

Lexington High School Building Project: Position Statement

The School Building Committee (SBC) has worked diligently over the last two years to develop a plan for a new Lexington High School that meets the current and future needs of students and staff while being fiscally responsible and addressing community concerns. After thoroughly evaluating options and gathering feedback, the SBC strongly recommends option **C.5b Bloom** as the preferred design for a new Lexington High School.

This decision represents the culmination of extensive research, analysis, and community engagement.

How Did We Get Here

We began by assessing the condition of the existing high school facility. The complex was originally designed to accommodate 1,850 students. Current enrollment is 2,419 — leading to densely packed classrooms and overcrowded common spaces. Several major pieces of infrastructure are at the end of their useful life, and there are serious expensive code upgrades required to keep the building safe for students and staff. For these reasons, we determined renovation alone was not a viable option. Furthermore, a renovation would not meet the educational standards required to maintain Lexington as a leader of academic excellence.

We then engaged with the community through public forums, surveys, and meetings to gather input on design priorities.

Based on community feedback and the research completed by the project team, a total of 19 massing studies were created and considered as options for a new school. These options were carefully evaluated based on educational program needs, cost, construction timeline, and community impact. After months of deliberation, which included gathering additional feedback from the community, the SBC narrowed the choices to two: Bloom and Weave.

Choosing the Preferred Option

Educational Excellence: Both Bloom and Weave result in a new building designed from the ground up to meet modern educational needs. This allows for optimal classroom layouts, improved adjacencies between departments, and flexible spaces that support innovative teaching and learning practices.

Why Bloom?

Bloom emerged as the superior option due to several key advantages:

- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Bloom is projected to cost \$648 million¹, significantly less than Weave's price tag of \$720 million. A project of this magnitude requires the Town to prioritize any opportunity to reduce costs.

¹ A note about estimated costs - these have been developed by third party estimating firms as a means to compare the relative cost between concepts. They include the full project costs including ground preparation, field reconstruction, parking, central-office/expansion space, and renovation of the existing fieldhouse. The estimators caution that these are only estimates of what a construction bid would be for a project midpoint of 2028.

- **Efficiency:** Bloom offers a shorter construction timeline of 4.5 years, compared to Weave's 6.5 years. This reduced timeline means less disruption to the school community and a faster path to a new, state-of-the-art facility.
- **Minimized Disruption:** Bloom's construction plan involves building on some of the fields, allowing the existing school to remain fully operational until the new building is ready. When compared to Weave, this eliminates the need for disruptive phased construction and modular classrooms. The disruption associated with Weave is significant, involving multiple moves, managing travel corridors through construction areas, coaxing end-of-life mechanical systems to continue working under the stress of temporary and changing connections, and the loss of use of the cafeteria, gym, and auditorium for lengthy periods. Choosing Bloom ensures a more stable and consistent learning environment for students, safer working conditions for staff, and reduces the risk of expensive temporary repairs for the aging mechanical systems in the old facility.

Addressing Community Concerns

We have heard concerns from the community about the Bloom option, primarily regarding the following:

- **Article 97 and Athletic Field Relocation:** Bloom requires Article 97 legislation and necessitates relocating some athletic fields. This swap of recreation land for school sites is a common practice in Massachusetts, where unused land is simply unavailable. The SBC acknowledges these concerns and is committed to working closely

with the community to minimize the impact. We have engaged in extensive field use planning with representatives from the Recreation Department, Recreation Committee, and Lexington Public Schools Athletics to ensure we can accommodate current and future athletic needs. We have also explored various fieldhouse options to provide additional indoor space for athletics and community activities. It is worth restating that any recreation areas displaced by this project will be reconstructed on the land currently occupied by the existing high school. The cost of this reconstruction of fields and the amount of time it will take are both built into the current estimates for the price of the project and the estimated construction timeline.

- **Financial Burden:** Even with its lower cost, we recognize the significant investment the Bloom design represents. However, we believe that this investment is essential in providing our students with the safe facilities needed to deliver a modern educational program. Further, this investment represents a modest premium over simply addressing the critical infrastructure needs of the aging high school and the additional costs of reducing overcrowding. The cost of inaction would be significant in the short term and far greater in the long run, both in terms of educational quality and the increasing costs of maintaining an outdated facility.
- **MBTA Zoning and Enrollment Projections:** We share the community's concern about the unknowns of future growth and changes in enrollment. There are, however, practical limits to the size of a single high school facility. The challenges of operating a high school do not scale well with an enrollment in excess of 3,000 students. The Bloom concept includes opportunities for expansion

that meet and exceed these limits. In addition, the School Master Planning Advisory Committee is revising strategies for accommodating growth when that growth exceeds the maximum desirable size for a Lexington high school.

We have also formally requested reconsideration from the MSBA regarding enrollment projections. We have asked that some of the contemplated flexible expansion space be deemed eligible for MSBA financial support.

Alternative Proposals:

We appreciate the community's thorough engagement in the project thus far. The time and commitment spent by some residents to put forth alternative proposals is commendable, and we are grateful for their interest in finding the best solution for Lexington Public Schools and the community. However, the proposal they have put forward, which involves renovating a portion of the existing building and pursuing a phased construction approach, is not practical. Analysis by the Permanent Building Committee and the rest of the Project Team determined renovating only part of the existing building would be costly, disruptive, and ultimately prove insufficient to address the educational needs of our students. A phased approach, while recommended by some, would lead to extended construction timelines, logistical challenges, and increased costs. By phasing or delaying this project, we also risk losing our opportunity to work with the Massachusetts School Building Authority and taking advantage of the grant funding that comes with that partnership.

Conclusion

The SBC firmly believes that Bloom represents the best path forward for the Lexington High School Building Project. This option balances educational excellence, fiscal responsibility, and community considerations, ensuring a bright future for Lexington students and the town as a whole. We are confident that, together, we can make this vision a reality.