# OnTECH Charter High School Minutes for May 24, 2017 Board Meeting

The Meeting was held at: White Branch Library, 733 Butternut Street, Syracuse NY

# Present:

Ellen Eagen, Founder & President Stephen Kimatian, Secretary Treasurer Robert Gardino, Trustee

Victoria Girratano

Bill Sanford, Trustee John Stegeman, Trustee

Edward McLaughlin, Foundation Representative Francis Coudriet, Administration

The meeting was called to order at 5:15 PM

# WELCOME

Chairperson of the meeting, Ms. Ellen Eagen, welcomed the Board members and also those community representatives present. She asked Board members to introduce themselves to the community members present. The Chairperson thanked all community members in attendance and told them there would be an opportunity for them to comment, as the Board was very interested in gaining as much community input as possible.

# APPROVAL OF PRIOR MEETING MINUTES

Next order of business was approval of minutes of the April meeting. Prior to the instant meeting, minutes of the April 19, 2017 meeting had been distributed to the Board members. Additional copies were made available at the meeting. A motion by Mr. Sanford and seconded by Mr. Gardino was made to approve the minutes. The Chair asked for any additions, corrections or modifications. There being none, there was a call for the vote and the minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

# PRESIDENT’S REPORT

The President began by presenting a quote from the New York Times which she pointed out reflected the mission of OnTECH. She explained that considerable thought had gone into the design of the curriculum of OnTECH, taking advantage of the latest thinking on neuroscience and the way young adults learn best. She said that the meeting would return to that subject in the discussion of curriculum.

With respect to securing a Directors & Omissions policy, the Chairperson reported that she expected to receive another competitive bid one within two weeks. She reported that advancement had been made in the processing of the OnTECH applications to the State and federal government to enable receipt of grant monies. Ed Riley of Brine Wells had also convened a meeting with an individual with grant writing expertise. There are possibilities she said of collaborative grants with On Point for College, the Southwest Community Center, Onondaga Community College and others. Once the cost structure for the renovations was defined, OnTECH would be able to effectively strategize the grant applications.

The Chairperson then recognized Joyce Macknight, a realtor from Pyramid Reality in attendance at the meeting. She said that Ms. Macknight was the realtor for OnTECH who undertook a diligent search for the best location for the school. For a year and one half Ms. Macknight brought dozens of possibilities to the OnTECH Board, which ultimately culminated in selection of the 484 W. Onondaga Street site. The Chairperson publicly thanked Ms. Macknight for her work on behalf of OnTECH. The chosen site is strategically located in a city of the Syracuse economic development zone on the Near West Side. The location provides access for students from the Southside, Northside, Near West Side and is accessible through public transportation from all areas of the city.

At this time, the Chairperson asked the Board for approval to move the curriculum discussion on the agenda up to the present point in the meeting. She explained that a major purpose of having community members present was to gain input on how the school could continue to evolve to serve the interests of the students of Syracuse.

In unanimous verbal assent by the Board, the agenda item of Educational Programming was moved up to be the next agenda item.

**4. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING**

The Chairman then addressed Curriculum as the next order of business. She first read a quote projected on the screen from Stanford University that supported a PBL (Project Based Learning) based curriculum. She explained that was the approach being taken by OnTECH. The Chairman then spoke about the building that the OnTECH would be housed in dating back to 1893 when it was a location for horse drawn carriages. Though that was modern for the time, the mode of travel went through a revolution with the advent of motor vehicles. She pointed out that our educational system is in many ways still structured on a 19th century model of instruction. To insure the most effective approach to teaching, she said the OnTECH approach was Project Based Learning where the teaching would incorporate the subject matter being taught using a very specific hands on approach. She further explained that the anticipated student body would be those over age and under-credited individuals who might be 17 but reading at a 6th grade level. This student group would include those students “at risk” of dropping out and also those needing greater proficiency in the English language.

She also showed those attending the front page of a Wall Street Journal special section devoted to high tech urban farming and how that was making a great impact in many cities. Board member Kimatian also mentioned an article on a hydroponic farm of 40 acres near Monroe, New York.

At this time in the meeting the Chairperson recognized community members to speak and express their opinions. Among some of the relevant comments were the following.

* One community member asked whether the money for the charter schools came from the public schools. The Chairperson explained that both a charter was a public school and that while money did come per pupil, ONTECH expected to recruit students who were not in school at the moment and the money for those students would not be coming from the school district.
* There was also a question on why farming was a focus of the curriculum. The Chairperson responded that agriculture and agribusiness were undergoing explosive growth in the demand to provide enough food to feed the world and that agriculture was the largest Upstate industry. As such there was the need for many jobs with technical skills based on chemistry, biology and botany, as well as the mechanical skills needed to run and service equipment.
* Another person said he came to American to study things other than farming. Board member Mr. Gardino asked the person if it wasn’t true that he came to the America for its freedoms. He replied, yes. Mr. Gardino then said, that is what you are free to do, choose the area of study that suits you. No one is forced to attend OnTECH. It is a school of choice.
* One person said he came to America and wanted to be a lawyer. The Chairperson responded saying that was a wonderful goal. She said that there seems to be a misunderstanding by some in attendance in knowing that enrolling in OnTECH was a matter of choice and that a student graduating from OnTECH would also be prepared to continue in their education to college.
* Another individual wanted to know why “at risk” students and New Americans were indicated as potential students who might want to attend OnTECH. In reply, the Chairperson explained that in many cases “at risk” students needed remediation in English language and other basic skills. Likewise, many New Americans needed intensive focus on English language to establish the basic foundation for learning. She also said that anyone wanting to know about the school could go to the OnTECH website, [www.ontechcharter.com](http://www.ontechcharter.com), which has a record of all meetings and information about the school. In addition, anyone having a question can make an online inquiry and will receive a response.
* One community member said she had not know about OnTECH and was just finding out now and wanted to know why. Board member Mr. Kimatian replied saying that OnTECH had several community meetings over the last two years, that information in the form of flyers and posters were placed at key locations around the Northside as well as elsewhere in the Syracuse community. In addition, he said that there were many interviews given by the OnTECH Chairperson on television and radio talking about the school and advising anyone interested to get in touch.
* Another community member wanted to know if OnTECH was pushing kids out of the district schools. The Chairperson responded saying in no way was OnTECH looking recruit anyone from a district school that was not directly interested in the OnTECH educational offering and that there was no outreach to that effect.
* Some members of the community in attendance said they liked a school like OnTECH and others said they preferred not to attend a school like OnTECH. Once again all were informed that OnTECH was a school of choice.

To keep the discussion on track, Board member Sanford took the floor to ask everyone in attendance to put the school in the perspective of being one of the many educational offerings available to the students of Syracuse. He said that OnTECH has been through a thorough review by the Charter School Office of the New York State Education Department.

Sanford said some things are certain. The charter is approved and the school will open. He suggested that comments should be constructive toward the development of the curriculum of the school and providing useful community input that would be of value to the operation of the school.

Cyprien Mihigo, a community member who had attended many development meetings of OnTECH said that he knows many members of the New American community who very much like the idea of a school focusing on agriculture and that in his opinion OnTECH has a lot to offer.

Ms. Getahun, a community member who had attended several OnTECH meetings over the last two years asked for the floor to speak with those in attendance. She said that agriculture encompasses a large population of workers, many of whom are retiring. She further said that the industry included many exciting technical jobs, such as those researching and developing new equipment for agricultural use, or the use of drones to take pictures and gather data. She said there are many sciences involved in the industry of agribusiness and all those present can make their own decision to pick the educational path of what they want to do. She felt OnTECH offers a great opportunity. In discussing and making comments, Ms. Escobar urged that all be respectful of each other.

One community member said that he had spoken to some New Americans who said they did not want a school focused on agriculture. Board member Kimatian reminded him that OnTECH is a school of choice and, though the individual had spoken with some members from the New American community who expressed that to him, there were many other New Americans who expressed the opposite opinion. Board member Kimatian stated that the Board welcomed his comments, but that they represented only a small segment of over 12,000 New Americans who had settled in Syracuse community over the last several years. The community member said there were over 44,000 New Americans in Syracuse.

# FINANCIAL REPORT

The meeting then moved to the Secretary/Treasurer’s report on the progress of the applications to establish the financial relationship with the State and Federal governments. He was pleased to report that all necessary data and information needed for the applications had been forwarded to the company retained by OnTECH to file the applications. Once filed, the applications would be reviewed by Grants Gateway of the State and SAM.gov of the federal government. He stated that OnTECH was also in the process of obtaining its 501(c)(3) exemption.

# FACILITIES REPORT

# The Chairperson reported that the King + King architectural plans had been finalized and had

# been forwarded to the Brine Wells, the developer, who had then put them out for bid to

# construction companies. The bids were expected back within the next three weeks. That cost

# information would form the basis for the financial needs for the renovation of the 484 W.

# Onondaga Street, building.

# 6. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

# The subject of educational programming was discussed during the Chairperson’s report.

# 7. NEW BUSINESS

# There being no new business before the Board and since it was close to the 7:00 PM closing time

# of the White Branch Library, the location of this meeting, the Board moved on to adjournment.

# 8. ADOURNMENT

# A motion was made to that effect by Mr. Gardino and seconded by Mr. Stegeman. There

# being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 7:05 PM.