



Meeting of the Board of Directors  
May 17th, 2021, at 4:00 pm

Via Zoom Conference Call and YouTube Livestream

**Board Members Present:**

Chair Maria Moran, Treasurer Rocco Ferraro, Secretary Todd Kusnierz, Steve Bulger, Eric Connolly, Josh Spain, David Wood, Benny Zlotnick, Tim Dunn, Tim Szczepanek, Jeff Jones, Brendan Chudy

**Board Members Absent:** Tim Szczepanek, Justin Baker

**Saratoga Partnership Staff Present:** Shelby Schneider, President; Aimee Johnson Economic Development Assistant

**Guests:** Gretchen Steffan, Executive Director of the Saratoga County Workforce Development Boards; Jennifer McClosky, Executive Director of the Saratoga County Employment and Training Center

Chair Maria Moran called the meeting to order at 4:01 pm.

**ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

**April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Board Meeting**

Dave Wood made a motion to accept the April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021, minutes, seconded by Benny Zlotnick. No further discussion was made.

**Vote on the motion: AYES: 13 NOES: 0.** The motion carried.

**WORKFORCE OUTLOOK PRESENTATION**

Chair Maria Moran introduced Gretchen Steffan, the Executive Director of the Saratoga County Employment and Training Center. Gretchen states she has been with the workforce board for seven months. She also has a background in human resources, planning, and community service. She was a self-employed consultant for several years and has worked with many employers in Saratoga County. The workforce board is a network of state and federal boards. The workforce innovation opportunity act (WIOA) is the funding source through which workforce dollars are allocated to the boards – there are 33 in New York. They work with the state labor department to established career centers for adults, dislocated workers and youth. They facilitate partnerships and use DOL labor statistics to target demographic groups by establishing regional and local plans. They have 30 people on their board of directors. 50% of their board must be business members. Labor unions, community colleges, and elected officials also serve on the board. Board composition is required through legislation. They tailor programs to special needs as well. They run career centers in Warren and Washington County, three of them, and Gretchen is currently trying to professionalize the organization and build relationships.

None of the centers have been open due to the pandemic. The board is taking this time to look at providing distance services and creating a new purpose post pandemic. Shelby Schneider asks about market conditions. Gretchen says the board is concerned because of the pandemic and low labor participation rates. There are help wanted signs everywhere. Childcare challenges and stimulus checks have much to do with this. She is hoping to channel funding resources into getting people back to work. Jeff Jones asks if these barriers were a problem prior to the pandemic. Gretchen says she believes so. There is also the issue of wages, because childcare is a huge expense. For lower wage earners, the balance is what can they afford versus what will they make. Juggling benefits in the households is another problem; trying to balance one parent staying home to watch the children and avoid the childcare expense. States that we must collaborate to solve this complex problem. There are people in the workforce that still don't have access to broadband. She is hoping to be able to lure people with laptops or access to hotspots to return to work.

She is optimistic, even after this pandemic, and this is an opportunity to reimagine their service delivery model. Employers are also now able to reimagine their hiring and recruiting practices. For example, a program called Career Jam is a day long program to help students research available careers. Tim Dunn asks what the largest skill gap is in Saratoga County. Gretchen says there are multiple: social skills, manufacturing skills, teamwork (the motivation to be part of a team), problem solving, and decision making are important skills as well. Also states that computer literacy keeps coming up, especially for smart technology in manufacturing. Eric Connolly shared information about changes in education; he is using problem-based learning now in his Social Studies classes. Something only a small percentage of teachers do – it is very student-based learning. Gretchen mentions tech prep initiatives, which benefit those who think differently. Depending on individual education level, book learning or practical application may not work for everyone. Learning style is important. The focus used to be on college, but student debt has increased exponentially, and people are now thinking about that pathway differently...more college students are taking one or two years off. Part of the college experience is being involved in-person and many don't like remote learning. There is an opportunity to push apprenticeships and attract students who have many study halls and spark an interest in working through college. Chair Maria Moran asks how involved the families are throughout this process. Gretchen states the aim is to have parents and students involved to in order to plant seeds and reach other family members. The summer youth program funded from WIOA dollars is based on income eligibility. This program provides some education and hands-on learning with a financial education component. Many apprentice programs in our area have waitlists, and not just for skilled trades, even employers are developing their own programs.

Gretchen introduces Jen McClosky. Jen says she is the boots on the ground of the workforce board. Things are changing daily. Wednesday we can take our masks off indoors, so it feels like the end is in sight. The new pandemic is a shortage of workers. Every business is feeling the same thing. Unemployment insurance is one issue - at \$20/hr. there is no incentive for people to return to work. We can't fix unemployment; she states we must work with what we have. They have been partnering with the Saratoga County Prosperity Partnership to develop a framework to remove barriers to employment. State and federal funding frameworks exists to make sure money is spent efficiently.

Money can be used on workforce housing, childcare – including in home centers, even to increase childcare spots and shifts for off hours workers who need additional coverage. In terms of workforce transportation, they are partnering with Tech Valley shuttle. They are trying to change the narrative... for example, Work Pays is a regional campaign to highlight businesses that offer increased benefits and higher wages. They are also trying to educate unemployment recipients on the pitfalls of being out of the workforce for too long. The pandemic has turned talk to action with childcare and transportation. But we must be creative and realistic.

Jeff Jones asks how we got to high employment before the pandemic with these barriers. Jen says workforce money is coming into the area and needs to go to business for advocacy as well as addressing operating costs. She has advocated to end unemployment. Eric Connolly recommends going into high schools to discuss employment opportunities; the kids are not working. Shelby Schneider states she completed an assessment of the working papers process – not many families are presently aware of the process. From the 1970's to today there has been a drastic drop in kids working in high school. 1/3 of people have their first jobs in the service sector. She states that for most of the schools she researched, you can't even find working papers on their website. As baby boomers age out, this silver wave is coming due to disconnects between higher education and jobs available in the economy. Benny Zlotnick agrees that we are not teaching kids to work for what they want. More and more people think that earning \$15-18/hr. is the key to life. Eric Connolly adds that we need to start with Juniors and Seniors to activate interest in the trades before college. Penny Hill adds that tech is backlogged with interest, and if kids lose interest, they need to know about their other options. Degrees are not as important as skill sets. Apprenticeship programs are so important to provide skill and training. Jen states worksite restrictions prohibit kids from hands-on learning or equipment use on farms and in other settings - transportation and participant age are issues as well. Dave Wood says the Federal Farm Bureau is working to ease restrictions to open apprenticeships and training programs.

Shelby Schneider says it's tough for employers to get in front of kids in schools, and soft skills are what is missing. Tim Dunn asks if we can do something by the end of the school year to get into schools. Shelby Schneider says yes, she has sent info and statistics over to the chamber of commerce to see if we can even get schools to post job and transportation info. Tim Dunn discusses career program from Mohawk Valley Edge. Shelby Schneider suggests engaging unions and schools to create meaningful pathways. Gretchen adds that there is a very delicate balance in New York state between pay and mandates/regulation for employers. Maria Moran thanks everyone for their presentation.

### **TREASURER'S REPORT – ROCCO FERRARO**

Full Treasurer's report will be held off until the next board meeting. Rocco Ferraro states he recommended changes due to discrepancies; staff currently trying to recast and reconcile some categories. Things have occurred this year that are not represented in the current budget, causing the need to recast. Focus has not been fully on this due to the staff shortage and other issues having taken precedence. He suggests we edit QuickBooks and the budget to reflect current changes and will discuss them at the next meeting. What was provided in the board packet was the percent to budget,

staff will be working today to change categories back as per budget. Rocco Ferraro provided a brief overview of SCPP financials. We are at about 26% of revenue. Have received the first quarter of payment from the county - have not billed or received the second quarter. StartUp NY has been an issue on the financial reports due to passthrough issues. The SBA PPP is not showing under revenue as it is not a grant until it is forgiven. The second-round loan has been completely used but not yet forgiven. Shelby Schneider discusses the use of the funds and the forgiveness process. Also states that we have received the USDA drawdown. She wants to verify that the county has collected the bed tax money before we request the second payment. We are keeping spending conservative. Rocco Ferraro says the statement of financial position cash flow is in good shape, we have a solid amount in the checking account. No red or yellow flags on activity or financial position. Simply a matter of reconciling QuickBooks with budget info and putting it into a context that is understandable to everyone. Will be worked on for next month along with a revised budget to review. Chair Maria Moran asks about health insurance discrepancies. Shelby Schneider says this is a function of staff reduction. Rocco Ferraro adds therefore we need a more realistic budget. Maria Moran thanks Rocco Ferraro for the presentation.

### **OLD BUSINESS – STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE UPDATE**

Shelby Schneider states she spoke to the Executive Committee to develop the committee concept. One of the first services listed in our county agreement is planning. We need to work with our single member – the county, to tell us based on funding constraints, where should we focus? Let's get thinking about the overall macro environment in the county, and where to spend energy and engage with other partners to maximize our impact. A general planning timeline was provided for review and consideration (document provided in packet). We should bring entities into meetings and engage the local economy and community to provide direction and guidance. Tim Dunn thanks everyone for working on this after the meeting last week. He is excited to get to work on this. Chair Maria Moran comments that we should ask the board to review and continue the discussion at the next meeting.

### **PRESIDENTS REPORT**

President Shelby Schneider provides the President's Report; states we were notified that our submitted EPA brownfield grant will not be funded. They received 429 applications and were only able to fund 154. As a relatively new entity, this process may require several submissions to get it right. HRP wants a debriefing meeting with the EPA to review our application. This program will provide over \$300k in funding over the next three years – administering this would be a fulltime job. We will keep going after the funding. We recently hosted an SBA restaurant revitalization Facebook live event at the Country Corner Café. The portal opened on May 3<sup>rd</sup> – there is not enough funding to meet the demand from the entire country – it is open to all the food service sector. The Capital Region Economic Development Council announced it is opening the funding portal - Saratoga County is underrepresented for this process... we have an ESD meeting to see if any of our projects can get funded. Have also been working on various business projects around the county – a lot of BRE. Startup NY's Spark Shoppe has had its campus plan approved. Doing fit up now. Also working with them on lease and sub-lease agreement – will be more info closer to August.

Still working on workforce training to expand childcare – partnering with Brightside up and Capital Region Childcare Council. Currently applying for a grant through Warren County’s Norther Borders grant. Hoping to use training dollars to help people open at-home childcare centers which solves two problems at once. The northern towns project with Beehan will be released this week. They have childcare issues up north as well. Working on a 56-unit workforce housing and childcare project in Saratoga County; have an MOU with a childcare producer for a 42-week early childhood development program to be included. Had a first interview with the Adirondack Explorer to discuss and work on an MOU for the northern town’s collaboration. Malta Works wrapped up a 9-week campaign, which was topped off with Malta Works masks provided to employers for their workforce. The Town of Galway project is moving forward with their senior housing piece study. There is \$150k available county-wide (\$7100 per community) to facilitate economic development - fund will be administered by SCPP. Chair Maria Moran thanks Shelby Schneider for the presentation.

### EXECUTIVE SESSION (IF NEEDED)

No time for executive session.

### ADJOURNMENT

Tim Dunn made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Rocco Ferraro. No further discussion was made.

**Vote on the motion: AYES: 13 NOES: 0.** The Motion was carried.

The meeting adjourned at 5:38 pm.

Recording Secretary \_\_\_\_\_