



**Vermont State Workforce Development Board**  
Hospitality and Retail Committee - Meeting Minutes  
March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
2:00 pm – 3:00 pm

**Committee Members in Attendance:** Hannah Goldman, Hans Van Wees, Patrick Amice, Maricela Ehmann, Patrick Amice

**Guests in Attendance:** Victoria Biondolillo, Abby Rhim

Hannah Goldman, Brand Events & Merchandising Director, Burlington Beer Company

Hans Van Wees, General Manager, Hotel Vermont

Maricela Ehmann, Creative Director and President, Ehmann Events

Patrick Amice, Beverage Director and General Manager, Caledonia Spirits, Inc.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo began by summarizing the overall goal of the committee. This includes developing a strategy for the hospitality and retail sector, which has been among the hardest hit throughout the pandemic, in how to tackle the workforce crisis. She then asked the group what the specific challenges are they are seeing in their industry. Additionally, she asked what their fears are down the road.

Patrick Amice started by saying that most of the potential employees that they are looking to hire are asking for wages that are significantly above what Caledonia Spirits can offer. He also noted people wanting to move into positions right away that they are not qualified for.

Hans Van Wees noted that when the hospitality industry first rapidly picked up again in the middle of the pandemic, there was a desperate need for workers and employees were asking for very high pay. Now that things have settled a bit, business owners are noticing the significant expense that comes with advertising for workers, versus historically advertising directed towards the consumer. Additionally, he noted a massive leave from the industry at the start of the pandemic and the stigma that hospitality workers are dispensable, which they are not. He shared that as they look to recruit more workers, they can't compete with benefits. The industry must now think more creatively on how to attract workers and create an interest in the lifestyle.

Maricela Ehmann noted the large demand for events in Vermont, but the inability to meet said demands. With this disconnect, she stated that it feels like she is capping what she could make in a year. If this proceeds, she fears it will spill over into coming years

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo agreed with Maricela, saying that she met with a business owner who said they were losing roughly \$8,000 per day because they could not operate at full capacity. She

then noted that due to the nature of the hospitality and retail industry, not being able to work remote and some with 24/7 service, we need to think of a more creative way to address this workforce shortage.

Hans Van Wees noted that customer demands have also changed. Unlike in the beginning of the pandemic, when folks were understanding, now customers aren't quite as patient as we shift into the new pandemic normal, whether that is with wait times or services available.

Maricela Ehmann highlighted the seasonality of work and workloads in Vermont. Located in Killington, the number of employees in the area boom through April, and then everyone leaves.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo referenced a worker share pilot program mentioned in a previous committee meeting, where two different seasonal businesses would share the benefits provided to workers. With this partnership, benefits would be split and the cost burden would be distributed among multiple employers.

Maricela Ehmann then mentioned a local caterer who has thought of the potential idea of sharing workers throughout the seasons. She volunteered to monitor those conversations and report back to the group.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo then shared the Board's potential partnership with a company that would target new workers and help recruit them to the state. She also highlighted the need to shift the narrative in the hospitality industry, showing potential workers that they can create a long and successful career in hospitality. She then noted the need to get the right type of people in front of employers to fill jobs. She reiterated that these ideas are the big buckets that the committee should be looking into.

Hans Van Wees shared that he is a member of the Vermont Lodging Institute. The Institute is working on a program surrounding workforce development. Within this program, they are looking into both developing career pathways and establishing some sort of certification process.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo echoed Hans' ideas, offering the idea of apprenticeships and tapping into kids and getting them exposure, earlier. She stated that pipeline will help us sustain our workforce in the long run.

Maricela Ehmann shared that she previously worked for a large catering company where she developed a J1 visa program. This program was more like a training program within every area of hospitality to allow participants to get a sense of what they were interested in, within all the different sectors. She was able to bring lots of individuals in from European countries but believes this could work in Vermont. She then added that if we were to bring individuals to Vermont, we would need to address the housing issue.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo added that, hopefully, ARPA funding will help with housing. She also noted the Regional Development Corporations and their value in helping folks relocate while housing continues to be such a challenge.

Patrick Amice mentioned Barr Hill's implementation of a new program called Learning Education Experience Program (LEEP) that would allow people to come into the industry, explore a bit and get

excited about the work. He noted that Caledonia Spirits is always looking for any sort of funding or state assistance with the program. It would enable the business to fill a labor need, even if temporary.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo noted that with the on-the-job training funds, specifically under WIOA, and assuming the person qualifies, there is the potential for 70% of someone's salary to be paid for. Outside of this funding, there is legislation in the works that would put the role of credentialing on the State Workforce Development Board. If the Board could qualify a specific credential of value from, say Caledonia Spirits, then you could receive funding. That legislation has not passed as of now but is in the works. She then told the group that a document will be distributed explaining the group's areas of actions for the upcoming meeting. At that meeting, the group will determine which area to tackle first and how to address problems.

Respectfully submitted by Abby Rhim.

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Abby Rhim, Executive Assistant

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