



City of Newton, Massachusetts
Department of Planning and Development
1000 Commonwealth Avenue Newton, Massachusetts 02459

Telephone
(617) 796-1120
Telefax
(617) 796-1142
TDD/TTY
(617) 796-1089
www.newtonma.gov

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

Barney S. Heath
Director

INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 13, 2022

TO: City Council

FROM: Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director of Planning and Development
Katie Whewell, Chief Planner for Current Planning
Cat Kemmett, Planning Associate

SUBJECT: §5-58 of the City of Newton Ordinances, request for site plan approval for site and building construction at 345 Walnut Street for the Newton Center for Active Living, NewCAL, project

CC: Alejandro Valcarce, Public Buildings Department
Design Review Committee
Public Buildings Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Planning & Development Department conducted a Section 5-58 review of the proposed plan for 345 Walnut Street, the Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL). The proposed action under review in this 5-58 report is to demolish the building that houses the current Senior Center located at 345 Walnut Street, and to construct a new facility.

As proposed, the facility will include a dining hall, multipurpose rooms, support spaces, a gymnasium, and several other interior spaces. The proposed project will include a parking lot with 31 parking spaces, which includes four accessible parking spaces. The landscaping plans show new tree plantings, planting beds, terraces, and exterior seating options surrounding the facility.

History

The existing building at 345 Walnut Street was erected in 1938. The building is over 50 years old, and therefore came under Demolition Review by the Newton Historical Commission (NHC). The one-year demolition delay is expired on March 24, 2022. Planning staff found the building to meet the requirements to be preferably preserved. At their September 24th, 2020, meeting, the NHC voted 6-0-1 to find the building preferably preserved. On March 24, 2022 the NHC voted to not accept a Local Landmark nomination for the building.

The current proposal by Public Buildings is to demolish the current Senior Center building, build a new facility with traditional building materials and design elements, while also incorporating several historically significant elements and fixtures from the existing building such as the stained-glass windows, light fixtures, and ornamental iron. The NHC voted to appoint John Rice to be the liaison to work directly with Public Buildings Commissioner for the duration of the project and to handle any updates and communications between the NewCAL project team and the NHC.

In planning for this project, many different design and site options were considered, which included both full demolition and new construction, as well as addition and renovation. In the end, the project team determined that full demolition and new construction would be the best option to provide an age-friendly, universally accessible, cost effective, and environmentally conscious solution that had broad community support. The Council on Aging and Design Review Committee both voted unanimously to select this as the preferred option, and this approach was further solidified by overwhelming support in the form of straw votes by the Commission on Disability.

Project Details

The new facility will total approximately 33,000 square feet and include a gymnasium, dining hall, art room, lounges, lobby, main office, library, restrooms, and support spaces. The building will include one large elevator and several fully accessible entrances. The building heating and cooling systems and cooking equipment will all be fully electric. The proposed building incorporates both LEED and passive house principles and targets net zero emissions. An embodied carbon analysis will be performed early in the schematic design phase to inform the design and reduce the carbon footprint of this project. The roof is being designed to be solar photovoltaic ready, and panels will be procured and installed using a Power Purchase Agreement towards the end of the construction phase.

Amenities will include outdoor seating, new tree plantings, planting beds, and terraces. A drop-off and pick-up zone will be incorporated on the north side of the facility at the east end of Highland Avenue and will be complemented by those who choose to use the rear parking lot entrance for drop-off and pick-up. Building signage is proposed above the main entrance which faces northeast towards Newtonville. The plans indicate a small diesel backup generator, which will maintain building safety and emergency systems. Trash and recycling will be stored onsite in barrels, which will be wheeled out to the curb as needed, therefore no onsite dumpster is needed or shown.

The proposed surface parking lot consists of 31 parking spaces, which includes four accessible parking spaces. The onsite parking is complemented by roughly 40 parking spaces on Highland Avenue under the Senior Permit Parking Program, as well as additional parking in the Austin Street Municipal Parking Lot. This will serve the six full time staff, with the capacity for a 40% increase in full time staffing levels. Additional parking is available in the immediate vicinity, however, the annual peak parking demand projections do not indicate a need to rely on any other parking options. The onsite parking shown in the new plans represents more than twice the onsite parking currently provided.



Proposed NewCAL Facility at 345 Walnut Street

I. SITE PLAN APPROVAL PROCESS

Prior to construction at any municipal building, Section 5-58 of the Newton City Ordinance requires reviews of associated plans by the following:

- The Director of Planning and Development for consistency and compatibility with the *Newton Comprehensive Plan* and other applicable planning and analytical studies;
- The Design Review Committee for layout, construction, and relationship to surroundings;
- The Public Facilities Committee to provide a forum for public comments and discussion about proposed buildings and their locations, followed by City Council action.

Once the site plans are formally approved by these bodies, they become part of the final set of project plans and construction drawings and cannot be substantially altered without being resubmitted to the Design Review Committee and to the City Council. After the requirements of §5-58(a)(1) through (a)(6) have been satisfied, the City Council can appropriate funds for preparation of detailed construction drawings.

Work on the facility is slated to be completed in 18-24 months, after a bidding process projected to last 8-10 months. All work, including the interior utility work will be addressed in one phase. The project was presented by BH+A Architects and the Public Buildings Department to the Development Review Team (DRT) on January 27, 2022. The project team subsequently met with NFD, Engineering, Traffic, and NHC during the development of the Schematic design and Site Plans. Plans submitted by the Public Buildings Department were prepared by BH+A Architects, dated April 15, 2022. Plans were reviewed with the DRT at a meeting on April 20, 2022, held by the Planning Department.

II. PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

The new facility proposed is larger than the current building in both height and footprint. The current building is 35' 6" tall, including the cupola. The new facility will be slightly taller at 44'. The current building

footprint is roughly 5,000 square feet, and the new facility has a proposed footprint of roughly 10,000 square feet. While the massing is increasing, the design takes care to pull massing away from the residential abutters and utilizes design details and varied building materials and colors to break up massing wherever possible.

The new building is being constructed in the same location as the current facility but will utilize more of the east side of the parcel. The location of the parking is being maintained and will consist of 31 parking stalls, accessed from Walnut Place and Highland Ave. Vehicles will enter on Walnut Place, travel in a one-way direction and exit on Highland Avenue. The northern portion of the parking lot is covered by the gymnasium. While some existing trees are slated for removal, the tree planting plan is in line with the City of Newton Tree Ordinance from a replacement perspective.

Site work will be completed on the entire lot.

III. TECHNICAL REVIEW OF SITE PLANS UNDER SECTION 5-58

1. Location and Existing Site Conditions

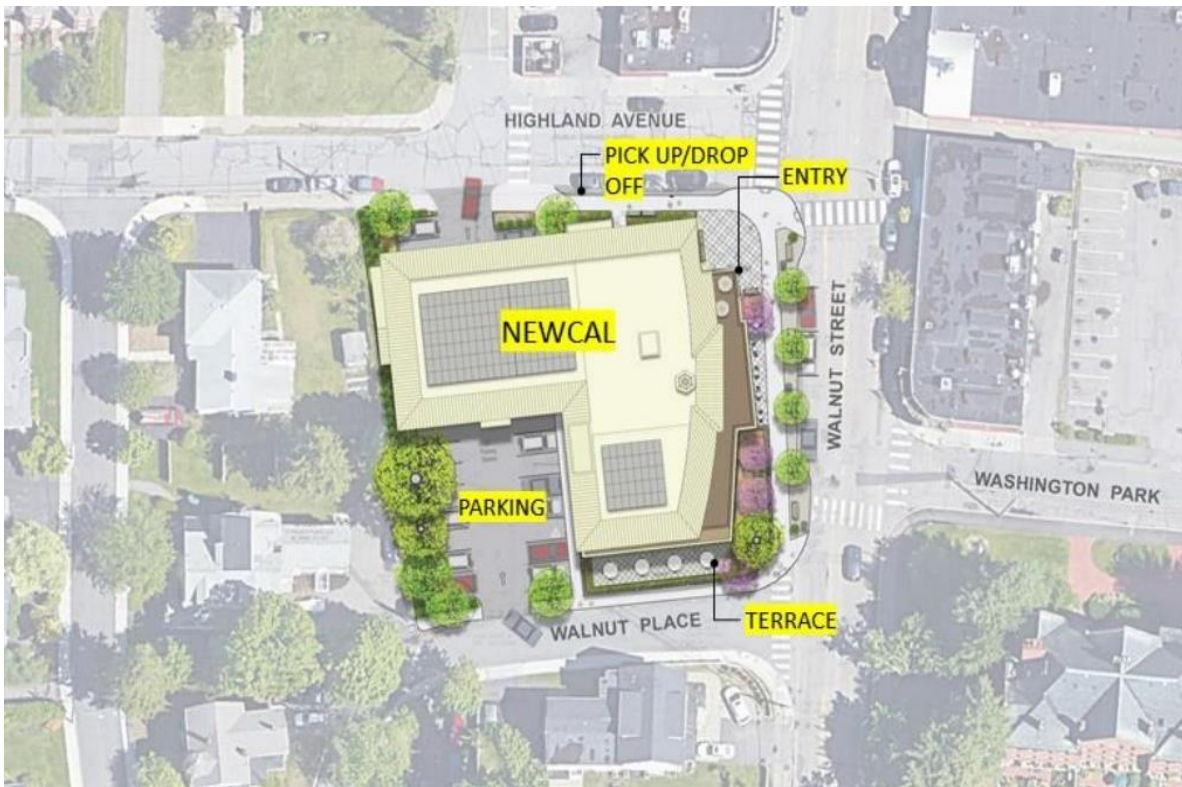
345 Walnut Street is zoned as Public Use. It is in a predominantly residential and business neighborhood in Newtonville bordered by MR1 and BU1 zoning. The parcel consists of approximately 25,909 square feet of land comprised of the 9,750 square foot Senior Center, an 8,000 square foot parking lot, and 5,000 square feet of hardscape, gardens, and pedestrian circulation.

2. Proposed Improvements

The NewCAL Project at 345 Walnut Street will include the demolition of the current building, selective tree removal, and removal of the existing parking lot and other site elements. New stormwater systems and utility services will be installed before the new facility is constructed.

The facility will include several multipurpose rooms, a library, art room, offices, lobby, lounges, a dining hall, gymnasium, and support spaces. Many of the historically significant fixtures and elements of the existing building will be preserved, restored, and incorporated into the design and construction of the new facility. The roof will be solar-ready, with solar panels anticipated to be added upon completion of the project. The facility includes a large 3rd floor deck that will face east, overlooking Walnut Street and Newtonville. The proposed cupola pays homage to the original 1938 cupola design. The building is shown as a combination of traditional red brick, limestone base and banding, with ample yet efficient glazing. The roof is shown as some form of a composite shingle, with a pyramidal design along the Walnut Street roofline, complemented by the centered cupola. The new facility will be complemented with new tree plantings, planting beds, terraces, outdoor seating, and new pedestrian circulation.

Four accessible parking stalls will be provided in the parking lot at the northwest portion of the site. Parking at the site will consist of 31 total spaces for automobiles with stalls that are 20 feet deep by 9 feet wide. These stalls will be complemented by 40 Senior Permit Parking Program eligible parking spots on Highland Avenue, and ample overflow parking in the Austin Street Municipal Parking Lot.



IV. OTHER REVIEWS

- **Senior Environmental Planner.** The entire Senior Center property is located outside of riverfront areas. After consulting the Senior Environmental Planner, it was determined that no review is required for the improvements proposed.
- **Associate City Engineer.** Please reference the memorandum regarding this NewCAL project written by John Daghljan, Associate City Engineer (Attachment B). The proposed work will result in a net decrease in the amount of impervious surface on the site. The Engineering Division will review the proposed plans to ensure that drainage infrastructure is constructed according to City standards. The Engineering Division will also review soil testing and evaluations prior to the issuance of a building permit.
- **City Transportation Engineer.** A traffic engineering study of the site and neighborhood will be undertaken to study any broader traffic effects on the area, as well as potential improvements to the traffic equipment, crosswalk systems, and general circulation patterns in the immediate vicinity.
- **Fire Department.** Fire suppression systems will be installed throughout the new facility, and the Newton Fire Department has already reviewed the early site and building concepts and the plans reflect their feedback. The Public Buildings Department should continue to coordinate with the Assistant Fire Chief to meet all applicable safety codes.

V. CONSISTENCY WITH NEWTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND OTHER PLANS/STUDIES

The Newton Comprehensive Plan (Plan) notes that Newton residents have made community cohesiveness and safety a strong priority. A new facility for Newton's older adults in Newtonville is consistent with this vision.

The Plan encourages historic preservation, proposing that the city "Wherever and whenever possible, use incentives and partnerships to encourage preservation and adaptive reuse," but also acknowledges the challenges and opportunities inherent in allowing for growth and change in a city with a varied and long history. The Plan notes that change over time is inevitable and spatial needs must respond to them.

For the long term, the Plan advocates for "creative consideration of future activity and facility configurations." When addressing such changes, the Newton Comprehensive Plan encourages creativity in making continued use of existing structures, where possible. Although the existing facility will be demolished, significant effort went into exploring renovation options. Many elements and features of the historic structure will be preserved, restored, and incorporated into the new facility, and the design pays homage to the existing building.

VI. SITE PLAN REVIEW CRITERIA

In accordance with Section 5-58, the City has filed plans for Site Plan Approval. These are to be reviewed in accordance with the procedure outlined in Chapter 30: Article 6, Chapter 5, Section 5-58 of the Revised Ordinances. The following is a review of the submitted plans against the relevant criteria established in this section.

A. Convenience and safety of vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site and in relation to the adjacent streets, properties or improvements

Vehicular access to on-site parking will continue to be provided from Walnut Place only, with a single one-way exit from the onsite parking lot to Highland Avenue, as exists today. There is no anticipated significant change to the traffic impact to the area as a result of this project. Increased facility use will yield higher trip generations, but it is anticipated that the varied means of transportation possible this site, the increased onsite parking capacity, and the recent expansion of the Senior Permit Parking Program will be sufficient to meet the increased parking demand. No change to vehicle flow is proposed, as such, the traffic operations are unlikely to have a significant impact upon the surrounding neighborhood.

The overall parking count on site will support more than 75% of the projected daily static parking demand and represents a significant increase in the current onsite parking capacity. The proposed parking lot balances the needs of the building program with the static parking demands. Daily and monthly peak parking demand can be met between the proposed onsite parking lot and the Senior Permit Parking Program on Highland Avenue. The projected annual peak parking demand will rely on a very small number of parking spaces in the Austin Street Municipal Parking Lot. No metered parking spots in Newtonville are being removed, and none are needed to support the NewCAL project.

B. Adequacy of the methods for regulating surface water drainage

Please reference the memorandum written by John Daghljan, Associate City Engineer (Attachment A). On-site monitoring and inspection by the Engineering Division is required and warranted at various phases before and during construction. A drainage analysis needs to be performed based on the City's 100-year storm event of 6.5 inches over a standard period of time. Any increase in runoff needs to be

infiltrated and accommodated on site. Dry well details also need to specify stone size and location beneath dry wells.

- C. Screening of parking areas and structures from adjoining premises. Location of parking between the street and existing or proposed structures shall be discouraged.

The proposal includes enhanced landscaping along the perimeter of the site. The parking areas will be visible from Walnut Place, as is the case now, but landscaping and fencing on the site will be improved with increased landscaping and a new 6-foot-tall screen fence. Neighbors on the west and south sides should be consulted regarding their choices for possible screening where warranted. Out of respect for the residential abutters, new lighting fixtures that are proposed for the perimeter of the property should have shields to direct light onto the city property and not upon neighboring properties.

- D. Avoidance of topographic changes; tree and soil removal shall be minimized.

Some topographical changes are anticipated, but plans indicate that there is no expected adverse impact to any areas outside of the parcel. The removal of large and mature trees should be avoided if possible.

Although final grading has not been determined, early indications are that topographical changes will be achieved through grading, site ramps, and stairs. No significant retaining walls are shown, nor does the current plan reflect the need for any. Minor retaining walls may be needed to optimize the site grading plan while creating a universally accessible facility.

- E. Consideration of site design including relationship to nearby structures.

345 Walnut Street is located in a neighborhood and village center of mixed uses including housing, institutions, and businesses. The residential neighborhood to the west, east, and south is largely pre-War housing in an MR-1 zone, with construction dates ranging from the 19th, 20th, and 21st century. The scale and design of the proposed public structure is somewhat compatible with the residential structures in this neighborhood and is more compatible with the brick and stone business and institutional architecture to the north of the site. The proposed design uses traditional building materials and design elements and draws inspiration from properties in the surrounding neighborhood and village center. This contextually sensitive approach, the proposed design will not result in substantial adverse visual effects on the neighborhood. Preservation and restoration of various existing historical building elements and fixtures, coupled with a design that uses traditional building materials and design elements, as well as one that pays homage to the existing building, the proposed design will complement to the historical context of the neighborhood.

The Planning Department received conceptual elevations and material specifications, which are subject to change during the design process. Final specifications of materials, colors, and landscaping should be submitted to Planning Department for review prior to issuance of a building permit to ensure compatibility with earlier reviews.

VII. CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

Prior to the issuance of any Building Permit, the Petitioner shall submit a Construction Management Plan (the "CMP") for review and approval to the Commissioner of Inspectional Services, the Director of Planning and Development, the City Engineer, and the Chief of the Fire Department. The CMP shall be in

compliance with all applicable policies and ordinances in effect at the time of submission. The Petitioner shall comply in all material respects with the Construction Management Plan, which shall be consistent with and not in conflict with relevant conditions of this Order and shall include, but not be limited to, the following provisions:

- a. 24-hour contact information for the general contractor.
- b. The proposed schedule of the project, including the general phasing of the construction activities and anticipated completion dates and milestones.
- c. Site plan(s) showing the proposed location of contractor and subcontractor parking, on-site material storage area(s), on-site staging areas(s) for construction materials and delivery vehicles and equipment, and location of any security fencing and erosion control.
- d. A plan showing temporary pedestrian access within work zones in accordance with DPW Policy.
- e. Proposed methods for dust control including, but not limited to: covering trucks for transportation of excavated material; minimizing storage of debris on-site by using dumpsters and regularly emptying them; using tarps to cover piles of bulk building materials and soil; locating a truck washing station to clean muddy wheels on all truck and construction vehicles before exiting the site. Include watering.
- f. Proposed methods of noise control, in accordance with the Revised Ordinances, §20-13. Staging activities should be conducted in a manner that will minimize off-site impacts of noise. Noise producing staging activities should be located as far as practical from noise sensitive locations.
- g. Tree preservation plan to define the proposed method(s) for protection of any existing trees to remain on site.
- h. The CMP shall also address the following: safety precautions; anticipated dewatering during construction; site safety and stability; and impacts on abutting properties.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Director of Planning and Development has determined that the site plans for the NewCAL Project are consistent with the Newton Comprehensive Plan and other relevant plans/studies, including the site plan review criteria listed in Section 30-23. It appears that the Public Buildings Department and the Senior Services Department have given serious consideration to finding the best plan to accommodate the needs of Newton's older adults.

The Planning Department offers the following items for consideration:

- Studying the systemic changes to the traffic, pedestrian, and bicycle flow in the neighborhood, and implementing modification and improvements as needed to mitigate impact to the neighborhood.
- New directional signage for the accessible and visitor parking (preferably sited near the entrance to the property)
- New lighting fixtures located at the perimeter of the property should have shields to focus light onto the city property and not neighbors' property.
- Traffic mitigation should be a high priority during the construction phase of this project.
- Continue to engage the neighborhood via multiple channels and allow for direct community input as the project and design evolves.
- A parking management plan should be developed in partnership with the neighborhood, City

departments, and elected and appointed officials.

If the Council, Mayor and School Department choose to approve these plans, prior to applying for Building Permits the Public Buildings Department should submit:

- 1) Revised plans showing any alterations to the site plan, parking or landscaping to the Planning Department, and Engineering Division.
- 2) An on-site soil evaluation, drainage analysis, and CCTV inspection witnessed by the Engineering Division.
- 3) Answers to questions posed in the memo written by John Daghljan.
- 4) Final material samples to the Planning Department.
- 5) A construction management plan to the Commissioner of Inspectional Services, the Director of Planning and Development, the City Engineer, and the Chief of the Fire Department.

ATTACHMENT A: **Memorandum from John Daghljan, Associate City Engineer, dated June xx, 2022**