

**NORTHWEST INDIANA WORKFORCE BOARD MINUTES**  
**Center of Workforce Innovations**  
**September 19, 2024**

**Present:**

Karen Kopka, Chris Bebee, Audra Peterson, Adrienne Carrol, Aco Sikoski, Lori Tubbs, Liz Negron-Haniford, Kevin Comerford, Debi Baughman, George Douglas

**Absent/Proxy:** Jim Clarida, Adam Collins Justin Mount, Anna Ortega, Martina Tovar

**Staff:**

Lisa Daugherty, Erin Sizemore, Tammy Stump, Kathy Neary, Shaun Sahlhoff, Jen Grabowski

**Guests:**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Karen Kopka called the meeting to order.

**Consent Agenda**

Mrs. Kopka asked the Board Members to review the items on the consent agenda.

**Motion:** A motion was made by Aco Sikoski and seconded by Audra Peterson to accept the consent agenda as presented. All were in favor. **The motion passed.**

**1. Board Business**

Dashboard/Performance

Ms. Neary highlighted some changes that have been made to the report. Based on a request, this report was changed to indicate program year. Prior program year versus current program year to date. Also worth noting is the number of placements is something that we are really looking at, how we can track between when those employers also place for those work-based learning opportunities as well as those that are placed in post-secondary a little more closely. This is specific to individuals and not to employers.

**Goal #1 Increase skills of current workforce to align with economic development strategies and key industry clusters** Activated the Career Services mobile unit at multiple events in Lake and Porter Counties. The implementation of Charity Tracker and On-site Career Advisor hours, bringing services straight to the clientele at HealthLinc now offered at Michigan City, Valparaiso, Knox and East Chicago.

**Goal #2 Improve employer access to qualified workers and awareness of training resources:** Incorporated Mental health Awareness and best practices within our organization. Launched an East Chicago Community Outreach initiative connecting with the city officials and economic leaders to foster relationships and gain an insight of jobs, training and resources needed.

**Goal #3 Ensure Youth in NWI are positioned for continued education/learning and workforce success:** Launched Career Exploration Virtual Reality Program for youth to explore different career paths using Oculus headsets for full immersion in realistic scenarios and perform tasks commonly found in various professions.

**Goal #4- Encourage and support an entrepreneurial spirit:** Michigan City and East Chicago hubs continue to move forward and remain on schedule to open in the fall of 2025. Created co-branding guidelines for partners and engaged digitally, supporting and sharing their good news victories and offerings

**Goal #5 Assure compliance and efficient operations of a workforce development system:** NWI Works, Inc. was created as a 501c3 to serve as the overarching governance and fundraising entity, honoring all brands and representing the collective work of the opportunity hub program partners. Met with Congressman Fran Mrvan to discuss the WIOA Reauthorization and update on county initiatives.

Local Plan Posting

Mr. Sahlhoff talked about WIOA Legislation that comes up every 4 years. We are at the 4-year point, so a new plan is needed. The state just wrapped up their process and what we do is informed by what the state does. The state submitted their plan to the Department of Labor in March, it was approved in April, at which point started the process where we ended up getting the instructions for what was going to be necessary from DWD at the end of May. New this year was the plan was posted online for public comment. On September 30<sup>th</sup> we will submit those comments and our plan to DWD. Our plan breaks out into 6 main sections. An Economic Analysis, Partnerships, Investment, Strategies, Resources, Compliance and Past Participant Information. Mr. Sahlhoff urged the members to view the plan on the WorkOne website.

Nomination of Mikie Stogsdill

Ms. Daugherty indicated that with the resignation of Anne Taylor there was a need to identify a replacement. Legislation requires us to have a certain make up of representation from different entities. With Ms. Taylor being a part of the Economic Development Sector, we needed to find a replacement within Economic Development. Ms. Daugherty met with Mikie Stogsdill the new Executive Director of the Starke County Economic Development Foundation who was nominated by Heather Ennis. Ms. Stogsdill is very interested in serving on the board and representing Starke County.

**Motion:** A motion was made by George Douglas and seconded by Chris Bebee to accept the nomination of Mikie Stogsdill. All were in favor. **The motion passed.**

Statement of Economic Interest

Ms. Kopka asked the Board to fill out and sign the Statement of Economic Interest and return to Jen Grabowski as soon as possible.

**1. Old Business**

No old business to report on.

**2. Reports**

Youth Employment Council

Ms. Stump talked about 3 new goals for this year.

Credentials- We want to know what credentials are valued by employers and then integrate work based learning and secure pathways for all youth.

Work Ethic Initiatives- We have more schools participating as well as more students but overall, the awards of certificates didn't go up as much

JAG- We have already hit our performance goal.

President's Report

Ms. Daugherty gave an update on the Michigan City Hub project. The renderings for the Elston location are completed Ms. Daugherty is waiting for the ok to go public with those. The East Chicago Hub location continues to be Carrie Gosh. There has been a changeover with the Superintendent. We have met with him; he likes the project and is aligned with his goals. His school board agendas have been extremely packed, and we hope to be on their agenda within the next month.

Ms. Daugherty gave an update on the status of the Hammond and Portage Workone locations. The Hammond landlord continues to say that he is making progress on HVAC system and continues not to do

so. We have engaged in a law firm (Krieg DeVault LLP) who will draft a letter expressing our concerns and our plan to vacate the building. A couple alternative locations have been identified.

The Portage WorkOne location. The goal in closing the Portage Office is to have *access points* throughout the county. One of the potential sites is the old Portage Township trustee's office. A scheduled tour of the space is coming. Ms. Daugherty also mentioned that in the data research regarding the Portage office, it was noted that the office serviced more Valparaiso residents than Portage residents, with that being said she has a meeting with Valparaiso University to look at a space they have available which also would be in one of the highly distressed census tracts in Valparaiso. Ideally, she would like to combine the corporate staff with WorkOne services as it gives us more flexibility. Nothing on this has been decided yet just exploring our options.

Ms. Daugherty informed the board of the resignation Of Barb Sacha.

With Ms. Sacha's resignation comes the need to fill her spot. Ms. Daugherty opened up to the board their thoughts for potential nominees.

**Motion:** A motion was made by George Douglas and seconded by Audra Peterson to accept the resignation of Barb Sacha. All were in favor. **The motion passed**

Save the Dates

**NWIWB meeting November 14, 2024**

**ADJOURN**

Mrs. Kopka adjourned the meeting.

Jen Grabowski, Recording Secretary