

# Greater Memphis

## Workforce Development Board

SHELBY · LAUDERDALE · TIPTON · FAYETTE

### Greater Memphis Workforce Development Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, December 19, 2023, 11:00 a.m.

Virtual or In-Person

Greater Memphis Chamber

100 Peabody Place, Ste. 1000

Memphis, TN 38103

#### Roll Call

**Board members present:** Jay Robinson (Terminix), Meka Egwuekwe (CodeCrew), Frank Olson, II (FedEx), Ron Wade (HopeWorks), Carlos Mendoza (Baptist Memorial Health Care Corp.), Ed Doyle (Express Chevrolet), Jackara Jones (Regional Director, TN Dept. of Labor and Workforce Development), Carlos Manning (J.M. Smucker); Antoinette Wiseman-Story (iBank) New board members: Latasha Harris (Memphis Medical District Collaborative), Larry Robinson (Kudzukian), Jozelle Booker (MMBC Continuum), Brigitte Green (TopCat Masonry), Ben Adams (Baker Donelson), Tracy Robinson (University of Memphis), David Dufour (Bank of Fayette Co.), Angela Massey (Atlantic Track), Heather Sacks (Dept. of Vocational Rehabilitation Services – Shelby Co.), Dr. Gwen Sutton (TCAT Memphis)

**Board members absent:** Nelson Keaton (Stabilit America), Clovis Brown (Memphis Electrical JATC), James Cole (Iron Workers Union), Lonnie Coomes, Jr. (Memphis Building Trades), Kevin Bradshaw (Central Labor Council of Memphis/West Tennessee), Paul Shaffer (Memphis AFL-CIO Labor Council)

**Other attendees:** Amber Covington (Director, Workforce Development, GMC), Sondra Howell (VP, Workforce Development, GMC) Jessica Mosley (Director, Community Development, GMC), Stephanie Ferrell (Support Contractor, GMC), Clint Anderson (Manager, Shelby County Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Involvement and Engagement, Marlinee Iverson (Attorney, Shelby County), Justin Attkisson (Director of Project Integrity, TN Dept. of Labor and Workforce Development), Sarita Alston (One-Stop Coordinator, Ross Innovative Employment Solutions), Diane Pabich (Sr. Project Director, University of Memphis), Debra Giordano (VP, Service Delivery, Equus Workforce Solutions), Anna Cumberledge (Regional Director, Ross Innovative Employment Solutions), Sara Dodeci (Regional Director, Equus Workforce Solutions), Ralph Thompson, (State of TN), Brian Wilks, (Agape), Keva Wilson, (Equus), Lacarrious Thomas, (MATA), Rachel Rogers, (State of TN), James Cottrell (State of TN)

**Meeting called to order at 11:00 a.m.**

**Jay Robinson, outgoing board chair:** Jay asked if board members would introduce themselves with their cameras on and if guests would list their name, title and organization in the chat.

There are several board members who have chosen to resign or to not renew their membership recently.

Amber Covington of the Greater Memphis Chamber (GMC) worked very hard to find new nominations to keep the board make up balanced not just within Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) guidelines but also with the workforce continuum here.

### **First Order of Business**

**Jay Robinson:** The Greater Memphis Chamber has been named the new fiscal agent and board and administrative agent, which was not without a lot of discussion and vetting of other potential partners with a close eye on who had the capability to ramp up and support the board. Having a Chamber of Commerce is a new model for the local workforce board. Memphis is once again leading the way in workforce innovation and in service deliveries, not just in Tennessee but around the country. They will serve as staff, financial clearinghouse and as the entity that will enter into contracts and agreements, training with the subcontractors issuing RFP's etc., and leases. The bulk of their work is truly administrative --- responding to audits, record keeping and program management, performance measurement of our training providers etc. For example, they'll shepherd the board through the next iteration of the corrective action plan due next week and the 2024 local area strategy that will be due at the beginning of the year. It's important that the board members continue to be engaged in fiscal matters. The fiscal agent is analogous to the board's banker, so they ensure compliance. They advise us on the kind of investments we can make, but they don't disperse or direct funding the board has not approved. It's imperative, especially in this this time of change and transition, that the board stay engaged and involved, particularly over the next six months as GMC carefully manages the transition.

With all this change in modeling also came a desire for a different kind of leadership on the board. At the request of the Chamber, Jay Robinson has offered to resign as the chair because he doesn't think it would be right or appropriate to stay on the board. In the private world when leadership or an operating model changes, it's a lot more difficult to get work done with the existing philosophies. He has appreciated his time here because of the wonderful people he's met.

Jay remarked that the news is a little bit of a relief, and it is a difficult decision to accept, but he thinks it's important to do this transition in the right way. He thanked everyone who has been a mentor to him over the last seven or so years, with a special thank you to the executive committee. Meka Egwuekwe, Antoinette Story, James Cole, Ernest Strickland and Sondra Howell have all been incredibly supportive to him during his time on the board.

The Chamber has nominated Mr. Ben Adams for board chair post transition. Jay said Ben's reputation certainly precedes him and that the board is lucky to have such an experienced Memphian showing interest in the board's work. For the rest of the board, the bylaws require a year of board service before someone can be named to the executive committee. Those requirements will be revisited at the first of the year, along with the other procedures and policies to make the board fully operational.

In that regard, an interim board chair is needed. Jay said it gives him great pleasure to nominate Meka Egwuekwe as the interim chair to oversee this transition, particularly over the next several months. Meka does incredible work in the community. Code Crew is nationally recognized, and they have trained

and mentored 11,000 students in the community. He founded the local chapter of Black Girls Code. Meka went to East High School before he got a scholarship to Phillips Andover and before he got his degrees at Morehouse.

**Jay Robinson made a motion to nominate Meka Egwuekwe as the new interim board chair. Ron Wade seconded the nomination. The motion was passed unanimously.**

**Meka Egwuekwe, interim board chair:** He thanked everyone for the honor to serve in this capacity, especially at this transition time. He has been honored to serve alongside Jay on the executive board and thanked him. Jay leaves a big hole to fill. He also thanked Jay for his and the board's work to accomplish a greater Memphis.

### **Second Order of Business**

**Meka Egwuekwe:** The next agenda item is to recommend a new executive director. He recommended Amber Covington. She has a 16-year, extensive background in workforce development. She is a passionate equity-focused leader. She's currently serving in the role of director of workforce development at the Chamber. She's a Vanderbilt graduate. She was the project director at the American Jobs Center. She's been featured in several publications, including Memphis Voyager, Canvas Rebel and Bold Journey magazines for her contributions in workforce development. She is recognized as a "she-legend." She is the vice president of the board of directors for Dress for Success. She serves on the TCAT-Memphis advisory committee. She is an active member of Riverside Missionary Baptist Church. She is a member of the IOTA Phi Lambda sorority. She is a fellow in the inaugural Aspen Institute Memphis Workforce Leadership Academy where her project team focused on bridging the gap between K-12, post-secondary, and industry, making work-based education a standard part of education for all. In 2024, she will be an Economic Mobility Fellow with the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, where she is one of 20 fellows selected nationally.

**Meka made a motion to vote for Amber Covington to be the executive director. The motion was passed unanimously.**

**Amber Covington, executive director:** Amber thanked Jay for all his work, as well as Jay and Meka for working with her these last couple of weeks to get the board composition where it needs to be according to the WIOA regulations. She also thanked the entire board for having faith in her.

This is a transition period with the Chamber becoming the fiscal agent and the administrative entity. Right now, the priority is getting funds back into our communities and our ecosystems for the individuals in our entire region who need this support to reach their goals. Right now, we're in the stage of still working with the state of Tennessee and the former Workforce Mid-South. There will be more to come at the January board meeting about the responsibilities of the board and how it will be engaged here regionally. She wants to ensure that the board has an ad hoc committee based not only board members but also community members engaged in the work to have a pathway forward. She has been working with subcontractors to ensure that service doesn't falter at any point.

The next board meeting will be January 24, 2023, which will be combined with a board training by the state.

### **Third Order of Business**

**Meka Egwuekwe:** Meka again expressed the board's collective gratitude and appreciation for the outgoing board chair, Jay Robinson, whose dedication to workforce has been pivotal. He will be missed. He has made significant strides in enhancing workforce development in Greater Memphis. Meka said as he steps into the role of interim board chair, he is keenly aware of the responsibilities and challenges ahead. The board is facing a period of transition and change not only in leadership, but also with the recent modifications to the board with our new board members, which presents an opportunity to reinvigorate the board's approach and to strengthen their commitment to the people of Greater Memphis. He urged everyone to embrace collaboration and unity. The board has diverse skills and perspectives, which is its greatest asset. This asset can be shown by working together to overcome the challenges and continuing to make a meaningful impact on the community. He urged the board to build on the success and solid foundation built by Jay and others, and for the board to strive to innovate and adapt to the evolving needs of our community. He said the board's primary goal remains unchanged, which is to serve the community effectively through the opportunities that enhance lives and livelihoods. He said the future may have challenges, but he's confident that the board's collective dedication and effort will not only navigate these changes successfully but will emerge stronger and more unified through this process. He urged the board to make a positive and lasting, better Memphis. Meka asked if anyone would like to publicly express their own sentiments.

**Sondra Howell:** She echoed what Meka said and thanked Jay for his diligence and commitment during this hard time. She thanked him for all that he's done for this board and this community.

**Ron Wade:** He also expressed his appreciation to Jay for his leadership and calming influence in the midst of a lot of turbulent water. He also appreciates Jay's dedication and the countless hours outside of the normal work hours and weekends.

Ron also expressed appreciation to Meka. Meka and Jay held a high level of professionalism that allowed the board to continue to reach levels that they hadn't before. He said he looks forward to working with Amber, who is a great selection.

**Meka Egwuekwe** asked if anyone else had any sentiments.

**He adjourned the meeting at 11:28 a.m.**