



Town of Arlington
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On Wednesday, August 29, the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) voted to move Arlington High School into the Schematic Design Phase. Over the next nine months, the MSBA and the District will collaborate to produce a detailed design, scope, budget, and schedule for our town's new high school.

Last week's vote was an important milestone and a moment to celebrate the extensive process of community engagement that has taken place over the past two and a half years. As we move to the schematic design phase, however, it is important to acknowledge the challenges and decisions that face the High School Building Committee and the Arlington community.

Some of these challenges stem from the current projected cost of \$309 million, which will change as design details are developed and refined. A number of factors that impact the current projection have been discussed by the High School Building Committee in our biweekly meetings, by residents at five community forums, and on the project [website](#).

First, and most importantly, the current projected cost is an estimate based on the feasibility study performed by the architectural firm hired by the Town. It is not a detailed design estimate or construction bid. As the schematic design progresses, the Building Committee will gain a much clearer view into the proposed aesthetic of the building and projected costs associated with it. Wisely conservative initial contingency estimates may be lowered, and decisions regarding various aspects of the building's program will be made.

Second, Arlington High School currently has many non-high school uses located within it, and the current cost estimate assumes these functions will remain in the new school. These include School District Administration, Community Education, Pre-School, Town/School Information Technology Department, Town/School Facilities Department, Town /School Payroll, and the Town Comptroller. Many school districts in the Commonwealth do not use their high school for non-educational uses,

which makes it challenging to compare the Arlington project to others. More importantly, we are seeking to relocate some of these uses to other places in town, which may reduce the necessary square footage and projected cost of the building.

Next, the Building Committee has charged the architect to design a building that will target NetZero status, meaning the building will produce as much energy as it uses over the course of a year. No public school building in Massachusetts has achieved this status, and the committee is working to determine whether that goal is achievable. If NetZero status is achieved, not only will the building provide a healthy and green learning environment for students, but its lifecycle cost will be reduced because of lower energy costs. This is a laudable goal, but it carries a price tag of \$18 million in the current estimate. As the design progresses, the Building Committee will be able to more clearly evaluate and articulate the long-term savings that incurring these costs will yield.

Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge the challenges of building on the current site. There are cost premiums associated with the construction given both the contamination of the site and the drop in height from the front to the back of the site. These cost factors, which will become clearer in the coming months, combined with the lack of alternative space in our densely built community make Arlington's project unique.

In addition to costs, the Building Committee is eager to engage the community in conversations about the look and features of the building. A [blog](#) on the AHS Building website gives the community a sense of why the committee chose the preferred design that won the unanimous approval of the MSBA last week. In the months ahead, there will be many opportunities for the community to weigh in on the facility's final design.

To learn more about the Arlington High School Building project and receive updates as the project progresses, please visit ahsbuilding.org. You can also visit the Committee booth at Town Day on September 15, from 9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m. The Building Committee will schedule community forums this fall to provide opportunities for the public to hear about the project and to give the committee feedback.

There is much work to do and many solutions to develop. With the Building Committee and the community working together, we are confident that Arlington will achieve its goal of building a modern facility that is well programmed for the education of our students and positioned to serve as a core community asset for decades to come.

Jeff Thielman, Chair, Arlington School Committee and High School Building Committee

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