

**School Building Committee Coordination Meeting**  
**Monday, September 9, 2024, from 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.**  
**Remote Meeting**

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

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.

**New Business:**

*LHS Field House Presentation*

Principal Andrew Baker, PE, Health & Wellness Coordinator Eamonn Sheehan, and Athletic Director Naomi Martin shared the [LHS field house presentation](#) with the School Building Committee.

Kseniya Salvsky explained that she is unaware of any massing studies designs that would eliminate the existing field house without replacing it, so they assume that the existing field house will stay in place. The question for the Town is whether to invest beyond that with a renovated and expanded or new and expanded field house. Also, can we get by without the field house for a certain amount of time if the Town voted to renovate or replace the current field house?

Andrew Baker: I think it's a subset of a number of problems that we have with any of the core spaces in the school right now, the cafeteria and the auditorium, right? The same could be said of the performing arts program and what will happen to the performing arts program if the auditorium goes offline. So it's not a question that is specific to just the field house. It's a question that is specific to all of the core spaces in the school. It's a good question, but it's not that localized,

Naomi Martin: I think we know that building a new school will cause athletics to be displaced in numerous ways. We have a meeting tomorrow that kind of begins a conversation about what LHS programming would look like and what the impacts of those things would be. I think we've seen nearly all Middlesex League schools go through renovations or new construction, and they have managed to keep their athletic programming going. I think there could be changes to our programming to accommodate the construction. Our goal would be to keep all of our programming alive. The budget implications of possibly needing to travel to other towns or have away games in certain sports would be a cost that we need to understand how to pay for, in addition to the high cost of a new school. Still, I think we're aware of that, and the benefits grossly outweigh the small loss of space for a period of time. So we will find a way to be creative, and it will potentially be taxing families and students for a period of time, but I think we're aware. Those conversations will be ongoing in the immediacy.

Claire Sheth explained that we know what we would lose if we didn't have a field house, but what would happen if we went with the small or medium option of the field house? Also, is it possible to think about identifying a future field house structure that we want to ultimately have and then bring it to the Town for a debt exclusion vote four years after the school has been built so that the tax burden of the larger LHS process is mitigated to the degree that people might be able to stomach?

Mike Cronin: If the main building comes offline, that isolates the field house, and we're going to need a process in place already to build an addition on the backside of the building where we can put an HVAC system to support the building and then follow through a typical capital path for a roof replacement because the top dome has been replaced recently, but the middle dome will need to be the next round to be replaced. We will wind up doing a new track and basketball courts in the next ten years. The HVAC will have to be pretty thoughtful and planned out pretty specifically. We'll have to bring power in because, of course, that's all-electric, so there'll be some components that we'll need to do to keep that building. We are working with SMMA on this right now, and they are working on getting us gross square footage for cubic footage so that we can figure out how many air turns and what that system will look like independently.

Naomi Martin: The large and medium renovations for the field house allow for a 200-meter track, which is the best option for the kids and coaches. It's also the most expensive option. As a district, we have stated that it's obviously of the utmost importance and necessary to our programming to have a field house, and the best case for all is an upgrade to a 200-meter track. We've seen the data, and we know that 200-meter tracks are few and far between in the public landscape, but evidenced by the fact that we are one of the few schools that have a field house. Lexington has long thought and done differently to meet our community's and student-athletes needs. I think Claire Sheth would be okay with me speaking on behalf of recreation, that their most coveted needs are indoor space for their programming. So it's not just a burden of the Lexington Public Schools, but a burden of the entire community, and that a larger field house in terms of billable, rentable hours, especially with a 200-meter track, would have a significant impact compared to what we currently have.

Andrew Baker: One clarifying question for people is that a 200-meter track with a straightaway in the middle would necessarily mean that the court, that is presently part of the field house, would not be there, correct? The idea would be that there is a space in the larger gymnasium where students could practice and compete, correct? Because some freshmen and JV volleyball games happen in the field house. It is mostly a practice space, but some wrestling meets, for instance, happen in the field house, too, which would move to the gymnasium, correct?

Naomi Martin: I spoke at the Capital Expenditures Committee meeting about having a new gymnasium space as drawn out in the plans, with renovated Field House space does allow us to pull a lot of the current programming that's in the field house out to the gymnasium, which will provide for safer conditions for the students that would be using that space, and we might be able to pull all competitions into the gymnasium space. In many of our current Middlesex League opponent schools, you'll have JV basketball happening concurrently with dividers down, or you'll have volleyball sub-varsity levels happening concurrently. I think it would give us many more options because it would also mean getting table tennis or badminton practice to meet the needs of other students we currently don't meet. So again, there are pros to all these conversations when we operate in spaces that meet our needs.

Claire Sheth asked why we would lose the interior space we have now in the existing field house.

Lorraine Finnegan: This is a design option. They could be moved to one side, which would make the overall box a little longer. I think one of the reasons why New Balance and Reggie Lewis have it in the middle is that it just continues to make the overall enclosure bigger, but it is a design choice for what you want in the middle.

Charles Lamb addressed Kseniya Slavsky's question. Yes, the massing does include the field house renovation and the other field house options, but the cost estimates do not include the 30 million dollars. This will need to be added to the \$600 or so million that we are already potentially looking at for the high school. In response to Claire Sheth's question regarding a larger field house. This question was posed at the August 15th Summit and will be addressed at the September 19th Summit. Still, anything larger than the \$30 million renovation of the field house will require another debt exclusion, and the idea of putting a future debt exclusion out there in five years is kind of contradictory to our five-year capital plan that we have in the Town, which is actually longer

because we do have other debt exclusions that we do have to address, like East Lexington Fire Station, library, Town Office Building, and 173 Bedford street. So, I think that a larger question will be addressed at the September 19th Summit.

Joe Pato: I am trying to remember if any new construction variant massing studies included potential sites outside this footprint that would allow for concurrent use.

Kathleen Lenihan: I am wondering about the 30 million-dollar renovation option. It does not create a 200-meter track, but I want to know how that could improve the field house for student use besides HVAC.

Naomi Martin explained that the 30 million-dollar renovation would be focused more on redesigning the space for students and storage.

Eamonn Sheehan explained that we do not have plans from SMMA yet, but the bleachers tend to get jammed in an open position, which precludes us from using some of that space when they cannot close. That is one example, but as Naomi Martin said, some storage space needs to be addressed. We do not have enough storage space for our PE and athletics equipment.

Lorraine Finnegan: Both the new construction on the field and all the phased in place or renovation addition options show the available land area would be concurrent. So the goal would be to build a new gym and have the new gym operational potentially before you take this down, so at least it will be a trade and in addition to the gym, you are there are two alternative PE spaces, a fitness center and a multi-purpose room in the program for another 4,500 square feet. For renovation options for the existing Fieldhouse, we have not developed yet. I will put that on my to-do list to ensure we consider what it means to upgrade that field house. However, as Mike Cronin mentioned, there is a lot that needs to be done to that existing space to bring it up to today's code and energy efficiencies alone, regardless of programmatic needs.

Shing Min Sha explained that we are not here to decide whether to build a new field house or not; our decision is whether to leave room for it. If we do leave room for it, does that significantly impact the design approach for our school or parking? I do not think we have the room to leave a different space for a new field house other than the space that is currently on.

Lorraine Finnegan: It does not.

Jon Himmel: If we were to do an ad/reno and the existing gym remained, we would then end up with 18,000 square feet of the new gym and around 12,000 square feet of the old gym. I wonder how the MSBA would look at our recreation and gym strategy if we had a field house, a new gym, and much of what is there of the existing gym. Would they allow it or disallow it?

Lorraine Finnegan: The MSBA would not allow you to keep a 12,000-square-foot gymnasium while building an 18,000-square-foot gymnasium and keeping the field house. In the ad/reno, we have done a black box theater, which is repurposing the old gymnasium into a double-height space for large group instruction and a black box theater.

Chuck Favazzo: I think it's unfortunate MSBA won't take part in providing the 200-meter track, but I think in renovating our existing Field House, one of the biggest benefits there is that the mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and fire protection systems can all be upgraded as part of the new high school system, with flexibility so that if in the future we were to expand the field house down the road. I do think that's a huge win for the Town and Lexington High School. In the short term, they will get a renovated field house. In the long term, the house systems can be tied into if and when the field house gets expanded.

Kathleen Lenihan asked if there would be any concerns about building a new field house right next to the new school down the road.

Lorraine Finnegan explained that you would probably spend more money doing it more carefully than if you did it when you had a free and open clear area.

**Public Comment:**

Bridger McGaw—89 Meriam Street—I appreciate today's field house presentation. I don't see a future Lexington High School without a field house, and I don't think the community is talking about getting rid of the field house. However, in my estimation, Lexington is not required to match meet or exceed track and field and educational needs at this time with a brand new track facility. There's no requirement for 200 meters or special bank tracks or hydraulics. All these nice-to-haves are not things we can afford, and none of these estimates talk about the annual operating costs of any of these larger options, operational costs of the high school itself haven't really been discussed. We have to be more thoughtful and realistic at this time. We need to minimize the churn around items that could significantly distract from the overall goal of constructing a new high school adjacent to our existing high school. I see the value of ensuring a similar-sized field house, but we do not need an NCAA training arena in Lexington beyond the 36,000 square feet that our educators shared with us today. After years in large building construction and site planning, I appreciate the challenge of programming across the board for a new high school and field house, especially due to these physical plant challenges that have been discussed, let alone our net zero goals. Those will play heavily, I'm sure when we vote to support the construction of a new high school. However, I think we don't need to create the only Middlesex league field house for our student-athletes and community program. We should urgently support a cost analysis of all these capital repairs and replacements, as Mr. Cronin suggested, and sustain the existing field house for the next five to 10 years, and then balance those against the new construction needs and the timing. The field house request must be rebalanced against other capital needs in Town and the space on LHS site massing studies is reserved until further analysis can be conducted.

Dawn McKenna—9 Hancock Street—It's clear that voice false choices have been given to staff: no field house, or renovate and take the field house offline or renovate. The choice for all of us is what we value. In the superintendent document that she put out on August 17, Section Six says athletics are an important part of a student's educational experience. In all likelihood, the MSBA policy decision not to fund athletics has more to do with how far their dollars can stretch than what children need in their educational experience. The choice we have is whether or not we believe this project will meet our needs. I hope everyone agrees that our job is to build the best possible learning environment for our kids to grow and develop over the next 75 years, if so, that includes a new, larger field house. According to our architects, that means asking taxpayers to spend nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars on this high school. If there are concerns about costs, let's face them head-on. Let's Be creative, and let's go door to door if necessary to convince people why this building is needed and to continue to provide the kind of education people move to Lexington for. Stop being afraid of what could go wrong and start being excited about what could go right. Then my question for everybody is, I was surprised to hear that Naomi and Eamonn have not met with SMMA to describe what they think their needs are. I wonder at what point you will have them do that so that they can give us a realistic estimate, not just a based estimate that mimics the exact figure per square foot they are using for the high school. We know for a fact that not only is that not going to be the case for the field house, but the field house also provides a wonderful opportunity to have a surface that would provide the much-needed solar panels we've been discussing. So, hopefully, they'll get a chance to meet and do that.

Mark Sandeen—10 Brad Road—Is it possible to provide a summary of the pros and cons of building a new small, 146-meter field house versus renovating it?

Olivia Kelley—44 Grant Street—My question is actually with Charles Favazzo. You mentioned that if the field house gets a renovation, the upgraded facilities will be part of the high school. From everything that has been

said, it seems that if we do anything other than a renovation, we must upgrade the HVAC systems in the field house on our own. Am I correct about that? Mike Cronin is saying no. So if we do a renovation and addition, we have to do that's on the hook for us, yes, for the Town, and if we just do a straight renovation, that we can connect to the high school and use their facilities, or would we still have to put them, have to put the field house on separate facilities. One of the benefits of doing the renovation is that we can upgrade the facilities, the HVAC, and the electric so that we could potentially crush the field house at a later date, build it back up again, and use the same systems as the high school. Then my second comment on top of that is it seems like an ineffective use of the money that we will spend to upgrade the HVAC and electricity putting that into a field house, a 34,000 square foot field house that is already too small, seems like an ineffective use of our money. Plus, taking that 15 to \$20 million off the top of new construction would make those numbers go from a 48,000-square-foot field house down to roughly, let's call it, 30,000, which might be a little bit more palatable for the Town. Ultimately, I respectfully disagree with Bridger McGaw, and I agree with Naomi Martin. We have done things differently in Lexington. For example, we had the first field house facility in Massachusetts in 1961 and still have one of the only field houses. In Naomi's words, we have always done things differently and continue to do things differently. So, I don't see any reason why Lexington should stop doing things differently. Thank you all for the presentation and every single second you guys spent.

### **Reflections:**

Chuck Favazzo responded to the public comment. From my understanding, if we renovate the existing field house or build new, we can tie the systems into the high school. Tying all the systems together instead of one for the field house and one for the new high school would be exponentially less expensive.

Andrew Baker: I just wanted to follow up on a comment by Ms. McKenna. I want to be clear that every department in the school, including PE, Health and Wellness, and athletics, had a chance to meet with SMMA to discuss the programmatic needs in December and January of this last year. There have also been follow-up meetings, so they have had plenty of input into the programmatic needs. I believe they were discussing the specifics of renovation and what could be achieved through a renovation, and they have not had that one-on-one with SMMA yet. I just wanted to clarify that.

Julie Hackett wanted to ensure that the first 10 minutes of the community forum were reserved for a student presentation from the Student-School Building Committee.

Joe Pato explained that the community forum flyer would go out today. The topic focus is cost clarity, and the estimates, how they compare against other schools in the Commonwealth, and the cost of not doing work are discussed.

Mike Burton explained that the Communications Working Group discussed the kartoonEDU Proposal for creating short videos in preparation for the big vote on November 12th. If the School Building Committee is comfortable with Facilities moving forward, we will send them information to begin the work.

The vote to accept the kartoonEDU Proposal will be on the agenda of the next School Building Committee meeting.

Claire Sheth: I think it will be really important to ensure that there is more than one example of a community that has done a reno build-in-place option like Arlington as part of the consideration. It would be really helpful to have one or two solid case studies of communities that were forced faced with a similar choice about building new in a separate location and building in place instead, and what the actual implications of that were on the community, on the students. There are many theoretical worries and concerns, but there is an example three miles down the road that has done it and is doing it, and I just think it would be really helpful to understand better what the reality was like. Was it doom and gloom? Was it better than they expected? Was it more expensive? Did it take significantly longer? Because we get presented with worst-case scenarios with that option, I want to make sure that we've done our due diligence in making sure those concerns have been borne

out. Maybe they do, but I think that's important.

Joe Pato motioned to adjourn the meeting at 1:17 p.m. Julie Hackett seconded the motion. Kathleen Lenihan took a roll call vote, passed 10-0.