



Art Smith

## The Standards Approval Process

by Art Smith

I'm writing this while I'm sitting in the Atlanta airport on my way home from the March 1998 MUMPS Development Committee (MDC) meeting (I've got lots of time to write it since my scheduled flight was cancelled . . . but that's another story). We are continuing to move forward toward the next version of the M Language Standard (ANSI/MDC X11.1). We have a meeting scheduled for June in Boston (immediately following the MTA Annual Meeting) and another in September in Seattle. It is our current plan to "roll the new standard" at that September meeting. It's conceivable that that date could slip, but there is no expectation of that yet.

So what happens then? Well, "rolling the standard" means that all modifications to the current standard (X11.1-1995) which have been approved by the MDC will be in the new standard, and any not yet approved won't. As these changes are approved, they are incorporated into the MDC draft standard, which is edited by Rick Marshall of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sometimes this is easy, and sometimes it is more difficult (for example, when two or more approved proposals modify the same section of the standard). The first printed version of this draft standard just came out at

the Atlanta meeting so MDC members can begin checking to make sure previously accepted modifications have been appropriately incorporated.

After we roll the standard in September, Rick will incorporate all of the approved proposals into a new "complete" version of the MDC draft standard. This will be distributed to MDC members prior to the next meeting after the standard is rolled. If we stick to our schedule, that will be the March 1999 meeting. At that meeting the MDC will vote to either accept or reject the draft standard as accurately representing the result of applying all of the approved modifications. If the draft standard is rejected, the editor will be directed to make the necessary changes and reprint the draft standard to be voted on at the next meeting. This process continues until the draft standard meets with the approval of the MDC. Note that no new proposals are rolled into the standard during this process.

Once the draft standard is approved by the MDC, we submit it to the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) for canvassing. In the canvass process, copies of the draft standard are sent to any interested parties who have requested to be on the canvass list. These parties have six months to respond with their

vote, either to accept or deny the new standard. If they vote to deny the standard, they must cite specific objections to the draft standard. Those who vote to accept the standard may also cite objections. These objections, if any, are sent to the MDC, which will then contact each objecting party in an attempt to resolve these problems. The standard cannot be changed during this resolution phase, but often the objections are based on a misunderstanding, or can be resolved by informing the objecting party of ongoing work in the MDC. The parties may change their vote at this time.

If there are any negative votes remaining, copies of these votes, the objections and the MDC's response to these objections are sent out to the entire canvass list. Canvass participants have a reasonable period to review this information and may then change their votes (in either direction).

If no negative votes remain at that time, ANSI will generally grant approval of the draft standard as an American National Standard (ANS). If negative votes are recorded, ANSI may still grant approval if, in their determination, there is a clear consensus of approval indicated by the bulk of the canvass responses.

If the standard is accepted by ANSI, parties who are directly and materially affected by the standard have the option of appealing that decision, which begins an additional process (the ANS standing is suspended during the appeals process). There are several levels of appeals that may be heard by ANSI. The appeals process delayed final approval of the last standard (ANSI/MDC X11.1-1995) for well over a year!

So let's add this up. In the most optimistic scenario possible, the standard will be rolled this September. The first complete draft standard incorporating all these changes could be approved at the March 1999 MDC meeting and submitted to Canvass that month. Canvass participants might receive the canvass package in April, which would make the deadline for returning the votes in October of 1999. If there are no objections or negative votes, the MDC could request ANS status immediately and possibly receive notification of acceptance before the end of 1999. The likelihood of any of these steps being performed in this optimistic time frame range from dubious to laughable.

In a slightly more realistic scenario, the standard will be rolled in September, and the first complete draft standard will be voted on in the March 1999 MDC meeting. This vote may well fail — it is almost impossible to edit that much technical content correctly on the first try! If the changes are not too extensive, a second version may be submitted to the MDC in a mail ballot in June of 1999. Assuming this version is approved, the canvass package could be submitted to

ANSI and distributed to the canvass list in July of 1999. This would mean that the canvass period would end in January 2000. Initial attempts at resolution and responses to negative votes and objections could be formulated for consideration by the MDC at the March 2000 meeting. The response package could be sent out following the MDC approval, to be returned with any vote changes by April of 2000. This information could be sent to ANSI shortly after that time.

ANSI may request additional information from canvass participants or from the MDC. This information would be approved at the September, 2000 meeting and forwarded on to ANSI who would then issue a ruling, probably early in 2001. If ANSI approves the standard, it will then be known as ANSI/MDC X11.1-2001 (hence the nickname "Millennium Standard"). If previous standards are any indication, we can expect appeals to be raised. The appeals process may take quite some time. The final acceptance of the standard rolled in September of 1998 might realistically be expected some time in late 2002 or early 2003.

So what does the MDC do in the mean time? Why start working on the next version of the standard, of course! Like most good quests, this one may never be completed. We'll keep you posted on our progress! **M**

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## **MDC Thanks MGA!**

The MDC (MUMPS Development Committee) would like to thank MUMPS of Georgia, and most especially Mr. Tom Ackerman, for their excellent hospitality at the March MDC meeting. Their generosity (and outstanding cooking!) helped to make the meeting both fun and productive.

*Art Smith, Chair, MDC*

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