

**BERKS COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
(WDB)**

7:30 a.m.

September 15, 2023

PA CareerLink® Berks County, 1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604

Meeting Summary

Members Present

Ms. Debra Antol
Ms. Kimberly Baskett
Ms. Auria Bradley
Mr. Ryan Breisch
Ms. Ashley Chambers
Ms. Kristi Gage-Linderman
Mr. Robert Harrop (via MS Teams)
Ms. Crystal Houser (via MS Teams)
Ms. Peggy Kershner
Ms. Debra Millman
Mr. Richard Olmos
Mr. Mark Pinkasavage
Ms. Christy Pisker
Ms. Alexia Pursley
Ms. Patricia Shermot (via MS Teams)
Mr. Karyn Troxell (via MS Teams)
Mr. David Turner (via MS Teams)

Members Absent

Ms. Jenny Batista
Dr. Karen Campbell
Mr. John DeVere
Mr. William Dorward
Ms. Marianne Brown Egolf
Mr. Michael Fischetti
Mr. Scott Mengle
Mr. Barry Unger

Staff and Guests Present

Mr. Daniel Fogarty	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Amber Columbo	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Megan Noll	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Patricia Spencer	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. Rory Stevenson	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. Robert Kerecz	PA CareerLink® Employment Services Team Supervisor
Ms. Helen Konnick	PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator
Ms. Pamela Shupp Menet	Director of Community & Economic Development, Berks County
Mr. David Hunter	Executive Director of the Berks County Planning Department
Ms. Tristin Prostovich	PA CareerLink® Berks County Young Adult Program Director
Mr. Andre Hardy	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Mr. Larry Melf	Educational Data Systems, Inc. (via MS Teams)
Ms. Katelyn Forringer	Trinity Solar

Mr. Fogarty conducted a roll call and confirmed that a quorum was present. The meeting was called to order at 7:33 a.m.

On Chairperson Turner’s behalf, Mr. Fogarty announced that the meeting was not being recorded and requested that members state their names when commenting or making or seconding any motion to assist staff in taking the minutes.

Mr. Fogarty referred to the consent agenda and asked if any items were to be moved. There being no such requests, objections or abstentions, the following items were adopted:

- Approval of the minutes of the June 16, 2023 Board Meeting
- Approval of the new WDB Customized Job Training (CJT) Policy Revision/Status as recommended by the Training & IP Committee
- Approval of WDB Policy Revisions per the One Stop Oversight Committee:
 - Supportive Service Policy effective 9/15/23
 - Incentive Policy effective 9/15/23
 - Addition of the Juneteenth Holiday to Holiday Policy effective 9/15/23
- Approval of Paid Work Experience Policy for Youth and Young Adults effective 9/15/23 as recommended by the Youth Committee
- Approval of PY2023 Contractor Goals as Recommended by Committees:
 - Business Services Team (BST) Goals with Educational Data Systems, Inc. (EDSI) (per One Stop Oversight Committee)
 - Title I Adult/Dislocated Worker Goals with EDSI (per One Stop Oversight Committee)
 - EARN Goals with EDSI (per One Stop Oversight Committee)
 - Title I Young Adult Goals with Equus (per Youth Committee)

Mr. Fogarty invited Ms. Columbo to comment on the Final PY 2022 Performance Outcomes (4th Quarter PY2022 Program Year-to-Date Results). Ms. Columbo reported that the Berks WDB successfully met the negotiated requirements. Both Berks and the Commonwealth received “green checkmarks” for PY 2022. However, these are “raw” results with “final” results expected in December.

Mr. Fogarty noted that under WIOA, local workforce development boards are required to be recertified by the Governor every two years. Notification was received from the Bureau of Workforce Development Administration (BWDA) on July 3, 2023 that the Berks County WDB is in full compliance with all requirements and is certified until January 2025. He thanked Ms. Columbo and staff for supplying the required documentation, negotiating with our L&I monitors and for managing this biannual process to a successful conclusion.

Mr. Fogarty reminded members that Labor & Industry’s Bureau of Workforce Development Administration (BWDA) issued a draft revised local governance policy for public comment in April 2023 without having consulted with Pennsylvania’s twenty-three local WDBs. Berks County and many other local WDBs, along with the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association (PWDA), submitted extensive comments expressing many concerns with the proposed policy during the required public comment period. Subsequently, BWDA agreed to step back and engage in a dialog with local WDBs. Mr. Fogarty was invited to serve on a statewide workgroup to review the revised policy and make appropriate and workable recommendations.

Mr. Turner and Mr. Harrop previously volunteered to serve on a subcommittee to be staffed by Ms. Columbo to review the WDB's current By-Laws. The work of this subcommittee is currently on hold pending receipt of L&I's final local governance policy. It is expected that the changes to the By-Laws will be delivered for approval by the County of Berks and formal adoption by the WDB no later than June 2024.

On Mr. Turner's behalf, Mr. Fogarty invited Ms. Noll to comment on the Finance Committee's report. Referring to the PY2022 Final Budget v. Expenditures Report, Ms. Noll reported that there were savings in the Board's operational expenditures due to unneeded contingency funds, such as a legacy payout, moving expenses not currently needed, and unexpended salary and fringes for a vacant WDB staff position. She added that year-end expenditures were slightly lower than expected across all programs and the PA CareerLink® shared costs primarily due to savings resulting from gaps in employment of certain budgeted positions with the contractors. Mr. Fogarty added that there will be a healthy carry over to fund the first quarter expenses in the new year.

Ms. Noll then commented on the PY23 Revised Budget Proposal (revised 8/30/23). Three competitive grants were recently received by the WDB: Statewide Activities grants in the amount of \$175,016 and \$111,000 as well as a Youth Reentry Grant in the amount of \$800,000. The line item for Board Operations including staff was increased by \$41,490 due to recent salary adjustments for management personnel resulting from the County's Salary Study. Any changes to contracted services were due to the grant awards and those funds being added to the contracts. Mr. Olmos moved to approve the Revised Budget as proposed and Ms. Antol seconded the motion. All members approved the revised budget. There were no abstentions.

Ms. Columbo provided the Youth Committee Report on Ms. Batista's behalf. The WDB partnered with Berks Connections Pretrial Services (BCPS) and Equus Workforce Solutions (the WIOA Title I Youth Services provider) to apply for a new youth re-entry grant opportunity. At the end of June 2023, the official announcements were made and the Berks County WDB was awarded the full amount of \$800,000 requested. The program will be operated at the PA Career-Link® Berks County and staffed by a BCPS staff person along with the Title I Young Adult program staff. Mr. Stevenson added that Berks was the only applicant who received the full funding amount requested. Ms. Antol asked how the outreach will be handled. Ms. Columbo replied that some youth were identified in the grant application and referrals will be made by BCPS as well.

Ms. Columbo commented on several planned events designed to directly reach disconnected young adults and to develop stronger relationships with the eighteen school districts in Berks County to connect with undecided seniors. School district representatives will be invited to hear a high-level overview of the 2021 update to the WDB's Disconnected Young Adult Study and have an opportunity to express their needs to better serve and help keep high school students from dropping out. Community agencies will be invited to hear an overview of the Study. A Youth and Young Adult Resource Fair will be held during the Spring of 2024 where a minimum of 100 agencies, resource providers and employers will be invited to present available employment, educational and support services to youth. Ms. Kershner added that there are many re-

sources in the community to be contacted for inclusion. Bus transportation will be offered to connect to the resource fair. Ms. Gage-Linderman offered Gage Personnel's assistance as well.

Mr. Fogarty next invited Ms. Chambers to comment on the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee's report. She noted that the Committee received positive feedback from the March 2023 Symposium which targeted the Greater Reading region. The Symposium was joined virtually by 225 individuals. 59 Berks County employers were represented at the event. 21 of those employers completed surveys at the end of the event. CareerLink's Business Services Team (BST) initiated follow up surveys with 200 of the attendees. Ms. Columbo added that the BST is a valuable resource, and more of this type of outreach will be added to their contract goals for PY2023. Ms. Columbo will update outreach statistics quarterly and post the results on the WDB's web page. Ms. Millman commented that the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) will work with the group. Mr. Fogarty noted that annual contractor goals are reviewed in WDB committees and final contractor goals are then presented to the Board for approval.

At their August 3rd meeting, the DEI Committee also reviewed a Resource Guide template which will be used to gather information to be included. This Guide will be the main charge of the DEI Committee over the next program year, with assistance from the BST.

Ms. Kershner was invited to comment on the One-Stop Oversight Committee's report. At its August 29, 2023 meeting, the Committee reviewed PA CareerLink[®] Status Reports from the CareerLink Administrator as well as the WIOA Adult/Dislocated Worker Program, the Employment, Advancement & Retention Network (EARN) Program and the Business Services Team (BST). Based on these reports, the Committee approved contractor goals for each to be presented to the full Board on September 15, 2023 for approval.

Mr. Kershner added that PA CareerLink[®] Berks County Fall Job Fair will be held on October 30, 2023 at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel. Recent renovations at the hotel have added new space to be utilized during the upcoming Job Fair and additional employers will be accommodated. She said that the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel has been confirmed as the site for the May 2024 Job Fair.

A By the Numbers (July 2022 - June 2023) summary report, prepared by Ms. Konnick, PA CareerLink[®] Berks County Administrator, was included in the Board's packets. It was noted that annual customer foot traffic (24,242) is recovering from the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, foot traffic reached 32,000 visits annually.

Ms. Columbo informed the Board that the State's new digital intake system to be introduced on September 20, 2023 is expected to be a challenge. Each person arriving at the CareerLink's office will have to sign into this system via an electronic device each time they come in for services. The objective is to capture foot traffic across the Commonwealth. Mr. Fogarty complimented Ms. Houser and her Bureau of Workforce Partnership & Operations (BWPO) team for the thoughtful rollout of this major project, particularly the strategy to implement the system at pilot sites before the Commonwealth wide rollout.

Ms. Houser commented that she was impressed by the helpful documentation provided during a recent new member orientation held by the Berks County WDB via MS Teams on September 7, 2023.

In Mr. DeVere's absence, Mr. Fogarty referred to several key points from the Training and Industry Partnership Committee report which Mr. DeVere had requested to be reported.

Program Year 2023 High Priority Occupation List – combining efforts with the Southeast Pennsylvania (Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia) Workforce Development Boards, a total of 33 additional or reinstated High Priority Occupations were approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry for addition to the 2023 Berks Workforce Development Area list. Of special importance to the Berks WDB are attractive occupations in agriculture, healthcare, construction and manufacturing.

On June 30, 2023, the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) successfully launched the Greater Berks Healthcare Connections Industry Partnership. A collaboration with the Reading Area Community College's Health Professions faculty in the development of a group-sponsored registered apprenticeship model to facilitate the training of Certified Nurse Aides (CNAs) and promote CNA to LPN career advancement is also underway. These initiatives are being subsidized by funding from a multi-year PA Nursing Pathway Apprenticeship Industry Partnership Grant secured by the Berks County WDB in early Spring.

On September 14, 2023, the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance hosted another very successful Manufacturing Summit held at the Reading Area Community College's Miller Center which was attended by 150 people. Mr. Fogarty thanked Ms. Pursley for her very active participation on the advisory committee for this event. Ms. Pursley commented on the excellent venue and valuable information shared by industry experts and leaders who presented.

Mr. Fogarty introduced Ms. Shupp Menet who previously shared a PowerPoint presentation of the *IMAGINE Berks* community and economic development plan at the September 16, 2022 Board meeting. Ms. Shupp Menet returned this morning to update the Board on the progress of the initiative over the last year. Included in the Board's packets was a two-page report titled *Looking Back Year One Implementation Success & Challenges* and *Looking Ahead Year 2 Implementation Key Actions*. The *IMAGINE Berks Year One Report 2023* is available for public viewing on the County of Berks website.

Ms. Shupp Menet related that the prime concentration over the past year was "inter connectedness" across all facets of the plan. This was accomplished, she added, by "upped communications" between all parties involved.

"With the formal adoption of the plan and the continuing commitment and leadership of the County Commissioners, the plan has achieved astounding first year results:

- \$28M+ invested across all Focus Areas
- New *IMAGINE Berks* website
- Hired a Housing Planner

- Adoption of County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan
- 9 Regional Municipal Meetings which led to 8 requests for Joint Comprehensive Plans
- Berks County Redevelopment Authority's Whole-Home Repair rollout
- Collaboration, Cooperation, Commitment Among Stakeholders"

Challenges included in the Year One synopsis:

- Competing Land Uses
- Achieving Local Consensus on Growth Strategies
- Aligning Data
- Communications

Ms. Shupp Menet reported that going out into the communities to gather information resulted in the knowledge that Berks County communities really do want to work together.

Looking ahead: Year 2 Implementation Key Action points covered:

- Build: Rollout of a \$55M infrastructure fund that will be administered by the Berks IDA
- Small Business and Entrepreneurship: New micro-grant and micro-loan programs to expand access to capital for Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses
- Talent and Economic Mobility: Support activity of the Healthcare Connections Industry Partnership and Disconnected Youth grants to increase labor force participation and available opportunity jobs
- Housing: Establish guidelines for a \$1M housing investment program to accelerate development of attainable and accessible housing
- Placemaking
 - Support Main Street activity with customized data
 - Direct an additional \$250,000 to projects that align with the County's Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan

A few recipients of small business and entrepreneurship grants were mentioned by Ms. Shupp Menet: Penn State Launchbox, Barrio Alegrio, Statewide Small Business Credit Initiative administered through the Greater Berks Development Fund, Neighborhood Housing Services, and the O'Pake Institute's Financial Lending Innovation Collaborative.

Ms. Shupp Menet noted the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance's (GRCA) partnership with *RoleCall*, connecting local companies with prospective new residents of the greater Reading area and job seekers.

She noted that another great tool, *Placer.ai Data* software, was utilized and will continue to be used by the Berks County Planning Commission. This software tool tracks location data and foot traffic in a specific perimeter, i.e., West Reading's Art on the Avenue.

Mr. Fogarty thanked Ms. Shupp Menet for her very comprehensive overview and noted that it would be an excellent lead in for Market Intelligence comments.

Mr. Stevenson commented that one of the topics discussed at the Greater Berks Healthcare Connections Industry Partnership meeting earlier that week was a candid dialogue, led by Dr. Charles Barbera, Reading Hospital CEO, on the critical need for new, attractive and affordable housing to attract qualified non-Berks residents to fill healthcare professional openings throughout the County. He added that prolonging this housing issue could also have a direct obstructive effect on the *IMAGINE Berks* Talent and Economic Mobility goals.

Ms. Pisker noted that her construction products manufacturing company has had trouble when trying to bring in workers from other countries. Finding affordable housing and childcare for these potential workers is particularly challenging. Ms. Pursley agreed. Ms. Millman commented that talent attraction has been in the forefront of economic development in many regions.

Ms. Gage-Linderman commented on the timeline for updates to *IMAGINE Berks* reporting. Ms. Shupp Menet noted that the program year for this Board runs from July to June. She would rather have a timeline of January to December for updates to the program.

Mr. Fogarty added that the WDB will look to integrate our workforce development plans with other planning initiatives in Berks County.

Mr. Hunter commented that he plans to share recent housing availability data with the Commissioners. He said not only are places to live needed, but builders are also needed to construct those places to alleviate some of the housing shortages.

Mr. Fogarty reported on the September 2023 COO Update noting that Berks County's seasonably adjusted (SA) employment rate in July 2023 dropped further to 3.6%, the lowest rate since September 1989.

He next referred to a flyer included in the Board's packets announcing a Virtual WEDTalk to be held September 20, 2023 with the subject *Inclusion: Reimagining a New & Better Workplace*. WEDTalks are sponsored by the Bucks County WDB with funding from L&I statewide activities funds and are available at no cost to all SE PA local WDB members and employers.

Mr. Fogarty congratulated Mr. Mengle and his colleagues at Penn State Health St. Joseph Medical Center. The Center recently celebrated 150 years of service to the Berks County community.

Referring to the chart included in the report, Mr. Fogarty noted that there remains only 0.7 unemployed worker for every job opening across the nation.

Ms. Antol noted that the job market appears to be more stable.

Ms. Gage-Linderman commented that her company is attempting to engage under-skilled entry level workers and youth.

Mr. Fogarty asked if there was any public comment. There being none, Ms. Pisker moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Kershner seconded the motion. There were no abstentions and the meeting adjourned at 8:56 a.m.