

School Building Committee Coordination Meeting
Monday, October 21, 2024, from 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.
Remote Meeting

School Building Committee Members: Kelly Axtell; Andrew Baker; Mark Barrett (absent); Michael Cronin, Vice-Chair; Rick DeAngelis, Liaison (absent); Charles Favazzo Jr.; Julie Hackett; Jonathan A. Himmel; Carolyn Kosnoff; Charles W. Lamb, Liaison (absent); 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.

Old Business:

Vote on the Definition of a Base Project

Julie Hackett made a motion to formalize the definition of the base High School project as including approximately 440,000 square feet for the high school, approximately 20,000 square feet for the additional 12 classrooms/central office, and approximately 34,000 square feet for the renovated Field House. Andrew Baker seconded the motion. Kathleen Lenihan took a roll call vote, passed 12-0.

Vote on New Construction on Fields

Julie Hackett made a motion to vote for the bloom as the new construction on the fields choice. Hsing Min Sha seconded the motion. Kathleen Lenihan took a roll call vote, passed 12-0.

Vote on Phased in Place

Julie Hackett motioned to approve the new construction and phased-in-place weave as the second option the SBC will consider. Joe Pato seconded the motion. Kathleen Lenihan took a roll call vote, passed 12-0.

Kathleen Lenihan explained that she emailed the School Building Committee regarding logistics for the November 12th meeting when they will vote for the one preferred option. I think it'd be helpful for the public if we all sort of explained our rationale for our vote. I said a time of three minutes for each committee member because there are 16 of us, and that can take a while. In addition to expressing our rationale at the meeting, we could also submit our thoughts in writing for those who wanted to, which could be attached to the agenda. This would allow members to not be limited to the three minutes as it might take some time since we have been on such a journey.

Hsing Min Sha asked if we could devote more time to voting members to give their rationale.

Joe Pato: I think the option for a written rationale is a good one, and I would hope we can hit the main points within three minutes.

Carolyn Kosnoff: I think that by the time we get to the people towards the end, a lot of the same things will have been said repeatedly. It might be a better use of time if people just concur, potentially, with what was already said and add anything new to that. I don't know that we all need to say the exact same things 14 times. I am running a few minutes late; my previous meeting is running over.

Kathleen Lenihan asked Joe Pato what it is that Madam Moderator says at Town Meeting.

Joe Pato stated that everything that needs to be said has been said, just not by everyone.

Andrew Baker: The former English teacher in me was just going to echo some of these ideas, saying that you should be able to state your thesis and your main supporting arguments in a very succinct way for people so that they can understand them. At this point, we've had hundreds of meetings of practice in doing so. Perhaps there might be some value to identifying stakeholder groups within this SBC group and speaking to particular points within this realm. I could see myself working on a statement with Julie Hackett and Kathleen Lenihan about the educational components of the decision and Mike Cronin talking about some of the facilities' challenges along with others. That might be a way of not repeating ourselves over and over again but highlighting the sort of thematic reasons for that decision.

Hsing Min Sha noted that he would like to make a statement about his deciding factors in voting the way he did.

Jon Himmel: I prepared talking points for today as well. It seems to me that there are really main clusters in my point of view of scope, which has a subset of sustainability and MEP, cost, schedule, and disruption. It seems if we do submit what we're talking about, or thinking of talking about, somebody could go through and see a commonality, and then people, rather than speaking three minutes each and saying, well, I agree with this, I agree with that. The only other thing I didn't hear was this: we could submit what we're going to talk about and then have people talk about things that they are particularly tuned into that other people weren't going to discuss. So you end out with an overall view of why we're voting in favor of this or that, but not to have everybody go through every element of what they wrote.

Julie Hackett: People can have my three minutes. If Hsing Min Sha and John Himmel have important things to say, they may lead the discussion. Then, we can chime in, and we will do our best to be brief, as you've suggested.

Hsing Min Sha: It is not just what we agree on but also how we phrase it and the value they bring to the table. Maybe we should say what we all agree on, such as the finance presentation to the Finance Committee, which shows that this project is well within national and local financial guidelines on debt-to-asset ratio and debt service. But then we can individually just speak to where we want to enhance.

Kathleen Lenihan explained that she believes it would be helpful for members to write out their thoughts and submit them for inclusion in the agenda so that they are part of the record. Also, as stated in my email, this is for the voting members of the School Building Committee and the liaisons because the liaisons are an essential part of this group and our process.

Alan Levine said he would like to talk about the MBTA community zoning and how many students there could be in the high school within a few years. I think a lot more analysis needs to be done on enrollment projections and projections of how much development there will be in Town, as there could be 3,000 units in the pipeline by next fall at the rate things are going now. I believe this should be a major topic on an upcoming agenda. Also, I have not seen preparation for the Special Town Meeting yet and it is coming up.

Julie Hackett stated to check your email inboxes, as there is a presentation for Special Town Meeting and a report from the School Building Committee. I also want to direct people to our completed Massachusetts School Building Authority enrollment reconsideration letter. In the presentation for the Special Town Meeting, we address the MBTA zoning by law changes, and we are also going to re-engage the Master Planning Committee (MPC) on those very issues as I believe the work resides with the MPC. Still, we will keep the School Building Committee updated.

Dan Voss: When are you looking to receive the written responses?

Kathleen explained that she would like to attach all written materials when sending the agenda to the Town Clerk's Office. Please submit it by Wednesday, November 6th, for posting on the Tuesday, November 12th agenda.

Dan Voss and Julie Hackett discussed having a complete and comprehensive overview of all the issues for the project. We will plan to carve out some time for this at the November 4th meeting from 12-3 p.m.

Julie Hackett: I just want to be really clear and explicit about the next steps with the Master Planning Group. So we do have a plan, a Master Plan, and a Master Planning Compendium that's arranged according to low, medium, and high enrollment. When we constructed that plan, the MBTA zoning bylaws weren't a thing. We considered many different options. What we are going to do is reassemble the Master Planning Committee, and then we are going to take that existing plan and write a whole new section on what to do in response to the MBTA zoning by-law changes. So, we will have a plan that includes a document we can hand to people that thoroughly covers all of the options. The last thing I'll say is in the presentation I sent you for the Special Fall Town Meeting, John's last point about considering the pros and cons. Take a look at the slides on bloom and weave. It's a pretty succinct summary that could be useful information for potential communication.

Hsing Min Sha: I think it is important for the public to realize that this committee convened shortly after the MBTA vote, which has been at the top of our minds. We need to discuss this further at a public meeting with the Master Planning Committee, so we need to schedule that before we vote. When will we receive the Master Planning Committee document?

Julie Hackett: You should receive the document shortly before the Special Town Meeting. If this committee is inclined, we can schedule a separate meeting to discuss this topic.

Alan Levine is concerned that people who think we can talk about this ourselves and come up with a solution are extremely naive regarding the MBTA community zoning. The School Building Committee's focus is on the high school and whether enrollment grows beyond X, but I think that is as far as this committee goes with respect to the MBTA Community Zoning. I think the Town should probably engage a real estate consultant to try to predict what will happen with further development.

Kathleen Lenihan noted that what happens with the MBTA Communities Act is not the School Building Committee's purview.

Alan Levine: What I am saying is that this committee is going to have to understand that you're not going to have answers in the short term, and it's there's going to be processes taking place beyond this that are going to affect the decisions that are made and may require reconsideration of some of the decisions that have been made. I think this committee should encourage other boards and committees to do the work necessary to address the issues. As far as I can see now, they're not being addressed.

Joe Pato: They are being addressed. A Plus One meeting included the Finance Committees, Select Board, School Committee, and School Building Committee about three weeks ago. This set up a range of issues that needed to be addressed, and certain staff members were tasked with certain items to work on. Reconvening the School Master Planning Committee was one of the items on that discussion, which is already in process, re-engaging with the MSBA on enrollment projections based on the growth that we're seeing, was part of that discussion and is in progress. So many of these things are being kicked off, and we're aware of them. As far as this committee is concerned, our scope is somewhat limited. We've been hearing from the school department that there essentially is an upper bound for a single high school, and we are at that upper bound, right? So the

issues that would be reconsidered really aren't about what would you build here? It is what do you do in the system more broadly?

Kseniya Slavsky: I would ask the project team for one piece of information regarding the enrollment number that would be accommodated by the two levels of expansion that we've been planning as part of a project from the beginning. One level of expansion is we know that the classrooms are being designed to 85% capacity. So what is that extra 15% how does that translate into a number of students? Second, the design team has already planned and showed us where wings of a building could physically be expanded when it was envisioned. It was meant to be something that happens many years later, and just spaces being reserved. If that became accelerated, how many more students or classrooms would that accommodate? So those two pieces of information, student quantity for the 15% in classroom expansion, and I think those are the only really critical things to our work here because the condition of the current school is as it is, and the needs are as they are. The solutions to those needs are what we've been working on all along. We have been building some room for expansion capacity. It is not infinite, but it is not nothing, and that is as much as we can do at this juncture with the purview of this committee.

Jon Himmel: We are discussing the high school, and the Master Planning Committee will discuss the other schools. We need to have a sense of the campus size and the absorption capacity at elementary sites, middle school sites, and the Laconia site.

Julie Hackett: We have the information about the planned operating capacity for every building. In response to Kseniya Slavsky's recommendations, I spoke to Mike Burton today, and the project team is already working on gathering all of that information.

Mike Cronin: We started out with 2820 students, and at 85%, you get the 2395 number. Also, taking the proposed addition for the Central Office at 12 classrooms for 23 students is another 276 for a grade, a total of 3096 students. Now, unfortunately, you're at 100% capacity. Still, those are the numbers that we actually talked about at the community meeting on Thursday night so that everybody's sharing the same number.

Public Comment:

Lana Panasyuk, 28 Saddle Club Road, I emailed all of you before the meeting, asking you not to vote for the inclusion of the central office. As an outsider from the committee, I want to share my view with the public, and I think it could be related. Correct me that I'm still trying to figure out the democratic principles of the local governance and what the committee does. I've read on the website, I'm still not sure why I understand the purpose of the central office. You're talking about additional space for students. I don't know why you have to use Central Office to add more room, which is a red flag for the public. You could just say we would design additional space for the classrooms, and if they become available, we'll put the central office there. But I am still trying to figure out the reasoning, so please help me. Is this committee representing the public, or just you? You make your own decision and then just let the public know your decision? Having an answer to this question is essential. I don't see a point in speaking up if I never hear an answer. How do you know that you're speaking is what the public wants? Again, I'm an outsider, and some feedback would make it better.

Olga Guttag, 273 Emerson Road, To follow up on Lana's comment about not getting answers to questions. I sent an open letter on October 7 with two questions, and I have not received answers to any of them. I think that these questions are essential to what Mr. Levine has brought up, which is the impact of the MBTA zoning on the entire project. How would a two to four-month delay in submission to MSBA affect the project? We know from MSBA that they are willing to provide fast feedback, which means if you submit it two months later, you'll hear back from them, and we have that from MSBA. My second question is, if the project is at this stage would the current acceptance into the MSBA funding program reimburse at least stage one at 31% as per our signed agreement letter? If this is correct, it's actually the enrollment rule for MSBA funding. Does this mean

that our current agreement is invalid because we cannot give them a project with real projected enrollment? If this is invalid, can we work at least on stage two? I hope that we get answers to these questions. I know you're not going to do it now because you told Lana you're not going to, but I've been waiting, and the rest of us have been waiting for at least two weeks to get these answers.

Nora Finch, 73 Webb Street, My first comment slash question is, we're talking a lot about the expanded ability to have additional classrooms. Still, I know a lot of parents are concerned about the cafeteria space and the fact that there isn't space in the cafeteria right now for all the kids to eat lunch at the same time. I'm just wondering what SMMA is considering, as far as that type of core space to make sure that, if we do expand to 100%, inclusive of those additional classrooms that are sort of being planned in, how that would affect the cafeteria specifically, and the second part is how it would affect time on learning. Would we be back in the situation we're in today, where juniors and seniors have free blocks, or would we be meeting the state's time-on-learning requirements for all four grades?

Dawn McKenna, 9 Hancock Street, In my opinion, this committee has not managed this project in a way that you're going to get the public to say yes. I'm very concerned about this because I want the public to say yes, but we're not there. I just heard a long discussion and was going to say other things, and I hope to get them in here about how much time to give people to speak. However, as part of that discussion, I learned that all the committees behind the scenes working on all these issues are comprised of the same people. You're not including people with different perspectives to get out some of this information to the public, and I'm concerned about that, especially the Master Planning Committee. But what I really wanted to say is that listening to everybody try to micromanage the voting process made every hair on my head stand up. You all have an obligation to tell the public whatever you want to tell the public. If you just want to say I agree with you, Hsing Min, that's fine. If you want to say, these are the specific reasons why I want to do it. You should do it. There should not be a limit because what it sounds like is that you're trying to control everybody, and that's why, when I say that, you're using all the same people, that produces anger. So I just think that you ought to leave the process alone. Tell everybody to do their best, not to duplicate as we do in Town Meeting, but let them do what they want. You spent months working hard on this, and they have the right to have the public hear their perspectives. I also want to say that I hope you all received the video that was sent by the Field House Working Group and that you watched it. The visuals make it clear that not only do we have a problem today, but if all you do is renovate the field house, you will have a problem the day this opens, and the MBTA community only makes that worse. What I want to say about the MBTA Community Act is the planning Director stood up a Town Meeting when we voted for that and expected it would be 10 years before we would see the first students come to schools, but that is not what happened. It happened instantly, and some of us tried to warn everybody about that. So I think you really need to be careful about that. The last thing is a question that I know you won't answer today, but I hope you will answer it at your next meeting. So you took a vote to include the renovation of the field house in the base, which I completely understand, but what I want to know is, what does that mean? Will you all vote on top of making sure that the field house is renovated, if need be, that you will also give us the other options for the public to vote on? Or are you saying that that's dead in the water? I really don't want anybody to respond to what I've just said because that's the problem; everybody keeps responding.

Reflections:

Andrew Baker: I just wanted to clarify something that Mr. Cronin said. I just want to put out there that there's no such thing as 100% scheduled school; we really couldn't do it. We can get to like 97% or 98%. It's tough really squeezing those last couple percent out, but we can get close, and we are now.

Julie Hackett: I want to address the Central Office and a few other concerns briefly. We've heard that Central Office is a luxury in the high school, and I want to say that that's not accurate. We know that the recreation and schools will need more playing fields if we keep kids and the community actively engaged during the construction project. We know the MBTA zoning by-law changes may mean that we would require more

classrooms in the future, and we know that the old Harrington was rated an F building, and it would need about \$20 million in system upgrades to address. What we did to address each of those concerns is come up with a creative plan for Central Office, which would enable us to knock down the building at old Harrington, replace the land with new playing fields, and then build 12 new classrooms that some central office could temporarily occupy. The idea is that Central Office could temporarily go in there until that space is needed for students. Also, some concerns about the MBTA phasing in options have been expressed, and questions are floating out there. I've seen Miss Guttag's questions, and Rod Cole answered her exactly how I would answer her. Thought his response was very good. I also have been working with the MSBA since 2009, they were first established in 2004, so I've had a 15-year relationship with the MSBA, and I'm not aware of any type of program that would allow for extended phasing over time and partnership over time. So I wanted to make that clear to people because I heard it a couple of times about sort of closed-door meetings and meeting behind the scenes or meeting with only the same people, what I want to say is that the Master Planning Committee has broad representation. Some of it happens to include some of you who are here today. There are no closed-door meetings. We work hard to have our public meetings and will continue that process. We will return to this body, share information, and explore that together.

Kathleen Lenihan: Lorraine Finnegan and Mike Burton have talked in the past about what delays look like, and specifically the importance of hitting our targets in terms of having a slot on an MSBA Board Meeting, and if we miss that, it isn't just a question of getting in the next one, because those are set up a very long time in advance. A simple two months then turns into a full year's worth of delay because once you miss the MSBA Board Meeting, you're not on the right track for our Lexington Town Meeting process. So I think it would be helpful to have some sort of reiteration of the domino effect that it creates. Then the question of who we represent was asked. That is a political theory philosophy question that you can read books about. I'm just going to say how I personally approach it as both an elected representative for the School Committee and Town Meeting and as an appointed person on this committee, there will be an article, and I will get ten emails saying, I want you to vote in favor of this and then ten more saying I want you to oppose this. It is not simply a question of determining what most people want. You do your homework, you examine all of your materials, you listen to people, and at the end of the day, you have to use your judgment to decide on how you as an individual are going to vote, and that is how I approach all of my elected and appointed positions.

Jon Himmel noted that it would be well served to understand how the school would be laid out if we have these extra students, not just if we absorb them into the space that was being designed for the central office.

Andrew Baker: I want to be clear that I don't think any high school cafeteria can fit all of the students in for a single sitting for lunch. We run three lunches here at the high school, and we would like to run three lunches in any future schedule in the high school. When you start to run more than three lunches, you run into issues wherein you're eating away at the academic integrity of the schedule. You're splitting classes with lunch, so you don't get sustained inquiry time. You're splitting up assessments. So really, the goal would be to continue feeding students in the fashion we have, where you have three lunches with a good 25 to 30 minutes to restock all of the food and get ready for the next round of students.

Hsing Min Sha: Central Office was not going to be a part of my 15 considerations for November 12th. Julie Hackett pointed out two reasons. One is that the Town, not us, the Town needs the field that the Central Office is sitting on. Secondly, the Central Office is part of prong two of arrow three-prong approach to the potential need for extra space. The most important reason is to save the Town money, and it would cost less to add the Central Office to the Lexington High School building project than to fix and renovate it. I also think it's important to keep that in mind, it's not the collateral reasons. This is saving money. I've also been worried for a long time about the fact that the public comment period is designed to maximize the time that people have to contribute their points of view and facts, and we don't want one person to convert our meetings into a Q and A session. We have separate public forums for Q and A, and we've even set up dedicated public forums where SBC responds to questions directly from the public. That being said, some of these questions do reflect a

general gap in communication, and I do think we need to address that better. Maybe that's something we get the Communication Committee to rethink. Frankly, many of the questions that are raised are questions that have been answered many times before or have answers in the FAQs. I want to ensure that we are responding to everybody, even if it is just a response that says, hey, look at the FAQ. But also, I hope we can do more than that. However, one person cannot write long responses to each individual. Still, maybe we can leverage the technology that we have paid for and used to make these responses available to everybody.

Julie Hackett motioned to adjourn the meeting at 12:58 p.m. Jon Himmel seconded the motion. Kathleen Lenihan took a roll call vote, passed 11-0.