# OnTECH Charter High School Minutes for July 19, 2017 Board Meeting

The Meeting was held at: North Side Learning Center, 501 Park Street, Syracuse, NY 13203

# Present:

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

Victoria Girratano, Trustee (excused)

Bill Sanford, Trustee

John Stegeman,Trustee

Edward McLaughlin,

Foundation Representative

Francis Coudriet, Administration

**Excused:**

 Robert Gardino

The meeting was called to order at 5:20 PM

# WELCOME

# The President chaired the meeting and began by stating that the meetings were public and that anyone who desired to attend was certainly welcome. She asked the Board members present to introduce themselves. \*

# 2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MEETING OF JUNE 22, 2017

# For the first order of business, the Chairperson asked for approval of the minutes previously distributed to the Board members prior to the meeting. A motion was made by Trustee Stegeman and seconded by Trustee Kimatian for approval. The Chairperson asked whether there was any discussion. There being none the Board voted unanimously voted to approve the minutes as presented.

# 3. PRESIDENT’S REPORT

# The Chairperson said since the last meeting she had met with the representatives of the West Onondaga Street Association (“WOSA”) to give them an update on the OnTECH planning. WOSA is interested in the progress of the school as they are an association concerned with the improvement of the West Onondaga Street corridor, the site of the school. They are currently considering a rebranding of their association to better reflect their goals to improve the neighborhood. The Chairperson reported they expressed great enthusiasm for OnTECH and said it was a significant event for the neighborhood. The Chairperson reported that she had met with the Consultant for developing the pre-opening plans for OnTECH. Ahmad Duwaik. She said he was working diligently on the curriculum and would be reporting to the Board. The Chairperson further reported she was invited to attend a rezoning meeting at the Southwest Community Center Association in conjunction with Jubilee Homes and was introduced to and welcomed by community members. She said the SWCCA representatives present expressed support for the school.

# 4. BOARD DEVELOPMENT

# On the next order of business, the Chairperson stated that the longer term goal of the Board was to increase the number on the board and particularly have representation of different professional skills and community members. The steps for consideration for Board membership were being posted on the school website.

# A person who had fulfilled the conditions precedent to being a Board member was Eskedar Getahun. At a previous meeting she had been presented to the Board. Prior to this meeting a group of Trustees met and spoke with her and found her credentials to be outstanding. She was then asked by the Chairperson whether she would like to speak prior to Board consideration of her membership. She indicated that she would like to and told the Board that in addition to her academic accomplishments she worked with youth programming, was employed by the Cornell Cooperative Extension and she felt that being on the Board would be an excellent community activity. Trustee Kimatian moved to place her name in nomination to be a Board member subject to the necessary steps (fingerprinting, financial disclosure form etc.) that need to be taken as required by the New York State Charter office. The motion was seconded by Trustee Sanford. The Chairperson asked if there was any further discussion. There being none, the Board voted on the motion and it was carried unanimously. The Chairperson asked Ms. Getahun to complete the application required by the Charter School Office. Upon review of the package, a resolution presenting Ms. Getahun to the Charter School Office would be adopted accordingly.

# The second piece of business considered was the scheduling of a potential student focus group to be held by Trustee Stegeman. He explained that it would be helpful to gather information on the interests of students with respect to OnTECH and he said a meeting would be scheduled over the next two weeks at a location to be determined. He said the meeting would be given public notice by posting on the school website. The information gathered would be presented to the Board.

# 5. FINANCIAL REPORT

# The Chairperson called upon Trustee Kimatian to present the financial report. Trustee Kimatian reported that the filing had been completed to date for registration with the New York State Grants Gateway site. OnTECH was working with CSBM (Charter School Business Management) on this application. This would allow for payments from various agencies to be made to OnTECH through the approved State site. The Treasurer also stated that the application for a grant had been submitted to the Regional Economic Development Corporation through the offices of Brine Wells, the developer of the school’s location site. Preparations were also being made to submit a proposal for monies from Governor Cuomo’s Urban Revitalization Initiative (”URI”) for the Central New York Region. He stated that the URI named agribusiness as one of the five most important industries of focus for state money and support, particularly controlled environment agriculture, which is one of the key elements of the curriculum for OnTECH. In going forward, OnTECH students would be in the direct path of the State’s economic initiatives. The Chairperson asked for approval of the financial report. A motion was made by Trustee Stegeman for approval of the report and seconded by Trustee Sanford. There being no further discussion, the motion was voted on and carried unanimously.

# 6. EDUCATION & CURRICULUM

# The Chairperson next reported on curriculum developments by the State Education Department.

# The State was reviewing the possibility of a Regents diploma allowing for a Regent’s

# examination based on a pathway to mastery of business and life skills which would fulfill one of

# the Regent’s requirements. This approach was being presented to the New York State Education

# Department to determine whether it would fulfill mastery skills. The Chairperson stated that the

# approach being taken here fit the Project Based Learning instruction of OnTECH. She further

# explained that OnTECH would start small and then build out over four years at the same time

# increasing the staff. She thanked Morgan Boerman for putting her in touch with the Bowne

# School and Connecticut schools for reference as city schools having an agriculture curriculum.

# A community representative at that time asked whether meetings could be held in one location

# and whether that could be on the Northside of the city. The Chairperson stated that the purpose of

# having the OnTECH meetings at various locations in the city was to allow for those in the nearby

# neighborhoods to the meetings to have access to the meetings easily. She said, for example, there

# was great enthusiasm in the Southside for what OnTECH was offering and they wanted to the

# opportunity to know more. She said that when the school is in operation, they would be able to

# hold meetings at the school. The community representative followed-up with the point that about

# 60% of the New Americans resided in the Northside. In response, the Chairperson said that

# OnTECH was for all students, particularly those “at risk” or who struggled in traditional school environments, not just for New Americans.

# 7. FACILITIES

# Trustee Kimatian then gave an update on the progress of the school facilities. He reported that

# the developer had sought an estimate for construction from a second contractor to have

# competitive bids. They have been given the target price point for what the cost has to come in

# under in order to do the build. We are still on schedule with breaking ground this fall.

# 8. ADJOURNMENT

# There being no new business, the Board opened up to community questions.

# The Board entertained questions from community representatives present.

# One community member asked when the school would open. The Chairperson responded that it would open in September 2018.

# In response to a question about the student focus group to be held, Trustee Stegeman explained how that would be done and informed the group all were invited.

# A community member questioned why “farming” would be taught. Trustee Kimatian explained that agriculture was one of the five key industries in Governor Cuomo’s Urban Revitalization Initiative determined to be of prime importance for state investment. He further stated agriculture was the largest industry in Upstate New York and there was a growing challenge to feed the world in which Syracuse could play an important. This was particularly true in controlled environment agriculture into which the State would be investing many millions of dollars. This area of the agriculture industry would be offering many job opportunities in the future.

# One community member asked if they could appoint OnTECH Board members. The Chairperson stated that while that would not be the procedure, they could certainly be a part of an advisory group. She also explained that there was a procedure for those who might want to join the Board posted on the OnTECH website.

# A question was raised by a community member on the age of students. The Chairperson explained that they would be of traditional high school age, but may not be reading at their age level. OnTECH was prepared to do extensive remediation to bring that student’s reading up to grade level. However, under New York State law, a student would age out of public school at age 21. She stated that OnTECH was working with other educational organizations for a transition for a student in that circumstance to enable the completion of high school or its equivalent.

# Another question was whether teachers would be certified. The Chairperson explained that all teachers would be certified except for those particular purposes allowed by the State Education Department to hire someone with special skills who might not be certified. Charter Schools are allowed a limited number of uncertified teachers.

# A question was raised on ENL (English as a New Language) instruction. The Chairperson said that all the New York State regulations would apply in the hire of ENL staff. There is a plan to serve this population and OnTECH is taking the necessary steps to effectively teach this curriculum.

# Another wanted to know if the school would be leasing its facilities. Trustee Kimatian said “yes” it would.

# A question was raised by a representative of the community, who represented he was not a New American, whether New American parents were equipped to decide whether their children should attend OnTECH, stating that parents were often confused about such decisions. A New American in attendance at the meeting challenged this statement saying that the New American parents, after discussions with their children and other inputs from the school and other members of the New American community were well equipped to make such a decision.

# The Chairperson stated that every parent would be furnished substantial information about the school and its curriculum sufficient to make an intelligent choice. In the end, she stated, applying to OnTECH was by choice and no one had to attend it they did not want to do so.

# Another asked if the board meeting could take place on the North side every month. The Chairperson stated that the purpose of moving around the city was to interface and engage all members of the City.

# A motion was made by Trustee Kimatian to adjourn, seconded by Trustee Stegeman. There

# being no further discussion, there was a unanimous vote to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 PM,

# at which time several of the Board members continued individual discussions with the

# community members in attendance.

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# \* Immediately prior to the meeting, the President stated to the community members present that within the last 24 hours she had received an email on the school website requesting a Somali interpreter be present at the meeting. She asked if the person asking for the translator was present. No one responded. She said based on that request she made an inquiry for a Somali interpreter to the local courts and to Catholic Charities. She also asked those she knew in the New American community. She said a Somali interpreter was present. After some discussion, certain representatives of the Somali community present told the interpreter that they did not understand him and the interpreter ended up leaving. Upon further information after the meeting, the President was informed by a Somali member present that the interpreter could have provided the service requested but that he was inhibited by the individuals in the room who questioned his language skills.