



May 18, 2016

Ms. Maureen G. Valente
Chief Executive Officer
Mr. John K. McCarthy
Executive Director
Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA)
40 Broad Street – Suite 500
Boston, MA 02109

Sent via email

Dear Ms. Valente and Mr. McCarthy:

This letter is submitted to you pursuant to MSBA's Failed Vote Policy.

Overview:

- Project funding was approved by the Minuteman District School Committee on March 15, 2016.
- The District secured affirmative action (or non-disapproval) by 15 of the District's 16 member Town Meetings (in one case subject to a Proposition 2½ debt exclusion vote on June 14).
- The bond funding was disapproved by the Belmont Town Meeting on May 4, 2016.

Absent further action, by operation of M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 16(d), this circumstance constitutes a failed vote.

The Minuteman project was unanimously endorsed by the MSBA Board of Directors on August 6, 2015. Our Final Schematics were approved unanimously by the MSBA Board on January 27, 2016. With the 120-day deadline for local approval approaching on May 27, 2016, the District is required to inform the MSBA of the failed vote, provide reasons for it, and outline its plans for securing approval under its Regional Agreement and statute.

Based upon the extraordinary support for the project shown by 15 member towns, and their recognition of the adverse consequences of a failed vote, community leaders throughout the district are willing to assist us in efforts to further engage the Town of Belmont and reverse the decision in that town. Failing that desired outcome, the district would move forward with a district wide referendum under M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 16(n).

If MSBA grants us more time to do this work, I am confident that we will achieve the same success in Belmont as we have had throughout the District.

1. District Voting Results

Attached is a chart showing the results of 16 member towns meetings. As you can see, the Minuteman project has received broad support in the District communities, with several endorsing the project by unanimous votes at Town Meeting. The vote at Belmont Town Meeting on May 4, 2016 was the single exception. By a vote of 81 in favor and 141 against, Town Meeting failed to endorse the District School Committee's decision to bond for the project. Assuming an affirmative vote on a debt exclusion to be held in the Town of Arlington on June 14, 2016, we would have gained full local approval, except for Belmont.

2. Reasons for the Failed Vote in Belmont

During the Belmont Town Meeting debate, speakers repeatedly expressed concerns regarding the school size, cost differences between building a new school vs. renovating the existing one, the credibility and longevity of the new state-approved capital fee, and competition with other key capital projects in the town, particularly plans for a new Belmont High School.

a. School Size

Some Belmont officials still question the target enrollment of 628 students. We have prepared lengthy documentation to support the enrollment: [Why We Will Fill the New School](#).

The 628 enrollment number is based on facts which were discussed at multiple public meetings. We came to the number, over time, based on our comprehensive review of enrollment trends, labor market data on occupational demand, the specific needs of the Chapter 74 career and vocational technical programs offered, and input from our member towns. The district school committee agrees with MSBA that 628 is the smallest sized school that allows us to retain the quality of education our communities expect.

b. Project Costs: Costs of Renovations v. Building New

Some Belmont town officials have stated publicly that the new school is too expensive. Despite extensive communication efforts, including the publication of all analyses and options required in Module 3 and Module 4, Belmont town officials stated that we have not fully vetted the alternatives, including renovations.

We have prepared numerous documents to address the cost of not pursuing the MSBA project and instead undertaking years of renovations. These documents are posted on our website at www.minuteman.org. We have pointed our member towns to [The "Go It Alone" Option](#) and to [Cost Breakdown for Go It Alone Option](#).

All of the member towns, except Belmont, were satisfied with the recommendations of the district School Building Committee and the explanatory documents provided.

c. Out-of-District Students and the Capital Fee

Some Belmont officials doubt that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will implement its new regulations resulting in a capital fee to be paid by non-member communities.

On February 23, 2015, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved Chapter 74 regulations allowing a capital fee be added to the base tuition rate set by DESE. Unfortunately, despite assurances from DESE, some Belmont officials continue to question whether the fee will actually be implemented at all and, if it is implemented, how long it will stay in effect.

d. Belmont High School and Other Competing Capital Projects

The Minuteman project appears to have been the victim of some very unfortunate timing: (1) our need to secure local approval (Module 5) for this project and (2) Belmont's recent entry into the MSBA pipeline and its need to fund a Feasibility Study and perhaps a new Belmont High School (Module 1).

Belmont Town Meeting overwhelmingly voted to approve funds for a Feasibility Study. When Town Meeting reached the Article discussing Minuteman, some of the Town Meeting members explicitly or implicitly pitted the two MSBA projects against one another. The issue was compounded by the fact that there are several other capital needs in the Town of Belmont that also need to be addressed, including a library, public works building, a police station, and module classrooms for overcrowded middle schools. We were disappointed that Belmont Town Meeting decided to reject the Minuteman project partly because of the potential MSBA/Belmont High School project.

e. Limitations on Our Ability to Present the Facts

At most Town Meetings in the District, as Superintendent, I have been invited to make presentations and answer questions in advocacy of the Minuteman project. Unfortunately, this privilege was not granted to me at the Belmont Town Meeting. I was only allowed to respond, factually, to two questions posed to me by members of Town Meeting. I did not have an opportunity to address specific assertions that arose during debate.

Several members of the District School Committee have urged me to provide you with a link to the Belmont Media Center's taped Cable TV coverage of the meeting so that you can draw your own conclusions. The discussion about Minuteman (Article 1) is filed as "Town Meeting 5-4-16 - Part 2" under "Videos." Here is the link:

<http://vp.telvue.com/preview?id=T02787&video=275385>

Based on our experience on the evening of May 4, 2016, we now know that we will need to make a more extensive communication and outreach effort to Belmont Town Meeting members and town officials.

3. The District's Plan to Remedy the Failed Vote

The Minuteman School Committee and Administration will address and resolve Belmont's concerns. We are actively engaging local officials, Town Meeting members, and the community at large on the value and need for the project, the consequences of not moving forward, and the specific factual issues involved.

We believe this effort can succeed. Elsewhere in the District, even in towns with multiple pending capital projects – one example is Arlington which endorsed the project 84%-16% at Town Meeting – the arguments in favor have won majority support after full discussion and review.

There is substantial support for the work of Minuteman within Belmont. The need for a major capital project at Minuteman is undisputed. We are confident that, once the facts are clear, Belmont's Town Meeting will support this project.

Members of the District School Committee, including its representative from Belmont, stand united in seeking this extension from the MSBA. Along with my Administration, School Committee members are committed to re-engaging the Town of Belmont in an attempt to get this project to "yes." Collectively, we are persuaded to do so because only one town has voted "no".

As the votes demonstrate, we have achieved the necessary support for this project in 9 of the 10 non-departing member towns in the Minuteman District, including "non-disapproval" from the 6 departing communities. In addition, wide margins in Town Meeting votes and associated debt exclusion ballot question votes were achieved.

Given overall support across the District, and our confidence in being able to work with Belmont's leadership and citizenry to improve understanding of the merits of the project, the District is proposing the following plan to secure local approval within the framework of Chapter 71 and our revised Regional Agreement:

1. The District proposes to reauthorize bonding and seek local approval. As of this writing, the District School Committee is keeping its options open to proceed under Chapter 71, Section 16(d) again, conduct a District-wide referendum under Chapter 71, Section 16(n), or possibly do both. The matter was discussed at a School Committee meeting on May 17, 2016. No vote was taken but the consensus was to keep all options open.
2. In order for this plan to be fully executed within a reasonable timeframe, the District is seeking a 180-day extension of its Feasibility Study Agreement with the MSBA. (I hope that I will be able to talk with you further about the precise length of time that may be needed and the type of time extension that MSBA would consider reasonable.) The District fully

understands that the Project Scope and Budget Agreement will not be adjusted in any manner as a result of this extension.

Over the next few months, I look forward to working with District stakeholders, including the Town of Belmont and its residents to provide further information, answer questions, and build support for this much-needed project. We will be enlisting the support of MSBA, DESE, NEASC and others to help focus and reinforce our messaging.

I thank you for your ongoing support for Minuteman High School. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Edward A. Bouquillon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Edward A. Bouquillon, PhD
Superintendent-Director
Minuteman High School

cc: District School Committee
Boards of Selectmen in Member Towns
Town Managers and Town Administrators
State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg, MSBA Chair
State Senators and State Representatives
Deputy Commissioner Jeffrey Wulfson, DESE

TOWN MEETING ACTION ON BONDING FOR A NEW MINUTEMAN HIGH SCHOOL - 2016

	Bonding Under M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 16(d)	Debt Exclusion Vote
Acton	Approved by nearly unanimous vote on 4/4/16	
Arlington	Approved by 165-31 vote (84%-16%) on 5/9/16	To be held on 6/14/2016
Belmont	Not approved by 81-141 vote on 5/4/2016	
Bolton	Approved by estimated 181-9 vote (95%-5%) on 5/2/16	Approved 237-146 (62%-38%) on 5/9/16
Boxborough	Non-disapproval	
Carlisle	Non-disapproval	
Concord	Approved by nearly unanimous vote on 4/5/16	Approved 745-259 (74%-26%) on 4/14/16
Dover	Approved by estimated 900-15 vote on 5/2/16	
Lancaster	Approved by unanimous vote on 5/2/16	Approved 251-153 (62%-38%) on 5/9/16
Lexington	Approved by vote of 152-0 on 4/25/16	
Lincoln	Non-disapproval	Approved 174-112 (61%-39%) on 3/28/16
Needham	Approved by unanimous vote on 5/9/16	
Stow	Approved by estimated vote of 177-12 (94%-6%) on 5/2/16	Approved 284-160 (64%-36%) on 5/10/16
Sudbury	Non-disapproval	
Wayland	Non-disapproval	
Weston	Non-disapproval	

Town votes within 60 days of School Committee's 3/15/16 bonding authorization vote.

Absence of a vote / "non-disapproval" is deemed a "yes" vote.

**Planned Activities during the Requested 180-Day Extension
(July 30, 2016 – December 30, 2016)**

Projected Dates, Milestones & Actions	Comments
<p>May 4, 2016 – Belmont Town Meeting votes to disapprove the project by a vote of 141-81.</p>	<p>Given the discussion on May 4th and subsequent statements from Belmont officials, it appears that Belmont believes the school is too large, that non-member communities will not contribute to capital costs, and that Belmont’s own high school should take priority over the Minuteman project.</p>
<p>May 4, 2016 and Ongoing – The District meets with District stakeholders to confirm Belmont’s reasons for disapproval and work to re-engage Belmont in the process.</p>	<p>Officials from the remaining district communities have been speaking with Belmont stakeholders to encourage reconsideration.</p>
<p>May 17, 2016 – The District School Committee meets to discuss the Belmont vote and agrees to continue to pursue local approval by seeking an extension of MSBA’s Feasibility Study</p>	<p>No votes were taken, but there appeared to be unanimous consensus to submit a request to MSBA for an extension of the deadline to secure local approval.</p>
<p>May 18, 2016 – District officially requests an extension from MSBA</p>	<p>The District seeks the extension to secure local approval by (1) engaging the Belmont stakeholders and (2) simultaneously preparing for School Committee votes under either Chapter 71, Sections 16(d) or 16(n).</p>
<p>May-June 30, 2016 – The District continues meeting with Belmont officials and Town Meeting members to clarify and overcome objections, laying the groundwork for another effort to secure approval from the Town of Belmont via Chap 71 16(d)</p>	<p>This work is critical. Time is needed to help improve chances for success.</p>
<p>By July 15, 2016 – School Committee votes to reauthorize debt under Chapter 71, Section 16(d)</p>	<p>Member towns have 60 days in which to hold a Town Meeting to disapprove.</p>
<p>September 1, 2016 – The District holds meetings with Town Clerks in the District’s member towns to prepare for a possible district-wide referendum.</p>	<p>Only two similar elections have ever been held before, one at Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School in Charlton, the other at Franklin County Technical School in Turners Falls. From what we have been told, the planning process will take 45-60 days.</p>

<p>By September 15, 2016 – If no town disapproves the debt or makes it contingent on a subsequent Proposition 2½ debt exclusion vote, the project is <u>approved</u>.</p>	<p>If a Town Meeting vote is contingent on a related Prop 2½ vote, we might not know the final outcome for a few days (or possibly weeks) later. This fact adds a further bit of uncertainty to this calendar. That is why we have believe 180 days allows the district to respond as noted below.</p>
<p>By October 15, 2016 <i>(or earlier if Belmont remains in opposition)</i> – The District School Committee votes to call for a district-wide referendum to approve debt under Chapter 71, Section 16(n) and sets the date for the district-wide referendum</p>	<p>If Belmont reaffirms its opposition to the project, the District School Committee will call for a District-wide election under 16(n). While the district is reluctant to subject the towns that supported the project to a district-wide referendum, it may occur earlier and be the only option available should outreach efforts to Belmont fail.</p>
<p>By December 30, 2016 – District-wide referendum held on one day in all member communities</p>	<p>The aggregate vote total will determine whether the debt is approved or rejected. Given the overall support for the project as confirmed in votes to date, the district believes the majority of voters will support this project.</p>