

School Building Committee Coordination Meeting
Monday, June 10, 2024, from 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.
Remote Meeting

School Building Committee Members: Andrew Baker; Mark Barrett; Michael Cronin, Vice-Chair; Charles Favazzo Jr.; Julie Hackett; Jonathan A. Himmel; Carolyn Kosnoff; Charles W. Lamb (absent); Kathleen M. Lenihan; Alan Mayer Levine; James Malloy; Hsing Min Sha; Joseph N. Pato; 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 12:01 p.m.

Unfinished Business:

Community Dialogue

Matt Rice gave a quick update on the Design Workshop that was held on Thursday, June 6th. We took the 5 massing options that were voted on and had 3 tables per design, for a total of 15 tables. This allowed people to become familiar with the options and understand the site constraints. Julie Hackett and Andrew Baker did a great job of making the case for the project and familiarizing everyone who was there with some of the limitations that the existing building provides. They also reviewed the student enrollment numbers and why that exacerbates the condition of the building and drives the need for the project. Many floated between tables to get different perspectives and hear different things about each option. After about 30 minutes, each table had the opportunity to report on the conversations that happened during the table discussions. Members of the Student-School Building Committee did an excellent job reflecting on virtual learning and how challenging that kind of education was for them.

Kathleen Lenihan explained that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education requires us to have 180 days of school with 990 hours of instructional time for the high school. That instructional time is defined as being at school, and only the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education can determine when hybrid and remote learning is allowed. That is a non-negotiable item. We do not want virtual learning, and neither do the students.

Hsing Min Sha explained that he believes how we define space is much less about brick and mortar and more about media and process. Maybe we won't need classrooms someday, but we cannot make decisions and capital plans around a maybe. What we do know is the school is too small, and we need classrooms. I would like two or three hours to discuss future-proofing because we are working with resources and processes already agreed upon or mandated by the state and the Town for us to follow. During the Design Workshop, we had a lot more balanced opinions. We heard strong views that argue for fields, and we heard strong opinions arguing against fields. We heard people say to build a big block for a building to save money, and others say this needs to be a significant architectural contribution to the community. There are many more points like that as well. In the ThoughtExchange poll, renewable resources were voted to the bottom. This is the kind of information we get when we open the doors wider, and we might not get it when we work with the ecosphere of the higher levels of government engagement. Also, do we know why D.2 was at the top among all the options? Was it because people did not want to do an ad reno?

Kseniya Slavsky: It is very important that we know who is represented in the room during public sessions. Not many people were at the workshop with young kids. I am very leery of polls taken in a room like that, where we don't take into account how these groups fall within the demographic of the Town. If D.2 was the preferred option in the room during the Community Design Workshop, it is meaningful to understand why, but in the

context of who is speaking.

Alan Levine: There was a question about whether people prefer new construction on the fields or construction on the existing footprint. It was about $\frac{2}{3}$ preferred on the fields, and about $\frac{1}{3}$ preferred it on the existing footprint. Of the five options, three new options are on the fields, making distinguishing them hard. You have to add up the responses for the three and consider it one. When you do that, it outweighs the other options.

Charles Favazzo agrees with Alan Levine's comment. I believe that once we explore the options further, we will show people that D. 2 will be viewed similarly to B.2 when it was voted out in the first round, not only from a cost standpoint but also from a school disruption and safety perspective. I am not sure people understood that D.2 involved construction disruption.

Kathleen Lenihan: It would be beneficial to talk to administrators, teachers, and, ideally, students at Somerville and Arlington to understand what it was like being a student during construction. What was their experience? How was that disruption managed or mitigated so that we can get a sense of what we might anticipate in Lexington?

Jon Himmel explained that we did have some votes that showed specific schemes to be better or worse during the workshop, but that does not negate the fact that the architect is to continue the 5 schemes and develop them all. I hoped the charrette would help us understand what else the community wants to have considered. We have a debt exclusion vote on the horizon and need to prepare. There has to be a strategy and things we need to address, like cost and schedule, and there may be more, so we need to understand what else there is. I think ThoughtExchange should be used frequently to continue to learn what needs to be addressed.

Kseniya Slavsky agrees with Jon Himmel about recognizing the points of criticism or exploration we hear from the community. We need to acknowledge these points and start with the cost-driven concern. The workshop was fantastic for seeking a free form of input from people. I agree with continuing to use ThoughtExchange, but I am unsure about the frequency, as we hear many of the same themes. The cost, fields, no fields, disruption to the school, do not disrupt the school, wetlands, no wetlands, and so forth. I was surprised at how many people were discussing why you don't do school in two shifts. We addressed the AI question, but probably not to everyone's satisfaction, so we could elaborate on that.

Julie Hackett reflected on the Community Design Workshop. Next time, we could ask the ThoughtExchange questions as everyone is shuffling in instead of taking time from the meeting. We received the questions for the ThoughtExchange tool one day in advance but did not get a chance to bring them to the School Building Committee or the Communications Working Group. For any future public meeting, we need the materials well in advance to do our due diligence and weigh in on them. The time and place for this charette seemed a little out of sequence. This goes back to what we have heard from the community: what is the bigger picture here? What are we doing? What are the entry points? Where do we want to go with this? It would be helpful for me to hear from Matt Rice or Mike Burton about what other public-facing presentations you envision and then to have a conversation with the School Building Committee about what we think the community needs to hear from us. Do we have a big-picture public-facing presentation?

Mike Burton: At the last Communications Working Group, the subcommittee was going to make a recommendation to the full School Building Committee for holding a community forum with topics they think should be covered in July and August. We planned to have the following community forum in September. One of the apparent topics is that cost needs to be explained better. A community member came up to me during the workshop, and they pointed out Revere High School. I am unsure where she got her numbers, but I reached out to get the project budget. I will have slides on this at the next full School Building Committee meeting on June 24th. It is important for people to understand the data, but it is not comparing apples to apples. I recommend we dive deeper into cost in July or August at a community forum. We also need this committee to confirm the other scope, which is what is in and what is out - is it a 36,000 square foot field house, 72,000 square foot field house, offices, pool, all that stuff needs to be decided for the design team to move forward

efficiently. This could be another topic to be discussed publicly to get more feedback.

Carolyn Kosnoff: There was a lot of interest in understanding the costs better, especially on a cost-per-square-foot basis. People are looking at recent building projects like Belmont, Arlington, and Waltham. I think explaining the timing, these projects were bid three years ago, and our project is not going to be bid for another two years, and in some cases, you are looking at an eight to nine-year differential in inflation. I also think explaining and understanding some of the sustainable building policies will help explain why our building might be more costly in terms of those items than some of these other districts that may not have policies like that in place. Another item that we could dive into more is the MSBA reimbursement. We are saying a \$100,000,000 MSBA reimbursement looks like less than 20% of the project, and people want to understand why. At the Summit, we discussed caps and limits, but where are those hitting this project? Regarding the Community Design Workshop, we are receiving feedback similar to what we have received in other meetings where there is a lot of conflict. Some say we need a field house, and some say we don't need one. Some say we need a courtyard, and some say we don't. I did appreciate the one comment where the one table said they appreciated how challenging it is to fit everything on the site after sitting down and looking at it. I was glad that it was said out loud and was acknowledged by some attendees.

Hsing Min Sha: What was important was that people had a chance to talk to one another. We need a longer format to receive comments and provide responses; it does not necessarily have to be an agreement. We just want the community to feel they have been heard and understood. We also need a project review to determine the budget and how we are doing thus far. I would like to hear back from the contractors on how they are doing regarding hours and ability to get work done.

Kseniya Slavksy: Mike Burton, you said you were hoping to get a decision from us regarding the pool, field house, etc. I assume you mean what is in and out regarding the design team exploring it and continuing with the following design phase. I believe you are not asking us to decide what will be carried forward permanently, as that is a matter of a vote on the debt exclusion.

Mike Burton: At the end of this phase, you need to pick what is in and what is out. When we go into schematic design, we cannot continue to look at add-on options.

Joe Pato: If the School Building Committee votes an item out, it does not go to the community for a vote. If the School Building Committee votes an item in, it is subject to a debt exclusion vote to determine whether it is built.

Kseniya Slavsky: I have heard from quite a few parents from Hastings who most recently lived not through a renovation but construction next door, and they talk about it as a PTSD sort of experience, and that was not even a renovation. I have also heard from many who are interested in additional tours of the LHS building. Andrew Baker did a fantastic job giving tours, especially since this was my first time seeing some of the high school spaces, especially the world language classroom. These classrooms have high, low, high, and low seating so students don't bump elbows because they sit tightly beside each other. There were questions during the workshop regarding previous attempts to get this high school project launched. Many have been studying other building placement and design options and asking why they aren't considering my idea. My history of this project does not go that far back, and I don't know if someone with that context might be able to address this question better than I looking at the overall pursuit of this project. The ThoughtExchange questionnaire included two questions regarding sustainability. However, a good chunk of sustainable design is due to our local decision since the Town voted in the sustainability policy. It would be helpful to understand this policy, as some people look at the price and think maybe we can save money by not doing that, but in reality, we can't take that much off the table.

Andrew Baker: We need to remind people that some of these upfront costs for sustainability options are offset by long-term operating offsets. For example, buying an electric car is costly upfront, but you expect to recoup some of that by buying less gasoline.

Alan Levine spoke with a man who works for an engineering firm and has done many underground parking garages during the Community Design Workshop. This man observed that building a one-level underground parking under the LHS building would be very appropriate. The reason is if you create on the fields, you have to drive it down to something more substantial to anchor the building. When you do that, the peat is not providing any structural support to the building so you might as well remove it and put parking down there. I think this is worth more exploration. We could put some parking underground, which would help with the tightness of the site. Also, if we put in a geothermal well, the operating costs would be reduced over several years. We need to start developing the numbers to understand what they are. We need to know how much energy we are spending on the current high school and how much we would spend on the new high school.

Jon Himmel: Some people in Town have calculations for the payback and the reimbursement from our source related to the PV batteries and the geothermal. I think the design team should schedule a time to talk to these folks in a public meeting to discuss the payback cost estimates associated with PV batteries and geothermal.

Kathleen Lenihan: We need to discuss why it costs so much to build a high school right now and explain to people why the high school has to be as big as it is. The size of the building is, in large part, driven by classrooms, as we have so many students. We need to explain to people why classrooms need to be bigger now than in the past.

Public Comment:

Sarela Bliman-Cohen - 17 Dane Road - I'd like to say that I'm very happy to hear about the conversation that was just taking place at this meeting. It seems like you're starting to take and address some of the public's concerns. I would also like to thank you and Jonah Millers for sending a message via text and email about the event on Thursday. I hope that in the future, we get an opportunity to see it a few days in advance so people can rearrange their schedules and attend the meetings. Also, I propose that the school building committee consider holding a town hall meeting again where we can have a dialog. I emphasize dialogue with the community so people can ask questions, raise concerns, and have those addressed. Because I don't think the ThoughtExchange is good enough. The charrette on Thursday was a start, yet it still felt limited in that people didn't have an opportunity to address the entire room. In the future, maybe more could be done to give the community a chance again to ask questions and get answers, and it doesn't feel like a one-way street. I also want to thank Mike and Carolyn for your recent comments. I think the community would appreciate a breakdown of the project overhead costs and the sustainability costs, and based on what I've heard, I assume a more detailed breakdown is forthcoming. I would like to reiterate that I favor a reasonably expensive new high school. I agree we need a new building, but I still think that the 625 million is relatively high, and when we go to debt exclusion, and given such a high cost for the new school, there is a chance that the Town may vote against it, and then we all lose. So I think that the town should have a plan B. We don't want to risk the debt exclusion not passing. So rather than go back to the drawing board in November 2025, I think it would make sense to have another option, a lower-cost option now that will address the needs of the students with a new high school and will still pass the debt exclusion and again, thank you for what you're doing.

Aviram Cohen - 17 Dane Road - I want to emphasize education and knowledge acquisition, both in my blood. I'm in favor of renovating the school, but the school that will lead us into the future, cost is still a significant issue talking about the future. What technologies will occupy the buildings to better prepare the students for the future, and what is the investment associated with all these technologies? The following item has to do with the dialog. From my observation, there is minimal dialog at this point. I feel that although our voices are recorded, and I emphasize recorded, no real action items are assumed. I read several of the minutes. These are the summaries of all the of all the meetings. I was wondering where the action items of each one of these meetings are and who is handling these action items. Many people ask for broader communication. There is a way to resolve it. I offered several times to form a more extensive list based on the old data sets of families with kids in the school system. If this one is not doable, there must be a better way to resolve this issue. I go back to the earlier point about the cost. \$650 million is a significant concern. I wish it had been 350. Thank you for bringing hybrid learning into this discussion. I think that we should have more of this because, in my

observation, in my understanding, two technology cycles, which is about 10 years, and the building will be obsolete. Thank you so very much, and have a great afternoon.

Dawn McKenna - 9 Hancock Street - I will share a few of my takeaways. First of all, I want to thank you all for your efforts to make it as best as possible in such a short time. There was a significant improvement between what I heard on Monday and what happened. So thank you for that. My takeaway is that the public wants and needs to engage if we get them to vote for a project of the size it will have to be, whatever the ultimate idea is. Another takeaway is that the broader participation came from the broader outreach, attracting people who don't usually attend these meetings. So we want to build on that. I disagree that the ThoughtExchange was helpful. I found that people who understood it and could put keywords in would do that. But I don't think most people felt as comfortable with it. I also want to reiterate that I believe the committee needs to be in front of the meeting. They should be introduced at those meetings so people know who they can talk to in the community. One thing that was said today: I just want to be careful about interpreting results based on personal opinions, which, just as an example, whether we build new sites in stages or building on the fields, even in this conversation, had a feel of it being directed. The other thing I want to talk about is that your next steps should be bi-monthly Zoom meetings all summer long that you tape record and post, allowing people who are available to get more familiar because we just got everybody engaged. You don't want to lose that. I would post what those topics are. So, for example, I think the prior efforts to address all the LHS issues that led to the nine-school debt exclusion, which failed, and what we did after it failed is important. What happens if we build on the fields? What are the consequences versus if we build on-site? I think Carolyn should do the presentation she did at the group meeting for the Town Officials for the public about how they will fund the project with the debt exclusion and what preparations we've made leading up to that. I think the deficits of the current building would be another good topic, as well as the sustainability costs and payback, the whole explanation of the MSBA reimbursement, the cost of the designs and what goes into them, and the aesthetics. Finally, I think you need a community-wide engagement on the field house and the pool issue, and I think that should be a separate topic. If you did these bi-monthly, you would have a chance to do all of them.

Kathleen asked the committee if they were receiving emails from the group email address. The consensus is that only Town email addresses have received these emails, so they will look into this.

Kseniya Slavsky: I think it is less important that we discuss and debate topics that we have already discussed and debated. What is more important is that we spend a reasonable amount of time putting together short explainer videos to get people caught up on the big topics. Everything we have done so far has been very public, documented, and publicly available. Still, it is not the same as making easily accessible videos that are cliff notes to the project.

Joe Pato: I sent an outline of a project narrative, which addressed many of the things Kseniya Slavsky mentioned. We will review it in the Communications Working Group meeting.

Jim Malloy motioned to adjourn the meeting at 1:09 p.m. Joe Pato seconded the motion. Kathleen Lenihan took a roll call vote, passed 13-0.