

Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) project

Community Meeting					
Date: Thursday, September 19, 2019					
Date: Newton Education Center – Room 111					
Time: 7:00PM					
Attendees:					
Alex Valcarce	Working Group	Y	Sandra Butzel	Working Group	---
Amanda Berman	Working Group	---	Bea Goldsmith	Working Group	---
Barney Heath	Working Group	Y	Peter Johnson	Working Group	---
Bob DeRubeis	Working Group	Y	Cheryl Lappin	Working Group	---
Jayne Colino	Working Group	Y	Brooke Lipsitt	Working Group	---
John Rice	Working Group	Y	Jack Neville	Working Group	Y
Jonathan Yeo	Working Group	---	Sue Rasala	Working Group	Y
Josh Morse	Working Group	Y	Richard Rasala	Working Group	---
Maureen Lemieux	Working Group	---	Carol Schein	Working Group	Y
Thomas Rooney	City Staff	---			
Deb Youngblood	Working Group	---	Joel Bargmann	BHA+A	Y
Jini Fairley	Working Group	---	James Bruneau	BHA+A	---
Nancy Scammon	Working Group	Y	Tom Murphy	NV5	---
Seth Bai	Working Group	---	Melissa Gagnon	NV5	Y

Josh Morse, City of Newton Public Buildings Commissioner, opened up the meeting at 7:00PM. It was explained that the meeting was scheduled about eight months ago. Additional introductions were Jayne Colino (Director, Department of Senior Services) and Bob DeRubeis (Commissioner, Parks and Recreation Department) and Joel Bargmann from BH+A Architects.

Project History

Jayne Colino provided a brief overview about her personal connection growing up in the City of Newton. Jayne also talked about the City being an age friendly community. The process started well before Mayor Fuller was elected. The City of Newton was designated as an age friendly community back in 2016 when the City applied to the World Health Organization (WHO) with a

commitment to continue improve resources, programs and services for seniors and that allowed the WHO to designate the City as an age friendly community. What that meant is that City needed to engage the community to understand what the City needs to do, not just the Department of Senior Services, for the City to remain age friendly. The Council on Aging (COA) started an age friendly campaign during the mayoral race, and engaged with hundreds of people and asked what was lacking in the City. One of the four top goals that came out of that process was a new or improved facility for senior programs and services. Every candidate in the mayoral campaign was committed to improving facilities for programs and services for seniors. Mayor Fuller was elected and has continued carrying through with her campaign commitment. A process was quickly implemented to evaluate what the programmatic and service needs were which would help to determine what building size was needed. Through an overwhelming response to the application process, residents were selected and over 30 residents and City officials became engaged in a Working Group, an Executive Building Committee (EBC) and the Advisory Building Committee (ABC).

Project Vision Statement

It was noted that every building project in the City needs a Vision Statement so that everybody who is working on the project is guided by the same overarching vision. Mayor Fuller felt the need to articulate the Vision Statement to reflect the commitment that the planning process would be focused on the needs and interests of seniors. The Vision Statement is available on the homepage of the NewCAL website. Attendees were invited to sign up to receive NewCAL emails if they are not already receiving project information. In addition to reviewing information on the NewCAL website, folks were informed that a paper copy is available at the Senior Center, which has over 1200 pages of material. The Department of Senior Services would work very closely with the Parks and Recreation Department, as well as the Commission, to collectively insure that the project stays on track and does not veer from the Vision Statement.

City Demographics and Project Need

The City of Newton has the fifth largest senior population in the Commonwealth with over 20,000 seniors out of over 85,000 residents. It was noted that the City of Newton is creeping up to 23% of the overall population, with residents over the age of 60. Forty percent of Newton households have someone over the age of 60 who the City is mandated to serve through the Department of Senior Services.

As part of the evaluation process, we learned why residents come to senior center as well as why folks do not come to the senior center. In many instances, we learned that residents do not come to the center because it is just too small. In comparison, the town of Needham has 7,500 seniors, which is close to 21% of the total population of 35,000, and Needham has a 22,000SF senior center, which is called Center at the Heights. In comparison to communities smaller in

population than Newton, Newton is behind with its existing senior center at 6,000SF of usable space. Many of the programs have many wait lists due to lack of available space.

How was the program determined?

There have been approximately 70 meetings, some of which were community meetings like the meeting tonight. Some meetings were listening sessions for residents to speak about what they would like in a senior center. Many responses were for spaces to be right sized. There were also monthly Dialogue with the Director sessions as well as over 700 responses to an online survey. Based on feedback received, a proposed program was developed which resulted in 36,000SF.

This program document is on the NewCAL website:

https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/download/program_design/2019-03-14-NewCAL-Community-Meeting-Proposed-Program-Rooms-Spaces.pdf. The need was realized for a multitude of

multiple use spaces, for programming flexibility. Currently there is an average of 35 participants in a fitness class, which takes place in a space approximately 600SF. When the architects looked to right size that space, 1500SF was determined to be appropriate, based on current demand. A large gymnasium will serve as a large multipurpose space, which can be sub-divided for events including large lectures or large community gatherings. If there were no gymnasium, the SF would need to be made up in the multipurpose spaces to accommodate programming needs. A need was determined for year round walking, which can be accommodated with an elevated walking track. The 10,000SF gymnasium space could be programmed so that different age groups can be in the gym at the same time. There would be an ability for multi generations to co-exist in this facility.

Nationally, there has been a decline in senior participation in congregant lunches. A café will provide ongoing nourishment, which is important throughout the day for both the seniors as well as for the community.

As part of the feedback, there was interest to create common space for casual social interaction. It was noted that there is nothing luxurious in the proposed program. Over 200 volunteers help to operate the Center. Designated space is needed for staff and volunteers.

Currently the pool is open 500 hours/season. The new pool would be open approximately 10 times that number, at approximately 5,000 hours/year. In the summer, there would be no changes relative to the current use. During the off-season is when pool access is problematic.

What was the site selection process?

The Parks and Recreation Commissioner noted that he is a lifetime Newton resident. It was explained that 1) the Albemarle site is on Parks and Recreation land and 2) Parks and Recreation Department will be part of this program and part of the building. As part of the site selection process, we started 145 City owned sites were narrowed down to a group of 24 which was further narrowed to six. With the six sites, the Parks and Recreation Commissioner, as a

steward of open space, noted he had concerns with five sites because they all touched on green space. The uniqueness of the Albemarle site is 1) where NewCAL is being proposed, the building stays on hard scape and does not take green space and 2) as part of the project, there would potentially be a new pool. Over the next couple of years, the basketball courts and tennis courts will be evaluated and a determination will be made as to where they would be repurposed. Albemarle Field is comprised of 1) active athletic space, 2) passive green space and 3) neither of the two. The latter is at the south end of the field, near the playground, and is tough to maintain because it is not irrigated. In the event the courts need to be repurposed, that area would be a potential location. The Albemarle field house is used by seniors and gets a lot of use. The building is old and is in desperate need of repair. The men's toilet room, is the old out house, and is outside the building. Gath pool is upwards of almost 60 years old. Although the City staff does a great job of maintaining the pool, this past season the pool lost over 18,000 gallons of water/day. If a new pool were part of NewCAL, the pool would be an indoor/outdoor facility for year round use, as part of the Parks and Recreation department. The public would have access to the pool much earlier in the evening than currently available at Newton North. The pool schedule, including pre-season, regular season and post season was reviewed. No changes would be made to the summer pool use. Pre-season and post season, including the wintertime, is when pool use would be increased.

With regard to program development, this past winter the program was analyzed and created. In the spring, site criteria was established and the program was developed into a massing diagram. The parking program is approximately 75 spaces. This number could possibly be reduced if there is complimentary or supplementary parking in the neighborhood. It was also identified that outdoor green scape was a priority. Of the 40 senior community centers that the project team looked at in eastern Massachusetts, the majority of the centers are directly adjacent to parkland and all but two are adjacent to green space.

It was explained that the current program requires 2.5 acres, including the building, green space and parking program. It was identified that overall acreage could be reduced if there were other elements existing at the selected location (parking, green space). The 145 City owned sites were sorted by parcel size. Any sites, which are less than 1.5 acres, were eliminated. Any site that has a fixed asset, which cannot be moved, such as the Newton Center fire station, was tabled in the lower tier as not a viable option. The middle tier included sites, which are 1.5 to 2.5 acres, many of which were recognized as needing programmatic compromises, which would be possible, although not ideal. This process resulted in the list of 24 sites. All 24 all parcels are large enough to accommodate the program although not all of the sites are ideal. In fact, many have significant challenges. On 6/20/19, the 24 sites were presented at a community meeting. This meeting was followed by a presentation to the City Council. Based on feedback, several of the sites were determined as not viable, including Nahanton Woods and West Newton Commons. The goal is to try to replicate any outdoor programmatic elements, which may be

need to be removed for NewCAL, either on the same site or in the immediate neighborhood. On smaller sites, relocation is not possible. Of the 24 sites, 18 were tabled as being the least viable. The six remaining sites were evaluated with regard to established site criteria, including preservation of trees and preservation of open space.

The Marlborough senior center was built on parkland. Parks and playgrounds tend to bring community together. One of the goals for this project is to break down the barriers of age and the separation that occurs, to prevent isolation and to embrace the community. The thought was that a playground could help bring the community together if we could find a way to site a facility that does not harm, but rather benefits, from being adjacent to a park. It was recognized that with select sites it would not be possible to create the NewCAL project without significant compromise to open space. For example, it was recognized that sites like Weeks, Richard McGrath and the Newton Center field house were just not possible without significantly impacting open space.

With regard to the Albemarle site, the City is well aware of challenges in the area, including the traffic situation in the neighborhood as well as pedestrian crossings. The known challenges bring opportunities to slow down traffic with improved lines of site as well as improved bicycle safety, possibly two (2) new pedestrian crossings at Cheesecake Brook (one near the Gath pool and the other ½ way down, closer to where near NECP), improve storm water management and improve the streetscape. Curbing allows for better storm water management as well as sidewalks along the west side to encourage and promote walkability. Parallel parking along the west side can be formalized. DPW already has a plan to repave Albemarle Road, which would include restriping as appropriate. With the Horace Mann School having moved to 222 Nevada Street, walking and vehicular patterns will need to be restudied. The City is committed to working with the F.A. Day School to develop a parking management plan for faculty and staff. The City will need to work with the Fessenden School and the Chinese School at F.A. Day (on Sundays) and NECP to develop a parking plan.

Questions and Comments

Following an overview of the site selection process by Josh and Bob, the City opened up the forum for questions and comments from the public:

- A. Would the size of the proposed senior center change if a different site were selected?
The size of new senior center would not change. Every SF is accounted for. The pool is a completely separate component.

The City explained that the current senior center functions as a community center. Many civic groups and organizations use space in the Center. The staff is experienced in

managing outside demands without compromising senior needs. There is a lot of multigenerational programming that already happens at the existing senior center. Currently, the Center operates from 8:30-4:00 Monday through Friday. The new facility could potentially operate seven days a week, from 7:00AM to 7:00PM initially with the possibility of expanding hours depending on demand. The time available for programming would be multiplied by about 500%.

Currently, the center closes at 4:00PM due to staffing availability. After hours programming, based on rental from outside organizations, are open to the public, which expands programming without needing City resources to staff. Ideally, the new center would be a resource for as many user groups as possible. Extended hours would reduce the wait list for programming events.

- B. Was 150 Jackson Road considered? The property at 150 Jackson Road is currently being designed to be the new home for the Lincoln Elliot Elementary School. Space beyond the building footprint on the site includes an acre of wooded area. With four schools and 55 units of housing as abutters, this makes the site challenging to for NewCAL. The NewCAL website includes a brief description of each site that was considered, including 150 Jackson Road.
- C. The current senior centers draws residents from all over Newton. The Albemarle site is 4 minutes farther north, driving distance. Of all the residence who use public transportation to the current senior center, 44% are from the south side of the City.
- D. There are always events at Fessenden and Albemarle Road is always crowded. More people and activity will cause more people to get upset.
- E. Newton is the 10th largest City in the Commonwealth. In response to an email to the Commissioner of Elder Care in Quincy, it was discovered that Quincy has one large facility, with seven smaller facilities. A large gym near public transportation and amenities could be part of the senior programming with a variety of services. The City noted that it would be challenging to offer needed services equitably throughout the City.
- F. In theory, the NewCAL sounds lovely. Although the Albemarle location seems like an overwhelming place, as it functions as a recreational area. It feels like it is going to be hard pressed to feel like a warm relaxed atmosphere. The site is disconnected from services and there are no amenities near Albemarle Park.
- G. Proximity of the Boys and Girls Club also needs to be considered.

- H. Potential support to revitalize the village centers would be taken away by building NewCAL at the Albemarle site.
- I. There is lots of building ongoing on the north side of the City. By taking away the basketball and tennis courts, resources are being taken from the students at the FA Day school. The Public Buildings Department has been speaking with the Principal at FA Day, with specific mention of the basketball and tennis courts.
- J. A traffic study was done as part of the NECP project by MDM consulting. The study was done last spring, which was prior to Horace Mann relocating to Nevada Street. The City is aware that the study will need to be re-done.
- K. The pool is not something that the seniors are interested in. Residents can go to the JCC or the YMCA. If the size of the gym were reduced, the possibility of other sites would open up.
- L. Can Cheesecake Brook be culverted to allow the ability to cross? The current design does not include that concept.
- M. The Chinese School at FA Day will need to be engaged in this process.
- N. The City noted that if parking cannot be resolved, this site would not be pursued.
- O. The Senior Center should be by itself. The Hawthorne location is perfect. The Albemarle location sounds like a maze.
- P. What mitigation will be done to project risks? Traffic and parking studies will be performed. The site will be evaluated to determine whether an engineered solution can be developed.
- Q. There is a challenge to overcome the large proposed building program. Programs need to be compatible. There is a risk of never coming to a consensus and never finding a perfect site.
- R. Would there be a bus to the new Senior Center? There is an advantage to being nearby amenities. Albemarle Field is very well used, constantly. The impact to residents, as well as to the kids who use the fields, needs to be considered further.
- S. Why does the new Center need to be linked to green space? The City responded that housing, transportation and access to outdoor green space is key to being part of an age friendly community.

- T. The fact that the current facility is called a Senior Center, as well as the deteriorated building condition, deters residents from participating in events.
- U. The basketball courts are heavily used. There is lots of traffic.
- V. Is it possible to expand the existing senior center? The City noted that the existing property would have to be expanded significantly to have the land area needed for the new building. The current Senior Center is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Although the location is very good, the site is very small. Regardless of where the building is located, the existing Senior Center building will remain as a City asset and be reused.
- W. The current senior center is decrepit. The roof leaks every winter. The heating cannot be controlled. There is no space for private conversations to take place. There is no space to bring friends.
- X. Webster Woods is a fluid situation. The City will follow up.
- Y. Concern was expressed that the active recreation programs at Albemarle field would affect the ability for a guest to engage in quiet activities in the new facility.
- Z. What will NewCAL cost and what is the timeframe? The City noted that the project would be bonded and funded through the existing City budget. The project is listed in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) at \$16.5M. The pool is a separate project. The timeframe depends on how long it takes to build a consensus.
- AA. The Albemarle site does not meet many of the site criteria. A new senior center is needed, just not at the Albemarle site.
- BB. Albemarle Park is chaotic. The site needs to be rethought.
- CC. Some of the scoring on the site evaluation matrix is inconsistent. The pool component should be removed from the program. There is no redeeming value to have the new center at Albemarle. The parking demand will be increased, which will increase traffic.
- DD. There is no doubt that everyone in the City wants the new facility, although it should be centrally located.
- EE. If sited on Albemarle, the new center will likely take away functionality of the fields. Intergenerational programming could be wonderful although there is concern about the compromise of green space.

- FF. The vision is great although the backlash is difficult. The City should not be so divisive. Public discourse is very important.
- GG. Wherever the new center is built, parking and traffic will be challenging. The City noted that kids are raised for just about 20 years. Senior years are much longer.
- HH. A primary goal is to solicit feedback to help identify issues to address. A Feasibility study has not been done yet. The project team is going to review the issues identified and will come back with some possible new ideas. Urban design will have challenges regardless of the site location.
- II. The City noted that 100% of green space would be taken the other five sites, with the exception of Pellegrini, which would result in taking some hardscape as well. The Parks and Recreation Commission is not willing to entertain loss of green space. The City noted that the Albemarle site is not a done deal.
- JJ. It was noted that per the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Albemarle site would not be further evaluated unless additional sites, other than parkland locations are also studied.
- KK. The City noted that the green space along Center Street, at the Newton Center triangle, is deed restricted.
- LL. At the Newton Center triangle site the program would need to be more compact. Underground parking may be needed at this site and would be expensive.
- MM. Senior may not want to be part of a large athletic complex. The question was asked about the relaxing nature of a gym for Zumba and TaiChi. The seniors may feel that they deserve their own place. The questions were asked about compromises that people are willing to make and whether such a large facility is needed.
- NN. The City noted that there is a deed restriction on the Avery estate.
- OO. The new complex at Walnut and Washington streets is inevitably going to bring a lot more traffic to the area. A traffic study will need to be done to evaluate the potential impact on the north side of the City, relative to the NewCAL project.
- PP. Accessibility to public transportation should be a high priority for site selection. There are not a lot of sites that can accommodate the full breadth of the proposed program.

- QQ. Are there any assurances that can be put into place to prevent NewCAL from future expansion at Albemarle? Parks and Recreation Commission can put forth an order of conditions, with a restriction for further development.
- RR. There should be an effort made to consider privately owned sites. Perhaps the armory as well as the current senior center can be programmed. Perhaps there are churches that are downsizing.
- SS. The City noted that the Working Group has no authority and is purely advisory and makes recommendations to the Mayor’s office. Minutes are not taken at the Working Group meetings, as they are not publicly posted meetings. Initially, the meetings were joint with the EBC. Advisory groups that do not report to an elected body are not required to produce minutes.
- TT. The division being felt is because of the cross tensions for the desire to build on green space vs. the resistance for any parkland to be compromised.
- UU. The question was asked whether NewCAL could be redesigned and scaled down. The City will determine whether the Albemarle site is feasible. If not, sites on the middle tier of the selection process will be looked at. The team could look at reducing SF although a 3-story building could be considered on a smaller site. If the gym were removed from the program, more spaces that are multi-purpose would need to be added to achieve the required program area.
- VV. Has a decentralized model of senior centers been considered? The City explained that in theory decentralization could become simpler for the site selection process although in terms of logistics, would be more complicated for management and staffing. Services would be scattered and other facilities would need to be improved.
- WW. The question was asked as to why this project is not part of the Washington Street development, which is more centrally located in comparison to the Albemarle site and closer to amenities as well as the potential for seniors to live close by.
- XX. Central location is a factor, although not the only factor. What about the Riverside location? The City explained at Riverside, the senior center would be part of a much larger complex. In addition, NewCAL progress would be dependent upon Riverside approval.
- YY. What about the Barn location? There is so much housing and development close by.

- ZZ. What about the Armory? The armory has many challenges. The building was built to withstand artillery. If NewCAL were to occupy that building the building would need to be reclassified as a change of use and would need to be brought up to current code if it were going to be used for any purpose other than a drill hall. There are many challenges with this location which would be cost prohibitive. There is more information about this site on the NewCAL project website.