

Update on School Project Petition

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We wanted to bring to your attention and clarify some information. A petition was filed last Tuesday asking for the town to reconsider the school building project that was voted on May 2016. Tonight the board of selectmen was asked to act on this petition with the town attorney present. Here are a few answers and information so you can be informed...

Will we be re-voting on the school building project?

In essence, yes. North Stonington is a non-chartered town, therefore nearly anyone can petition the town for any reason with only 20 signatures. Though this may seem unbelievable it is true and we are bound by state statute to call the meeting and honor the petition.

Can't we just ignore the petition because we have already spent millions of dollars and stand to lose millions more should the project not proceed?

No we cannot. Unfortunately we are required by our bond council to hold this petition or they cannot allow us to borrow the rest of the money we will need in order to move the project forward.

Are we in compliance with the vote and resolution we passed in May of 2016.

Yes absolutely. There has been some misinformation circulated which incorrectly tries to discredit this fact. Our bond council and town attorney are in agreement we have done everything we were supposed to do and continue to do so.

Did the state give us our reimbursement?

They have promised us our 46.07% reimbursement rate on eligible costs as of October 31, 2017. In addition more costs have become eligible due to us being approved for our space standard waiver to the tune of an additional 1.6 million dollars. So the town is going to be responsible on our 38.5 million dollar project to pay only approximately 21.6 million.

I heard that we are getting 23% reimbursement. What is that all about?

Last year when we presented the proposals and worked on the resolutions we always knew and communicated that the roof project at the existing Middle High School would be reimbursed at 1/2 of the reimbursement rate. i.e. 1/2 of 46.07% is 23.04%. Our resolution reads we must receive 46.07% of ELIGIBLE costs. Roof projects are reimbursed at half of project costs and thus eligible at that rate. The bond council (the authority on our resolution and the entity which guarantees our borrowing) approved our project as in compliance. The state has approved our project as in compliance. These rates are exactly what was discussed in the three presentations proceeding the vote in 2016. To summarize, we are getting the 46.07% reimbursement rate on both of our school projects and only the roof is eligible at 1/2 the rate.

Do we still have our USDA interest rate of 2.875%?

Since May of 2016 USDA rates fell slightly so our current and locked rate is actually 2.75%, less than what was discussed back in May of 2016.

Why are we being asked to re-vote on something that already passed?

Unfortunately it appears that given our non-chartered status in town we are held to follow state statute and our legal guidance is recommending this course of action.

What happens if we decide at the town meeting not to move the project forward?

We will immediately put forth a proposal to begin the 29+ million dollar effort to fix the bare necessities at the school. This will likely result in us having to borrow monies at rates closer to 5% vs. the 2.75% we are getting through USDA. It also will likely represent a mil rate increase double the projected mil rate with this project. For those who are unaware, there are basic security and environmental issues that we are mandated to fix and have only been allowed to go on for this long because entities such as the State and EPA have known we have a school project about to break ground.

When will the re-vote take place?

Next Thursday February 1 at 7pm a meeting will take place at the Gymatorium at the high school. We will have a presentation likely followed by a vote, which is what the petition asks for.

Where can I learn more?

Please consider watching the video of the Board of Selectmen meeting, which took place on January 16th, 2018. This meeting gives a very good overview of the project and most questions are clearly answered within the first 1/2 hour of the video. It is available at www.northstoningtonct.gov

As a side note it is important that we understand this petition represents 1% of the registered voters in town (50 or so out of 4,000+). It is important that everyone's voice is respected and heard but it is equally important to recognize the countless volunteer hours that our boards and commissions spent putting this incredibly cost effective project together. North Stonington as a whole values education and realizes that this project is going to greatly benefit the town both fiscally and economically and truly represents the most cost effective way of fixing the issues we have in our schools and ultimately results in a state of the art facility our students and faculty deserve as a school of distinction.