

PRESS RELEASE:

SENSIBLE WILTON DELIVERS 1100+ SIGNATURES TO PETITION FOR REVOTE OF \$50M SCHOOL RENOVATION

On Thursday, 1/8/15, Sensible Wilton delivered a Petition to the Clerk of the Town of Wilton calling for a Special Town Meeting to consider a Revote of the \$50M renovation of Miller-Driscoll Elementary School.

Sensible Wilton President Alex Ruskewich announced, "Over **1,100** Wilton citizens/taxpayers signed Sensible Wilton's petition for a revote. That is more than **5 times** the minimum number of signatures required by Charter for voters to call for a Special Town Meeting by Petition."

Ruskewich says, "Voters are upset about reports of Election violations during the September vote. The people of Wilton want to start 2015 with a revote of this \$50 Million project".

On September 27, 2014, Wilton passed the \$50M Referendum by a razor thin margin of 27 voters - 979 voted "Yes" versus 952 voted "No".

Shortly after the referendum vote, Sensible Wilton filed a Complaint with the State Election Enforcement Commission (SEEC) over documented violations of State Election laws by Town and School officials. Subsequently, the SEEC voted unanimously to investigate Sensible Wilton's evidence that Town and School officials conducted an unlawful advocacy Campaign during Parent Night Open House meetings at Wilton Schools. That First Complaint is under investigation by the SEEC.

Town Officials orchestrated and participated in a "Vote Yes" campaign which included the distribution of Vote Yes fliers.

Curt Noel, Treasurer of Sensible Wilton, says "Our initial SEEC Complaint was well reported in the local press. Over the next few weeks residents and parents began contacting Sensible Wilton to report more irregularities by Town and School Officials. More evidence resulted in more Election Complaints under investigation by the SEEC."

Sensible Wilton began collecting signatures for the petition on Election Day 11/4/14. On that first day, with no marketing campaign, only a handful of volunteers, and despite obstacles imposed by the Town who delayed approving the petition "form", Sensible Wilton immediately found widespread support for a revote among Wilton voters.

Ruskewich points out, "In September only 979 Wilton Voters voted YES for this \$50M project. On our first day of collecting signatures one month later, more people signed our petition for a revote than the 979 Total YES votes in favor of the Referendum."

Noel, who headed up the election day Petition drive at Cider Mill said, "We had no problem persuading Wilton voters to sign our petition. Our problem was so many people wanted to sign, at one point we ran out of petition forms."

Noel adds, "By the end of the day we had a Petition team at each Town polling station for at least a few hours. But at Cider Mill, when we had extra help, we found 80% of the people coming to vote wanted to sign the petition. There was more interest in a revote than even we thought. If we had full teams at every polling station for the full day and a lot more Petition Forms, I'm sure we could have gotten significantly more people to sign on that first day."

Ruskewich says, "The largest project in Town History shouldn't be decided by 27 votes. We will all be paying for this for years. And the cost will detract from funding teachers and school programs. A lawful revote without the Election violations in September is important no matter how you voted in September. Sensible Wilton has declared if the project passes in a lawful vote, we will support the will of the voters. But there were so many irregularities in the September vote, as a matter of integrity our Politicians should be leading the effort to clear the air with a lawful revote."

Noel adds, "After Sensible Wilton got "tips" about other violations, a freedom of information request for emails about the referendum revealed Town and School officials engaged in conduct prohibited by State Election laws. The emails suggest the officials knew what they were doing was improper because one senior official put out a note reminding others of the "cover story" in case anyone asked about their advocacy campaign."

Ruskewich adds, "Town Counsel likes to call the evidence "allegations". But facts are facts. And one of the violations personally involves the Town Counsel not formally reviewing the multicolor brochure the Town passed used as part of their advocacy campaign. Unless he can provide minutes of Board of Selectman meeting at which that brochure was approved in public, and there is no record in any published minutes, then the Town Counsel himself has a problem with an apparent Election Law violation."

Noel elaborated, "Many citizens have informed us that they were unaware of the vote. There is concern meetings were not properly noticed. Other citizens have expressed concern that documents have not been made readily available. We've also been told there were issues with absentee voting. We learned that the Building Committee vote to approve the proposal was improperly taken via email instead of following Freedom of Information requirements that votes be taken in person at a properly noticed public meeting."

Sensible Wilton Treasurer Curt Noel points out the group voluntarily disclosed their total spending in their state required filing with the Town Clerk. "We spent only \$98.84 on our campaign. After reviewing Building Committee reports we know the Town of Wilton spent over \$12,000 on Consensus Building/ Outreach/Brochures before the \$50M vote, possibly a lot more. They outspent us more than 100 to 1 but still had to bend the election laws to win by only 27 votes."

Ruskewich jokes, "We are proud for less than \$100 we were able to alert over 1,100 people to think twice about this project. Each No vote cost Sensible Wilton less than 10 cents. At 10 cents per vote, for another 3 bucks we might have gotten 30 more people to the polls to vote NO. If we had set our budget at \$102, we might have overcome both the Town's \$12,000+ budget and their election violations. "

Noel says what upsets people the most is evidence Town and School officials broke the law to get the project passed. "If the Town won fair and square we couldn't have gotten nearly 1000 signatures the first day."

Ruskewich adds, "The Selectmen can't be proud they won a \$50M vote under these circumstances. Every Selectman, even the First Selectman, took an oath to honor all state laws. To restore their honor each of them should sign our Revote petition and vote to schedule a revote as soon as possible. If they win the vote in a lawful election, Sensible Wilton agrees to accept the outcome."

On the other hand, Sensible Wilton's position is a prompt revote is important because there is an urgent need to immediately pursue less costly renovations to the roof and HVAC system to protect the health and safety of the students.

According to Curt Noel, "The \$50M project the First Selectman has sponsored is not only too expensive it is too slow. Recently discovered Town Reports indicate Town Officials not only knew the Miller-Driscoll roof has been leaking continuously for 13 years, they knew that chronic leaks lead to mold which can harm health. And around 2002-05 they knew Middlebrook had the same problems of mold and an inadequate ventilation system which made teachers and students ill. Instead of immediately fixing the problems at Miller- Driscoll when teachers there became ill, Town Leaders spent 6 year designing a \$50M project for 900 students around a preschool that serves only 30 Full Time Students.'

Ruskewich says, "The 900 students can't afford to wait 3 more years to get the roof and HVAC fixed. A smaller project planned around what we need for the 900 K-2 students, rather than what a few people want for the 25 preschoolers, can be done more quickly and at a lower cost than the \$50m proposal. A new roof can be put in place in months, not years. And it makes no sense to knock down the newest parts of the current building to build a smaller cafeteria and a straighter hallway."

Ruskewich concludes: "We need a prompt revote so the people of Wilton can openly debate the issues that have to date been decided in private. A smaller project isn't just smarter, it is better for the children who remain at risk today. With 1100 signatures in front of him, we hope the First Selectman realizes his legacy will be determined by how he handles the documented irregularities with this \$50M vote. If he can't say YES to a revote out loud, as a smart politician about to retire, we would hope he realizes this is a good time to nod his head. After all, it is completely possible in a lawful vote, he may win his \$50m project fair and square."

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Sensible Wilton's website is www.sensiblewilton.org