

May 16, 2016

Dear Amherst Town Meeting Members,

We are aware that Article 38 will come before you for an upcoming vote. This article is not supported by the members of the School Building Committee, whose names are signed at the end of the document, for reasons listed below:

1. Since its inception, the School Building Committee has consistently followed the process(es) provided by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). The schedule that has been followed can be seen in Appendix A. A summary of meetings with different stakeholders can be seen in Appendix B. This process should be allowed to reach its conclusion without an alternative process occurring simultaneously, which is not supported by the elected School Committee or our body.
2. The MSBA process is one that included the voices of this public body, as well as staff, parents/guardians, and the community, to further develop the building plans. Hiring an external consultant who will not be interviewing staff or community members about critical needs, design choices, or having a similar public process will not contribute to gathering a more specific plan or estimate. More details on the iterative process and engagement of an array of critical stakeholders are below:
 - The School Building Committee is comprised of a diverse group of individuals, such as teachers, town employees parents/guardians, school and district administrators, and community members, who offer feedback to the architects at every School Building Committee meeting held, which are all public meetings
 - We have hosted 8 Community Forums to gather feedback from community stakeholders, and recently had a Parent/Child Forum for current students and will be hosting a similar event next month
 - The Educational Program, a foundational document that described the vision for the new school, was developed over four full days of work by a large group that included teachers, principals, parents, town officials, and community members, but was a very different group than the School Building Committee with few members of both teams.
 - In the past few weeks, more than 40 staff members had small group or individual conversations with the architects. They were able to offer feedback on the site plan, share requirements for their programs, and how school needs should be organized in order to respond to student needs. These conversations included classroom teachers, custodians, principals, special education teachers, food service staff, art teachers, music teachers, and librarians, among other staff members
 - The building design has undergone many revisions based on the feedback from all the stakeholders and that process will continue in the future

3. The actions and steps proposed by the Article will not result in achieving its stated goal of “preparing a detailed assessment of the feasibility and estimated cost of renovating the Wildwood School and the Fort River Elementary School” for these reasons:
 - As mentioned, developing a design plan is an iterative process that requires dialogue and conversations with the “users” such as staff members, parents/guardians, and students—none of which would occur based on Article 38
 - Any study that did not involve professionals, such as architects and engineers, would lack credibility
 - In addition, the Article assumes that the costs of renovating both Wildwood and Fort River would be identical. However, it is impossible to know if that is true before doing a true site assessment of Fort River, which is not proposed in this petition. Fort River is a complex site given that the school is bordered by a Flood Plain and a Flood Zone and has struggled with wetness and mold throughout its history. To get a clear assessment of this cost, engineers would have to do a similarly thorough investigation of the site as was done for Wildwood as part of the MSBA process (see details in the “Evaluation of Existing Conditions” report, which starts on page 55 of this larger Preliminary Design Program document, which can be found at: <https://goo.gl/ocQIBI>).
 - A significant expense in any renovation model would be “swing space” costs—essentially, spaces where the students would attend school while renovation is occurring. The district did an initial swing space estimate for the Wildwood renovation and found it would have cost the town more than \$1 million per year while construction would take place and result in Wildwood students attending four separate sites during those years (Fort River, the Middle School, the former East Street School, and rented trailers behind Wildwood). To see a detailed cost estimate for the swing space required by a renovation option, a professional firm would need to be hired to further develop this cost as well as a plan that would need to be vetted by students, teachers, and parents/guardians for and the educational and community implications, but this step is also not included in the Article.
4. Independent cost estimates were completed in January for the different options and were fully within the average range of other MSBA elementary school projects over the past three years. The renovation cost estimate for Wildwood was \$338 per square foot (*resulting in a total estimated cost of \$34.6 million for renovation of just one school*). For the twelve MSBA elementary school projects from 2014-2016, the average estimated cost of renovation (with appropriate cost escalation factored in) was \$333.83 per square foot at the same phase of the project. **Simply put, the estimate for the renovation of Wildwood was fully within the average range of all projects.** Given the lack of permanent walls between classrooms at Wildwood, it was not expected that the estimates for such as renovation would be on the low end of the average range. The estimates for the renovation option, as well as the reconfiguration option that was chosen as the preferred schematic as part of the MSBA process, can be found in Appendix C.

5. Cost was not the primary reason for the School Committee's vote on reconfiguration; equitable experiences for students and staff were prioritized in their decision-making. The Amherst School Committee recently discussed Article 38 in an Open Meeting and drafted a letter; please see the statement in Appendix D
6. The School Committee decision in January on grade configuration and our February decision on building site and design have already been made as per the requirements of the MSBA process; any alternative plans would not have the funding grant of the MSBA to reduce the load on Amherst taxpayers. Getting into the MSBA process is very competitive; 90% of applicants are denied entry because the school infrastructure needs across the Commonwealth are great. We were invited into the process due to the poor conditions at Wildwood; in particular, the quad classroom design that does not include permanent walls between classrooms was a primary deficiency cited. We are estimated to receive a \$33.8 million grant from the MSBA if we support the project locally. Alternative plans would forgo this grant support for the Town.

In closing, we are deeply appreciative of the Feasibility Project funding that Town Meeting authorized for this project and we will continue to work to ensure that these funds lead to a proposed school that will benefit the students, teachers, and community of Amherst.

Sincerely,

School Building Committee Members

Katherine Appy, Amherst School Committee Chair

Anna Bartolini, 1st Grade Teacher

Ron Bohonowicz, Director of Facilities

Holly Bowser, Assistant Comptroller

Sasha Figueroa, Recorder

Maria Geryk, Superintendent

Monica Hall, Director of Equity and Professional Development

Laura Kent, Parent and School Committee member

Sean Mangano, Director of Finance for the Schools

Claire McGinnis, Interim Co-Finance Director for the Town

Guilford Mooring, Director of Public Works

Michael Morris, Assistant Superintendent and Chair of School Building Committee

Ludmilla Pavlova, Senior Facilities Planner, UMass

Irv Rhodes, Community Member

Timothy Sheehan, 4th Grade Teacher

Nancy Stewart, Parent

Nick Yaffe, Principal

Dave Ziomek, Assistant Town Manager

Appendix A: MSBA Process Summary

<u>Date</u>	<u>Details</u>
November 2013	Invited into MSBA Process
February 2014	An Enrollment Study was completed
May 2014	A presentation requesting funds for a feasibility study was made to Amherst Town Meeting
October 2014	A School Building Committee is formed with representatives who are town employees, parents/guardians, teachers, school administrators, school committee members, and community members
April 2015	An Owner's Project Manager (OPM) is hired using an open process as per statute/MSBA
July 2015	A Designer is hired using the open statutory/MSBA process
December 2015	The Preliminary Design Program which describes existing conditions, establishes the District's program for design, and shows possibilities for solutions is submitted to the MSBA
January 2016	The draft schematics of each option were developed and presented to the community and to the Amherst School Committee, and The Amherst School Committee voted for a grade configuration
February 2016	The School Building Committee voted for a preferred schematic layout of the school, and the Preferred Schematic Report was submitted to the MSBA
March/April 2016	Presentations were made to the Facilities Assessment Subcommittee of the MSBA
May 2016	The MSBA Board is scheduled to approve the Preferred Schematic Report
June 2016	A Construction Manager will be hired using the open statutory/MSBA process, with a contract to begin working with the designer on the plans for the preferred option
August 2016	A Project Scope and Budget document will be presented to the MSBA
September 2016	The MSBA Board is scheduled to approve the Project Scope and Budget
Within 120 Days of MSBA Board Approval	Local approval (Town Meeting Vote and Town-wide vote for Debt Override) will be required for the Project Scope and Budget

Appendix B: Public Engagement And Communication Listing

<u>Event(s)</u>	<u>Date(s)</u>
Community-wide Forums	9/29/15 @ 3:30P and 7:00P 10/26/15 @ 3:30P and 7:00P 12/8/15 @ 3:30P and 7:00P 1/15/16 @ 6:30P 3/15 @ 6:30P
School Committee Meetings	03/12/13, 02/04/14, 04/29/14, 10/21/14, 11/25/14, 12/16/14, 01/20/15, 02/10/15, 03/17/15, 04/28/15, 05/17/15, 08/27/15, 09/21/15, 10/20/15, 11/17/15, 12/22/15, 01/14/16, 01/19/16, 02/09/16, 03/23/16; 04/26/16
School Building Committee Meetings	10/21/14, 01/26/15, 02/23/15, 03/26/15, 04/08/15, 07/22/15, 09/15/15, 10/15/15, 11/17/15, 12/22/15, 01/13/16, 01/21/16, 02/02/16, 03/15/16, 04/07/16
Wildwood PGO (Parent/Guardian Organization) Meetings	5/26/15, 10/15/15
Wildwood School Council	4/15/15
Wildwood Staff Meeting	5/13/15, 10/14/15, 10/26/15
Crocker Farm PGO (Parent/Guardian Organization)	10/9/15, 12/21/15
Crocker Farm School Council	04/28/15
Crocker Farm Staff	04/29/15, 09/30/15, 10/21/15
Fort River PGO (Parent/Guardian Organization)	05/08/15, 10/16/15, 01/15/16
Fort River School Council	04/30/15
Fort River Staff	06/02/15, 09/30/15, 10/21/15
Discussions to gather feedback from over 50 staff members (all three buildings represented) on interior spaces in different areas of the building design	5/4/16, 5/5/16

Forums for Families with children with special needs (co-facilitated by the Special Education Parent Advisory Council)	10/29/15, 11/02/15
Forum for Families with young children/preschoolers	10/13/15
Visioning Group of early childhood staff members, families of young children, community members, and administrators are developing a vision for Crocker Farm as an Early Childhood Center	4/7/16, 5/12/16, 6/16
Forum for Fort River Families and their children	05/05/16
Forum for Wildwood Families and their children	06/16
Forum for Crocker Farm Families and their children	06/16
Family Center Advisory Board	11/18/15
Forum at Applewood Retirement Community	01/16/16
Meeting with Residents of Local Apartment Complexes	02/24/16
Select Board	01/11/16
Finance Committee	02/11/16, 3/31/16, 4/14/16
Amherst Media informational programs	06/9/15 (http://bit.ly/1QQqlqS) , 09/22/15 (http://bit.ly/1W4aT2l) 02/10/16 (http://bit.ly/1OcGQ0l)
Daily Hampshire Gazette/Amherst Bulletin Articles	11/26/13, 09/24/14, 09/16/15, 09/21/15, 10/20/15, 11/03/15, 11/09/15, 01/19/16, 02/3/16
Project Facebook site started with up-to-the-minute updates (link at http://bit.ly/1Tt19st)	07/15
Project Website with all meeting minutes, presentations, etc. started (link at http://bit.ly/21sC6eX)	08/15
Amherst Senior Center	06/16

Appendix C: Estimates Completed by Independent Cost Estimator

**Wildwood Elementary School
Amherst, Massachusetts**

Preliminary Project Budgets Detailed Summary

Budgets prepared by A.M. Fogarty & Associates, Inc., Hingham, MA based on drawings prepared by JCJ Architecture

	Wildwood K-6		Co-Located Schools 2-6	
Option (Description)	Option W1: Reno K-6 for 360 <i>Replaces one school</i>		Option W12r: New (2) 2-6 for 750 <i>Replaces two schools</i>	
Student Enrollment	360		750	
Total GSF	82,000		122,272	
Code Upgrades	0	\$ -	0	\$ -
Renovation	82,000	\$ 18,450,000	0	\$ -
Addition	0	\$ -	0	\$ -
New Construction	0	\$ -	122,272	\$ 32,371,230
Demolition	0	\$ -	82,000	\$ 553,500
Haz Mat Removal	82,000	\$ 820,000	82,000	\$ 820,000
Subtotal Building	<i>\$235.00</i>	\$ 19,270,000	<i>\$275.98</i>	\$ 33,744,730
Site Cost	6.0%	\$ 1,156,200	9.4%	\$ 3,163,092
Total Trade Costs	<i>\$249.10</i>	\$ 20,426,200	<i>\$301.85</i>	\$ 36,907,822
Design Contingency	10.0%	\$ 2,042,620	12.0%	\$ 4,428,939
CM Contingency	2.5%	\$ 561,721	2.0%	\$ 826,735
Escalation (4%/year)	5.0%	\$ 1,123,441	5.0%	\$ 2,066,838
General Conditions	14 months	\$ 1,470,000	30 months	\$ 3,450,000
General Requirements	2.0%	\$ 512,480	2.0%	\$ 953,607
Building Permit	1.0%	\$ 261,365	1.0%	\$ 486,339
P&P Bond/Insurance	2.0%	\$ 522,729	2.0%	\$ 972,679
Profit	3.0%	\$ 807,617	3.0%	\$ 1,502,789
Total Construction Costs	<i>\$338.15</i>	\$ 27,728,172	<i>\$421.98</i>	\$ 51,595,748
Owner Soft Costs	25.0%	\$ 6,932,043	25.0%	\$ 12,898,937
Total Project Costs	<i>\$422.69</i>	\$ 34,660,215	<i>\$527.47</i>	\$ 64,494,684
Effective Reimbursement Rate	0%	\$ -	53%	\$ 33,859,709
Estimated Amherst Share		\$ 34,660,215		\$ 30,634,975

Notes: Escalation is calculated at 4%/year to the approval of a Guaranteed Maximum Price construction agreement between the Town and Construction Manager at Risk.

Appendix D: School Committee Rationale for Reconfiguration Vote

Dear Town Meeting Members,

I would like to respond to the request made by article 38 for additional town funds to be spent on a Feasibility Study for “Repair of Wildwood and Fort River schools”.

In their request for town funds, the petitioners presented to the Select Board and the Finance Committee and represented the Amherst School Committee vote for grade re-configuration, as based primarily on financial considerations. I wish to clarify the School Committee vote.

As an elected representative body, the Amherst School Committee is charged with making decisions based on what is best for our educational community and more specifically, the students we educate in our district.

With that in mind, the Amherst School Committee voted 4-1 to reconfigure our elementary schools. The new configuration will consist of two co-located schools of approximately 375 students each. Each school will have separate administrators, specialists, staff and teachers.

Several School Committee members publicly shared their very careful deliberations and thought processes prior to voting. As per the MSBA process, school committees are required to vote on the best option to support their district’s educational plan and students’ needs. In studying the various options, it became clear that renovating the buildings would not result in a learning environment that supported our educational plan which was created by teachers, administrators and other educators in the district.

In their final deliberations, several members spoke about the need for educational equity, which includes access, for all students. This configuration is the only one that addresses some serious barriers to this access for many students in our community.

It also addresses the environmental impact of continuing to run two deteriorating buildings, with poor ventilation, heating and cooling systems that the Committee considered a serious liability to our children’s learning environment. The new building, which will be greener (reaching the LEED Silver rating), more efficient and with a smaller footprint than either Fort River or Wildwood has now, is environmentally more sound and moves the district in the direction of true climate justice.

Another significant concern to the committee and to educators was the potential disruption to education should students need to be moved out of one or more buildings to accommodate simultaneous or concurrent renovations. Amherst does not currently have space for such a move, thus any renovation plan would necessarily include at least four different locations for students currently at Wildwood for a period of more than two years and a cost of over a \$1,000,000 a year. Of course, a Fort River renovation would also be subject to similar costs and relocation efforts.

I would like to briefly quote some of the thoughts and statements made by school committee members in open meeting, prior to the vote:

One committee member stated:

“We live in a beautiful town with an amazing and diverse community that cares passionately about our children and their education”

“While a majority of our students are experiencing the benefits of our system there are children in our community who are not able to access it as successfully.”

“Children with special educational needs would have all the needed resources in the same building in this new configuration”

Another committee member observed:

“For years the community has been rightly demanding that we address glaring inequalities in educational outcomes---specifically the achievement gap”

“The new re-configuration would allow for an expanded pre-school, in particular for children in Amherst who have been denied pre-school seats because of space limitations. This is primarily students whose families cannot afford private pre-school”

“This configuration would eliminate busing and redistricting for any reason whether it be socio-economic balance, overcrowded schools or special education needs.”

“Small class size is a priority as well as a school committee policy; this new configuration allows for the maximum amount of flexibility so that class size can be equalized across grades”

A third committee member wrote:

“Equity means equal opportunity. In looking at the various options for building or renovating our schools, the key word for me is resources. There is only one configuration that provides maximum resources for providing equal opportunity and that is (this re-configured) and consolidated plan.”

These quotes are just a few examples of statements that School Committee members made publicly explaining their commitment to equity that underlies their vote for this building option.

In terms of the cost estimates, as a School Committee member and a member of the Building Committee, and someone who has met several times with the MSBA, it is clear to me that the MSBA process is an involved, thorough and strictly determined one. Each option and its associated costs were arrived at by independent professional estimators. The School Committee, Building Committee and administrators had no contact with said estimators. Additionally, it seems that a state agency that is potentially going to spend \$35,000,000 would not do so - as suggested by the petitioners - with cursory and insufficient cost estimates.

I urge Town Meeting to vote no on the motion put forth by article 38.

Sincerely,

Katherine Appy

Chair, Amherst School Committee