



Vermont State Workforce Development Board
Relocation and Recruitment Committee - Meeting Minutes
March 16th, 2022
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

Committee Members in Attendance: Robert Peterson, Gary Scott, Ethan Phelps, Peter Edelmann, Patrick Amice, Amelia Seman, Jen Stromsten, Molly Mahar, Christopher Koliba

Guests in Attendance: Victoria Biondolillo, Abigail Rhim

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo began the meeting by introducing herself and the purpose of the committee. She explained that while the State Workforce Development Board is large, she hopes that the committees can be used to target the workforce needs of individual sectors and use this information to make change. She then opened the floor to introductions.

Amelia Seman, Government Affairs Specialist for the Vermont Chamber of Commerce

Robert Peterson, Chief of Park Operations for Vermont State Parks, Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation

Gary Scott, Vice President of Hospital Services at the University of Vermont Medical Center

Peter Edelmann, Owner of the Essex Experience and the Essex Resort and Spa

Chris Koliba, Director of the Office of Engagement, University of Vermont

Molly Mahar, President of the Vermont Ski Areas Association

Jen Stromsten, Director of Programs for Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

Patrick Amice, General Manager of Hospitality at Barr Hill/Caledonia Spirits

Ethan Phelps, Regional Manager (Southeastern quadrant) for Vermont State Parks

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo began by asking the group what they hope to get out of this committee and the workforce system in general. More specifically, what is the direction the committee first hopes to move.

Peter Edelmann mentioned a support system for job training for a variety of trades. He noted that business owners can't afford to pay internship salaries that would meet housing needs and lifestyle in Vermont.

Patrick Amice, a recent transplant to Vermont, noted the trials and tribulations that come with relocating to Vermont, including the lack of housing. He reflected on his experience, looking for 3 months and moving after only viewing the house via Zoom. He also mentioned the lack of available information regarding relocation incentives in Vermont.

Amelia Seman shared that her partner applied for the remote worker grant. While they were fortunate enough to relocate without the funds upfront, waiting for grant funding to come through for months could be a barrier to some. She stressed the need for better marketing trainings, grant fundings, etc. to ensure that folks have access and can take advantage of all the resources available.

Gary Scott then reflected on his own experience relocating to Vermont. He shared that he had to stay in a hotel for 7 months and almost returned to Texas. He was only able to find a place after getting assistance from co-workers. He then mentioned a recent engineer hire for UVMHC. This candidate was unable to find housing and backed out of the job. Gary then encouraged the group to think of creative ways to attract and retain people, otherwise, we will continue to miss out on great potential.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo noted the opportunity that comes with the ARPA funding and its potentially transformative nature. She then stressed the idea of a full-service model where we can help newcomers relocate and take this pressure off the businesses and the new Vermonter.

Jen Stromsten pointed to workforce data, including the need for 10,000 new workers per year and 4,000 to 5,000 more housing units a year. She also flagged how the legislature tends to sway towards supporting entrenched state entities, and the unfortunate direction that upcoming legislation points towards organizational investments and little support to newcomers. She then noted how relocation is a personal process and we need to make more of those connections to help folks successfully move.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo agreed with Jen and noted how we must work to empower folks who are relocating. She also asked the group to work on identifying the biggest barriers to people moving to Vermont, outside of finding a job, using data from Vermont Department of Labor and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. With this information, we can then take a more targeted approach with our marketing.

Chris Koliba echoed the need for creating services that successfully relocate folks with the help of those who have social capital, already living in the area. He suggested data analysis to understand the gaps in services needed. He then pivoted to the University of Vermont's interest in incentivizing students to stay after graduation, including benefits from H.703. He notes how the state has suffered greatly from not having a statewide internship program, and we need systems in place to retain potential young workers. He also stressed that in addition to housing, we must cultivate a culture of belonging in our communities and focus on diversifying our workforce. He then said we can learn from other states, in terms of how to support workers, by looking at their programming. He also offered two data products that the

committee can use via a graduate student to run data reports on industry trends, workforce and job openings.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo highlighted the idea of relocation among Vermonters and how this can be a sensitive subject. However, through marketing, we can change the idea of what it means to be a Vermonter, more as a mindset than a birthright.

Robert Peterson noted Vermont State Parks' unique position of hiring many seasonal employees and the challenges that come with that type of work. As Vermont Parks currently faces its hardest hiring season, the department is unique in that it does have housing to offer with a few positions, however, the department could always use more housing stock. Regarding pay and benefits to seasonal workers, Vermont Parks is unable to offer competitive wages that meet the cost of living in Vermont. On a positive note, he did mention that although not all employees who relocate due to a job with Vermont Parks remain in that original position, they do end up staying in the state. Lastly, he mentioned the struggle to find skilled trade workers.

Ethan Phelps reiterated Rob's points. He highlighted how many seasonal workers alternate between the ski areas and parks. He referenced an old pilot program between the ski areas and the parks that cost shared employees which is no longer running. He noted that if there were more ways to partner with other seasonal partners, that would relieve some burdens.

Molly Mahar acknowledged the housing shortage for ski employees as well. Dependent on international workers to fill positions, she agreed that some type of linkage between outdoor workers in the winter and summer months might help. She then discussed her current work with state colleges to create programming that allows students to work at ski areas to supplement their education. Although not traditionally viewed as a long-term career path, she stressed how there are many opportunities to create a career in the ski industry, whether that is in human resources, communications, or engineering. The narrative around long-term careers needs to change in order to attract more to the industry.

Jen Stromsten reminded the group that we need think big picture and not get bogged down in the weeds. The reality is that the state's labor force has dropped 10% in the last 10 years and this trend is not temporary. She urged folks to think strategically and not get caught up in short-term solutions.

Peter Edelmann then shifted the conversation to housing, saying that we should try things like challenging each town to expand their housing base by some percentage or become more affordable. He echoed the concern that while we have a large amount of money now, we need to think strategically about how to spend it in ways that will create a positive long-term impact, not short-term.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo agreed with both Jen and Peter by saying that while there are pockets of great work throughout Vermont, we don't have a holistic picture in the workforce space. We must create a sustainable plan. For the next meeting, we will get a sense of the global picture and best identify what pinch points need to be addressed.

Molly Mahar then asked if there was a way to view other committees and their work.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo directed her towards the State Workforce Development Board's website. She also suggested that at certain points, it may be useful to combine certain committees for some meetings. She also suggested that in the future, committee members will be invited to attend full board meetings and may be asked to give an update on committee progress.

Meeting adjourned at 12:57 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Abby Rhim.

Abby Rhim, Executive Assistant
Vermont State Workforce Development Board