

Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) project

Community Meeting					
Date: Thursday, September 23, 2019					
Date: F.A Day Middle School Auditorium					
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	---	Peter Johnson	Working Group	---
Bob DeRubeis	Working Group	Y	Cheryl Lappin	Working Group	---
Jayne Colino	Working Group	Y	Brooke Lipsitt	Working Group	Y
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	Y
Maureen Lemieux	Working Group	---	Carol Schein	Working Group	---
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. Additional introductions included Jayne Colino (Director, Department of Senior Services), 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, on Albemarle Road. Jayne also talked about the City being an age friendly community and provided some background into the process, which 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, which 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 and to improve the quality of life for older adults in the City. The Council on Aging (COA) started an age-friendly campaign during the 2017 mayoral race, and engaged with hundreds of people and asked what was lacking in the City. The following areas were determined to be important for the City to pursue: Housing, transportation, access to outdoor space, communications, buildings that serve seniors, isolation and loneliness. Of these, four areas were determined at top priorities: Housing, transportation, isolation and an active senior center.

Every candidate in the mayoral campaign was committed to improving facilities for programs and services for seniors. Mayor Fuller was elected and has continued 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 a request for applications, 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). EBC and ABC members in attendance raised hands.

Project Vision Statement

The project statement was presented. It was explained that every public construction project in the City creates a Vision Statement so that everybody who is working on the project is guided by the same overarching vision. The Vision Statement was created by the project Working Group. 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 NewCAL facility would be co-managed: Senior programming would be managed by the Department of Senior Services with input from the Parks and Recreation Department.

Project information is available on the website. In addition to reviewing information on the NewCAL website, folks were informed that there are paper copies available at the Senior Center and Library, with over 1200 pages of material. Attendees were also invited to see Melissa (from NV5) at the front of the room, to sign up to receive NewCAL emails if not already on the list.

It was noted that the City of Newton has the fifth largest senior population in the Commonwealth and 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?

It was noted that there have been approximately 70 meetings, some of which were community meetings like the meeting tonight. There were 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, with a wait list, 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. Most of the spaces proposed for the new facility are multipurpose rooms, which can be broken down and set up for a variety of uses and programs. A large gymnasium will serve as a large multipurpose space, which can be sub-divided for events including large lectures or large community gatherings. Without a gymnasium, the SF would need to be accommodated by additional 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 divided for several different programs to take place at the same time. Pickle ball and its benefits were presented. It was also noted that gymnasium space is at a premium in the City. Beyond meeting senior programming needs, the gym would help to meet the needs of the greater community.

During the presentation of the proposed program, a question was asked by a resident to explain why the Albemarle site was specifically chosen for NewCAL.

What was the site selection process?

The Commissioner of Public Buildings explained that over this past winter the program was analyzed and created and in the spring, site criteria was established and the program was developed into a massing diagram. The parking program is approximately 75 spaces. It was explained that the current program requires 2.5 acres, including the building, green space and parking program. The parking 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 36,000SF 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 into three tiers. The first tier included sites that are 1 to 1.5 acres. These sites were insufficiently sized and were eliminated. The next tier included any site with a fixed asset, which cannot be moved, such as the Newton Center fire station. This group of sites was tabled in not being 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. This process resulted in a list of 24 sites. All 24 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. Based on feedback, several of the sites were determined as not viable, including West Newton Commons. It was recognized that sites like Weeks, Richard McGrath and the Newton Center field house were just not possible without causing significant impact to open space.

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.

What was the site selection process?

The Parks and Recreation Commissioner 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 with 145 City owned sites, which were narrowed down to a group of 24, which were further narrowed down to six. With the six sites, the Parks and Recreation Commissioner, as a steward of open space, noted he had concerns with five of the 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. Currently the Gath Pool at Albemarle is open 500 hours/season. A new pool would be open approximately 10 times that number, at approximately 5,000 hours/year.

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 Gath pool complex is an existing asset that is in need of a lot of attention. 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. Public pool access would be increased, compared to current access.

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 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 parking spaces 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.

Public Comment

- A. Albemarle Road and Crafts Street intersection is the most dangerous in the City.

City: There may be opportunities to improve the entire site.

- B. Would the size of the proposed senior center change if a different site were selected?

City: The size of new senior center would not change on a different site. Every SF of programming is accounted for. The pool is a completely separate component.

- C. Teacher parking is challenging. The fields are used for gym classes, which have 100 students.

City: A commitment has been made to work with the F.A. Day school to improve teacher parking for faculty and staff.

- D. Residents are angry and want to hear why NewCAL cannot work at another site. The question was asked why challenges at other sites are not worthy of overcoming. The City noted that given site limitations, some of the sites could not accommodate the program.

City: The Parks and Recreation Commission has requested the project team study non-park sites for NewCAL. The Commissioner of Public Buildings noted that although another site may be found, that site might not be able to deliver the entire program so there may be compromises.

- E. There should be two or three locations that are accessible by seniors and will support local businesses.

City: Very few communities have found the effectiveness of multiple sites. Large cities such as Cambridge and Somerville, which have two locations, target specific needs at the second location. It can be very challenging to decentralize services at multiple locations.

- F. There could be traffic impact from the new complex on Austin Street.

- G. Is it possible to expand the current senior center?

City: The existing facility sits on a ½ acre. The existing Senior Center is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There are limitations as to what can be done on this site. Although the location is very good, the site is very small. It was noted that the Town of Needham has 7500 seniors of a total of 35,000 residents with a 22,000SF senior center. The Newton senior center has 6000SF of usable space with a senior population close to three times that of Needham.

- H. Where will the money come from for the new facility?

City: As the project develops, the cost will be determined, along with potential impacts. Mitigation will need to be figured out for each of the potential locations. It was also noted that there would be increased operational costs.

- I. Removing the basketball and tennis courts is problematic.

City: Relocating the courts on site will be studied. Perhaps some PE classes could be in the new gym. There is opportunity for a great synergy with the new facility.

- J. If the pool component does not happen with the NewCAL project, would the City consider building a year round pool?

City: If the NewCAL project does not happen at the Albemarle site, a new pool should be opened for year round access. Meeting demand for swim availability is problematic during the winter months.

- K. As a user of both the Senior Center as well as the Gath pool, it is difficult to find parking at either venue. Parking at Albemarle Road will not be good.
- L. Thousands of residents signed a petition online to not build NewCAL on a park. The City noted that if this site were not feasible, the team would need to rethink the design on a different site or on multiple sites.
- M. The City needs to look at a long-range development plan.
- N. Per one NNHS student, kids would not use an indoor pool in the summer months. The City explained that the plan would be to create an outdoor pool, which can be winterized.
- O. Increased foot traffic in the area will increase the potential for other issues.
- P. A Day student noted that there are many cars at the crossings and that additional congestion will make it hard for people to bike or walk.
- Q. The question was asked how basketball courts and tennis courts are different from building on, and needing to relocate, a playground.
City: The tennis and basketball courts would need to be relocated. The Gath Pool is losing 18,000 gallons of water per day as it has outlived its life.
- R. Statements were made that development in the City has been unbalanced, with too much construction on the north side.
- S. Parking on Albemarle will not be dedicated to NewCAL. Seniors are looking for their own space.
- T. The question was asked what would happen to the Gath Pool if it not part of the NewCAL project. If the project is moved up in the CIP, what other projects will be affected?
- U. The statement was made that most seniors do not drive and there are so many better site options, which would be more accessible. The seniors should have their own center, which would not have to be shared with children.

- V. A physical education instructor at F.A. Day Middle School noted that by placing the NewCAL facility at Albemarle, a significant portion of the PE department programming would be affected, which could not be replaced. The NewCAL project can go on another site. The fields are needed for student programming. It was noted that F.A. Day has the highest student enrollment of Newton middle schools and the lowest resources.

- W. With regard to the NECP, there are many vans at pick up and drop off times.
City: An additional traffic study will need to be performed, specifically to address parking and traffic generated by NECP.

- X. Several attendees openly spoke in favor of the senior center project, just not on Albemarle Road, which is the only parkland north of the Mass Pike.

- Y. It was noted that based on the survey data, the majority of seniors want spaces for pickle ball and yoga as well as space that they can call their own. A pool and a gym were not highlighted as being very important.

- Z. Several comments were made in support of a new senior center being built in Newton Center. From the south side, it would take close to a ½ hour to drive to the Albemarle site. Given the ongoing development in Newtonville, there will be increased traffic.

- AA. The Austin Street development is proposing to rent two bedroom units for \$4400/month, which will likely not be for seniors, but rather for families, which will need more park land. Safety needs to be priority for teachers, students and seniors.

- BB. Emergency vehicle access and circulation will need to be considered and factored into the design of a new senior center facility.

- CC. There seems to be many underutilized buildings on California Street.

- DD. Does the \$16.5M include mark up for mitigation for roads, bridges, etc? What would the total project cost be?