

## Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) project

<b>Community Meeting</b>					
Date: Thursday, October 24, 2019					
Date: Newton Education Center (100 Walnut Street) – Room 111					
Time: 7:00PM					
<b>Attendees:</b>					
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	---	Brooke Lipsitt	Working Group	Y
John Rice	Working Group	---	Jack Neville	Working Group	---
Jonathan Yeo	Working Group	Y	Sue Rasala	Working Group	Y
Josh Morse	Working Group	Y	Richard Rasala	Working Group	Y
Maureen Lemieux	Working Group	---	Carol Schein	Working Group	---
Thomas Rooney	City Staff	---			
Deb Youngblood	Working Group	---	Joel Bargmann	BHA+A	---
Jini Fairley	Working Group	---	James Bruneau	BHA+A	Y
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 7:15PM. It was noted that there has been a lot of conversation with regard to the Albemarle site. Albemarle is not off the table although further discussion has been tabled. Per the Parks & Rec commission, the team is focusing on non-park sites.

Josh explained that there is a list of 145 City owned sites. The list has been sorted by parcel size into three tiers. The first tier includes sites that are 1 to 1.5 acres. It was determined that these sites are insufficiently sized and have been eliminated. The next tier includes sites with a fixed asset, which cannot be moved, such as the Newton Center fire station. This group of sites was categorized as non-viable options. 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. Whereas the Parks & Rec commission asked the team to look at non-park sites, the middle tier sites will be analyzed to determine whether any programmatic compromises would need to be made. There is flexibility in how the program can be delivered. Depending on the size of the site, if the footprint needs to be significantly smaller, there may need to be a smaller gym with more multipurpose rooms. It is possible to deliver the program in a more compact package, without increasing the footprint size.

The City generated list of 145 sites, including a few additional sites, such as Northland and Riverside, was distributed. The Newton Center triangle site is on that list. Newton Public Buildings explained that the Newton Center triangle taskforce volumes are public documents and are available to anyone who may be interested. Although the City is well aware that parking and traffic are challenges, the Newton Center location is centrally located and is within great proximity to amenities and public transportation. The City will need to work with residents and businesses. It was explained that the Newton Center green space is deed restricted. The land area could be improved upon although development is not permitted.

The Newton Center triangle site is 1.3 acres. It was explained that development on a triangle shaped site is inherently challenging as intersections are tough to build on. The team will study the geometries and try to regularize the site. The current parking lot has 155 spaces. Studies have shown that the parking lot is typically at an 80-85% utilization rate. The parking lots on Pelham and Cypress streets will be evaluated, including the option of creating structured and/or non-structured parking. It was noted that based on an early look, it appears that the NewCAL program could fit on the triangle site although traffic and parking will need to be studied. Some early possibilities for parking and development:

1. Below grade parking beneath the footprint of NewCAL to accommodate 170 parking spaces. The estimated cost would be between \$8 and \$10M. Advantages would include:
  - Avoiding an above grade structure which would create more mass and density
  - Expanded green space
2. Above grade parking (approx. \$30K/parking space) with residential and some retail development above, with expanded green space.
3. No parking structure. Parking would be maximized at nearby lots.

The segment of Langley Road, which borders the triangle, is very wide at 55' from curb to curb. There may be opportunities to incorporate angled parking along Langley as well as at Center and Beacon streets. More cars can park with angled vs. parallel parking. A parallel parking space requires 20' whereas a parallel space requires 11'-13'.

## Public Comment

- A. The planning department is trying to keep people moving, by increasing parking rates to \$3.75/hr at select parking locations in the City. Please clarify how this works with the plan to increase parking spaces for the NewCAL project.

*City: The City will follow up with the planning and transportation departments.*

- B. The prospect of a new senior center in Newton Center is exciting and it checks all the boxes. Although parking cannot be reduced at the Pelham, Pleasant and Cypress streets lots, it can be made more efficient. It was suggested that NewCAL could be located at the Pelham Street lot (33,000SF). Accommodations for relocated, as well as additional parking, could be provided with a raised structure at the Pleasant Street lot (25,000SF). The vision of the triangle site would be green space.
- C. Another suggestion was made about acquiring the Citizens Bank building, which is located behind Walgreen's. The bank building is four stories at 30,000SF. This may be a viable as a renovation alternative for NewCAL being in Newton Centre.

- D. What will happen to the current Senior Center?

*City: The building will remain as a City asset and will be repurposed.*

- E. Can NewCAL be incorporated into the ongoing development along Washington Street?

*City: The City is keeping an eye open as to whether any parcels adjacent to City owned lots may become available.*

- F. Is there an option for the gym to be separate and not directly on the NewCAL site?

*City: That arrangement is possible although there may be challenges with staffing, etc. Depending on the site, the gym could be located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor to save on footprint.*

- G. There is an empty building on the corner of Richardson and Centre Streets in Newton Corner. Has this structure been evaluated for NewCAL?

*City: The City will look into this property to determine size and availability.*

- H. Would the City consider a long term lease for privately owned land?

*City: Although this has not been done, it could be considered.*

- I. The ride from Oak Hill to the Ed Center this evening took 30 minutes. This resident is an advocate for NewCAL being centrally located.

- J. Would the City look at the possibility of a potential land swap?  
*City: Land swaps are a possibility.*
- K. If NewCAL is built too far on the north side of the City, it will difficult for seniors on the south side to attend. Being more centrally located is preferred.
- L. The Chair of the COA inquired about how the ongoing site evaluation will impact the schedule and how that affects the timing of NewCAL?
- M. Would need to be sensitive to local businesses during construction.  
*City: The project would need to be phased. A construction management plan would include creating additional nearby parking prior to construction.*
- N. How was Albemarle decided on as the preferred site?  
*City: Although the site is not centrally located and has accessibility challenges (which will be evaluated and improved), there is land area and amenities which are beneficial to seniors and the overall community.*
- O. Is the plan still for NewCAL to be developed and used as a multigenerational center?  
*City: Every SF is being designed to deliver programming for seniors. The plan is that when spaces are non-programmed they will be used for non-senior programs.*
- P. According to the survey, only 4% of the folks who responded, wanted a gym.  
*City: Senior residents responded that they want pickle ball, aerobics, an elevated indoor walking track, etc. These programs can be accommodated with a gym. There is some flexibility in the sizing of the gym.*
- Q. According to the survey, only 4% of the folks who responded, wanted a gym.  
*City/Working Group: Senior residents responded that they want pickle ball, aerobics, an elevated indoor walking track, etc. These programs can be accommodated in a gym. There is some flexibility with the sizing of the gym. When NewCAL is complete, there will be more seniors in Newton, which will put a greater demand for senior programming. A gymnasium creates a large flexible space.*
- R. Gath pool was designed to be an extension of Crystal Lake and is meant to be an outdoor pool. If an indoor pool is desired off season, the YMCA or the JCC can be used.

- S. The question was raised as to whether it would be possible to acquire the land behind Walgreens in Newton Center for NewCAL.
- T. Traffic in Newton Centre will get worse if NewCAL is at the triangle site. The parking will put the project over budget. Are there any other sites that are centrally located?  
*City: Even if the Citizens Bank building behind Walgreens was an optional location for NewCAL, parking would still be impacted. Plus, there is the cost of acquisition.*
- U. With the Webster Woods initiative, has there been any thought about the former Mishkan Tefila building?  
*City: Boston College purchased that building.*
- V. There is a lot that can be done to improve the Triangle parking lot site, including the consideration of Langley Road. It would be good to summarize the Newton Centre Triangle task force study. Back in the mid-1800s the Mason School stood on the triangle, facing the Newton Centre green, along Centre Street, with a strong civic presence.
- W. How will NewCAL be built for \$16.5M, based on the average cost/SF? Does the total cost include possible land acquisition and a possible parking structure?
- X. The Newton North High School parking lot could be a good location for NewCAL.  
*City: Any school site would need to be approved by the School Committee.*
- Y. Is it an option to have two senior centers? One more serviced focused and the other more for athletics?  
*Working Group Member: As an active user of the Newton senior center, a member of the Working Group explained if there were two centers, users would need to drive to different centers for different types of programming. This would be difficult for those who cannot easily get from point A to point B. An active senior center offers a real community to participants, which for many, is an answer to loneliness. The City noted that as explained in prior meetings, 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.*

- Z. A Working Group member noted that there are 40 senior center sites documented on the NewCAL project website <https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/> (under the Senior Center Info tab). Of all the centers listed, Cambridge and Somerville are the only two cities/towns that have more than one senior center. Developing two centers at two locations would only contribute to extending the site selection process, not help.
- AA. A member of the COA will inquire with the Director of the Department of Senior Services as to whether full membership can be posted on the NewCAL project website. It was noted that there are 22,000 seniors in Newton which equates to 20% of Newton residents over the age of 65. The senior community is growing.
- BB. A representative from the City noted that Parks and Recreation over 55 programming takes place in many locations across the City, including non-City owned locations, such as Boston College. Elementary school gymnasiums are booked and many locations are often over crowded.
- CC. Is the DPW stable on Crafts Street being considered for NewCAL?  
*City: The City responded that site is home to City wide DPW operations center, including the DPW garage. The site is heavily programmed.*
- DD. Is the West Newton Armory being considered for NewCAL?
- EE. *City:* The City noted that there are several factors which make this site extremely challenging to develop and would be cost prohibitive. The challenges with this location have been explained at prior meetings. In summary, the site is only about ¼ acre which would mean that the NewCAL program would not fit. Plus, the building itself is inaccessible. There are many challenges with this location, which would be cost prohibitive. For more information about this site, refer to the 9/19/19 meeting notes as well as the Armory Letter which is posted on the NewCAL project website: [https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/download/site\\_selection\\_newcal/2019-05-06-Armory-Letter.pdf](https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/download/site_selection_newcal/2019-05-06-Armory-Letter.pdf)
- FF. Is the Education Center being considered for NewCAL?  
*City:* The City noted that although the building is approximately 70,000SF, the building is fairly heavily programmed with administrative offices (20,000SF) and Educational programming (20,000SF) with the balance comprised of meeting areas and the IT hub (30,000SF). Although the IT infrastructure could possibly be folded in with NewCAL, the building would need to be upgraded to meet current building codes for a change in use. Renovation would be expensive.

A comment was made that the Ed Center has dining spaces and classroom spaces, is HCP accessible and is located near two bus routes – the #59 and #556 routes. The existing building could be transformed into a vibrant, well maintained civic center. The school department offices could be relocated into the current senior center, which is closer to Newton North High School and is more centrally located in the City, relative to the current location.

GG. Is 150 Jackson Road being considered for NewCAL?

*City: The current Lincoln Eliot School will be the new swing space for future school construction projects. As noted at a prior community meeting, the property at 150 Jackson Road is currently being designed to be the new home for the Lincoln Eliot Elementary School. The site is 6.2 acres, which the City is continuing to evaluate. 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 for NewCAL. The site does not have fields or playgrounds and starts to fill in quickly with parking lots and space for vehicular drop off/pick up. For more information about this site, refer to the Summary Conclusions for NewCAL – Sites Not Shortlisted on the NewCAL project website:*

[https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/download/site\\_selection\\_newcal/Summary-Conclusions-for-NewCAL-Alternative-Sites.pdf](https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/download/site_selection_newcal/Summary-Conclusions-for-NewCAL-Alternative-Sites.pdf)

HH. The City will continue to explore the viability of 1294 Centre Street as well as the Cypress Street parking lot.

II. In lieu of evaluating the list of all 50 sites, the list should be narrowed down to only include sites that are viable.

*City: Each site presents its own challenges and costs.*

JJ. If the new senior center were located further south than the current center location, it would be more attractive for residents on the south side of the City.

KK. The CEO of the Newton YMCA commended the community on the work done so far and noted there are established partnerships between the YMCA and the Senior Center.

LL. It is important that services are provided for seniors on fixed means who cannot take advantage of programs and services offered at the YMCA and the JCC.

MM. A comment was made that Wellesley, Natick and Ashland do not have resources such as a YMCA or JCC.

- NN. A central location is important. Adding 5 minutes to an already half-hour ride is significant, relative to adding 5 minutes to a 5 minute ride. Location is important.
- OO. A municipal space with green space would create a positive impact in Newton Centre. It is important to unite the City, rather than create division with two different locations.
- PP. A covered parking structure could be used for covered outdoor events.