February 26, 2023

To: LWVA Steering Committee

From: New Amherst Elementary School Review Group

The School Review Group recommends support of the proposed new Ft. River elementary school building based on our Education and Schools and Energy Policies and comparing those positions with the information and materials on the project’s schematic design, construction costs, reviewing minutes and attending several Elementary School Building and Finance Committee meetings, as well as the January public forums.

We strongly urge our Steering Committee to support the elementary school construction and the debt exclusion vote on May 2. LWVA is in a unique position to proactively inform, educate and influence community response to construct and help fund a new K-5 elementary school, the 1st new elementary school construction since 1973.

The school will be Amherst’s 1st public net zero building, comply with town By-laws, be all-electric, not dependent on the grid or on fossil fuels, and be on the path to achieve LEED Gold status. With an anticipated $250 thousand savings yearly, it is also expected to be the 1st net zero public school in the state and nationally newsworthy. Construction will also depend on the willingness of a majority of voters approving an estimated $55 million property tax debt exclusion, currently estimated to average $478 per household.

Should the town reject the current proposal and debt exclusion, Amherst (i.e. residents) will need to incur maintenance and energy cost upgrades for the 50 year old Ft. River and Wildwood Schools while failing to meet educational and classroom space needs and health standards for the current student population. If we allow state funding for this school to pass, it may be another decade before Amherst will have a funding opportunity from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), estimated to be approximately $43 million of the $98 million total cost.

In summary, upon examination of the preliminary design goals document approved by MSBA in 2022, that educational programming, inclusive student needs, physical structure and features, and climate energy elements to be very well-aligned with our Amherst League of Women Voters Education and Schools and Energy policy positions (LWV of Amherst Program Book, 2019 ed., pp. 11-15).

Respectfully Submitted,

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