



**NORTHWEST REGIONAL
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**
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**Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Thursday, June 10th, 2021
VIA Zoom**

NRWIB Full Board of Directors' Meeting
Thu, Jun 10, 2021 at 12:00 PM

<https://zoom.us/j/91272554132?pwd=bkhjOVU2NHZzR2N2MEI3dGxnYzZXUT09>

Meeting ID: 912 7255 4132

Passcode: 507081

In attendance: B. Dupont; E. Berns; A. Florez; E. Hawthorne; G. LaCapra; J. Ryan; J. Vrabely; J. Wrinn; L. Gold; P. Smithwick; C. Rafael; S. Romano; R. Bessette (on behalf of F. Spagnolo); S. Jannetty; W. Pizzuto; W. Starbuck; G. Pisani; W. Levy; M. Rooke; S. Mancini; R. Richard, K. Lucey

Also in attendance: B. Amin; C. Martin; D. Collins; S. Domanico; F. Hardy; H. Pelletier; J. Reho; M. Caffè; L. Lawrence; P. LaRosa; S. Barbieri; R. Venturino; M. Polzella

Staff in attendance: C. Awwad; M. Hayden; C. Chasse; J. Amis; G. Fonseca; S. Mertz; A. Goncalves

Meeting commenced at 12:02PM

1. Approval of Minutes from March 11th, 2021 Meeting

A motion to approve was made by L. Gold and seconded by P. Smithwick. Motion approved.

2. NRWIB Committee Reports and Updates:

a. Committees

- **Personnel - JoAnn Ryan**
Nothing was reported.
- **Youth - Fernando C. Spagnolo**
Nothing was reported.
- **Finance - William Pizzuto**
W. Pizzuto reported that the NRWIB has chosen Mahoney-Sabol as the Audit Firm for the NRWIB's annual audit, as is reflected in item number 13 of the agenda.
- **One Stop - Joseph Wrinn**
Nothing was reported.



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• **Disability - Joseph Vrabley**

J. Vrabley reported that the Disability Committee met on April 19th, 2021, and there were three takeaways from the meeting. The committee collaborated with the Department of Aging and Disability Services to discuss virtual learning for older individuals searching for jobs. The committee discussed summer youth with disabilities starting in June. There were fifty slots available for participants, and at the time the Disability Committee met in April the NRWIB had secured twenty participants, which was ideal. J. Vrabley hoped those slots had now been filled. The next takeaway regarded the Ticket to Work program. There were twenty-eight people that transitioned from Social Security long term benefits to a job that was a pathway backup. The committee also discussed noting disabilities when registering clients in CTHires. It was noted that it is very important that intakes are educated, so that the participants' right disability is understood to funnel the right services for those individuals. The next Disability Committee Meeting is scheduled for August 10th, 2021.

b. DOL – Stephen Romano

On June 1st, 2021, the American Job Center in Waterbury opened up to 50% customer capacity. The AJC is receiving customers and open from 8am to 4:15pm. On July 1st, 2021, the AJC will open to 100% customer capacity, and they are currently preparing for that traffic load when it occurs. S. Romano announced that as of May 30th, 2021, the work search requirement was put into effect for Unemployment Insurance. The individuals that were receiving Unemployment Insurance throughout the Covid-19 pandemic now have to document their three job procurement efforts per week. As of July, those recipients will have to enter those efforts electronically into their weekly claim forms. There are still virtual assistants available in the AJC for anyone seeking employment services or unemployment insurance services within the Career Center.

3. Approval of Contracts

a. JFES - \$ 1,411,559.00 (Tentative)

This figure is approximately \$200,000.00 less than the NRWIB received last year, which means there was a reduction in funding there. The NRWIB has submitted a budget to the state, and without affecting staffing or cuts to services, the organization was able to mitigate that.

b. WIOA - \$3,427,742.00

This is the final figure, and an \$800,000.00 reduction in the NRWIB's funding. The workforce board is working with the state and other workforce boards to mitigate those cuts, but it is extremely difficult to operate with that type of hole in their budget. The NRWIB will look at some staffing decisions and how to provide "street dollars," for ITAs and OJTs.

c. CYEP- \$1,102,500.00 (Tentative)

C. Awwad believes that this figure will be the base of the contract for services to students with an additional allocation to support those students with services such as food, transportation, peer mentoring, mental health support for issues that arise during their employment, etc.



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d. DCF - \$105,000.00

This is a small contract that supports the summer program for dedicated DCF students.

e. ADS – \$917,220.07 (3-Year Allocation)

This figure is a three-year allocation for a summer and year-round youth employment program targeted specifically at disabled youth and young adults in the amount of \$917,220.07. This year the NRWIB will be utilizing approximately \$300,000.00 of those funds to provide work experience and wages for the disabled population.

***Pending issuance from the Connecticut Department of Labor. Funding levels may vary.**

When this agenda went to print, the state budget had yet to be approved, and therefore, some of these figures were marked tentative depending on the budget. These were the five contracts put before the Board for ratification so that the NRWIB could move forward and deliver services under those funding streams. A motion to approve was made by L. Gold and seconded by P. Smithwick. Cindy Rafael abstained. Motion approved.

4. Approval of Subcontracts:

• **JFES: TBICO - \$60,000.00**

The JFES subcontract is a contract with TBICO of Danbury to continue providing (virtual) services to every JFES participant over the course of the year for workforce and work readiness development services in the amount of \$60,000.00.

• **ARPA: Waterbury Youth Services - \$153,153.78**

This subcontract is funded through ARPA dollars that the NRWIB will be receiving from the City of Waterbury to provide additional slots for funding the overflow of Waterbury summer youth participants. The mayor is desirous of giving every student in Waterbury a summer opportunity and is therefore providing additional funding to support that. This contract will likely fund an additional seventy-five slots over and above the slots that are allocated to the other Waterbury vendors.

A motion to approve was made by L. Gold and seconded by P. Smithwick. Motion approved.

5. Approval of Contract with Career Resources for WIOA Career Services and JFES Case Management – TBD per funding allocation

Initially the NRWIB had known what the cost of delivering the services in the next year would be, when the WIOA funding came in and the board was short the \$800,000.00. The NRWIB is working with Scott Wilderman to determine what that contract value will be, based on potential cuts to funding and to support the WIOA end of that contract. The NRWIB is working with the state and is ‘under the gun’ because this contract must be executed by June 30th, 2021. C. Awwad asked the Board for their conditional approval of this item and will later email the full Board of Directors what that final contract dollar amount will be, once it is locked in. C. Awwad hopes to do that no later than June 25th or June 26th, 2021. If there is going to be a reduction in force, the NRWIB staff is likely to be affected by that reduction, at least a week’s notice prior to the July 1st start date of the new fiscal program calendar year. A conditional motion to approve was made by W. Pizzuto and seconded by L. Gold. B. Dupont abstained. Motion approved.



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6. Approval of One-Stop Operator Contract: Northwest CT Chamber of Commerce - \$125,000.00

As required under federal regulations, the NRWIB is required to procure a One-Stop operator no less than every four years. The NRWIB did this initially back in 2016 for the 2016-2017 contract year. The NRWIB went back out to bid and received two proposals. The One-Stop committee reviewed those proposals, and their recommendation was to contract with the Northwest CT Chamber of Commerce. This is the first of what will likely be a four-year contract, and the NRWIB will renew them on an annual basis. The cost of providing the One-Stop operator services required by the US DOL will be approximately \$125,000.000 to support staff and the associated costs of administering the responsibilities of this contract. A motion to approve was made by L. Gold and seconded by W. Pizzuto. J. Ryan abstained. Motion approved.

7. Approval of Annual Grant of Authority 2021-2022

C. Awwad advised the Board that this is the document that the NRWIB exercises at the beginning of each program year, that allows a number of functions to take place throughout the year. C. Awwad advised the board to refer to her with any questions they may have in regards to the Annual Grant of Authority. A motion to approve was made by W. Pizzuto and seconded by P. Smithwick. Motion approved.

8. Approval of All-Funds Budgets for Program Year 2021-2022

C. Awwad referred the Board to S. Merz, the NRWIB CFO, who was on the call and has been working diligently to balance the budget, as the NRWIB has had close to \$1,000,000.00 cut from the budget. At the time of the meeting, the budget before the Board was unbalanced by \$227,000.00, leaving no money available under WIOA for services to clients. C. Awwad informed the Board that the NRWIB received some good news pertaining to the funnel money allocation that supports the NRWIB's construction job funnel. The money will be funded above and beyond what was anticipated, which will somewhat help to balance the budget, and create opportunities for some training programs. C. Awwad advised the Board to direct any questions regarding the All-Funds budget to S. Mertz, who has done a great job in putting the budget together. The NRWIB staff has been doing their best and meeting regularly to discuss how to move costs in and out of different funding streams where it is allowable. W. Pizzuto commended S. Mertz and the NRWIB staff on their efforts to balance the budget, as it is a difficult task to accomplish, and Chairman G. Pisani agreed. A motion to approve was made by J. Wrinn and seconded by L. Gold. Motion approved.

9. Approval of the 2021-2022 Cost Allocation Plan - Please Refer to Bound Notebook

This document reflects the NRWIB's new indirect cost rate that the US DOL cost allocation department came to terms with earlier this year. The Cost Allocation Plan was approved by the US DOL and sent to all of the NRWIB's cognizant agencies so that they know what that indirect cost rate is. A motion to approve was made by L. Gold and seconded by P. Smithwick. Motion approved.

10. Designation of "Industries with Significant Labor Market Demand" for the Purpose of Funding ITA's in Excess of the \$4,000. Maximum PY 21

A motion to approve was made by W. Pizzuto and seconded by L. Gold. Motion approved.



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11. Approval of NRWIB WIOA Policies:

C. Awwad advised the Board that these are two policies that were re-worked.

a. WIOA Registration/Customer Flow Policy

There were significant adjustments made to the WIOA Registration/Customer Flow Policy's economic threshold for eligibility. In light of the additional money that has been provided to individuals that are collecting unemployment compensation, it was discovered that a large number of people were no longer going to be eligible for services, because the unemployment compensation put them way out of the margins. The NRWIB went back and compared the policy with the other workforce boards' and addressed the issue. The policy guideline will now follow 185% of the federal poverty limit, which will seek to bring individuals back in that would have fallen off that benefits cliff.

b. Basic Skills Assessment Guidelines

The NRWIB has worked to revise the CASAS score that one should achieve to be able to be determined basic skills deficient. This guideline clarifies the CASAS test series that the NRWIB uses and what the required score is for someone not to be classified as basic skills deficient. It is very important that when registering individuals in the system, that the NRWIB is aware of all their barriers, and if someone is basic skills deficient as a result of their CASAS scores, it's important that that is noted in their profile, because it does significantly alter the NRWIB's performance when serving those individuals. A motion to approve was made by P. Smithwick and seconded by W. Pizzuto. Motion approved.

12. Approval of One-on-One Literacy and Numeracy Tutoring Services Contracts:

a. EdAdvance - \$15,000.00

This contract will serve clients in the Litchfield and Northwest Hills area.

b. Naugatuck Adult & Continuing Education - \$15,000.00

*Item 12b was revised to reflect Naugatuck Adult & Continuing Education, not Naugatuck Community College, as was printed on the initial agenda. This contract will serve clients in and around the Greater Waterbury area. These two contracts will be funded with JFES, as it was realized that many of those individuals present without a high school diploma and are significantly basic skills deficient. This will allow one-on-one tutoring for the purposes of helping those individuals achieve a better score on the CASAS test. The NRWIB had hoped that the individuals in the Danbury area would submit for this, but unfortunately, WERACE does not have the significant staff at this time to offer those services, and the NRWIB will look to engage them once they feel they are prepared to deliver those services. These contracts are for one-on-one tutoring services, whether in-person or virtual, to help clients who need significant remediation in either math or literacy to receive those services. A motion to approve was made by W. Pizzuto and seconded by P. Smithwick. Motion approved.

13. Approval of 3-year engagement with Mahoney-Sabol for Annual Audit

The NRWIB went out to bid for this contract and the Finance Committee oversaw the process. Two firms provided proposals. The NRWIB worked with the Finance Committee and CFO S. Mertz, and it was determined that Mahoney-Sabol was the most responsive. The NRWIB will enjoin them on a three-year engagement and will notify the state following the Board of Directors' approval at today's meeting. The contract is for approximately \$21,000.00 a year for



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the NRWIB's audit, which is actually a very good price for the size of their audit, and C. Awwad expressed she was very pleased with this figure. Mahoney-Sabol has been the NRWIB's auditor, and the organization went out to bid because they were required to, not because the NRWIB had any issue with the firm. Therefore, the Finance Committee recommended that the NRWIB continue their engagement for the next three years. A motion to approve was made by G. LaCapra and seconded by C. Rafael. Motion approved.

14. Approval of License Agreement Amendment with New Opportunities Inc. for AJC office space in Torrington

The NRWIB renews this agreement on an annual basis, as the organization shares space in Torrington on Field Street for the American Job Center that is co-located with New Opportunities, Inc. C. Awwad expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to leverage their services with the NRWIB's services for the Northwest corner residents. C. Awwad reported that she had a good meeting with the new CEO of New Opportunities, Inc., Bill Rybczyk, about making sure that the Waterbury office is also leveraging their services with the NRWIB's services. This license agreement is required to be renewed, as it sets forth payment of some rent for the next year. A motion to approve was made by P. Smithwick and seconded by W. Pizzuto. Motion approved.

15. Renewal of Conflict-of-Interest Policy

This is the NRWIB's annual review of the Conflict-of-Interest statements and memorializes that the Board members are aware of the Conflict-of-Interest Policy. The NRWIB is required to renew this on an annual basis. C. Awwad requested that each Board member review, print, sign, and date the Conflict-of-Interest Policy and either scan or fax the document back to A. Goncalves. This is part of the NRWIB's federal compliance. No motion necessary.

16. Additional Updates:

a. One-Stop Center Director Update – Kathy Maness

K. Maness was not on the call, and C. Awwad spoke on her behalf. C. Awwad commended K. Maness for doing a tremendous job and advised the Board that a report from K. Maness was submitted as an attachment to the agenda.

b. Executive Director Update – Cathy Awwad

• Update on Partner Memorandum of Understanding(s) and Infrastructure Funding Agreements

C. Awwad thanked the Board for their time and advised the members that the Annual Meeting for the Consortium Executive Committee of Lead Elected Officials was held on Thursday, June 3, 2021. The five mayors that serve as the governing body for the forty-one lead elected officials that make up the NRWIB's service delivery area met. An agenda very similar to the current Board meeting agenda was executed. The mayors that attended were sorry to hear about the cut in funding, and they also gave the NRWIB a conditional approval to the budget pending what will eventually be required to fill the gap. C. Awwad advised the Board that the NRWIB had recently completed the negotiations to



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renew all of their Memorandums of Understanding with their required partners, which included the negotiation of the Infrastructure Funding Agreement. C. Awwad once again thanked S. Mertz for her time and effort spent on accomplishing that. The NRWIB took a very deep dive on behalf of all the workforce boards, as the work that they have done this year will likely be relayed out as technical assistance to the other four boards. The NRWIB worked in partnership with the DOL, and C. Awwad thanked them for their help, specifically Mark Polzella and his staff for the help they provided in determining the cost centers that helped the NRWIB negotiate the Infrastructure Funding Agreement. Those MOUs and IFAs are all out for signature to the requisite commissioners. C. Awwad requested Chairman G. Pisani's signature and advised the Board that she would be meeting with Mayor Cavo to secure his signature, as he is the chairman for the coming year for the Consortium Executive Committee of Lead Elected Officials. Mayor Cavo replaced Mayor Boughton earlier in the year when Mayor Boughton stepped aside to take the position as Commissioner of Revenue Services in Governor Lamont's administration. No motion necessary.

- **Update on COVID -19 Reopening Plans**

C. Awwad advised the Board that the NRWIB's Covid re-opening plan is well underway. The offices are opened and the NRWIB is pleased to have customers visit once again. The majority of the individuals coming into the building are doing so to review unemployment compensation issues, but the NRWIB is hopeful that as time winds down on the extra benefits, that more individuals will be looking to access the workforce board for training and placement services. The NRWIB is engaging in a recruitment marketing campaign with the slogan "Let us help you collect that back to work bonus!" If the NRWIB can get individuals back to work, they will be eligible for the bonus that the Governor has offered. The NRWIB has advertised on billboards to promote the workforce board and encourage people to access their services. There is a large digital billboard advertised on Route 84 and there are some more in the Torrington and Winsted area. The NRWIB is also working through some digital click-through ads in the Danbury region and will be advertising on bus wraps in the rest of the region. The face of the NRWIB's bus wrap campaign will be that of a young man on a career pathway with a great story, and the theme of that campaign will be something along the lines of "I'm on my career pathway, let the workforce board help you get on yours," but the language has not been landed yet. C. Awwad hopes that campaign will help encourage people to return to using the AJC's services to get back to work. C. Awwad thanked all of the Adult Ed partners that were on the call. Earlier in the week, the NRWIB submitted a "Re-think Adult Ed" challenge, and earlier in the year the NRWIB partnered with Adult Ed and submitted for round one. The NRWIB was pleased to make the finals. There were two hundred and fifty applications submitted, and out of ninety-five finalists the NRWIB was one of them. C. Awwad thanked Sue Domanico and the individuals at Ed Advance, who served as the lead grant writers, and C. Awwad is very hopeful that the NRWIB's application will be met



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with success. The application centered around creating a pre-apprenticeship program for manufacturing, embedded as the NRWIB's Adult Ed students work towards completing their GED, they would engage in career pathway training that would be for credit towards their GED, and then lead them into a career in manufacturing. C. Awwad advised the NRWIB's community college partners that Dr. Dresner had been appointed as the new CEO of Naugatuck Valley Community College and Dr. Rourke remained at Northwestern Community College. Both colleges are integral providers of the NRWIB's training programs throughout the region, and C. Awwad thanked them for their partnership and their ability to be flexible to continue to work through the re-opening and the delivery of services to clients.

M. Hayden advised the Board that the NRWIB launched its new website as of Monday, June 7th, 2021. The NRWIB staff worked very hard with the WORX Group to revamp the NRWIB's website www.nrwib.org. The WORX Group did an extremely nice job, they completely re-designed the old website, the new website is much more user-friendly, and the NRWIB is really satisfied with it. M. Hayden encouraged everyone on the call to visit the new website when they have the chance.

C. Awwad thanked the NRWIB team that took a deep dive into helping the WORX Group create the new website, as that was her first true lesson in letting go of a process, and the staff did a wonderful job. The new website contains a staff directory with pictures of all the NRWIB staff members, better explanations of the NRWIB's programs, and is more interactive (such as the CareerPath Manufacturing app to register for the manufacturing program). C. Awwad hopes to add the Next Gen Manufacturing partnership information to the website as well, as the partnership is well underway and the NRWIB is very excited about it. The NRWIB is working with a high-level team of industry partners from manufacturing across the region, mapping out what is needed for talent development and marketing careers in manufacturing. The NRWIB is going to take the lessons learned from the manufacturing partnership, and apply them to begin a Next Gen Healthcare Partnership in late summer/early fall, to have similar conversations and activities that help drive workforce development for the healthcare industry. C. Awwad expressed her appreciation for all of the partners that have assisted with the Next Gen Manufacturing Partnership.

C. Awwad also noted that a new board member, Warren Levy, of Danbury Metal Finishing, Inc., has joined the Board of Directors, and the NRWIB is very happy to have him. C. Awwad expressed that the NRWIB is looking forward to his input, as it continues to address the workforce issues in Danbury.

C. Awwad commended the NRWIB staff, specifically the program and finance staff, for doing a tremendous job. The NRWIB had their first in-person staff meeting since the outbreak of COVID-19, and C. Awwad expressed her enthusiasm to be able to meet in-person again, and to possibly hold the September Board of Directors' meeting in-person as well.



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On behalf of the Board, Chairman G. Pisani also commended the NRWIB staff and the amazing job they have been doing, and commented that their work does not go unnoticed.

17. Financial Report

C. Awwad advised the Board that the financial packet was part of the backup documentation attached to the agenda and directed any questions regarding the report to CFO S. Mertz, who was on the call. C. Awwad informed the Board that the NRWIB is in good shape, and some of the expenses may be prepaid for next year, if the Board had any questions about what seems to be an overage. The financial report was accepted as submitted. No motion necessary.

18. Other Business

For consideration and discussion, C. Awwad advised the Board that the workforce boards are still waiting on the language regarding the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS). It is now understood that it will likely take shape in the implementer bill. The workforce boards are working with the OWS to make sure that all efforts are collective and collaborative across the state. C. Awwad stated that the workforce boards do a really good job, work hard in a very challenging time, and as of late feel vulnerable to some unfair circumstances. They have worked with the OWS and will engage in a state-wide report to look at the entire workforce system in general, not just the workforce boards. The workforce boards' partners are required to participate in taking a hard look at the workforce system in the state of Connecticut and make adjustments for the benefit of the system. The goal is to create a collaborative effort to make sure they are meeting the needs of the residents.

C. Awwad reminded the Board that the NRWIB is always available for questions and tries to be as responsive as possible. There are a number of employers calling every day looking for employees, but unfortunately there is a shortage of employees. This is the reason that the NRWIB will attempt the marketing campaign to get recruits back into the job centers, as this has affected every job industry.

S. Mancini commended C. Awwad on the new NRWIB website and for everything the NRWIB is doing for individuals in the region. S. Mancini thanked C. Awwad for revamping the CASAS testing scores under the revised Basic Skills Assessment Guidelines (item 11b on the agenda), as she believes it is very important that different agencies work together to have some commonality, and not use different criteria when testing students. C. Awwad commented that the workforce board wanted to be in line with the state policy and understood that they needed to use the Goal Series. C. Awwad advised S. Mancini to connect with her should she have any questions pertaining to the revised Basic Skills Assessment Guidelines upon review.

C. Awwad informed the Board that she has asked Commissioner Lehman to consider speaking at the September in-person Board of Directors' meeting, about the economic workforce development climate in the state. Commissioner Lehman responded that he will join the meeting if his availability allows for it. C. Awwad hopes to focus on one or two of the NRWIB's premier programs at the next meeting, so that individuals can see the impact that has been made. C. Awwad will also share some exciting success stories of how the NRWIB has helped move individuals along their career pathways, and onto a better and more secure job. The NRWIB's motto is "First job. Next job. Best job," and C. Awwad will talk about how that impacts people throughout the region, at the September 9th, 2021 meeting.



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C. Awwad also informed the Board that the Waterbury Mayor's office made a financial commitment to a training center in Waterbury to stand up an Introduction to Plastics program. The program graduated its first ten plastics trainees the Friday prior, and C. Awwad believes that by the following week all ten will be gainfully employed. The NRWIB is very excited about the program, has the next class ready to go, and continues to meet the needs of the manufacturing industry. More importantly, the workforce board is excited for the employers in the region, that there is now a facility in the region that can help meet their needs. Along with C. Awwad, Rich Dupont and Evan Berns helped put that program together, and C. Awwad thanked Evan Berns, as he was extremely instrumental in helping review the curriculum. E. Berns had the students visit the Seitz, LLC facility and sent instructors to assist with the instructions. The industry partners stepped up in a very large way, working with the workforce board to make that happen, and the NRWIB is very thankful for their participation and looks forward to their continued success there.

E. Berns thanked C. Awwad, R. Dupont, and everyone else on the team, as he believes the partnership is a game changer for his industry, and the program has been great for his corporation.

Chairman G. Pisani thanked C. Awwad for all that she does and wished everyone on the call a safe and healthy summer season. G. Pisani also thanked the Board of Directors for their commitment, their time, and their dedication, as he believes this is a trying time, and hopes to get through it all together with good will and perseverance.

19. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by J. Wrinn and seconded by W. Pizzuto at 12:53pm. Motion approved.