

I plan to abstain tonight. Here is why.

It's not about the school. Westport is going to build a new LL school and it's high time we got that done.

It's about a broken process.

My vote tonight reflects the deep concerns many share about the way our elected leaders have approached this important task.

It has been characterized by what I would call a crisis-mode mentality, where speed takes priority over a reasoned discussion. Incredibly this is the second time in the past five years we have been forced into this crisis-mode fire drill regarding a school construction project.

There was a better way.

We could have followed the established procedure and precedent using the mechanism set forth in the Town Charter that worked so well for us back in the early 2000s when the town met the challenge of renovating and constructing multiple schools at the same time. That committed effort facilitated a broad based discussion with a broad based membership reflecting the views of the entire community.

Instead that tried and true process was short circuited. In a rushed vote the First Selectwoman and the RTM created a committee that does not reflect a cross section of stakeholders and includes a number of people who are clearly wearing too many hats. The result has been a real mess.

Because of the flawed process, we ended up with bitter acrimony. We have people accusing community gardeners of being a threat to public safety which is absurd and repugnant. We have people in the RTM claiming anybody with a contrary view “hates kids.” This is unacceptable.

The rushed decision to devote \$100 million to a single project was made in isolation and without context, without any attempt to take into consideration whether there will be enough money to meet the demands of many looming capital projects including other school renovation and upgrades we face in the near future.

As an RTM, we have not handled this well. How can the public trust that kind of process, especially when they feel shut down from asking questions, unable to get time-sensitive information requested under FOIA, and denied the right to petition to be heard?

Last fall when petitions were filed then denied by the RTM Moderator, the petitioners were told by the RTM to "trust the process". I don't see anything about the current LL building effort to be worthy of the public trust.

I was elected to represent RTM District 9. Voters in my District very much support the new school. But many are concerned about the huge size and whether enough will be leftover when Saugatuck needs upgrades.

So while I support a new school, I don't support the way we got here.

For all these reasons, I will abstain.