



Town of West Newbury

Select Board

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November 29, 2023

Massachusetts School Building Authority
40 Broad Street, Suite 500
Boston, MA 02109

Maureen Lynch, Superintendent
Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School
115 Amesbury Line Road
Haverhill, MA 01830

RE: Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School Building Project

Dear Superintendent Lynch,

We greatly appreciated you joining us for a special Select Board meeting on November 13, 2023 to review the Whittier School Building Project. We as a board fully support the role of vocational programming in the education of the young people of West Newbury and throughout our region. Although we were asked to sign onto a letter of opposition to this project and the voting approach prepared by other members of Whittier's region, we decided to share our comments and suggestions in a separate letter. Our hope is that we can offer constructive feedback on the project and its path forward so that it will gain the support of all regional members and ultimately be successful.

At the outset, we want to say that we do not think renovation of the building is a wise or cost-efficient option. We agree that the only logical choice is to construct a new building with updated equipment and facilities that will last well into the future. The fact that the MSBA will only provide funding for a new building, thereby reducing the cost to region members, is evidence that renovation is not a desirable choice.

We therefore understand the decision to take advantage of the option for a majority rule regional vote. Given the relatively small proportion of students attending Whittier in many of the region towns, the project is unlikely to pass if individual town votes are taken. The consequence of this choice must also be understood, however. To communities that already feel that they have been blindsided by the cost of this project, having a regional vote makes it seem that their authority as a municipal entity is being undermined. In light of the public outcry over the cost of this project, it also remains a distinct possibility

that even a regional vote may fail. That would force the option of rehabilitation, ending up costing taxpayers considerably more and resulting in an unsatisfactory facility for vocational programming. Given the urgency of a successful vote for this building project, it is imperative that a pause in the schedule as proposed occurs. We propose that a formal request be submitted to the MSBA asking for a delay on their vote in order to allow Whittier time to provide the proper outreach and consideration of regional member concerns. If they are willing and able to consider this, the following could be accomplished without the building project having to start over in the MSBA process:

- Allowing regional members to add these costs to their five-year capital plans and educate voters about long term costs
- The opportunity for clarification about alternative design and site options to reduce costs
- Establishment of regular communication updates to municipal officials and their residents
- Identification of potential additional sources of funding
- Review and revision of the Whittier Regional Agreement by members

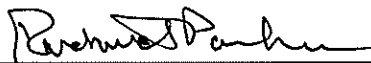
If the request for such a pause was successful, we envision a kickoff meeting with municipal officials from all member towns and cities. A list of questions would be provided to Whittier ahead of time so that specific and thoughtful answers could be provided at this meeting. It would be important to consider and be responsive to these questions as an opportunity to educate the voters and move the project forward efficiently. Municipal officials and taxpayers seem to accept the need for a new school. They want to know what other designs were considered, why they were not chosen and what the cost impact of this was, though. We understand that the Building Committee and consultants have spent a lot of time evaluating the options. It's difficult for those being asked to pay for the project to just accept the final design without an understanding of what other options were considered, though.

Please let us know if there's a role we can play in supporting a proposal to the MSBA for pausing the project. Given that this has the potential to turn the significant opposition to this project around and build consensus among the 11 members of the region, it seems well worth the delay in final approval of the project.

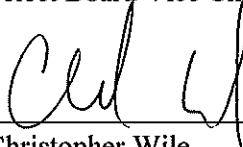
Sincerely,
West Newbury Select Board



Wendy Reed
Select Board Chair



Richard Parker
Select Board Vice Chair



Christopher Wile
Select Board Clerk

cc: Chip O'Connor, WN Representative to Whittier School Committee
Kassandra Gove, Mayor Amesbury
Amy Smith, Chair, Board of Selectmen Georgetown
Daniel MacDonald, Chair, Board of Selectmen, Groveland
James Fiorentini, Mayor Haverhill
Melinda Barrett, Mayor-Elect Haverhill
Sarah Player, Chair, Select Board, Ipswich
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Chris Manni, Chair, Select Board, Merrimac
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Cliff Pierce, Chair, Board of Selectmen, Rowley
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Massachusetts School Building Authority
Senator Bruce Tarr
Representative Adrienne Pusateri Ramos

