



Ruthanne Fuller,
Mayor

CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Newton Center for Active Living Working Group

Members

Susan Albright,
CC President

Nicole Banks,
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Jack Neville,
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John Rice,
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Nancy Scammon,
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Alex Valcarce,
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Jonathan Yeo,
COO

June 10, 2021

Dear Mayor Fuller:

Last summer, the Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) Working Group formally recommended the existing Senior Center site at 345 Walnut Street in Newtonville as the preferred site for this project. Since then, the Working Group consulted community members, stakeholders, user groups, city staff, and elected officials. The input led to dozens of design variations, all of which can be distilled into two basic project approaches:

1. Renovation and addition to the existing Senior Center, and
2. Demolition of the existing Senior Center and construction of a new facility.

We evaluated dozens of options and variations for each of these project approaches, including partial and selective demolition of the existing building. While we were able to accommodate the full breadth of program in both project approaches, the renovation and addition options resulted in the following design shortcomings:

- The main floor of the existing building is six feet above grade, requiring ramps, stairs, and lifts at the entrance to the facility.
- Because of the siting of the existing building, the massing of the addition would be in the rear of the site, bringing the building closer to the direct abutters. This creates a condition that does not allow for a separate vehicular entrance and exit, requiring multi-point turns when leaving the parking lot.
- The renovation/addition is estimated to cost \$2.4M more than the new construction option.
- The renovation/addition would mean a longer construction schedule, displacing senior programming for a longer period.
- The renovation/addition requires a larger building site footprint, limiting onsite parking, green space, and other site amenities.
- Although the program can be met, the renovation/addition approach requires compromises in how we achieve that program from a building design and layout perspective.

The complete Feasibility Study has been posted on the NewCAL website and can be found at <https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/BHA-NewCAL-FeasibilityStudy2021-0610-FINAL.pdf>

The options were presented to hundreds of residents, senior center patrons, and elected and appointed officials over many months. Concepts were continually adjusted based on input and re-presented. Over the past few months, this review process led to narrowing the options to the most favorable conceptual plan for each of the two basic approaches (new construction and renovation/addition). The following committees, commissions, and councils reviewed the final two proposed conceptual designs and gave formal and informal recommendations as follows:

Design Review Committee: Unanimous straw vote to recommend new construction.

Council on Aging: Unanimous formal vote to recommend new construction.

Commission on Disability: Although there was no official vote, there was significant verbal support for new construction.

Community Members and Senior Center patrons who attended and spoke at the last two community meetings: Overwhelming majority spoke in favor, and informally straw voted, to support new construction.

City Council Programs and Services and Public Facilities Committees: The project team presented the conceptual plans and updated the City Councilors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the overwhelming feedback in support of the proposed new construction option, and in light of the substantial shortcomings of the renovation/addition option, the Working Group is formally recommending that the existing Senior Center located at 345 Walnut Street in Newtonville be demolished and that a new facility be constructed in its place.

We recognize that the existing building has architectural character that is important and is also a part of the fabric of Newtonville. Therefore, we propose that the following actions be taken in conjunction with this recommendation:

1. Where feasible, historically significant elements on and within the existing building will be protected, salvaged, restored, and installed in a manner that respects their significance and pays tribute to the rich history of the existing building. The stained-glass windows and various interior and exterior elements and fixtures will be included in this effort.
2. The fundamental design goal for the new facility will be to create a beautiful building that fits into the fabric of Newtonville and that has sufficient glass and “openness” that older residents as well as others may sense the activity in the building and feel an invitation to come inside. Elements of the new building facade may echo aspects of the current Senior Center.
3. During the Schematic Design / Site Plan Approval phase of the project, we will continue to study and develop design elements including:
 - a. Well-designed Public Open Space, Access/Connectivity, Seating, Landscaping, Lighting and Setbacks.
 - b. Enhanced Building Accessibility and Universal Design features.
 - c. Excellent Vehicular Circulation; Drop off / Pick up Area; On-Site and Off-Site Parking.
 - d. Indoor spaces which are flexible and forward thinking.
 - e. Outdoor roof deck(s) that provide additional “fresh air spaces” for activities and social interaction.
 - f. Solar Energy Opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,

Newton Center for Active Living Working Group

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