



Meeting of the Board of Trustees

Minutes for August 16, 2017

The Meeting was held at: Southwest Community Center, 401 South Ave., Syracuse, NY 13204

Present:

Ellen Eagen, Founder & President
Stephen Kimatian, Sec/Treas
Victoria Giarratano, Trustee
John Stegeman, Trustee
Francis Coudriet, Administration

Excused:

Robert Gardino, Trustee
Bill Sanford, Trustee

The meeting was called to order at 5:10 PM

1. WELCOME

Trustee John Stegeman chaired the meeting. He thanked Sharon Owens and the Southwest Community Center for allowing OnTECH to hold the meeting in their space. He welcomed those attending as community representatives. For the manner in which the meeting would be conducted, he said the Board would take care of the business part of the meeting first and then have time for questions after from any attendees. Cards were provided to the community on which they could record their questions. He said that it would be appreciated if those who had questions would bring them up after the business portion of the meeting.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MEETING OF July 19, 2017

The Chairperson stated the minutes had been distributed prior to the meeting. The Secretary asked whether there were any additions, changes or modifications. If not, the Secretary stated they could be accepted as presented. The Chairperson ask the members if they had any changes. There being none, he said they were accepted as presented.

3. PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The President, Ellen Eagen, reported that it had been a productive month. There were meetings with the developer of the school site, with those building the curriculum and the community, all of which would be reported on during this meeting. She said that anyone wanting to know more about OnTECH should visit the website as it contained a lot of information. She said Board members should direct people who are interested to the site. She credited, Fran Coudreit, the



OnTECH administrator for the design and keeping the website up to date regarding most recent minutes, announcements and progress of the school. Ms. Eagen took a moment to demonstrate how the website worked and how the public could navigate the site.

4. FINANCIAL REPORT

Ms. Ellen Eagen, reported that work was currently being done by OnTECH counsel to have OnTECH designated with 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. She said up to this time, during the application period and for the initial work, she had funded the school with contributions to the Sustainable Sciences and Technology Foundation and also directly. At this point in time, however, the school would need to have an infusion of additional monies in order to carry business forward. She said that she was prepared to loan the money to the school and asked the Board members if that was a satisfactory approach. She said that OnTECH had been approved for a federal CSP funding in the amount of \$800,000. However, she said that there would be a period of time before OnTECH received the money. As such, bridge monies were needed and that was the purpose of her loan. The Board members agreed to this proposal and a motion was made by Trustee Giarratano and seconded by Trustee Kimatian to accept a loan of up to \$20,000 from Ms. Eagen and have that memorialized in an agreement that would be presented and voted upon by the Board at the next meeting. Upon call for the vote by the Chairperson, it was unanimously agreed to take this step.

Treasurer Kimatian further reported that the developer of the 484 West Onondaga Street site had submitted a request for a grant from the Regional Economic Development Corporation (REDC) by the July 28 due date. In addition to the expectation of that grant, a submission was also being made for Upstate Revitalization Initiative (URI) monies. He stated that the objectives of OnTECH very closely married with that of the URI. For example, agribusiness was one of the five key industries targeted, which was a part of the OnTECH curriculum, it addressed the issue of “at risk” students, an important part of the city’s educational need, it was located in a designated economic poverty zone, where it would help to rebuild the area, it provided over 70 new jobs, a goal of the URI, and the location of the school would potentially rejuvenate the whole several block area of Onondaga Commons, an objective of the URI.

Trustee Giarratano asked about the match for the URI grant. Mr. Kimatian said the developer was working that out. Potentially, because of the location of the school at that site, the whole of Onondaga Commons would be fully leased, leveraging an increase of many jobs to the city, plus all the other factors contributing to the URI.

Chairman Stegeman asked whether the loan was connected to our not being a 501(c)(3) at the moment. He also asked whether we should be raising money. Ms. Eagen replied that the previous monies contributed were to the Foundation which was a 501(c)(3) and used for the school. She further stated that all monies going to the charter had to be accounted for in our reports. As to whether we should be raising money, there was one concern in that we did not want to directly compete with other local charitable institutions. Foundations that had education



as a mission, such as the Rothenberg Foundation which had expressed interest in OnTECH, were the kind of contributions we would seek.

Trustee Giarratano said that the process of the REDC sometimes was slow. She also said that we could sit in on their meetings as they were public. She also said that we should target contributions from private sources. One question she had was whether our developer was working under a PLA for employee. Trustee Kimatian said that was a good question. He stated it was his belief that there was no PLA involved, but he would inquire and report back.

5. FACILITIES

Trustee Kimatian said that the developer was proceeding with vetting the site for the renovation. Aside from the submission of the grants referred to in the Financial Report above, the developer had discussions with Syracuse city administration with respect to zoning and traffic, as well as with the community association representatives in the neighborhood.

Ms. Eagen said that she had connected the developer to a D.C. company called Building Hope. She had worked with Building Hope extensively in other charter school situations in NYC. They were extremely knowledgeable about charters and had built many around the country. The developer, Ed Riley, was very appreciative for their connection and the opportunity to gain their opinion and expertise on the OnTECH project. They spoke on a teleconference and the developer sent estimated costs of the renovation for their review and input.

6. CURRICULUM

The President stated that the curriculum development was making excellent progress. The person retained by the Board, Ahmad Duwaik, was reviewing the possibilities in an innovative way. Given that the students would be entering with different levels of skill sets, potentially at different times during the year, he was looking at a flexible approach that would be tailored to each student, predicted on their ability to achieve mastery of a particular discipline. The curriculum taught would be within the Project Based Learning context which lends itself to individualized instruction.

Students would be placed in different clusters. Those admitted later in the year would be able to catch up by meeting mastery levels. A student would not be restricted by the pace of other students. The President said she was very excited about this approach and as the curriculum developed would keep the Board apprised. She noted that Mr. Duwaik had been involved in drafting the curriculum as part of the application and had been working during the summer on OnTECH curriculum but in fact is not officially an independent contractor with the School until September 1. The Board would receive their first official report during the September meeting.

Trustee Stegeman, who is involved in the independent school community, said that independent schools are rethinking how they are assessing students. He said that in completing the OnTECH curriculum, we should be cognizant of how the outcomes would be viewed by colleges. He said



one obstacle is that colleges don't have an easy way to assess graduates from a school that uses unique benchmarks. He suggested that one way of thinking about it is that colleges need to have a grouping of schools, say 80 or so, that conform to some approach that the colleges can recognize for comparison. He referenced the Mastery Transcript Consortium <http://www.mastery.org/faqs/> - a movement in the independent school community that is rethinking the high school transcript and this concept of mastery. Ms. Eagen thanked him for this contribution. She said she went to a workshop launching of this consortium at the National Association of Independent Schools conference two years ago in San Francisco, and it made a good deal of sense for us to revisit this approach in creating a best practice for OnTECH.

The conversation segued to a discussion of New York State's CDOS option (Career Development Occupational Studies) which contemplates a mastery approach and has an established outcome by New York State. Ms. Eagen mentioned that Mr. Duwaik will be contemplating all of these factors as we develop the curriculum.

In connection with curriculum, Ms. Eagen introduced Ms. Theresa Spain, who was formerly with the Cornell Cooperative Extension in Onondaga County, and had reached out to Ms. Eagen over a year ago when the first story about OnTECH had appeared in the local news. Ms. Eagen said Ms. Spain has been a wealth of information. Theresa ran a farm with horses and crops. The students were subsidized in the summer by Cornell University. She also worked with Elephants and moved to Syracuse when the Elephants were moved to Syracuse. She then got her certification to teach and taught at Fowler High School in the City of Syracuse and in the Lafayette School District. Theresa said that the Tully School District is the only one connected to the FFA (Future Farmers of America) and the 4H. Through a workforce development grant, Theresa said she taught veterans how to work in agriculture.

Trustee Giarratano said that 4H curriculum uses a project-based learning approach. She said 4H teaches the science and engineering behind agriculture. She further said that 4H is the dominant youth development organization across the world. It is the only organization of its kind supported by the federal government. She said studies have shown that caring for animals has been connected to building parenting and social skills.

Ms. Eagen then related a meeting she and Mr. Kimatian had with the Department Head for Radio, Television and Film at Syracuse University's Newhouse School, Michael Schoonmaker. She explained that Professor Schoonmaker has done extensive research in how video can be used as a teaching tool in the classrooms. It can be used in conjunction with teaching any course, whether English, science or mathematics. Schoonmaker's most recent book on this subject is "How to Unlock Your Movie Making Mind." This approach to teaching is now a course for Newhouse students in conjunction with the Education Department and Professor Schoonmaker said Newhouse could plan to have a student do an internship with OnTECH and apply the principles of teaching using video. Also at the meeting was Vaughn Schoonmaker, a graduate of Newhouse who had left a job with MTV to become a consultant for charter schools in New



Orleans, Louisiana. He helps schools create a media presence with social media and said he would be glad to help OnTECH.

7. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

As a result of a discussion at the previous Board meeting, the Trustees agreed to have an open meeting for students who would like to learn more about OnTECH and provide input. The meeting was held at White Branch Library. Board members Stegeman and Eagen and prospective Board Member, Eskedar Getahun were present. At the request of the Board, Ms. Getahun provided some details of the meetings:

In attendance were eight youth and five adults. Some of the comments and themes that came up were the following.

- A 19 year old who was not good in English stated a language barrier prevented him from attending school and felt it was best to go out of state.
- One person suggested that OnTECH have ambassadors to the community.
- Another asked how OnTECH would deal with the multiple languages. Ms. Eagen responded by saying students would be individually separated on ability, not necessarily age, and the language barrier would be the first thing that would be addressed.
- Robert spoke about students in their late teens who wanted to learn English but who have no traditional avenue of support.
- Cyprien Mihigo spoke of the need for community advocates from the various ethnicities.
- One person mentioned there is a wariness of organizations and whether they have the true interests of the New Americans at heart.
- There were questions on how the lottery would work.
- There was a question on whether teachers needed to be certified.
- One person said she wished there would be continued meetings like this.

Ms. Getahun said the attendees at the White Branch meeting were truly interested in OnTECH. Because there were no disruptions, they were able to focus on the answers to the questions and positive outcomes.

Some at the meeting did express concern about getting into OnTECH. On the issue of those who were 18-24 and who might age out or who were already aged out of public school, Ms. Eagen said there could be ways to address that problem with a separate entity.

Trustee Kimatian pointed out that the Albany public school district had started a school just for New Americans because of the inherent issues they faced integrating within the traditional school system. The news report in the Albany Times-Union stated that the school was met with great enthusiasm by the New Americans and the plans are to continue into a second year with increased student population. Ms. Eagen said that there are some legal concerns about schools that focus on only immigrants and she reinforced that OnTECH is for all students but would have a program that some could benefit new Americans as well as non-traditional learners.



Thomas (a leader in the Liberian community) had asked to meet with Ms. Eagen. She reported that he is very supportive of OnTECH and feels it will play an important role in the New American community, but some in community need to understand more how it will help them.

Ms. Eagen reported on a good meeting with the President and lawyer for WOSA (West Onondaga Street Association) who expressed optimism on how OnTECH would be a positive impact for the entire neighborhood.

Eskedar Getahun told the Board that she was putting together her application for submission to the Charter School Office.

Theresa mentioned that OnTECH should connect with the Syracuse School District. Ms. Eagen said that she had a favorable meeting with the current Superintendent. While there are probably political reasons for his not giving written support to the greater community, he seems to be impressed with the work OnTECH is doing. His predecessor Superintendent had given OnTECH a written letter of support.

8. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, the Chairperson asked for motion to adjourn. Trustee Giarratano moved and Trustee Kimatian seconded. The Board voted unanimously to adjourn.