

Durham Workforce Development Board of Directors Meeting

March 25, 2021

Virtual Board Retreat

**Members and Staff Present:** Chair Paul Grantham, Vice Chair Steven Williams, Scott McGregor, Wade Smedley, Michael Dombeck, Nicole Thompson, Ernie Mills, Jeff Frederick, Rebecca Axford, Quillie Coath, George Hining, Gregory Bellamy, Anthony Nelson, Rhonda Stevens, Kenneth Angeli, Ashley McKenna, Geoff Durham, Roger Shumate, Ari Medoff, Councilmember DeDreana Freeman, Commissioner Nimasheena Burns, Commissioner Nida Allam

Staff: Executive Director Andre Pettigrew, Deputy Director Adria Graham Scott, Jennifer Fox, Russell Ingram, James Dickens, Courtney McCollum, Chuk Manning, Sandra Lassiter, Tony Carrington; Eckerd Connects: Matt Fields, Terry Johnson, Yolanda Chisolm

**Guests:** Durham County Commissioners Chairwoman Brenda Howerton; City of Durham Mayor Steve Schewel

The meeting was called to order by Board Chair Paul Grantham who welcomed everyone, acknowledged guests, and provided an overview of how this virtual retreat would flow. Formal roll call was taken by Adria Graham Scott. Quorum was reached.

Mr. Grantham provided an overview of the Board's progress of its 2019 goals:

- **Durham YouthWorks Program:** The goals of this program over the last two years were aimed at providing Durham's young people with exposure to career pathways and guidance on how to be successful. The number of intern commitments had been doubled prior to the COVID pandemic, which derailed those commitments. Board and staff developed plans to expand the internship program, provide awareness of services offered by the Board, and make people aware of program services. The framework is still in place to move forward.
- **Justice Involved Program:** The Welcome Home Program under this project was an extremely successful pilot program. Feedback, both qualitative and quantitative, has been exceptional, and the program will continue to move through 2021.
- **Certified Career Pathways:** This program is designed to help people find better jobs and careers in health and life sciences, information & technology, construction and skilled trades, and advanced manufacturing. Durham Public Schools was a major partner with us in distributing information on this program. Working remotely during this time of pandemic has made it hard to move forward but a good framework is still in place.

Mayor Steve Schewel was an invited guest at the meeting and discussed the City's perspectives and priorities for workforce development. He acknowledged the havoc that COVID has brought to our community and commended the Board for its resilience, along with the community, in continuing to move forward. He reported that the City is experiencing a "K shape" recovery where some industries, such as real estate, are doing very well, while others are

not. Many people want to relocate to Durham which has created a competition in the housing market that is driving original residents out of their homes. He acknowledged that while there is prosperity at the top of the K shape recovery, the bottom of that K shape recovery is just as real.

The Mayor shared a conversation he had with Google, and that they were coming to Durham because of the talent pipeline, great quality of life, and Durham's overall welcoming environment. He expressed the importance of ensuring our residents are ready to fill the workforce needs of our community, stating that 60% of workers in Durham do not live in Durham. Mayor Schewel expressed the importance of the YouthWorks Program to career pathways, and how we need the private sector to step up and help in this workforce effort. He said his office is happy to help with recruitment, visiting employers, or in other ways that would be useful to this cause.

The Mayor announced an exciting new program, Mayors for Guaranteed Income (MGI), that the City is embarking on. About twenty cities are participating in this program, and Durham has chosen people who are returning to the City from the justice system to receive this guaranteed income. MGI will begin in October and the Mayor is hopeful the Workforce Board will work together with the City in supporting this program.

Commissioner Howerton spoke from a policy perspective stating that the Board was looking at how to invest workforce development funds including how to help citizens around job placement and training in growing industries and/or doing an assessment of what the business community really needs. Businesses are looking for more training in soft skills for people, and this is a need throughout the County. She reported that unemployment before, and now during, the pandemic is almost the same, if not less at this point. Minority owned businesses have been going out of business during this pandemic yet there is no shortage of companies moving into Durham. There still exists a gap with young people being able to connect to jobs that pay decent salaries, as well as a gap for Black and Brown communities being able to enjoy the fruits of the economic growth in Durham.

Commissioner Burns said one of biggest issues in Durham is that of connectivity in areas such as bringing up skill sets to fill employment gaps, getting farmers certified and highlighting the need to develop a talent pipeline for agricultural career paths, as well as investing in our local entrepreneurs, to name a few.

Councilmember Freeman affirmed that the City echoes the same goals and strategies as the County. The goals of both sides are interconnected, and she looks forward to continuing to work with the Board in this effort. Concerning the youth aspect, she pointed out that "it will take all of us to ask the business community to be engaged with us" and encouraged both the County Commission and the Board to work together in continuing to explore opportunities for youth employment, race equity, people with disabilities, and homegrown businesses. When we support our local businesses, they come out stronger than before.

Steven Williams made the suggestion to run all entry-level positions at County and City levels through the DWDB. This will help bridge the gap with the business community, and he said this Board is ready to take on the effort.

The Board discussed the importance of soft skills training and how it currently lacks in areas of funding as well as organized planning and equity (related to inclusion and diversity). They agreed on the need to focus on ways to deliver soft skills, making sure the Board is following best practices and connecting people to services. Scott McGregor shared that at Cisco, they have noticed young people who are coming out of high school or college do not have the experience and exposure to know how to act in professional environments. He would like to focus on this element which disproportionately affects minorities, by imparting the soft skills they need, as the Board is creating work relationships and connections with employers.

George Hining asked the Mayor to explain where he sees the biggest hole in the workforce system's existing pipeline. The Mayor responded that while the Board has done a great job in developing the pipeline, he is worried about the dearth of private businesses stepping up to help with internships. He stated that he is happy for his staff to be ambassadors for this effort. He struggles with the lack of engagement from other companies and questioned how we could create the same level of engagement, such as Wade and his company have, in other businesses; especially large companies who have the resources to sponsor internships. Mr. Grantham suggested that Board members are going to have to engage with other business contacts, colleges, and friends to convey to them how they can help. He thanked all the elected officials for being a part of this effort.

The Board discussed the impact that the pandemic has had on Durham and the City's unemployment rate. The hospitality industry has been hit the hardest, losing over 128,400 jobs. The most optimistic sectors for hiring currently are companies in Life Science, IT, and Healthcare. Many of these jobs only require completion of professional certificates or community college programs.

Adria Graham Scott thanked the Board, Board staff, Welcome Home staff, and all other staff for their work. In a slide presentation, she reviewed results of a Board survey. (This presentation is available on the Board's website.) Ms. Graham Scott acknowledged the staff for providing great support to the Board. She also recognized that the work really gets done in the committees and thanked all committee members, as well. One common theme that was revealed from the survey was a need for more agility around DWDB's community structure, and Ms. Graham Scott asked participants to think about different ways in which the Board might be able to incorporate some level of flexibility so it can be more responsive to some of the economic issues that might arise. Perhaps an ad hoc committee or community outreach committee would be appropriate, which may mean refocusing some of the Board's existing committees, and/or reinventing what we are currently doing. She further asked Board members to reassess their own participation and where they are in terms of making sure we are meeting our needs both programmatically and strategically.

Breakout sessions were commenced, and subcommittee members were instructed to (1) look at goals and priorities and a strategic focus from their committee's perspective; and (2) discuss how their committee can advance its strategic priorities for the coming year. Groups were (1) Youth Council led by Rebecca Axford; NCWorks led by Wade Smedley; Business Services led by George Hining (it was announced that Nicole Thompson will be assuming the

leadership role for this Subcommittee); and Marketing and Communications led by Paul Grantham.

**Committee Recaps:**

Youth Council – The committee discussed outreach and making sure that whatever they do gets to all areas, all people, and all youth of Durham. Financial planning and other resources were discussed, as well as engagement with service providers, innovation spaces (making things engaging to youth), and making things equitable by ensuring that whatever they do reaches all people.

NCWorks Career Center – Discussion included existing programs that are not utilized, what services are and are not available, and the Board’s level of engagement. The Career Center should increase awareness in career pathways. Center staff should be involved in the Board’s engagement with service providers. The Center should utilize Made In Durham and enhance the Chamber partnership.

Business Services – This committee discussed messaging between businesses and the Board; refining the NCWorks system to make sure youth and business matches are effective; making sure communication is accurate concerning what businesses really need with regard to skills; being careful about duplicating efforts but instead leveraging what other organizations are offering; making sure youth skills and training match what businesses are already doing; and not duplicating the efforts of other professional organizations. The committee introduced an innovative idea of organizing a job fair where companies can pitch their needs and requirements to youth, and youth can ask questions through interviewing the companies.

Marketing and Communications: A lot of discussion took place around leveraging existing resources; taking an assessment of the DWDB’s media strategy and how it is using social media; creating a Business Partner Award to the Board’s business partners and give exposure about activities of the Board. A lot was learned through COVID such as using other networks, connecting better to the community, and finding out the needs of businesses and the community.

This completed the Board Retreat, and Mr. Grantham reiterated his pleasure and honor to have worked on the Board. He encouraged all subcommittees to meet again to formally organize their strategies, as he thanked everyone for their participation in this retreat.

Mr. Pettigrew closed the meeting by thanking Mr. Grantham and Ms. Graham Scott for organizing such a great event.