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**Minuteman School Committee Calls for
District-wide Referendum on New School**

LEXINGTON – In hopes of saving a \$44 million state grant and securing final approval to build a new high school, the Minuteman School Committee has decided to submit the issue directly to the voters of its member towns. On June 27, the Committee voted 12-1, with one abstention, to conduct a District-wide referendum on approval of bonding for the project.

The election will be held on Tuesday, September 20, 2016, from 12 noon to 8:00 p.m.

“We tried the traditional Town Meeting route and won by overwhelming margins just about everywhere,” said Dr. Edward A. Bouquillon, Superintendent-Director. “But we were unable to make the case properly in one town and, given the rules of this process, that was enough to require going directly to citizens through a formal referendum.”

Belmont’s Town Meeting voted against bonding for the project on May 4. Under the town meeting approval process, the project could only move forward if no member town voted to object.

Key stakeholders from throughout the District met with Belmont officials on June 20 to determine whether Minuteman should attempt to bring the matter back to Belmont Town Meeting or, alternatively, go to a referendum. Belmont officials informed representatives from the other 15 member towns that they would not change their opposition to bonding for the project. Based on that, it was clear to a majority of those present that it would not be productive for Minuteman to seek Belmont’s reconsideration without a reasonable prospect for success. Instead, they felt that the sensible course would be to proceed directly to referendum.

“Fortunately, state law gives multi-town districts such as Minuteman a second option for getting capital projects approved,” said Dr. Bouquillon. “It’s a simple vote across all the District towns. It’s done on the same day during the same hours. The votes are totaled. If there are more “yes” votes than “no” votes, the project is approved.”

The election will be paid by the Minuteman School District so the School Committee also voted to transfer funds within its FY 2017 budget to cover the anticipated costs.

Officials from Minuteman will be meeting with area town clerks to discuss the mechanics of holding the election, according to Dr. Bouquillon.

There have been at least three previous district-wide ballots conducted by regional vocational-technical school districts in Massachusetts. Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School in Charlton secured approval for a \$73.8 million repair project through a district-wide ballot in October of 2012. Franklin County Technical School in Turners Falls secured approval for \$2.456 million in repairs through district-wide balloting in June of 2015. Tri-County Regional Vocational Technical School District in Franklin secured approval for a \$2.3 million bond through district-wide balloting in 1995.

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) has committed \$44 million towards the \$144.9 million Minuteman project. The MSBA has given Minuteman until November 30 to secure local approval.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has revised state vocational regulations to allow Minuteman to charge out-of-district communities a capital fee to help pay for the project. Non-member towns sending students to Minuteman will pay a capital fee in addition to the current state-set annual tuition.

The New England Association of Schools & Colleges (NEASC) has placed Minuteman's accreditation on "Warning" status solely due to the condition of the building.

Proponents have argued that building a new school will actually be less expensive – and far less disruptive to students – than renovating the current facility. Renovations and repairs are projected to cost local taxpayers roughly \$100 million and take 6-10 years to complete. With the MSBA grant, the local share would be roughly the same amount, to be paid by local taxpayers and by out-of-district communities through a new capital fee assessed by the state.

Minuteman began its MSBA Feasibility Study in 2009.

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