

12-5-2022

Greeting Lowell School Committee Members

I want to thank you first for your commitment and servant leadership.

My name is Mary Wambui, I live at 33 Morse Street Apt 10 in Lowell, MA.

I am writing to you because I am concerned about how the City of Lowell has handled Lowell High School's solar project and to some extent the building strategy for the new high school. I am also interested in touching on air quality improvements in all of the City of Lowell's schools.

1) I would like to encourage the City of Lowell to **OWN** the proposed **solar array** in the Lowell High School project. Ownership of the array will be an investment in the future of our children as well as the residents of Lowell. As you may all know current world conflicts have made our energy prices go crazy high, I have heard that some school districts like Canton, MA may see **an increase of up to 40% in energy costs**; it will be absurd for the City of Lowell not to take advantage of this opportunity to build for the future and to mitigate future energy crisis risks to Lowell taxpayers in term of prices and reliability. I have heard that the City was never enthusiastic from day 1 about building a modern **energy efficient resilient school** and it is very sad to know that my elected officials are not taking the climate crisis serious and did not prioritize reducing new high school reliance on gas at a time when the State of Massachusetts is moving forward with its ambitious climate goals that include moving away from fossil fuels heating and cooling to more reliable renewable sources. Not taking this action now will have consequences in the future for taxpayers who may have to foot the bill of **unstable energy prices**. Public schools all over the country are turning to solar and using savings to upgrade facilities without increasing costs to taxpayers. Renewable energy investments are a good solution for cash strapped districts without generous tax bases. The City of New York made a solar investment in a school that benefits the City too and you can check it out here.

<https://www.smartenergydecisions.com/renewable-energy/2022/02/15/queens-high-school-installs-solar-power>

If the City of Lowell is concerned about **FUNDING**; there is no time in history that the federal and state governments have increased **CLIMATE CRISIS RESPONSE** funding for schools as in 2022; for example, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has announced a funding opportunity through the Renew America's Schools program, in addition the IRA has generous tax provisions in favor of clean energy. The bottom line is that Lowell should be forward thinking and not make decisions without doing serious homework regarding a project like the LHS solar program. Design should respond to the future not just the present challenges. Solar at LHS is not just about energy savings it an equity issue and our City should do whatever it needs to do to close equity gaps by working hard to access resources for our children.

2) The second issue that I would like to bring to your attention is indoor air quality improvements. During the height of the Covid crisis we all learned of the need to improve indoor air quality. Creating safe breathing spaces for our children is non-negotiable. Indoor air quality, ventilation and filtration improves student performance and reduces absenteeism due to lung diseases like asthma. All public Lowell schools should have (1) **improving indoor air quality plan**. (2)The City of Lowell needs a strategy to take advantage of Governor Baker's 100M of ARPA funds that has been set aside for schools to improve health and air quality in schools. As a Lowell resident I feel that our City is not strategically pursuing or making plans to make our schools cleaner and that is not fair for our children. [Lowell was eligible for \\$4.2M](#) of the DESE HVAC money. These are ARPA dollars so they must have a nexus with COVID, but all manner of upgrades and audits are possible. The list of priorities that DESE encouraged school districts to consider is [here](#).

3) Extreme heat and impact on student mental health. Massachusetts experienced two early heat waves this year , some schools had to release students early. Extreme heat can exacerbate existing health conditions as well as heat exhaustion, this can affect mental health and academic performance . Our schools must plan for heat resilience and as I have said previously there are new funding sources to help with mitigating the effects of heat and the City of Lowell should take strategic actions such as identifying the heat risks, plan for heat safety and actual physical infrastructure changes in the schools that will mitigate extreme heat risks.

Thank you listening or reading my letter. I will be expecting real positive changes in our schools.

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