

School Building Committee Coordination Meeting
Monday, November 18, 2024, from 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.
Remote Meeting

School Building Committee Members: Andrew Baker; Steve Bartha; Mark Barrett; Michael Cronin, Vice-Chair; Rick DeAngelis, Liaison (absent); Charles Favazzo Jr.; Julie Hackett; Jonathan A. Himmel; Carolyn Kosnoff; Charles W. Lamb, Liaison; Kathleen M. Lenihan; Alan Mayer Levine, Liaison; Hsing Min Sha; Joseph N. Pato; Claire Sheth, Liaison (absent); Kseniya Slavsky; Dan Voss

The minutes were taken by Sara Jorge, Office Manager, to the Lexington Superintendent and School Committee.

The School Building Committee Chair, Kathleen Lenihan, began the meeting at 12:00 p.m.

New Business:

November 12th Meeting with the MSBA

Dr. Hackett updated the committee on the meeting with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) on Tuesday, November 12th, at 3 p.m. to discuss enrollment numbers. They explained that they could consider design enrollment reconsiderations. Still, the implication of doing so is that we would have to go back to the eligibility period, which would be costly and pretty time-intensive. This would slow things down considerably, and based on recent questions, we know it costs around 20 million for a year delay, which also factors into the conversation. The other bigger issue is that we need to see data proving the need for a higher enrollment number. Our enrollment information suggests that our elementary cohorts are coming in smaller. It suggests a potential decline in high school enrollment. However, if all goes as planned, the wild card is the MBTA Zoning Bylaw change and what those impacts will be. It would take us three to five years to produce the models necessary to make the case for enrollment changes, so it does not make sense to go back to the eligibility period to reconsider design enrollment.

Joe Pato noted that we were asking MSBA if they would participate in the expansion space area that we are anticipating, and the MSBA essentially said no, not at this time. The only way they would consider that is if we went back to feasibility and started again. It is important for us to remember a couple of points. We have discussed that there is a maximum size we are looking for, and we are at it with the expansion space. There are upper bounds to certain spaces, like the gym, and we are designing that for 18,000 square feet. We talked about field house participation, and the MSBA said you are doing a gym, correct? We said yes. They replied, no, we wouldn't even consider participation in the field house then, and there is no expansion on those spaces. There would also be no expansion for the auditorium. 750 seats is what the MSBA will participate in, but they also won't allow a school to have larger than 1,000. So even if we had a higher design enrollment, these spaces would remain the size we are planning for them to be. Essentially, the only spaces we were trying to get them to participate financially were Central Office or classrooms. The key takeaway is that the amount of participation we would get from that is well less than a year's delay cost in inflation costs. So, there is no financial advantage to start over.

Julie Hackett added that there would be no guarantees of a higher design enrollment even if we were to return to the beginning.

Hsing Min Sha: Even if we were to delay, which we are not considering, we would still need demographic modeling, not just educated guesses, to get any increase. So that won't solve the problem as the modeling doesn't exist. Also, since the auditorium and gym are capped out, I am confident that this size is the maximum right size for this building, and we deal with any other increases in student population in a systemic way.

Kathleen Lenihan explained that there is no benefit to delaying and that the cost of continuing to have our students in a school that does not meet their needs is much higher.

School Building Committee Role and Input in Schematic Design

Julie Hackett explained that this next phase will be less intense for the School Building Committee (SBC). However, the SBC will remain active throughout the project's life, so we need to figure out how to move forward with meetings. It would be helpful to know the types of decisions and the kinds of decisions that get made by the School Building Committee. Those things are going to become clear as our project team is able to fill us in.

Kseniya Slavsky: The root question is who will oversee the design process—the SBC or the Permanent Building Committee? I would love to hear what the proposed process is.

Chuck Favazzo: I don't know if I have my School Building Committee (SBC) or Permanent Building Committee (PBC) hat on, but I feel that the SBC should meet monthly to get an update on the design. From the PBC side, we will likely meet bi-weekly or at least monthly as well.

Jon Himmel: SMMA and D&W have a process that they have gone through to deal with the issues for schematics, and they need to convey that information to us in the form of a schedule. The PBC and the SBC will meet based on the milestones in that schedule. The SBC will want to keep up to date on key points of this project. The choreography is based on the schedule that the consultants are working on and when it is appropriate for us to meet. That might be once a month for a while or twice a month if needed, but the SBC needs to remain involved and informed.

Hsing Min Sha noted that up to this point, we have publicly promised to watch costs like a hawk in the design process. We have promised that many community concerns that have been raised will be addressed in the design phase. We have promised that we will revisit certain specific elements in design. I want to maintain oversight, transparency, and community input so that we bring the community with us to the override vote. I am asking for oversight and two-way communication to be nailed down in the timeline.

Joe Pato: There will be a lot of technical questions, and the Permanent Building Committee is the right place for those to proceed. I'll also note in the PBC charge that when they start a project, they're supposed to have one or two members added that is for that particular project that constitutes either community or residents of the target facility. In my mind, that's sort of a mix between the SBC and the existing PBC. I agree with Hsing Min Sha in the sense that the SBC is ultimately the body in Town supervising this, and we need to keep our hands closely involved in this. When Chuck Favazzo and Jon Himmel spoke about maybe meeting once a month, it might be that once a month the PBC meets with the architects and works on details, and then the second meeting of the month is this committee. I do think we need to cross-post the PBC meetings as SBC meetings because I think frequently we're going to want to have more of us attending only to observe the details.

Jon Himmel explained that he reached out last February to the School Committee with a list of people for the high school project specifically to join the PBC. I will reach out again.

Kseniya Slavsky noted that I want to eliminate the need for the project team to give the same presentation to two committees and have potentially overlapping and repeating discussions.

Jon Himmel suggested that the SBC request of SMMA and D&W that they prepare a schedule of activities that they plan on going through as part of the Schematic Design sequence. Then, the School Building Committee, the Permanent Building Committee, and Sustainable Lexington will need to agree on their draft plan.

Mike Cronin: The SBC is responsible for supervising the project, and part of being a good supervisor is delegating some of those responsibilities. So, the SBC is delegating some of the decision-making responsibilities to the PBC and the SLC. There are going to be thousands of decisions that we have to make. I think the PBC and the SLC have worked successfully for the last few projects, including the MSBA project for Hastings. The SBC has to watch the budget so that we are aware of cost-saving measures and value engineering.

Julie Hackett explained that this is her tenth School Building Committee. Decisions like tile and the type of brick being used come to the School Building Committee, as they are important to many people on the SBC and something I definitely would like to be involved in. The other nitty-gritty design details are better left for the PBC.

Kseniya Slavsky would like to discuss the level of transparency in the PBC meetings. I think the level of remote access and recordings that are publicly available for the School Building Committee versus the Permanent Building Committee is different. Also, does the School Building Committee need to form subcommittees for things like site design, building design, and sustainability? Those are the three that I'm used to from other MSBA projects and SBCs. But it may work differently because we've got the Permanent Building Committee as a resource. Then given the MBTA Communities Act and the potential enrollment issues, are we looking to pull the trigger on building the expanded wings of the building as part of the schematic design? When they were conceived, it was said that this is where you could add to the buildings 20 years from now. Are we in a different place on that now, and are we looking to direct the design team to go ahead and design it bigger? This could be a future meeting agenda item.

Jon Himmel: The SBC is charging us to continue with the scope that was voted on and approved. If other things are outside that scope, they need to be brought back to the SBC for directive.

Public Comment:

Olga Guttag, 273 Emerson Road: could you post online the capacity size for the auditorium, gym, library, cafeteria, and any other common spaces?

Dawn McKenna, 9 Hancock Street: I like the changes made to the website's front page. The only suggestion that I have is under the meeting schedule. The first button on the left, you should list the names of those committees that people should follow because I don't think it's clear to people, and I have a hard time navigating. So I'm sure other people do too. Going to Olga's question about the number of capacities, I don't remember what size is in the proposal for the auditorium. If it's already at 1,000 seats then, maybe in the plan, we ought to consider either making the room larger and leaving space for other seats to be added if we can, and if we can't do that, perhaps some of the adjacent rooms to the auditorium could be made in such a way that if expansion was needed, we could down the line because we all agree that that auditorium is not big enough to serve the school. Then, as far as the Permanent Building Committee, it's unique and extremely helpful that the town has a PBC. Their knowledge of that committee is really important for building projects. I think both Joe and Jon discussed the requirement to have two people on that committee representing the schools, which is critical. I think the School Committee should be careful about how they do that, but I believe this committee needs to continue meeting at least twice a month, regardless. What I have found over time is that you don't have enough time to discuss all the issues, so one of them might be focused on what SMMA needs, but the other one might be focused on some of these other issues. You can always cancel them, but that's my suggestion. In terms of the issues Jon raised at the end, I would add one more key issue: that a lot of what's costing us money is the sustainability issues. I'm not saying that we should not be doing as much as we can, but

it's a cost balance between how much capacity we have for storage. But again, that's the topic that should be added, and I'll leave it at that.

Reflections:

Joe Pato: There was a little confusion as to what our decisions were made at the last SBC meeting. Things that were not confusing: we voted for an ad/reno field house for the project as the base project, and we voted not to reserve any additional land for a new field house. Those two decisions were taken. The third part of it, which has created some confusion, was about the availability of the footprint of the existing field house for it to be replaced with a new field house. Throughout the project, we've said that SBC is not advocating for that. However, should the Town desire to move forward with a capital project for a new field house, it could replace a portion of the MSBA project that had the renovated field house and build a new field house in that area. Instead, some of the people after last week's meeting walked away thinking, not SBC members, but members of the public, that we precluded the potential for a new field house to be created. My recollection is that we talked about whether we should proceed to construction if it seemed very unlikely that the Town would want to tear down a recently renovated field house and build a new one. But if between now and when we get to construction documents, the Town were to have mounted a new field house project, that real estate is available for that to be done. That's my understanding. I've spoken to Julie Hackett and Kathleen Lenihan, and that was our joint perception, and I wanted to make sure that was the common belief of the SBC. So my question is, does anybody have a different thought?

Carolyn Kosnoff: I agree; however, I wonder what that would look like. If we were to demolish the field house and build a new one, we would essentially lose the field house for a portion of time. When would that happen? This would have to be done as a separate project because the MSBA would not allow us to do that as part of the regular project. What does the timing of that look like?

Joe Pato: I want to make clear that what we voted did not preclude that. I also want to underscore that the SBC is not pursuing that, and my understanding is it's not currently on the capital plan. It would have to be some project that came forward, and what I heard from the Finance Committee is the Select Board and the School Committee do not have the desire to do that. Still, if there were a third party that wanted to fund something, then the project could be brought to the Town, and that is still available as a path, just as time progresses, the feasibility of doing that declines.

Jon Himmel: My answer to Joe Pato is yes, but Lorraine has made it abundantly clear that they should know if a new field house will be an option before they start to lay out the interior of the existing plan.

Chuck Favazzo: The answer is anything can be done, but you will be redesigning, rebuilding, and rethinking things at the project's expense. We are proceeding with the ad/reno, so if the Town decides to go with the new large field house on campus, we must redesign. Redesigning costs more money, but it can be accommodated.

Kseniya Slavsky motioned to adjourn the meeting at 12:59 p.m. Julie Hackett seconded the motion. Kathleen Lenihan took a roll call vote, passed 12-0.