

Howard County Equity Task Force
Economic & Workforce Development Meeting Minutes –**APPROVED**
Chair: Candace Dodson-Reed
February 10, 2021

Panelists Present – Aaron Johnson, Leonardo McClarty, Minah Woo, Jonathon Studdard, Pamela Pina, Ayesha Holmes, Lauren Marra (Facilitator), Michael Harris (D2), Ashley Alston (D2), Theo Wimberly (Council Staff).

Guests Joining/Attendee: Yolanda Sonnier, Denise Boston, Francine Trout, and Larry Twele

Not Present: Candace Dodson-Reed, Darin Atwater, Nat Alston, and Young Ran Smith.

Opening:

Aaron Johnson completed attendance and opened the meeting.

Discussion Points:

Aaron started with the approval of last meetings' minutes

- Moved to approve the meeting minutes from January 13th
 - Minah pointed out a typo
 - EPA should be switched to EDA for the Economic Development Authority
 - Second by Roger with corrections
 - Approved by everyone

Lauren introduced the subgroup member who invited the speakers and gave an overview of agenda

- Leonardo gave a brief introduction of Fran and Larry
 - Fran and Larry's offices are 2 chambers trusted and work closely with Leonardo
 - Fran's job is charged largely with helping the applicant and the employer/organization. This includes resume writing, interview prep, assist with job fairs, and work with department of labor
 - Larry's job is focused on job creation and growing the local tax base. For right now, his job is centered around business retention. They are the lead entity in the County when there is prospect looking to either relocate or open a business here. Lastly, he manages a couple of loan funds.

Fran began her presentation

- She works for the Howard County Office of Workforce Development
- They are largely funded with federal grants and have been offering all services online
- Effective this July (2021), they are going to be their own workforce entity and no longer sharing with Carroll County.
- They serve people who have GEDs and people who have higher education
- They work specifically with:
 - Laid-off workers, also known as dislocated workers.
 - Underemployed adults
 - Unemployed adults
 - Youth (14-21, but they primarily focus on 18-24)
 - Veterans
 - Veterans always get priority for services
 - English Language Learners
 - Professionals
 - Homeless
 - Individuals with disabilities

- Returning Citizens
- Mature workers
- Adult Services:
 - Career counseling
 - Help with reading, math, and language assessments
 - Makes sure that individuals are at least at an 8th grade reading level
 - Essential skills
 - Soft skills
 - Encourage getting education, like GED program
 - Work with training vendors for certain trainings
 - Career Pathing (“mobility”)
 - Encourage people to take trainings in order to increase experience and expertise in the hopes of obtaining a better job
 - Workshops
 - Grant awarded to them to offer virtual training
 - Job search workshops
 - Referrals and job placement assistance
- Youth Services:
 - Geared towards youth with more challenges
 - Low literacy, high school dropouts, pregnancy, limited English skills, economically disadvantaged, known to the criminal justice system
 - Work with them to help them become self-sustaining
 - First thing is to encourage GED or high school diploma
 - Teach financial literacy skills
 - Leadership skills
 - Required to send at least 20% of their budget on work experience
 - They will work with County Government and look at offices they need help
 - This allows them to build their resume with a County job and get paid
 - Occupational skills training
 - Job search preparation
 - Youth Job fair
 - Summer Youth Program
 - Demographics: all were self-report except for IEP/504, income, and zip-code
 - Targeted outreach in 21045, 21044, 21046, and 21075
 - These zip codes tend to have the most disconnected youth or youth at risk of disconnection
 - Several of the students had a disability or had a IEP/504 plan
 - 1 offender
 - 2 homeless
 - 40 were low-income
 - 20 female
 - 34 male
 - 38 Black
 - 9 White
 - 3 were 2 or more races
 - 1 Hispanic
 - 4 Asian
 - Virtual program this summer was a success and engaging
 - Taught them how to look for work and community training:
 - mental health-suicide prevention
 - how to have appropriate relationships

- equity

Fran showed a diagram depicting those that they serve with the federal grant funds July 2019-June 2020

- Every funding source that they work with has a different method of data collected or there isn't an official method, mostly them keeping files
- Largest barriers:
 - Almost half of those individuals were low-income
 - Cultural barriers
 - Long-term unemployed
 - Low-literacy
- Customers by race out of 400 people:
 - 61% African American
 - 17% White
 - 7% Hispanic
 - 12% Asian
 - 2% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Customers by age:
 - Greatest age range was 25-64 (65%)
 - Approx. 15% were 65+
 - Important to note that 65+ are looking for work too
 - Approx. 18% were 19-24
 - Approx. 5% were below 18
- From her experience, age is the area that most people feel the most discrimination
 - If the customers feel as though that they were discriminated against, then they recommend reaching out to Human Rights, Yolanda's office
 - The OHR does come in for presentations
- Leonardo asked if the demographics shown were primarily based on who walks into the door or if there is any kind of charge based upon a particular segment of the population.
 - Fran answered- Receive different funding. There is funding to work with people who were laid off. Also, there is funding for individuals who have certain barriers to employment. i.e. economic disadvantage, underemployed, English learners. Lastly, there is separate funding specifically for youth programs, so they reach out to their designated groups.
- Customers by Gender:
 - 49% female
 - 46% male
 - 5% preferred not to disclose

Fran shared a graph that represented the rate of unemployment claims.

- There is an increase in January
 - Suspected that this is part of the "Holiday Rush"

Fran continued with presentation

- High Demand Occupations
 - Registered Nurses
 - Nursing Assistants
 - Medical Assistants
 - Personal Care Aides
 - Secretaries and Administrative Assistants
 - General and Operations Manager
 - Heavy and Tractor Trailer Truck Drivers
 - Light Truck Drivers

- Laborers and Freight, Stock and Material Movers
- Computer Systems-constant demand for computer people
- Software Developer
- Funded Training by Occupation
 - Health 36%
 - Occupational/Trade 28%
 - IT 19%
 - Adult Education/GED/ELS 10%
 - Office 3%
- Expenditures
 - HCC 28%
 - UMBC 14%-IT
 - Towson- IT
 - North American Trade School 10%- Truck drivers
 - (Anne Arundel Community College) AACC 8%- Truck drivers
- Business Solutions
 - Recruitment and Job Fairs
 - Pre-screening
 - Workforce retention analysis
 - Help companies hold on to their workforce
 - Usually it's because of competitive wage or competitive benefit
 - Connect businesses to tax credit information
 - Incoming and on-the-job employee training
 - Tied to upward mobility and employment
- Challenges
 - Majority of the layoffs from the Pandemic have been retail, hospitality, food service, social service, child care, etc. For individuals who are still trying to get into these careers, there is now an increase competition for these entry level jobs
 - Minimum wage makes it challenging to live in this County
 - Baltimore Metropolitan Council did a study and said that a family in the Baltimore Metro area needs to be making at least \$23 an hour. \$12-\$13 would not be enough
 - Digital equity issues
 - A lot of people, particularly young people, try to take trainings or extending class on their phone, which can be difficult.
 - The "Great Trifecta"
 - Transportation, child care, and housing
 - Entry level people, it is difficult to go back to work and kids are at home and not in school
 - Unemployment checks are higher, so people do not want to work
 - Outreach
 - Work experience
 - Always looking for more work sites for youth and career changers
 - Economic Disadvantaged have short term visions because they need the funds immediately and not always taking certain trainings
- Opportunities
 - Library is loaning out computers
 - Literacy training on digital platforms
 - Community partnerships for both public and private
 - Intentional service delivery
 - Specialized initiatives for individuals with disabilities
 - Time set aside for returning citizens
 - Mature worker workshops

- English Language Learning classes
- Funded Certified Nursing Assistant training and Patient Care Tech training
- Apprenticeships awareness training for companies/businesses
 - 21 registered apprenticeships
 - Provide funding for apprenticeships
 - Continue to educate on the importance of apprenticeships
 - Starting salaries are higher than some college ones
- Process of going through racial equity training
- Roger asked if this slideshow will be available later on
 - Laura- Yes, it will

Larry began his presentation

- Starts off with sharing a graph about employment change within the County, State, and U.S. from the past 10 years
 - Jobs continue to grow
- Graph representing unemployment from the past 10 years
 - Unemployment continues to decrease
- Graph showing unemployment rates from the past year
 - Even with Covid-19, unemployment rate has continued to trend down
- Graph about the top employment sectors comparing Howard County with Maryland
 - Howard County has one of the largest professional business services sector in the country
- Industry Growth Graph from the last 10 years
 - In several categories, the County exceeds the growth rate
 - Some categories, we do not
- Business Size Distribution
 - Over 82% of our business have fewer than 20 employees
 - Small business is the “lifeline” of the County

Larry talked about what EDA does

- Business development
 - Work on about 40 to 50 projects a year
 - Expansion and attraction projects
 - Over the past 5 years, they have closed about 240 projects, attracting over 600 new jobs and retaining over 5300 jobs.
 - Retained jobs are jobs that are looking to expand somewhere else, but they end up staying
 - Capital investment is the money that these businesses are investing in their facilities and their companies.
 - The more capital investment that they have, “the harder” those companies become. It is hard to walk away from a large capital investment
 - Square Footage is how much space is being consumed by these projects
 - Driving the Property tax base on the commercial assessments is a factor of how many buildings you have. When buildings are full, new businesses come on online.
 - Technical Assistance is solving problems for businesses
 - Day to day work of the EDA
 - Financing regulatory
 - Cutting through red tape
- Graph of the key indicators of business development
 - New jobs and retained jobs from the past 5 years

- Graph of the square feet impacted, capital investments, and technical assistance cases
 - There were more technical assistance cases in FY 20
- Top industry sectors form FY '16-'20
 1. Cyber/IT
 2. Manufacturing
 3. Retail
 4. Healthcare
 5. Agriculture and Forestry
 6. Food Services
 7. Finance, Insurance, Legal Services
 8. Transportation and Warehousing
- EDA Projects cover a diverse variety of industry sectors
- Loan Fund
 - Catalyst fund
 - Tool that is used for small businesses lending, specifically targeted for women-owned and minority-owned businesses.
 - Last year:
 - 72 loans approved
 - 12.6 million dollars
 - 793 new jobs
 - 836 retained jobs
 - Leveraged over \$34.8 million in private funds
- Offer small business counseling
 - 3 different types of services (free)

Larry shares Covid-19 impact and most exposed sectors

- Graph depicting the loss and areas impacting
 - In the Baltimore Metro region, over 240,000 jobs that are defined as most severely impacted
 - Restaurants and bars
 - Travel
 - Transportation
 - Retailers
- Graph showing most exposed sectors compared to the rest of the industry sectors in the County
 - Graph showing a deeper look of the employment in those exposed sectors
 - Restaurants and bars took the biggest hit
 - Graph showing an even deeper look. It shows wage level by exposed and non-exposed sectors in Howard County
 - The most impacted industries have been the lowest level of wages
 - Deeper dive: Graph showing the wage level by race in Howard County
 - Majority of the more impacted sectors have been a larger share of the minority population
 - Graph showing wage level by gender in Howard County
 - More females have jobs in lower level sectors than do males
 - Females have been more impacted by Covid
 - Assistance Grants under the Executive's HoCo Rise Initiative

- Deployed over \$2.2 million to various industries in those exposed sectors round 1
- 4th quarter of 2020, there was a round 2 of grants. Over \$11 million were additional funding
- Round 1:
 - Distributed to about 260 minority-owned businesses
 - Distributed to about 250 woman-owned businesses
 - Distributed to about 20 Veteran-owned businesses
 - 188 were distributed to the rest
- Challenges:
 - Access to capital
 - There still isn't enough risk tolerant capital available to small entrepreneurs; micro-lending
 - Digital access-5G
 - Work with Leonardo with that issue of digital broadband
 - Transportation
 - Massive transit to move people from one side of the County to the other
 - Childcare
 - Hard to find reliable and affordable childcare
 - Land availability for commercial development
 - Running out of land for commercial development, this translates to opportunity for employment for residents.

Ayesha gave a brief introduction of Yolanda and Denise

- Ayesha thanked them for taking the time to present. She believes that their work is very important.

Yolanda begins presentation about the Office of Human Rights and Equity

- Overview of the Office
 - Mission:
 1. Seeks to eliminate discrimination, increase equal opportunities, and protect and promote human rights in the County
- Investigates complaints of discrimination in 5 areas:
 - Employment
 - Financing
 - Housing
 - Law enforcement
 1. Although their office accepts these complaints, they don't investigate them. Once a complaint comes into the office, they send it to internal affairs. Internal affairs do the investigation.
 - Public Accommodations
- There are 16 bases that someone could file alleging discrimination:
 - Howard County code is more extensive than both state code and federal code
 1. Race
 2. Creed
 3. National Origin
 4. Sex
 5. Occupation
 6. Religion
 7. Disability
 8. Marital status
 9. Sexual Orientation
 10. Political opinion
 11. Personal appearance

- 12. Age
- 13. Color
- 14. Familial Status
- 15. Gender Identity
- 16. Source of Income
- The Office also does outreach, advocacy, and training
 - One of the major hurdles that they found was that many people did not know that this office existed.
 - They didn't know where they could go to file cases of discrimination.
 - Eradicating discrimination needed to approve as well
 - Community engagement and equity work
 - Celebratory events that expose people to people of different backgrounds, so they can have a appreciation and understanding with the hopes that it would further eradicate some of the discrimination
- New Changes
 - Name change to Office of Human Rights and Equity
 - County Exec has created a position called the Equity and Restorative Practices Manager to work on promoting those things throughout the County.
 - Dr. Denise Boston was hired, and she has begun her analysis and assessment of ways the County can improve and be more equitable. From there, she will develop a 3-year strategic plan on how to execute these efforts
- Human Rights Commission
 - Made up of 11 commissioners that are appointed by the County Exec and confirmed by the County
 - These commissioners conduct hearings when a complainant appeals the Office of Human Rights and Equity's decision about their case. They can also file a complaint based upon patterns or practices of discrimination. They would be the complaining entity that would file to the Office of Human Rights and Equity for them to do further investigation. Lastly, they conduct studies and have Thursday monthly meetings.
 - 2017 Study of 5 entities in the County (HoCo Government, Sherriff Department, HoCo Libraries, HCC, and HCPSS)
 - Looked at their hiring practices
 - Diversity in workforce
 - Recruiting and a retaining a diverse workforce
 - County resolution 180 allowed the Commission to conduct a study and send it to the Council
- Race is always their highest basis that they receive discrimination complaints on
 - In 2018, 32 complaints
 - In 2019, 28 complaints
 - In 2020, 26 complaints
- Number 2 highest changes
 - Some years it's sex and other times it's disability

Denise briefly shared some information about what their office will be doing

- Equity has been used a lot within the past year to the point that people are really starting to notice its importance
 - People are also becoming aware of what it means to have an equitable workforce.
- They will look at ways in which they begin thinking about and answering these questions
 - How we service from an equitable mindset.
 - How do we hire?
 - How do we retain our diverse workforce in employees that come work for us?

- Hiring an assistant to work with Denise with the tracking and collecting information. This will help them figure out if they can change the numbers of racial prejudice or if their service is perpetuating it. Lastly, whether people feel welcomed and included

Yolanda ends the presentation

- One of the major issues is identifying that there is a problem within our County
- Although our County is great, there are still many inequities and then finding mechanisms to address it and hold us accountable. This should go beyond conducting another report and getting tucked away.
 - This is a great thing about Denise's unit because she will be putting mechanisms in place to create change

Laura opens up the discussion for questions

- Minah- Race is the biggest complaint. Is there further breakdown around whether if it's race within the community, workforce, etc?
 - Yolanda- Majority of those cases is in employment. In 2020, they had 44 new discrimination cases in employment, 4 new in housing, 2 new in public accommodations, and 2 new in law enforcement.
- Roger- Is there any accountability component as far as the employer when those cases are found to have merit?
 - Yolanda- After investigators complete their investigation, and they find cause that discrimination occurred, they move to the conciliation stage. This is very similar to mediation. As the administrator or compliance officer, we will engage in party conciliation. There, they take them through the damages the complainant is asking for. The complainant is capped at \$5000 if it is found non-pecuniary losses. If it is lost-wages, receipts of medical bills, and things of this nature, there is no monetary limit. However, if it only caused stress and anxiety, they are capped at \$5000. They try to see if both parties can come to an agreement. If they can't, there case moves to the Commission. If either party is still not satisfied, they can file a case to the circuit courts of Howard County. There is some form of accountability. They look at non-monetary concerns of the complainants, including certain trainings.
- Roger- Are all of the complaints received based on individuals or is there a business to business complaint?
 - Yolanda- No, usually they are individual complainant. They have seen individuals file a case of discrimination from the same business before. If there is a larger group, typically the Commission would take over and file the case.

Yolanda talked about the many groups under the Office of Human Rights and Equity

- LGBTQ work group
- Latin work group
 - One of the big things they brought up was access to job information and having different languages throughout County government information
- Each of the work groups look at the best practices and any concerns or disparities within their group.

Continued with questions

- Minah- If we compare our racial complaints to a jurisdiction of a similar size, is it comparable? Are we doing better as a County? Of the 44 cases, what percentage do you find credible?
 - Yolanda- They don't use the word "credible;" they just say finding cause. Every case feels as though that they are credible. It is a matter of once they gather info and see by law if discrimination occurred. In terms of a comparable County, they have not

done a comparative study to see how our numbers align with others. Their office consistently gets raving reviews from EEOC. There are a greater majority of no reasonable cause finding as opposed to a cause finding. However, it doesn't necessarily mean that there isn't merit. It comes down to the complainant's ability to prove. The office is a neutral party, and they go based on pure facts. There was a 2019 hate bias report that the State conducts. This report shows each county how many times a hate bias crime occurs. The police keep this record and then send copies to OHRE. The top hate bias incidents are incidents against black people.

- Leonardo- Found it interesting in seeing the work Yolanda's office does. He is continuing to learn more about the various resources.
- Ayesha- Thanks the speakers and needs more time to digest the information that she received. Loves the work Fran's office is doing for the youth and internships.
- Minah- Thanks the speakers once again for taking the time to present to this subgroup. She was wondering that because women and minorities were the ones mostly impacted by Covid-19, did Fran see that reflected in the people who come in for help. Can these people find you (Fran's Office) now that we are in this virtual world? Are they able to access this information?
 - Fran- people reach out to them. Primarily, more on the phone but emails are received too. Their numbers are starting to pick back up again. They are able to connect them with the necessary tools remotely.
- Minah- Of the many companies that you work with, how diverse are the entrepreneurial and small business that we have here in the County? Does it mirror the diversity we have in the County?
 - Larry- Yes, it does. There is data on it as well.
- Aaron- Are there any disadvantages that make woman-owned and minority-owned businesses less lucrative and make them struggle with access to capital and land?
 - Larry- The access of the capital is a consistent theme across smaller start up ventures. Conventional banking is hard to get for some businesses. They don't have a micro lending risk. They don't have enterprise zones. They just calculate broad demographics
 - Leonardo- Our location of Howard County ends up losing the focus. The focus is more towards the inner city, PG County, etc. They are targeting a group that hasn't been traditionally banked or had access. They are looking at it from a more altruistic, instead of "we need to be paid back" mindset.
- Aaron- Has there been a trend in established businesses arriving in the County? For example, could a minority business that already has existing funds able to grab a foothold in the County? Is there a space for these businesses to exist?
 - Larry- There are challenged by space availability and the types of products that we have available. A lot of projects want to be in the County, but they want to buy their building. We mostly lease them. Sometimes we miss out on opportunities because we do not have the right inventory. Greenfield space is becoming a challenge. We do not track those projects so much.
 - Laura makes a connection- The land use and housing subgroup is looking at zoning right now, mostly in terms of types of housing available. We could get you in touch with the Chair or someone in that group.
 - Leonardo- The challenge arises more if you are on the startup side rather than an already established business or company. If your customer is the public sector, then you will have challenges. There are some difficulties from a procurement perspective as well.

Laura thanks the guest speakers and pivots to the rest of the agenda

- Laura suggests that the facilitation team will compile materials and send them out to everyone. If everyone could make time to go through it and come up with questions.

- Laura would like to solicit volunteers who want to dive deeper into this topic and work on recommendation development in between meetings
 - She will put this out in email
- Recommendations will be in March, April, and May
- Minah suggests allowing the group to rank their top choices of research
- Action Plan
 - Next meeting will be about income inequality
 - Minah is United Way and the Baltimore Metropolitan Council
 - Access and ability through Pathways
 - Candace is bringing people from HCC and potentially the UMBC training centers
 - If needed, in March, we will make up any topics on procurement. If not, we will dive in to recommendation.
 - Tuesday, February 23rd from 6:00pm-8:00pm will be the next meeting
- Upcoming Events
 - Public Hearings will be hosted by the Chairs/Co-Chairs of each subgroup
 - First one is on March 4th from 6:00pm-8:00pm
 - Chair of Education and Chair of Public Safety will host and give an overview of the Racial Equity Task Force and the charge of each subgroup
 - Sign up for speaking
 - Purpose is to listen to the community's testimonies
 - Howard County Library is holding a storytelling listening and storyteller listening series
 - Not officially affiliated with the Task Force
 - This could be use as testimony for the Task Force
 - Great opportunity for encouraging student space
 - Thursday, February 18th from 7:00pm-8:30pm and Saturday, February 20th from 1:00pm-2:30pm
 - March meeting is March 10th from 6:00pm-8:00pm

Laura did a recap

- We will share materials from this meeting afterwards and think about follow up questions
 - Aaron and Laura will compile questions
- Take a poll in terms of breaking out for areas of research

Meeting adjourned 7:59pm by Aaron with no further questions.