



NCWorks Commission Quarterly Business Session

Wednesday, November 13, 2024

Catawba Valley Community College | Webinar

1:00 P.M. – 2:00 P.M. | Hickory, N.C.

Minutes

Present:

Chair Tom Rabon, Christopher Arabia, Rebecca Axford, Daniel Briggs, Shawn Brown, Sherry Carpenter, Rodney Carson, Pamela Cashwell, Wesley Davis, Robert Doreauk, Chris Egan (*Secretary Kody Kinsley*), Jeffrey Frederick, Christopher Gergen, James Hartman, Byron Hicks (*Peter Hans*), Stephen Hunt, Himanshu Karvir, Candace Lowry, Paul Lawler, John Loyack (*Jeffrey Cox*), Marti Martin Mathews, Nikki Nissen, Olalah Njenga, Dayson Paison (*Governor Roy Cooper*), Sharene Pierce, Cheryl Richards, Cynthia Speight, Gregory Thompson, Sandra Thompson, Pam Townsend, Hope Williams, and Annie Izod

Absent:

Suzanne Johnson, Darla McGlamery, Ronnie Smith, Kim Toler, Jordan Whichard (*Secretary Michelle Baker Sanders*), Tammy Simmons, Kristie Van Auken (*Superintendent Catherine Truitt*).

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Chair Tom Rabon welcomed the commission members and guests to the final quarterly business session of the year. He thanked Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC) for being a key workforce development partner in the region and for hosting the meeting. He also expressed his appreciation to the staff at both the CVCC Manufacturing Solutions Center and the CVCC Workforce Solutions Complex, for providing excellent tours of both facilities for the commission members. The CVCC Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC) in Conover, specializes in applied research and development, prototyping, testing, domestic sourcing and training for 21st century manufacturing and the CVCC Workforce Solutions Complex creates state-of-the-art classrooms and laboratory spaces to teach advanced manufacturing and other technical in-demand skills by a growing local and state economy.

Chair Rabon reflected under Dr. Hinshaw's leadership, CVCC has continued to empower individuals to aspire, dream, and achieve. The college is a leading entity in redefining the region's economy. Dr. Hinshaw's collaborative efforts have developed partnerships at the local, state, and national levels.

Dr. Garrett Hinshaw

Dr. Hinshaw welcomed everyone to the campus and provided opening remarks on his journey as President of the college and the transformative changes which have occurred under his leadership since 2006.

Chairman Tom Rabon Workforce Updates

Chair Rabon extended his gratitude to Dr. Hinshaw for his opening comments and all the excellent work that Catawba Valley Community College has accomplished for Western North Carolina's workforce under Dr. Hinshaw's leadership. He then noted several new developments related to our workforce since meeting on August 14th.

Chair Rabon acknowledged all military veterans and reminded everyone of their special recognition during the week of November 11-15. The week was proclaimed "Employ a Veteran Week" by Governor Cooper who stated, "Veterans strengthen our communities and enrich our businesses, as citizens and as skilled workers and leaders. We owe veterans and their families a deep debt of gratitude for their service and as America's most military and veteran friendly state, North Carolina honors them by helping them get good jobs in growing industries."

Moreover, Chair Rabon noted that several of the NCWorks Career Centers had made efforts to organize events that help connect veterans to obtain jobs and other services. He highlighted a recent job fair organized by Catawba County on November 6th. He then recognized Russ Vickers Regional Veterans Employment Consultant at NCWorks in Catawba County. Chair Rabon extended an expression of continual thanks to all veterans. He then introduced our two newest board members, Rebecca Axford and Jim Hartman who replace Dan Segovia and Brock Ashburn. Rebecca Axford currently serves as an International Representative for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), where she plays a pivotal role in facilitating education, workforce development, and strengthening opportunities for workers. Jim Hartman is the founder/owner of Secret Garden Bees, an upscale honey and jelly farm in Cumberland County, NC with sales across 24 states and in over 170 stores. After welcoming the two new members, Chair Rabon thanked Dan Segovia and Brock Ashburn for their diligence, dedication, service, and commitment to the NCWorks Commission.

Chair Rabon then turned everyone's attention to the state's recovery efforts in Western North Carolina since Hurricane Helene. He commended all the staff in the western region's NCWorks Career Centers and the Local Workforce Development Boards for their leadership and service to the communities that suffered devastation. Efforts to support the community included dispatching the NCWorks Mobile Unit to provide assistance at several different locations in the west. Other efforts included the state Division of Employment Security who worked in close collaboration with the workforce system to help people apply for unemployment assistance.

Rabon shared in other news, the Department of Commerce has received a National Dislocated Worker Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, of up to \$10 million to further assist with recovery efforts. The grant will provide eligible people with temporary jobs that support either clean-up and recovery or humanitarian assistance to residents of the affected areas. The grant can also pay for workforce services such as training. The widespread devastation impacted many individuals who lost their jobs, but also employers, primarily small businesses in western North Carolina. Chair Rabon said, we continue to look for ways to support our citizens and businesses. Other key partners include local community colleges who continue to play a key role in the region's recovery. The John M. Belk Endowment has committed \$2 million in funding to support 14 community colleges impacted by the storm.

Additionally, Chair Rabon discussed Governor Cooper's recent state budget recommendations to help rebuild western North Carolina in a stronger capacity to withstand future storms. The Governor recommended an initial \$3.9 billion package to begin rebuilding critical infrastructure, homes,

businesses, schools, and farms damaged during the storm. Despite such large devastation, Chair Rabon shared, we have seen some positive economic development announcements, in areas hit by the hurricane. Governor Cooper recently announced that Cedar Direct, LLC, a lumber distributor, will create 20 new jobs in Rutherford County. In addition, the governor announced 22 Rural Infrastructure Grants to attract 144 new jobs and over \$83 million investment, across the state.

August Minutes Approval

Chair Rabon asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the August 14, 2024 quarterly business session. Jeff Frederick made the motion to approve, and Shawn Brown seconded the motion. There being no corrections, the minutes were unanimously approved as written.

Employer Needs Survey Report

Chair Rabon introduced Josh Levy, Senior Policy Analyst Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) who began his presentation by stating the Employer Needs Survey has been conducted every two years since 2014. He shared that LEAD conducted phone surveys and stated that five industry samples were included in the report as well as a 2nd overall survey with experimental questions. Josh expressed that the key findings were: 1. hiring difficulties eased from 2021 were discovered to be like pre-pandemic levels. 2. Employability issues had dominated the list of reasons for hiring difficulties. 3. Barriers to employment were important to consider. 4. There were opportunities to grow work-based learning. 5. Most employers were optimistic about future business conditions. Other topics and statistics included a demonstration (graph) depicting reporting difficulties over a 10-year span, the overshadowing of skills gaps, and the missing workforce qualities of young workers under 30 were all topics discussed during the presentation.

Josh shared that diversity was rated high by employers and received an 8.5 scoring on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest. The responses to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation included a 21% response regarding the number of employers who expect to increase the use of this technology. The percentage of employers experiencing hiring difficulty in this area was 37%. He ended his presentation citing opportunities to support employers which included 1. Expand efforts to engage underutilized talent pools. 2. Comprehensively address challenges around employability. 3. Prioritize addressing barriers to employment. 4. Facilitate employer driven talent development initiatives 5. Prepare employers and workforce for automation/new tech. 6. Continue to strengthen industry specific partnerships. Josh concluded his presentation by stating that the [full report](#) and the [interactive dashboard](#) were available on the NC Commerce website.

Employer Needs Survey—Employer Forums Report

Chair Rabon introduced John Metcalf, President of Workforce Systems Associates. John began his presentation by informing the commission members that 24 forums were held across the state with 194 engaged employers participating in the forums. The scope of work included a consistent set of questions which determined barriers to attracting and retaining talent, a listing of skills that are high in demand, the frequency of locating talent, and the interaction with the NCWorks Career Centers. John shared that the word “struggle” was most used word during the forums. Some examples of statements included: “we don’t just struggle to fill any one position; we struggle to fill all positions” and “in small business, the struggle is real.” The five (5) hot topics included 1. Filling skilled trades and maintenance technician positions 2. Lack of adequate childcare/transportation/housing 3. Attracting young workers, who may be disconnected from the workforce 4. Lack of durable skills 5. NCWorks brand awareness. In closing John shared that the NCWorks Commission can approach most of the employer challenges; however, some challenges will need assistance from the NC state legislature or local governments, while

others will require innovative approaches to solutions. His final point involved creating a call to action and John stated, “the one thing we all can do is become an advocate.”

Chair Rabon thanked both Josh and John for their informative presentations. He asked the members for any questions. There being none, he proceeded with the committee reports.

Committee Updates

Employer Leadership Committee

Jeff Frederick, chair, reported the committee met on October 24, 2024, and they continue to learn from the results of the Employer Needs Survey and the recent Employer Forums and they are working to develop an action plan to advocate for solutions to the many challenges employers face in attracting and retaining top talent in our state.

Local Innovation Committee

Cynthia Speight, chair, reported the committee met on October 16, 2024, and was pleased with the positive feedback from the Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) webinar and said the committee looked forward to everyone joining upcoming Childcare webinar scheduled for December 4, 2024, at 11:00 a.m. Cynthia asked for anyone needing the webinar link to please reach out to the Local Innovation Committee staff. Additionally, she said the committee continues to track the progress for the NCWorks Local Innovation Grant awards. In conclusion, she expressed excitement regarding the appointments of the 2 newest committee members Rebecca Axford and Jim Hartman.

Governance and System Alignment Committee

Chris Egan, chair, reported the Governance and System Alignment Committee met on October 23, 2024, and heard presentations from Ken Allen on the Employer Needs Survey -- Employer Forums and Wendy Johnson on the NCWorks Career Centers Best Practices and Recommendations Report.

Skills and Education Attainment Committee

Sherry Carpenter, chair, reported that in their last meeting on October 15, 2024, the committee had the pleasure of hearing from Ken Allen on the outcomes of the Employer Leadership Forums and heard from Jenni Harris about a career pathways sector partnership project with business services, and from Veronica Green on partnering with Local Innovation for the upcoming commission’s childcare webinar on Dec. 4th, and lastly, about a new certified career pathway from Cape Fear Workforce Development Board director, Ginger Brick and deputy director Brian Jackson.

Cape Fear Workforce Development Board - Career Pathways Presentation

Chair Carpenter announced her excitement in recognizing a brand-new career pathway from the Cape Fear Workforce Development Board. She explained the Advanced Manufacturing Pathway is a product of input from regional employers, educational/training providers, and workforce and economic development agencies dedicated to providing a pipeline of skilled workers to support the economic growth of the Cape Fear region. The Cape Fear region consists of Brunswick, Columbus, New Hanover and Pender counties with a combined estimated population of approximately 502,595 individuals. Industry response during pathway discussions revealed a career pathway was needed and should be developed to support industry needs while simultaneously providing employment opportunities with high wage growth potential. Brian Jackson and contributing local staff were present from the Cape Fear Workforce Development Board to receive the career pathway certificate.

Closing Presentation

In closing, Chair Rabon reminded the commission about the 2025 meeting dates, he then turned the floor over to Dr. Annie Izod

Dr. Izod surprised Chair Tom Rabon a recognition of his steadfast and continued leadership within the NCWorks Commission. Chair Rabon accepted the award and thanked the commission for their recognition.

Meeting Wrap-Up

In closing Chair Rabon reminded the commission, that due to Hurricane Helene, the NCWorks Partnership Conference was cut short in October which meant that the Governor's NCWorks Awards of Distinction Ceremony was postponed, but said, "fortunately (for us), it was rescheduled to follow the commission meeting." Chair Rabon asked for any new business, there being none, he thanked everyone for their announcements and participation, then adjourned the commission meeting and turned the floor over to David Hollars, the executive director for Centralina Workforce Development Board and event emcee for the Governor's NCWorks Awards of Distinction Ceremony.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Annie Izod

Approved on February 12, 2025