



**Minutes approved
October 24, 2024**

**Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board
Quarterly Workforce Board Meeting
July 25, 2024**

Board Members Present: Cathy Witherspoon, Chair; Razell Ward, Secretary; Laurie Glidden, At-Large Member/Youth Chair; Sue LeClair; Josh Henry; Trampas Hutches; Chris Winstead, Treasurer & Chair of Resources; Kate Durkin; Diane Frigon; Grant Provost, Chair of Recruitment; Charlie Woodworth; Monique Roy; Chris Waite; Kelly Aho

Board Members Absent: Bruce Tisdale; Brandi Farrington; Billi Mitchell; Adam Wilson; Sam Hight

Staff Present: Erin Benson, Executive Director; Carrie Parker, Administrative Assistant

Others Present: Sara McLaughlin, Contracted Financial Manager; Tom Fernands, EMDC; Loretta Alley, EMDC; Joe Pietroski, Kennebec County Commissioner; Mark McInerney, CWRI; Joshua Brown, MDOL

1. Welcome and Introductions:

Cathy Witherspoon called the meeting to order at 9:02am. All present via ZOOM and in-person gave a brief introduction.

VOTED: To approve the April 25, 2024, meeting minutes as written.

Motion: Chris Winstead Second: Charlie Woodworth **Vote:** All in Favor

2. Approve Annual Audit:

Sara explained that the annual audit was due March 31, 2024, as it is always due 9 months after the end of the fiscal year. The current audit completed was for the year ending June 30, 2023. She stated that there was nothing uncovered and no findings, however, there was a comment that we need to continue to do subrecipient monitoring, the monitoring of EMDC or the service provider. This is something that has been discussed to start subbing out to someone other than Sara to have a “fresh set of eyes” look at it.

This monitoring is not within the same scope as a full audit but is done as more of an informational and helpful tool for improvements. Sara explained that she did complete the audit during the last week of June to satisfy the audit requirements and not get “dinged” for that year, but the plan moving forward is to look at contracting this out to a third party. Working so closely with EMDC and Fran Crosby reviewing drawdowns and quarterly reports, Sara felt it may skew her view of things and thought a new person with no toes to the organization would be beneficial.

Sara also stated that the report mentioned being taken off high-risk status, which is old news to us as a Board, but was important to have noted officially in the audit. It had been mentioned in the previous audit while still on that high-risk status, so it was important that they follow-up with that in this most current audit. The audit for the year ending June 30, 2024, will start being audited within the next few months.

VOTED: To approve the annual audit. Erin stated that due to the size of the audit it did not go through via email to everyone, but anyone who wants to read it can get it sent to them if they reach out to Carrie or Erin.

Motion: Chris Winstead Second: Charlie Woodworth **Vote:** All in Favor

3. Economic Overview—Mark McInerney:

Mark presented a short presentation that provided an economic overview of Maine, focusing heavily on our local regions. This presentation will be sent out to everyone for review, the full reports that Mark mentioned within his presentation can also be sent to anyone who is interested by reaching out to Carrie or Erin.

Mark's summary of economic indicators that have been closely monitored showed that the total economic output and jobs are steadily growing, the real gross domestic product is increasing around 2% per year through the 1st quarter of 2024, nonfarm wage and salary jobs continue to reach new highs while unemployment rates are below 4% for the last 31 months, job opening rates have been lower for the last 2 years with just under 6% in recent months, and inflation has cooled significantly but remains above the Federal Reserve's 2% target rate.

The state's overall job picture and data reflect jobs that are filled and reported as part of an employer's payroll during the reference period, unfilled or vacant positions are not counted. This data shows jobs have increased by an average of 700 jobs per month over the last year. Close to two-thirds of the increase was in healthcare and social assistance with one-third being in leisure and hospitality. Prior to the last year those sectors had lagged the broader job recovery from the pandemic. Healthcare and social assistance make up 17%, retail trade 13%, professional and business services 12%, and leisure and hospitality 11% comprising just over half of the jobs in the state.

Mark reviewed changes in nonfarm jobs from 1990 to present, mentioning that job gains in the last three decades were primarily in healthcare and social assistance, as well as professional and business services. These sectors added more than 40,000 jobs since 1990. He said that gains in most other sectors have been under 10,000 and manufacturing jobs decreased more than 40,000 through 2020 and have since stabilized. Some of the longer-term trends in the different workforce regions from 2023 the population, jobs and wages split shows a 49% population with a 52.9% job share and 57.4% share of wages and salary within the coastal counties followed by central-western regions at 27.4% population, 25.1% job share and a 23.2% share of wages and salaries. The Northeastern region makes up 23.5% of the population, 22% of the job share and only 19.4% of the share of wages and salaries.

Job growth has progressively slowed since 1990, parallel to slower growth in the working age 16-24. Except for recessions and the following recoveries, net growth in the 21st century was quite modest and stayed within the Coastal region. Jobs are increasingly concentrated in service providing sectors and around densely populated areas, to include healthcare jobs. Technology, law, accounting and finance, insurance and other professional services and colleges as well as industries comprised of rising share of jobs are also primarily found in population centers with the rise in remote work being a major expectation to the pattern. Within the Central-Western region, Kennebec and Androscoggin counties account for 72% of the total jobs and 85% of the net jobs added within the last 4 decades.

CWRI analyzed employment and earnings of 850+ apprentices that had completed their programs between 2017 and 2023 and found that over 50% of them that trained in either construction and extraction or production related occupations, and over 25% trained in healthcare support or technical occupations. Among those who were matched to employment records, the most common occupations were among Layout Worker and Metal/Plastic Workers, Electricians and those within the healthcare fields. Apprentices with full-time equivalent earnings increased from 38% one year before entry to 70% one year after completion of the program, and 74% of all those who completed a program were working with their sponsoring employer in the year after their completion. Apprentices saw increases in wages upon program completion with a median annual earning more than doubling within the year after program completion from the year before entering the program.

Mark stated that CWRI has done something similar with the states Adult WIOA programs, analyzing participants who completed services between 2016 and 2021 and found that approximately 1,600 participants completed services through the program. Most participants were female, under the age of 45 and many were head of a single parent household, in a historically marginalized group, had a disability or faced other barriers to employment, and had somewhat lower education attainment than the population of Maine residents. The outcomes for WIOA adult participants showed that earnings had nearly doubled within 2 years from enrollment to 2 years after completion and that the share of participants employed in Maine increased from 56% 2 years before the program completion to 73% 2 years after completion.

Erin wanted to know how Mark feels AI technology will impact the employment picture. She attended a presentation that stated that AI will affect jobs within 5 years, meaning school age children will have a very different employment experience when they graduate. Mark said that CWRI is interested in reading and following the AI technology as much as possible to better understand potential impacts. He stated that many economic changes occur very slowly over many years versus a sudden displacement, and sees AI similarly. AI has the potential to impact large swaths of the economy in various sectors as it is integrated, It will change the composition of what many jobs look like, but will also be a tool to enhance productivity in many types of jobs. As more workers integrate these technologies into their daily work life, this will increase the capabilities of these technologies and will also increase the usage of them within daily work and various jobs over time. Mark also feels that utilizing these tools may also remove barriers and enhance entry into the job market for those people who would not be able to gain

employment without these improved tools. This would include an increase of information and decrease the need for long-term education and training programs. Erin stated that some of the job fields mentioned in the plan that could potentially be affected were banking and finances, trades remaining safe. The AI Education Project gave the demonstration using ChatGPT. The speaker told ChatGPT that he was presenting to the workforce board, and asked the AI program to summarize WIOA into a PowerPoint presentation. The AI program reviewed hundreds of pages and within minutes had created a PowerPoint. Chris Winstead mentioned that one thing to remember about AI is that it is a learning tool and has been known to create false information, presenting it as fact, and getting lawyers and students in trouble for false information. Chris Waite said that it is important to remember they are called learning modules for a reason and should be used as an assisting tool and not as a data tool. Cathy stated that she uses it every day in her job but must edit the information it provides, but that the time it cuts off the workload makes it valuable. Chris Winstead also stated that he uses it quite often in his professional writing to provide a quicker means of producing documents and can easily edit them but that his time and workload for research, etc. has been cut down significantly. He mentioned that regarding state employment and higher education there are specific rules around AI and how and when it can be used and how it impacts plagiarism. Diane stated that accessibility is always a question, are these tools going to be accessible to those with adaptive needs and how will that be handled as this tool moves into more day-to-day environments. Chris mentioned that there are classes to teach people how to use things like Chat GBT to be able to structure a query so it produces trusted information. Chris Waite noted that this will be a job field created in the future around these tools.

4. Service Provider Report—Loretta Alley:

Loretta stated that enrollment in the adult program was at 137 participants and was 91.2% of goal despite a struggle to fill adult populations throughout the year. An increase in numbers came through various cohort projects with pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeships, and on-the-job trainings. The dislocated worker program was able to reach 118% of the goal which was a huge achievement especially with the economic struggles playing a part within dislocated workers. Youth enrollment fell short with only 80 of the expected 128 enrolled. Loretta said that they are seeing less out of school youth enrollment throughout all areas and populations. With the Associated General Contractors of Maine's summer pre-apprenticeships targeting youth, those cohort projects helped to increase numbers. The Quest program enrolled 80 of 158 of the goal. Often participants could be enrolled in either the Adult or Quest program. In the effort to meet Adult numbers, fewer were enrolled in Quest, which skewed those numbers. With the CBO's (Maine Recovery Network, Western Maine Community Action and Maine Immigration Refugee Services) referring more participants, she is confident that numbers will continue to increase throughout the upcoming year. Twenty-nine people were enrolled in apprenticeships, which lead to good careers. EMDC and Lewiston Adult Education have worked together on various training courses including a healthcare pathway with four students, a construction project, employer projects with CNA training and Oxford Hills for a CDL training. Three students completed pre-apprenticeship at Reed and Reed and were in on-the-job training partially funded through CMCC and were all hired at \$20ph with full benefits. There was also successful completions in the Oxford Hills CNA program and the Lewiston Adult Education Teller program.

A success story that Loretta shared was that of a single father of two children who after successfully obtaining his CDL via training classes was employed with Coca-Cola and is working full time at \$22ph with benefits. There was also a New Mainer in the dislocated worker program that participated in the healthcare pathways training who passed her CNA and started at Marshwood's before moving recently to Maine Medical Center. An out of school youth with a disability was able to get his CDL-B and complete the driving portion road exam as well.

Regarding outreach and cohorts 52.13% of enrollments came from projects which Loretta felt was significant and she hopes can be continued moving forward. She also stated that 54 referrals have come through from various organizations since July 1st showing the increase in referrals already this fiscal year.

There is a new Youth Director, Sam Giasson, who has been with EMDC for many years working behind the scenes with Tom and recently moved up into the Director role. She has a vast knowledge of WIOA and is a huge asset in her new role. Erin stated that there has been significant leadership turnover in this role for the past few years and she personally voiced her concerns about this trend. However, having worked with Sam previously, she is confident that there are great things to come. She also mentioned that the enrollment number of 128 for PY23 and was only met at 60% has been lowered to 100 for PY24. She has no doubt that number will be exceeded. Cathy asked why that number was so low and what was attributed to it. Loretta said that the struggle was due to the economy, finding out of school youth who want to work or get into training opportunities, etc. They have begun making more attempts to connect with high schoolers to reach them before graduation when they tend to get lost in the shuffle. Erin mentioned that a lot of youth were enrolled under the children's cabinet grant and not WIOA due to the change in regulations that were put into place in January around spending on in school youth. Tom also stated that when looking at the enrollment goals that look like they fell short, EMDC served more people in PY23 than in PY22, with 353 people being served compared to 337 the previous year. Kate asked if coming up short on youth enrollment affects the WIOA funding, and Erin stated that funds were already sent out and had been reduced slightly factoring in state employment and who falls into the youth category. Our region has the most dislocated youth than any other area which affects the funding as well. Chris Winstead asked what keeps people from qualifying for WIOA. Erin stated that in-school youth spending was stopped and that EMDC had to spend the ARPA grant funds before they expired. In school and out of school youth must have a barrier to qualify for WIOA as well, and if they are not low enough in income and have a barrier, they do not qualify. Plus, the low unemployment rate in Maine shows that if someone is not working, they either have significant barriers or simply do not want to work.

5. Financial Update—Sara McLaughlin:

Sara reviewed the financials and budget that needs to be voted for approval for PY24. She began with sharing a recap of the PY23 year end and how that looked upon its completion on June 30th. 100% of both the Opioid and PY22 WIOA funds were spent and expired. Career funding is scheduled to end on September 30th and EMDC has already spent 100% of their funding with the

local board having spent 97%. The board will have no problems spending the remainder before the end date. Currently QUEST and ARPA are scheduled to end between September and December of 2024, but Sara explained that there should be no-cost extensions for both grants which will extend them out past the expiration dates so the spending with that in mind is on track at this time. PY23 WIOA will start to see an increase in spending now that PY22 has been spent out by EMDC. The local board has already been spending PY23 funds and is at 71% of the spending already. Sara explained that the board can spend formula funds (WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) regardless of how much the provider (EMDC) spends. That is not the case with a National Dislocated Worker Grant (Quest, Opioid). The board can only spend the percentage that the provider spends. If an NDWG grant ends and the board has spent a larger percentage than the provider, the board would need to reimburse the state

Sara provided the detailed budget with the formula funds and the discretionary funding listed out in detail and reviewed the spending and budget for approval. She explained that the January 2023 to June 2024 budget was \$448,790 which is about \$250,000 larger than average due to the CBO grants within QUEST and ARPA. Looking at the year, the board spent \$263,403 of the budget which looks low, but the numbers are skewed by the mini grants. The bulk of the spending will be spent during this fiscal year that were not spent out last year. We are at 100% of our budget, with a short of about \$500.

Sara shared the 2024-2025 budget and went over the spending and allocations of funding. She explained that the breakdown is based on the start and end dates for each funding source and expenditures the board will have. She included both WIOA PY23 remaining funds and the WIOA PY24 funding, QUEST and ARPA with expected extension dates bringing the budget to \$463,879. At the time the budget was created in June, the May YTD numbers were used as a reference, so those totals were listed out for everyone to see and removed the mini grants to show the budget without contractual program funding which is \$246,203.

There are no big changes to the budget with the bulk of the expenses coming from staff in salaries and fringe benefits, contractual admin and professional fees, fiscal management and fiscal monitoring. The travel expenses were kept high since we still have discretionary funds and do not want to add to our fixed costs, so when those discretionary funds go away, we will still be able to meet the essentials. Most of the travel is from conferences and training that have ramped up since COVID.

Kelly asked what funds carry over and what funds must be spent. Sara explained that when she creates a budget, she looks at the total amount of funds, what was spent the previous year, what will be spent in the current year and if they continue after the current fiscal year. If they carry over, she puts that total into reserve from what will be spent, and the current budget becomes the award amount minus what's been spent and minus what is expected to spend. If we do not spend out all the formula funds she will carry that total into the budget for the following year, especially within the current budget since the discretionary funding sources are covering so much of the spending. If contracts are awarded, then those new funds will affect the budget and it would need to be revised with those extra monies accounted for.

Joe asked about the ARPA grants need to have the money designated upon receiving it. Erin explained that the money is allocated in various projects that are in contract and we are waiting for MDOL to get it back to us to move forward, but the obligations are there.

VOTED: To approve the budget. Erin explained that due to the beginning of the fiscal year the Operations Committee has previously approved the 2024 budget during the April meeting and that this vote is the formal Board approval. Due to the meeting schedule of the Board, the fiscal year begins between meetings and therefore the Operations Committee needs to vote the budget into action to meet the new fiscal year beginning on July 1st.

Motion: Chris Winstead

Second: Kelly Aho

Vote: All in Favor

6. Industry Updates:

Chris Waite discussed the broadband industry and where he sees work within this industry heading in the next few years. Chris owns a utility construction company and is engaged with the Maine Connectivity Authority. He explained that broadband has received a lot of funding through various parties including the bipartisan infrastructure law that is helping to provide a significant drive forward in this industry. Chris explained that the Maine Connectivity Authority was legislatively created to apply for, receive, and administer funding that would bring broadband connectivity components to places within Maine that currently do not have one. That would mean that anyone that is served by an internet provider that provides less than 25 megabits per second over to 3 megabits per second, or anyone using DSL is considered underserved. The Governor's mandate and compliance with NTIA (National Telecommunications and Information Administration), which is the funding mechanism, means that these underserved locations must be served before anything else can be done using these funds. According to an analysis, there are approximately 6,000 miles of fiber that will have to be built in order to serve these locations, as well as other types of technologies deployed that include wireless cellular towers and things. The idea being that the allocation of roughly \$200-300 million will provide some level of broadband connectivity and access across the entire state of Maine to populations currently not being served.

In terms of workforce development, he stated that he has previously had good conversations with Erin and the thought process behind workforce development and MCA (Maine Connectivity Authority) who has a workforce development group that's focused on this. Chris Winstead and his team within the community college system currently have programs going specific to placing fiber optics. This is a great example of the problems that need to be solved. This one skill set that's involved in the entire deployment of 6,000 miles of fiber will be one job function. This opens the gateway to discuss what it's going to take to construct all the lines on the telephone poles, make all the connections, going into homes to install equipment, and more. Moving forward with this project will mean a large increase in available, good paying jobs, in some of those areas. For example, internet service providers see long-term employment opportunities. The downfall to this is the "peak to valley" job forecasting with many of these jobs being called to demand but temporary. There will be some permanent job creation as in ISP growth and more subscribers, which will lead to the need for more in-house staffing. The primary

deployment of these networks are done by companies like Chris's who build fiber networks for the internet service providers. Chris stated that he can't add trucks at \$500,000 each and staff them for what is essentially a 5-year build plan and make that as a business make sense. Other businesses are running into the same issues. They can't have 25 technicians on staff versus the 10 they may currently have when at some point within the next 5 years that peak will end, and those jobs will no longer be necessary or affordable. This would set workforce development up for a place where these people are no longer employed, rejoining the workforce but with the expectation of making the higher wage they were previously making that may not be available to them in other areas.

The discussions that Chris and Erin have been having focused primarily on reframing what this would look like. Building the capacity, work with the community colleges and do the things needed to create the jobs that will not only be needed upon the demands of this project, even on a temporary basis, but also look at how to bring these skills into other industry areas once that peak is over. He explained that the same skills that are needed by technicians are the same skills that are needed for someone that works as a heat pump installer and can be transferred into that industry. This is also more fluid to what applicants and employees find within their level of interest when looking at employment opportunities. Creating this fluid workforce will address a lot of these initiatives like broadband as they move through the project life cycles. Though none of these problems are solved at this time, by continuing communications and addressing them keeps them at the forefront of everyone's mind and will create partnerships and programming that will eventually resolve and maybe solve what we're seeing. Chris is open to discussing partnering and creating efforts and opportunities to solve this at any time that anyone else is available to talk.

Cathy asked how many employees Chris has now versus what that need will look like in 5 years with this expansion project slows down. Chris explained that his company is considered the upper small company within this space and that he has four trucks and is adding a fifth truck and has 14 employees which leaves him short at the moment. He also explained that his company is in a strange place as they are waiting for funding that cannot be deployed until the first quarter 2025. It is impossible for his company to forecast the needs for the ramping up of the capital investment with the total amount needed for purchasing trucks, staffing, etc. to fulfill the needs of the project. There are numerous ancillary things that need to happen for him to scale up his company and prevent an influx of out of state workers which is another benefit, but these dollars need to stay within Maine for benefits that are needed within our state and workforce needs.

Chris Winstead stated that reaching out to the community college system is always a great resource as they have access and work closely with CMCC and have various programs that have amassed just under 7,000 training providers that provide training for all businesses across the state. He said that this allows them the opportunity to see what all those trainings are in and who's delivering the training, data that can be helpful in situations like this. He agrees that one struggle mentioned by Chris Waite is the costs and expected needs with these and any other forecasting projects.

7. Local Plan 2025:

Erin shared a PowerPoint presentation that was sent out to everyone about the local plan. Erin stated that conversations addressing needs around industry growth and projects like broadband are exactly why the local plan was created. The purpose of the local plan is to focus the board's work to develop new and reinforce existing partnerships, the outcome of which is to more effectively provide services to job seekers and employers, address skill gaps impeding economic growth and develop career pathways that support efforts of workers to access higher wages and more skilled employment.

Due to the circumstances around the creation of the current local plan, she does not feel that it is a helpful tool in guiding our mission and the work being done. The information within the plan is outdated as it refers to the pandemic and other areas that we are beyond at this point. Erin's goal is to create a new local plan that incorporates things like the broadband industry needs discussed by Chris Waite and things that are happening within various industries and how we can assist with those needs.

Erin gave an overview of the current 2022-2025 local plan and where she finds it lacking and in need of updates stating that anyone who wants to view the local plan can find it on the CWMWDB website. She reviewed the contents of the plan starting with an introduction, executive summary, strategic planning and regional analysis, local workforce development and local one stop delivery system, WIOA Title1, adult dislocated worker programs and all the court programs before going into cooperative agreements like the MOU/IFA, Jobs for Veterans state grant and then fiscal performance and other functions, performance accountability and local board assurances.

The introduction is 2.5 pages and is a list of critical trends gleaned from the set plans of Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission, which she found interesting because why are we interested in the sets plan for southern Maine, when there are only 9 towns within Oxford County that are served by this organization. The executive summary is 8 pages and states a vision that reads "a diverse and satisfied workforce meeting the needs of all employers" and 5 priorities that assist to meet that vision that include communication, collaboration, developing a pipeline of workers through outreach and education, develop demand-driven training opportunities, performance monitoring and developing stackable, industry recognized training programs. It also shows a SWOT chart based on the 3 CEDS plans, mentions pandemic effects which she feels we are beyond at this point, and CEDS goals. It also includes a summary highlighting the board as a convener of partners and a summary of strategies that will be implemented by core partners to achieve the strategic vision. She is unsure how the conversation with the core partners was handled to ensure they understood that strategies were being laid out that they would need to follow up on.

She moved on to the strategic planning and regional analysis piece which is 28 pages and includes all the data and analysis of the regional economic conditions with data on demographics, industry, occupations and wages. There is an analysis of knowledge and skills workers need to meet employment needs, an analysis of the workforce in local areas, including the labor force participation, unemployment, and labor market trends. It includes an analysis of the workforce development activities, this includes education and training, and a description of the local board's strategic vision and goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce. It

also has an exact repetition of the five priorities language outlined within the executive summary. This is most of the report along with the local workforce development system piece.

The 16.5 pages that make up the local workforce development system within the plan has a description of the workforce development system, WIOA 1B providers and other WIOA required partners, community colleges and UM systems, as well as Economic Development Partners. There is a description of how the local board, working with these entities will expand access to employment, training and education, and supportive services. It also describes the steps taken to involve other entities in the formulation of the plan and of the strategies and services used in the region to facilitate engagement of businesses, support local workforce systems that meet the needs of businesses, coordinate workforce development programs, strengthen links between one-stop systems and unemployment and the utilization of work-based learning approaches (RA, OJT, CT).

Some of the other items listed in the plan include a description of:

- how the board will coordinate workforce development
- how the board will leverage and coordinate supportive services
- how the board will promote greater business voices within workforce development and promote and cultivate industry-led partnerships
- the role of faith-based or community-based organizations within the one-stop system

Erin stated that most of her time will be spent between the expectations of the board and the 16.5 pages of the local workforce development system. The rest of the plan is content around the local one-stop delivery system, WIOA Title 1-adult, dislocated worker and youth program services, Wagner Peysen services, WIOA Title II-adult education and literacy programs, cooperative agreements, jobs for veteran's state grants, fiscal, performance, and other functions, performance accountability and the local board assurances. There is also an appendices page that concludes the plan. These parts are made up of descriptions that can easily be updated by partners such as EMDC and adult education.

Erin's concern lies around the other areas, with special attention to the data pieces. Moving forward, the first step will be to get the state guidance Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), the last one released was in January 2021 and Erin has asked for the current one but has not heard back yet. The next step will be to analyze and incorporate existing plans (Maine State QIOA Plan 2025-2029, CEDS Plans from SMPDC, AVCOG and KVCOG, The Maine 2020-2029 Economic Development Strategy: The 2024 Reset, Workforce Attraction and Recruitment, Reauthorization of WIOA and the Maine Apprenticeship Strategy). Once this is complete, we can gather data around the regional economic conditions: demographics, industry, occupations and wages. Gain knowledge and skills that workers need to meet employment needs. Review what the workforce in the local area looks like: labor force participation, unemployment and trends. What workforce development activities exist including education and training, and the board's strategic vision and goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce and how that will braid with the data and needs.

Other tasks that will need to be completed will include gathering input from business and job seekers, WIOA core partners and other one-stop partners (WIOA required partners), economic development partners and community-based partners. These can be gathered using a google doc or survey monkey style questionnaire. When the WIOA listening sessions took place, the

three boards got together and provided six questions to those managing the listening sessions and Erin found that in the two sessions she attended those questions were not really covered. They did send out something for those who couldn't attend those sessions and the questions were included there and she got the information at that time. Despite having some of the information, she feels there is more data to be gathered. A timeline for completion, which Erin is working on, will need to be developed and the decision on hiring a firm to complete the local plan or doing the development in-house. She mentioned that EMDC was hired to create one previously and it was pricey, but it would take her quite a while to create it and follow the guidelines that would be needed around demographics and data. She will check into options for hiring an outside agency. In the end, the plan must be a working document, not a "dust collector." Chris Winstead said that he feels if we are going to go this route, he would recommend sending out an RFP and finding out what other organizations do first and put that out there and utilize data that is already pulled together.

8. Executive Director's Report:

Marketing Campaign

Fuseideas was selected in early April as the marketing agency for the marketing campaign focused on reaching disconnected youth. As a recap, CWMWDB released the RFP on February 16 with proposals due by March 15. The board received four proposals that were evaluated by a committee: Chris Winstead, board member/treasurer; Angelina Klouthis-Jean, Director of Innovation and Strategy MDOL; Benjamin Hawkins, CWMWDB contracted marketing & communications professional; and Erin Benson, ED for CWMWDB. The committee met on March 29 and felt that only two were worthy of further evaluation. The ED notified Fuseideas via email on April 5 that they were the successful bidder. There was time spent on developing the contract, and some internal discussions with MDOL and the agency. The contract was signed June 7 and the kick-off meeting was held June 17. First steps outlined during the kick-off meeting will be to plan and implement the five youth focus groups and develop the Marketing Plan. On June 27, Erin introduced Fuseideas point of contact, Steve Mason, to some of the board's youth committee who are members of organizations that serve youth and might be able to help with the recruitment of youth for the focus groups.

Board Certification

Every two years, the local boards must submit a Local Board Certification letter including documentation showing the requirements of State Workforce Board Policy PY15-22 have been met. They asked us to include the following documentation with our request letter:

1. A current list of local board members and the categories they represent.
2. Assurance that the local board has sustained fiscal integrity (citing fiscal reviews and audits as evidence).
3. Documentation that the local area has met negotiated performance measures for two consecutive years; and
4. A brief report explaining how the local board has carried out the required functions.

On Friday, June 28, I sent Christopher Quint, the executive director of the State Workforce Board with the letter of request signed by Cathy Witherspoon, an excel sheet of board members and the areas they represent, a certification report, Performance Measure Outcomes from PY21 and PY22 (PY23 won't be available until August), and a listing of outreach from May

2023- April 2024 to ensure we are reaching out to businesses and community organizations. I sent an email on July 8, attaching board materials. Included in the attachments was the certification request letter and the certification report.

WIOA Re-Authorization

WIOA Reauthorization was a centerpiece during the National Association of Workforce Boards' conference and in subsequent weekly email blasts. NAWB has been encouraging boards across the country to contact their senators regarding the House's bill on reauthorization, even sharing other board responses. HR 6655, which passed the House on April 9, 2024, has some concerning passages. It is currently in the Senate's Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions committee which has authored their own version. The three boards and their service providers worked together to research how the House version would affect our regions. NWDB and CWMWDB penned a letter that was signed by both board chairs. It was sent to Senators Collins & King and Representative Golden on May 22 along with a bulleted list of the impacts if the House version was passed by the Senate. You received a copy of the letter and the bulleted list in a July 8 email with attachments for the board meeting.

WANTO

I participated in a statewide meeting convened by MDOL to discuss the Women in Apprenticeship and Non-Traditional Occupations (WANTO) grant offered through the Employment & Training Administration's Women's Bureau. I had worked with this grant when employed by ACAP in Aroostook County. I suggested it should be a statewide grant rather than a regional approach. All at the meeting were hoping that New Ventures Maine, a statewide non-profit, would take the lead. They were unable to as they are under the umbrella of the University of Maine System, and higher education entities were not eligible to apply. I received a call from Commissioner Fortman asking me if CWMWDB could take the lead. The WANTO grant was submitted Monday, July 10 at 5:07pm, meeting the midnight deadline. Sam Dinah, MDOL Associate Commissioner was a huge help with gathering information and data needs and the writing process. MDOL Communications Specialist Jessica Picard helped with editing, Sara helped with the budget, and Carrie was invaluable in the submitting process. One issue with submitting the grant was a section on financial risk, so we had to submit the high-risk letter and notification of resolution and the audit. These may be red flags for receiving the grant. We should hear in August/September. If successful, the grant would provide about \$67,000 in administrative funds, which is why Sara mentioned the placeholder for the grant that would create changes to the 2024-2025 budget.

MDOC

I convened several meetings around a proposed pilot to help residents of MDOC correctional facilities earn a CDL-A, a credential which could help them earn employment quickly after leaving a facility. Discussions included staff from the MDOC, staff from the two other regional boards, and WIOA providers, along with a non-profit (FreeWorld) that focuses on the classroom training portion of the CDL-A. We are in talks with NTI to provide the driving portion of the CDL-A training and are considering a pilot with the correctional facility in Charleston. MDOC has no correctional facilities in our CWM region. However, we could enroll and support residents if they

have a permanent address in our region. I am also in talks with creating a pilot for training in one of our local jails.

WORC

I worked with Mike Roughton, Executive Director for the Manufactures Association of Maine, on the Work Opportunities in Rural Communities (WORC) ETA grant. Mike is the lead on this with CWMWDB helping. During the July 2023 board meeting, Josh mentioned a need for more advanced electricians (E&I). We convened two meetings with TimberHP, Sappi, Huhtamaki, and Cianbro, along with EMCC instructor Rick Reardon. EMCC offered a two-week long upskilling program on December 23/January 24, of which Sappi and Huhtamaki took advantage. However, this still did not meet the goals of TimberHP. The need includes E&I but also automation and robotics. The grant application seeks to solve this issue. The goal is to work with businesses to create curriculum that addressed these needs and trains people in these areas and then provides further training and apprenticeships in the manufacturing industries. The WORC grant would not provide any funding for CWMWDB, but it will focus on our region and help our businesses, and the model could then be shared around the state.

ARPA

The third proposal for the additional \$300,000 of ARPA funding was accepted. The amended contract was signed June 12, 2024. The amended contract will include funding for an assessment tool and a transportation pilot. Most assessment tools used in career exploration are really an interest inventory, which could limit a person's potential career path. If you are not exposed to something, chances are you will not have an interest in it. Fit First developed an assessment based on psychological research, predictive analytics, machine learning and their proprietary algorithm. The goal is to assess a person's behavioral characteristics that are more reliable predictors of success in an occupation. The assessment tool is tied to the occupations outlined in ONET. A job seeker can take a 15-minute assessment and see how their traits match the traits that are most relevant to a specific occupation. When someone is happy/fulfilled in their job, retention is much better, which is good for the job seeker and the employer. In working with unions and apprenticeship, Fit First used this tool to identify those most likely to be an electrician. The attrition rate for their apprenticeship program dropped from mid-40% annually to 3.5% over four years. We will use this assessment tool in a pilot with five Oxford County high schools, and any other partner who would like to take advantage of this tool. We will have it for one year and track success.

As for the transportation pilot, CWMWDB nine 7-passenger mini vans that could transport 4-6 workers to a place or places of employment. Each van will cost \$1300 per month, a cost that would include insurance and maintenance. The nine vans will be rented for 18 months each at a cost of \$210,600. A van could be used to transport current or recruited employees for a single company, or a cluster of companies within close proximity. Beyond the 18 months, employees would need to develop strategies of permanent transportation, or employers may find value in renting the vans themselves to help with recruitment and retention. Other potential uses would be students attending a training, community college, a pre-apprenticeship, or apprenticeship. This would be particularly helpful in the construction industry or working with participants in

recovery homes. GoMaine will map locations of employees in a business or cluster of businesses to find the most likely opportunities for carpooling or van pooling. The board will work to identify businesses that would be a likely fit for van pooling. With a requirement of 4 riders in each van, 36 people could be served among nine or more businesses.

Advanced Manufacturing Center

After MAME connected me with John Belding, the Director of the Advanced Manufacturing Center (AMC) at the University of Maine in Orono, we met for a discussion of what AMC does. AMC (lead in the grant) and Southern Maine Community College recently received a \$7 million grant from the US Department of Defense to develop training for the manufacturing of the future—Industry 4.0 that includes the robotics and automation skillsets that TimberHP and other manufacturers need. The training will be mobile, so it can deliver training on site at a company's location. It will be available to do these trainings within approximately 6 months. I connected John with Josh and Sarah King at TimberHP, and to Amy Herrick at Sappi. I had connected with Amy on June 21 to find out how Sappi's multi-million-dollar upgrade to the paper machine was going. Their training was scheduled to be delivered between January 2024 and end by May 2025. The training is timed with equipment installation/startup phases. I set up a tour with her in August. After my conversation with John at AMC, Amy agreed to have him join the tour so he can understand needs.

Advancing Job Quality: Celeste Banda from Main Street Skowhegan was hired for the Re-Compete grant and found Results for America (RFA)'s *Advancing Job Quality Academy* online, a program that would meet some of the outcomes of their grant. RFA encouraged interested people to apply with a government partner, such as a workforce board. Celeste contacted me and asked if I would participate and be included in her application to the academy. I agreed and invited Susan Cerini from EMDC. This also connects to a focus of the USDOL's Good Job Principles. While Re-Compete is focused on Waterville, Fairfield, and Skowhegan, we can apply lessons learned on a regional basis. Results for America (RFA) helps government leaders harness the power of evidence and data to fund solutions that work to accelerate economic mobility and improve lives. Its mission is to help local, state, and federal policymakers deliver better results and faster progress. As a Fellow, I will have the opportunity to engage with experts in the field, collaborate with peers, and develop innovative approaches to advancing job quality—all things we can include in our local plan. It is a six-month commitment. Fellows are asked to budget 2-4 hours a month as part of participation in the fellowship: 90 minutes for monthly training webinars, one hour for monthly technical assistance sessions, and up to two hours for intermittent, self-paced work (e.g. collaborating with colleagues, making progress on project plans, etc.).

NSF Engines grant

I received an email (addressed to our generic email) in May from Terry Shahata, the executive director of the Maine Space Corporation. Its Executive Committee gave the green light for the Corporation to submit an application in response to NSF Engines funding opportunity. This program is NSF's version of the EDA Tech-Hub Program but with significant funding and is more

encompassing. Successful applicants would be in line to receive up to \$160 million from NSF over a 10-year period. Business and workforce development are key elements of the program. Of the counties targeted, two fall within our region: Androscoggin and Kennebec. I set up a virtual meeting with Terry and had an interesting conversation. I attended a few meetings to understand what our role might be. Terry asked all three board directors to serve as senior personnel on the pre-proposal and help guide the project regarding workforce development and economic opportunities. WE all agreed, but we must be asked to apply based on the pre-proposal.

Letter of Support

- June 15, 2024—Associated General Contractors of Maine (AGC-Maine)'s proposal to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Highway Construction Training Program grant.
- June 18, 2024—Manufacturers Association of Maine (MAME)'s proposal for the Northern Border Regional Commission's Workforce Opportunities for Rural Communities (WORC) grant.
- June 18, 2024—Maine Community College System's Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities (WORC) Round 6.
- June 18, 2024—Eastern Maine Development Corporation (EMDC) and Eastern Maine Community College (EMCC)'s proposal for Workforce Opportunities for Rural Communities (WORC) Round 6.
- July 11, 2024—Center for an Ecology-Based Economy (CEBE)'s proposal for US DOE Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations' Energizing Rural Communities Prize.

9. Adjourn Meeting:

Cathy adjourned the meeting at 11:08am.

Next Board Meeting Date: Thursday October 24, 2024, via ZOOM, 8:30-10:30am