



MCA board secretary Katherine Charmin speaks to the MCSD Board of Education Dec. 10. (Jeremy Morrison/Montrose Daily Press)

**BOARD**

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“There were just too many things that were of concern to me that weren’t covered in this application,” he said.

Board member Alice Murphy took a similar position.

“You know, at the beginning I was going to go with approving it with conditions,” Murphy said. “But when I started writing down all the conditions, it became a big list and I thought, ‘this is a lot of things that you would have to fix in order for your school to go through,’ so, because of that — that’s why I’m thinking the way I’m going to vote is there’s just too many conditions to fix.”

Among the concerns school board members have expressed is MCA’s lack of a physical facility for the charter, as well as questions about the charter’s ability to serve students with special needs. Board members have also expressed concerns about MCA’s claims of innovation and of its proposed curriculum in general.

“I think the number I finally reached was 85 things that could be

corrected,” noted school board member Tom West.

But not all the school board members felt that MCA’s charter application should be denied. Board member Neisha Ballack said that as a parent — who has sent her children to public, private and charter institutions — she has always appreciated expanding choice.

“The more options that I’ve had, the better,” she said.

Ballack also contended that MCA’s approach to education was indeed innovative, pointing to the school’s proposed classical curriculum, the wearing of school uniforms, as well as the teaching of Latin and cursive writing as innovative educational options not currently available in the district.

“Those are big things

that show to me that it’s different,” she said.

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~  
Alice Murphy,  
MCSB Board of  
Education

conditions. “I don’t think we’re that far off in giving them an opportunity to work on this with conditions,” he said.

Valerio also explained that he viewed the role of a school board member as a servant of the overall community, rather than

Ballack pushed for approving the school with conditions — “it’s normal to have a couple of high-level conditions in approval” — and said that MCA should be given a chance for “tightening up certain things” in its charter application.

Board member Ted Valerio also said the board should be approving MCA with

limiting their scope to the interests of the school district. In that sense, he said, the school board should put a high value on input they’ve received from community members.

“We should be listening to the community, the community who has voted for us and asked us to be here to look after what’s best for the community and I think that’s what we’re here for. And we’re taking care of the school district, but we’re representing the community,” Valerio said

“They’ve asked a board from all different areas in the community and from different backgrounds or whatever to represent the community ... We’re

not just representing the school district, we’re here to be a part and to help it function and to make policy decisions. But, that is my stance and that’s where I come from.”

School board President Sarah Fishing also noted that she was inclined to give the charter a chance to address some of the school district’s concerns. The president, however, was much more cautious in her conditional support than either Valerio or Ballack; she noted

her concerns about MCA’s ability to serve “special populations” of students, as well as the “viability of the budget” it has presented.

Additionally, Fishing clarified that the school district does instruct students in cursive writing and questioned how elements such as Latin and school uniforms amounted to innovative approaches.

“These are not innovative solutions to education in any way, shape or form,” she said. “But, I recognize there is support for it. And, I, for that reason, would have been willing to consider approval with conditions.”

The president added that any conditions that would be laid out for MCA to meet would be “stringent and extensive” — and that she had doubts the charter could meet them.

“I’m not 100 percent certain that the board would actually be able to meet with those conditions,” Fishing said, “but

I would be in favor of giving them the opportunity to try, to see if we can get to ‘fully developed’ for a budget, ‘fully developed’ for a facility plan that meets with regulations, ‘fully developed’ for how will we meet the needs of those special populations. But I have to say I have some serious misgiving about the application, but I would have personally been willing to consider with conditions.”

The president then suggested that a denial wouldn’t necessarily be the end of MCA’s journey.

“If it doesn’t go in your favor this evening, come back with a more complete application,” she said.

Fishing ultimately voted with the losing side of the board’s 4-3 split, siding with Ballack and Valerio in rejecting a straight denial. Bush, West, Murphy and Jody Hovde voted to deny MCA’s application.

In the public gallery, Kay Alexander — president of the MCA board and driving force behind launching the charter effort a year ago — watched as the board explained their rationale and, ultimately, handed MCA a denial of its application. Afterwards, she said the rejection was an unexpected disappointment — she had expected an approval with conditions.

Despite the school district’s denial of the charter application, Alexander said her team’s efforts will continue.

“I will be talking with the other MCA board members tomorrow about our next steps, but I can assure you and the almost 300 parents who signed an expression of interest for Montrose Classical Academy — the grandparents and our other supporters who are committed to excellence in education and desire school choice for the children of Montrose County — that we aren’t going away!” Alexander wrote in an email to the Montrose Daily Press Tuesday night, adding that MCA would soon have an “action plan” to move forward.



MCSB School Board members Sarah Fishing, Stephen Bush and Alice Murphy listen to speakers address the issue of MCA’s charter application Dec. 10. (Jeremy Morrison/Montrose Daily Press)