

## Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) project

<b>Community Meeting</b>					
Date: Thursday, February 27, 2020					
Date: Senior Center (345 Walnut Street)					
Time: 7:00PM					
<b>Attendees:</b>					
Alex Valcarce	Working Group	Y	Maureen Lemieux	Working Group	---
Amanda Berman	Working Group	---	Nancy Scammon	Working Group	Y
Barney Heath	Working Group	Y	Peter Johnson	Working Group	---
Bea Goldsmith	Working Group	Y	Richard Rasala	Working Group	Y
Bob DeRubeis	Working Group	---	Sandra Butzel	Working Group	Y
Brooke Lipsitt	Working Group	Y	Seth Bai	Working Group	---
Carol Schein	Working Group	Y	Sue Rasala	Working Group	Y
Deb Youngblood	Working Group	---	Thomas Rooney	City Staff	---
Jack Neville	Working Group	Y			
Jayne Colino	Working Group	Y	Joel Bargmann	BHA+A	---
Jini Fairley	Working Group	---	James Bruneau	BHA+A	---
Jonathan Yeo	Working Group	---	Tom Murphy	NV5	---
Josh Morse	Working Group	Y	Melissa Gagnon	NV5	Y

Jayne Colino, Director of Senior Services, opened up the meeting at 7:05PM. In addition to Josh Morse, the City of Newton Public Buildings Commissioner, the following participating groups and individuals were recognized: NewCAL Working Group, Council on Aging (COA) and Advisory Board, NewCAL Advocacy Group, Alex Valcarce (Newton Public Buildings) and Nancy Scammon (Parks and Recreation Department).

Since the last Community meeting on 1/16/20, the project team received hundreds of comments, via the project website (<https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/contact/>) as well as with handwritten sticky notes posted directly on the site display boards, which have been at the Senior Center. Based on community feedback, the two sites which have been brought forward, as having received the most comments and interest, are the Newton Center Triangle Parking Lot and the current Senior Center.

Feedback noted this evening will be tracked according to the following categories: Traffic, Neighborhood Impact, Parking and Site and will be recorded by NV5 (Owner’s Project Manager) to be posted on the project website: <https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/site-selection>. The architectural team of BH+A will refer to this information when preparing test fits for these sites, which will be the next step in the site evaluation process. The intent is to show test fits at the next Community meeting, which will be scheduled in March.

Participants were reminded to sign in to be added to the project list serve.

Josh provided a status update of the five (5) additional sites, which were presented at the last Community meeting. Comments received to date are posted to the project website: <https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/site-selection>. The Senior Center site and Newton Center Triangle received the most feedback although the Senior Center site received many more positive comments than the Newton Center Triangle site. With regard to the sites at 100 Walnut Street (Newton Ed Center) and 150 Jackson Road (former Aquinas College), a letter was received from Newton Public Schools (NPS) stating that although NPS supports the NewCAL project, based on current and future programming, they are not in a position to relinquish control of either of these sites. There was far less positive feedback with regard to the other remaining sites.

#### Senior Center site

The building is approximately 8,000SF with only 6000SF usable programming space. The City has over 25,000 residents over the age of 60, which correlates to the 5<sup>th</sup> largest over 60 population in the Commonwealth. The current building is undersized and cannot accommodate necessary services and programming. Whereas the current Senior Center building is on the National Register of Historic Places, the goal would be to preserve the building envelope as much as possible. There were comments about the possibility of preserving and salvaging historic elements and building new, to use the site area most efficiently. There were also comments made in favor of preserving the existing building, with an extensive renovation and addition. The City noted that regardless of whether the final design is an addition/ renovation or new construction, if NewCAL is built at the existing Senior Center site, programs and services currently offered will need to be temporarily relocated during construction. The City explained that although 345 Walnut Street is on the National Historic Register, the building can be taken down. A demolition review would be submitted to the Newton Historic Commission which would likely result in an 18-month demolition delay to determine whether the property can be preferentially preserved. BH+A will study options.

Parking will be challenging. It was noted that the Austin Street parking lot has 125 spaces, which have been returned for public use, and is not far from the Senior Center. Some onsite parking

spaces will be needed, adjacent to the building. Another option may be to extend parking on Highland Ave, towards Lowell Ave, only on one side.

Per rough calculations, the City provided an overview of how the current site could accommodate the proposed 35000SF building program. The front section of the existing building is 8000 SF (including the first floor and basement). Provided that portion of the current building is retained/renovated with a three story addition at the back, at 9000SF/floor, the proposed program would fit on the site. 5000SF would be available for onsite parking and circulation.

There will be targeted outreach to Newtonville residents and businesses.

The City has not approached the Swedenborgian Church across the street, although acquisitions will take up a huge part of the project budget.

A question was asked whether data is available about impact to local businesses during the Austin Street development?

A member of the Working Group stated that although the current Senior Center is beautiful from the front, the building itself is not HCP accessible via the Walnut Street side. It would be preferable for the architectural team to work with the entire site. Consideration needs to be made about preserving a building that was designed for a different use.

It was noted that the Walnut Street Enhancement project is scheduled to begin this July. Sidewalks and setbacks will be made wider. The City has put a hold on tree plantings in front of 345 Walnut Street.

Newtonville Area Council will be pleased to distribute a survey.

#### Newton Center Triangle site

Parking and traffic are already a challenge. Overall, this site will take more years and will cost more than the project budget, as opposed to building at the current Senior Center site. Opposition from local business owners in Newton Center needs to be considered. This location would take 8-10 years and 150 parking spaces would need to be replicated prior to the start of construction. To make this location viable will take time. A plan for parking and pedestrian and vehicular flow will need to be figured out, as part of a bigger vision plan for Newton Center.

The City noted advantages of Newton Center site: The site is geographically centered, larger, has more green space and has greater access to public transportation. At this site, NewCAL could be four stories, which would offer more potential for more programming on the ground floor.

Newton Center has a T stop, which is good. It was noted that most seniors drive who come to the Senior Center and regardless of the site selected, seniors will either drive or use NewMo. Public transportation should not be so heavily considered as a site selection factor.

There is concern about impact to local businesses, during construction as well as when the project is complete. The City noted that if parking modifications and accommodations cannot be made prior to the onset of construction, NewCAL will not be at the Newton Center site. The thought is that the majority of parking for the new senior center should be onsite.

A representative to Newton Center business owners noted local businesses would be negatively impacted and could go out of business. A landlord of many Union Street businesses noted that parking is already strained in Newton Center and businesses will not approve this site.

As a point of clarification, the City noted that the Newton Center green was never considered for NewCAL programming. The Triangle parking lot is 57,000SF, with expanded circulation areas, including berms and sidewalks, the total area is 75,000SF.

Parking in Newton Center is for patrons, commuters and employees. Need to make sure that NewCAL parking would not impact residents.

#### General Comments

A comment was made that either of these two sites would work. There is currently a trend in Brookline and Brighton to reduce vehicular traffic, improve mass transit and not add parking spaces. In the future, there will likely be fewer cars. Perhaps retailers should reconsider.

A comment was made that residents who live on the south side do not come to the current senior center as it is too far. Is it possible to assess whether residents on the south side would come to a new renovated building, at the Newtonville location? It was noted that as of a few months ago, visitors who came to the Senior Center via NewMo were from the following areas in Newton: 46% from south of Commonwealth Ave and 54% from north of Commonwealth Ave.

If NewCAL is not built at the current location, the building at 345 Walnut Street would remain City owned.

The plan is to increase hours, including weekends, at the new senior center facility.

The less time spent in the current senior center building will mean less money needs to be put into repairing a building which has lived well beyond its useful life.

Comments from attendees were recorded on boards at the front of the room and are noted in the tables below. Photos of the handwritten notes can be found on the project website:

<https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/site-selection>.

Neighborhood Impact			
Newton Center Triangle		Current Senior Center	
<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Challenges</u>	<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Challenges</u>
Business patronage would increase	Impact on businesses (small margin)	Business patronage would increase	Businesses would be impacted by construction
If possible to mitigate impact to businesses, could be a huge boom to the village	---	---	Parking would be needed to support project
New retailers	----	---	Neighborhood and nearby homes would be impacted
More green space	---	---	---
	Will need to be a pre-construction parking solution	---	---
	Businesses concerned about construction and parking	---	---

Site			
Newton Center Triangle		Current Senior Center	
<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Challenges</u>	<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Challenges</u>
Opportunity for more green space	Longer project time frame	Shorter project time	Programs and services will need to relocate during construction
More destinations in the village	Exceeds \$16.5M project budget	Can be built within \$16.5 project budget	Building is on the National Historic register so there is a process required for demolition
Geographically centrally located in City	Businesses would be impacted by construction	Demolish current building and build new, use all available site SF	Must drive to this location, there is no public transportation, other than NewMo
Access to public transportation	Green area would be restricted due to mature trees	Build an addition, but retain some historic features inside	---
More opportunity for access to ground floor programming	Public transportation options	Residents are familiar and are accustomed to this site	---
Greater potential for village	Not near Newtonville amenities	Nearby supermarket	---
Potential for more than just NewCAL	---	---	---

Traffic			
Newton Center Triangle		Current Senior Center	
<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Challenges</u>	<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Challenges</u>
High public transit	Tough traffic already	---	Traffic will increase during and after construction
Amazing site	Current traffic rating	---	---

Parking			
Newton Center Triangle		Current Senior Center	
<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Challenges</u>	<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Challenges</u>
Mitigate parking prior to construction	Need to replace parking close by	Austin Street parking lot is available	One sided parking on Highland Ave
	Most participants drive	Parking will be less of an issue during construction	---
	Parking is currently problematic	---	---
	Need onsite parking	---	---
	Will need to be a pre-construction parking solution	---	---
	Businesses concerned about construction and parking	---	---

