East Tennessee Local Workforce Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 12 April 2022

Bridgewater Place

Knoxville, Tennessee

Present

Martha Axeford

Pete Barile

Joe Daughtery

Sean Hensley

Gary Human

Angie Respess

Rob Rule

Brian Shoffner

Julie Simpson

Absent

Sam Alexander

Jessica Belitz

Paul Boyles

Jimmy Brooks

Chris Griffey

Brad Hale

Cindy Holt

Anthony Mountain

Mark Palmer

Michael Raiford

Jerry Sexton

Jerry Slaven

J.J. Walker

The meeting began at 6:05 p.m. Ms. Axford asked for an approval of the December 2021 meeting minutes. The motion for acceptance of meeting minutes as written was made by Pete Barile and seconded by Joe Daughtery. Motion passed. Ms. Axford introduced Mayor Jacobs, asking if he would like to speak. Mayor Jacobs thanked the Board for the important work that was being done, and the challenges and growing pains that employers are facing today. Ms. Axford welcomed and thanked the Career Specialists in attendance for their hard work and dedication. She called for any public comments. There were none.

Ms. Axford called for the 2021-2022 budget to be approved. The motion of approval was made by Ms. Axford and seconded by Pete Barile. Motion to adopt 2021-2022 budget passed.

Director Walker thanked Victor Oakley and Janice Cole for writing both the local and regional plan. He noted that both plans were posted on ETHRA’s website. He also said that The Associates of Thomas P. Miller handled the Request for Proposal process for us. They read and scored all of the submitted proposals. They also suggested finalists.

 ETHRA was one of seventeen entities that has applied for a twenty five million dollar TANIF contract. He presented the ETHRA proposal last week in Nashville.

 He said that the Workforce money for 2022-2023 will be cut by five hundred thousand dollars.

He asked the Board to approve a new conflict of interest policy. He thanked Julie Simpson for the diligence of her husband in reading the old conflict of interest policy. Ms. Axford called for approval of the new conflict of interest policy. The motion to adopt was made by Sean Hensley and seconded by Gary Human. Motion passed.

The next order of business was the selection of the new contractors for program year 2022 through 2023. The bids in each of the three areas: One Stop Operator, Adult and Dislocated Workers, and Youth services were reviewed and graded by Thomas P. Miller and Associates. Miller and Associates then recommended the top two finalists in each category. The bids were scored on a scale of 100 by Miller and Associates. The oral interviews of the top two finalists were conducted by the Executive Committee over WebEx and were given grades of up to 25 points.

Ms. Axford said that East Tennessee State University (ETSU) scored the highest 86.38 points by Miller and Associates for Adult and Dislocated workers. ETSU were also the Executive Committee’s choice after the oral interviews. She asked if there were any questions before the vote. Julie Simpson asked what Board members were on the Executive Committee. Director Walker said that the committee consisted of Martha Axford, Gary Human, and Sean Hensley. Ms. Axford called for a motion to approve. Joe Daughtery made the motion, seconded by Pete Barile. Motion passed. ETSU will be the new service provider for Adult and Dislocated workers beginning July 1, 2022 and ending June 30, 2023 with a renewal option for three one year bids ending in 2025.

Director Walker said that the Docu sign services that we adopted during Covid-19 to continue services to our clients would end and that ETSU would be providing a similar service free of charge to us. He also said that ETSU would maintain our current American Job Center staff and that they would be reinstating the positions of American Job Center Managers. They also have a set pay scale for staff.

The One-Stop-Operator bids were next on the agenda. The top two bidders were University of Tennessee Center for Industrial Studies (UTCIS) and In the Door, a company based in Georgia. Miller and Associates read, reviewed, and graded all applicants. Their recommendation was UTCIS. The Executive Committee interviewed the top two applicants and made the recommendation the Board that UTCIS be awarded the contract. After a call for discussion. Questions were asked about the bid from UTCIS being over the set price. Director Walker explained that there was a negotiation about the price difference and UTCIS agreed to a lower amount. They also agreed to employ Jennifer Eppley as the O-S-O. Jennifer described her role to the Board as a go between the partners, making sure everyone played nice. She also insures that the AJC staff and clients have what they need. A motion to pass was made by Sean Hensley and seconded by Gary Human. Motion passed. UTCIS will be the new One-Stop-Operator.

For the Youth services contract Billy Worsham recommended ETSU. They will deliver fourteen elements of the youth contract, including in-school youth, out of school youth, and work experience. Mr. Worsham talked about how important the youth program in the East LWDA area was to him at sixteen and wants the same experience for all youths. ETSU also operates the youth program in the Northeast LWDA. The motion to pass was made by Joe Daughtery and seconded by Sean Hensley. Motion passed. ETSU will be the new Youth Program provider.

The onboarding process for the new providers will begin with a small ramp up budget and full funding will take place July 1, 2022. Director Walker told the Board that next year’s budget will be eight hundred thousand dollars less than this year’s budget, which had already been cut by five hundred thousand dollars. He asked that the Board come together and look at “right sizing our foot print” with the budget cuts in mind.

The Board will need to look at how we have done business in the past and come up with different ideas on how we can stretch budget dollars. He said the number of American Job Centers will need to be looked at and it may call for Access Points to help the clients. He also asked for volunteers to form a committee to look at alternatives. Gary Human, Joe Daughtery, Pete Barile and Martha Axford all volunteered to be the committee. Jennifer Eppley talked about the state pushing for Virtual Job Centers, but said that in our rural areas it is almost impossible with the broadband services not being available. We have 25 to 30 access points already available in our 16 county area with trained staff in each location. It was also discussed that we could shift to “specialized American Job Centers”

Victor Oakley and Janice Cole presented the state of the area. Both the local and regional plans are completed. They are posted for public view and comment on ETHRA’s website. The local plan will be posted until April 25, 2022 and then sent to the state for approval. Victor said that the state wants plans to reflect “work first”. Employers state wide want the same thing, workers. They want individuals to have skills that transfer to other jobs in other companies.

Jennifer Eppley talked about the need of workers, transportation, child care, and other things that would make them “work ready”. Director Walker tasked Gary Human to ask new companies coming into Tennessee to consider onsite child care in their facilities. Gary Human said that 5,000 workers will be needed in two of our communities in the near future. We needed to have our clients work ready. Jennifer also said that the AJC’s focus was on getting people to jobs not training right now. Mayor Jacobs also complimented the Re-entry Job Fair that had been held in Knoxville.

There was no more business and the motion to adjourn was made by Sean Hensley and seconded by Gary Human. Motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.