

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, December 11, 2024
MEETING MINUTES

Board Members Present

Dr. Kamran Tasharofi, Union County Healthcare Associates (Chair)
Stan Robinson Jr., SHR Marketing, LLC (Vice Chair)
Debbie Ann Anderson, Union County Department of Human Services (Karen Dinsmore)
James R. Brady, The Savor Group
Curry Bucu, Trinitas Regional Medical Center (Linda Pauer)
Gloria Dunham, Qunnection Management
Erich Peter, Union County Economic Development Corp
Juanito Chiluisa, NJ Department of Labor
Gwen Ryan, Union County Vocational Technical School
Morgan Thompson, Prevention Links (Emily Newton)
Roshan White, UA Local 24 Plumbers (Chadrick Garris)
Timothy McConway, Steamfitters Local 475
Dr. Margaret McMenamin, Union College of Union County, NJ (Dr. Lisa Hiscano)
Valerie Kerrigan, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Richard Capac, Crowne Property Management
Courtney Villani, Villani Bus
Danielle Johnson, JCT Solutions

Board Members Absent:

Paul Belardo, KML Carpenters
Craig Coughlin, Kean University
Melynda Disla, Gateway Family YMCA
Bernadette Griswold, Community Access Unlimited
Hilary McCarron, Port Authority (Secretary)
Daryl Palmieri, Union County Schools K-12
Alan Rutan, Rutan Mechanical LLC
Teresa Soto-Vega, PROCEED

General Counsel:

Kraig M. Dowd Esq., Weber Dowd Law, LLC

County of Union:

Ed Oatman, County Manager
Amy Wagner, Department of Economic Development
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
Nasrene Mondol, Union County American Job Center
Hawa Bonds, Union County Division of Youth and Children Services
Jeffrey Jackson, Union County Department of Human Services

Guests:

Raul Ludizaca, New Jersey Department of Labor
Anthea Williams, New Jersey Department of Labor

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Ingrid Mejias, New Jersey Department of Labor
Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County
Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library
Patricia Banks, Plainfield Public Library
Isaias Rivera, UCNJ Union College of Union County, NJ
Franchely Inoa, YWCA of Union County

I. Call to Order & Welcome

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Kamran Tasharofi, Chairman Workforce Development Board, at 9:05AM.

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 2024 ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE TO THE NEWSPAPERS CIRCULATING WITHIN THE COUNTY OF UNION AND DESIGNATED TO RECEIVE SUCH NOTICE, AND BY POSTING THE YEAR 2024 ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE IN THE COUNTY COURT HOUSE, THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD WEBSITE, AND BY FILING THE YEAR 2024 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 of these minutes.

V. Approval of the Minutes

The minutes of the September 25, 2024 meeting were presented for a vote.

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**BOARD
ACTION**

James Brady. made a motion to approve the meeting minutes for September 25, 2024. **Richard Capac** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

VI. **Election of Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary**

Chairman Tasharofi proceeded with the election of officers. It was noted that the term for each position is two years. Chairman Tasharofi expressed satisfaction in completing his term and opened the floor for nominations for the following positions:

- Chairman: Stan Robinson was recommended
- Vice Chair: Erich Peter was proposed
- Secretary: Richard Capac was suggested

No additional nominations were made for any of the positions. A motion to approve the nominations was seconded, and with no objections raised, all nominees were unanimously approved.

Chairman Tasharofi emphasized the significant responsibilities associated with the roles of chairman, vice chair, and secretary. These positions involve oversight of resolutions, contracts, performance reports, and the activities of various subsidiaries and partners, including Union College, United Way, and other entities within the Union County Workforce Development framework.

The chairman encouraged members to review reports thoroughly, ask questions, and focus on ensuring efficient use of resources to benefit Union County residents effectively. He acknowledged the extensive work done by Antonio Rivera and his team, as well as the contributions of the One-Stop and American Job Center teams.

Chairman Tasharofi concluded by urging all involved to prioritize efficiency and accountability in their processes.

VII. **UCWDB Report**

Director Rivera provided a comprehensive update on regulatory compliance, funding, and program management. He highlighted the significant level of monitoring on fiscal and policy matters, including the submission of 50,000 pages of documentation to the State Employment and Training Commission (SETC). This documentation included committee meeting minutes, approvals, and actions taken by the board. By the end of the meeting, 64 resolutions had been approved for the year, reflecting the extensive regulatory oversight involved.

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The board recently received certification from the SETC, a rigorous process required every two years to ensure the board's continued operation. Director Rivera noted that certification demonstrates a strong public-private sector partnership based on transparency and accountability. He emphasized that not all state boards achieve certification, with some being taken over by the state due to non-compliance.

Regarding the budget and funding updates, Director Rivera reported that \$1.5 million in Program Year 2023 funding must be spent by June 30 of the following year, with specific allocations detailed in the meeting packet. Additionally, \$106,000 must be spent by December 31 of the current year, or it will revert to the state. All training contracts associated with the \$1.5 million must be completed by April 30 to meet the June deadline.

The discussion addressed ongoing efforts, challenges, and future plans for utilizing available funding effectively to deliver workforce development services and training programs. There was a focus on the \$1.5 million in Program Year 2023 funds that must be expended by June 30, 2025. Efforts to spend the funds include contracts with the American Job Center and Union College, which are actively recruiting and providing training. Specific programs, such as medical assistant, supply chain management, and patient care technician training, were highlighted as examples of initiatives funded through Workforce Development Board grants. These programs focus on small-group information sessions to recruit trainees, reflecting the college's personalized approach to community engagement.

Challenges were acknowledged, including a temporary closure of an American Job Center facility due to environmental issues, which impacted service delivery. Efforts to increase participation include collaborating with social services to improve client access and expanding marketing and outreach initiatives.

The importance of literacy and pre-apprenticeship programs was emphasized, particularly for addressing skill gaps and preparing individuals for trades and emerging industries like fiber optics and supply chain management. Discussions included potential collaborations with local schools and union groups to streamline transitions from high school into training programs.

It was noted that the state has simplified eligibility criteria to remove barriers for individuals seeking services. Efforts to promote efficiency and accessibility are ongoing, including monthly budget meetings to monitor expenditures and allocate additional funds where needed.

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Director Rivera acknowledged that half of future funding under the anticipated Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reauthorization will be required to go directly to training programs, a significant shift from the current 40%. This change underscores the importance of focusing on employer-driven training programs, innovative partnerships, and robust data-driven performance monitoring to meet future accountability and competitive funding requirements.

VIII. **Resolutions of the UCWDB**

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

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-58:
RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD RATIFYING THE ACTIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

Chairman Tasharofi requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-58**. **Richard Capac** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-58**. **James Brady** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

**BOARD
ACTION**

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-59:
RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD AUTHORIZING THE MUTUAL TERMINATION OF A CONTRACT FOR THE PROVISION OF COMPREHENSIVE ONE STOP CAREER CENTER SERVICES TO YOUTHS.

Karen Dinsmore abstained from Resolution No. 2024-59.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Tasharofi requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-59**. **Gloria Durham** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-59**. **James Brady** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-60:
RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD AWARDING A CONTRACT FOR THE PROVISION OF COMPREHENSIVE ONE STOP CAREER CENTER PROVIDER FOR YOUTH SERVICES.

Meredith Barracato reported that the Union County Workforce Development Board issued an RFP for youth services on November 4, 2024, and received one proposal from the United Way of Greater Union County on December 4, 2024. The proposal met all requirements and outlined plans to serve in-school and opportunity youth with academic support, work experience, mental health services, leadership skills, case management, and career counseling.

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The \$600,000 contract will run from January to December 2025, focusing on collaborations with school districts in Plainfield, Elizabeth, and Hillside.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Tasharofi requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-60**. **Richard Capac** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-60**. **James Brady** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-61:

RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD AUTHORIZING THE USE OF BUDGET ACCOUNT NUMBERS FOR FUNDING THE UNITED WAY OF GREATER UNION COUNTY CONTRACT.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Tasharofi requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-61**. **James Brady** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-61**. **Lisa Hiscano** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-62:

A RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD AWARDING A CONTRACT TO WEBBER DOWD LAW, LLC, FOR THE PROVISION OF GENERAL COUNSEL SERVICES.

Meredith Barracato reported that in October 2024, an RFP for general counsel services was released. On November 14, 2024, one proposal was received from Weber Dow Law. The evaluation committee determined that the proposal met all requirements and highlighted the firm's extensive experience with government entities, including the Union County Workforce Development Board.

Weber Dow Law will provide legal assistance with procurement, contract guidance, and WIOA regulations. The \$20,000 contract will run from January to December 2025. A motion was made to approve the contract.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Tasharofi requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-62**. **Courtney Villani** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-62**. **Stan Robinson Jr.** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-63:

RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD AUTHORIZING THE REGULAR MEETING DATES OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD FOR THE 2025 CALENDAR YEAR.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Tasharofi requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-63**. **James Brady** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-63**. **Richard Capac** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

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RESOLUTION NO. 2024-64:

RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD AUTHORIZING THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE STATE FISCAL YEAR 2025 ADULT LITERACY INNOVATIONS PROGRAM GRANT, EXECUTION OF A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH PARTNERS, AND ISSUANCE OF PURCHASE ORDERS.

Meredith Barracato reported that on September 30, 2024, the Union County Workforce Development Board submitted a proposal for the New Jersey Department of Labor's Adult Literacy Innovations Grant. Union County was one of seven counties to receive the grant.

In partnership with Workforce Advantage, Union College, and the Plainfield Public Library, the \$500,000 grant will fund services such as ESL, Microsoft Office skills, digital literacy, supportive services, and career readiness. The grant period runs from December 1, 2024, to September 30, 2026. A resolution was passed to accept the grant and outline roles and responsibilities.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Tasharofi requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-64. James Brady.** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2024-64. Erich Peter** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Lisa Hiscano and Dr Kamran Tasharofi abstained from Resolution No. 2024-64.

IX. American Job Center Report

Jeffrey Jackson, provided an update on the operations of the American Job Center (AJC) network. He described ongoing efforts to enhance collaboration among partners by developing a unified orientation that includes all partner programs while allowing individual agencies to retain their specific orientations. Efforts are also underway to create a single customer satisfaction survey to replace outdated pre-COVID surveys, establish a training strategy for cross-training staff, coordinate partner event calendars, and formulate a cohesive strategy for delivering business services. The next virtual meeting, scheduled for January 16, 2025, will focus on organizing workgroups to address these areas.

Chairman Tasharofi emphasized the importance of focusing on measurable outcomes rather than meeting schedules. He suggested that operational meetings should be data-driven, confidential, and centered on client outcomes, performance metrics, and service improvements. Antonio Rivera supported this perspective, urging a shift from theoretical discussions to actionable plans, highlighting the importance of capturing and analyzing data effectively to reflect the performance and contributions of all partners.

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The discussion also underscored the need for a unified intake and referral system to guide clients through services more effectively. Progress has been made in conducting upfront assessments to direct clients to appropriate services efficiently, which has resulted in an increase in clients entering training programs. While acknowledging the progress made, the board reiterated the importance of focusing on results and continuous improvement in the effectiveness of the AJC network.

Nasrene Mondol, Program Administrator for Title I at the American Job Center (AJC), presented a detailed update on program activities and outcomes for the first quarter of Program Year 2023 (July to September). Title I focus on employment and training opportunities for individuals meeting adult and dislocated worker criteria.

During the first quarter, 395 customers attended orientation, and 450 individuals registered for Union County Works, a virtual one-stop system open to all Union County residents. Of these, 108 customers pursued training services, completing 216 assessments in math and reading. Seventy individuals were deemed eligible, including 30 adults and 40 dislocated workers. For PY23, 170 Individual Employment Plans were created, and 142 customers completed workplace readiness training, including 93 in-demand training completions, over half of which were in transportation-related fields such as CDL licensing.

In terms of funding utilization, three class-size contracts were created for both dislocated workers and adults. Currently, 42 dislocated workers and 22 adults are in training, with additional pending enrollments. Nearly \$300,000 in projected charges was allocated for dislocated workers and \$133,375 for adults.

Nasrene Mondol also highlighted job fair data from the first quarter, including attendance and confirmed employment outcomes: July Transportation and Logistics Job Fair: 191 attendees, 44 employed. August Veterans Job Fair: 93 attendees, 16 employed. September Pharma Hiring Event: 109 attendees, 5 employed. September General Job Fair: 173 attendees, 34 employed.

An expungement clinic, scheduled for October 17 at the Roselle Public Library, was noted as a key event to support residents in overcoming barriers to employment. Given the popularity of such events, plans are underway to expand these offerings in the future.

Dr. Hiscano, representing the American Job Center's training programs, reported on additional efforts during September and October. The team engaged with over 500 individuals, provided soft skills training to 39 participants, and launched new CMA and accounting classes. Several On-the-Job Training

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(OJT) contracts were initiated, with expectations to finalize more by the year's end. Follow-up services and employer engagement remain priorities, with results anticipated in upcoming reports.

Hawa Bonds, Director of the Division of Children and Youth Services under the Department of Human Services, provided an overview of the division's services, which include a 24-hour Family Crisis Intervention Unit offering counseling and support in schools to help youth succeed. The unit also identifies eligible students for WIOA programming. Bonds congratulated the United Way for their transition into the role of youth service provider and commended their ongoing excellence.

Juanita Vargas from the United Way reported progress on the in-school youth program. As of October 31, 2024, the program had exceeded its goals by certifying 60 youth, with an additional 17 in the final certification phase. The program operates in schools in Elizabeth, Plainfield, and Hillside, with plans to expand into Rahway. Juanita Vargas highlighted recent process improvements, including her team's certification to input data directly into the AOSOS system and serve as certified proctors for the CASAS exam, which has streamlined operations.

Work experience initiatives were also shared, including: Ten youth engaging in paid work experience restoring laptops in partnership with Dwyer High School's tech program. A Hillside Youth Tutoring Program where high school WIOA youth tutor children at the Stepping Stones Aftercare Program. Youth in Plainfield gaining administrative skills through placements in various departments.

These work experiences aim to provide youth with academic support, job readiness, and career exposure. Juanita Vargas emphasized the importance of partnerships and announced co-enrollment as a key strategy moving forward to ensure youth receive comprehensive services, stay engaged, and progress along career pathways.

Gwen Ryan provided an update on Simon Youth Academy's progress and activities. She noted that all students graduated last year, which was a significant accomplishment. Enrollment for the current year is ongoing, with 12 students currently enrolled and five more in the enrollment process. The academy aims to reach full enrollment of 24 students and is prepared to over-enroll if needed.

Upon enrollment, students undergo a transcript review and are placed in high school courses required to meet New Jersey Department of Education graduation requirements. The program provides additional support, including

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mental health resources, yoga, and life skills programming to help students succeed beyond academics.

Simon Youth Academy is collaborating with the YouthBuild Program to provide industry training credentials and is working with Union College to establish an articulation agreement for dual credit opportunities. The academy is also focusing on improving connections between high school graduates and college, with plans to track students as they transition to higher education.

Amy Wagner expressed concerns about the discrepancy between the number of individuals engaged in programs and the comparatively low job placement outcomes. Director Rivera identified systemic issues in data management as a primary cause, noting that outcomes were not adequately captured or reported. Director Rivera noted although services and training programs are being delivered and invoices verified, the state data systems often fail to reflect these achievements. This gap complicates the ability to demonstrate progress and meet performance metrics.

Stan Robinson raised concerns about the extent to which employers' failure to report hires contributed to data challenges. He was informed that while employers play a role, the primary issue was inaccurate data entry and management within the system. For example, Union College had completed on-the-job training programs, but the data was not properly reflected in state records despite verified payments. Robert Croom added that job placement data was being actively updated through various methods, including daily checks of the loop system, direct follow-ups with customers, and outreach to employers. However, delays in hiring processes and background checks often impacted the timing of these updates.

Emily Newton asked how connections were established with schools and districts, and Courtney Villani inquired about expanding services to areas like Linden and Roselle. Hawa Bonds clarified that while current efforts were focused on specific districts, services were open to youth across Union County. Strong relationships with school districts and participation in Youth Service Commission meetings facilitated these partnerships.

Lisa Hiscano emphasized the importance of job placement as the ultimate goal of all programs. She noted that reporting placements required employer verification, often in the form of paycheck stubs, which could be difficult to obtain due to delays in hiring processes and employer policies. Despite these challenges, Lisa stressed that her team prioritized clear communication with clients from the outset, highlighting the importance of job placement and documentation.

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James Brady suggested exploring incentives, such as bonuses, to improve data reporting and compliance, but Chairman Tasharofi and others noted that funding limitations and regulatory constraints often prevented such measures. Valerie Kerrigan added that some jobs, particularly in certain sectors, were not reported in state systems, further complicating data collection.

Director Rivera highlighted upcoming changes under WIOA reauthorization, which emphasized engaging employers through subsidized training and hiring programs. He explained that employers could receive up to \$10,000 for hiring employees through these initiatives, aligning their interests with workforce development goals. Rivera suggested that these strategies would address current barriers and enhance employer engagement in workforce efforts.

Jeffrey Jackson reported on the work participation rate for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which was at 5.9%, a slight improvement from the previous 4.1%. He highlighted challenges such as limited Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) sites and emphasized efforts to improve engagement. New CWEP sites were established, and a coordinator was appointed to manage site relationships. Strategies included rebranding the program, developing orientation guides, and implementing group orientations to address gaps in participation.

Scott Kuchinsky discussed discrepancies between job seekers' salary expectations and market realities. Using CDL drivers as an example, he noted the average salary was \$46,000 statewide, but unrealistic perceptions of higher earnings created challenges in aligning expectations with available opportunities.

Chairman Tasharofi highlighted the need to address these perception issues, emphasizing that competitive realities must align with client expectations to attract employees.

Courtney Villani noted that while the driver market had improved post-COVID, retaining employees required offering competitive wages, which remained a challenge.

Jeffrey Jackson also addressed the placement of bilingual Haitian Creole speakers in CWEP sites and outlined plans to reengage TANF participants, including collaborations with organizations like Plainfield Public Library.

Lisa Hiscano provided updates on Title II programs, noting that the Union County College Consortium was meeting its goals. Integrated education and training

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programs allowed English language learners to obtain industry credentials while improving their language skills. Programs included certifications in Microsoft Office, supply chain management, and digital literacy, with efforts to incorporate AI into job readiness programs.

Juanito Chiluisa reported serving approximately 3,120 customers annually, with 1,120 being new. He highlighted efforts to meet state targets and discussed plans to temporarily transition services to Union County College.

Valerie Kerrigan emphasized the importance of individualized approaches for people with disabilities, including leveraging psychological evaluations to design tailored support. She advocated for direct engagement with employers and job seekers to overcome systemic barriers, particularly for individuals with cognitive or learning challenges.

X. Old Business

Gloria Durham reported that her nonprofit organization successfully completed four workshops in 2024 as part of a grant awarded through the federal Justice40 initiative. These workshops focused on green infrastructure and offshore wind power. She announced that the nonprofit is pursuing additional grants for 2025 to continue its work in these areas.

For new business, Gloria shared plans to collaborate with Net America to offer fiber optic training in the first quarter of 2025. She noted that Rutgers University has agreed to include Union County residents in the program, which will provide parking and access to public transportation for participants. Further updates on this initiative will be presented to the board as it progresses.

XI. New Business

No Comments

XII. Public Comments

No Comments

XIII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Dr. Kamran Tasharofi at 11:22 am.

Meeting Schedule:

9:00 AM, Wednesday, February 5, 2025

Location:

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