

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter to the editor: A new high school to meet the educational needs of future generations



by Alix Fox and Brielle Meade

October 9, 2024

Lexington has long prided itself on being a community that is deeply committed to public education. Accordingly, many residents are excited to see that the much needed new Lexington High School is finally on the horizon.

Lexington was fortunate to be invited into the [Massachusetts School Building Authority](#)'s (MSBA) grant program for school building in 2022 (our third application). Since then, LPS administration, town officials, and our [School Building Committee](#) (SBC) have been collaborating with the MSBA to ensure that the new LHS meets the 21st century teaching and learning needs of our students in the most cost efficient and sustainable way.

The planning and design process have been [open to the public](#) from the beginning, and there has been robust resident engagement. To deliver our educational program and relieve the [significant overcrowding](#) LHS students currently experience requires not only appropriately sized common spaces and hallways, but both more and larger classrooms. Including [sustainability features](#) will provide several important benefits: proper ventilation and temperature control that create a much healthier learning environment, onsite power generation and battery storage that will reduce our carbon footprint, increased building resiliency, and decreased operating costs for the life of the building.

Many residents are understandably concerned about the estimated \$600 million cost of the LHS project. It is a big number. **But we are currently in the optimal position to mitigate that cost, and the time is right to take advantage of these opportunities:**

1. We expect our partnership with the MSBA to contribute approximately \$100 million to the project cost;
2. Lexington anticipates receiving roughly \$39 million in reimbursements from state and federal programs for the project's sustainability features;

3. The Town expects to have \$40 million in its capital stabilization fund when the project is financed, which will be used to ease the impact on taxpayers.

The SBC is currently evaluating six design options, and will narrow that selection to two this month. Their final design selection – the Preferred Schematic Report – will be submitted to the MSBA on November 12. To learn more, please visit the [LHS Building Project](#) website.

It is critical that we build a new LHS that meets the educational needs of future generations of Lexington students. Please attend the upcoming LHS Building Project Community Forum on October 30, 6:30-8:30pm at Cary Memorial Building to voice your support. This is the last community forum before the preferred schematic is submitted.

The Yes for Lexington campaign has formed to advocate for building a new LHS and encourage support for the December 2025 debt exclusion vote to finance the project. Our primary focus is voter education through resident engagement, and we continue to welcome new volunteers. Please email us at contact@yes4lex.org to get involved.

Please join our efforts encouraging voter support for the December 2025 Debt Exclusion vote.

Now is the time to make a new LHS a reality.

On behalf of Yes for Lexington,

Alix Fox and Brielle Meade

Communications Co-Chairs



Alan Seferian

October 11, 2024 at 7:53 am

Please visit LHS4ALL.com for a different perspective on the LHS project. Please endorse us if you agree.

What the Yes people propose is “Too Much Money for Too Small a School.”



Marianne M McKenna

October 11, 2024 at 8:00 am

Let's revisit those financials — we don't yet know the full prices but at last meeting SBC was saying \$620 Million plus associated costs of infrastructure, mitigation, moving CO, temporary classrooms, field house renovations etc. The early construction estimates show that the costs will be \$1100-1400 PER SQUARE FOOT. The \$39M rebates will come to short term operating costs (we don't know costs of future maintenance); these will NOT automatically lower the overall cost of the project. It's great projection, but these savings could also be achieved within a lower cost building. \$40M stabilization (still Lexington tax dollars) is great but is a mere drop in the hat in the face of a towering bill, plus needed future overrides for operating and other town projects. Even with this mitigation, the estimates are about \$1700-\$2000 per million assessment per year; many can absolutely NOT afford this. It also doesn't position the town for potential influx of students from the development surge due to new zoning. Before anyone is asked to vote to approve such a huge, long term liability, let's at least explore in detail and with seriousness a lower cost option — pros and cons.



Denis Kefallinos

October 11, 2024 at 8:47 am

We agree in the need for a new school, however there needs to be some compromise between features, and cost.

While there has been invitation for public comment, there has been little compromise shown by the SBC in the designs to seriously address the high cost.

The present designs are also planned to be built in the middle of our beautiful town recreation fields — forever damaging this great asset for generations forward.

It is also unclear if the school is large enough given the MBTA housing initiative Lexington has signed onto. Imagine spending \$600+ million, and then in a few short years finding out the new LHS too small. This is a risk.

We believe the planned spend is too high for the entire community, given the continual capital expenditures which the town has on the horizon. Consider a sensible cost-sensitive approach. Find a balance. Fix the big rocks of needed space first. Eliminate costs not associated with safely and comfortably housing and teaching our kids. Spread the investment out. Make it affordable. It's public money. Build for a purpose, not a palace. Sign on to lhs4all.com



Taylor Singh

October 11, 2024 at 12:46 pm

The designs currently being considered by the SBC are all approximately 460,000 square feet. Building something even larger than that will obviously cost even more. As has been noted in SBC documents for a while now, there is flexibility for increased enrollment built into those designs.

The \$39M +/- in sustainability rebates actually do come off the project cost, reducing the total cost to the town by that amount. Those rebates will “automatically lower the overall cost of the project.” In addition, there will be operating cost savings that the Town will realize annually on top of the initial rebate savings. It is a win-win on the sustainability features. The estimate of \$1700-\$2000 does not include either the mitigation from these savings, nor from the \$40M stabilization fund. The LHS4All plan will ultimately cost taxpayers MORE, not less. In any case, we should absolutely focus our efforts on working with the town on more ways to mitigate the tax increase for folks who feel they will be unable to afford it.

The current massing studies do not include any “features” beyond: enough square footage for 2,400 students (and room to expand to 3,000+ students as needed); cafeteria, gym, auditorium, and other shared spaces large enough for the enrollment; adequately sized classrooms, labs, and hallways for the enrollment; adequately sized parking and prep space for staff; efficient heating and cooling, all electric utilities and solar panels, and other sustainability features (that pay for themselves within 1 year of build). The costs are in line

with the recent high school building projects across the greater Boston area (and – of course they are, because the estimates are based predominantly on the sqft cost of those projects escalated to the Lexington project timeline).

Regarding the fields: if one of the designs built on the fields is chosen, all the beautiful town recreation fields will be recreated and still exist, and the entire campus will be designed with connections and corridors that make it a cohesive recreation complex with the added benefits of distributed parking, better accessibility, and potential for net gain in green space on the site from more efficient layouts. The pool, basketball courts, tennis courts, track, playground, skate park, softball diamond, and probably the baseball diamond and C7 rectangle field will be on the North side, while the JV baseball diamond, little league diamond, football field, cricket field, Worthen practice field, and maybe room for additional rectangle field will move to the other side. This new school and recreational complex arrangement has a lot of positives over what we currently have in my opinion.

With regard to MBTA and the size of the school – as you already know, the building is designed at 85% capacity and so can accommodate 2,800 students without lifting a finger. The SBC has a two prong plan to expand the new LHS if needed beyond that: first, through building additional classrooms and locating the Central Administration in those classrooms. Should LPS need those classrooms for students, those can easily be transitioned to accommodate a higher student population just by adding furniture. Second, through a horizontal expansion that will be prepped for so it can be built with minimal disruption if needed. Further, Dr. Hackett stated at a recent SBC meeting that beyond those measures, creative thinking would need to be done instead of increasing the size of LHS beyond that point as a school much larger than this is not ideal. Possibly add 9th grade to the middle schools. The takeaway is that even if we find MBTA zoning increases enrollment over the next 10 years, we will choose to build a school the same size as the current options under consideration. Delaying for 2 years in the hope that we get better at predicting enrollment won't really change the needs of the project; it will just INCREASE THE COSTS BY DELAYING.

Simply put, the plan described by LHS4All to do a phased project and extend construction over many years will cost the Town more and will make this project less affordable for everyone. Let's not advocate for something that will be more expensive and will take longer. I urge residents to instead join me in support of the project that has been carefully considered over the last 2.5 years by the SBC.

With gratitude for your attention,

Taylor Singh, Yes for Lexington Co-Chair



Nathaniel

October 11, 2024 at 12:56 pm

Regardless of the other comments, many that have been made without facts, this is the best and most economical way to build a new high school now. Saving part of the current HS will have negligible cost savings, if any. Delaying making a choice for the preferred design will delay the entire project and potentially knock Lexington to the back of the line for MSBA funding, which means years until Lexington would be eligible again.

For those worried about space, the current HS has 98% utilization of all spaces, there is rarely an empty classroom. The capacity figures for the new HS are based on 80% usage rates meaning there is room for more than the number of students stated on documents. Additional build out for future needs is also included in the designs and capacity also does not take into account for the flex spaces that aren't considered classrooms.

Finally, while the net zero goals do make the project more expensive, with the incentives and hundreds of thousands of dollars that will not be spent on heat and electricity every year makes servicing the debt load easier than what the top line numbers show.

