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Ellington Voters Approve Windermere School Building Project

Renovate-to-New concept addresses necessary capital and educational elements

ELLINGTON, CT – On Tuesday, March 1st, the voters of Ellington went to the polls and overwhelmingly approved moving forward with the \$61M renovate-to-new building project at Windermere Elementary School. Approximately 74% of the voters cast their vote in favor of the project (630 of 853).

“We are truly excited that the residents of Ellington came out to support the project. This project has been in the works for several years but ultimately any delay was worth getting it correct, as the project is a long-term investment for the school and community.”

- **Jennifer Dzen, Board of Education Chair**

The \$61M price tag is the total cost of the project, however the Town expects an anticipated grant from the state with a reimbursement rate of 55.36%. The Town is estimated to receive roughly \$32M to offset the project cost.

“This project concept addresses the educational needs of Windermere School, turning it into a modern school environment, while also addressing the broader growth we expect to see in elementary enrollment,” said Dr. Scott Nicol, Superintendent of Schools.

In August, the Board of Education 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 was previously approved—a roughly 38,000 square foot addition and renovation, and demolitions of portions of the existing building.

“While it took some time to get the Windermere building project to referendum, I am proud of the careful work this Board of Education and Administration accomplished. It is an exciting time for the Ellington community as it embarks on this important project. Last night’s vote was not only a vote to build/renovate a new school, it was a vote to reinvest in our town and continue to move forward.”

- **Kerry Socha, Operations Committee Chair**

Principal Jennifer Hill, an Ellington resident, stated, “Our school and Windermere community are overjoyed that the project will be moving forward! Our children will thrive in an updated facility that fits the needs of all our learners. The project will allow for our school to grow to fit the physical demands of growing classrooms, but also provide flexible learning environments that continue to do what's right and best for students.”

In addition to educational issues of a building designed in the mid-20th century, the district has dealt with challenges associated with an aging facility for several years. The roof in some areas of the building is close to 30 years old and has been patched several times. Some boiler systems are the same age and have had to be taken offline due to their condition. Original building materials also raise environmental concerns if any smaller year-to-year renovations need to be done.

“We look forward to working with the Permanent Building Committee as the design of the new school takes shape. We’ll look at ways to value-engineer the project and save money where possible, but ultimately we’re going to advocate for the best project for the Town. The building will stand for another 60 years, and we’re going to make sure future generations of Ellington children benefit from what we do now,” said Brian Greenleaf, Director of Finance and Operations.

The Board of Education will complete its Educational Specifications and submit the project to the Office of School Construction Grants by June 30, 2022. Project funding and design work will begin in 2023. Construction is anticipated to begin in 2024 with final completion projected for 2026.