Ulster County Recovery Task Force – assessing needs for re-opening and recovery: childcare, housing, opioid crisis. Gene mentioned concern that the meeting is almost a month from now and the crisis is here. He felt that not too many kids would be working this summer and that the \$600 PUA will run out in July. When that ends it will expose people to economic distress. Training should be happening now. The hospitality sector has been hit hard and some of those employees will need re-training. Discussion followed.

Chris spoke about customer service training programs through SUNY Ulster in collaboration with Mohonk Mountain House for micro credentials. Would like to see if it can be rolled out on a large basis with a broad range of employers. Discussion followed.

Michael Berg spoke about new projects to employ youth; something similar to Conservation Corps. Tomasine stated that we have confirmed worksites for SYEP. We are not sure what the work experience will look like and are awaiting guidance from OTDA. Discussed SYEP Ad Hoc Committee; Dan Whalen of the Boys and Girls Club has projects and Rose Eldie Desanges-Belfort from OET is attending a Youth Bureau event that will provide outreach to kids in the community. One challenge is obtaining all the necessary documentation for the SYEP applications. We are trying to get these in the safest way possible. Normally, we have about 150 kids working in SYEP. Stephen noted that many kids are working right now: fast food, landscaping, etc. Tomasine stated that we are trying to find jobs that the kids will be interested in.

Mike Iapoco spoke about OTDA and flexibility with Pre-Covid parameters. He stated that the County Executive is employing youth initiatives to keep them in Ulster County. Discussion followed re: connecting youth to previous entrepreneurs in Ulster County. Discussed tourism, hospitality, restaurants, college kids in leadership positions.

Michael noted that one issue will be housing costs as wealthy people move up from the city. Ulster County needs more affordable housing.

Sean asked Mike what the current situation looks like at DSS regarding the huge influx of people who need services. Can we identify metrics? Mike stated that DSS is not yet starting to see more than a gradual increase in SNAP, MA, etc. People are currently relying on U/I, stimulus money, Project Resilience, utility moratoriums and these efforts effectively extended have helped stabilize them. Much will depend on re-opening the economy. An uptake in SNAP is most significant. There is some stability across the housing spectrum. A lot is unpredictable right now. Discussion followed re: Air BnB's, housing. Sean mentioned that CNA training may change dramatically. Angela advised that RNs are retiring early – there is a need for RNs and hospitals are hiring. They will need staff after COVID-19. There has been an upsurge in delivery services. Lots of students are doing work tryouts and OJTs. Construction and landscaping are great job opportunities.

Sean noted that we need to change to a fluid and ever-changing landscape. Things need to stabilize in order for us to see what will be the most impactful ideas we will need to move forward.

Tomasine advised the board that she will try and reschedule the UCEDA/WDB meeting for next week.

4. MOTION TO ADJOURN

Sean asked for a motion to adjourn. Motion made by John Eickman, seconded by Chris Marx. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 4:45 pm.

**ULSTER COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
NEXT MEETING:
TBD**

/ljs