

**School Building Committee Coordination Meeting**  
**Monday, June 17, 2024, from 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.**  
**Remote Meeting**

School Building Committee Members: Andrew Baker(absent); 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(absent); 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:**

*Communications Working Group Update*

Kathleen Lenihan explained that at the last Communications Working Group meeting, frequently asked questions were discussed and what we wanted on the website, including videos, to help people understand the project and catch up on what has been going on. The group also discussed hosting community forums on July 16th, August 14th, and September 18th.

Julie Hackett gave a [Communications Working Group Update](#) by reviewing this letter with the Committee. As part of the Communications Working Group, Julie Hackett proposes holding a full one-day School Building Committee Retreat to discuss complicated issues. A [draft agenda](#) for a future retreat is based on some of the concerns we have heard from the Committee and the public. Items for discussion:

- Scope
  - Evaluate the June 2024 “LHS Space Summary” to understand the educational program and determine if +/- adjustments are needed.
  - Gain a better understanding of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) reimbursement process.
- Cost
  - Review presentation on costs of comparable high schools
  - Review the recent cost estimates to gain an understanding of the cost drivers.
  - Discuss sustainability and the opportunities to recoup costs, along with federal reimbursements.
  - Discuss project delivery options, including (1) Lump Sum Chapter 149 or CM Chapter 149a.
- Schedule
  - Further, at a schematic level, explore what project delivery options and phasing do to the overall schedule.

Kseniya Slavsky: a three-hour session late afternoon into the evening might be more doable.

Carolyn Kosnoff agreed that we should dive into all these items. I keep receiving these questions from the public, and I think they expect us to have the answers, but we do not have that level of detail yet.

Joe Pato: We should try to get this done in one shot. I will be away the week of the 4th, but I will be back that Saturday if you need to do it over the weekend.

Chuck Fazzo agrees with Kseniya about doing two three-hour sessions for two nights.

Kseniya recommended a Friday night and picking back up Saturday morning as well.

Jon Himmel: I think two sessions work because some agenda items are unique to themselves. Regarding cost, we should review the program first because it reflects how they pressed the project out. This is how they determined the square footage and multiplied that by the square foot costs. Also, we don't have enough information to do this agenda. How do we come by this information?

Julie Hackett recommends sending a Doodle Poll to determine the date for the retreat, but would like this to be an in-person meeting. We will have to give some assignments before the retreat to obtain this information. If our project team wants to be there, that would be great, but either way, we would need the information well in advance. Joe Pato shared helpful resources at the Communications Working Group meeting and will share them again with the Committee. I will take responsibility for obtaining the information before the retreat, assuming we want to do that.

Mike Cronin would like to stay away from all weekends to hold the retreat.

Kseniya Slavsky: If the retreat is not hybrid, I think it is really important that it be a high-quality experience for the public to watch. In some in-person meetings, like the focus group type meetings with many people in the room, the recordings were not a high-quality experience, and the audio wasn't necessarily great. If this retreat is an effort to get the School Building Committee members to be very well prepared to be able to inform the public in the following public forum then it is less critical.

Julie Hackett explained that the School Committee voted on the Educational Plan, but the discussion relates to cost implications as square footage is money.

Joe Pato: The retreat is a working session to reach a consensus and understanding. It is not a public communication session. The public can attend, but it is not a broadcast. We are learning what the message is so that we can craft it and then get it out to the public.

Jon Himmel: One of the things we discussed in the Communications Working Group meeting was the situation we found ourselves in relative to the charrette. We found out what the charrette would be only a day prior. I think we are trying to get ahead of the message and how it will be packaged for the retreat. I remember at one of the first public forums, the consultants said we could get as much as 37% reimbursement and I wonder why we were giving that sort of message because I don't remember it being that much. I started looking at other communities' websites, and they have some informative information regarding the reimbursement program, such as what is not reimbursable.

Kseniya Slavsky: I would be very cautious of using any other communications information on MSBA reimbursement. I have multiple projects in different phases with the MSBA, and the reimbursement rules differ depending on the year a project is approved.

Kathleen Lenihan: I have looked at various other communities' project websites. I am a big fan of someone else coming up with an idea or a way to do something. There is no need for us to reinvent the wheel. Looking at

other communities' websites can give us useful ideas and avenues to explore as we think about what you want on your website.

Jim Malloy: I agree that I would prefer not to have the retreat on a weekend. Other than that, it sounds like what Julie Hackett has laid out is what we need to focus on because those are many of the questions we are receiving. I don't think we need an all-day retreat, but maybe two evenings make sense to me.

Mark Barrett: The design or project team needs to attend the retreat because they are our best resource for factual information, especially regarding items related to the MSBA rules and protocols for this project.

Mike Cronin: We probably just need to give the OPM Team a list of things we are looking for at the retreat so that we can establish a work plan for them. This also means something else will get paused when inserting the materials we are looking for.

Julie Hackett explained that Sara Jorge would send out a Doodle poll to determine the best dates for the committee. Julie Hackett requested feedback on the agenda, particularly the outcomes piece for what you want to walk out of that retreat having accomplished.

Kathleen Lenihan: Any school district that is doing a project now is going to be looking back, whether it's a high school or middle school or even an elementary school, they're going to be looking back and saying, I don't understand it only cost \$50 million for X town to build that elementary school. Why is it costing \$75 million now? So, I think explaining this will just be a part of all OPM workflow processes.

Jon Himmel: I was looking at the MSBA website about reimbursement, and it talks about the base rate, additions, and subtractions. I think communities that are receiving 25% of the bill, as opposed to 75% of the bill, are probably not as engaged because it's not hitting their tax base as much. I think the population in those towns are not getting into the nitty-gritty of the project as something they want to be involved in because they figured that it's all taken care of. We're a lot more interactive and may have higher expectations as a committee, but our Town has a higher expectation. As a result, we need to be more proactive about what is being put out to the community, which might be a higher expectation than our consultants generally deal with.

Kseniya Salvsky explained that she understands why Jon Himmel would think that. Still, I'm working in communities with close to 80% nominal reimbursement rates, where some of their projects failed in the initial exclusion votes, and public involvement was extremely high. This varied, in some cases, into very different communities from Lexington. But everybody cares very much about their tax bills. Then, communities with higher reimbursement rates care more rather than less, or at least as much, maybe for different reasons. So I would just caution us that we are so special because we're a Lexington, and this process is absolutely normal. Public concern over a significant project is absolutely normal across different towns, and it's a very reasonable expectation of the OPM team and design team to come prepared for these meetings with well-rounded contextualized explanations. I would strongly recommend that we place the burden of preparation and leading this effort on the OPM because I think part of the issue that we've had, as voiced by the project team in the last session that we were in, was that they didn't get what they needed from the design team early enough. This means that they either weren't able to push for it early enough or didn't get what they asked for early enough. Going into any more public meetings with information that's not fully vetted, I would rather cancel a meeting than go to a meeting unprepared or prepared but in a way that has not been vetted. Sometimes, it's even the choice of a few words that are used in the sentence. Nobody hears anything else you say once you use the wrong

words for the next half an hour. It is critical. I think our OPM is very capable, and we need to ensure that it is their responsibility and that this is reinforced. We also need to give them the correct support they need from us if they need it and from a design team. One more thought: I think about this retreat as almost like a dry run for the next public meeting in terms of preparation, and I would not mind dedicating time to providing more dry runs before community meetings if it means that the quality of delivery and the information that we're going in with is a rerun, fully vetted, and prepared.

Julie Hackett: I hear what you are saying, Kseniya Slavsky, and I hear what Jon Himmel is saying as well. There is still a lot of engagement, but the level of engagement is different. I think it has a lot to do with the fact that we have a lot of architects, designers, and OPMs in the community; at least, that was true for me in the communities that I was in before with school projects. They were involved, but they were involved in very different ways, and the questions asked were not focused on the kind of work and outcomes we are discussing today.

Kathleen Lenihan: I will say this as a School Committee member who's been on the School Committee for multiple school building projects. This is an entirely different level of engagement and interest from the public, which makes sense because the high school is not just physically large but financially large. There's no comparison between this and, say, the Hastings project.

### **Public Comment:**

Bob Pressman: 22 Locus Ave—Based on Joe's comment, I'm assuming that whether or not this is called a retreat, if there is more than a quorum of the committee present, there will be a contemporaneous opportunity for people to watch. Is that right?

Kathleen Lenihan responded that this was correct.

Dawn McKenna: 9 Hancock Street - I want to mention your comment about the prior Hastings debt exclusion and other debt exclusions. You all have to understand that there were many years of history of a nine-school project. Until this high school project, all the projects have been a continuation of a lot of education over many years, whereas this is brand new and big. We knew it was coming, but it's different now that it's here. With that said, I liked the idea of doing the retreat, and to Bob Pressman's point, which I know you said, whether it's in person, that they have to come to participate or that they will be able to join by Zoom, I think you do need to make it clear that the public will be able to get in. However, I think some things need to be added to the agenda. One is the process of determining whether or not to accept the included options, and I'm not saying to make the determination. I'm saying to make the determination of the process. I will just give you all a quick lesson on the public facilities building model. I was Chairman of the board when that project had a 20-year logjam over one simple question: what site it would be built on, and nobody knew how to do it. So, the year I was Chair, I orchestrated a conversation with the board and the public to say how we would conclude that everyone would accept this. Then, once we set up that process, the board voted on it, and we followed the process to the letter. At the end of the day, not everybody agreed with the decision that it would remain where it was, but everyone understood they had been given the opportunity. Some of these questions have been lacking, especially about the fieldhouse, the school administration, the pool building, etc. The other thing that I think needs to be added to the agenda is whether or not this board should engage, again, with the MSBA, particularly on increasing the size of the school building, based on the MBTA community laws. We know the number of projects. When we voted, we were told it would be years before we saw projects. We are seeing them through the floodgates now. I think we have a right and an opportunity to do that. Again, using my experience, when Avalon was built, and the state wanted to turn that property over to us, they insisted that there would be no school impact. Again, I was Chair at the time, and I insisted that if they didn't think there was going to be such an impact, give us a pot of money, so they thought we were going to have money for 10 years, it went away in a couple of years. So, I

think there is an opportunity to have that conversation. And I urge the board to consider that.

Joe Pato: Dr. Hackett mentioned that I shared useful information during the communications meeting. There were two pieces: one was from the MSBA on comparable projects over the past several years, and one's currently in bidding. There are tables and data. I have sent it to the committee as a whole. However, since I did send it to the committee as a whole, I wanted to make it public here, and the two links are available below:

1. [Capital Planning Data and Information: Cost Data | Massachusetts School Building Authority \(massschoolbuildings.org\)](https://massschoolbuildings.org/CapitalPlanningDataandInformation:CostData|MassachusettsSchoolBuildingAuthority)
2. [info.massschoolbuildings.org/TabPub/TableauCostData.aspx](https://info.massschoolbuildings.org/TabPub/TableauCostData.aspx)

Kathleen Lenihan explained that all School Building Committee meetings are posted and open to the public, and this retreat will be no different.

Kseniya Slavsky motioned to adjourn the meeting at 1:09 p.m. Joe Pato seconded the motion. Kathleen Lenihan took a roll call vote, passed 11-0.