

SELECT BOARD MEETING
Monday, February 2, 2026

A meeting of the Lexington Select Board was called to order at 6:30p.m. on Monday, February 2, 2026, via a hybrid meeting platform. Ms. Hai, Chair; Mr. Pato, Mr. Lucente, Ms. Kumar, and Mr. Sandeen were present, as well as Mr. Bartha, Town Manager; Deputy Town Manager, Ms. Axtell; and Executive Clerk, Ms. Katzenback.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Bob Pressman, 22 Locust Ave, commented on the immigration enforcement memo. The content of the letter notes that the duty of a Lexington police officer would include ensuring the safety of a person being served. It also mentions that federal law prohibits local police from interfering with federal immigration enforcement operations, and that any actions which deliberately impede federal officers could expose officers and departments to legal liability. He noted that federal officers are often seen using unnecessary force. He asked that the content of the third paragraph means that enforcement in the Town includes that police officers and others are instructed to photograph what occurs.

SELECT BOARD MEMBER CONCERNS AND LIAISON REPORTS

1. Select Board Member Announcements and Liaison Reports

Ms. Hai noted that the National Conference of Mayors met last week and there was broad consensus across the country that sharing information about rights is a key element of keeping all the community safe and building a community and neighborhood network.

2. Lexington High School Project Update to Board

Mr. Pato stated that the School Building Committee met earlier today. There was discussion regarding the creation of a work activity to consider optimizing public access for non-school uses in the building. Also, the creation of a finance subcommittee.

Mr. Sandeen asked if the finance subcommittee considered who it would report out to and when. Mr. Pato stated that it will have a standing report out to the SBC, with a primary role to make sure that materials and information are accessible to the public and easily understandable to a layperson.

Mr. Sandeen noted that the Permanent Building Committee met and, as part of the total value design, recommended another reduction in cost for the Lexington high school project of between \$300,000-\$400,000.

TOWN MANAGER REPORTS

1. Town Manager Weekly Update

Nothing additional at this time.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve: One-Day Liquor License - Galaray House, 1720 Massachusetts Avenue
 - 'First Friday' Monthly Art Show - Friday, February 6, 2026

To approve a One-Day Liquor License for Galaray House to serve beer and wine at 1720 Massachusetts Avenue on Friday, February 6, 2026 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM.

2. Approve: One-Day Liquor License(s) - Spectacle Management, Inc., 1605 Massachusetts Avenue
 - Saturday, March 14, 2026 – Troubadours
 - Friday, March 20, 2026 - Hot Chilli Pipers
 - Thursday, April 2, 2026 - Peking Acrobats
 - Sunday, April 26, 2026 - Rick Thomas
 - Friday, May 1, 2026 - Madeleine Peyroux

To approve **five** One-Day Liquor Licenses for Spectacle Management, Inc. to serve beer and wine at Cary Hall, 1605 Massachusetts Avenue, for their Concert Series on March 14, 20 & April 2, 26 & May 1, 2026.

DOCUMENTS: Event Diagram

3. Approve: New Legacy Cultural Center Lantern Festival Parade
 - Sunday, March 1, 2026: from Cary Memorial Building to the Visitors' Center

To approve the New Legacy Cultural Center's request to hold their Lantern Festival Parade on Sunday, March 1, 2026 from 6:00pm to 7:00pm, traveling from Cary Building to the Visitor Center lawn, with a backup route from Cary Building to Fletcher Park, if necessary, subject to working out the final details with Town Departments.

DOCUMENTS: NLCC 2026 Lantern Parade Plan

4. Approve: Expenditure of Funds for Gift of Cash Received by Fire Department

To approve the expenditure of a cash gift in the amount of \$20,544, received for the exclusive use of the Lexington Fire Department, for the purpose of purchasing sixty-four (64) winter jackets for Fire Department personnel, in accordance with MGL Chapter 44, Section 53A, and to authorize the Fire Chief or designee to proceed with the purchase.

5. Town Manager Committee Appointment and Reappointment
Reappointment:
 - Metropolitan Area Plan Council (MAPC) - Abby McCabe

Appointment:

- Metropolitan Area Plan Council (MAPC) Alternate - Meghan Roche

To reappoint Planning Director, Abby McCabe to the MAPC Council for a 3-year term and;
To appoint Assistant Planning Director, Meghan Roche, as the MAPC Council Alternate Representative.

DOCUMENTS: Memo- Council Appointment

VOTE: Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Select Board voted by roll call 5-0 to approve the Consent Agenda.

ITEMS FOR INDIVIDUAL CONSIDERATION

1. Presentations: 2026 Annual Town Meeting Articles

- Article 10: Appropriate for the FY27 Community Preservation Committee Operating Budget and CPA Projects
- Article 34: Skip the Stuff (Citizen Petition)
- Article 26: Oversee Financial Expenditures Lexington High School Project (Citizen Petition)

Marilyn Fenollosa, Chair of the Community Preservation Committee, explained that Article 10A is for document conservation for \$20,000. Article 10B is for the Monroe Center cash refinancing. In 2023, Annual Town Meeting approved the issuance of debt. Due to a surplus of cash this year, the request is to use some of the excess for the project and cancel the debt. Article 10C is for the Affordable Housing Trust for \$3,200,000. This is the fourth year of requesting funds for the Affordable Housing Trust. The grand total over the four years is approximately \$10.9M. Article 10D deals with Lexington affordable housing support, restoration and preservation, for \$395,355 to preserve and rehabilitate units, and also to provide rent assistance and rent subsidies for Lexington's lowest income tenants. Article 10E is for the athletic fields for \$2,630,000. The fields are natural turf. Article 10F is for playground infrastructure at \$100,000 to create fencing around the elementary schools to keep out anyone that might endanger the children. The last item is for \$150,000 toward administrative expenses, which is collected every year.

Laura Swain reviewed Article 34. Skip the Stuff would require takeout food establishments to ask the customer if they want prepackaged condiments or plasticware before including it in their order. This is not a ban. This will help reduce plastic waste. 70% of the restaurants in Town have been contacted and support has been received from most.

Mr. Lucente asked if Town staff has been asked about any potential workload from this proposal. Ms. Swain stated that the Health Department would need to be asked if there would be any additional work from this. Ms. Axtell stated that the Department and Board of Health are prepared to work on this without issue.

Dawn McKenna, Precinct 6 Town Meeting Member, suggested including language about straws in the wording.

Gauri Govil reviewed Article 26. This petition is an opportunity to strengthen public trust, improve financial transparency, and support the successful delivery of the largest public building project in Lexington's history, the new Lexington High School project. This project represents an extraordinary investment by the community. It is funded by taxpayers, supported by State reimbursements and approved through a debt exclusion. With a project of this scale and complexity, Lexington deserves not only excellent project management, but also clear, timely, and accessible financial insight. Lexington already has a governance structure in place. The School Building Committee (SBC), Permanent Building Committee (PBC), and Town staff work diligently and professionally. This motion does not replace or undermine any of their authority. Instead, it seeks to complement their work by adding what residents deserve, which is greater visibility into how project dollars are being spent as they are being spent. The Citizens Petition proposes the creation of a temporary Independent Financial Advisory and Transparency Committee. This committee will be composed of Lexington residents with expertise in construction, finance, auditing, procurement, and large-scale project delivery. Their role would be advisory, not supervisory. They would not approve payments, manage contracts, or direct the project. They would provide early contemporaneous review of payment streams, identify potential anomalies or risks, and communicate these observations constructively to the SBC and other relevant committees. Early visibility prevents late surprises. Identifying issues in real time saves money. Transparency builds confidence; confidence that every dollar is being spent wisely and that residents have a clear understanding of how their investment is progressing. This committee would also help translate complex financial information into clear, accessible updates for the public. This will help ensure that Lexington continues to lead in

responsible, transparent governance. In short, this motion is about partnership, strengthening existing systems, and giving residents a window into the financial life of a project that will shape the Town for generations.

Ms. Hai asked if the proponents have met with the SBC, PBC, or Appropriations Committee to discuss this matter. Deepika Sawhney stated that they have spoken to some town staff and groups, but not yet the SBC.

Mr. Lucente stated that the Article makes a number of legitimate points for the community. He asked for a concrete example of how the proposed committee could influence or change potential savings and/or early warning signs. Ms. Sawhney, Precinct 6 Town Meeting Member, stated that various materials from the project are being reviewed. The materials show that Estabrook School was built in a hurry. The close-out report shows information regarding the contingencies, and it is unclear why some of these were rejected as ineligible costs. There was also information regarding hazardous materials that were ineligible costs. A taskforce could help determine potential savings for the future project.

Mr. Lucente asked who would appoint the members and control the scope of the group. Ms. Sawhney stated that there is flexibility in the wording for these items. Mr. Lucente stated that, as he continues to consider this suggestion, he believes there could be better centralized financial communications and systems, instead of other authorities created.

In response to a question from Mr. Sandeen, Mr. Bartha explained that staff had a chance to meet with the proponents after this article was submitted and would like to meet with petitioners before they submit. In terms of this Article, there are already four levels of review that occur before payment is made for a project like this. The proponents made reference to contingencies on a former project and whether some of those costs may have been eligible. There are very specific policies around this. An additional two meetings per month for the next six years for the proposed committee gives him pause. There is a difference between transparency and public understanding. Transparency is making all information available. Public understanding is a different threshold.

Mike Cronin, Director of Public Facilities, explained that he has spoken with the project team regarding finding ways to display information more transparently and to make it more readily available. He does not believe creation of a new committee will unearth anything additional. There is an existing level of investigation and research on all documents and pieces of information. The current process spends between 1,000-2,000 hours per month working through each individual invoice for review. This discussion is that transparency needs to be different for this particular project than we've done in the past. Staff are working to create a dashboard to allow the public to more easily access financial information about the project as to progress.

Ms. Sawhney asked about potential exceptions reports from the auditors and how these are managed. Human error is normal and to be expected, but it would be good to understand what the cadence is. She stated that she does not want Mr. Cronin to do any extra work. The intention is to bring some new energy and new people into the process to potentially get ideas and different ways of looking at the same data.

Mr. Pato stated that it would be good for staff to clarify the review of the procurement process as a way to give better insight and visibility to the community. The total value design process, which is already ongoing for this project, is the way for optimizations to be found for certain items, hopefully in a less expensive way.

Ms. Kumar stated that the Article is well-intentioned. This is inspired by the desire to strive for excellence. She asked if the proponents have looked into the existing checks and balances for gaps in the

process. This may not be the right way to address these. The onboarding process for a group of this magnitude will be difficult. Ms. Sawhney stated that a pause and reflection period on the process thus far is desired in order to consider more frugal mindsets. This proposal is a collaborative way to move this forward to help make the decisions.

Mr. Cronin explained that there should be a rough draft of the new dashboard available prior to Town Meeting.

Olga Gutttag, Emerson Road, stated that it appears staff members and Board members see this Article as being in conflict with getting the project finished as best as possible. There are many in Town who have the expertise to improve the delivery of this project and potentially reduce costs.

Bob Pressman stated that there is a community representative on the School Building Committee whose job is to be a construction manager. No member of the committee has exceeded this person's contribution value.

DOCUMENTS: Art 10 draft motion, Art 10 CPC presentation, Art 34 Skip the stuff motion, Art 34 Skip the Stuff presentation, Art 26 Oversee Financial LHS motion, Art 26 financial oversight LHS

2. 2026 Annual Town Meeting

- Approve Letter from Town Moderator for Inclusion in 2026 Annual Town Meeting Warrant
- Approve Annual Town Meeting and Election Warrant

Kelly Axtell, Deputy Town Manager, noted that Article 12L was removed from the Warrant as it will not move forward at this time.

VOTE: Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Select Board voted by roll call 5-0 to approve the 2026 Annual Town Meeting and Election warrant as presented and authorize staff to make non-substantive edits as needed. Further, to approve the 2026 Moderator's Request letter for hybrid Annual Town Meeting.

DOCUMENTS: 2026 Moderator Letter, 2026 Election and ATM Warrant 2.2 26

3. Discussion: FY27 Town Manager's Preliminary Budget & Financial Planning

Ms. Hai explained that this is on the Board's agenda in order to discuss the Superintendent's request to reinsert free cash back into the budget and the Town Manager response against the proposal.

Mr. Bartha explained that draft budgets were produced by the Town and School last fall. The Town came in around a 5.1% budget request, and the school budget came in at 4.6%. There was \$0.00 in commercial new growth in the levy this year, and there is usually more than \$1M. This leaves the budget \$1M below its typical trend. The Town was also told in the fall to carry a 15% health renewal increase. In January, the intention was to rely on close to \$1M in free cash to balance the operating budget. This is a major red flag in terms of using one-time revenue to pay for ongoing expenses. The revised health insurance protections saw the increase drop from 13.5% to 9%. Due to this decrease, \$900,000 of free cash was removed from the proposed revenue budget and some items were reincluded. The Superintendent indicated that the school budget now shows a 3.9% increase versus the original 4.6% request. Some hard decisions had to be made to get to that point. The request is to leave the \$900,000 of free cash in the operating budget so that additional cuts can be restored. If the one-time revenues are left in the proposed FY27 budget, this will leave the budgets automatically starting in the negative for the next fiscal year

because the one-time revenue will need to be repeated in order to provide a level service budget. The recommendation is to approve the budget as discussed.

Mr. Lucente asked for additional information regarding the proposed school FTE reduction. It needs to be clear what the level of reductions amounts to for students.

Mr. Pato stated that the school department is utilizing other one-time funds and creating potential risk in their budget. Given that, he would not recommend compounding the risk by taking more money out of free cash than is needed. He believes the budget should move forward as proposed.

John Goodwin, employee of Lexington Public Schools, stated that the schools are not as funded as they should be. The programming and the care that students are receiving is at risk, both in the current budget and in the future. In discussing reducing fees, those are likely educators losing their jobs and children losing out on this expertise. Lexington prides itself on its quality of education. That system is currently propped up by educators that are struggling. He respects that money is tight and the Town needs to be judicious in its financial planning, but this cannot continue to come at the expense of the Town's hardest working and lowest paid employees.

Dawn McKenna, Precinct 6 Town Meeting Member, stated that Lexington has always worked to balance the needs of its people. Institutional staff, whether municipal or school, cannot be replaced. The School Committee is saying that there is a tightness in the budget that they are not necessarily comfortable with. The Town is sitting on \$21M in free cash. The requested \$900,000 is less than 5% of that. Allotting this amount will still leave 95% of the free cash. Not only does the Town have this free cash, but it also has many dollars in stabilization funds.

Mr. Bartha stated that the Department of Revenue estimates that between 5%-8% of net operating revenues should be expected to be generated each year. The free cash amount of approximately \$20M, is around 6.5% of this, in line with the recommendation. Currently, Lexington's balance sheet looks good because it is carrying almost \$60M in its construction stabilization fund. If the Town were to spend that down today, it would be grossly underfunded in its reserves. Free cash is neither free nor cash and could better be considered as an unassigned fund balance.

Matthew Small, school counselor and member of Lexington Education Association, thanked the School Committee and Superintendent for advocating for the funds the schools need. He expressed concern that the schools will not be properly funded in the next cycle. He stated that he heard the GIC's projected range if all changes are adopted would be an increase of 4%-8%. It is unclear where the 9% figure is coming from. The GIC was previously disclosing a range of 8.9%-12.9% increase, whereas Lexington was stating it as a 15% increase. If there is a discrepancy, this would indicate that there could be money available to properly fund the schools.

Mr. Bartha explained that the Town has a consultant who gives guidance throughout the year regarding trends. Typically, the Town receives a placeholder number from its healthcare consultant based on discussions with the GIC. The Governor has strongly recommended that the GIC consider making some plan design changes because holding renewals at even 9% would require an infusion of cash from the legislature. The Governor will likely continue to provide a financial backstop to the health plan which is in place for State employees. There needs to be some structural changes because even 9% is not a sustainable number for either employees or Town/cities that end up carrying between 50%-90% of those costs. Ms. Kosnoff stated that 9% is at the top of the Town's projected range and this is what is conservatively budgeted for. There are other offsetting amounts that need to be factored in.

Mona Roy, Bertwell Road, stated that teachers, especially those serving the most vulnerable students, carrying institutional knowledge is truly irreplaceable. When that workforce is destabilized, it puts the stability of an entire school ecosystem at risk. The budget cannot be balanced on the backs of educators, nor by quietly shifting costs to families who are paying privately because the system cannot meet student needs. Qualified teachers are harder to recruit and retain. There should be more transparency in how dollars are spent. This needs to be discussed before accepting cuts that harm educators and destabilize classrooms. Discretionary spending and eliminating deficiencies should continue to be examined.

Leah Rochbert, 33 Freemont Street, thanked the School Committee and Superintendent for the support of the schools. She expressed concern regarding the loss of appropriate accommodations, music and sports programs, and other items through the proposed cuts.

Robin Strizhak, President of the Lexington Education Association, thanked Dr. Hackett and the School Committee for their advocacy. She stated that funds often described as reserved for emergencies are needed now, as the schools are in crisis. She cited mid-year teacher resignations, staff exhaustion, and high absenteeism partly driven by mental health concerns, and emphasized that the schools cannot continue to be underfunded.

Mr. Bartha noted that he would bring any questions and comments from this evening to the School Committee for further discussion at the next meeting.

DOCUMENTS: White Book Summit III Presentation FY 2027_1.27.2026, 2026.01.28 email communication - School email-Memo for Budget consideration

4. Discussion: Select Board Report to 2026 Annual Town Meeting

The Board discussed sending a Select Board report to 2026 Annual Town Meeting.

Mr. Lucente suggested only submitting a report if there are significant items that need to be followed up on.

Mr. Sandeen agreed that the report should focus on items of an exceptional nature.

Ms. Hai suggested including updates on the high school project and home rule petitions. The Board may not need to report on the high school project if the School Building Committee also will be reporting out.

The Board reviewed items of potential inclusion this year.

DOCUMENTS: Select Board Report to 2025 Annual Town Meeting FY 2025 Select Board Report - Annual Town Report

ADJOURN

VOTE: Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Select Board voted by roll call 5-0 to adjourn at 8:13 p.m.

A true record; Attest:
Kristan Patenaude
Recording Secretary