

## Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board

Minutes of July 8, 2020

**Members Present:** Ananda Sweet, Robert Austin for Ed Barr, Robin Bartholow, Erin Carlson, Judy Coffey, Susan Cooper, Sara Cummings, Brad Davis, Keith Dias, Nancy Emanuele, John McEntagart, Brandy Evans, Steve Herrington, Steve Herron, Kristina Holloway, Eddie Gilbert for Roy Hurd, Stephen Jackson, Judy James, Scott Kincaid, Chris Knerr, Anita Maldonado, Frank Cuneo for George Steffensen, David Tam, Pedro Toledo, David Wayte, and Audra Verrier

**Absent:** Ed Barr, Ethan Brown, Paul Duranczyk, Roy Hurd, Michael Pickens, and George Steffensen

**Staff:** Katie Greaves, Patricia Andrews, Jessica Taylor, Shaydra Ennis, Amanda Gayda, Sharona Elfus-Schatzkin, Manuel Benitez, Pedro Guevara, Michelle Revecho, Katie Stohlmann, Tiffany Hill, and Judy Oates

**\*Attendees with asterisks arrived late or departed early.**

### **I. Introductions and Public Comment**

None.

### **II. Approve Minutes of May 23, 2020**

The committee reviewed the minutes of May 23, 2020.

**Motion to approve the May 23, 2020 minutes: Brandy Evans /s/ Scott Kincaid.** All approved (Ananda Sweet, Robert Austin for Ed Barr, Robin Bartholow, Ethan Brown, Kristyn Byrne, Erin Carlson, Judy Coffey, Susan Cooper, Sara Cummings, Brad Davis, Keith Dias, Paul Duranczyk, Nancy Emanuele, John McEntagart, Brandy Evans, Steve Herrington, Steve Herron, Kristina Holloway, Roy Hurd Stephen Jackson, Judy James, Scott Kincaid, Anita Maldonado, George Steffensen, David Tam, Pedro Toledo, David

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Wayte, and Audra Verrier). There were no “nay” votes and no abstentions. The motion carried.

### **III. Announcements**

None.

### **IV. Success Story**

Jessica Taylor of Job Link shared an inspiring client story of a client who was a single mom of two who was laid off from her dispatcher position. She came to Job Link and decided she wanted to go into the accounting field. We were able to help her pay for accounting classes at Santa Rosa Junior College. While she was waiting for her last class to earn her credential she ran out of unemployment and decided to go back to work, but was nervous about working in an office after working from home the past eight years. She applied for a great job that stated it required the accounting credential that she was just one class shy of attaining. She and the employer just clicked and they hired her on the spot! The office is only five minutes from her house so she is still close enough to run home if her sons need anything. She still plans to go back and finish her credential when the class is offered, but she is already gainfully employed in a new career thanks to the WIB and the work of the Job Link counselors.

### **V. Networking / Member Update**

WIB Members broke into small groups of four or five to discuss the challenges and trends they are seeing and what we expect as we move into recovery. The groups reported out the following highlights of their conversations.

*Judy James, Steve Herron, and David Tam jointed the meeting.*

#### Business

- Everyone is cautiously expanding their services offerings due to the uncertainty of potential roll backs.
- People are getting by but starting to worry how long this will affect their businesses.
- Manufacturing has had layoffs.

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- Childcare continues to be an issue.
- The hospitality industry is worried about regressing a few steps for the shelter order as we are now on the watch list. Also, it is close to fire season and the PSPS events could be starting soon which also disrupt business. Businesses may be bringing staff back in only to have to shut back down in days or weeks.
- Mary's Pizza Shack pivoted proactively and worked with staff about a week before the official SIP was in place and their loyal employees are ready to come back when they are called.
- Job Link's Business Services team is working with AC Hotel and the food bank on virtual hiring events.
- Job Link is working with clients virtually, replacing the in-person meetings.

#### Healthcare

- Hospitals in Sonoma County lost income as they stopped elective surgeries during SIP to have ICU beds available for COVID patients. They have started doing more procedures as we did not get the expected wave of patients and now they are starting to fill up and there is concern about spikes and capacity.
- Healthcare is busy. New guidelines and regulations. Lots of COVID testing for the public and the healthcare workers.
- Petaluma Health Services has the contract to take care of the people currently housed at the Sonoma State University campus. It has been challenging for their staff to provide this care and their staff has had to be COVID tested constantly.
- Kaiser continues to see patients and is cautiously opening their facilities for more services so they don't get overwhelmed with cases.
- Sunrise Senior Living is still hiring caregivers, nurses, and other staff.
- Healdsburg District Hospital and Department of Rehabilitation are currently experiencing furloughs.

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## Construction

- Construction is adopting new protocols and continuing to work. The jobs are out there.
- Construction could be fragile as if people do not follow the warnings of the CDC and follow safety protocols jobs are shut down.
- There is a strong need for construction workers in the residential market.
- The Trades Introduction Program (TIP) was able to identify funding through Vallejo Community College to continue offering classes.

## Education

- There are more than 10 new regulations for Sonoma County schools regarding social distancing and various learning models, including distance learning so that education can be delivered appropriately and in ways youth can benefit from. There are only about five weeks for schools to pull this all together.
- Educators are now considered essential workers.
- Santa Rosa Junior College is impacted by a new law about foreign students needing to have at least one class face to face to remain in the United State.
- Empire College was able to welcome back some medical and clinical group classes that are allowed. They are also working with recent graduates on job placements.
- Sonoma State reports that 32% of their recent graduates are working, 15% are continuing education, and 50% are looking for employment. These numbers mean they are on track for the normal about of graduates looking for work this soon after graduation.
- Sonoma State is about to open 3,200 rooms on campus for their student housing. This is about one third of what they have available.
- Sonoma State plans to have limited in person classes in the fall.
- Universities and colleges are facing impacted budges and are looking at personnel layoffs.

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- The junior colleges are working with Cal Fire and PG&E train 100+ arborists to clear the power lines before fire season.

### Non-Profits

- Community Action Partnership has a rental assistance program that normally services 10 to 20 households a month. They now have a waitlist of 300 households requesting assistance. They are working to learn how to do their services remotely. They have received some new funding, but lost other funding they traditionally receive. Their staff is doing a lot of navigating and pivoting.
- Many folks in the non-profit world have been laid off.
- Job Corps is preparing to bring staff back into the office.

## **VI. COVID and Job Link Operations**

### Data Presentation

Katie led a review of data provided Chimera Economics for labor market information.

- Pre-COVID our economy was sound and the unemployed rate was a historic low of 2.6%. The recession started in February and the April Sonoma County unemployment jumped to 14.5%.
- As of May, Sonoma County had the 15<sup>th</sup> lowest unemployment rate in the state.
  - Sonoma County 12.7%
  - California 15.9%
  - Nationwide 13%
- The timing of a vaccine is very important for economic recovery.
- It is forecasted the economic impact of COVID will be sharp and short, not sustained.
- Unemployment claims continue but are now at a slower pace, and most are considered temporary.
- There has been a decrease in the civilian labor force participate rate.

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- Due to stimulus payments and unemployment there was a spike in income that is dropping. Spending declined when stores were closed those numbers are coming back up.
- Consumers want to spend - surprising many forecasters.
- More job ads are being posted which is a good sign for the economy and jobs.
- The areas with the most remote work options has the least COVID impact.

### **Panel Discussion of the Wine, Restaurant, and Hotel Industries**

Karissa Kruse, President of Sonoma County Wine Growers

Vince Albano, CEO of Mary's Pizza Shack

Steve Young, General Manager of the Doubletree

*Q. Please tell us about the COVID impact on your operations from beginning of the Shelter In Place (SIP) through today when we are back on the watch list to and may have to close indoor activities.*

#### **Karissa Kruse, Sonoma County Wine Growers**

- On the agriculture side things continued. Growers had to work on logistics and how to have field workers travel to sites, and who was living together in order to pair them for proximity and risk of exposure. There was a lot of education and training increasing sanitation. The nature of the job being outside helped as a precaution.
- Regional wine production continued but 98% of the consumer experience and wine business stopped overnight.
- 70% of Sonoma County wineries are small producers. Small by definition means they produce less than 10K cases. They rely on tasting rooms, direct sales, and restaurants.
- Larger wineries that work with retail chains did well. Sales are up 28% across the states. The industry needed 25-30% in sales to offset what was lost from the restaurant sales.

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- Tasting rooms closed, and food became required to have outdoor wine tastings.
- Wineries were very innovative during the SIP with virtual tasting.

#### Steve Young, Doubletree

- Steve has been in the hospitality industry a long time. He has worked through the gulf war, 9/11, the recession, and this has by far been the most devastating crisis he has seen for hospitality.
- The hotel suspended operations at the end of March and reopened the beginning of June. Sonoma County is a “drive to” market and a lot of travelers from the bay area are coming to stay in hotels.
- Business is down from last year.
- Furloughed 90% of team members during the SIP.
- We are bringing back more people every week since we have reopened and now have 40 of 130 staff working again.
- The food and beverage part of the business will not come back for quite a while.
- Hilton laid off 2,100 staff across their organization.

#### Vince Albano, Mary’s Pizza Shack

- Prior to SIP they had 500 employees in 14 locations.
- Revenue declined to 65% at first month of SIP. That improved to 75% of prior year revenue by mid-April, and then to 85-90% of prior year revenue when patios were allowed to open.
- They pivoted with changes to stay open.
  - New food safety rules to build trust and consumer confidence.
  - Curbside pickup.
  - Contactless delivery.
  - New job opportunities including Sanitizer, Curbside Hosts, additional Cashiers, additional Phone Order Takers, and Third Party Expeditors.
  - Signage so people knew they were open.

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Some of these changes were ideas that had already been discussed and were able to be put in place quicker than originally planned.

- Created a staff COVID Taskforce to plan for the challenges.
  - Sent letters to staff in March about new safety measures, sick pay, day care options, time off, and other benefits. Offered to cover cost of benefits for furloughed crew members with reimbursement plans to fit their economic situations.
  - Provided 50% off meals for crews and their families.
  - Set up a company-wide text communication program to keep people informed about reopening and safety.
  - Established a Safety Ambassador Group made up of staff doing zoom safety training to keep current with the changes.
- Benefited from the PPP Loan and provided “hero pay”.

***Q. How is COVID affecting staffing levels and training?***

Steve Young, Doubletree

- Staff levels are down as we have a lot of people working part time and receiving unemployment insurance.
- We are cross-training many team members as we need to utilize everyone in every way possible. We need people who can work in various areas including accounting, culinary, and back of house.
- Knowledge of technology and soft skills continue to be important for staff.
- Sanitation and safety are now at a whole new level. We partnered with the Mayo Clinic to develop our cleaning protocols with them and we had to re-train every team member on the importance of cleaning and safety.
- We expect long recovery which could be 15-18 months.

***Karissa Kruse, Sonoma County Wine Growers***

- The wine industry will have winners and losers.

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- Agriculture was not affected immediately as they have longer term contracts. Those that did not are out renegotiating and cancelling contracts.
- About 20% of the wine grape crop will go unsold this year.
- Agriculture had an influx in women to work in the fields as they were not working in hotels and other positions requiring training for these new vineyard workers.
- Wineries are changing their selling strategies and moving more to digital. There is not a lot of cost to use zoom and telephone calls to do virtual tastings and email campaigns. This allows customers to do a wine tasting with someone from Italy or New York and not just your local friends. This is not expensive to arrange and a good option for smaller wineries. These additional in-house positions are bringing more women into the workplace.
- Childcare is important as many of our workers have dual income household.
- Want our next generation and students to stay in the county and support the local economy.

***Q. What training would you like to see for upskilling for your workforce?***

Vince Albano, Mary's Pizza Shack

- Would like to see more food handler programs, general food knowledge, food allergies and food safety.

Steve Young, Doubletree

- Classes for non-English speakers to learn about basic technology as many of them are intimidated in this area.
- Sanitation and food handling.
- Expect it will not be an employee's market going forward and job seekers will need new skills to be better candidates.
- We had 130 employees before COVID. We expect to have 100 back in the work place within a year as business picks back up.

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Karissa Kruse, Sonoma County Wine Growers

- Now is a good opportunity for SRJC to teach trades and winery processing to women and vocation trades in a digital space.

***Q. What are key items we should be aware of in your industries? Or in what ways can we support you?***

Steve Young, Doubletree

- We would like to educate people about the careers in hospitality to increase interest.

Vince Albano, Mary's Pizza Shack

- Would like to see a training for customer service and de-escalating angry customers who are asked to wear masks in businesses.
- Training for adaptability to evolving technology.
- Would like to see some sort of classed for acumen for food. People in Sonoma County want to know the ingredients of what they eat.
- Training in food safety and sanitation.

All of hospitality would benefit from more people in the county doing staycations and visiting their local restaurants, wineries, and hotels.

Vince shared that Mary's Pizza Shack has meal kits that can be bought so people can make their pizza at home and asked if there was any opportunity for the wine industry do some type of "make your own wine" type of product to use the grapes they expect to go unsold this year. Karissa responded that the blending and bottling involved are too complicated for that. What they would love to see is some sort of better wine packaging for a one-time experience wine tasting without having to open multiple bottles to get the full experience at home. She does appreciate that Sonoma County is part of a maker community and it is great that so many people are getting a whole new appreciation for agriculture during this time by planting vegetable and flower gardens.

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***Q. There are people employed at current wages that do not meet expectations. When you are bringing people back and asking more of them, are you looking at changes to their wages?***

Vince Albano, Mary's Pizza Shack

This has been a part of all the minimum wage discussions. Many would like to see the back of the house wages increase. The servers make \$25-\$40 an hour and get more flexibility to decide on their hours, while that is not true for the back. Not sure how to do this yet.

Steve Young, Doubletree

The Hilton corporation was rated number one to work for years but they have similar disparity in wages. The front of the house people earn more money.

Bartenders can make up to up to \$90K while housekeepers and other back of house workers make less. It is a challenge and something we want to continue to focus on.

Ananda thanked today's presenters and asked them to please not hesitate to reach out to the WIB if they have more to share at a future date. The WIB is definitely interested in engaging with you and supporting you.

### **Update on Operations**

Jessica shared her team has been incredible welcoming new clients and servicing existing clients. They are running close to full capacity again. Our Counselor of the Day (COD) mechanism allows someone to have a virtual appointment to access typical services, and/or support for being laid off in about a week. We are continuing to handle a lot of unemployment issue telephone calls. We now have an Employment Development Department (EDD) supportive service grant that can provide assistance in amounts of \$400 or \$800 per client and hope to serve 600 people with the grant. Kaiser has shared our grant flier with their staff that have had lost income so eligible staff can apply. Often a reduction of hours makes someone eligible.

**Action:** Staff will see that Steve and Vince get a copy of the EDD grant fliers.

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The Business Services team reported the following items.

- They are hosting their first virtual hiring event on July 15 where the AC Hotel is recruiting 19 positions for their new hotel.
- The team has placed six dislocated workers into new positions, five of those new jobs have been in healthcare.
- The English Language Learner (ELL) Cohort is working with the Adult Education Consortium and recruiting 25 people for the next ELL Workgroup starting August 18.
- Sunrise Senior Living is actively recruiting for additional on-the-job training positions.
- The Food Bank and Food for Thought are recruiting for workers as they do not have the volunteers right now they normally do. We had two potential clients from Los Guilicos, and a client from SonomaWORKs applying for these jobs with assistance from transitional job funding. These jobs are good opportunities for those looking to build their work experience. Youth and clients with barriers like homelessness find these to be good entry positions.
- We have started receiving training requests through Business Services. One request is for a Latino owned business looking for assistance with training in COVID cleaning. Other requests have been from non-profits and manufacturing. Adding the fifth criteria to the funding parameters for using training and supportive service funding to support items specific to COVID layoff aversion or to meet safety guidelines in the public health order is allowing for more training opportunities.

## **VII. WIB Business**

### **A. SB1**

Frank Cuneo shared that the SB1 High Road Construction Careers two-year grant has been awarded to the Trades Introduction Program (TIP) and will be used to fund 10 cohorts. The first class will begin in October and a flier will be send out when all the fall dates are confirmed. The current TIP class transitioned to online due to our

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need to be flexible during COVID but we hope to transition back to face to face when possible. The TIP is focused on assisting five populations: 1) women interested in the trades, 2) formerly incarcerated, 3) disadvantaged youth, 4) racial and ethnic minorities, and 5) veterans. If you have interest in joining with us in our endeavors please contact Frank.

**B. NBEC Region Updates**

Katie shared that the state did an analysis of our NBEC region to decide if Solano would remain with us or move to another region. It was decided Solano would remain in our region.

**IX. Adjourn 5:01 pm**

Next meeting: **September 9, 2020 via Zoom**

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