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Training hub to address LI's shortage of factory workers gets thumbs-up ^[1]

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A proposed training hub to address the shortage of factory workers on Long Island moved a small step closer to reality Monday.

A resolution calling for the establishment of “a regional training facility with an apprenticeship component” to serve local plants was endorsed by a majority of the 22-member Long Island Manufacturing Task Force during a meeting in Hauppauge.

Suffolk Legis. William J. Lindsay III, who co-chairs the task force, said the resolution will be among the recommendations given to the county legislature on ways to strengthen manufacturing. He said the task force will now develop a detailed proposal on the training center.

“This is something that is needed here,” Lindsay said.

Task force co-chair Anne Shybunko-Moore, president of defense contractor GSE Dynamics Inc. in Hauppauge, said the training center isn’t meant to displace existing manufacturing

programs at Suffolk County Community College, Stony Brook University and other schools.

“We aren’t replacing anything,” she said in an interview after the task force meeting.

“We want to create a one-stop shop for manufacturing, where companies can learn about the available resources, train their future employees, and to educate the next generation about the career opportunities available at local manufacturers.”

The proposed Long Island Regional Manufacturing Center is modeled after Buffalo's Northland Workforce Training Center.

Northland, which opened last year, is run by a nonprofit organization. It received \$44 million from the state to pay for construction and equipment to outfit a former factory in a low-income neighborhood.

Northland and the proposed Suffolk facility come in response to a shortage of trained mechanics, engineers, machinists and others to fill manufacturing jobs. Last month 40 percent of manufacturers said their inability to hire skilled workers is the No. 1 factor preventing them from expanding payrolls, according to a statewide survey conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

Before Monday's vote, several task force members representing government agencies expressed concern about long-term funding for the proposed training center.

“Maybe we don’t need to reinvent the wheel, maybe we just need to look to more collaboration” between existing programs, said Cara Longworth, Long Island regional director for Empire State Development, the state’s primary business-aid agency. In the Hudson Valley manufacturing training is centralized at community colleges, she said.

John Lombardo, Suffolk County Community College’s workforce training czar, backed the center, saying, “I like the idea of a hub, one-stop shopping for companies for services. There can be a hub and spoke system with the spokes being training providers.”

Lombardo added: “What attracts companies and keeps companies here is the talent pool.”

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