



***Economic and Workforce Development  
Meeting #4 Notes***

August 20, 2015  
1:30 pm to 3:30 pm  
City of Grand Rapids Parking Services  
50 Ottawa Avenue NW

**WORKGROUP MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ann Armstrong Cusack, Tracie Coffman (Co-Chair), Sue DeVries, Jarrett DeWyse, Ashley Garrigan, Ruth Kelly, Betty Beth Johns, Senita Lenear, Denavvia Mojet, and Bill Pink

**STAFF PRESENT:** Erin Banchoff, Connie Bohatch, Emily Madsen, and Johanna Schulte

The group reviewed the notes from the August 6, 2015 meeting, the proposed recommendations document, and the goals and strategies chart.

Tracie Coffman explained the recommendations were split into two categories. The first category were items the City Commission could impact and were related directly to housing. The second category of recommendations are items the workgroup feels are important to the community but are either not directly related to housing or are not under the purview of the City Commission.

Bill Pink commented in addition to making sure there is safe and reliable transit 24/7, the routes also must be accessible to worksites and industrial areas. The group decided to add this to the recommendation on transportation.

*Recommendation:* Access to reliable transportation is important to a vibrant workforce. Residents need safe, reliable public transportation which operates 24/7. Public transportation should be located near housing and workplaces including concentrated industrial areas. The city needs complete streets and a variety of transportation options in every neighborhood.

The group discussed combining the equitable internships recommendation on the bottom of the Proposed Recommendations handout with the youth employment program recommendation on the top.

Drug policy and sentencing reform was discussed as important because of its impact on returning citizens' ability to secure employment and housing.

The group decided to add wording that emphasizes a spectrum of affordability for employees to the recommendation on employer assisted housing. The incentives would apply when employers are creating housing options for all workers, not just for attracting upper-management.

The group decided to change the second recommendation in the first category to read “Support efforts to ensure every child attending Grand Rapids Public Schools graduates from high school and is college and/or career ready.”

The third recommendation in the first category said “explore opportunities to educate employers on racial equity and inclusion.” The group decided to add “support programs which provide employee training such as Community Ventures.”

The group discussed the recommendation to “support efforts to provide resources to small employers.” The group decided this recommendation was too broad and it could be related to the development of cooperative business models. Commissioner Kelly commented there are economic gardening programs already in place. The group decided since supporting small business was already a priority in the community, these recommendations would be better focused on other efforts.

The recommendation to “incentivize employers to provide more education and job training programs” was discussed. The group discussed how some company’s job training and education programs have failed because too few employees take advantage of them. The group considered how the City could incentivize these programs. Mr. Pink said the language of the recommendation needs to be pinned down better.

The group discussed combining the “support efforts to provide resources to small employers” recommendation and the “create incentives for employers to locate near neighborhoods with high unemployment” recommendation.

The group discussed adult learning as an important tool for housing because they are trying to pay for housing right now.

The group discussed whether providing resources to small businesses, incentivizing education and job training, and locating near neighborhoods with high unemployment were related directly to the attraction and retention of businesses. Bill Pink commented in addition to attracting new employers from outside of Grand Rapids, these tools could also create an environment for new local businesses to form.

Commissioner Kelly commented there has been development of live-work spaces that are being converted out of factories. She said this model is something the City could incentivize.

Commissioner Kelly said some communities have created worker co-ops. She explained the structure of those models.

The group decided to add the recommendation about cooperative businesses to the first category.

Bill Pink commented he was not sure the strategies discussed at this point would have a huge impact on affordability. He suggested the group consider strategies that increase employment and affordability significantly. The group revisited their original focus of “opportunities, resources, and tools to improve housing affordability and stability.”

Connie Bohatch mentioned a Brookings institute article that argued childcare and benefits can add more value to housing affordability and stability than small increases in wage alone.

Denavvia Mojet discussed how college debt affects the transition from renting to homeownership among younger housing consumers. She explained spending 30% of income on housing might not be truly affordable for some younger residents who are also spending a substantial portion of their income on student debt.

The group discussed strings attached to City incentives like wages and benefits. The group discussed making sure there are clear expectations on the front end and significant follow up with businesses.

The group voted on which recommendations are priorities. The group decided any recommendations that include incentives must also include measurable outcomes and expectations.

The following recommendations received the most votes:

*Recommendation:* Implement incentives for employer assisted housing.

*Recommendation:* Educate employers on racial equity and inclusion

*Recommendation:* Access to reliable public transportation which operates 24/7 and near industrial areas and areas of concentrated employment.

*Recommendation:* Create incentives to locate near neighborhoods with high unemployment.

Ashley Garrigan commented the phrase “employers that require basic skills” was problematic in the original wording of this recommendation. The group discussed how encouraging employers that only require basic skills to move to areas of unemployment may not be a successful long term strategy. It could lead to some areas being even more unstable and have less opportunities in terms of mobility. The group decided to remove that portion of the recommendation.

*Recommendation:* Create live-work space in neighborhood business districts.

*Recommendation:* Develop and implement cooperative business models.

*Recommendation:* Increase career opportunities such as internships, coaching, mentoring, and job shadowing for entry and incumbent workers. Ensure equitable access to those opportunities.

The group discussed existing opportunities for internships but acknowledged there has not been enough significant and intentional efforts to ensure access to career opportunities for those who do not otherwise have access to professional and industry networks.

The group discussed that some of the less priority recommendations can still be in the report as being important topics that were discussed.

The group discussed which of these address the workgroups goal of talent development (to increase the skills and education of residents so they may be employed by a diverse set of employers).

Ms. Mojet mentioned there are aging industries in Grand Rapids, including the medical industry, which would be interested in programs and policies that support career development of young residents.

Connie Bohatch commented internships are generally thought of as being for young professionals and students but there are low-income people who do not have access to starting a new or higher paying career without the necessary experience internships provide.

The group discussed businesses were in “survival mode” due to the recession and are just now coming out of that mindset. This means industries are having these conversations later than necessary.

Commissioner Kelly commented all of these recommendations will need City staff to implement.