

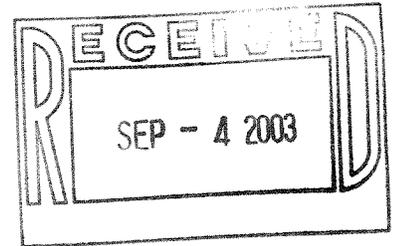
BOS - for discussion

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DRAFT
For Discussion Only

August 25, 2003

Superintendent of Minuteman Regional High School
Minuteman Regional High School Committee



Dear Sir/Madam:

The undersigned members of the Acton Board of Selectmen, School Committees, and Finance Committee are writing to indicate our displeasure and disappointment with the process and lack of communication with the Minuteman Regional School, and its representatives relating to the budgetary process for this past year. Acton saw an eventual 17 percent increase in its assessment from Minuteman between the time at which we prepared our final budgets for town meeting approval and our receipt of the final assessment in May 2003. Acton has been able to cope with these difficult budgetary times with careful planning, an informed electorate, and excellent communication among the town's leadership through the Acton Leadership Group (ALG) process. This process has worked very well in recent years, and has been an integral part of our multi-year budget planning process. The Minuteman assessment, however, which now approximates a \$1 million budget item for Acton, proved to be an unfortunate surprise in our budget planning process this year and we hope that action can be taken to ensure that this surprise will not be repeated.

After having been told throughout the year as we developed our budgets that the Minuteman assessment would be approximately \$780,000, we were informed on the first night of town meeting (April 6th) that the assessment would in fact be higher. At a specially convened joint meeting on April 7, 2004, Ronald Fitzgerald (Superintendent of the Minuteman Regional High School) and Charles Olmstead (Acton Representative to the Minuteman School Board) met with the Acton Board of Selectman, the Acton Public School Committee, and the Acton Finance Committee. The Acton's governmental Boards were asked to support and recommend to town meeting an increased FY2004 Minuteman assessment from \$782,000 to \$824,000, an increase of \$42,000. At the meeting, the Town was assured that the \$824,000 was the maximum Acton would be assessed. Acton has always been a supporter of Minuteman. Even though the unplanned \$42,000 increase represented a heavy burden to the town in today's economic environment, Acton's Board of Selectman and Finance Committee supported the request. Later that evening, at Town meeting, the Town voted to approve the appropriation using additional free cash to plug the budgetary gap created by the increased assessment. This was after the town worked hard to win the voters' support of a \$3 million operating override, while giving assurances that the following year we had sufficient reserves so that added overrides would not be needed. This additional use of free cash for FY04 was unplanned, unwelcome, and immediately created a problem looking ahead to FY05.

Subsequently in late May, we learned that our Minuteman assessment would increase from \$825,000 to \$920,000, or another almost \$100,000. We understand that a part of this increase was due to the House Ways & Means (HWM) increasing Acton's minimum assessment from \$419,000 to \$501,000. This additional increase came as quite a surprise to us, and frankly, we are disappointed in the manner in which Acton was informed of this increase. We received a one-page memo informing us of the increase without any forewarning and no further notification or explanation of the increase was provided. This is particularly disturbing in light of what we believe are serious discrepancies between Acton's per student costs and per pupil costs of other member communities. A simple analysis shows that Acton's cost per pupil is \$8,000 higher than other towns. These differences violate the agreement that Town Meeting approved years ago that called for costs to be allocated equably among the towns. To date, we have not received an explanation of how Acton's FY04 Net Minimum contribution was calculated.

We request an explanation of how the FY04 Net Minimum Contribution was calculated for the towns and the legal basis for the formula used in calculating each town's assessment. We have also for explanations from our legislators as well as the Department of Education as we feel as there has been no explanation forthcoming as to how Acton's share has become so far out of line with other member communities.

Finally, Acton is reviewing its options as we feel that this chain of events has damaged support for the school, and without a better understanding of how we were placed in this position, we believe we must consider all options.

Sincerely yours,

Acton Board of Selectmen

Acton Finance Committee

Acton Public School Committee