

APPROVED



## City on a Hill Charter Public School

### Minutes

#### December 2023 Board Meeting

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

Tuesday December 12, 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), Andres Tejada Soto (remote), Brooke Fincke (remote), Edelyn Contreras (remote), Melisa Lemire (remote), Ted Gildea (remote)

##### **Trustees Absent**

Danielle Canty, Jacqueline Bennett, Kimberley Thai Small, Michelle Allwood

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

Sonya Pratt (remote)

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

Sonya Pratt (remote)

##### **Guests Present**

Asha Ibrahim (remote), Gabriela (Gaby) DeLeon-Evora (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 Dec 12, 2023 at 5:02 PM.

### C. Approve October 2023 Meeting Minutes

Ted Gildea made a motion to approve the minutes from October 2023. October 2023 Board Meeting on 10-24-23.

Alekz Hirschmann seconded the motion.

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

#### Roll Call

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

## II. Organizational Updates

### A. General School Updates

Lemire directed the attention of the Board to the General School Updates. Sonya Pratt, Executive Director, shared that the School is in the middle of second quarter and heading towards Winter Break which begins on December 20. She noted that the School continues to hold its School Year 2023-2024 enrollment lotteries, but will soon be winding down to focus on School Year 2024-2025 recruitment, which has already begun to take in applications. Pratt shared that the School will continue with the marketing avenues, including MBTA Bus ads and local radio ads, with which is saw success this school year.

Pratt then pivoted to staffing and noted that while the School had recently made several key hires, including a new Special Education Teacher, an Office Coordinator, and a Director of School Operations, there were some roles, including Paraprofessional and Building Substitute that remained vacant. She noted it was odd, as those positions haven't traditionally been difficult to recruit for but shared that the Human Resources department was looking into alternative staffing options given the point in the year. She

also that this week was also Spirit Week at school, and an opportunity to end the calendar year on a positive culture note.

## **B. General Finance Updates**

Next, the Board turned their attention to the General Finance Updates. Ted Gildea, Vice Chair and Treasurer, noted that the School remains in a financially strong position. He shared that the School continues to meet its self-set goal of having over six months of cash on hand, the School continues to hold no debt, and it is not currently using its line of credit. Gildea also noted that given the positive enrollment trends, the School Year 2023-2024 budget remains on track for this point in the year. He also shared that School Year 2024-2025 budget discussions would soon start with the Finance Committee and School Leadership to prepare for a presentation of the budget to the Board in the May 2024 Board Meeting. Andres Tejeda Soto, Finance Committee Member, also noted that the Committee discussed upcoming maintenance of the building and ensuring that those costs were also considered throughout budgeting.

## **III. Executive Session**

### **A. Executive Session**

Lemire then announced that the Board would be entering Executive Session, citing purpose #3: To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares. Lemire confirmed that she believed public discussion of the topics might have a detrimental effect on the School's litigating position, noted that the Board intended to return to public session, and called for a motion to enter Executive Session.

Andres Tejeda Soto made a motion to enter Executive Session.

Ted Gildea seconded the motion.

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

#### **Roll Call**

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

Public Session ended at 5:16pm. Executive Session began at 5:17pm.

Andres Tejeda Soto made a motion to adjourn Executive Session and return to Public Session.

Ted Gildea seconded the motion.  
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

**Roll Call**

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

Executive Session ended at 5:43pm. Public Session began at 5:44pm.

**IV. Board Member Candidate Discussion and Vote**

**A. Board Member Candidate Discussion and Vote**

Lemire next introduced Gaby De Leon as a candidate to join the Board of Trustees. Lemire shared that De Leon had previously met with members of the Governance Committee to discussed her background and interest in joining the Board. She then asked De Leon to share a bit more about her background for attendees.

De Leon thanked the Board for the opportunity, and explained that she is a Boston native with finance and professional development. She shared that she was excited to bring her expertise having previously had tangential exposure to the School through her network. Board members welcomed De Leon, and Lemire called for a motion to approve De Leon as a Trustee.

Andres Tejeda Soto made a motion to approve Gaby De Leon as a member of the Board of Trustees.

Alekz Hirschmann seconded the motion.  
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

**Roll Call**

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

## **V. School Leadership Discussion**

### **A. Leadership Transitions Discussion**

Next, Lemire shared with the Board that Pratt had shared her intention to step down as Executive Director of City on a Hill in June 2024, which is the end of her current contract. Lemire shared that Pratt spoke with her in October 2023, and that the Governance Committee and Executive Director Support Committee had been working with Pratt to discuss her transition, as well as starting the process to name her successor. Lemire then asked Pratt if she would like to share anything else. Pratt thanked the Board for their support through her three-year tenure as Executive Director, and noted that after over 21 years of service at City on a Hill, she is ready for the next chapter and looks forward to transitioning with a leader who is also excited about City on a Hill's potential. Board members shared their gratitude and memories of Pratt throughout her time with City on a Hill before noting to the Governance Committee that starting a search would be important.

Lemire agreed and shared that the Governance Committee had begun vetting search agencies, and had just discussed a contract with a finalist, AAM Search. Lemire noted that while this transition had not yet been shared on a school-wide level, key leadership team members had been notified and were being schedule to meet with AAM to provide information to begin the search. Board members inquired as to the process, and whether AAM would screen all candidates and present a single finalist, or if the Board would have the opportunity to engage with several candidates. Lemire shared that AAM's goal was to provide 2-3 finalists to meet with the Board to conduct an interview before making a final decision, pending reference and background checks. Jordan Pina, Chief Operating Officer, also noted that the School will be holding a staff meeting on December 15 to share this news, and will be sending home a letter to families explaining the transition and outlining next steps.

Board members inquired as to the impact of this decision on the School's probationary status and upcoming renewal. Pratt shared that it will be part of the discussions, and that the School's goal is to plan a strong transition that leaves no financial or legal issues for the next leader. She noted that she has already begun this work by talking to her mentors, coaches and other charter leaders about thoughtful transition, and is planning to work directly with a transition consultant while also supporting her successor. She acknowledged that any leader transition has effects throughout a transition, but felt that a strong plan could mitigate many of the potential issues.

Next, Lemire shared that Laura Edouard, Principal, would also be transitioning into a new role, and asked Pratt to share more information. Pratt explained that the School anticipates an opening in its Chief Academic Officer role, and that Edouard has expressed interest in the work. Pratt shared that this both keeps the institutional information that Edouard, who has been with City on a Hill for over 15 years, has

accumulated and allows her to work directly with the next Principal. Pratt explained that she believed an Interim Principal appointed from current leadership was the most likely step the School plans to make, noting that the decision both continues to preserve consistency in leadership but also allows for the next Executive Director to evaluate whether the interim principal is the right fit for their vision, or if a different principal is needed. Pratt also noted that while this is not yet final, she hopes to solidify these decision in early winter. Lemire reminded the Board that while Pratt was sharing her thought process, it is not the Board's role to make school-level staffing decisions, and that Pratt and Pina would lead all school-based searches.

Finally, Lemire also shared that Pina would also be moving on from City on a Hill on a similar timeline to Pratt, and asked if Pina would like to share anything else. Pina shared that while she has appreciated her journey at City on a Hill, she originally intended to move on in June 2021 before being asked to stay on for the transition between Pratt and her predecessor, and expressed her intention to not return for school year 2024-2025 to Pratt in spring 2023. She also noted that, like the Principal role, she felt that there was ample talent on the operations team, and explained that she and Pratt would be looking to move staff into new positions after break to begin their training.

## **VI. Board Committee Updates**

### **A. Governance Committee Update**

Updates from the Governance Committee were discussed in the Leadership Transitions Discussion section, but again asked the Board to tap their networks for additional members.

### **B. Academic Excellence Committee Update**

Alekz Hirschmann, Academic Excellence Committee, shared that the Committee met with Michael McGean, Chief Academic Officer earlier in the week and discussed the most recent set of academic data. He noted that McGean shared that overall passing rates were increasing from those of the same period last year, and that the school continued to see growth. He also shared that special education data shows that they are on track with their general education peers, and that the new Director of Special Education and an additional Special Education Teacher have been onboarded. He also reminded the Board that the School continues to work with consultants to update the curriculum to be better aligned with MCAS standards across all subjects.

Hirschmann also shared that the School will begin "Attendance Buyback" program for students with chronic absenteeism, which allows them to have additional classroom time. He noted that this program is self-driven for 11th and 12th graders, and heavily involves parents for 9th and 10th graders. Edelyn Contreras, Committee Member, added that the School will also be launching additional Saturday MCAS prep for students who are set to take the test this spring.

The Committee asked whether the buyback would also affect the School's attendance rate in terms of its accountability scores. Pratt confirmed that it would and shared that the School developed this program with the guidances issued by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) related to their initiatives to reduce chronic absenteeism as it is a Commonwealth-wide issue.

Pratt also noted that the School's dual enrollment program with Roxbury Community College is going well with multiple students taking 3-4 classes, which earn them college credit towards an associates degree.

**C. Finance Committee Update**

Updates from the Finance Committee were discussed in the General Finance Updates section.

**D. Executive Director Support Committee**

Lemire shared that the Executive Director Support Committee met to hold Pratt's mid-year evaluation based on goals previously discussed with the Committee. She noted those goals as:

1. Participating in professional development and partnering with transition consultants;
2. Creating a balanced School Year 2024-2025 budget and long-term projections for the School;
3. Negotiating a successor agreement to the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) currently in place; and
4. A district staffing plan that addresses the need of the School and District.

Lemire shared that, based on Pratt's evaluation and the discussion following the evaluation, the Committee voted to recommend a satisfactory performance evaluation and full awarding of her fall semester bonus potential, which totals \$10,000.

**E. Vote to Accept Recommendation of the Executive Director Support Committee**

Andres Tejeda Soto made a motion to accept the recommendation of the Executive Director Support Committee.

Ted Gildea seconded the motion.

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

**Roll Call**

|                    |        |
|--------------------|--------|
| Michelle Allwood   | Absent |
| Danielle Canty     | Absent |
| Brooke Fincke      | Aye    |
| Ted Gildea         | Aye    |
| Jacqueline Bennett | Absent |

**Roll Call**

Alekz Hirschmann Aye  
Melisa Lemire Aye  
Edelyn Contreras Aye  
Kimberley Thai Small Absent  
Andres Tejada Soto Aye

**VII. Organizational Goals Dashboard**

**A. Organizational Goals Dashboard**

Finally, the Board turned its attention to the Organizational Goals Dashboard. Pratt began sharing updates related to passing rates, showing that current English Language Arts (ELA), Math and Science, as well as the passing rate of Students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), are all currently meeting or surpassing school goals:

- ELA: 81.2% (+7.1%)
- Math: 76.5% (+22.5%)
- Science: 68% (+15.2%)
- Students with IEPs: 75% (+15%)

She reminded the Board that the School is working with consultants to better align the curriculum to MCAS standards, including the assessments from which these results were calculated.

Next, she shared that Average Daily Attendance is surpassing the School's goal of at least 85% ADA with a current ADA of 85.2%, which reflects a 1.9% increase since the Board's last meeting. Pratt noted, however, that as described during the Academic Excellence Committee Updates, Chronic Absenteeism continues to be an issue with 44.16% of students chronically absent. Pratt shared that while it is not necessarily that students have COVID-19, the School has noticed that many more families will keep students home when they may not need to. She also shared that the Director of Family Engagement makes daily calls and will be sending home a letter to all families of students who have missed 10 or more school days to share the School's attendance programs.

Then, Pratt shared that the School's suspension rate is currently at 10%, which shows an increase over last school year, which ended with 9.9% of students receiving suspensions. She noted that many schools have seen behavior issues, and that the School is in the final stages of hiring additional culture roles. The Board inquired to why Pratt believed there was such an increase, and she shared that the School has seen a lot of students who have not been able to access mental health care or special education services due to the continued effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. She noted that in the next week alone the Director had 8 meetings schedules to start building IEPs for students who need them, but there are also other contributors, like the national shortage of medications taken by students to help regulate themselves. Trustees who are involved in educational

spaces echoed these issues, and noted that it's likely to be a bit longer until these are resolved.

## **VIII. 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 6:45 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Melisa Lemire

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## **Documents used during the meeting**

- Statement of Cash Flows 11.30.pdf
- SNP 11.30.pdf
- Budget vs Actual Summary.pdf
- Org Goals Dashboard\_Dec2023.pdf