

# School Building Project Consensus Plan

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*Consensus of the 25 February 2015 Lexington Budget Collaboration/Summit*

## Introduction

This document describes the consensus position of the Lexington Budget Collaboration/Summit (Board of Selectmen [BoS], School Committee, Appropriation Committee, and Capital Expenditures Committee) held on February 25, 2015 (“Summit”), regarding Article 2 of the March 2015 Special Town Meeting #1.

That Article will request initial funding to develop various school-building projects in response to ongoing and future overcrowding issues, and building-condition issues, in the Lexington Public School (LPS) System. The projects cover school buildings serving grades Pre-Kindergarten (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 the actual construction and the design & engineering costs for projects that proceed to construction.

This document is the result of the discussions of a working group before the Summit composed of two members from the BoS and each committee, and reflects subsequent feedback obtained from deliberations of the BoS on February 23, 2015, and deliberations of the School Committee on February 21 & 23, 2015, and again at the Summit, as well as input from the Appropriation and Capital Expenditures Committees.

## 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 BoS will coordinate the refinement of the plan, with advice from the two

finance committees, and then the BoS will approve additional spending from the original appropriation. Depending on the project, that additional spending will advance the work into the design development or 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 at least annually.

## **Leased Modular Classrooms**

Leased modular classrooms (lifespan of 3 to 10 years) 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 the Bridge, Bowman, and Fiske elementary schools, and the Diamond and Clarke middle schools, will help to alleviate current overcrowding in those schools.

Once the populations at Bridge and Bowman are lowered, their pre-fabricated classrooms or equivalent square footage of existing space will be adapted for other school system needs such as in-house special education programs. That reallocation will not significantly increase pressure on core spaces.

We will start by doing feasibility and design-development 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 studies and would be initiated by a request of the School Committee, a review of funding needs by the financial committees, with final approval from the BoS.

## **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 is the preferred solution. The new school should be designed as a 30-classroom (5 sections of each grade K-5) building with up to 9 more classrooms than the existing facility (including its modulars), assuming that the site and resulting traffic circulation can accommodate that size. The request to the upcoming Special Town

Meeting #1 covers a feasibility study for a new building on the Hastings site both with and without pre-K.

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. The current Hastings School will remain in operation during construction.

In parallel, the Town will again file a Statement of Interest (SOI) with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for the Hastings School. We expect to receive a response to this filing by the end of the year; the Town's 2014 SOI filing was declined by the MSBA in December 2014. Should the MSBA accept our request and choose to partner with the Town on the Hastings project, the design will be subject to constraints imposed by the MSBA. The Town will have the opportunity to continue on its own or to engage with the MSBA.

For the (new) Harrington, the architectural consultant firm Symmes Maini & McKee Associates (SMMA) has proposed a complicated renovation 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 School site is not considered suitable for expansion.

## **Pre-K**

Pre-K requires 15,000 square feet as a standalone program. It is currently hosted at Harrington with a recently expanded satellite program at the Central Office (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 maximum of the school's core capacity.

We will study the feasibility of constructing a new Pre-K building or relocating the Pre-K program to an existing building. If a site is identified, then work will proceed on the design-development phase for the construction of a new building or the renovation of an existing building. A plan for the minor refurbishments needed at Harrington would be included in this project.

## **Middle Schools**

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 physical-space or educational-policy needs (e.g., effects of such a large school) of the school system on its own.

## Redistricting

The potential benefits of any redistricting plan are based on untested assumptions. The School Committee will initiate a technical redistricting study to identify plans and will provide an analysis of the pros and cons of each so that policy discussions can occur later this year.

The study will explore redistricting plans that would shift school density away from more-crowded schools 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 one of two or three adjoining districts. These buffer zones would be large enough to accommodate volatility, but not so large as to require unreasonable bus routes.