

SCHOOL COMMITTEE POSITION RESPONSE TO ARTICLE 8

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Recording available on Lexmedia

ARTICLE 8—DELAY MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL BUILDING AUTHORITY (MSBA) FILING RESOLUTION

To see if the town will vote a non-binding resolution to delay the MSBA filing and request a two part funding for Lexington's High School building project due to uncertain future enrollment from new housing as result of the recent MBTA multi-family rezoning. (Inserted by Peter Kelley and 99 other registered voters)

DESCRIPTION: This resolution seeks Town Meeting support to delay the filing to the MSBA for the Lexington High School construction project from its current schedule.

TEXT OF RESPONSE

Madam Moderator : The Chair Eileen Jay has recused herself as she is an abutter to the high school. The remaining four members of the school committee unanimously oppose this article.

We would like town meeting members to understand our urgency to give over 2800 people a better place to study, teach, and work everyday.

As, the proponent has requested a delay and two part funding. We will try and explain what any delay, or uncertain path to state funding, means for our students, as at the heart of this matter it's about students.

Firstly: The proponent's plans and our current campus do not provide the tightened safety measures necessary today.

These include :

- controlled access,
- three layers of doors and lockable vestibules,
- clear sightlines, and
- lengthy driveways that limit direct access.

A delay, or a mix of old and new campus buildings does not solve these problems.

The next concern is access and appropriate environment for all of our students:

The LHS Existing Conditions Report, notes that the facility's greatest deficiencies impact students with disabilities and mobility challenges. We are only in partial compliance with the current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). There are a lot more details in the report, from insufficient guardrails to mini ponds forming on our high school rooftops.

Please imagine a student on crutches navigating the tight corridors, uneven pathways and old doors on our campus in a crowd of students. Imagine them navigating a building on one end of the campus and the main office, with a heavy backpack in addition.

Therefore, a delay, or a mix of old and new campus buildings does not solve these problems.

Given that the reason LHS exists is to educate our students. The crowded 70 year old high school makes it difficult to provide full and flexible access to the LHS course offerings. Arts, Drama, Music, Athletics are all similarly impacted.

Forming social connections and friendships can be more challenging. Spaces to gather and collaborate are limited.

Even times in a busy school day that should serve as a respite, such as lunch, can be stressful as there is hardly any space to sit. Meanwhile, the current facility's limitations hinder the necessary 21st-century educational practices and innovations we should be applying.

Scheduling an academic year for any one Lexington high school student, is decided NOT JUST by the student's capabilities and interests, BUT also by the limitations of the buildings.

Consider that issue multiplied by the 2419 students we serve.

A delay, or a mix of old and new campus buildings, does not solve these problems.

The financial committees will elaborate on some of the costs so we will say only this:

- National and state financial contexts may change.
- Lexington is in a very good position.
- We have an accepted MSBA project well underway.
- Which means multi year financial support is already allocated in their planning

These are significant advantages that the town has worked hard for. We don't want to jeopardize them.

There has been much concern about the impact on schools of new residential development.

However, many Town meeting members may not be aware that since 2014, Lexington Public Schools has monitored enrollment, at every grade level.

We have made difficult decisions, based on enrollment and projections, such as redistricting, with demonstrated success.

Other examples of our complex planning processes, include:

- establishing a centralized registration process for schools,
- creating three types of school models during the pandemic (i.e., fully remote, hybrid, and a middle school- project based learning academy),
- Expanding the Fiske Intensive Learning Program (ILP) to Estabrook,
- and the more recent METCO elementary consolidation.

These have all been undertaken with care and compassion, and balancing different needs and benefits as the guiding principles.

A delay only makes our work harder.

Therefore in conclusion:

Inadequate, unsafe, tight, overcrowded, barely in compliance, no respite, grade 'F' these are not adjectives one wants to use for a school system.

Please give our high school children the setting they deserve, and not a continuation of the setting they endure.

We request all town meeting members to vote NO on this article. Thank you