



Approved by Board:

April 24, 2025

**Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board
Quarterly Workforce Board Meeting
January 23, 2025**

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

Board Members Absent: Chris Waite; Kate Durkin; Bruce Tisdale; Sam Hight; Adam Wilson

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

Others Present: Sara McLaughlin, Contracted Financial Manager; Tom Fernands, EMDC; Sam Giasson, EMDC; Joshua Brown, MDOL; Joe Pietroski, Kennebec County Commissioner; Dwight Littlefield, MDOE; Noelle Coyne, WMCA

1. Welcome and Introductions:

Cathy opened the meeting at 8:31am and had everyone take a few minutes to introduce themselves to the group.

VOTED: To approve October 24, 2024, meeting minutes as written.

Motion: Chris Winstead **Second:** Razell Ward **All in Favor**

2. Service Provider Report-EMDC-Sam Giasson

As of the end of PY24 Quarter 2:

- Adult 147 of 124 (118.5%)
- Dislocated Worker 44 of planned 47 (93.6%)
- ISY/OSY combined 73 of planned 73 (100%)
- Quest currently 105 of planned 158

Our collaboration with partners and employers has continued to have positive impacts and performance outcomes through project development:

- We are currently engaged in three active projects with Lewiston Adult Ed, Spruce Mountain Adult Ed and Oxford Hills / Nezinscot Adult Ed for Healthcare Pathways, CCMA and CDL. Between all these projects EMDC is working with 42 customers enrolled in various programs.
- 7 projects concluded during the quarter with customers attaining certifications in CNA, culinary arts and two pre-apprenticeship programs with AFL-CIO for construction and welding. These pre-apprenticeships were focused on women in the trades.

- There are several projects in the works for the upcoming quarter that will include CNA, CDL, Today's Teller, and Trades.

EMDC staff continue to actively engage with community partners to build new and foster existing relationships. Some of these collaborations included:

- Several staff met with the Somerset Economic Development Corporation which oversees the Somerset Connect Center in Bingham and had a tour. This will allow us to better connect with people living in northern Somerset County. Marianne Young was invited to and recently attended a Forks Area Chamber of Commerce Meeting where she made connections with employers and businesses in Northern Somerset County.
- Director of Youth Services and Senior Director of Workforce & Business met with the CEO of the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies (CES) in Farmington. They are working on securing funding for a project that will allow them to develop housing and entrepreneurial opportunities for youth in Franklin County. We will be following up with them in the new year to discuss how EMDC can potentially assist and be part of this partnership. Erin expressed her delight in the connection made with the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies as Bonita Tompkins is one of the members of the Youth Committee and she has had many conversations with her and hearing this connection is wonderful as they are an amazing resource for all of us.

EMDC staff have engaged with many employers and businesses across the five counties that include:

- Holy Cannoli, Pinette Funeral Homes, United States Postal Service (Madison), Nicki Lynn's Decor, Vera's Iron and Fine Maine Craftsmanship, Food City, Maine Passive House, Dignity Funeral Homes, Somerset Connect Center, Madison Public Library, Daddio's Restaurant, Molly Ockett School, New England Animal Hospital, Home Town Veterinary Care, Ware Butler, T&L Garage, Tractor Supply, Central Maine Medical Center, Angstrom, Reed & Reed, Frederickson Farm, Dirigo Veterinary Care, West Minot Millwork, and Somerset Humane Society.

Work-based learning activities are actively running:

- 10 new work experience agreements were established, and one carried in from the previous quarter. Two host sites were new employers: Somerset Humane Society and Molly Ockett School.
- One new on-the-job training contract started at the Tree Street Youth Center in Lewiston; two OJT activities carried in from the previous quarter.

Success Story:

Customer was found eligible for WIOA as a DW in Kennebec County in May 2023. His goal was to attend KVCC's Diesel Mechanic program to obtain his associate's degree. This young man had brain surgery very early on in his enrollment and had to pause his training while he was recovering. He did not allow that to slow him down and is scheduled to obtain his associate's degree from KVCC in May 2025. He has been on the Dean's list since his brain surgery, has very consistent grades and has been an excellent participant. He has utilized WIOA funds for tuition and books for each semester, no PELL awarded as he was not eligible. He was denied for CSSP at

enrollment, so we are his only financial support for school/work. We have supported with tires, mileage and a new laptop. He is on track to be able to obtain employment out of school and we are starting to discuss his options to do so. While he has not yet graduated and obtained employment, I feel he is a true inspiration to us all in that he did not allow the health scare to deter his goals.

3. Financial Update: PY24 budget-Sara McLaughlin

Sara provided a financial update starting with high level concerns and covering the five open contracts we currently have with MDOL. She explained that the contracts all start and end at varied times so the overview does not cover any one specific time period, but more of a snapshot of where we are with each one at this time. Spending focuses on those contracts that have end dates first and proceed to those ending last.

The Career Dislocated Worker grant, which was originally scheduled to end in September 2024, received a short extension and a small amount of funding of approximately \$10,000 which has begun to be spent and should not be a problem to complete by the end date of March 24, 2025.

There are two contracts that Sara and Erin continue to watch very closely, one being the WIOA formula funds that last for two years and therefore at any given time there may be two years open. This is the case now with the PY23 funds that were awarded July 1, 2023 and end June 30, 2025 and the PY24 funds that were awarded July 1, 2024. CWMWDB has spent out 100% of the PY23 funds from last year with EMDC spending about half of those funds because they needed to spend out the remaining PY22 funds. Though they are spending at a quick rate, Sara and Erin continue to monitor this closely and meet with EMDC staff to ensure they spend out those funds within the next six months. This means they need to draw about \$164,000 per month or \$75,000 bi-weekly.

Quest, which is also a dislocated worker grant, was given a one year no cost extension. EMDC has currently spent 42%. Where this is not a formula fund, the local board can only spend the same amount the service provider spends. So, the local board cannot spend any more on this contract until EMDC begins to spend more on their end causing Sara concern to spend it all down prior to the September end date. Sara was asked if there would be an extension on the funding to which she explained that there was not and any money left “on the table” at the end of the contract would be given back to the state. Sara mentioned that discretionary funding from grants like Career, Quest and ARPA have changed how we are spending money versus previous years when there were only WIOA formula funds.

Sara reviewed the ARPA contract. This grant was kept at the board level, not sub-contracting to EMDC. Due to a slow start, CWMWDB received a no cost, one-year extension for the ARPA funds. Currently 22% of spending has been made, but Sara expects spending to start picking up and is not concerned about it at this time. The current PY24 WIOA formula funds have begun to be spent by the local board, but again, EMDC needs to spend out the PY23 funds before they begin spending the PY24 WIOA funds. Sara doesn’t expect them to start spending until around July of this year. Currently the board has about \$5.7 million in contracts awarded to us, of which we have spent about 1/3.

Sara reviewed the administrative budget, which she explained is a more detailed format of the information on our five contracts she just reviewed. Because the contracts are multi-year and have multiple spending periods, ending at different times, she's constantly making certain that we're spending at a rate that will spend out the contracts in the order they expire without overspending. She does this by looking at what we've spent in prior periods, what we need to reserve for future fiscal accounting periods and subtracting those two. What is left is what we've estimated we're going to use to fund this year's budget. So, for this year the local board budget for administrative pieces is \$474,000. This is almost twice as much as the normal budget because of the community-based organization mini grants from both Quest and ARPA that distort things. Throughout the end of December, we should be at 50% of spending and we are at 49.2%, removing those funds that distort the budget, we are at 46% of spending which is perfect. Sara explained that there are funds that can be carried into the next fiscal year if we underspend. Some funds are reserved for next year that can be used for this year if we overspend, so she always makes sure there is a cushion. The bulk of the budget is spent on people, salaries and fringe benefits, which is on target. Outreach for marketing and advertising shows we are almost through the budget, and everything else that looks greater than 50% is just timing like insurance which is front loaded. Fiscal management, which is Sara, is already known as she is contracted. At this time, we've spent \$233,000, which is slightly half of our budget and is right where Sara wants us to be, so she has no concerns.

Erin explained that when looking at the \$500,000 ARPA fund, the breakdown for that gave \$50,000 to the local board, \$90,000 went to the Fuseideas marketing campaign which will be spent out by April, and the largest amount of \$210,000 is dedicated for a transportation pilot program which will be spent out before September of 2026. Grant asked if the CBO's who have been awarded money will present anything on how those funds were spent in the same way EMDC does? Erin said that she can have Fuseideas present to the board in April for the marketing campaign, but that the CBO's report monthly on their progress which is rolled into a quarterly report for ARPA. The Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services, referred 30 people or 39% of all those enrolled and has been a huge success. They have the highest percentage of referrals turning into enrollments. The other two CBOs are struggling. MERN has submitted most of the referrals but none have turned into enrollments. WMCA has done an outstanding job of outreach, but they are not getting the interest for referrals.

4. Maine's Career & Technical Education-MDOE-Dwight Littlefield

After board members showed interest in CTEs and how they could connect more closely with potential employees, Erin asked Dwight Littlefield who oversees CTE at the MDOE to join the meeting and discuss Career and Technical Education and answer some of the board's questions.

Dwight explained that CTE is part of the Department of Education, part of the Workforce Development and Innovative Pathways team which is made up of adult education, extended learning opportunities and early college. There are 27 CTE schools across Maine with various locations throughout the state with 19 CTE centers and 8 regions that all function similarly and all but Ellsworth being connected to a high school. The director functions as an administrator within the building and reports to the Superintendent as part of the school. When looking at

regions, the CTE director reports to a board and most of those are in separate buildings. There are 3 primary funding sources for programming—state appropriations, like all SAUs, that are referred to as essential programs and services. CTE receives around \$70 million. A small amount of funding, \$7 million, is federal through the Carl Perkins grant. The only entities that are eligible to receive this funding are the 27 CTE schools and the community college system. They also receive ARPA funding of about \$20 million that is issued out in two different RFAs, one being focused on equipment upgrades and personnel infrastructure and the other was infrastructure of 4 buildings and large projects across Maine.

Dwight gave examples of various projects that included an \$8 million bond that allowed them to issue RFAs to CTEs for the upgrading of outdated equipment. With ARPA funding they were able to add a small 600 square foot addition to the school in Lincoln and double their welding programs. Biddeford Regional Center for Technology was able to add additional programs in athletic training, hospitality and culinary arts, as well as improve their plumbing and heating program. Oxford Hills was able to build through MJRP funding and expanded their electrical program and has a lab space for plumbing programs they offer. They also have truck simulators that are used for heavy equipment, law enforcement and truck driving and include a trailer that can be moved around in the community and provides some outreach. Region 2 was able to purchase a \$500,000 piece of equipment that everyone in the forestry industry is using and is a great connection to the community.

CTE continues to grow and has seen a 20% increase since 2018 with 8,000 students in 2018 and 10,500 students currently enrolled in its various programs. The biggest challenge now is a lack of space to put programs in and CTE continues to attract freshman and sophomores while engaging younger students as well. Juniors and seniors continue to be full-time CTE students, and these students are now going to the middle schools and engaging younger students into the programs and opportunities. Dwight reviewed enrollment and stated that automotive technician continues to be popular along with culinary arts, carpentry and health sciences which has split from straight CNA programs into medical assisting and other health occupation programs. They continue to work on pilot programs in middle schools that deliver a career readiness approach that emphasizes a hands-on structure and is available during the February and April breaks or at the end of May into June when many of the programs wrap up with seniors and can be catered for middle schoolers. Farmington has a camp experience and a building where their middle schoolers focus on CTE, partnering with Foster Tech Center.

Dwight stated that more information is available on the CTE website and anyone who has questions or wants to know more can always reach out to him. He will also get his slideshow to Erin so that she can send it along to everyone after the meeting. Brandi said that she was curious how the curriculum is developed by CTE schools. As a board member and employee of KBH, she is always looking for how to tool up mental health and rehab technician folks either at MERT1 or the MHRTS level. KBH now provides services that were formally provided by Crisis and Counseling, so they have HRT crisis providers as well and are always looking at developing that workforce. She and Erin discussed how ideal it would be if there was a program that started training those people up as they're leaving high school instead of waiting until after the fact, like

what CTE does with CNAs. She would like more information on how to develop that opportunity. Dwight stated that this is started at the local level and each of the CTE directors would need to ask for a program to be opened around something like that, survey to see what student interest there is and engage in that process, then work on developing standards. He mentioned that Woodfords worked with Westbrook through a grant and had a program much like she is describing a few years back. It is something that periodically happens. If they cannot pull together enough interest for a full program, they will look for opportunities to piggyback on what is currently being done and enhance the delivery of the curriculum to provide opportunities for students in this area. Dwight explained that due to costs, a budget needs to be developed about a year in advance along with a survey of interest, get board approval, check out space and work closely with directors to get everything planned out to initiate the startups. Erin clarified with him that if Brandi wanted to start the process, she would need to start by connecting with a director in her area like Mid-Maine, to which Dwight agreed. Erin mentioned to Brandi that she is on a committee for the care economy and that it is a work credentialing and workforce committee and there's a huge need for DSPs and that Brandi may be able to work with them to get the ball rolling on something like this. Dwight mentioned that with Brandi's office being in Waterville she can connect with Gabe Levesque who is the director at the Mid-Maine Technical Center and discuss her interest with him and see what opportunities may already exist or how they can help. He also mentioned discussing with David Dorr around the Early Childhood programs he runs and checking into possibilities there also. Erin stated that anyone who would like to connect with CTE and talk with a CNA class or get materials or discuss needs to be sure to reach out to a director in your area on the website. Dwight mentioned that all programs do require a program advisory committee so folks from the industries provide feedback on what's being delivered in the program and making sure that CTE stays up to speed. They meet a few times a year and talk or visit the classrooms. Erin stated that this too allows an opportunity for anyone who has the time and wants to join that committee when there's openings. Cathy stated that her business has apprenticeships but is always in need of culinary experience and cooks. Dwight stated that Foster Tech and Skowhegan have a great culinary program in region 9. Cathy stated that they have students now in apprenticeships, but they would like to enhance opportunities and move more to Sunday River.

5. Youth Committee/Fuseideas Updates-Erin Benson

Erin reviewed the youth marketing campaign that is well underway with Fuseideas. Focus groups were held via Zoom, and social media advertising through Facebook and Instagram are currently running as well as digital marketing and search engine marketing (SEM). SEM is when someone uses a search engine like Google and types in "jobs in Maine" or "Jobs around me," our ad will appear. Anyone who sees it can click on a link and be led to the landing page, where a fillable form is available and goes directly to EMDC for submission. There are also radio ads, and a press release that was sent out to various media outlets. WGME called and asked if Erin would sit for an interview, which she did on December 20. The taped piece aired on Monday, December 23. EMDC made an adjustment in its response process. Now there is one staff member who responds to all forms, reaching out via calls, text and email. So far there have been 265 people who filled out the forms, and despite geofencing there have been people outside of our 5-county region and some from other states or countries responding. EMDC handles the

Northeast as well and those are rerouted to them. Any forms from the Coastal Counties region are sent to Workforce Solutions. Any forms outside the state or country are sent to Carrie, who then reaches out and provides them information and contact for the career center or career assistance for their area. From the 265 who responded, only 92 of those are youth ages 24 and under. Many respondents are 25-54 and only 1 youth enrollment has been made. Youth enrollment takes longer as it is a 4-step process required by the feds including eligibility, objective assessment, development of an employment plan, and delivery of one service. Erin stated that there are likely more youth in the pipeline who have not finished the process. She feels confident that an increase in enrollment will happen through the rest of the campaign and into March. They are still looking at advertising with video testimony on YouTube but are struggling to get anyone for filming. Most of the responses from social media, the display ads, and the search engine marketing have come from women and the YouTube ads would reach more of the men who are not being reached via the other methods.

6. Hospitality/Tourism Industry-Cathy Witherspoon

Cathy provided an industry overview on Boyne resorts and the hospitality industry. She stated that Maine has three resorts with Boyne, a recent purchase of Pleasant Mountain as well as Sugarloaf and Sunday River, and 12 resorts across the country, British Columbia and Cyprus. However, her focus during the meeting was primarily on Sugarloaf and Sunday River because most of the hiring they do is within those two resorts. Both are full-service resorts that have hotels, golf courses and restaurants on site. Both sites are close to being fully staffed with only about 60 more staff needed at Sugarloaf and 60 openings at Sunday River, which is slightly larger with 2 hotels and more restaurants on site. 45% of staff are considered full-time seasonal, meaning they work during the season and less staff are required in the summer when the numbers are lower and 25% of the staff become part-time employees working weekends and during vacations. The hardest positions to fill are in housekeeping and cooking. Sunday River struggles with front office staff and Sugarloaf has trouble with outside property support (i.e. shovelers, snow removers, plow drivers, etc.). Boyne hires international team members and currently 120 staff at Sunday River and 24 staff at Sugarloaf are considered international members of staff with an H2B visa for adults or a J1 student visa for younger staff. Those holding an H2B visa need to show why they are needed for employment and can stay for a certain amount of time, whereas the J1 visa holder has a lot more leniency and can travel. The resorts do a lot of in-country H2Bs, meaning they take staff from around the coast of Maine and use them for employment during the winter months and they return to the coastal areas in the summer. The goal at each resort is to grow and develop the team members and hire from within and retain staff. They provide an in-house ski patrol and ski school training program and are being to grow in-house vehicle maintenance and information technologies programs with apprenticeships. They have also created levels for cooks and have their own internal training programs for cooking, housekeeping, and retail. They do all the training in house for groomers and lift maintenance staff as well as corporate training programs for servant leadership, time management and goal setting. There are also some online training programs that utilize DK Leadership from Karen Gordon out of Canada. Other areas of focus are recruitment and team member housing, transportation which has led to grant funding focusing on vehicles and vans for staff, loyalty bonuses for staying until the end of the season (staff receive a 5% bonus) and

providing competitive wages. Providing opportunities to coastal workers works well also, using fishermen during the winter season coincides with their schedule and allows them to work through the winter season and get back to fishing in early April when things are winding down at the resorts. There are discounts for team members that are available across all the resorts, the company pays 80% of benefits and matches funds for their HSA and 401K and have an on-site employee daycare program with reasonable rates for staff.

Sam stated that hearing Cathy has been making her think of how EMDC can work with Boyne to connect youth work experiences or transitional work experiences for adults, dislocated workers and Quest participants into resort staff. She mentioned someone in Franklin County who has a culinary certificate and Cathy stated that he may be a good fit for work experience in the Dining area of the resort. She and Cathy will connect offline to discuss further. Erin stated that these types of connections are why she will continue to ask board members to provide an overview to the board at each meeting on their particular industry, using Chris Waite as an example and his need to hire a contracted worker to write his employee policy and safety manual and Sarah at Timber HP was able to provide some contacts around that, showing how we all need more information and how it will help us connect and utilize each other more often. Kelly stated that she is impressed with Cathy's presentation and all that Boyne is doing to recruit and retain staff, especially with how they look at the struggles like transportation and childcare and work through those for staff.

7. Executive Director's Report

- **WIOA Reauthorization:** Erin mentioned that since the last Board meeting in October when there was a hold for the WIOA Reauthorization until after the election, the effort to keep the government funded a CR-Continuing Resolution put WIOA back in the spotlight. The first and second drafts included WIOA re-authorization, though neither draft passed. The third draft presented was a "Skinny CR" and did not include the WIOA authorization and did pass. In both CRs that were submitted around WIOA, the requirement of a 50% funding training mandate was still on the table. It is a requirement that we should oppose. She sent letters to Maine's congressional delegation back in May outlining the reasons for opposing the mandate, and sent an email December 6th reemphasizing the reasons for opposition. This email was also sent out from Galan uniting both boards, and someone from Senator King's office in DC contacted Galan and discussed the 50% training mandate and why we are opposed to it. We are back to waiting for more information or a final decision and are unsure how long that will take. Erin explained that we are still receiving funds despite the reauthorization being in limbo, but she is unsure what will happen with the DOGE committee as there were 72 bills up for reauthorization and they said that they were going to get rid of all of them to save money. This doesn't seem logical as they include things like Head Start and Veterans' programs all of which have widespread support. Being part of the National Association of Workforce Boards gives us the benefit of abreast of the most current information and sharing it with the board.
- **NSF Engines Grant:** Erin explained that she attended the Maine Space Conference in October, which was very interesting, and she was able to learn about the emerging

space economy in Maine and the need for a workforce pipeline. The presentation at the conference included a map of Maine and numerous dots on the map that defined the Maine Space Complex. The complex includes Aroostook County's former Loring Air Force base, a presence in Washington County, as well as the Brunswick area. There were no dots within our 5 counties, which Erin pointed out during the sessions she attended and said that it is important to consider the manufacturing companies in those regions and how they can play a role in the supply chain. This led to all 3 local boards joining together with the Maine Space Consortium, industry companies, higher education, and industry associates like the Manufacturing Association of Maine and the Maine Composite Alliance to apply for a National Science Foundation grant. This grant could potentially bring \$160 million to Maine and New Hampshire over a 10-year period to develop the space industry and the workforce it will need. The focus of the grant would be small satellite development. The typical value chain for small satellites is from 21-42 months. The proposal would make ME/NH a hub for accelerating innovations to achieve a small satellite development timeline under 12 months. There are higher education entities involved such as the University of Maine, Dartmouth, and the Roux Institute, who will focus on preparing engineers, but there will be a need for technicians and operators. The workforce boards will focus on developing that pipeline. A pre-proposal was sent to the National Foundation from the Maine Space Corporation, who was 1 of 72 selected to submit a full proposal which is due February 11th. It is the only proposal of the 72 that focuses on small satellites, which makes Erin think there may be a good chance of receiving the grant.

- **Transportation:** Within the \$500,000 ARPA grant is funding for a transportation initiative. \$210,000 will be designated toward a transportation pilot that is looking to be rolled out by the end of January. The goal of the pilot is to have businesses work with GoMaine to outline what their transportation issues are and define steps on how to solve them. Originally, the \$210,000 would fund 9 companies with minivans for 18 months to get staff to work. Within those 18 months, employees could have time to solve their transportation issue or the company could decide to keep the minivans going, either covering the costs themselves or charging part or all costs to individual riders. Businesses and/or business partners will be asked to submit an RFA and work with GoMaine to develop a solution that makes sense, whether it be a minivan, e-bikes, carpooling, etc. Once we see the strength of the applications and the costs associated with the resolutions, we will select the number that makes the most sense. Erin will be looking for board members to join the review committee for the business applications around the end of February to the beginning of March to decide which businesses to work with on this project.
- **Quarterly Reports:** Quarterly reports need to be submitted to MDOL for each grant we receive, i.e. WIOA, Quest, Career and ARPA and are co-written by the board and the service provider, EMDC, and are due on the 25th day of the month for that quarter. The Quarter ended on December 31st, so the report is due January 25th, then again in April, July and October. As soon as Erin receives all the reports, she will send them to everyone, this will be around the middle of next week, this will give everyone an idea of

what they hear from Sam and provide a broad overview of the work that has happened within each quarter.

- **Virtual American Job Center:** The MDOL received funding associated with the Career grant that was designated to creating a virtual career center. During the Covid Pandemic many businesses and people shut their doors and used virtual connections like ZOOM to continue to reach out to clients. Maine also has a very large problem with adequate transportation, especially in rural areas, and virtual connections have continued to be a lifeline for people and allow them to overcome this barrier. The virtual career center will be a great tool for getting people, like those with transportation barriers, connected to staff and career services virtually. The virtual career center will give the user the option of choosing a “job seeker” or “employer” path and be directed to agency information, organizations and forms as they would if they walked into one of the career centers in person. Part of the development has been working on Resource Cards that will include much of the information needed for these agencies and organizations to be uploaded to the site. They will also be holding focus groups of job seekers and employers in person beginning next week. This will ensure the virtual career center is working correctly, is it user friendly, and are they able to find services they need, etc. The focus group for our area will be held at the Lewiston Career Center on Thursday, January 30th from 9am-1030am and 3pm-430pm for job seekers and 1pm-230pm for employers. Erin expects to have a few local businesses but doesn’t expect much of a turnout for employers from Farmington, Augusta, and places a bit further away due to the time of day and the length of time to get there. Due to this concern, there is discussion about holding a ZOOM group for employers or a survey they can take for feedback. Erin asked if anyone on the board is available and can attend to represent the business/employer group to please consider joining, she will send out a flyer with the QR Code to sign up and attend.
- **Board Membership:** We are currently at full board membership, however, there are a few board members who have not attended any of the board meetings since 2022. Because we are full, we can take the time to look for replacement members for those who are not engaged. Grant suggested Matt Watson, the CEO of Form Tech, a company located in Clinton that manufactures high performance coil handling and processing equipment and systems. Erin reached out to Matt and is waiting for him to respond to her touring the facility and discussing his joining the board. We have a great representation on the board from the healthcare industry, which is the largest industry sector in our region. The second largest is retail and Bobbi Avery fills that role. However, the third largest industry in our region is education. Erin reached out to Ginny and asked if a Superintendent can represent on the board as a business. 51% of our membership needs to be represented by business, so if we can have a Superintendent fill a business representative spot Erin has had suggestions from both Cathy and Chris for people who would fit that role. She would like more recommendations for members as a lot of people she talks to about it decline, and it would allow her to reach out to more people and increase the chances of finding some to fill our needs.
- **Local Plan:** The local plan is due on June 30th, Erin gave a breakdown of the plan at the October meeting. Carrie has been working with ChatGPT and Microsoft CoPilot to summarize the commonalities of the six plans that should be reflected in our local plan:

Maine Economic Development Strategy 202-2029, The 2024 Reset Plan (both from the Governor's economic plan for the state), The Workforce Attraction and Recruitment Plan, the Maine Unified Workforce and Innovation Opportunity (WIOA) State Plan, KVCOG Kennebec Valley Comprehensive Economic Development and AVCOG Androscoggin Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (the last two being the CEDS). Using the AI programs, Carrie input all plans and for a list of commonalities, all of which should be addressed in our local plan. The other thing Erin wants to address in the local plan is industry sector partnerships and a way to reflect the work that we've already been doing with the broadband, the care economy, and the space economy. She has reached out to EMDC to prepare the data section needs through emails with Lee Umphrey and is now working with Tom on that piece. At the April board meeting she will share parts of the local plan that are completed but she will also have two representatives regarding industry partnerships there as well. One of them is the chair of the new state board industry partnership committee, and the other is from a working industry partnership in forestry to discuss how they started and what they are doing and why. She hopes to have the complete draft of the local plan by mid-May, which she will send to everyone. She is looking for volunteers to commit to final reviews of the entire document as it will not be ready by the April board meeting, and it will need to be submitted before the July board meeting. She would also like to develop a questionnaire for businesses and workforce partners—a piece similar to something she saw at a workshop from WorkforceGPS that Indiana put together for its business and partner stakeholders. Carrie will work on a fillable form to gather pertinent information. This would give us an idea of what is most important to businesses and partners, identifying challenges and needs. She sent out a presentation one from the workshop for everyone to review. This would be a great tool to identify what services are being utilized, what is not being offered and rate the degree to which they feel their needs are being met. We can then use those answers and address them in our plan. The goal for the July meeting is to take information as she saw from the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) who hired a company for technical assistance to put together a webinar about how to activate a plan and make it actionable that gives a clear idea of what committees we need and what to focus on first and who to involve in those goals. Erin would like someone from SAFEL to attend the July meeting via ZOOM and help us understand how we can make our plan actionable, so we don't create a plan that sits on a shelf for four years, but one that contributes to our mission. Erin stated that if anyone wants to review the surveys and add anything, reach out to Erin. Cathy feels the survey is a good idea, and Erin said that in the past getting people together is difficult versus being able to complete a survey at their own pace yields more results.

8. Adjourn Meeting:

Cathy adjourned the meeting at 10:30am.

Next Board Meeting Date: Thursday, April 24, 2025, via ZOOM, 8:30-10:30am