

Recruiting and Retention Task Force
Tuesday, January 17, 2023 - 11:00 AM

Joe Pete Wilson - Chairman

Chairman Wilson called this task force to order at 12:12 pm with the following in attendance: Stephanie DeZalia, Jim Dougan, Ken Hughes, Steve McNally, Jim Monty, Joe Pete Wilson, Jen Mascarenas, and Chelsea Merrihew.

Also present: Dina Garvey

WILSON: Alright, we have a small-dedicated group here. So, we don't have to spend a lot of time, because my real goal here, the agenda is really focused on how do we wrap up this task force and lay out a concrete path to follow.

So, we've talked a little bit. We have budgeted funds. The next thing on the agenda, I started a draft summary report and recommendations from all the conversations we've had. The goals for that are summing up some of the ground we've covered. The ideas we had and finding a home base, you know someone to see this through, so it's not always a task force in here. That it finds a home in the right place and that that group can follow-up in the work.

So, and Steve got your idea. I recorded your idea about the weekly paychecks and Jen is that something you can look at, like how that, what would be cost? Are we able to manage?

MASCARENAS, JEN: Yeah, I can check into that.

WILSON: Yeah, thank you. So, one of my fears is if this Committee keeps meeting, every meeting we're going to get a new idea and we're not going to be able to keep track of and follow through on some of the ideas. So, from Jen's report this morning, I just quickly did the math and right now we're at approximately 15% of the workforce is vacant. So, this issue isn't going away. So, we really need to make this, rather than a task force, a permanent, ongoing work that we're doing.

So, I'm going to get a draft of the summary recommendations report, send it out to you to look at. So, I want some feedback from this committee. I want us to produce something we can give to the Full Board. So, if, you know when you get the report, email me or whatever your comments are and I'll incorporate them.

We handed out the marketing strategy document, last time and that's going to part of the overall recommendations. Just to get a few things for the report. If we find a home for this, when should be reconvene this Task Force to evaluate? Or do we need to? Do we just leave that with the home? I am looking for some feedback back on that, if anyone has opinions.

MONTY: I think we should reconvene it at times, so we can, as a group go over what is being done, so the task force can make a formal recommendation. We don't have to meet, I think, monthly. Just when we have something, something's been presented that we need more opinion on. Just my thought.

WILSON: So, if we find a permanent home in a committee would it be enough for the Task Force to meet like once a year? Or once a quarter? Again, I'm looking for ideas, what do you think?

MONTY: I would say once a quarter. Just my thought. We tend, which I found in the housing, we tend to, when we're meeting once a month, we spin our wheels a lot and go over the same stuff, over and over. Which I think is what you're feeling.

WILSON: Yeah

MONTY: And I think once we present our recommendation on the Land Bank, I see us closing that up, that task force and then put it into a normal committee where it fits accordingly and if you need to convene, you bring it back. Just my thinking.

HUGHES: I think the task force has been like the repository of great ideas; right? And those great ideas are not going to stop happening. People are going to have experiences so those ideas are still going to come about. So, maybe the task force maintains its authority for a repository for those ideas and then we discuss here to which committee or to which department or which personnel should take that on, based on our collective conversations. But, I don't think we need to meet monthly, I do like the idea of quarter or we can just kind of gather and disseminate, just gather and disseminate.

WILSON: Yeah

DOUGAN: I would agree. We have other committees that don't meet every month that are still standing committees when we need them. Later this month, the Fish Hatchery Committee is going to meet for the first time in a few years, because we have some specific things that we have to talk about; okay? So, I think to keep it as a committee, per se and then as things come up, you know this once a month thing is tough, because we see some of the same faces at all the committee meetings we are preparing all the documents and it can become overwhelming when you're trying to get your other jobs done. So, we can make some, like you said, make a report, recommendation to the Board, keep this available and other thoughts and ideas are going to come up. You know, I think, we don't necessarily need to talk, for example on what you just handed out, education pipeline every month, but in a few months we might have more to talk about again on what we accomplished.

HUGHES: And to piggyback on that, I think, I created this document, because of something you said a month ago and it was a great idea and I wanted to try and run with it just to give it some energy, but I feel like this document really should be in the Personnel Committee and I'm not looking to make more work for Stephanie as the Chair or you, as the Department Head, but I believe I want to make more work for that committee and take something like this and funnel it to them and let them hash those ideas out and take it from there. You know, again, ideas to committees, to departments, to whatever.

MONTY: And to piggyback on that, Ken, I love Jim's idea, I love that paper. Last week I had a conversation with a teacher from next door, who is a good friend of mine. Who they now have a new guidance counselor. It is no longer Derek. It's I can't think what the woman's name is, it was originally, she was a guidance counselor at Seton.

HUGHES: Okay

MONTY: When through some family stuff, took a year off, she came back here, because Derek left and went to Beekmantown, I believe and she reached out to Aubrey, if she knew anybody that could generate some interest in kids that aren't necessarily ready to go to college. I said, does she know about the program that Jim's got with one of the students from Boquet Valley and they knew nothing, ironically, this teacher, he's one of her students and she didn't about it. And so I gave the information, contact Jim on this and I think it's something that can conceivably work, not only for Boquet Valley, but any school district in Essex County. I think this is a tremendous avenue for us to potentially fill some of those jobs.

WILSON: Yeah and so that brings up the picture. Like what you've got here, Ken. What you're talking about is how do we sustain something like that? I look at North Country Community College as a model. They do the kind of marketing to bring people in that we can copy from. They have their recruitment people go into the schools. Like how do we build who's going to do it? Who's going to be actually out there pounding the pavement, you know, connecting with the schools? Is it reasonable to expect that from department heads? Is it productive in some departments? I don't know. You know, how do we have a clear, develop a clear consistent relationship that's going to feed that pipeline?

HUGHES: Is this a rhetorical question?

WILSON: No, this is something...

HUGHES: Because I presented an idea to that. I think if you finish asking the question I am happy to respond. Again, I still think this conversation should happen at the Personnel Committee level, but if the question's on the table, right now, I think the answer is we don't use the department heads right away. We have to establish those relationships between the County Manager, maybe the Chair of the Committee or somebody else, one or two people. We get them to sit down with those presidents or with those organizations, here, say, hey, we're Essex County, we're representatives of Essex County. We want to establish a school to work program. Here are the programs that we are looking at. Here are the departments where we have the need. We just want to get the relationship started and then we send our surrogates out. Those surrogates talk, so it could be the Department of Social Services. We get Angie to have a conversation with the department head up there. So, we at least establish a relationship and say, oh, here's our person, here's our person, we get those two on the phone and they have that conversation, but all under the umbrella of the County Manager and a board chair, a board member.

WILSON: Yeah, because there's both county and regional workforce development committee that's been meeting for 20 years.

HUGHES: I forget about that.

WILSON: Yeah and so that's already got that structure there. If we're going to send somebody to that, who goes? Because that's already there, it's the schools, the colleges, employers, the federal and state supported employment and training people. It's there to do workforce development. So, that's part of why I ask, if we're going to have department heads, are they all going to go to workforce development or you know, who's going to be that point of contact for the County at that top level that then spreads it out to a department head or to the County Manager or to Personnel.

I think to be effective in those settings we've got to have someone attending those workforce development meetings, building relationships with CV Tech. you know, it's got to be one person that can relay, oh, I know this program would fit DPW, this program we could train clerks that would work in DMV. It's somebody who's going to be your sorting and your bid picture to make that really sustainable and effective. That's the question and I know there's not an easy answer we're going to take to come up with that.

DOUGAN: I agree with that. I would love to see Ken's suggestion work. For myself, I'm in triage mode, right now is how I'm feeling. You know if it would go back through the years I've been here, there's a number of good things that we've done that we've done there at DPW that I would love to take credit for, my people take credit for, but the thing that's going to hurt everything that I've put in place for budgeting, constant budgeting, bridge plans and building plans and all these other things, if I don't have anybody to fill the jobs it doesn't matter. I can have the best plans in the world, but I can't fill the jobs and what I've learned is that really the workers out there, I have to go make them familiar with me just about as early as I can. I really think that the educational pipeline is my best avenue; okay?

WILSON: Yeah

DOUGAN: And so I almost feel like I have to be there. I would prefer it was somebody else, but like I said, I'm triage mode.

WILSON: And I think you're farer down this pathway though, too. You know this is pretty structured and you've already started to build, you've got a student coming in. You're in a more hands on point. How do we get other departments feeding into that?

DEZALIA: I am just thinking about what Jim just said about this friend that you talked to, a new guidance counselor and also I am looking at this list that Jen just handed out. Jim went to CV Tech. Jim's people are at CV Tech, but yet there maybe 5 other seniors or juniors that are talking to a guidance counselor that aren't going to CV Tech, they're taking Regents courses. They're taking college courses in their junior and senior year, they don't want to go to college. But, they might see this list that Jen gives us all the time, 76 things listed here and the guidance counselor has to be responsible to sit down and say, well, I hear what you're saying, how about working for the County, in this department, because it sounds like you would like to work with children or families? I mean I feel like the guidance counselors are a good spot, but it needs to be a personal experience with a guidance counselor, first, to say, do you have someone coming in talking to you, that really isn't ready for college, but look at this list that we have right here. I don't think guidance counselors have this list in front of them like this. They might be getting the, every time you have an opening, I'm not even sure that they.

MASCARENAS, JEN: They are submitted to all the schools. We have set-up a job fair, well; Moriah School has setup a job fair, April 6th. So, we can go met with the students, like you said, that aren't interested in college after graduation. I agree, I think guidance counselors, I can tell you right now, there are kids as young as, you know, sophomores, that they kind of know that they aren't interested already.

DEZALIA: A lot of those aren't going through CV Tech, they're graduating or they're even sometimes taking Regents and college courses, but that's just because that's what they're being told to do. But, if they see this list that all these jobs are available, as soon as they graduate, well not all of them, some are degree jobs, but a lot of them could be. So, we have to have that link there.

WILSON: Yeah and those are excellent ideas and you're right, that list could be a good jumping off point, but what I learned from, a little bit, from talking to the college, from working in that setting is because the guidance counselors are so busy that somebody's got to be there reminding them. Just getting it in the mail, it just won't be enough. They need to associate it with a face, somebody they can ask questions.

MONTY: I couldn't agree more with what's being talking about here. I think, going back to the original question, again, I hate putting more work on Jen, but in this case, she's the one with her finger on the pulse of all the jobs available. So, she should be at the top of the ladder and then come down appropriately, but I think conversation with Dr. Davey and Dr. Friedman at CV Tech and BOCES is imperative that we get a hold of them, so they know what we're trying to do and again, it's going to affect Clinton County, because I imagine Clinton County's having the same issues as we are and I know from talking to people that I know in the education field, what's happening with a lot of your guidance counselors, they're being the Dean of Students, so they're in charge of discipline. They're getting so many levels of responsibilities, that really, other than to say here, you need to go to college, you need to look at this, you need to look at this. I don't know how to fix that within the school districts, I really don't, but if we give them this list and say, you know what, there's jobs on here that they could work and do and eventually they may want to take it to the next level and go to a school to get a degree, because that degree is going to increase their earning power. I really think this giving to the BOCES, CV Tech administration level and say, look; this is what we're really pushing for. We've got availability to hire these kids and learn on the job. I mean it may not necessarily benefit the County, but it may benefit one the communities within the County which would then, I mean I have a vacant laborer position I've had for almost a year now and I can't get anybody to step up for it. I just think it's a good way to go and keep pushing down this road I think it's going to help.

HUGHES: Jen, what are the barriers to entry for a job on that list? Is it a just a job interview? Civil Service exam?

MASCARENAS, JEN: Well, first of all we have to have a title.

HUGHES: Okay

MASCARENAS, JEN: Jim just created a mechanic intern. So, most of these, if you're talking about that type of a position it would have to be created prior to hiring.

HUGHES: Okay

MASCARENAS, JEN: So, there's that.

HUGHES: I am more than happy, as a former educator to work with somebody, it shouldn't be by myself to go with somebody to represent the County to CV Tech to talk to, I don't know the doctor that you just mentioned, but I do know Michelle. Michelle Friedman is the former principal in Westport and I know her well, we served at the same time. I would be more than happy to go up with somebody and establish this conversation. Because I know, the question I'm going to get is what are the barriers to entry. I want to make it so it's a seamless transition. You graduate and I put this on here specifically, you graduate from the National Resources Management program which is doing backhoe, bulldozer, excavating, welding, all of this stuff that I would know, I know would benefit Jim and would benefit that department and give them a one way shot right into our county, minimum barriers without breaking the law, how can we lose at that?

MERRIHEW, CHELSEA: I was going to say, if you come up with a standard presentation for that. Something that you could translate into a pamphlet or something. Something that we can give out at DMV when people are coming in to take their permit tests or at the County Clerk's office for passports, when you're getting those kids when they're 16, 17, 18 years old, you know, outside of the school. As a reminder that this is available.

HUGHES: And that goes back to marketing and branding and I would love to see the Personnel Committee maybe with the County Manager to identify an organization that can create that kind of strategy, because the pamphlets are great for the people that are coming in there, because it's a take a grab.

MERRIHEW, CHELSEA: Right

HUGHES: You know and they're captured, right there. It's one tool in our toolbox to get the word out, but I'm volunteering to push this forward. I believe in what Jim said and what Jim said in the reply email, great idea, try to make a little bit better and then move it to try and make it a little bit better, we all win here.

WILSON: Thank you

HUGHES: Absolutely

MONTY: Quick question for my own knowledge. Where do people sign up for unemployment? To get their employment benefits.

MERRIHEW, CHELSEA: I think that's a State.

WILSON: Yeah, that's a State.

MONTY: Are we sending this list of opening jobs to that agency?

MASCARENAS, JEN: I believe we do.

MONTY: I wasn't sure about that. I mean, you're claiming unemployment, look at these jobs available to you. Not saying they're going to take it, but.

WILSON: And that's something, the State representation sits on that workforce development committee, from State Office for Employment. So, that's, it's great that you're willing to get the education pipeline rolling, that's awesome.

HUGHES: Absolutely, but I want somebody else with me. I won't do it by myself. There should be somebody else with me, I'm just a member, I'm not a committee Chair, I'm not anything. I need somebody else who has more authority to come and represent the County with me.

WILSON: Alright

DEZALIA: Just thinking, I really like that video that had Angie Allen and it had multiple people from the County talking about what they do. I don't know where that was actually going to go and end up. Do you know the video that was presented?

WILSON: It is for their recruitment to go on their website.

DEZALIA: For the County website.

WILSON: I think they're using it on their Facebook.

MONTY: Wasn't it Public Health?

MASCARENAS, JEN: No, it was BRIEF.

DOUGAN: It was part of the BRIEF

DEZALIA: Okay, so I was wondering where that was going to be. Because I see that as recruitment. Too.

HUGHES: Absolutely

WILSON: Oh yeah.

DEZALIA: So, I envision a little bit, not to put more on Jen or myself, okay, I'm the Personnel Committee Chairperson, but for I'm looking at the three of us, I envision coming up with some kind of program. Say, you had from my area, Schroon Lake/North Hudson area, Linda Beers is from there, myself, I'm sure, if you look at the County there's multiple other people from that region that work for the County and have for a long time, have worked their up, have done different things, that can go to present to that, not only the guidance counselor, but those that are important, maybe some of the teachers that are important to those and maybe some of the 9-12 kids and have this list to say, as soon as you graduate, these are the things that you could apply for. Obviously, these are the things if you go to a 2-year college you can apply for. I think a kid seeing somebody they know can mean something more.

WILSON: And Stephanie that's a great idea, but what we need is a step above that. That's opening that door, because they go through, the counselors have sort of a cycle they go through, too and we've got to be able to schedule that. We've got to have the contacts at the school. I think

to set that up, we still need someone slotted in there, that's job it is to build and maintain relationships with schools, doing the job fair, you know overseeing the marketing, all of that stuff. I think the more we dice it up and hand it out, based on who's willing to do it, as people change, you know, if it's not part of a job, if it's just something they're taking on, it's going to fall apart.

HUGHES: I think focusing on trades is really important.

WILSON: Yeah, that's a good natural place. You're already building those relationships. It will serve us for a lot of other recruitment. Recruiting other jobs.

DOUGAN: I don't want to focus so much on what I'm doing because a lot of my people are little more blue collar in nature than many of the other departments. So, it can be a little different in focus, but I'm actually taking the job descriptions that are online, some other ones that Jen's helping me create. I contact at CV Tech is Sherri Snow is, she's kind of the job placement person, is really what it says in her title and I'm going to give her all my different positions.

HUGHES: Jim, maybe you're the logical person to go up with me, because you serve two roles; you're the Deputy County Manager.

DOUGAN: I'm not sure that's...

HUGHES: No, no, no, but you're also the head of DPW; right? And you have direct relationship to the programs that go on there and you're a direct recipient of any positives coming out of that.

DOUGAN: I'll do it, like I said, I'm in triage mode, as far as CV Tech, here is Moriah, okay? I'm talking to Chris LaCroix who is the Natural Resources Management Teacher.

HUGHES: Okay, good.

DOUGAN: I'm talking to Kevin Shaw who is the Buildings Trades one. We're trying to, basically infuse myself or some others into a few of their classes. Jodi Olcott from the IDA is asking the Natural Resources Management group to do some work over at the business park, which is right across the road. I am offering up some of my guys and our services, so they work along with us with some of our equipment when we do it. Which is I guess taking me away from other work, but it's that investment.

HUGHES: Can we go into those people with a sweeter ask?

DOUGAN: Sure, why not.

HUGHES: Because I think that's what we need to do. We need a sweeter ask. We've got 78 job openings. I need to know that we can walk in there with a bigger lollipop.

DOUGAN: I would like to go to CV Tech, in Mineville.

HUGHES: Sure

DOUGAN: And offer them one of my trucks.

HUGHES: Yup

DOUGAN: To do CDL training.

HUGHES: Yup, yup

DOUGAN: They do it in Plattsburgh, they don't do it here. It seems like, nothing against Plattsburgh, but it seems like they're trying to keep the program there.

HUGHES: Fine

DOUGAN: And but, they've got trucks to do it in Plattsburgh. I would offer them one of my trucks, I mean if the Board allowed me to. All these things are on the table, I think, right now for me. I don't know how that helps your report.

WILSON: So, I feel like I've got the information I need to start a draft. You guys are going to talk about a school visit.

HUGHES: If you're okay with that. If Jim's all right with that.

WILSON: If Jim doesn't have time or can't do it, let me know.

DOUGAN: I'm in triage.

WILSON: You're going to look at the payroll. This is what I don't want to do, have this be every meeting, we just are tackling new ideas, because we're not wrapping up. We're not accomplishing anything.

HUGHES: Let us do our work and then report back to the Personnel Committee in a month.

WILSON: Okay, but I'm going to get a draft summary report and recommendations for everybody to look at. So, hopefully we can that out to the Full Board, too.

HUGHES: I would like to suggest that, I think you're report is really important, because you need to let the County know what you're thinking about when it comes to sun setting some of the responsibilities that we have. That's got to be seen, not closing it, but just sun setting it.

WILSON: Yeah and we have a plan for actually putting some stuff in place, too. So, let me work on that. I'll get it to you, hopefully, middle of next week, so there's time to correspond back and forth and we'll see what I've left out, what I've not explained clearly. Any new ideas, maybe have some feedback from your conservation. So, does that seems like a good...

DEZALIA: Is that what you're calling the marketing strategy?

WILSON: No, so that, we started that draft and then I realized that that's just focused on marketing. So, that marketing strategy will be within the overall recommendations. I realized that just the marketing is only a small portion of what we've been talking about. So, that will be included in the overall summary and recommendations.

MERRIHEW: I'm curious; didn't the County create a few years ago, a position for marketing the fairgrounds?

HUGHES; Yes, Holly Aquino.

MERRIHEW: Is there anywhere on the table where that would be a potential for us, as a County as a whole? I mean there's a lot of stuff that we're talking about that seems like a long-term job.

WILSON: Oh yeah, that's the point I've been trying to make. That yes, that we need somebody.

MERRIHEW, CHELSEA: Maybe that's part of our presentation. How we think that there is enough work and long enough.

WILSON: Especially when you combine it with like Shaun's idea of needing an information officer and that's what I'm leaning towards is that, because right now, Jen's staff in Personnel...

MERRIHEW, CHELSEA: They're busy enough with what they have.

WILSON: Yeah, if we just try and add more, we're not going to be successful with carrying these things forward.

HUGHES: One of my recommendations, Chelsea is to have, would be to hire out an RFP for a professional marketing organization to actually do the work for us, but to have an internal person, potentially Holly, who would be the liaison between the Committee and that organization.

MERRIHEW, CHELSEA: I think that makes a lot of sense.

HUGHES: Because you need to have somebody locally who can help all the departments kind of organize themselves. Each department shouldn't be doing it on their own and you need to have somebody that has a little bit of the county culture. You need to understand the culture of the county and what's going on at the county and they have to be respected by the committee under the Board to whom they report. So, that's been my vision for it, but I really think we've got to push this out to a professional marketing organization to do this and I still want to say, I love what North Country Community College is doing and they have that model and it's working really great. Why we can't do that?

MERRIHEW, CHELSEA: To me it just makes sense. You're going to get better product.

HUGHES: Yup, absolutely, professional

MERRIHEW, CHELSEA: Consistent

HUGHES: Pamphlets, all the way up to radio, television, news, you know.

WILSON: And that person is building these relationships.

HUGHES: Yes

WILSON: And is going, like instead of you setting up the job fair, you know that's part of their responsibility. So, it can be done consistently and gain, you know, experience and do it better and better, because I don't think we could just say, okay, Jen, here, your department has to do all of this. There's no way and we can't keep doing it via this task force, either. It can't be use volunteering.

DEZALIA: So, what you're saying is a marketing and organization to first to come up with our marketing plan and actually do the marketing? But, then we'll also hire, have somebody that works for the County, takes care of that?

WILSON: Would be overseeing it, really.

DEZALIA: Overseeing it?

WILSON: Say our marketing strategy is sound, everyday says, this is what we want to do. That we put it out to bid, we end up hiring, whoever, company X, the specialist here is going to be reviewing the timelines, the data collection. Like what we saw from North Country Community College. They sent us a 76-page report of the demographics of what their advertising is doing.

HUGHES: Their report is awesome.

WILSON: Somebody's got to be able to go through that and say, okay...

HUGHES: Make recommendation on where we should spend our money, how did radio do versus newspaper versus scrolling versus Instagram, you know and just be able to interrupt that with the background that they have and then make recommendation for us, the Board and the communities on how to spend that money.

WILSON: And seeing, yeah, it's working for DPW, we got something working there. It's not working for Social Services, what do you need to change, you know somebody who's hands on it with it and it's definitely not something I feel like I've got the skills or the time to do that, as a week in, week out job.

MERRIHEW, CHELSEA: It's a long term program, it's not going away.

HUGHES: Right, right

WILSON: It's only going to get more dramatic, I think as we face retirements, especially as the next wave. I mean we're facing that in our town and I think we want to be ahead of this and we want to have our name out there as that wave of retirements hit. So, that's absolutely, I think, going to critical in this being successful or this just being sort of hit or miss.

MERRIHEW, CHELSEA: And when do we make that recommendation?

WILSON: I've been taking notes through this whole conversation and it's going in that draft.

MERRIHEW, CHELSEA: Oh, good

WILSON: that's an example of the, the marketing strategy is going to be in there. You know sustainability, that's the word I've been thinking of, how do we sustain this and part of it needs a committee home, part of it needs a person who's accountable for this. They're being paid to work on this. We're not carving them off of, well, let's grab whoever's available for 5 minutes and try and get them.

HUGHES: A committee has that authorization where a task force may not.

WILSON: So, yeah, absolutely, I've been getting more notes to add to my thoughts, so that's what I want to put out in that summary report and recommendations is concrete stuff like that.

MONTY: That BRIEF video that we saw, that was produced by Stephanie down in Public Health.

WILSON: Stephanie Miller was the County employee who was overseeing it, but the actual production was Great Range.

MONTY: Okay

WILSON: They hired a consultant or a specialist or whatever, a contractor to write the scripts and film it and line up all the people and edit it.

Alright any other thoughts? Thank you for sticking this out. Thanks for the good ideas. I think I got fuel for a good report. So, I will get that out to you, as soon as I can. We are adjourned.

AS THERE WAS NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THIS RETENTION AND RECRUITING TASK FORCE, IT WAS ADJOURNED AT 12:46 PM.

Respectively Submitted,

Dina L. Garvey, Deputy
Clerk of the Board