Pursuant to your request for a copy of TSBC member Rachel Orr’s letter of May 24th 2021, your subsequent acknowledgement you have obtained a copy, and request for my comment as chairperson of the TSBC I respectfully submit the following:

Tisbury School Building Committee (TSBC) member Rachel Orr’s letter of May 24th, 2021 to the TSBC did not come to the TSBC unexpected. The events leading up to her letter began on Feb.18, 2021 when the TSBC voted to unanimously (less a member who departed the meeting early, yet has stated her support) to recommend the approved Schematic Design (SD) for the renovation/addition to the Selectboard, the School Committee, and ultimately to the voters.

During the Feb 18th meeting of the TSBC, members thoroughly reviewed and initiated edits to a draft document including eight specific recommendations to be sent to the Selectboard and the School Committee in preparation of the Special Town Meeting. Each recommendation was read aloud as they were being reviewed including the phrase, “The TSBC recommends...”. In viewing the video recording of the meeting, Ms. Orr was a participant in this process. At the conclusion of this process the TSBC voted unanimously, including Ms. Orr's “Aye”, to submit the recommendations. (the recording is posted to the project website here: https://tisbury-school-project.com/photos-videos/)

On February 23 the MV Times announced the unanimous vote.

On April 5, 2021 Ms. Orr submitted a letter to the TSBC stating she misunderstood the vote of Feb 18th claiming it was a report on prior votes and inclusion of two items: solar and construction manager at risk. In this same letter Ms. Orr states, “I believe the schematic design, in its current form, has flaws that pose significant challenges to functionality and has built-in inequities”. In the meeting of April 5th members of the TSBC requested that Ms. Orr provide documentation supporting her opinions of “challenges to functionality and built-in inequities”.

In watching the video of Feb 18th meeting Ms. Orr is a consistent participant offering edits, nods, and a thumbs up as we move through the list of recommendations. The material covered was complete including the reading of edits by the secretary and the posting of information via screen share. While I cannot speak for Ms. Orr it appears the letter of April 5 has more to do with voter remorse than confusion over the content of the recommendations.

This brings us to Ms. Orr’s letter of May 24th, 2021 further distancing herself from her yes vote of Feb. 18th to recommend the Schematic Design. Ms. Orr lists 14 items of concern plus an additional 4 project comments. Every item on her list has been part of previous conversations by the TSBC inclusive of the Professional Team. She delves into programming and educational practices with no expertise in these areas, after the faculty representatives on the TSBC have vetted and approved the Schematic Design. Ms. Orr continues with criticisms of the architectural and design work of Tappé and their professional associates regarding universal accessibility, lighting, building orientation, and sound management without acknowledging all of the committee discussions and review that went into the decisions that contributed to the recommended Schematic Design. She revisits the placement of the additions, their size and scope presumably to imply that the TSBC failed to incorporate passive solar gain as a design goal. In this opinion, Ms. Orr does not recognize the objective to preserve the historical integrity of the 1929 building and fails to recognize that building a large addition on the west side of the site, towards the cemetery, would greatly reduce the playground area. All of which was reviewed and discussed by the TSBC.
To understand the impetus for this letter, one must reflect back to Ms. Orr’s position as a member of the TSBC. On July 24th, 2019 when Ms. Orr was chairperson of the TSBC, the TSBC acted on and debated the merits of adapting and updating the existing Education Program as one of the guiding principles of the Tisbury School Project for implementing the Space Needs assessment process. An essential step in moving the design process forward. When the TSBC voted, Ms. Orr was the only member of the TSBC to vote against endorsing the Ed Program. In the twenty-two months since Ms. Orr’s refusal to endorse the Ed Program she has not introduced a change in her position to the TSBC. As the Ed Program and the Space Needs Assessment are inseparable, one must question her objectives.

Over the next eighteen months as the TSBC worked through the study and design process Ms. Orr was often the only member of the committee that voted against every motion to move the study and design forward. During this time, Ms. Orr asked great questions and was the inspiration for deeper consideration of issues. However, eight other members of the committee, thoughtfully selected and appointed to this committee, including an experienced school building architect, a Select Board member with an extensive professional resume, two professional educators representing the full faculty, the respected principal of the school, an experienced businessman, a parent/building commissioner who was on the previous TSBC, and a builder with decades of public service and committee work, regularly reviewed, debated, built consensus, and came to different decision than Ms. Orr.

Ms. Orr’s letter gives the impression that the other members of the TSBC, the Educators and the Professional Team overlooked or ignored the opinions expressed. In many instances Ms. Orr’s point of view was simply out voted. Additionally, as chairperson, I committed to forwarding Ms. Orr’s thoughts to the next TSBC for consideration during the Design Development Phase of the project. It is important to note that the Schematic Design is representative of the early design phase to define the project scope and budget. As such, a fraction of the overall detailed design and engineering work is completed. The depth of details will be worked through in the Design Development and Contact Documentation Phase after funding is approved.

To further understand the decision to recommend the Schematic Design one must understand the commitment to processes by the TSBC. In a very condensed overview, it started with the updated Education Program. Based on the Ed Program, a Space Needs assessment was conducted, a comprehensive Existing Conditions Report completed, visioning sessions held with the community, workshops with the staff, a review of enrollment projections, and other data was collected. Guiding principles were established including, but not limited to: removal of all hazardous materials from the school, replacement of all aging mechanical systems, to renovate and revitalize the 1929 and 1993 buildings, fulfill the objectives of the Planning Board vision list, increase community use and universal access, preserve the historical integrity of the 1929 building, and increased building efficiency - which may result in the largest Net Zero building on Martha’s Vineyard. The TSBC and the Professional Team have recommended a Schematic Design accomplishing all of this and more; the TSBC has maintained all the parking in the Spring Street lot and added a +/- 17,000 square feet of space in concert with the natural topography of the site. This design allows the project to build the necessary space for the education program without a significant impact on the field or playground spaces.

In this process Ms. Orr has not acknowledged the strategies and recommendations developed over the course of a year-long study that addressed many of her stated opinions. While I cannot speak for other members of the TSBC, I can tell you that Tappé has addressed the questions and opinions on northern light and indirect light expressed by Ms. Orr. The school currently has five or six classrooms dependent on northern light. The kindergarten rooms are
the same rooms that have been in use since they were added in 1993. Feedback from the Kindergarten teaching staff, who have taught in those rooms for years, supports the recommended Schematic design. The majority of areas in the design that will be dependent on northern light exposure, light referred to as the ‘second best’ light by leading architects, are areas of transitional use; the gymnasium, industrial arts, the cafeteria, and the media/librarycommons areas. This is a factual improvement over the existing conditions. The kitchen may benefit from skylights, but project and construction costs were also a major factor in the study and this opinion will be vetted with the school staff and the Professional Team during Design Development. There are multiple lighting strategies available to architects for meeting the lighting challenges in a renovation/addition and Tappé has demonstrated their capability to do so and will also refine this in Design Development.

In conclusion, as chairperson of the TSBC, I am confident the members of the TSBC and Professional Team have fulfilled their obligation to provide the voters a Schematic Design for a renovation/addition that meets the needs of the current school, the Education Program, and the greater community with a comprehensive and complete effort by all.