

EASTERN WASHINGTON PARTNERSHIP

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL AND REGIONAL BOARD MEETING

December 12, 2019

Spokane, Washington

The meeting of the WorkForce Development Council and Regional Board was called to order at 12:30 PM by Chairperson, Bill Clemens.

1. Attendance and Introductions

WDC Members: Jerry Anhorn, Jr., Bill Clemens, Gabe Coates, Larry Frick, Scott Habenicht, Barry Lamont, John Little, Angela Merritt, Jennie Weber and Rob Willford. Kathy Covey, Jim Drake and Tony Maiorana participated via phone.

Regional Board Members: Mike Talbott, Steve Kiss and Arthur Swannack. Jim Jeffords and Scott Hutsell participated via phone.

Contractors and Guests: Doug Loney, Jaclyn Jacot, Bryan Raines, Cassidy Peterson, Ajsa Suljic. Kelly Charlton participated via phone.

2. Approval of Agenda

Bill Clemens called for a motion to approve the agenda. *Mike Talbott made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Jim Jeffers seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

3. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Bill Clemens called for a motion to approve the minutes from the September 26, 2019 meeting. *Scott Hutsell made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Art Swannack seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

4. Presentation: Columbia Pulp by Eleanor Specht

Eleanor Specht began her presentation on the new business, Columbia Pulp, by providing a brief description of her work experience. She has been serving as the Administrative Services Manager for Columbia Pulp for approximately six months. Her background is in the hospitality business.

Columbia Pulp's main office is located in Dayton. However, the main plant is on a 45-acre site near Lyon's Ferry. It is a new company that is utilizing straw (instead of wood) to create pulp. In Southeastern Washington there is an ample amount of wheat straw available. The process for creating straw pulp requires lower energy, chemicals and water. The process is sulfur free, so there is no odor created. Eleanor went over the process as well as the many benefits of using straw to create pulp. She also shared some of the uses of the pulp and the benefits that have been provided to the communities surrounding the area. The company provides good paying jobs to over 100 full-time employees!

Eleanor shared some of the issues they have had with hiring. One of the first issues was getting workers to drive to the remote area. This was solved by creating shifts that were longer and rotated, allowing the workers less “road” time. Originally Ride-Pools were discussed as a solution, but the shifts appear to have solved the issue, so the Ride-Pool concept has been tabled. She noted that approximately 80% of the employees drive from the Dayton area to the plant. Wages are livable at \$16 - \$20 for operators and \$45K - \$50K for salaried employees. There is also a benefits package provided. The requirements for entry level work at the plant are simple. Applicants must be hardworking, High School or College graduates, and must like to learn. As with most industries, screening employees has been a problem.

When asked about Labor and Industry regulations, Eleanor replied that the company takes a positive approach by talking about safety on a regular/daily basis with staff.

The plant uses Natural Gas to power the machinery. Some other advantages include:

- It is a new industry, the first plant of its type.
- Local straw is utilized.
- They hope to install another plant in the future (not immediately).
- The process for using straw was locally developed at WSU in Pullman.

Eleanor explained that the end products are being marketed both domestically and as exports. She also added that the original Research and Development plant is now being utilized for other new products, including products using Hemp.

Columbia Pulp appears to be a business with a bright future and is a great asset to the Southeast Region of the state.

5. Regional Board Report

The Washington State Employment Security Department has provided the Final PY2018 Monitoring Report. The report was shared with attendees. There were no findings in the monitoring process. The Noted Practices on Page 6 of the report were discussed and again, kudos were provided to Rod and his staff.

6. Chairman’s Report

Bill Clemens shared that in the past, a Coordinator has been hired to assist with the Request for Proposals (RFP) regarding Grant Contractors. There is a 2020 – 2023 Youth Grant that will require RFP’s. *Rob Willford made a motion to allow Rod Van Alyne to move forward in securing a contracted Coordinator to handle the RFP process. Scott Habenicht seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.* Rod will begin the process of putting together a Request for Information (RFI) that will be published in local and college newspapers, shared with Board Members and to anyone that may have an interest. The goal will be to get the word out. The entire RFI process should take until the end of February. The RFP should be completed by the end of May.

7. Quality Assurance Committee Report

Jerry Anhorn, Jr. reminded the attendees that there was no report in September because there was no QA meeting due to changes in the EWP office. Jerry reported that a QA meeting was held on December 6, 2019. Rod presented a rough draft of a revised report to the committee at their meeting. There are concerns remaining about the data in the report. Rod will be working with staff to assure that the report is correct and accurate. The new report will provide the updated information and will be completed in time for the February meeting. Jerry noted that the new report appears to be simpler and easier to understand and he is looking forward to the new format(s).

Rod discussed the on-going situation with the vendor providing computer software that is used to create and pull data reports. Actions were taken to put pressure on the vendor in order to improve the data provision. If changes were not made, it could have meant the possibility of using an off-the-shelf product. Rod feels confident that by this same time next year, a product that produces accurate and necessary data will be available. The final goal is to create reports that will include information on follow-up services as well as immediate services. This will rely on extra effort from the service providers. The reports that Rod is currently working on will include the current (to-date) information as well as annual information compared to proposed numbers.

8. Director's Report

Rod Van Alyne spoke about the updating of the EWP Strategic Plan. The current plan is four years old and is due to be updated by July 1, 2020. Rod added that the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board had stated they would be providing information to be used for target setting in updating of Strategic Plans. The Board had supplied a timeline of November, but to-date no information has been received. Rod will be moving forward with the updating of the Strategic Plan. The updating will include a review of previous plans, updating information and setting goals for the future. Much of the February 27, 2020 WDC meeting will be dedicated to this project. It is hopeful that a draft of the updated plan can be ready by the end of March 2020. At that time, the plan will go out to the public for comment(s) with the expectation that the plan be finalized in May. Art Swannack asked if there were any issues to be dealt with from the Federal Side. Rod replied that there were none. Rod will be doing some searching to find out what the Department of Labor has communicated to the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board regarding targets and expectations. He suspects that the changes in the Perkins Plan for educational funding may be a cause for some of the hold up in information.

9. Labor Market Economist Report

Ajsa Suljic, Regional Labor Economist, provided a presentation on Labor Market information. The presentation included maps that compared various labor market information for several different types of industries in the State of Washington.

10. WorkSource Report

Jennie Weber presented the Eastern Washington Partnership report. She shared statistics regarding Job Seeker Services, Employer Services and the demographics of Job Seekers.

Doug Loney offered an update on a Career and Internship Fair that was held at the Walla Walla Community College in October. He also shared that after a year of planning, the two separate offices of ESD staff in Pullman have been combined into one office. Sharing in that space is the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Rural Resources Employment and Training Department. This is a vast improvement for all the partners in Pullman.

Bryan Raines reported that an outreach program has started in Davenport. The Rural Resources Victim Service office is sharing space with staff from the RRCA Employment and Training Department and/or ESD twice per week. It is hoped that the new presence will increase services to Lincoln County and will serve as a catalyst to like-projects in Pend Oreille, Ferry and Southern Stevens County.

11. Old Business

There was none.

12. New Business (and Round Table)

Cassidy Peterson gave a brief presentation on her new role with the Career Connections Washington project. Cassidy is an employee at Greater Spokane Incorporated (GSI). The project that they have been awarded will cover five counties (Ferry, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Lincoln and Whitman) as well as Spokane and Adams County. GSI will serve as the regional network for Career Connect Washington. Cassidy has been tasked with finding out what is currently in place as far as youth programs and what opportunities there are for other programs. She will be working on creating a better-connected system and is looking forward to growing outside of the Spokane area.

Jaelyn Jacot spoke briefly on the changes in the Carl Perkins funding (note: this is a carry-over conversation from the Partner's Meeting held earlier. Refer to those meeting minutes for further information). Jaelyn also announced that the Community Colleges of Spokane, IEL Colville location will be receiving four brand new lathes. In addition, there are mills that are on the way. This is a \$400K + investment in upgrading equipment so that excellent training skills can be provided.

Jerry Ahorn, Jr. shared that the Walla Walla Community College has expanded its cosmetology program to include acrylic nails. The classes will be two quarters and will begin in Spring 2020. Graduates will be state licensed. There has already been a great deal of interest in the courses and local shops are excited about the program begin offered. Jerry also shared that the Burbank Training center of WWCC has completed its first courses with the Industrial Training program in Maintenance. This program is held in conjunction with the needs of employers Tyson Fresh Meats and FirstFruit Farms. These businesses are ecstatic over the success of the training program. A \$150K investment has been made and there is full commitment to continued growth of the program.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, February 27, 2020.