

**Worcester Jobs Fund Oversight Committee**

December 17, 2019

4:00 p.m.

MassHire Central Region Workforce Board, 340 Main St. Suite 400, Worcester, MA 01608

**Meeting Minutes**

WJF Oversight Committee Attendance: Janice Ryan Weekes, Fred Taylor, Maritza Cruz and Jeff Turgeon.

WJF Staff: Kelsey Lamoureux and Theodora Appiah.

Guests: Peter Dunn, Ethan Brown, and Jim Karam.

- The meeting was called to order after a quorum was established.
- All attendees introduced themselves, their positions and their organizations.

History and Mission of the Worcester Jobs Fund:

- F. Taylor requested K. Lamoureux provide a summary of the history and mission of the Worcester Jobs Fund. K. Lamoureux described the core principles and organizational structure of the project and detailed the different employment and community services the Jobs Fund provides.

Discussion on the Home2 Suites by Hilton Project

- P. Dunn provided a review on the Home2 Suites by Hilton project. P. Dunn noted that the Home2 Suites project has similar workforce goals as the previous Karam project, Homewood Suites. P. Dunn described the location of the proposed Home2 Suites Hotel and some of the challenges and opportunities with this land.
- J. Karam provided background on the First Bristol Corporation, a development company that focuses on up and coming areas through retail, office, and hotel spaces. J. Karam described how Worcester's status as the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in New England provides a great development opportunity and noted current room occupancy rates and availability.
- J. Karam described First Bristol's experience meeting workforce goals are varies on projects and their previous use of union labor on construction projects. The current composition of employees at the Homewood Suites was described as 75% City of Worcester residents. J. Karam detailed that at the new Home2 Suites project, all employees will be paid at least \$15/hr., with full-time employees receiving health insurance coverage and 401K benefits, and noted that opportunities for career advancement is an important goal for the company.
- J. Turgeon requested a blueprint of the Home2 Suite project and J. Karam distributed copies and explained the plan for the building and necessary parking.
- F. Taylor inquired about the timeline to start the Home2 Suites and J. Karam estimated that groundbreaking will occur in August 2020 or September 2020 and will be completed in 12 months.
- P. Dunn noted the importance of the TIF in making the Home2 Suites project possible. P. Dunn described the sources of demand for additional hotel rooms including the growth of the City,

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nearby attractions sites such as Union Station, DCU Center and the Polar Ball Park, and hotels that have closed in the past 10 years.

Next Steps:

- J. Ryan Weekes described MassHire Career Center's ability to connect individuals to employment through activities such as job fairs or connections with local hospitality training programs.
- M. Cruz inquired about the hiring timeline for Home2 Suites. J. Karam shared three stages of employment which occurs in the four months prior to the hotel opening. J. Karam noted that customer service is an essential function for the employees and that opportunities for individuals to be employed across the two hotels in Washington Sq. will increase efficiency and full-time positions.
- K. Lamoureux requested information on the turnover rates of employees and J. Karam identified challenges employees face during the first year.
- F. Taylor inquired about what supports the Jobs Fund could make available and J. Karam stated that having consistent communication throughout the development of the hotel would be helpful.

Adjourn:

- A motion to adjourn was made by F. Taylor was seconded by M. Cruz and was unanimously approved.