

Minuteman High School Building Project: The “Go It Alone” Option

The current state of the Minuteman facility and the need to comply with State and Federal regulations necessitates either a replacement or substantial renovation of the current facility. This statement is based on multiple engineering and technical reports. It is no longer open to debate.

A failure by the Minuteman District to proceed with the Minuteman MSBA Building Project this spring would be a financial and educational debacle for the Minuteman School District and its member towns. Without State support, the District would need to “Go It Alone.” This would require the District to pour tens of millions of dollars, without State assistance, into an outdated facility which cannot meet the district’s long term educational or financial goals. Furthermore, the “completed” school would be far inferior, both educationally and financially, to partnering with the MSBA in building a new high school.

If the proposed MSBA Minuteman Building Project is not approved by its member towns, the District will need to proceed with a series of self-funded capital projects:

1. ***Capital repairs for basic infrastructure, maintenance, and safety purposes.*** Many critical projects, including the total roof replacement, have been delayed in the expectation that the State would share in these expenses through the MSBA partnership. If the towns fail to approve our continuing with the MSBA process, then these projects would need to be fully funded by District towns.
2. ***Capital improvements to retain NEASC accreditation.*** The Minuteman School is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Minuteman is currently on NEASC’s “Warning” list and is in danger of losing its accreditation solely due to facility issues. Substantial building upgrades will be necessary to retain NEASC accreditation.
3. ***Updates to comply with modern fire codes.*** The current facility is not in compliance with modern fire codes. Due to its age, the Minuteman facility has been exempt from many changes in the fire code regulations. However, due to “triggers” built into the regulations, as we implement the repairs from items 1 & 2 above, Minuteman will lose its exemption, and the district will need to pay for substantial upgrades including a school wide sprinkler system.
4. ***Updates to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.*** The current facility is not in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. Due to its age the Minuteman facility has been exempt from many ADA regulations. However, due to “triggers” built into the regulations, by performing the above facility improvements Minuteman will lose its exemption, and the district will need to pay for substantial upgrades to bring Minuteman into compliance with ADA regulations.

Thus, in the event of a failure of the member towns to approve this project, the district would be subject to fully paying the expenses from the above items. **The current cost of these items is estimated to be about \$105 million. This entire expense would be the responsibility of the District.**

A list of required projects, estimated costs, and timelines for the projects is attached.

Additional detailed information is available on the Minuteman website, including:

Kaestle Boos Associates (KBA) Existing Conditions Survey Parts 1 and 2, November 4, 2013:

http://minuteman.schoolwires.net/cms/lib8/MA01907667/Centricity/Domain/81/Subcommittees/Appendix%20VIII%20Pt%201%20-%20KBA%20Existing%20Conditions_2013.pdf

Report of the Non-MSBA Building Plan Subcommittee (Draft), February 2, 2015:

<http://minuteman.schoolwires.net/cms/lib8/MA01907667/Centricity/Domain/81/Subcommittees/ER%20Final%20Draft%20Non-MSBA%20report%201.13.15v.5.pdf>

New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Letter Placing Minuteman on “Warning” Due to Building Conditions, November 30, 2012:

<http://minuteman.schoolwires.net/cms/lib8/MA01907667/Centricity/Domain/81/NEASC%20Letter%2011.30.12.pdf>

New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Focused Visit Report, May 5-7, 2014:

http://minuteman.schoolwires.net/cms/lib8/MA01907667/Centricity/Domain/81/Subcommittees/Appendix%20II%20-%20FINAL%20NEASC_Focused%20Visit%20Eval%20Report_May%202014.pdf

MSBA Staff Memorandum Recommending the Project from MSBA Director of Capital Planning Mary Pichetti, July 21, 2015:

http://minuteman.schoolwires.net/cms/lib8/MA01907667/Centricity/Domain/81/MPichetti%20Memo%207.21.15%20Excerpt_MSB A-MM%20Corr%207.28.15.pdf

There are other serious consequences to the “Go It Alone” approach:

1. District officials have long expressed concern that the current Minuteman facility is too big for the district’s needs. The proposed new building is significantly smaller (628 students). With “Go It Alone,” we would retain the current facility which has a potential operating capacity of 1,200 students but a practical capacity of approximately 900 students.
2. Minuteman has long recognized that a dramatic improvement in the educational offerings of the school could be realized by a closer integration between career offerings and academic classes. This is the approved Academy Model. This curriculum integration is probably the most important feature of the proposed new facility, as integration of career and academic education is *the* foundation of high quality career vocational technical education. Unfortunately, the layout of the current facility does not support integration. The Educational Program Plan could be partially realized in the current facility by further renovation estimated to be about \$90 million. This would be *in addition to* the \$105 million described above. This is clearly impractical.
3. The “Go It Alone” approach would necessitate a minimum of six years of disruptive construction while students remain in the building. Being a student or teacher at Minuteman during the years of this renovation would be a truly miserable experience.
4. The “Go It Alone” approach would also be disruptive to the politics of the District. “Go It Alone” requires a large number of small, medium, or large projects. Presumably these would be implemented individually, requiring continuous deliberation within the District, and the never-ending search for unanimous votes by member towns for the projects large enough to require bonding.
5. In the event that capital projects at the school trigger provisions of the new fire code or ADA regulations, the District would be forced, under extreme time pressure, to bring the facility immediately into compliance under the threat of a closed facility. We already have experienced one example of this. In June of 2011, a new Lexington fire official inspected the Minuteman “Trades Hall.” Although the condition of the Trades Hall had never before been an issue, Assistant Fire Chief John Fleck informed us on June 24, 2011, that the Hall was out of compliance, and immediately shut it down. If this had occurred during the school year all trades programs would have been suspended. Luckily, since this occurred during the

summer, the administration was able to quickly put together an emergency project. Two months and \$500,000 later, the renovated Trades Hall was open for the start of the new school year. In the event the District chooses the “Go It Alone” option, the Fire or ADA regulations would soon be triggered. With little prior notice, the District would need to implement similar emergency building improvements, with no opportunity to plan for the best and least costly approach.

The following table summarizes the above analysis:

Summary of the MSBA-Funded Project vs. the “Go It Alone” Option

	Successful MSBA Project	Go It Alone
Total Project Cost	\$145 million	\$105 million
Portion Paid for by the State	At least 40% of “covered” costs	Nothing
District Portion	About \$87 million	\$105 million
End Result	Brand new state-of-the-art 628 student high school with dramatically updated educational programs based on Career Academy Model.	Patchwork renovation of a 40 year old, 900-1,200 student building with no improvement in educational model.
Construction/Renovation Time	Building ready for occupancy in September 2020	At least six (6) years of disruptive construction, longer if project is delayed due to District politics
Construction Impact on Students	None, as the new building would be on a different section of District property	At least six (6) years of disruption to student education due to continuous construction
Impact on Enrollment	The Minuteman school will be hosted in a brand new building and would offer a substantially updated education model. This, plus the District’s clearly stated support of the school via approving the MSBA-funded project, will greatly improve attractiveness of Minuteman education to district families. In-district enrollment will strongly increase.	A piecemeal approach to renovation, continuous ongoing construction, continuous arguing among the member towns over all aspects of renovation, retention of 40 year old building, limited ability to update educational programs, and continuing uncertainty about the district’s support for the school will result in a continuing decline in enrollment.

Notes:

1. The estimate of \$145 million for the MSBA project is the maximum that the project could cost. It is hoped that during the Schematic Design Phase this number will be decreased. In addition, the District Town Officials may be able to further reduce the gross cost of the building through encouraging appropriate legislative action.
2. The estimates of \$105 million for basic renovations in the current facility and \$90 million for educational improvements are estimates taken from the above referenced Non-MSBA Report. These are not engineering estimates developed specifically for this project. The estimates were developed by Minuteman School Building Committee members who have expertise in the building profession. The estimates are based on examination of the costs described in the Daedalus Base Options Cost Estimate Report of August 15, 2013. In the event the district does pursue the "Go It Alone" option, then hired experts would examine the issues involved and would develop more accurate estimates. However, while these numbers cannot be taken as definitive, the magnitude of the numbers, meaning many tens of millions of dollars, is accurate.
3. It has been suggested that if the current MSBA-funded project is not approved, Minuteman could simply reenter the MSBA pipeline at a later date. Unfortunately, this option is not practical for the following reasons:
 - a. The Minuteman MSBA project is currently grandfathered at a 40% minimum reimbursement rate. New projects are given only a 31% reimbursement. That would be a loss of 9% or about \$13 million in state support for the project.
 - b. Construction costs and interest rates are likely to be higher the longer the project is delayed.
 - c. A number of the needed capital repairs cannot be delayed. Implementing these repairs would likely trigger the fire safety and ADA regulations. Thus, even if we were to enter the MSBA pipeline at a later date, it is likely that most of the renovation expenses would already have been expended.
 - d. MSBA officials have clearly stated that the proposed school is the smallest they would approve. Therefore, no cost reductions from a smaller sized school are realistic.
 - e. Minuteman has no special status with MSBA. If Minuteman needs to reenter the pipeline, it would be at the end of a very long list. It is unlikely that Minuteman would be able to reenter into an MSBA project for many years.

We strongly believe that the above analysis indicates that the "Go It Alone" option would be an extraordinarily poor choice for the District. The financial model required if the District should fail to approve the MSBA project is not sustainable.

Summary

The Minuteman building project includes a 40% reimbursement rate which is higher than the reimbursement available for new projects. The proposed project recognizes requests from member communities for Minuteman downsizing. Minuteman's proposal to build a new school with a design enrollment of 628 students is the smallest sized school that the MSBA will support. Despite its smaller size, the proposed school, with its Career Academy design coupled with robust academics, will allow the dedicated teachers and staff at Minuteman to continue to provide the highest quality education. For all of these reasons, we believe that it is strongly in the interest of Minuteman and its member towns to support the MSBA-funded Minuteman Building Project. MSBA's deadline for district approval of the MSBA Minuteman project is June 30, 2016.