

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Project Basics

### What is the Lexington High School Building Project?

The Lexington High School Building Project is an effort, already several years in the making, to significantly repair and enlarge or fully replace the existing LHS. The current structure no longer meets our educational needs due to failing infrastructure and overcrowding in classrooms and common spaces.

### How much will it cost?

The School Building Committee (SBC) selected massing study C.5b, or Bloom, as their preferred design. The SBC will submit this design to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for inclusion in the Preferred Schematic Report.

The estimated project cost of the Bloom design is \$662 million. This estimation encompasses the school, a renovated field house, and the inclusion of the Central Administration Offices inside the building.

The SBC anticipates reimbursement of approximately \$100 million from the MSBA and intends to utilize all available state and local energy rebates. Combined, the grants and rebates are expected to lower the total project cost for the Town to approximately \$522 million.

### How long will it take?

The preferred design option, C.5b Bloom, carries an expected construction timeline of four and a half years. That time frame includes construction of the new building, demolition of the existing structure, and reconstruction of any athletic fields impacted by the project. The project team anticipates construction starting in 2026 and the new school opening to students for the 2029-2030 academic year.

### Where will it be located?

Under current [massing studies](#), a newly constructed or larger, renovated building would be placed in the general area of the existing structure, or on the playing fields adjacent to that site, along Worthen Road. Either of these options will impact the recreation space currently managed by the Town. This is an issue the Town and LPS are working diligently to address. We anticipate the Town Pool Complex, playground, Center Recreation turf/track, tennis, and basketball courts will remain open and available to the public during the project.

## Who is involved?

The project team is composed of the School Building Committee, an Owner's Project Manager, and a Designer. Other groups involved include Town Staff, LPS staff and administrators, and residents. Representatives from the Massachusetts School Building Authority are also heavily involved, as are a variety of local community groups with a vested interest in the project.

## Why are we doing this now?

The needs of the LPS student population have outgrown the existing Lexington High School. Overcrowding, inadequate facilities, failing infrastructure, and undersized educational spaces are among the issues that need to be addressed. The reputation of our educational system far exceeds the [deteriorating condition of our high school](#).

## How can I learn more?

It is our top priority to engage with the community and involve the residents of Lexington as much as possible during this project. The success of our efforts depends on your input, commitment, and support.

### 5 Ways to Stay Involved

[Sign up for ParentSquare](#): This is a digital notification platform used by Lexington Public Schools to communicate with the district. Anyone can sign up, even if you don't have a student in the school system.

[Subscribe to Agenda Alerts for the School Building Committee](#): This is a service through the Town's main website that allows you to receive text or email alerts when a new agenda is posted for the School Building Committee. Agendas include meeting times, dates, and locations, as well as the topics expected to be discussed at future meetings and links to any relevant documents.

**Utilize the School Building Project Website:** This website is the easiest way to stay informed on and involved in the project. It includes information on upcoming events, meetings, important deadlines, and updates you may have missed in previous weeks.

[Contact the School Building Committee](#): The SBC welcomes and encourages feedback from the community and other stakeholders. Please [contact the SBC](#) with any questions, comments, or concerns you have about the project.

**Sign up for Text Alerts:** Text BetterLHS to 99411 to sign up for text message notifications about project updates and meetings.

## Project Cost

The School Building Committee (SBC) selected massing study C.5b, or Bloom, as their preferred design. The SBC will submit this design to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) as part of the Preferred Schematic Report.

**The estimated project cost of the Bloom design is \$648 million.** This estimation encompasses the school, a renovated field house, and the inclusion of the Central Administration Offices inside the building.

The project team recognizes how significant this project's price tag is; they want to underscore the [high cost of doing nothing](#).

## **How is the estimated cost being determined?**

Eventually, the cost estimate will be based on a detailed design. For now, professional estimators have provided us with total estimated costs based on a rough per-square-foot cost. That number is multiplied by the estimated square feet needed to meet the Educational Program of the school. The estimated per-square-foot cost is based on other recent school construction projects in the metro Boston area, adjusted for cost escalation/inflation. The Educational Program and space required to meet that program were developed by the project team, working with the school administration, and approved by the School Committee.

The School Building Committee spoke to the estimators during a meeting on August 5, 2024. The [recording of that meeting is available online](#), and the portion involving the estimators begins approximately 7 minutes and 30 seconds into the recording.

## **How will the Town pay for this project?**

The Town will pay for this project by issuing Municipal Bonds. These bonds will be competitively sold on the open market and the Town will choose the bidder offering the lowest True Interest Cost (TIC). The Town will work with a contracted investment advisor to determine the most appropriate term and structure of the bond payments. The specifics of the Bond structure will determine the annual costs to the Town and the taxpayers.

## **How does this project compare to the construction of other local schools?**

The cost of this project is in line with the construction and total cost of other school projects in the metro Boston area, once adjusted for size, local building code, and cost escalation/inflation.

The [cost-comparison to other school building projects](#) is broken down in detail in a video produced by SMMA.

## **What is the expected impact of this project on taxpayers?**

Current estimates of the total project cost to the Town equate to an increase in annual property taxes of approximately 10% to 14%. As of July 2024, the Town's median property value is \$1,354,000. The estimated increase in property taxes for a property of that value ranges between \$1,699 (10%) and \$2,412 (14%).

Several factors could mitigate the impact on taxpayers.

The Town has already planned to absorb approximately \$4M in debt annually from within the tax levy. This number could increase in the coming years.

The Town also continues to build up a cash balance in the Capital Stabilization Fund. The current available amount is approximately \$32M. This money could be used in several different ways.

- The Town could allocate this money directly to the cost of the project therefore lowering the size of the bond needed.
- Funds could be used to cap the annual increase in property taxes to a certain percentage
- Money from the CSF could be used to draw down the balance evenly to reduce the taxpayer impact over a certain number of years
- The Town could choose a level principal financing plan (Higher annual costs early on, but decreasing payments over time) and use the money from the CSF to bring down the total annual payments in the early years of repayment.

## **Project Design**

The project design encompasses the logistics of location, construction, and the overall timeline of the project.

On November 12, 2024, the School Building Committee (SBC) voted to select massing study C.5b Bloom as their preferred design. This conceptual design will be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) as part of the Preferred Schematic Report (PSR), which represents the second stage of Phase 3: Feasibility Study.

If the PSR is approved, the project will move into Phase 4 of the MSBA building process, Schematic Design.

## **Where are we in the process?**

We are in Schematic Design.

This is the fourth phase of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) building project process.

During Schematic Design, the Project Team will work with the MSBA to refine the current design to create a more defined project scope, budget, and timeline.

## What is Schematic Design?

[Schematic Design](#) is the fourth phase of the Massachusetts School Building Authority's (MSBA) building process. During Schematic Design, the Project Team will work with the MSBA to refine the current design to create a more defined project scope, budget, and timeline. Schematic Design concludes with the submission of a Project Scope and Budget Agreement to the MSBA.

## What is a Preliminary Design Program?

The Preliminary Design Program (PDP) is the first stage of the Feasibility Study phase ([Module 3 of the MSBA building process](#)) where the District and its team collaborate with the MSBA to document their educational program, generate an initial space summary, document existing conditions, establish design parameters, develop and evaluate alternatives and recommend the most cost-effective and educationally appropriate alternatives to the MSBA for further evaluation in the PSR phase.

The Town of Lexington submitted their PDP submission to the MSBA on May 31, 2024.

View: [LHS Building Project PDP Submission](#)

## What is a Preferred Schematic Report?

The Preferred Schematic Report (PSR) is the second stage of the Feasibility Study phase ([Module 3 of the MSBA building process](#)) where the District and its team collaborate with the MSBA to refine their educational program and space summary, further develop and evaluate alternatives, and recommend the most cost-effective and educationally appropriate solution to the MSBA Board of Directors for consideration. The MSBA must receive and approve the Preliminary Design Program and the Preferred Schematic Report before a project can move into the [next stage of the building process, Schematic Design](#).

## How will a Design Be Chosen?

On Tuesday, November 12, 2024, the School Building Committee (SBC) selected massing study C.5b, or Bloom, as their preferred design. The SBC will submit this design to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for inclusion in the Preferred Schematic Report.

## What are Massing Studies?

Massing studies are conceptual diagrams created based on the high-level requirements of a project. These studies illustrate the potential locations and dimensions of a project. Massing studies **do not** represent **final designs, locations, or costs** associated with a project.

# Project Team

The Project Team is an umbrella term used to describe any individual or group who is playing a direct role in the project. However, this term does not encompass every individual, group, or organization involved.

## Who is involved in the project?

The Project Team, as defined and required by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), includes the School Building Committee (SBC), an Owner's Project Manager, and a Designer.

Other groups involved in the project include:

- The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA)
- SBC Communications Working Group
- Town of Lexington Staff
- Lexington Public Schools Faculty, Staff, and Students
- Town Committees (with varying levels of involvement)
  - [Select Board](#), [Appropriation Committee](#), [Permanent Building Committee](#), [Capital Expenditures Committee](#), [School Committee](#), [Recreation Committee](#), [Sustainable Lexington Committee](#)

## What is the School Building Committee?

The School Building Committee (SBC) is a collaborative body comprised of Town & School staff, members of the community, and representatives from the Owner's Project Manager (OPM) and Designer teams. The SBC works hand in hand with the OPM and Architect to oversee the site selection and design of the building, provide input, and assist in managing MSBA requirements. The SBC also takes all MSBA votes necessary to advance the project.

Establishing an SBC is a required part of the MSBA Building process. There are strict guidelines about community representation on the committee and the responsibilities placed on the group.

The current SBC membership is as follows:

—(*Voting Members*)—

**Kathleen Lenihan**, Chair, Lexington School Committee

**Michael Cronin**, Vice Chair, Department of Public Facilities

**Mark Barrett**, Member, Public Facilities Project Manager

**Charles Favazzo Jr.**, Member, Permanent Building Committee

**Dr. Julie Hackett**, Member, Superintendent of Lexington Public Schools

**Jonathan A. Himmel**, Member, Permanent Building Committee Chair

**Carolyn Kosnoff**, Member, Assistant Town Manager for Finance

**Joseph N. Pato**, Member, Lexington Select Board

**Steve Bartha**, Member, Town Manager

**Hsing Min Sha**, Member, Resident/Community Representative

**Kseniya Slavsky**, Member, Resident/Community Representative

**Andrew Baker**, Member, Lexington High School Principal

**Dan Voss**, Member, Sustainable Lexington

**—(Liaisons)—**

**Rick DeAngelis**, Recreation Committee Chair

**Charles W. Lamb**, Capital Expenditures Committee

**Alan Mayer Levine**, Appropriation Committee

## What is an Owner's Project Manager?

An Owner's Project Manager (OPM) is a consultant firm hired by the Town through a qualifications-based selection process. Prospective OPMs submitted written proposals for evaluation. The Town then conducted formal interviews with potential candidates before a decision was made. OPM teams consist of professionals in design and construction management. In collaboration with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), we have hired Dore and Whittier as the OPM for this project.

The presence of an OPM on a public project of this magnitude is required.

The OPM works as an extension of the group pursuing the project, in this case, the Town and the School District. The OPM represents the Town's interests through all project phases. They provide project oversight throughout its duration, from design and permitting, through construction.

Other responsibilities of the OPM include, under the Town's guidance, managing project-specific communication, monitoring the budget, and tracking the project's progression.

In addition to working closely with the Town and the School District, the OPM collaborates with the chosen team of architects and designers. The OPM and the design team gather public feedback throughout the early stages of the project to ensure the Town and the School District have options consistent with the wants and needs of the community. This effort helps keep the project in line with policies and procedures outlined by the MSBA. Adhering to MSBA guidelines is necessary if the Town wants to receive maximum funding reimbursement.

During construction, the OPM provides full-time on-site supervision of the project. They monitor the quality of work and the fiscal status of the various project phases. The OPM also maintains an open line of communication between the Town, residents impacted by the project, and the construction team.

## Who is SMMA?

SMMA is the architecture firm chosen by the Town and the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to manage the design of the school building project. They have worked on more than two dozen school-building projects in communities across Massachusetts, including High Schools in [Waltham](#), [Winchester](#), and [Tewksbury](#). SMMA has core expertise in architecture, engineering, interior design, and site design.

## Who is Dore & Whittier?

[Dore & Whittier](#) is a New England-based design and project management firm comprised of architects, designers, educational planners, interior designers, and project managers.



Dore & Whittier has served as an Owner's Project Manager on several school building projects in the area, including the design and construction of Lexington's own [Maria Hastings Elementary School](#).

## Additional FAQs

The following questions and associated answers address more specific elements of the project.

### Why do we need larger classrooms?

Lexington's reputation for academic success and increasingly challenging educational standards at the State level have raised the expectations for the overall learning experience in Lexington Public Schools. These issues and rising enrollment have pushed the already outdated classroom spaces inside Lexington High School well beyond their capacity.

At the High School level, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) [recommends a minimum classroom size of 825 square feet](#) to accommodate a class of 20 students (85% of maximum space utilization). On average, LHS classrooms are approximately 700 square feet, and [in the 2023-2024 school year, the average class size was 18 students](#). In the five program concepts currently in development, the architects have accounted for an average classroom size of 850 square feet.

### What is an Education Plan?

An educational plan (ed plan) is a forward-looking document used by a school district to identify the structural and academic strengths, areas needing improvement, and long-term goals.

The superintendent of Lexington Public Schools, Dr. Julie Hackett, guided the Educational Planning process, with lots of input from the Lexington High School administration, faculty, and staff, along with the many students, parents/caregivers, school committee, and community members who contributed to the district's strategic and master plans. The [current Educational Plan](#) received unanimous approval from the School Committee in February 2024 and similar approval from the School Building Committee in May 2024.

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) requires districts looking to partner with them on constructing a new school to use an educational plan. An educational plan allows the district to work effectively with the Owner's Project Manager (OPM), design team, and local stakeholders throughout the project.

### What is the Capital Stabilization Fund?

The Capital Stabilization Fund (CSF) is a reserve fund that was established in 2013 to help fund future Capital Improvement Projects (CIPs). The Town has set-aside revenues into this fund over the last 10+ years, specifically to offset the financial burden of a large capital projects on the Town's taxpayers. In 2022, the Town began diverting all **new** tax revenue growth from specific commercial and industrial developments into the CSF annually. Current cost estimates

for the construction of a new high school, and the associated increase in property taxes, do not include mitigation from the CSF. [The CSF currently has a balance of \\$32M, and an additional \\$4M has been allocated to the fund for FY2025.](#) This fund is expected to be applied to further reduce the cost of this project to the taxpayers.

The fund has previously been applied to mitigate the impact on taxpayers for projects such as the new Hastings School, the new Fire Department Headquarters, and the recently completed Police Station.

## **What is a debt exclusion vote?**

Under the State's [Proposition 2 ½ law](#), municipalities are limited to an annual property tax increase of 2.5%. They can go beyond that limit if one of two things occur: An operating override or a debt exclusion.

A debt exclusion allows a municipality to temporarily raise its property tax rate to pay debt service costs on municipal bonds associated with a large capital project. This increase can only be applied through the maturity of the bond, and reverts once fully paid-down.

An operating override is a permanent increase in the tax levy over and above Proposition 2 ½ to pay for the Town's ongoing operations.

## **How does MSBA reimbursement work?**

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) operates a "pay-as-you-build" reimbursement system. The MSBA allows districts to submit eligible project costs for reimbursement during construction. The MSBA audits every submission to verify eligible costs, then typically issues a payment within 15 days of receiving the request.

This benefits communities because they don't need to borrow an amount of money equal to the entire cost of the project, reducing the amount of debt incurred and interest accrued by the City, Town, or district.

All projects start with a base reimbursement rate of 31 percentage points. That number fluctuates up or down based on a number of factors. The Town of Lexington expects to receive a reimbursement rate between 13% and 17% of the total project cost. [Read more about the MSBA's reimbursement rate calculations.](#)

## **What is the plan for the Central Administration Office?**

Right now, the Central Office for Lexington Public Schools Administration operates inside the former Harrington Elementary School, near the Lowell Street and Maple Street intersection. The SBC's preferred massing study, C.5b Bloom, incorporates the Central Offices into the design of new Lexington High School. There are several reasons for this:

The former Harrington Elementary School building needs extensive renovations to address structural and mechanical issues. The estimated construction cost of that renovation is between \$15 million and \$19 million. This estimate is similar to the expected cost of including the Central Offices in the new High School.

With the Central Office relocated, the Town can demolish the former Harrington Elementary School and use the land to construct new athletic fields.

Temporary space to support Central Office operations at 173 Bedford Street was approved by Town Meeting in 2024 and will allow the removal or renovation of the former Harrington school to proceed in 2025.

The current design proposals allocate 17,000 square feet of space for the Central Offices inside a new LHS. It could be converted into approximately 15 to 20 classrooms if the school's enrollment were to increase beyond the capacity of the new building.

Further explanation of the proposal to include the Central Offices in a plan for the new High School can be found in a [memo issued by the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Julie Hackett](#), on May 15, 2024.

## **What policies and bylaws would the project need to adhere to in regards to sustainability?**

A newly constructed High School would be required to follow Lexington Bylaws [Chapter 115: Specialized Energy Code](#) and [Chapter 106: Regulation of Fossil Fuel Infrastructure](#). This means it would be an all-electric building, and no fossil fuel-burning infrastructure would be used.

Additionally, Bylaw [Chapter 135 Section 5.1 Parking Regulations](#) would mandate a certain amount of electric vehicle parking availability and an appropriate number of charging stations.

The project would also be heavily influenced by the [Integrated Building Design & Construction Policy](#). This document outlines the policy for achieving high-performance standards for health, energy, and resilience in Town building projects.

See a [simplified breakdown of sustainability and resilience features](#) included in current design options.

## **What is Article 97?**

[Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution](#) protects certain publicly owned lands used for conservation or recreation purposes. To sell, transfer, or convert Article 97 lands to a different use requires a 2/3 vote of the Town Meeting, as well as a roll-call 2/3 vote of each chamber of State Legislature.

