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Business Development Committee Minutes

April 16, 2021 One Stop Career Center

Attendance

Committee Chair: Max Slusher Jean McAlister Terri Lutz Fran Kuhn Alan Beatty

Jim Drew Joe Ingemi Michael Chait Samuel Wear Lisa Martinez

Minutes

This meeting was called to order by the Committee Chair Max Slusher at 2:30 pm. The meeting was held by video conference. As first order to business, the minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed. There has been a significant gap in meetings since the last meeting was held, so the minutes of the November 2019 meeting were discussed. A motion to approve the minutes was offered by Alan Beatty with a second by Jim Drew. Max Slusher raised the question of quorum from the time of that meeting. The executive director indicated that although the membership had changed significantly within the past eighteen months, as a matter of protocol to conform with SETC expectations, the minutes needed to be reviewed and voted upon. With no further discussion, the minutes were approved, with Max Slusher abstaining.

The chair of the meeting then took up the discussion about the current concerns with local businesses having difficulty finding enough workers to fill the positions needed in order to provide a full level of services to their customers, and the potential impact that could have on the local economy. Several of the committee members, including Terri Lutz of the Tropicana Casino and Jean McAlister expressed concern that there are problems with efforts to hire staff right now. Ms. Lutz indicated that there is a great deal of difficulty hiring anyone in the hospitality industry, but especially the lower level jobs. She provided the example of the Tropicana holding a job fair yesterday, where 18 candidates appeared for interviews and the Tropicana hiring 17 of them. She stated that in the past there would be 50 people standing outside the door applying for the openings. She stated that she believes the workers are not responding because they are receiving so much in unemployment benefits. She also stated that not only the casinos, but all of the businesses are in the ‘same boat’.

Jean McAlister asked about the demographics and used the data that 21% of the population had less than a high school diploma, She asked if the entry level casino jobs required a high school diploma. Jim Drew responded the most did not. He stated that they are just not finding job candidates there and used the example of one of the culinary schools that they rely on had closed. So the usual referral sources for culinary talent are diminished. He expressed concerns about being able to open restaurants within the casino.

Michael Chait of the AC Chamber stated that he is hearing similar things from chambers throughout the state. He stated marketing and outreach are strong, but there is limited to no response. All of the businesses are currently exploring labor pools resources to attempt to fill the jobs currently vacant.

Michael then brought up an earlier point that had been discussed regarding the potential for workers who do not work at least 20 weeks during the season to be ineligible for any unemployment benefits in the fall, when the unemployment extension ends. Lisa Martinez of state employment services confirmed that was correct. The discussion then moved to the concern that the extension would end at the beginning of September.

Fran Kuhn then indicated that it was very important to create a strategy to convince the governor or the commissioner of labor that the policy that enforced the requirement for laid off workers to return to their jobs when called and have the unemployment payments stopped needed to be in place and active. Michael Chait said that the chambers were working on a letter, to express the business concerns. Lisa Martinez suggested that the letter request a mechanism from the labor commissioner to notify workers who have been called back, that they run the risk of losing their unemployment for refusing to return to work. Ms. Martinez stated that the request needs to come from statewide business interests.

Terri Lutz indicated that they had notified the commissioner of the problems with several of their current laid-off wokers.

Fran Kuhn asked whether any of the employers are considering increasing wages. Both Jim and Terri stated that it is difficult to offer increased wages because of the workers that are currently employed and the unions.

Michael Chait also discussed the viability of the J-1 visas, but there appeared to be a number of difficulties in accommodating the population. Fran Kuhn mentioned that Will Morey found workers in Puerto Rico, but Jim Drew stated that Morey’s has housing that cannot be provided by the casinos for Atlantic City. He stated that he had used the program extensively in the past, but the requirements and expectations make the program too difficult to manage.

Jim Drew also stated he has reached out to most of the school districts because they do hire 16 and 17 year olds. Michael Chait said that he had a meeting with all school superintendents on April 23rd and requested all hiring information be given to him so he could share it at that time.

Fran Kuhn expressed concern that all job postings are focused on the same component of the labor pool. Lower wage workers for full or part time positions in front line jobs. So all businesses are competing for the same limited labor pool and there isn’t enough to go around. He stated that the number he had shared from NJDOL indicated that 25,597 workers continued to receive unemployment because they had determined that they were making more money from unemployment.

The committee members then began discussing ways to outreach to the college population to make them aware of the opportunities for employment. Joe Ingemi suggested that there would be a lot of college graduates in the spring, both at Atlantic Cape and Stockton. He suggested that they could possibly a temporary bridge to get through the summer if they were not immediately employed. He suggested some may want to stay, but the time between now and September when unemployment would end could be a time filled by the college student. He suggested a message be sent out through Atlantic Cape’s texting system making the students aware of the employment opportunities. Jean thought that the messages could be given to the students either through text or e-mail. A similar discussion was proposed for Stockton as well. Jean also felt that something needed to be done with the students’ parents as well.

Max suggested that he and Fran Kuhn sit down and create a message for the students that would explain the need and the opportunity. Working from the idea of a summer job and agreeing to be contacted. Michael Chait offered to build a landing page for the interested individuals, but commented that the youth would rather hear from their peers. After further discussion, the group decided to pursue the text system as the short term solution to getting the word out. There will be an effort to create a message that can be sent out by text within the next week.

Fran Kuhn also asked if the workers who had been laid off had any rights if they planned to return in Septmeber, Jim Drew said no. If they do not return when called, then they will have no rights to the position.

Max Slusher also expressed concern about the 20 weeks problem and stated that all the ‘powers that be’ need to be made aware of this so that no one is caught offguard by the potential dangers.

Max then requested that Fran Kuhn provide an update on the resources of the workforce development board. Mr. Kuhn reported that efforts were underway to develop incumbent worker training opportunities for employers, in addition to the On the Job Training program and the recent development of the registered apprenticeships. He stated that the agency was working with the USDOL Office of Apprenticeship to create a half dozen work processes for various industry job titles including two in IT, one in manufacturing, one in landscaping, possibly one in cyber security and one in waste water management. The agency is making a concerted effort to provide training funds that will not only benefit the WIOA customer, but will also benefit the employer.

Continuing the conversation, Alan Beatty acknowledged that there were issues with the unemployment, but was also concerned that the pandemic would continue to affect work and life in general into the fall, that could still adversely affect the ability to hire needed workers. He suggested that there be some discussion of considering the idea of locating workers from other areas of the country and re-locating them to Atlantic County to address the need. This had been done in the past. He then stated that there is a second problem that involves finding housing for any recruited staff. So there are a number of challenges that are occurring simultaneously.

Joe Ingemi suggested that there are a number of avenues to help recruit talent and suggested Campus Philly as a resource that could help identify and locate talent. Alan Beatty stated that the difficulty is present in hiring and retaining nurses aids because the wage is the same as a worker at McDonalds. Jean McAlister also discussed the re-entry population as a possible source.

Max then went on to discuss the developing industries that hold promise for the future, including manufacturing, aviation, UAVs, off-shore wind, warehousing, Lifesciences, value added agricultural and fisheries.

Max requested that a follow-up meeting be held next month because of the urgency and planned course of action. A meeting will be scheduled for next month to discuss the progress on assigned tasks.

Sam Wear, the state Business Services Representative, introduced himself and discussed his responsibilities and the intitial virtual hiring experience he had with Tropicana.

Max will be providing his phone number to all committee members. He also posed the question of having people receive the shots prior to summer employment. Michael Chait and Alan Beatty indicated that supply is exceeding demand right now. Shots are readily available.

Alan Beatty and Joe Ingemi will talk about specialized nursing and Campus Philly.

Max will reach out to Jean M. for outreach planning.

Motion to adjourn was made and seconded. Meeting ended at 3:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Francis Kuhn