

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, October 15, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

Board Members Present

Stan Robinson Jr., SHR Marketing, LLC (**Chair**)
Caroline Aubrey, The Aubrey Group
Debbie Ann Anderson, Union County Department of Human Services (Karen Dinsmore)
Erich Peter, Union County Economic Development Corp (**Vice President**)
Gwen Ryan, Union County Vocational Technical School (Janet Berman)
Roshan White, UA Local 24 Plumbers (Chadrick Garris)
Dr. Margaret McMenamin, UCNJ, Union College of Union County, NJ (Dr. Lisa Hiscano)
Valerie Kerrigan, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Hilary McCarron, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
Bernadette Griswold, Community Access Unlimited (Sandra Lynch)
Juanito Chiluisa, NJ Department of Labor-Employment Services
Teresa Soto-Vega, PROCEED (Srabanti Sarkar)
Timothy McConway, Steamfitters Local 475
Dr. Kamran Tasharofi, Union County Healthcare Associates
Morgan Thompson, Prevention Links
Paul Belardo, KML Carpenters
James R. Brady, The Savor Group
Curry Bucu, Trinitas Regional Medical Center (Shimon Pradhan)
Antonietta LaVecchia, UPS Store
Joseph Venezia, Colliers Engineering & Design
Alan Rutan, Rutan Mechanical LLC

Board Members Absent:

Craig Coughlin, Kean University
Richard Capac, Crowne Property Management (**Secretary**)
Melynda Disla, Gateway Family YMCA
Gloria Dunham, Qunnection Management
Danielle Johnson, JCT Solutions
Courtney Villani, Villani Bus
Daryl Palmieri, Union County Schools K-12

General Counsel:

Kraig Dowd, Weber Dowd Law

County of Union:

Ed Oatman, County Manager
Amy Wagner, Deputy County Manager
Antonio Rivera, Workforce Development Board
Meredith Barracato, Workforce Development Board
Gina Tuesta, Workforce Development Board
Lisa Bonanno, Workforce Development Board
Robert Croom, Union County American Job Center

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, October 15, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

Melissa Lespinasse, Union County Department of Human Services
Lillian Roman, Union County American Job Center
Jeffrey Jackson, Union County Department of Human Services
Rhonda McClain, Union County Division of Social Services

Guests:

Christina Lorenzo, NJ Department of Labor
Marie Alston, United Way of Greater Union County
Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County
Julio Sabater, Workforce Advantage
Sabrina Sabater, Workforce Advantage
Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library
Patty Banks, Plainfield Public Library
Jessica Zorola, Per Scholas
Dr. James Lebrun, Community Food Bank of NJ

I. Call to Order & Welcome

The meeting was called to order by Stan Robinson, Chairman of the Workforce Development Board, at 9:15AM.

Chairman Robinson opened the meeting by thanking everyone and welcoming the three new board members. He explained that he would give a quick overview and then asked if everyone could briefly go around the room to introduce themselves so that the group could get to know them. He noted that he would begin with Antoinette, whom he had met first.

Antoinette LaVecchia introduced herself and shared that she and her family ran a franchise business in Summit, specifically a UPS Store that had been operating for nineteen years. She stated that she served on several boards and was very involved in the Summit community, and she expressed her interest in helping within the county.

Joe Venezia introduced himself next and stated that he was with Collier's Engineering and Design. He explained that he was an engineer and had been involved with Union County, Union Township, and several municipalities throughout the area. He said he was excited to work with the board and to support the people the board served.

Caroline Aubrey then introduced herself and explained that she was with The Aubrey Group, which offered grant writing services for both private and public entities. She stated that the business was based in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and added that she was also an Elizabeth resident and a committed Union County supporter.

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, October 15, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

II. **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America was recited.

III. **Open Public Meetings Act**

Meredith Barracato read the Open Public Meetings Act Statement below into the record:

PURSUANT TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF N.J.S.A. 10:4-10 OF THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT, ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD HAS BEEN GIVEN BY MAILING THE YEAR 2025 ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE TO THE NEWSPAPERS CIRCULATING WITHIN THE COUNTY OF UNION AND DESIGNATED TO RECEIVE SUCH NOTICE, AND BY POSTING THE YEAR 2025 ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE IN THE COUNTY COURT HOUSE, THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD WEBSITE, AND BY FILING THE YEAR 2025 ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE WITH THE OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK.

FURTHERMORE, ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THE LOCATION OF THIS MEETING HAS BEEN GIVEN BY PROVIDING AT LEAST FORTY-EIGHT HOUR NOTICE TO THE NEWSPAPERS CIRCULATING WITHIN THE COUNTY OF UNION AND DESIGNATED TO RECEIVE SUCH NOTICE AND BY POSTING THE SAID NOTICE AT LEAST FORTY-EIGHT HOURS PRIOR TO THIS MEETING IN THE COURT HOUSE, THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD WEBSITE, AND BY FILING THE NOTICE AT LEAST FORTY-EIGHT HOURS IN ADVANCE OF THIS MEETING WITH OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK.

THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT STATEMENT SHALL BE ENTERED IN FULL IN THE MINUTES OF THIS MEETING.

IV. **Roll Call**

Meredith Barracato conducted the roll-call of the Union County Workforce Development Board members in attendance. Union County employees present and guests were acknowledged on the record, as reflected on page one and two of these minutes.

V. **Approval of the Minutes**

The minutes of the July 23, 2025 meeting were presented for a vote.

**BOARD
ACTION**

James Brady made a motion to approve the meeting minutes for July 23, 2025. **Alan Rutan** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

VI. **UCWDB Report**

Director Antonio Rivera began by explaining that the previous board meeting had been canceled because there had been significant chaos occurring at both the federal and state levels. He referenced the United States government shutdown and explained that one of the primary challenges for the board, especially for the new members, was the fiscal year structure. The county's fiscal

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, October 15, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

year ran from July 1 through June 30, but the New Jersey Department of Labor had not provided the Notice of Award guaranteeing funding for the new year until September 30, and even then only for about 30% of the funding. Because of that delay, the board had approved a temporary budget starting July 1. Although the department eventually issued the new Notice of Award, the delay had created serious budgeting impacts. Some programs could be funded, while others could not. Director Rivera stated that the situation was chaotic and the board needed to determine how to adapt, pivot and continue providing essential services to Union County residents while simultaneously pushing back whenever the state's expectations were unrealistic.

Director Rivera provided an overview of the Workforce New Jersey program, noting that this funding was tied to the TANF population, the most difficult and neediest population to serve. The Notice of Award came with a contract-like agenda requiring Union County to place 80 percent of the TANF population into employment. He emphasized that the individuals in this population had challenges that often exceeded the system's capacity, let alone achieving job placement. He explained that while the board was pushing back against the Department of Labor, the requirement was currently in place. The change would substantially alter business operations going forward. He noted that the county had not issued an RFP for the WorkFirst New Jersey population because the state had advised them to wait, stating that changes were coming. The changes had now arrived, and the county continued negotiating to understand what the state expected. He summarized by saying the state wanted one thing—people placed into jobs.

Director Rivera stated that staff had been working diligently since the September 30 Notice of Award to determine how to budget and proceed into the fiscal year. He stressed that challenges existed on every side, and that county and partner agencies were meeting constantly to determine how to pivot internally, provide services, training, and infrastructure support. He added that if there had ever been a moment when board involvement was essential, it was now. The situation was real, the consequences serious, and the system would require adaptation, collaboration, and strategic change.

During the discussion, Eric Peter asked what the previous performance goal had been before the state introduced the new 80-percent placement requirement for TANF participants. Director Rivera explained that the prior focus had been participation in activities such as Community Work Experience or job search rather than direct employment outcomes. The state viewed this as a cycle producing little movement into jobs, prompting the shift to a strict employment-based standard. He added that the county had been building infrastructure, including new agreements with the City of Elizabeth, to support work-experience

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, October 15, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

pathways, but the requirement now demanded that 80 percent of those served be placed directly into employment.

Chairman Robinson then asked what had triggered such a major shift, and Director Rivera replied that it was driven by federal pressure, state policy changes, and increased accountability expectations connected to WIOA. He explained that federal agencies had criticized ineffective programs and poor data quality, and New Jersey's outdated and fragmented data systems had contributed to the problem. The state now required counties to enter data into state systems and also duplicate the same information in Excel spreadsheets, significantly increasing administrative burden. When Tim McConway asked how long the county had to meet the new benchmarks, Director Rivera stated that the requirements were immediate and aligned with the newly adopted federal fiscal year of October 1–September 30. He confirmed that the county had until September 30 of the following year to meet the employment goals for the required 200 participants. When Tim asked whether the county would receive funding to upgrade its systems, Director Rivera clarified that the systems belonged to the state, not the county, and therefore no upgrade funding would be provided. Melissa Lespinasse added that multiple state-owned systems—OSOS, FAMIS, OMEGA, and others—were involved, and data could only be captured through proper dual-enrollment.

Karen Dinsmore added that while the county had long worked to strengthen internal data-collection practices, the state would not fund improvements to systems it controlled. She and Director Rivera emphasized the need for accurate local data, transparency, and the willingness to intervene quickly when something was not working. When a board member asked how the Workforce Development Board could support these changes, Director Rivera said the board's role was to be actively engaged, support the American Job Center and partner agencies, and embrace the level of transparency required to pivot quickly. Another board member noted that some of the pressure was likely tied to recent SNAP and Medicaid work-requirement changes, which were being implemented faster than systems could adapt. Director Rivera agreed, adding that although he would not publicly share all strategic ideas due to competition with other counties, success would require breaking down silos, coordinating services across funding streams, and working collaboratively.

VII. Resolutions of the UCWDB

Director Rivera transitioned the conversation to the review the resolutions. Meredith Barracato reviewed the following resolutions.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-31

**Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, October 15, 2025**

MEETING MINUTES

**RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
AWARDING A CONTRACT FOR THE PROVISION OF A PROVIDER FOR OUT-OF-
SCHOOL YOUTH SERVICES PURSUANT TO THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND
OPPORTUNITY ACT.**

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-31**. **Erich Peter** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-31**. **Tom McConway** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Gwen Ryan abstained from **Resolution No. 2025-31**.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-32

**RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
ADOPTING THE PROGRAM YEAR 2025 UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
AREA BUDGET.**

Chairman Robinson asked whether the information presented applied only to the Workforce New Jersey program. Director Rivera clarified that the documents attached to the resolution included the budget for WFNJ, showing WIOA funding on the left side and the newly awarded \$2.2 million WorkFirst New Jersey allocation on the right. Amy Wagner then asked if both grants would now operate on the same fiscal year, and Director Rivera confirmed that all programs were shifting to follow the federal fiscal year of October 1 through September 30. He explained that although WIOA had historically used the state fiscal cycle, the state was now requiring counties to continue charging salaries into the new fiscal year, which would likely eliminate the need for separate June and July budget-approval meetings.

Before the board voted on Resolution 2025-32, Director Rivera added that TANF and SNAP General Assistance requirements had become significantly stricter. The county was required to serve 200 individuals, with 80 percent placed into employment and 60 percent retained after six months. He noted that these expectations far exceeded the negotiated WIOA Adult benchmarks and would require co-enrollment between WFNJ and WIOA participants, alongside a stronger focus on career services, Individual Employment Plans, training, and supportive services. Rivera stated that the county would likely need to expand job fairs, job search assistance, training pathways, and placement efforts and acknowledged that traditional community work experience placements might no longer be viable since they did not lead directly to employment, which was now the sole measure of success.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, October 15, 2025

MEETING MINUTES

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-32**. **James Brady** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-32**. **Alan Rutan** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-33

RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD ADOPTING AND AUTHORIZING THE EXTENSION OF THE AGREEMENT WITH THE UNION COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES FOR THE PROVISION OF COMPREHENSIVE ONE STOP CAREER CENTER SERVICES AND AUTHORIZING THE USE OF PROGRAM YEAR 2025 FUNDS.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-33**. **Gwen Ryan** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-33**. **James Brady** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Karen Dinsmore abstained from **Resolution No. 2025-33**.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-34

RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD ADOPTING AND AUTHORIZING THE EXTENSION OF THE AGREEMENT WITH THE UNION COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, AS AMERICAN JOB CENTER OPERATOR, THROUGH SEPTEMBER 30, 2026.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-34**. **Tim McConway** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-34**. Dr. Lisa Hiscano seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Karen Dinsmore abstained from **Resolution No. 2025-34**.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-35

RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD AUTHORIZING THE AWARD OF FUNDING TO PARTNER AGENCIES FOR THE DIGITAL EQUITY TRAINING GRANT PROGRAM.

Meredith Barracato reported that the Union County Workforce Development Board had received a \$1 million grant in July to provide digital training to 125 Workforce New Jersey recipients. She stated that the Board had partnered with Union College and the Plainfield Public Library to conduct assessments and deliver digital literacy instruction, including Northstar and IC3 certification. She further explained that the United Way of Greater Union County would provide supportive services using a holistic approach that addressed both individual and family needs.

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, October 15, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

Meredith added that the American Job Center would manage assessments, case management, career counseling, data entry, and follow-up services to help the program meet its 30 percent job placement requirement. She noted that each participant would receive a laptop from the Workforce Development Board and that, upon successful completion of the program, they would be allowed to keep the device to support continued job-search activities.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-35**. **James Brady** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-35**. **Erich Peter** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Karen Dinsmore and Dr. Lisa Hiscano abstained from **Resolution No. 2025-35**.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-36

**RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
AUTHORIZING THE CLOSE-OUT OF THE AGREEMENT WITH UCNJ, UNION COLLEGE OF
UNION COUNTY, NJ, AND AUTHORIZING FINAL PAYMENT.**

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-36**. **Tim McConway** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-36**. **Erich Peter** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Lisa Hiscano abstained from **Resolution No. 2025-36**.

VIII. **American Job Center Operator's Report**

Karen Dinsmore wanted to place the larger discussion into context, building on the points made by Antonio Rivera and Amy Wagner. She emphasized that the central issue was determining what the county could control versus what remained outside its authority. She noted that many of the new requirements were likely connected to federal policy shifts, while also stressing that WorkFirst New Jersey participants—both TANF families and General Assistance clients—traditionally faced deep and multilayered barriers.

She stated that the entire system would need to operate more efficiently by expanding partnerships and seeking additional funding. Karen highlighted that the Operators Committee had recently grown to include staff from the Division of Social Services Income Maintenance Unit, given their daily work with the WorkFirst population. She explained that while the American Job Center and Social Services remained central to service delivery, the Workforce Development Board and employer partners would need to collaborate more intentionally. She noted that the new mandate requiring an 80 percent

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, October 15, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

placement rate into unsubsidized employment represented a significant challenge based on past experience.

Karen reported that internal operations had already begun shifting before the formal announcement of the new benchmarks because systemic change had been anticipated. She described how participants were now being co-enrolled in both WIOA Adult and WorkFirst New Jersey and how Digital Equity Training partnerships were already functioning effectively, with training under way in Plainfield and referrals coming in steadily. She concluded by noting that Program Year 2024 closeout was on track for January and that current participants were completing their final benchmarks. WorkFirst New Jersey referrals were high enough to meet service volume requirements, but the true challenge would be achieving unsubsidized employment within one year—a dramatic shift from the former five-year federal timeframe. She further clarified that unsubsidized employment meant the participant would no longer receive public benefits and would rely solely on earned income.

IX. American Job Center Report

Robert Croom reviewed the WIOA Title I reportable individuals, orientation activity, and spending projections. He stated that the American Job Center had conducted 343 orientations, completed 126 CASAS assessments, initiated 78 eligibility determinations, created 154 Individual Employment Plans, and recorded 18 in-demand training completions. Robert also summarized training expenditures for both Program Year 2024 and 2025. For PY24, the center served 110 dislocated workers with an estimated \$380,473 in projected spending and 49 adults with approximately \$179,995 projected. For PY25, he reported 16 dislocated workers with projected spending of \$75,050 and 11 adults with projected expenditures of roughly \$49,735.

Robert then summarized the Workforce New Jersey assessment activity, explaining that 582 assessments had been scheduled and 271 completed. He noted that a large number of no-shows required staff to conduct significant outreach and rescheduling. He also reported that the Division of Social Services had issued 230 referrals to the American Job Center for assessment. Following Robert's report, Karen Dinsmore briefly returned to explain that the Workforce Innovation Business Center would likely no longer appear in future updates because the board had discontinued funding those services. She added that although WIB-funded services would not continue, the county and Union College were actively seeking alternative funding sources to support training opportunities, and she shared the positive news that Title II adult education funding had been reinstated with classes resuming at the college.

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, October 15, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

Karen concluded by noting a substantial rise in activity within Employment Services. She reported that the first quarter reflected 793 applicants, a 39 percent increase compared to the prior year's average of 570 applicants for the same period. She also stated that updated DVR service numbers were not yet available for the full year but were anticipated to exceed the most recent figures, given strong ongoing collaboration between DVR and the Plainfield American Job Center. Karen confirmed that updated DVR data would be provided at the next meeting.

X. **WIOA Youth Services Provider**

Marie Alston delivered the WIOA Title I Youth Services update, reporting that the In-School Youth program operated after-school services at Dwyer Technical School, Hillside High School, and Plainfield High School, serving 88 students across the three sites. She stated that the Out-of-School Youth program enrolled 96 participants across New Jersey Youth Corps, Simon Youth Academy, and newly enrolled YouthBuild students. She noted increased interest in WIOA services from high schools and partner agencies and said the team was ensuring capacity to maintain high-quality service. She explained that exit requirements included measurable skill gains, academic progress, high school completion or equivalency, credentials such as IC3 or CPR, and verification that each youth was either employed or enrolled in further education or training.

Marie also reported that the Summer Youth Employment Program had officially closed out, and the next step involved sending a final survey to determine post-program employment outcomes. She noted that many youth expressed interest in WIOA during paycheck pickup, with approximately ten already co-enrolled, prompting plans for additional in-person information sessions. She added that Simon Youth Academy had 21 enrollees and had begun career-focused sessions and academic exploration activities. Youth Corps Cohort 11 launched with 18 participants, who were already participating in health education workshops and school exploration activities. Marie highlighted strong early results from the YouthBuild co-enrollment partnership, including one youth earning a high school equivalency diploma and others passing initial exams within the first three weeks.

Marie described the success of the August Youth Festival, which expanded from 300 to over 1,000 attendees, and previewed an upcoming Youth Leadership Summit with The Links, where she would present on in-demand industries and where 90 youth had already registered. James Brady asked why military information was missing, she replied that students had recently expressed interest in military pathways and that she had begun coordinating with recruiters to incorporate updated information in November. Chairman Robinson stated that it had been encouraging to hear positive news and thanked the team for the strong youth outcomes presented.

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, October 15, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

XI. **Old Business**
No Comment

XII. **New Business**

Paul Belardo, representing the EAS Carpenters and serving as a board member, explained that he had previously discussed with Antonio a new Carpenters Union employment initiative designed to create long-term job opportunities for county residents by training them in building maintenance work that property owners typically subcontracted. He stated that the program had already been implemented in several parts of New Jersey and could be used in both public and private settings, allowing employers to select local candidates while the union provided rigorous, no-cost training at its training center. Paul noted that once trained, participants would be hired under customized contracts, receive competitive union wages, and obtain full union-managed benefits, including insurance that employers would not need to fund. He emphasized that the program covered a wide range of maintenance tasks—such as doors, hardware, ceilings, flooring, windows, bathrooms, and other facility needs—and that the union would also handle all future upskilling and certifications at no cost. Paul shared that he had informational materials available and could email further details, and he concluded by stating that the program offered a significant opportunity for Union County residents and employers and that he wanted the board to be fully aware of its potential.

XIII. **Public Comments**
No Comment

XIV. **Adjournment**

Chairman Robinson asked for a motion and a second to adjourn the meeting. He announced that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday, December 10, and said he looked forward to seeing everyone then. The meeting adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

Meeting Schedule:

9:00 AM, Wednesday, December 10, 2025

Location:

The Hill Tavern at Galloping Hill, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033