



TOWN OF STOUGHTON

OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

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South School Building Project Independent Working Group

Greetings Stoughton Residents,

On June 11th, 5,208 Stoughton citizens cast their votes on a proposed debt exclusion to pay for the construction and furnishing of a new K-5 elementary school to be located on Park St. Of the 5,208 votes cast, 2,320 citizens voted yes and 2,884 citizens voted no. There was a 23% voter turnout.

Since the June 11th election, there has been considerable debate over the reasons that the measure failed. Most feel that given the low voter turnout, conflicting information about the project, may have caused people to stay home on election day. However, there is no question that 23% of our citizens have spoken.

One day, an elementary school must be built. The South School is approximately 60 years old and we cannot afford to replace it without the financial support from the State. It is very important that we maintain a strong and credible relationship with the Massachusetts School Building Authority if we are to receive the State's financial support. Therefore, we must clearly understand why only 23% of our voters weighed in on this important decision. I requested that the MSBA extend our current grant application to their first meeting following Stoughton's April 1st Town election. The MSBA has agreed to extend the application period until April 3, 2025. Had they not done so, the Stoughton grant application would have been rejected. A new application would not be considered by the MSBA for 4 – 5 years. In addition, a new feasibility study will be required as part of the new application. That study will cost more than \$1.5 million.

There are active Political Action Committees working in support and opposition to this project. In an effort to gather, vet and publish information for the public, I have formed the South School Building Project Independent Working Group. This working group consists of citizens and Town employees appointed by me. The purpose of the working group is to research the issues and questions surrounding the South School Building Project. The working group members have demonstrated their ability and willingness to be objective. Invited members have taken public positions both for and against the School Building Project. This balance of opposite positions brings credibility to the working group. During a 10-week period, the group will meet once a week to take testimony from subject matter experts. By November 15, 2024, the working group will publish a document which will provide vetted information on the issues of known interest to our residents.

During the working group weekly meetings, members will take and challenge testimony, fact check information, collect supporting documents and review draft summaries on issues. Each of the members will be expected to sign the final document, demonstrating their support of the data included in the report.

This independent working group, is committed to following a deliberative public process. Its primary objective is to provide our residents with unbiased, accurate and verifiable information from which residents are able to make an informed decision should the Select Board vote to place the question on the ballot for the next Town election scheduled for April 1st.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas J. Calter".

Thomas J. Calter,
Town Manager