

City of Melrose
Commission on Disability
562 Main Street
Melrose, MA 02176

January 3, 2023

Mr. Jack McCarthy
Massachusetts School Building Authority
40 Broad Street, Suite 500
Boston, MA 02109

Dear Mr. McCarthy:

I am writing on behalf of the Melrose Commission on Disability, in regards to the plan for the new Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational High School in Wakefield (NEMT), a major portion of funding for which is being provided by MSBA.

As you may be aware there is significant controversy over the proposed site for the new building, for a variety of reasons. However, I am writing in particular about concerns over accessibility for people with disabilities at the proposed new building. We understand there will be ADA accessible parking at the upper and lower campus. Also, it would be our expectation that the building will be fully ADA compliant, and conform with requirements regarding accessibility from the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board. However, we have major concerns that access to the proposed building from the lower parking lot is either via 10 flights of concrete stairs, or a 735-foot wooden ramp. For any individuals with mobility issues, this will create significant accessibility issues. It also our understanding that there will be an elevator available to bring individuals from the lower parking area, but this will only account for 2 of the 10 flights of stairs. Not only is the length of the proposed ramp/boardwalk an issue, but the need for the boardwalk and stair to be kept clear in inclement weather will create accessibility and safety issues for all students. Also, in two locations, traffic will need to be stopped in order for students to cross the road. This creates concerns for all students, including those with disabilities, in terms of safety. A much more universal approach would be to locate the building in the open space next to the current building, as was originally proposed in the 2016 pre-feasibility report, and until recently was the general perception of the public regarding the building plans (per the *Boston Globe*, October 12, 2022 – “The \$317.4 million project involves replacing the existing school with a new and larger building, to be constructed on the current athletic fields on Northeast Metro Tech’s 30-acre campus in Wakefield.”). This is much preferred to having individuals traverse a long ramp or take an elevator, and deal with the safety issues in the roadway.

We also want to express our concern regarding the space allocations for special education in the proposed design. Per the August 4, 2022 MSBA Development Submittal, “The District is proposing a total of 7,070 net square feet (nsf) which is 9,040 nsf below the MSBA guidelines based on the total enrollment.” Even though it appears the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education signed off on this allocation (per the August 13, 2021 letter from DESE that is attached to the Development Submittal), given that 24% of NEMT students are in special education, we feel having a design that is so significantly below the MSBA space guidelines for special education is unacceptable, and frankly shows a lack of responsiveness to the needs of special education students.

Once the new building is constructed, it will be too late to correct the accessibility and space issues outlined above, and they will be features of NEMT for generations to come, impacting the ability of students with disabilities to fully access and benefit from the facility. There is still an opportunity to create a new state-of-the-art facility that is universally accessible and better meets the needs of all, including those with disabilities. The Melrose Commission on Disability is requesting that MSBA work with the NEMT administration and school committee on a revised plan for the new NEMT building that:

- does not involve constructing the new school building at the current proposed location
- does not shortchange space for special education
- provides a location and building that is fully and universally accessible to all.

Please feel free to reach out with any questions or to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,



David Hoff

Chair – City of Melrose, Commission on Disability

commissionondisability@cityofmelrose.org

Cc:

Mayor Paul Brodeur, City of Melrose

State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg, Commonwealth of Massachusetts