

APPROVED



## City on a Hill Charter Public School

### Minutes

#### September 2023 Board Meeting

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##### **Date and Time**

Tuesday September 26, 2023 at 5:00 PM

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This meeting took place remotely pursuant to a supplemental budget bill which, among other things, extends the temporary provisions pertaining to the Open Meeting Law to March 31, 2025 signed into law by Governor Healey on March 29, 2023. The meeting was held via Zoom at <https://cityonahill-org.zoom.us/j/81315100800>.

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##### **Trustees Present**

Alekz Hirschmann (remote), Brooke Fincke (remote), Danielle Canty (remote), Edelyn Contreras (remote), Kimberley Thai Small (remote), Melisa Lemire (remote), Ted Gildea (remote)

##### **Trustees Absent**

Andres Tejeda Soto, Jacqueline Bennett, Michelle Allwood

##### **Trustees who left before the meeting adjourned**

Melisa Lemire

##### **Ex Officio Members Present**

Sonya Pratt (remote)

##### **Non Voting Members Present**

Sonya Pratt (remote)

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## Guests Present

Asha Ibrahim (remote), Cynthia Marie (remote), Jordan Lopez (remote)

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## I. Opening Items

### A. Record Attendance

### B. Call the Meeting to Order

Melisa Lemire called a meeting of the board of trustees of City on a Hill Charter Public School to order on Tuesday Sep 26, 2023 at 5:04 PM.

### C. Approve June 2023 Meeting Minutes

Ted Gildea made a motion to approve the minutes from June 2023 June 2023 Board Meeting on 06-21-23.

Alekz Hirschmann seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

#### Roll Call

Andres Tejeda Soto	Absent
Kimberley Thai Small	Aye
Edelyn Contreras	Aye
Melisa Lemire	Aye
Jacqueline Bennett	Absent
Danielle Canty	Aye
Ted Gildea	Aye
Brooke Fincke	Aye
Alekz Hirschmann	Aye
Michelle Allwood	Absent

### D. Approve August 2023 Meeting Minutes

Ted Gildea made a motion to approve the minutes from August 2023 August 2023 Board Retreat on 08-29-23.

Alekz Hirschmann seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

#### Roll Call

Brooke Fincke	Aye
Danielle Canty	Aye
Edelyn Contreras	Aye
Michelle Allwood	Absent
Melisa Lemire	Aye
Andres Tejeda Soto	Absent
Kimberley Thai Small	Aye

**Roll Call**

Jacqueline Bennett	Absent
Ted Gildea	Aye
Alekz Hirschmann	Aye

**II. School Year 2023-2024 Updates**

**A. School Year 2023-2024 Kickoff Updates**

Melisa Lemire, Chair, thanked the Board for their presence, and directed their attention to the agenda for the meeting. After a brief overview of planned topics, she presented Sonya Pratt, Executive Director, to provide initial updates on the start of School Year 2023-2024.

Pratt confirmed that City on a Hill has been back to school for almost a month, as the School's academic year begins in August, and that the first few weeks have been positive. She noted that the School is continuing to work through its lottery, enrollment and transfer process, and will likely continue to bring in students through the first several months of school. She noted that the School also has several open positions for which City on a Hill is still recruiting, but confirmed that the key role of Director of Special Education that had recently become vacant had been filled with a new staff member who has previous experience in both charter and traditional public schools. She noted that other currently posted roles are intended to provide additional support to departments currently staffed primarily by new teachers.

Next, Pratt shared that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) recently requested to speak with School and Board leadership related to the School's 2023 Accountability Report, which is an annual public report detailing the School's progress to meeting key accountability indicators and was recently released. Pratt and Lemire shared that the discussion was an opportunity for the School to highlight the work that has been done to improve results, as well as key context for City on a Hill's interpretation of the results. Pratt listed concerns as the the School's most recent Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), particularly math, which saw losses compared to previous administrations and the School's engagement (4-year graduation) rate. Pratt shared that the MCAS trends were at odds with the School's other standardized testing results, which showed via the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) MAP Growth Test that students were experiencing growth. Additionally, she shared that while the School's 4-year graduation rate received a low rating, the School's overall graduation rate received the highest possible rating.

Pratt shared that following receipt of these results, the academic leaders reviewed all available data, including Lexile levels of incoming students, which showed that the majority of students were entering City on a Hill with elementary-level reading comprehension. She and Lemire then explained that they brought this data point, among others, to that meeting as they believe it addresses both concerns. Pratt clarified that the

MCAS measures achievement, or a student's mastery of specific content, whereas MAP measures growth, or a student's improvement over time. Given this, the School believes that the disparity in results supports the idea that while the School is seeing improvement on academic results, students are not yet performing on grade-level on MCAS as they have come in to City on a Hill multiple levels under.

Pratt also noted this as the reasoning as to why City on a Hill's 4-year graduation rate is low, as the School would rather retain a student for a 5th year to ensure that they meet the graduation standards, rather than socially promote/graduate the students without demonstration of content mastery. She noted that this trend is also related to the School's recent charter amendment to accept 10th grade students, as many of those students are also coming in with elementary-level mastery.

Board members briefly discussed the information shared by Lemire and Pratt, and those familiar with MCAS results underlined that learning loss from the Pandemic has also effected schools across the Commonwealth and with few exceptions, schools saw declines. Pratt agreed that it is a shared issue, but also noted that regardless of the root cause, City on a Hill still must improve. She also noted that the Academic Excellence Committee will also have a deep-dive with Pratt, as well as the School's Principal and Chief Academic Officer.

### **III. Finance Updates & Discussion**

#### **A. General School Financials Update**

Pratt then thanked the Board for their engagement, and noted that Cynthia Marie, CEO of CentralSource, was present to present the School's most recent financials. She noted that generally both the finalized, unaudited Fiscal Year 2022-23 (FY23) and Year-to-Date (FY24) results demonstrate that City on a Hill remains in a strong financial position.

Marie directed the attention of the board to the FY23 results, noting that it had a large closing due to the Circuit Street mortgage's \$4.3m balloon payment which came due on June 30, 2023. She reminded the Board that the City on a Hill Foundation ("Foundation") owns the Circuit Street building, and entered into refinancing with the support of the School. The Foundation and School together paid off the \$4.3m, and refinanced the remaining \$2.5m over 10 years. She also noted that the School's contribution towards the balloon payment constitutes as pre-paid rent to the Foundation.

Marie then turned to the FY24 Year-to-Date results, including both Budget vs Actuals and the Statement of Activity, and noted that while the financials available only account for the initial two months of the fiscal year, the School's enrollment is currently above the School's budgeted number, which will positively impact the School's budget. She noted that the School has retained a small surplus in the past several years, and following discussion with Leadership the current recommendation would be to budget those funds for roof and general building repairs.

Board members then inquired about the long-term financial impact of the School's commitment to ensuring mastery rather than social promotion/graduation which was discussed in the last session. Pratt explained that while the School does take on the costs of serving the student for an additional year, the School is allocated normal tuition for any student enrolled under the age of 22, regardless of their grade level or number of years at the School.

Ted Gildea, Vice Chair and Treasurer, also asked Marie to confirm that the School continues to not carry any debt or utilize its \$300,000 line of credit through FirstBank. Marie confirmed that this remains true. Board members then inquired if there were any requirements on how often the credit line must be paid down, and Pratt confirmed that while there is not, the School has not utilized it in several years and has no plans to do so.

**B. Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Audit Update**

Pratt and Marie then confirmed that the FY23 Audit had begun at the end of the summer, and that the Finance Committee would be reviewing it for feedback and recommendation before the Board's October 2023 Board Meeting. Marie shared that the audit, which is being performed by Daniel Dennis, is going positively and the School expects an initial report within the week. She also noted that separate from the auditor's report, she will also be bringing additional discussion points on the long-term financial strategy of the School to discuss further.

**C. Vote to Approve the FY24 Fiscal Policies and Procedures**

Jordan Pina, Chief Operating Officer, then presented the School's updated FY24 Fiscal Policies and Procedures. Pina shared that while the Board had recently reviewed an updated the School's Fiscal Policies and Procedures in spring 2023 following CentralSource's recommended updates, the School had additional minor changes. She noted these as updating title changes following role shifts, and adding Chief Academic Officer as a role eligible to receive a School credit card.

Ted Gildea made a motion to approve the Fiscal Year 2023-24 Fiscal Policies and Procedures.

Melisa Lemire seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

**Roll Call**

Michelle Allwood	Absent
Brooke Fincke	Aye
Jacqueline Bennett	Absent
Edelyn Contreras	Aye
Melisa Lemire	Aye
Ted Gildea	Aye
Andres Tejeda Soto	Absent

**Roll Call**

Kimberley Thai Small Aye

Alekz Hirschmann Aye

Danielle Canty Aye

Melisa Lemire, Chair, then announced she would need to leave this meeting early, and

Ted Gildea, Vice Chair, began acting as the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

Melisa Lemire left.

**IV. School Year 2023-24 Organizational Goals & Board Calendar**

**A. School Year 2023-2024 Goals**

Gildea then directed the attention of the Board to the School Year 2023-24 Goals. Pratt noted that while the School is still working with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to update City on a Hill's Academic Action Plan, she believes that given the positive results related to last year's plan, that most goals would remain relatively similar in structure while raising the bar. She noted the currently proposed goals as:

- 70% of students will meet or exceed expected growth on English Language Arts (ELA), Reading, and Math MAP Growth Testing
- 60% of students will meet or exceed expected growth on Science MAP Growth Testing
- 70% of students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) and English Learners (ELs) will meet or exceed expected growth on ELA, Reading, and Math MAP testing
- 60% of students with IEPs and ELs will meet or exceed expected growth on Science MAP testing
- City on a Hill will reduce the chronic absenteeism rate from SY23 by 15%
- City on a Hill will have no more than 10% of students suspended
- City on a Hill will increase enrollment to at least 229 for SY23
- 90% of students accepted and plan to attend a post graduation program (public or private college, apprenticeship or military)
- City on a Hill will increase staff retention by 15%

Pratt shared that following additional feedback and eventual approval from DESE, she would again present these goals and discuss year-to-date results.

**B. School Year 2023-2024 Board Calendar & Committee Assignments**

Next, Pina presented a small update to the proposed School Year 2023-2024 Board Calendar shared with the Board in June 2023, stating that the April 2024 Board Meeting had been shifted as the original date fell on the School's April Break.

The School Year 2023-2024 Committee Structure, as discussed by the Governance Committee at their September 2023 meeting, was then shared with the Board. It was

requested that all Board members closely review their committee assignments and the proposed dates/times for the Committee Meetings, and send any feedback to the Governance Committee and School Leadership to be able to adjust the meetings.

Gildea then reminded all members about the importance of both attending meetings, but also ensuring that Trustees RSVP for all meetings in BoardOnTrack so quorum can be determined as soon as possible.

## **V. Circuit Street Renovation / Construction Update**

### **A. Circuit Street Construction Update & Discussion**

Gildea then directed the Board to the Circuit Street Construction Update. Pina shared that while the School initially anticipated construction to be fully completed on August 21, 2023, there have been several delays that have led to a small continued work being performed at the School. Currently, those remaining "punch-list" items are being completed after school and on weekends, as not to disrupt school, with final completion slated for this upcoming weekend. Pina and Pratt thanked the Board for their support throughout this process, which has spanned the last two school years, and shared that the additional space has already provided for greater collaboration and concentration for on-site staff.

## **VI. Consent Agenda**

### **A. Consent Agenda Overview**

Next, Gildea directed the attention of the Board to the Consent Agenda, and asked Pina to provide an overview of the process. Pina explained that while many votes are taken throughout the year in meetings and are done so individually, when the Board has routine votes like the policy approvals and term affirmations on the agenda today, a consent agenda can be used. When utilizing a consent agenda, all votes are discussed individually and then approved in one action.

### **B. Vote to Approve the School Year 2023-2024 Staff Handbook**

Pina shared that the 2023-2024 Staff Handbook was largely unchanged from the 2022-2023 Staff Handbook, with the exception of contact information and title updates to reflect the school's current organizational structure. She noted that the School would begin negotiations with the Boston Teachers Union (BTU), which represents both of City on a Hill's bargaining units, regarding a successor agreement to the one currently in place later this school year, and the School felt it best to wait for any major changes until these negotiations have been completed in Spring 2024.

### **C. Vote to Approve School Year 2023-2024 Student and Family Handbook**

Next, Pina shared that the 2023-2024 Student and Family Handbook was also largely unchanged from the 2022-2023 Student and Family Handbook, as the Handbook had

gone through significant updates in the previous two school years to better reflect City on a Hill's updated behavior management practices, though it similarly contained minor title and contact updates.

**D. Vote to Approve Updated Executive Director Succession Plan**

Then, Pina shared that like both Handbooks, there have been no major changes to the Executive Director Succession Plan, which outlines a communication and leadership plan in the case that the Executive Director was unable to lead. This includes short-term and long-term/permanent absences, while also taking into account whether the absence planned and unplanned. She noted that the list of successors was updated to include:

- Laura Edouard, Principal
- Jordan Pina, Chief Operating Officer
- Michael McGean, Chief Academic Officer

She also shared that the School's recommendation in the case of a sudden, unplanned absence by Pratt would be an interim co-leader model where the Principal and Chief Operating Officer would work closely with the Board Chair and Vice Chair/Treasurer to maintain stability at the School while the Board works to determine a permanent leadership model.

**E. Vote to Approve a Second Term for Ted Gildea & Edelyn Contreras**

Pina then noted that both Ted Gildea and Edelyn Contreras had come to the end of their first terms, which began in 2020, and thanked them both for their service on the Board. Gildea and Contreras shared their gratitude for the ability to serve on the Board, and their excitement for continuing on into a second term.

**F. Vote to Re-Appoint Officers**

Finally, Pina shared that while Officer positions are held through a Trustee's term, it is best practice to annually reaffirm the Board's leadership, who also serve as the Governance Committee. She reminded the Board of the current slate of Officers:

- Melisa Lemire, Chair
- Ted Gildea, Vice Chair & Treasure
- Brooke Fincke, Clerk

She and Gildea then called for any questions or concerns related to this slate of officers, or any of the other votes mentioned in the consent agenda. Attendees thanked the Officers for their leadership, and raised no concerns.

**G. Vote to Approve Consent Agenda**

Ted Gildea made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda.  
Aleksz Hirschmann seconded the motion.



The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

**Roll Call**

Ted Gildea	Aye
Kimberley Thai Small	Aye
Jacqueline Bennett	Absent
Michelle Allwood	Absent
Edelyn Contreras	Aye
Melisa Lemire	Absent
Brooke Fincke	Aye
Danielle Canty	Aye
Andres Tejeda Soto	Absent
Alekz Hirschmann	Aye

**VII. Closing Items**

**A. Adjourn Meeting**

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 6:07 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Ted Gildea

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**Documents used during the meeting**

- CoaH Strategic Plan SY 2024-2028.pdf
- Proposed SY24 Board Calendar\_Sept Update.pdf
- COAH Board Committees - SY2023-24.pdf
- Statement of Net Position\_06.30.23.pdf
- Budget vs Actuals\_FY23.pdf
- Statement of Net Position\_07.31.23.pdf
- Budget vs Actuals\_07.31.23.pdf
- YTD SOA.pdf
- YTD SNP.pdf
- CoaH\_Policies\_and\_Procedures\_August2023\_DRAFT.docx
- City\_on\_a\_Hill\_Employee\_Guidelines\_DRAFT\_Aug2023.pdf
- Student and Family Handbook 23-24.docx
- COAH ED Succession Plan v.3.1.pdf