

Finance Summit - Lexington High School Building Project
Select Board, School Committee, Appropriation Committee, Capital Expenditures Committee,
Recreation Committee and School Building Committee
August 15, 2024

The Finance Summit regarding the Lexington High School building project was called to order by Select Board Chair Doug Lucente at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 15, 2024, via remote meeting services.

Present for the Select Board (SB): Mr. Lucente, Chair; Mr. Pato; Ms. Barry; Ms. Hai and Mr. Sandeen as well as Mr. Malloy, Town Manager; and Ms. Katzenback, Executive Clerk

Present for the School Committee (SC): Ms. Cuthbertson, Chair; Ms. Sawhney, Vice Chair; Ms. Lenihan; and Mr. Freeman

Present for the Appropriation Committee (AC): Mr. Parker, Chair; Mr. Ahuja; Mr. Bartenstein; Mr. Levine; Mr. Michelson; Mr. Osborne; Ms. Verma; Mr. Padaki; and Ms. Yan

Present for the Capital Expenditures Committee (CEC): Mr. Lamb, Chair; Mr. Kanter, Clerk; Ms. Rhodes, Vice Chair; Ms. Beebee; and Mr. Cole

Present for the School Building Committee (SBC): Ms. Lenihan, Chair; Mr. Cronin; Ms. Kosnoff; Mr. Malloy; Mr. Pato; Ms. Hackett; Mr. Himmel; Mr. Barrett; Mr. Baker; Mr. Min Sha; Mr. Favazzo; Ms. Slavsky; and Mr. Levine

Present for the Recreation Committee (RC): Mr. Boutwell, Vice Chair; Mr. Fantasia; Ms. Sheth; and Mr. Bassik

Also present: Ms. Kosnoff, Assistant Town Manager for Finance; and Mr. Cronin, Director of Public Facilities; Dr. Hackett, Superintendent of Schools

All boards and committee called their groups to order with a roll of attendance.

Public comment will not be taken this evening, and no votes or decisions will be made.

Mr. Pato stated that last night's High School Project Community Forum #6 was disrupted by an anonymous Zoom bomber who used a racial slur and posted inappropriate comments in the webinar's chat feature. Hate speech in all forms is anathema to the community's values and has no place in Lexington. The Town is actively investigating this incident, and any information should be reported to the Town Manager or Superintendent of Schools.

ITEMS FOR INDIVIDUAL CONSIDERATION

- 1. Informational Summit - Select Board, Appropriation Committee, Capital Expenditures Committee, School Committee, School Building Committee and Recreation Committee**
 - Discuss Potential Projects related to Lexington High School Building Project
 - Field House
 - Swimming Pool

Mr. Malloy stated comments have been raised about the potential of a new Field House and a swimming pool for the High School Project. As such the School Building Committee recommended having a summit to provide information and begin the discussion

SMMA, architects for the project, reviewed the timeline for the High School Building project noting the target date to vote the preferred High School Building design is by November 12, 2024 in order to move forward into schematic design. It was explained it would be key to understand at that time if the Town is going to continue to study the potential of including a pool and a field house. The five remaining High School Building project design options are being studied in great detail. All of the five options begin with the assumption of a design enrollment of 2,395 students. They all use the same program area of roughly 460,000 s.f. They use the same fundamental principles of planning for next generation teaching and learning, as described in the District's educational plan. The addition renovation is the only scheme that is not a four-story building. This is a two-story building which tries to leverage the existing structures of the science and math buildings. This would essentially be a gut renovation in order to meet all the new energy codes and allow for a high performing future-looking school. This option would be phased in place, constructing new pieces wing-by-wing, as students are moved around into modular classrooms.

SMMA noted that the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) will not fund construction of a field house or a pool. MSBA has advised these would require a separate warrant article, separate ballot question, and separate funding from the High School project.

Currently, Lexington practices at the indoor track in the existing field house. It is approximately 34,400 s.f., with a 146 meter banked track, four lanes, and a six-lane straightaway. Lexington competes at the New Balance track, in Brighton, the Reggie Lewis Center, in Roxbury, and the Boston University Track & Tennis Center. Five options for the field house are being reviewed: to renovate in place the existing field house (approx. \$30M), to renovate and add onto the existing field house to elongate it (appx \$51M), a small build with a 140-meter track (\$41M), a medium build with a four lane 200-meter track (\$68M), and a large build with a six lane 200-meter track (\$79M).

Regarding the swimming pool options, Lexington currently practices swimming at the old Boston Sports Club. There is no current indoor facility at the existing High School. The girls compete at the Atkinson pool in Sudbury, and the boys compete at the Beede Center in Concord. A new pool with six lanes, 300 seat bleachers, and an 8' deck around the pool would cost approximately \$25M.

Ms. Kosnoff reviewed the proposed financing options for the field house and swimming pool. The field house renovation option, approximately a \$30M project cost, would result in an annual debt service of approximately \$2.2M/ year, or approximately \$150 per household with an average a median value of \$1.3M. The largest option for the field house would cost the average household \$396 per year. Adding a pool onto that would cost an additional \$125 per household per year. Mr. Malloy stated that Staff would recommend considering this proposal at 20 years at 4%, whether level payment or level principal.

Mr. Padaki (AC) asked about the Article 97 process for the High School project and the potential field house/pool projects. SMMA explained that Article 97 is an active legislation that changes the land swap. The process takes approximately one year but SMMA cannot submit for the process until a preferred alternative has been determined. A vote at Town Meeting is needed to agree with the swap.

Mr. Padaki (AC) asked about potential efficiencies in combining the LHS building project with the new field house and swimming pool projects. SMMA explained that the Town may want the new buildings to be similar in materiality and design approaches. There will be an overlap in the planning stages for these projects and there is an escalation factor to consider.

Mr. Parker (AC) stated that his biggest concern is the added expense for these athletic facilities. He asked if any modeling is being done to find out what the real net impact to the Town will be. Mr. Malloy stated

that the School Department and Recreation Department would need to determine programming recommendations and other considerations. These analyses have not yet been completed.

Mr. Bartenstein (AC) stated that he was surprised that the cost of the pool was much less than any of the field house options. SMMA explained that the pool will likely be more expensive to operate than the field house.

Mr. Levine (AC) stated that, in terms of the financing plans, all the plans shown for financing the High School involve 30-year borrowing. It would be strange to borrow for 20 years for a project that is more or less coterminous. He noted that the Lexington swim team currently practices at the Boston Sports Club pool. That parcel has been a subject of possible redevelopment plans. If or when it is redeveloped, the pool will likely go away.

Mr. Bartenstein (AC) stated that the emails received from the supporters of a new field house seem to be interested in a training facility. He asked how much bleacher space is really needed, if this is to be used for a training facility. Reduction in the bleacher space could lead to a more economical project and may show the Town that this is being built to a need and not to a want. SMMA explained that the number of lanes is driving the size of the track. The bleachers itself are approximately 10' deep when opened. This will not make a significant difference to the overall size of the building.

Mr. Cole (CEC) stated that he would like to better understand the cost drivers for the field house, as it appears to be a simple building. There will need to be a substantial public ability to use these facilities moving forward, in order to justify the cost.

Ms. Rhodes (CEC) asked if the pool is being considered for accessibility features. SMMA explained that the pool design includes a ramp into the pool, and a chair lift into the pool.

Mr. Kanter (CEC) asked about the role of the Capital Stabilization Fund in this process. Ms. Kosnoff explained that the messaging for the project has been that this will be used for the School project.

Mr. Lamb (CEC) asked who all the stakeholders are for a field house and a pool and if they have been involved in discussions.

Ms. Cuthbertson (SC) noted that the Article 97 line runs between the corridor and the edge of the field house. She asked about the process for potentially building a new field house and if there are differences between renovating in place, expanding, or demolishing and then building a new one. SMMA explained that it will be important for the design team to understand if the field house is being planned for or not. Even the renovation choice will require making those exterior walls wider and this will need to be accounted for in terms of Article 97.

Ms. Sheth (RC) stated that the field house has only been discussed in terms of being a track, but the interior of the track is also a basketball court, a wrestling area, and a batting cage. The Department is running at a significant deficit for interior recreation space. This field house could offset some of these deficits.

Ms. Sawhney (SC) noted that, if the MSBA will not fund any portion of a new swimming pool, and may fund a portion of the field house, the Town would have to treat them as separate projects and go through a separate bid process for finding design and construction teams. She asked if there could end up being three design teams and three construction teams working on all the projects at one time. SMMA explained that this could occur. Ms. Sawhney explained that it will be important to determine which costs fall in which buckets once construction begins. She asked if the loss of revenue to the Recreation Department

based on loss of field space should be invoiced on the design side of the invoices. Mr. Malloy stated that any losses in revenue that the Recreation Department has during the term of the construction would not come out of the project costs, because the Town would not want to bond and pay for that over 30 years. Ms. Sawhney suggested a data modeling method for explaining the financial pieces of the project.

Ms. Lenihan (SC) noted that the proposed gym is approximately 18,000 s.f., which is larger than the current gym. She asked if the larger space could lead to additional uses of the indoor facility that are needed. SMMA agreed that the plan will be for physical education stations that could be used afterschool for other activities.

In response to a question from Ms. Lenihan (SC), SMMA stated that, if the Town decides to ask its residents to approve a Town Meeting Article and a debt exclusion for a pool and a field house, the Town will likely want to have some detail on it. At a minimum, this would be a schematic design for those facilities. Ms. Lenihan noted that if the groups decide that they are not comfortable making a decision on these items for November, it will likely mean that those two votes would not only be decoupled on the ballot, but they would also be decoupled in time.

In response to a question from Mr. Min Sha (SBC), SMMA stated that a field house is generally between 36'-40' tall. This will be a tall space. The feel and approach to that on Worthen Road is something to be considered. The intention is to plan the gymnasium closest to that end to tie in the articulation and language of the fenestration and not block natural light.

Dr. Hackett (SBC) stated that she believes the purpose of this meeting is to try to get some traction around what the community wants, and a direction that these groups want to go in. The base project is critical as the schools are already significantly overcrowded. The project design has been conservative. The project looks to maximize its reimbursement potential, while not maximizing the square footage.

Mr. Baker (SBC) asked if there was a fair analysis regarding advocacy for the pool that preceded the project, as the swim team has never had a local spot to practice or compete. Ms. Sawhney (SC) – stated that she believes around 60-70 students participate in the swim team, whereas approximately 250 children participate in track. It is important to think of the challenges that the swim team members currently face.

Mr. Boutwell (RC) stated that the Committee tends to look at needs versus wants, the value to the community at large, how projects will impact the Recreation Enterprise Fund, how projects will impact existing recreation land needs and land use, and how projects fit into the other Town priorities. The same priorities will be applied to considering these projects. Regarding potential community use of a pool, he asked if the schematic and estimated pricing include zero entry or other accommodations for use by community members of differing abilities, and/ or heating. SMMA stated that the pool is heated and includes a ramp and wheelchair lift.

Mr. Boutwell (RC) suggested showing the massing elevations of the five field house options. He also requested that the financial models compile the current estimates of the five building options to show the potential overall impact on the taxpayer.

In response to a question from Mr. Bassik (RC), Mr. Cronin explained that, in the current 20-year Capital Plan, the field house comes underneath the entire High School facility. The single building alone, in the next ten years, contains a \$15M amount for some capital work, to keep the building as is. If changes are made to the main building, something will need to be done to the field house. These capital items have been held off on as they were anticipated as part of the High School project.

Ms. Sheth (RC) expressed concern regarding the fact that some of the residents are blanching at a \$600M High School construction project, and she is worried about how the town will view the renovation of the field house and the addition of a pool. She also asked about access. The concern is that the field house and pool, if they are attached to the School, will not be available to the general public during school hours, and presumably students will also get first rights. She asked if there could potentially be separate entrances and management in order to encourage additional accessibility for the community. Dr. Hackett agreed that this should be further discussed once a design is determined.

Ms. Barry (SB) asked if there has been any modeling done regarding the increased square footage for the new High School building, the potential for a pool and/or a field house, and the Article 97 items, as to what the impacts of all of these might be on the municipal budget, the School budget, or the enterprise budget. She asked if an operating override is expected in one of the upcoming years. Mr. Malloy explained that this is a debt excluded project, and so the debt should not impact the Town operations. If there was a driver for an operational override, it would probably be for any increased costs related to the operation costs above and beyond what the School would typically see from year to year.

Ms. Barry (SB) asked if adding a field house and/or a pool to the Town's debt load would potentially affect other forecasted or upcoming building projects in the Capital Plan queue, in particular the East Lexington Fire Station. Mr. Malloy stated that, on the School alone, he does not believe the East Lexington Fire Station would be jeopardized, but additional recreational amenities could cause a reason to pause or delay other projects until the debt service payments came back down to where the Select Board and the community felt they could afford to move forward.

Ms. Barry (SB) noted that the Select Board heard from the community about the need for a community pool when access to the Minuteman's pool went away. At one time the Town had discussed putting this at the Community Center. She asked how the decision was made to instead put it at the High School campus. She noted that the elected officials may need to consider how to get a High School passed along with considering a pool and/or field house.

Mr. Sandeen (SB) asked if any of the five High School design options would be impacted by the field house choice. SMMA explained that the field house location is currently situated on the knoll, away from the School and not on any fields. No field space will be lost from any of the designs, and they should not impact the School design options.

Mr. Sandeen (SB) stated that he would like to hear from the Lexington School staff whether they have a recommendation regarding the size of the field house. He stated that his concern regarding the pool is that the Town needs to consider the total operating cost of managing it, including energy and staffing. It will be important to present the total cost of running a pool, including the debt service, plus operating and maintenance costs. He would like to hear from the Recreation Department and the Recreation Committee regarding their desire and/or capacity for managing this.

Ms. Hai (SB) stated that the planning for the High School has been ongoing for some time. The issue about the field house and the pool seems to have come up more suddenly, and she feels that the Town is being forced to decide without the opportunity to have the same kind of thoughtful analysis. She is not convinced that there is a lot to be gained by pushing this issue right now.

Mr. Pato (SB) noted that the Town has to start planning for a potential field house as part of the High School design. He has concerns about what operating costs might be for a pool. He also believes that there may be a reasonable probability that there will be a need to expand the educational capacity of the existing school over the next 75 years on this property.

In response to a question from Mr. Lucente (SB), Ms. Kosnoff explained that the dollars estimated for the total project are inflated to the midpoint of the construction project. Regarding the taxpayer impact, it is based off today's average single-family home, but property values will likely change over the next couple years.

Mr. Lucente (SB) asked for information regarding how many hours the current field house is used and what the design for the gymnasium included in the new High School will contain. He noted that all of the designs seem constrained by Worthen Road, and he would like to further consider the possibility of moving the road in order to gain additional land that could be used.

Mr. Lucente (SB) asked each of the committees to reflect on today's discussion and stated that a future summit will be scheduled to bring everyone back together sometime in September 2024 for further discussion regarding a potential swimming pool and/or new field house.

DOCUMENTS: Project Presentation - Options on Field House and Pool, Single Family TaxImpact Analysis - Level Payment, Single Family TaxImpact Analysis - Level Principal

ADJOURN

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Select Board voted 5-0 by roll call to adjourn the meeting at 9:34p.m. The Appropriation Committee, Capital Expenditures Committee, School Committee, School Building Committee, and Recreation Committee followed suit.

A true record; Attest:
Kristan Patenaude
Recording Secretary