

September 10, 2024

Dear Members of the School Committee,

As you know I have started paying attention to the LHS project once I found out the cost of the current proposals. I have told you multiple times why I believe that both the proposed location and the price will do very serious damage to our town. I will not repeat myself here.

Since April when I started paying attention and was one of the organizers of a group of residents with similar concerns (LHS4all) many new things have come to light. Based on new information my thinking about the project has evolved.

I was told that currently there are proposals for 1,000+ residential units in front of the Planning Board, and that every week at least one new proposal is added. Since the MBTA zoning now permits multi-family residential units and cluster housing near MBTA lines by right, I expect that most of these units will be built. If the current trend continues, a vast majority of these units will go to families with children. I do not expect that we'll get a better picture of how Lexington's housing mix will change for at least a couple of years.

This has convinced me of two things. First, Recreation Department is counting on the old Harrington to be demolished and the land will be given to them to build additional fields. In fact, the Rec. Committee has started planning on the amount of money they will need to request from TM to build these new fields.

The reason we are having so consider building on Article 97 protected fields is because in the past the School dept. did not hold on to the properties they owned when some schools closed. With the great potential growth of residential housing, we many need additional school(s) in not-so-distant future. Please do NOT change the status of the old Harrington property for at least several years. For now, you can keep maintaining the building as has been the case in the past 10 yrs. I expect that the Rec. Committee and the constituencies they represent will not be happy about not getting the old Harrington property, but you'll very likely need it for another school.

Second, the unpredictabilty of future school enrollments has also convinced me that trying to build the "right-size LHS" with the current information cannot be done. My recommendation is to take the MSBA money, build one 4-story building in place of the foreign language building and connect it to the current main building. Also, keep the current modulars in place. The new building will allow you to address the needed excess capacity and expand the cafeteria (the loudest complaint I heard). You may have to make a few modifications to the current structures, but I'd do as little as possible until you know how big a high school Lexington will need. If the housing proposals materialize, the student count could be off by 500-750 students and your current designs will have a hard time to grow gracefully and at an affordable price.

With MSBA being willing to reimburse additional PE space, you could apply that money towards getting a better fieldhouse (which could be expanded to the grove). Once you know what the “right-size LHS is” you can expand the gym at the next stage of the project.

Regardless whether you decide to consider and take my advice above, there is one way that you should reduce the cost of the project. When MM Tech was going out for their DE, many member communities complained that students from non-member communities paid tuition that covered operating expenses but none of the construction costs. New contracts were renegotiated with the non-member towns sending their kids to MM Tech and now the new tuition also covers appropriate portion of the construction and facilities costs for the new school. We house the LABBB program which serves students from non-member towns at a tuition that supposedly covers the cost of operating expenses. The new LHS plans to build 13,000 sq. ft. of new space at about \$1,300/sq. ft. costing Lexington almost \$17M. I urge you to insist that a new tuition price is negotiated for LABBB that will correctly allocate the cost of the new LABBB space to ALL communities whose students we service. Note that MM Tech’s cost of construction was covered by ALL member communities, not just Lexington. Same should be true for LABBB.

I hope that you will put all three suggestions below on your agenda for an upcoming School committee so you can have a serious discussion:

- Hold on to the Old Harrington property – both the building and the fields.
- Do not design new LHS to a specific capacity until the projected student population is easier to predict (2-3 yrs). In the meantime commit to using approximately \$100M in MSBA funds to build one new building to relieve some overcrowding, improve the fieldhouse and keep the rest of the campus operational.
- Immediately open negotiations with LABBB about increasing tuition to capture both operating and construction costs of the space that LABBB program uses in Lexington.

Thank you for listening,  
Olga Guttag