

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Saturday, February 21, 2015
School Administration Building, Upper Level Conference Room
146 Maple Street

9:00 a.m. Call to Order:

9:01 a.m. Agenda:

1. PreK-8 School Building Options and Preparation for Summit 7 (2 hours)

11:00 a.m. Adjourn:

The next scheduled meeting of the School Committee is as follows:

- Tuesday, February 24, 2015 – 7:30 p.m., Town Offices Building, Selectmen’s Meeting Room, 1625 Massachusetts Avenue

All agenda items and the order of items are approximate and subject to change.

School Building Project Consensus Plan

Draft for the 25 February 2015 Lexington Budget Summit

Introduction

This document describes the draft consensus position of the Lexington Budget Summit (Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Appropriation Committee, and Capital Expenditure Committee) regarding Article 2 of the March 2015 Special Town Meeting #1.

This Article will request initial funding to develop various school building projects in response to ongoing and future overcrowding issues in the Lexington Public School (LPS) System. The projects cover school buildings serving grades Pre-K, K-5, and 6-8, and may include pre-fabricated classrooms, brick and mortar additions, and/or a new elementary school building. Total costs are estimated to be on the order of \$100 to \$120 million. A debt exclusion vote will be required to finance the costs of design and engineering work, as well as the actual construction.

This document is the result of the discussions of a working group of the Budget Summit composed of 2 members from each committee and will be formally presented to the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee in advance of the next Budget Summit on February 25.

Basic Assumptions

Enrollment growth has been growing at approximately 2% per year for the past seven years and it is causing overcrowding in existing school facilities now. This growth is expected to continue for several more years, bringing even greater pressure to a strained school system.

The LPS System requires expanded school facilities to properly meet its educational mandates, and to limit the need for expensive out-of-district placements.

The long-term goals for the public school system are to:

- keep school buildings moving towards their optimal usage,
- minimize disruptions to students,
- avoid extremes of over- or under-utilization.

The Town must pursue these goals in a fiscally responsible manner, and without ignoring other vital capital projects, e.g. public safety buildings.

The requested appropriation will be based on a flexible plan that allows the Town to begin by spending some of the requested funds to study a set of alternatives in depth. Some options may be modified or eliminated during this process. In late summer or early fall, the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen will coordinate the refinement of the plan and then the Board of Selectmen will approve additional spending from the original appropriation. Depending on the project, that additional spending will advance the work into the design document or the

construction and bid document phases. The results of this process will inform the request for funds at a fall Special Town Meeting.

Input from the Department of Public Facilities and the Permanent Building Committee is expected throughout this process – for both facility planning and for advice on timing needed to execute desired projects.

Planning Process

The Town must carefully manage its spending in light of the uncertainty around future needs in the school system. Our process for school planning will be to keep a close eye on long-range trends, while limiting definitive construction plans to a 3-year window. We will monitor this plan continually, and re-assess the plan annually.

Leased Modular Classrooms

We will avoid using leased modular classrooms (lifespan of 5 to 10 years), since they are expensive and provide only short-term solutions to what we see as a long-term problem.

Pre-Fabricated Classrooms

Adding pre-fabricated classrooms with a lifespan of 20+ years at Bridge, Bowman, Fiske, Diamond, and Clarke will help to alleviate current overcrowding in those schools, and in some cases provide a separate music room as mandated by a recent change in School Committee policy.

The populations at Bridge and Bowman will be lowered once new classrooms are available at other schools. At that time, their pre-fabricated classrooms will be adapted for other school system needs such as in-house special education programs. These new uses will not significantly increase pressure on core spaces.

We will start by doing feasibility and design work for all the pre-fabricated classrooms. In order to bring them online quickly, the Town may opt to proceed with construction and bid documents for some or all of these locations prior to a fall Special Town Meeting. This will be contingent on a review of the engineering studies and would be initiated by a request of the School Committee, a review of the funding needs by the financial committees, with final approval from the Board of Selectmen.

Bricks and Mortar

The existing Maria Hastings elementary school requires significant repairs. It is also burdened with sub-standard sized classrooms, and its 8 modular classrooms are well past their intended lifespan. Constructing a new school on the site (a la Estabrook) is the preferred solution. The new school should be designed with up to 9 more classrooms than the existing facility (including modularity), assuming that the site and resulting traffic circulation can accommodate that size. The request only covers a feasibility study for a new building on the Hastings site.

In the fall, if the feasibility study shows that a new Hastings School can be constructed on the site, then a construction proposal for Hastings (and any other components determined to be necessary and desirable) will be brought to Town Meeting and a debt exclusion vote will be presented to the voters at the end of the year or early in 2016.

Pre-K is a standalone program that requires 15,000 square feet. It is currently hosted at Harrington with a satellite program at Old Harrington. Relocating the entire Pre-K program to a new building would allow the four Pre-K classrooms at Harrington to be refurbished for use as K-5 classrooms. Filling these four K-5 classrooms would bring the school's population to the brink of the school's core capacity.

We will study the feasibility of building a new Pre-K, and if a site is identified we will proceed to the design documents phase. We would then develop a plan for the minor refurbishments needed at Harrington.

The architectural consultant firm SMMA has proposed a complicated renovation at (new) Harrington that incorporates an expanded Pre-K and an enlarged cafeteria and gym. This proposal is expensive considering the number of new classrooms that would result, and it requires moving three geothermal wells. This plan will not be studied.

Contingency funding is included for exploring options at Harrington and Fiske if the preferred plan for a larger Hastings proves to be infeasible. At Harrington and Fiske we have the option to develop feasibility studies for expansion.

Based on the analysis by DiNisco Design, the Estabrook site is not considered suitable for expansion.

For the two Middle Schools, the topography at Diamond is more suitable to an extension, and we would rather do construction at only one Middle School. We will perform a feasibility study for adding a single large extension at Diamond. We will also study an extension at Clarke in the event that the Diamond site cannot accommodate the needs of the school system on its own.

Redistricting

The School Committee will explore redistricting plans that would shift school density away from more crowded schools on the eastern side of town towards Estabrook at the northwest end of town. If deemed practical, such a plan will be implemented as soon as possible.

Given the volatility of students moving into and out of the school system throughout town, plans that are not traditional in Lexington should be explored. For example, adding "buffer zones" at district boundaries might allow districts to adapt by placing *new* students into either of two adjoining districts. These buffer zones would be large enough to accommodate volatility, but not so large as to require unreasonable bus routes.

The benefits of any redistricting plan are based on untested assumptions. The School Committee will initiate a technical redistricting study to identify workable plans, so that policy discussions can occur later this year.