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Ellington Board of Education Votes to Move Forward with Windermere School Building Project

Renovate-to-New project deemed a high priority due to increasing sunk costs if further delayed

ELLINGTON, CT – On Wednesday, October 27th, the Ellington Board of Education voted unanimously to move forward with an approximately \$61M renovate-to-new school building project at Windermere Elementary School. The Board expects an anticipated grant from the state with a reimbursement rate of 55.36%, resulting in roughly \$32M being provided to the Town to offset the project cost. The Windermere project had previously been delayed twice due to uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic and potential changes to enrollment.

“Pausing the Windermere Project at the onset of the pandemic was the right thing to do from both a fiscal and developmental perspective. Now it is time to move forward. The building is in need of extensive updating, our student population continues to increase and the state is now offering an additional percent of reimbursement on renovate-to-new projects.”

- Jennifer Dzen, Board Chair

In August, the Board re-engaged with an architecture firm to update cost estimates and also secured a new enrollment demographic study. The enrollment study justified planning for a project with 739 students at Windermere. The Board was in agreement with moving forward with a similar project concept as it approved previously—a roughly 38,000 square foot addition and renovation and demolitions of portions of the existing building.

“Keeping our Ellington community moving forward has much to do with how we are educating our children. Building a new Windermere is an important component and I am so excited to get this project started. COVID-19 may have caused a delay, but it has not deterred this Board of Education’s commitment to rebuild. Based on the condition of the building it makes sound fiscal sense to renovate to new as the cost to continue repairing it would be prohibitive in the long run. A new Windermere... it's good for the children and it's good for the Ellington community. ”

- Kerry Socha, Operations Committee Chair

Previously, the Ellington Board of Education determined through a facilities study that Windermere was in most need of renovation due to existing and long-term capital improvements required and fit with the educational needs of students. Although there are no current structural concerns, testing found evidence of pyrrhotite, the mineral determined to be the cause of crumbling foundations in the area, in the foundation of a small addition to Windermere School.

The Board at the time weighed three Windermere building project options: One - Renovate, Two – New (at two locations), and Three - Renovate to New. Option One - a straight renovation - was not supported by the State of Connecticut. The Board closely examined Options Two and Three discussing student safety, probable traffic implications, neighborhood aesthetics, educational programming and short and long term financial costs.

Ultimately, the Board felt both options were comparable excluding the financial cost. Option Two – a new build – would cost approximately \$8 million more than Option Three – renovate to new.

The Board unanimously agreed that a ‘renovate to new’ Windermere Elementary School building project was a fiscally responsible approach that would meet the educational needs of the Ellington Public Schools for decades to come.

The project now moves to Town Boards of Selectmen and Finance who must approve the project before sending it to referendum in early 2022.