

Oneonta Christian Academy

Redevelopment Proposal for Otego Elementary School



"This building is dedicated to the boys and girls of the present and coming days; to training for citizenship; to the development of scholarship and character; to the service of the community, the state and the nation."

-Frank H. Wood

Quote taken from the plaque at the entrance of Otego Elementary School

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Application Highlights:

Oneonta Christian Academy:

- Brings 35 years of experience and excellence in education
- Hopes to revitalize the building back to its original purpose as stated on the plaque at the front door of Otego Elementary School.
- Values service to the community
- Provides the only educational alternative in the region
- Seeks partnership in providing UPK and Pre-school at below market rates
- Honors the history of the building and its place as the heart of a community
- Seeks to avoid disruption in the community
- Exposes new families to Otego
- Creates affordable event spaces for community members
- Offers rental space for local businesses
- Desires transition of operations rather than re-development

Thank you for the opportunity to apply for the responsibility of becoming the caretakers of this special place.

**Developer Statement of Willingness to Acquire and Redevelop the Property
Executive Summary**

Oneonta Christian Academy is pleased to submit our proposal to acquire and develop the Otego Elementary School building. We are confident that our vision for this building closely aligns with the objectives included in the Request for Proposals put forth by the Board of Education and identified by the community as outlined in the Repurposing Study. We bring with us our deeply held aspirations to equip our students to be world changing leaders; confident in their purpose and humble in their calling while serving in their families, vocations, and communities. It is our heart to reinvigorate this building with our students and families, and to provide the community with a partner who is willing to work side by side with them to create new opportunities for families and children in Otego and the surrounding area. We commit to being excellent neighbors and to serving this community as well as our students.

Oneonta Christian Academy (OCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization with a Board of Directors holding the fiduciary responsibility for the organization. OCA is the product of the merger between the two Christian schools that have been operating in the city of Oneonta for over 35 years, Oneonta Community Christian School and Lighthouse Christian Academy. OCA is currently located in Oneonta and houses the full school, grades K-12 as well as our 3 and 4 year old preschool / UPK programs. Our 2018-2019 school year ended with 92 students, our highest enrollment in over 5 years. Our preschool program for 3 year olds reached its maximum enrollment in our first year and our pre-k program also reached a 5 year high this year with 16 students. During our years in operation, we have served a broad community, extending beyond the Oneonta city limits. Our students come from Otsego, Delaware and Chenango counties and our current student population of 92 students is comprised of 75% Otsego County residents and 25% Delaware County residents. Our school serves attendees from over 20 area churches and various denominations. Additionally, some of our attendees have no church affiliation.

The primary purpose of Oneonta Christian Academy has always been to positively impact the lives of children and families in our community. Our primary vehicle for serving these children has been their education. We believe that every child has a God-given purpose. We strive to individualize the education we give our students to support them in identifying their giftings in order to walk out from our school, confident in their calling and equipped to impact their world through their service and meaningful work. This equipping is not only focused on their spiritual and emotional development, but is strongly linked with the academic rigor of our curriculum.

Additionally, we are expanding our vision as the only educational alternative in southern Otsego and Northern Delaware counties. We see our students not only academically but through a variety of lenses. Our students are creative. They seek to perform, to create, and to share their giftings with our community through productions, participation in community art events, and other projects. Our students are athletes. They participate in sports locally as active members of the community. Many of them dance and have even competed nationally. Our students love STEM. They engage in our LEGO STEM program and have participated in the National Youth Leadership STEM program. As we look at our students through each of these lenses, it expands

our vision for our program and future. With the acquisition of the property, our future can now also affect the future of the community of Otego. Our anticipated growth will allow us to develop programming benefitting the families in Otego and Unadilla in the form of club sports like CrossFit Kids, early educational options through our preschool, summer programs, adult education, and more. Our school expansion equals an expansion in the benefits available to your community because our worldview includes service to our community.

Our encouragement of student's giftings in the arts, sciences, sports and other extracurriculars is only limited by our space. In our 158 River Street location, we have the classrooms to support the core educational needs of our students as well as the required square footage for a three and four-year-old preschool. This space, currently houses our 92 students, but in some of our classrooms, we have already met our full capacity for the space we have for our core academic programs. For those programs such as physical education, art, drama, technology, and music, we have to be creative and flexible. Many of our projects have to be portable and easily cleaned up after each class as they can not be left out over time. For gym classes, we utilize both the Oneonta Boys and Girls Club and the 6th Ward fields. In preparation for our productions, we have to transport our entire school to outside locations simply to practice and prepare for these events. Each of these constraints put on our programming by our lack of space limits the growth of these important programs and our contributions to the community. The Otego Elementary School building would change all of that.

Since the merger of the two schools that created Oneonta Christian Academy, the need for additional space to accomplish our educational objectives and to increase our outreach opportunities has become evident. The Board of Directors and administration of OCA has been looking for opportunities for expansion, and are so very excited about the Otego Elementary School. As a school one of our operating principles is fiscal responsibility and that has driven our decision making process in preparing our proposal. We are offering \$100,000 for the acquisition of this building. It is our great hope that the vision we bring for the school and community will carry more weight than the financial gain to be had from other proposals. We however, would ask that if this offer is not in line with the goals of the School Board in selecting a developer that you return to us with a counteroffer.

We propose to acquire the Otego Elementary School, make the minor repairs that are necessary, make any required updates to meet code, and bring the sounds of young feet, excited voices, and eager learning back to its halls.

We are very grateful for the opportunity to apply. Thank you.

Developer Statements Regarding Proposal Objectives

- *To experience minimal disruption in the residential areas surrounding the property related to the redevelopment construction activities.*

The Otego Elementary School was the heart of this community. As the population began to shift towards fewer students, and the cost of educating each student increased, the school district had to make the difficult decision to close this building and merge two schools.

It is a priority of the School Board to minimally disrupt the residents within the village of Otego through this transition of ownership. By choosing OCA, the School Board will ensure that there is indeed minimal disruption. Our purpose is education and this building has already been designed to meet our needs. Following some cosmetic updates in the classrooms, we would simply transition our PreK-12 operations to this site. There is no need for us to change the building to meet our needs.

As a school we highly value service and view this project as an opportunity to serve in a new area. Our greatest hope is to become the opposite of disruption for the community. Our desire is to come alongside this district as we provide a comfortable, welcoming place for events, activities, meetings, performances, and athletics.

- *To improve the environment and development potential of the surrounding area.*

Bringing OCA to Otego has the potential of exposing over 60 non-resident families to the village on a regular basis, increasing the opportunity for businesses in the vicinity of the school to capture the support and attention of a completely new audience. As an aside, we are positive that the deli and the pizza restaurant will get to know our students quite well!

As our families get to know the Otego community, we invite the Otego community to get to know OCA as it will exist within the former Otego Elementary School. As the winning developer of this building, we would fully expect to make space available to the community for events and meetings. Meeting space and event space is always secured at a premium and is generally costly to organizations and individuals. The school, with its gym, stage, industrial kitchen, cafeteria, and large classrooms provides a number of spaces that could be utilized outside of school hours. And, as with everything we do, we intend to serve the community by providing such space at below market rate.

We have also envisioned the opportunity to provide rental space to local businesses, services, or nonprofits. OCA will require about two-thirds of the space to accomplish our educational objectives leaving available space in a secure building with excellent parking for businesses or services to utilize. We are currently exploring several options for providing this space for rentals.

One of the most exciting opportunities we plan to provide to the district and surrounding area is Universal Pre-K (UPK). We are prepared to work as a collaborating agency with the Superintendent of the Unatego School District in writing the required grant application to receive UPK funding from the state of New York for Otego and Unadilla Residents. As we have done in the Oneonta School District, we commit to keeping our costs of UPK below market rate, making K-3 and K-4 an affordable option for parents. Should the funding for UPK not come through, we are committed to keeping the self-pay costs of UPK and preschool below market value, and certainly at a lower cost than traditional child care for 3 and 4 year olds. The space in the school lends itself to a substantial UPK program, and we have the experience to provide that service with excellence. It is our hope that an additional educational option in Otego when paired with an established preschool program will increase the interest of potential residents in the community.

These points reveal a strong desire to enhance the community and to positively impact the economic and educational landscape of the community.

- *To achieve excellence in design by selecting a development team with design capabilities appropriate to a location with potential for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.*

We want to thank you for caring for the building, preserving original woodwork and historical elements. The members of the Board and the Faculty are unanimously in awe of the beauty of the Otego Elementary School. There is strong agreement that we would be honored to take on the responsibility of maintaining and restoring the building while preserving its history and character. The Board of Directors commits to reviewing the application process for being listed on the National Register of Historic Places with the hope of moving forward on the process.

- For our educational purposes, there is very little that will need to be done initially. Moving forward, we will seek to make repairs and restore damaged areas in several ways. Over our years in operation, we have made it our mission to support local businesses as we also do business in this area. Therefore, whenever possible, we will be hiring locally to complete work within the building. We also seek to create new community partnerships whenever possible to complete a project or expand our school. Our school has taken steps in anticipation of this project to partner with a local apprenticeship program to coordinate some of our restoration efforts. Interior work, such as painting and minor repairs can be done by our "army" of committed parents, faculty and staff who are familiar and comfortable with our values of service and volunteerism. And finally, restoration of a historic building gives us the opportunity to develop an innovative elective for middle and high school students. Our students are eager to learn hands-on skills and this would be a novel offering taught by a faculty member with experience as a carpenter/contractor on historic homes in the area. The opportunity is ripe for a history/carpentry co-curricular experience.

Narrative of Developer Qualifications, Business Organization, and Principles

Oneonta Christian Academy is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) educational organization with a proven track record of financial conservatism. In our current location, at 158 River Street Oneonta, we operate completely debt free. Our business organizational structure will not require any changes if we are selected for ownership of the Otego School building. It is our intention to maintain and preserve the rich history of the Otego Elementary School which will not require any significant renovations at this time. The ownership of the property will be maintained by the organization under the leadership of the Board of Directors. The membership of our Board of Directors is a result of previous board members from both the Oneonta Community Christian School and Lighthouse Christian Academy along with new board members joining after the merger was complete. The Board of Directors represents those with diverse backgrounds and extensive experience in their respective professions, and is directly responsible for all the decisions for the school's finances, real estate, structure, curriculum, and faculty. Oneonta Christian Academy's bylaws, which dictate the decision making and organizational structure of the board and school, has been set forth by the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors will be intimately involved in the transition of our school to the Otego Elementary School building and all decisions moving forward with regard to renovations and cosmetic updates.

President - Dr. Joseph Rufrano
Vice President - Julie Dostal, Ed. S.
Secretary - Judy Armstrong
Treasurer - Ben Novellano
Member - Dianne Dirig
Member - Chris Rolko
Member - Rita Oellrich

**Developer Statement on Team Integration and Coordination
with School District**

Our team, led by the Board of Directors, School Administrator and Director of Programming will work with the Unatego School District to ensure the transition of ownership will be thought out and purposeful. Direct communication with the School District through the superintendent's office will be handled by an appointed staff member and our legal representation.

Upon completion of the selection process, were OCA's proposal chosen, it would be our desire to communicate about the contents of the building. There is a plentiful amount of equipment and supplies remaining in the building as a surplus, not currently utilized by the school district. We will use this as our first opportunity to partner with the school district for a mutually beneficial project. The equipment and supplies offer the Oneonta Christian Academy with an immense opportunity to cost-effectively furnish our expansion of operations and an opportunity for the school district to defray the labor and cost of removing the contents of the building. We look forward to discussing this idea further.

Developer Financing Plans, Loan Pre-approval, and Federal Tax Return

Oneonta Christian Academy has secured bank approval to support our offer of \$100,000. We are prepared to pay the 20% down payment on the day of selection. Because we have initiated the financing process with our bank, there will be no delay in scheduling a closing date and conveyance of title. Improvements and maintenance of the building will not require any additional financing.

Pre-approval Letter: Appendix A

Federal Tax Return: Appendix B

Financial Summary and Projected Operating Financials

Our objective is to maintain the Otego Elementary School as an educational facility, therefore the overall project cost will be minimal and limited to cosmetic upgrades to the classrooms. The Board of Directors of OCA view this project as a transition of operations rather than a full re-development. The Otego Elementary School provides our students and families with a great opportunity for the Expansion of Operations. The primary costs for renovation of the site will incorporate a general cosmetic upgrade to the current structure. There is no need to restructure the building to meet our needs. Our intention is to maintain both the interior and exterior of the school which is a beloved landmark for the Otego Community. This will result in minimal disruption to the community and immediate ability to utilize the facility for our school activities and events while we implement the transition of our students into full-time academic use.

Proposal Summary

When the Otego Elementary School was dedicated, the vision was clear:

“This building is dedicated to the boys and girls of the present and coming days; to training for citizenship; to the development of scholarship and character; to the service of the community, the state and the nation.” -Frank H. Wood

We were struck by the impact of this statement memorialized at the entrance of the Otego Elementary School. And OCA commits to carry this vision forward with us as we bring the building back to life. Our 35 years of experience has equipped us to step into this space quickly and seamlessly. The Board will ensure that there is minimal disruption to the community and that life will quickly return to this space as we make it a center of activity for our families and yours. This proposal may appear to be light on detail. This is because, if selected, we will not need to secure funding to develop the site, initiate a massive construction process, or submit applications for rezoning and permits. The building has been a school and it should continue to be used as one for “the boys and girls of the present and coming days.”

As the only educational alternative in the area, we look forward to supporting the needs of children from a wide radius, introducing new families to the village of Otego. We are excited to support the Unatego School District as an established preschool and UPK provider, and look forward to expanding the services available in the community to families of young children. The Otego community may also look to us as a partner in providing space not only for events, clubs, and programming but also as necessary rental space for business and other not-for-profits.

The Otego Elementary School has been a point of pride for residents and the heart of this community since 1931. If Oneonta Christian Academy is selected, we commit to ensuring that its history and beauty are preserved and that the training for citizenship, development of scholarship and character, and service to the community will continue for decades to come.