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### **Minuteman Gets More Time from the MSBA**

BOSTON – The state is giving the Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical School District more time to build local support for construction of a new high school designed for 628 students.

The decision was announced at the May 25 meeting of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). Top MSBA executives told the MSBA board of directors that they would be granting Minuteman an extension until November 30, 2016 to secure local approval.

The decision was well received at Minuteman.

"I am pleased the MSBA is still willing to partner with the district," said Dr. Edward A. Bouquillon, Superintendent-Director at Minuteman High School. "I'm grateful to the MSBA. Everyone there – the leadership, the staff, the board members – all believe strongly in this project. This decision endorses our efforts to complete the process we began 7 years ago, leading to the construction of a new high school."

The Minuteman School Committee voted to bond for the project on March 15 and gave member towns 60 days in which to disapprove. Every town that approved the project voted overwhelmingly in favor, several by unanimous votes. Some didn't vote at all, thereby clearing the way for bonding.

Only the Belmont Town Meeting failed to support the project, with some members expressing concerns about the school's size and cost, enrollment projections, and doubts surrounding a new state fee for out-of-district communities. A few Town Meeting members in other communities had raised similar concerns, but arguments in favor of the project had always prevailed.

MSBA has committed roughly \$44 million toward the Minuteman project. Member towns – **and non-member towns** – will pay the rest, approximately \$100 million.

Member towns will pay through an annual capital assessment. Non-member towns will pay through a new out-of-district capital fee to be set by the state. That fee will be in addition to the annual tuition fee set by the state and assessed to communities that send non-district students.

Some opponents have claimed the new 628-student school is too big. MSBA has indicated it has a “policy” not to pay for a school of fewer than 600 students.

Virtually all observers agree on one thing: Minuteman needs work.

The Minuteman School Building Committee, Minuteman School Committee, the MSBA, and the vast majority of the elected leaders in district towns have endorsed building a new school over “Plan B”, repairing the current one.

After an extensive review of engineering reports and architectural assessments, the Minuteman School Building Committee estimated that it would cost at least as much to repair the building as to replace it. They reported that repairs would take many years to complete, student learning would be disrupted while construction is underway, and local taxpayers would foot the entire bill because the MSBA has approved a new high school, not a repair project.

According to Dr. Bouquillon, the time extension granted by the MSBA will allow the District and other key stakeholders an opportunity to further engage Belmont officials in a substantive discussion about the benefits of moving forward with the project. He said he remains hopeful.

Dr. Bouquillon pointed out that Belmont officials played an instrumental role in getting the project to the point where approval is now within reach. First, Belmont pushed hard to get out-of-district communities to pay a share of capital costs. That led to a new state regulation allowing Minuteman to charge a state-approved capital fee for out-of-district students. Second, Belmont pushed for changes in the Regional Agreement that were approved late last year by all 16 District communities. Those changes reconfigured the makeup of the District, led to weighted voting on the Minuteman School Committee, and revised how long-term debt is allocated.

No decision has been made by the Minuteman School Committee on how to proceed next. The Committee has at least two options: (1) voting again to bond for the project and giving the member communities another 60 days in which to object, or (2) calling a district-wide referendum on the same day where the project is decided by the combined vote in favor versus the combined vote in opposition.

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

Dr. Bouquillon wrote to the MSBA on May 18, seeking additional time to build support for the new school. Exactly one week later, an extension was granted.

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