

## **Knox Business Advisory Council meeting minutes April 23rd, 2025**

Chair Julia Suggs called the meeting to order at 9:17 a.m.

### **Attendance:**

- East Knox Local Schools - Superintendent, Rich Baird
- Danville Local Schools - Superintendent, Jason Snively
- Mount Vernon City Schools - Superintendent, Bill Sedar
- Centerburg Local Schools - Superintendent, Ryan Gallwitz
- Fredericktown Local Schools - Absent
- Knox County Career Center - Superintendent, Kathy Greenich
- Area Development Foundation (Chair) - Economic Development Manager, Julia Suggs
- Area Development Foundation - Interim President, Sam Filkins
- Knox County OhioMeansJobs Office - Administrative Director, Brandy Booth
- Regional OhioMeansJobs Office - Absent
- Manufacturing Industry Representative - Mauser Packaging, Holley Wiford
- Construction Industry Representative - Kokosing Inc., Andy Fo
- Healthcare Industry Representative: Knox Community Hospital, Hanna Ford
- ESC Career Navigator - Sean McCutcheon
- Knox County Career Center (KCCC) Career Connections Advisor - Shelly Laslo
- Mount Vernon High School Career Readiness Advisor - Christine Keaton

### **Opening Remarks**

Sam Filkins, Interim President of the Area Development Foundation (ADF), introduced the meeting and shared that former ADF President Jeff Gottke had accepted a new position in Gahanna, Ohio. As the Interim President, Mr. Filkins shared that Julia Suggs would continue leading the workforce development efforts for the ADF and would facilitate the Knox Business Advisory Council (BAC).

Following this, Ms. Suggs invited each attendee to introduce themselves, sharing their name, role, organization, and their perspective on how workforce development supports their organization's mission.

### **Formation of the Knox Business Advisory Council**

- Ms. Suggs presented background information on the formation of the BAC.
- She explained that while the Knox Educational Service Center (ESC) had previously worked with ADF and the WorkDev group to fulfill Business Advisory Council duties under the Ohio Revised Code, there was no formal structure or communication between businesses and school districts. Although Sean McCutcheon had been submitting required reports, they were completed independently and without coordination or input from WorkDev or school/business leadership.
- Recognizing the need for a more structured and compliant approach, the ESC passed a formal resolution appointing ADF as the official manager of the Knox BAC. A copy of the

resolution was distributed at the meeting. Ms. Suggs emphasized that this new structure aims to meet legal requirements while also improving productivity and value for all stakeholders involved.

### **State Requirements and Best Practices**

- Ms. Suggs reviewed the state-mandated requirements for a Business Advisory Council and recommended best practices for operation. These documents will be emailed to all council members for reference. She reiterated that the BAC serves as a formal communication channel between businesses, school districts, and workforce providers to ensure that workforce development efforts are aligned and effective across the county.

### **Review of Draft Bylaws**

- Ms. Suggs presented the draft bylaws for the Knox Business Advisory Council, which include the mission statement, member roles and responsibilities, meeting expectations, and a proposed meeting schedule.
- She highlighted that representatives from the three core industries—Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Construction—would be given 10 minutes during each regular meeting to present an industry update. These updates would include current workforce challenges and trends from their own organizations and industry insights gathered through WorkDev meetings.
- It was noted that the proposed meeting schedule conflicts with an existing superintendent committee. Julia Suggs committed to confirming the conflict and sending out alternative meeting dates once clarified.
- She also clarified that WorkDev is an ADF committee, and because WorkDev members serve as BAC business representatives, activities conducted under WorkDev may also be officially recognized as BAC programming.
- There were no objections to the bylaws.

Mr. Fox motioned to approve the bylaws as presented. Mr. Gallwitz seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Industry Updates and Discussion**

- Construction:
  - Mr. Fox shared that Kokosing is successfully hiring recent graduates, particularly those with associate degrees in engineering or construction management. He noted that candidate quality has improved over the past two years. However, the company struggles to attract high school-age students into its apprenticeship program due to a lack of soft skills, especially communication and phone etiquette.
  - Mr. Filkins suggested that students' reliance on digital communication may contribute to poor interpersonal skills.

- Ms. Keaton mentioned that she works directly with students to develop these skills, and Ms. Suggs emphasized that career advisors are currently the primary soft skills resource in schools, though more support is needed.
- Mr. Seder of Mount Vernon City School District shared that while the need for soft skills is recognized, educators struggle to integrate them meaningfully across the curriculum. He advocates for a model where soft skills are taught in all classes, not just English.
- Mr. Gallwitz added that although soft skills are technically included in the curriculum, they are often deprioritized because they are not tested.
- Manufacturing:
  - Ms. Wiford discussed industry-wide manufacturing trends, citing the impact of tariffs and market instability. She noted that many manufacturers, including Mauser Packaging, have very few open positions, and Mauser is on a hiring freeze for white-collar positions. Attendance remains their greatest workforce challenge. While they offer cash bonuses to incentivize attendance, many employees view missing a bonus as a loss, which sometimes proves to be a more effective motivator.
- Healthcare:
  - Ms. Ford from Knox Community Hospital reported that the hospital currently has 110 openings—well above their target of 80 or fewer. She cited cost of living, childcare, and the rising cost of benefits as top reasons for turnover. Many employees are opting out of benefit packages in exchange for higher take-home pay. Younger workers are less concerned about healthcare benefits, as their parents' plans still cover them until age 26.
  - Ms. Booth of OhioMeansJobs shared that a program called Reality Store helps students understand real-world cost-of-living challenges and may be a useful future resource for programming.
- Ms. Suggs noted that while all three industries need employees with soft skills, their workforce situations differ. Manufacturing has limited openings but prioritizes long-term investment in the right candidates. Healthcare, conversely, has many vacancies and seeks to raise awareness of available roles. She shared that programs like Knox ASPECT are valuable for manufacturing recruitment, while events like the Healthcare Expo help school districts learn about healthcare job opportunities.
- Mr. Snively encouraged the group to remember that workforce development must address not only skills but also the relational and human aspects of the workforce. He emphasized building relationships as part of long-term solutions.
- Mr. Seder proposed that members begin identifying actionable next steps that could be discussed and developed at the next meeting to ensure today's productive conversations result in meaningful action.

### **Closing Remarks**

Ms. Suggs concluded by affirming that WorkDev is prepared to mobilize in response to the needs discussed. One area of immediate focus will be providing educational opportunities for teachers to better understand local workforce opportunities. She committed to preparing a list of

action items for members to consider ahead of the next meeting, especially related to improving soft skills development in schools and workplaces.

She thanked attendees for their dedication to workforce excellence in Knox County and informed the group that the meeting minutes will be posted on the ADF website in accordance with public records laws.

Mr. Fox motioned to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Keaton seconded the motion. All in attendance approved.

The meeting adjourned at 10:44 am.

Respectfully submitted by Julia Suggs, Area Development Foundation, Economic Development Manager