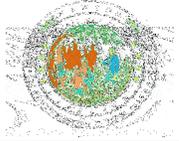




Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) project

Community Meeting			
Date:	Thursday, May 21, 2020		
Location:	Zoom meeting		
Time:	6:00PM		
Working Group Attendees:			
Alex Valcarce	<i>Public Buildings Dept.</i>	Nancy Scammon	<i>Parks & Rec Dept.</i>
Bea Goldsmith	<i>Community Member</i>	Norm Meltz	<i>Community Member</i>
Brooke Lipsitt	<i>Community Member</i>	Richard Rasala	<i>Community Member</i>
Devra Bailin	<i>Planning Department</i>	Sue Rasala	<i>Community Member</i>
Jayne Colino	<i>Senior Services Director</i>	Susan Albright	<i>City Councilor</i>
Jini Fairley	<i>Working Group</i>		
John Rice	<i>Community Member</i>	Melissa Gagnon	<i>NV5</i>
Jonathan Yeo	<i>Chief Operating Officer</i>	Joel Bargmann	<i>BH+A</i>
Josh Morse	<i>Public Buildings Dept.</i>	James Bruneau	<i>BH+A</i>

Josh Morse, the City of Newton Public Buildings Commissioner, opened up the meeting at 6:00PM. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 public health crisis, the Community meeting took place virtually, via Zoom. A total of (92) participants joined the meeting. In addition to Josh Morse, the following participating groups and individuals were recognized: NewCAL Working Group, Council on Aging (COA), BH+A (architects). Jayne Colino (Director of Senior Services), Alex Valcarce (Newton Public Buildings Department project manager) and Melissa Gagnon (NV5, Owner’s Project Manager) helped to facilitate the meeting.

At the last Community meeting on 2/27/20, feedback was received for the two sites: the Newton Centre Triangle and the existing Senior Center site at 345 Walnut Street in Newtonville. Since then, the project team has continued to evaluate both sites to address the challenges and capitalize on opportunities.

For the Newton Centre Triangle to be a viable site, parking and traffic challenges will need to be addressed prior to starting construction. The process will cause NewCAL at the Newton Centre site to take longer and cost more. NewCAL at the Newtonville location will take a shorter amount of time and will fit into the project budget. By building in Newtonville, an asset that Newtonville depends on will not be removed.

BH+A worked with collaboratively the NewCAL Working Group for the past six to seven weeks studying options for both sites. Test fits are plans which confirm whether the NewCAL program will fit on the site. Consistent across all test fits being presented is the exact same building program: a 33,000SF building with a 6200SF gym and walking track above. All options are universally accessible with a ground level entry, elevators, and accessible circulation and egress systems. All test fits have been brought up to the same level. The details of the plan layout and space adjacencies is to prove that the program will fit on each of the sites. The plan design is not final and will need to be worked out in the future, depending which option is determined to be the best for the site. A traffic study will be done when the range of options is narrowed and the economy improves.

Newtonville site

The site is surrounded by a mixture of institutional, commercial and residential buildings.

The following three (3) test fit options for this site were studied and presented:

- Option #1 – Retain existing building with an addition to the rear
- Option #2 – New three-story building
- Option #3 – New four-story building

Option #1:

The existing senior center is a former branch library. The existing addition at the rear of the building would be removed and only the original library core, facing Walnut Street, would remain. The two existing reading rooms have high ceilings with lots of natural light as well as the basement level rooms which have windows at 7'-0" above the floor. An addition would be built at the back and at the side (facing Highland Ave). A new entry at the corner of Highland Ave and Walnut St would help to unite the commercial and residential neighborhoods. The new entry addition would preserve the two-story stained glass window of the existing building. There are (27) covered parking spaces, all beneath the second floor. A design goal is to have 30-40% of parking spaces located within 125' of an entrance, which is accomplished.

There are half levels between the basement, new 1st floor, existing 1st floor and the new 2nd floor. Of the three test fits created for the Newtonville site, due to lack of space on the ground level, this is the only option where the multi-purpose room, dining and kitchen, are on the second floor. Destination spaces are on the third floor: Walking track, fitness, game room, administration and 3000SF of activity spaces. The addition preserves the existing two-story stain glass windows. Also, under the existing senior center there is approximately 3000SF of activity space which receives some light from existing windows. Overall, the existing building would be reused for approximately 6000SF of active usable space.

Option #2:

In this scheme, there is still a fair amount of green space along Walnut Street although it is somewhat reduced with the advantage of being able to expose some parking and not having the cost of having to cover all the parking in Option #1. The trade-off between site coverage and building height is studied in options 2 and 3. Option #2 is a 3-story building which needs to encroach deeper into the site to accommodate the gym. Although the gym is oriented so the impact to abutters is as minimal as possible. The alignment of the main entrance is maintained across from Washington Park which creates a very nice lobby space which unites Walnut Street and parking. In this scheme there are 34 parking spaces, which is 21 more spaces than at the existing center, all of which are within 125' of the back entry.

The plan arrangement includes dining and public spaces all facing the dining establishments along Walnut Street with smaller, more intimate programming areas on the neighborhood side of the building. The entry lobby is two-story so that the 2nd floor is visually connected. In all the options the gym is on the 2nd floor with a walking track above and in all the options the kitchen, dining and multipurpose are on the 1st floor, with the exception of Option #1 where kitchen, dining and multipurpose are on the 2nd floor. Overall, all programming locations and adjacencies are interchangeable and should not be focused on.

Option #3:

This four-story option studies the trade-off between a taller building and less site coverage. By increasing the building to a full four stories, land coverage is dramatically reduced creating a larger green space along Walnut Street. The four-story section of the building would be near the corner of Highland Ave and Walnut St, closer to the commercial zone of the property. Similar to option #2, the main entrance is aligned opposite Washington Park. Another advantage is that there is a lot more space along Walnut Street for a nicer green space.

The lobby is a 2-story space connecting to activity rooms on 2nd floor. Very flexible on a day to day operational basis. Third floor has the gym and a roof deck, so some of building mass is able to be reduced. The massing is only two stories which faces the abutters. On the 4th floor is the walking track, with another deck. This option incorporates two decks which can be used for outdoor programming, including Tai Chi. Going taller allows the building to be shorter on the neighborhood side of the site.

Newton Centre Triangle site

The site is along Centre, Langley and Beacon streets in a vibrant urban site with a combination of commercial and institutional buildings with residential buildings in the background. There are 152 parking spaces in the existing lot.

The concept is to place the gym, the taller portion of the building, along the taller side of the site and the lower portions of the building along the Bank of America side of the site with shorter story buildings. The building program honors the path that runs between the Newton Centre green and the parking lot so the setback has been kept back along the walkway so the building doesn't encroach onto the green space.

The following three (3) test fit options for this site were studied and presented:

- Option #1 – Two-story building
- Option #2 – Three-story building
- Option #3 – Four-story building

Option #1:

A new two-story option provides the largest footprint with 19000SF on one floor level. Able to accommodate the multi-purpose, dining, fitness, activity, gym and kitchen all on one level as well as a café seating area which could spill out onto a courtyard off the green. The lobby could also spill onto the courtyard. This option takes the largest number of existing parking spaces with 92 left from 152 existing. The lobby goes up to the 2nd floor which has more contemplative spaces including walking track, art room, computer room, classrooms, meeting room, game room and some administration. This is a nice, compact two-story scheme.

Option #2:

A new three-story option raises part of the building to gain more parking. By raising the gym, 127-130+ spaces can likely be achieved. A benefit of lifting the building is that a covered drop-off area is created which brings you into a lobby space. Similar to other schemes is the kitchen, activity/dining space on the ground floor (with the exception of the option that keeps the existing building). Activity spaces with the gym are on the 2nd floor. More game rooms, classrooms and admin are on the 3rd floor with a walking track, plus a large roof deck area for outdoor activities, which helps to lower the scale of the building as it comes across the site.

Option #3:

A new four-story option, migrated towards the taller portion of the site. Like Option #2, 127-130+ parking spaces are achieved. The scheme is the same as Option #3 on the Newtonville site.

As a concept, this option has the lobby, kitchen, dining/activity rooms and café/juice bar on the 1st floor with game rooms, fitness, computer admin and art on 2nd floor. The 3rd floor has the gym and a roof deck and on the 4th floor is the walking track, with another deck. The building is the same whether it is in Newtonville or in Newton Centre.

Based on options presented, it remains to be determined which site option is best. Is a 2-story, 3-story or 4-story building better? Which is better? A lower building with more site coverage or a taller building with less site coverage? All other factors are equal across options presented.

Site Statistics

As part of the presentation a summary of statistics was prepared to compare what is common and not common between the various schemes including the number of floor levels, onsite parking (covered and non-covered), available roof deck, etc.

Newtonville



Option 1



Option 2



Option 3



Newton Centre Triangle



Option 1

Option 2

Option 3



Community Feedback and General Comments

The City noted that a lot of time has been spent evaluating the two sites. For the Newton Centre Triangle site, the team did a great job creating a compact version of NewCAL which preserves as much parking as possible. Of the three options presented in Newtonville, an add/reno would keep the existing facility prominent and not buried. Balances will need to be considered when evaluating an add/reno vs. new construction.

Opportunities and challenges discussed at the last Community meeting were noted. In Newtonville, there is an opportunity to increase onsite parking in addition to the senior parking program on Highland Ave. Also, given that 345 Walnut Street is the current home to the senior center, a challenge will be relocating programs and services during construction.

Next steps include meeting with the Council on Aging next week as well as a presentation to the City Council Public Facilities and Programs and Services committees and a meeting with the Ward councilors in both districts.



Community Feedback

How heavily used is the Newton Center parking lot? The Newtonville location is preferred although starting from scratch may be better. If NewCAL is in Newton Centre, what would happen to the existing building in Newtonville?

The Triangle parking lot has approximately an 80% utilization rate. In addition to the new dedicated parking spaces for NewCAL, 152 displaced parking would need to be replicated prior to the start of construction. The existing senior center would remain as a City asset, although the specific use is TBD.

Business owners in Newton Centre are very concerned about the impact NewCAL would have on their businesses.

The concern that Newton Centre businesses have expressed is real. A great deal of work will be required to ensure that no additional pressure is put on businesses.

The presentation was brilliant. For the Newton Centre site, how would NewCAL be designed as it faces Centre Street to fit into the community?

Massing and aesthetics would need to be studied.

In Newton Centre, would a 4-story building present a problem with shading for the existing trees and grass?

There would be some shade on the grass area during the morning hours. Studies will need to be performed.

What is the understanding of the new budget and how does it affect the plan for NewCAL? Also concern about how the project will be funded, without a tax override.

Covid-19 has put pressure on municipal projects. Although there is sufficient funding in place to carry the project through the Fall for site selection, steps thereafter will need to be reviewed with the administration and City Council.

Any construction project in Newton Centre will have unseen problems that cannot be anticipated. To be considered are: 1) The cost to remain in Newtonville is a lot less and 2) the City needs to be thorough and careful with parking. Businesses need customers and customers need access.



Very impressed with the presentation. Concern was expressed about the Newton Centre site specifically with regard to traffic. Newtonville Option #2 is preferred as covered parking would be nice in the wintertime. Feel strongly about maintaining the fabric of the street. Option #1 is nice as the library is retained. A real café should be considered as well as outdoor patio.

A real café could compete with local businesses. The goal is for local businesses to embrace the new facility.

Perhaps consideration could be made for local businesses to supply coffee and pastries, which would benefit merchants.

How would new construction in Newtonville be affected by the historic nature of the existing building?

The existing senior center is on the National Historic Register. An 18-month demolition delay would likely be required, regardless of whether or not the preferred option requires the building to be demolished. Even if not being demolished, because the building is being modified, a demolition review will be required with the Historic Commission.

A member of the Newton business community should be on the NewCAL planning committee.

The question was asked about whether there is a sufficient number of restrooms on each floor, as well as a shower, in the event of an emergency.

The plan is to maximize the quantity of individual private toilet rooms vs. gang facilities.

The chair of the COA inquired about how the add/reno option in Newtonville will integrate with the existing building.

The plan is for all four walls of the existing building, including the roof, to be maintained as historic features. The historic architecture would be incorporated into the new architecture. The exterior of the existing building would be historically preserved and the interior would look brand new. All building systems would be upgraded. The feel would be like walking into a brand new facility.

The two stained glass windows are part of the historical significance, dating back to 1938. The window that faces Highland Ave depicts Robert Frost while the opposite window which faces Walnut Place depicts Emily Dickinson.

Newtonville Option #3 (four story) is preferred. Smaller footprint and shorter time frame.

Given the many issues that need to be addressed and solved with both sites, Newtonville may be the better option. The extended schedule associated with the Newton Centre site is a deterrent. Even if the City could afford to build NewCAL in Newton Centre, building in Newtonville is a more financially prudent option. The four story option offers more land and is better for potential expansion. The option for roof programming (gardens and decks) is a strong benefit. The more the building can be opened up is better. Also may be opportunities for solar panels and a garden. An add/reno will be challenging to blend new architecture with the existing building.

The Newtonville site is preferred for many reasons, including places to walk and sit, a pharmacy, supermarket and bus transportation.

Concern was noted about possible effects on the neighborhood and would vote not for the four story option as it is too high for Newtonville. The Needham senior center has a wonderful café, dining room and an outdoor deck.

The Newtonville site has many advantages, including cost and schedule. The project will cost more to try to renovate in comparison with building new. Option #3 (three stories) would be favored. Perhaps existing stained glass windows could be salvaged and transplanted to the new building. Option #4 (four stories) would be taller and would be farther away from homes on Walnut Place so the possible impact would be less. Could be pulled even closer to Walnut Street.

From a programming point of view, remote programming may be more prevalent in the future. Spaces should be flexible.

Every space will be designed with technology to broadcast activities. Although Covid-19 will impact changes to design, there needs to be a sense of community where seniors can gather in person.

Would like to see the existing senior center retained (Newtonville Option #1), similar to what was achieved in other towns including Ayer, Groton, Westford and Dracut.

Would the original entrance at the existing senior center still be functional? All public entrances need to be accessible. The current non-real entry door doesn't make any sense.

The costs are needed for Newtonville options 1, 2 and 3 before a decision can be made. Appreciate the notion of salvaging and reusing the two existing stained glass windows in a new building. Option #3 is preferred as there is more green space.

In the add/reno option, in lieu of stairs at Walnut Street, the doors could go out to a terrace which is only accessible from the interior.

The idea of an elevated seating area can be studied.

Is the gymnasium regulation size? Has there been any consideration given to a smaller gym?

The original program included a 10,000SF gym. The current gym size is comparable to the size gym at the new Angier, Zervas and Cabot elementary schools which is appropriate for the robust programming and there is no driving force to be smaller.

Interested in playing basketball and volleyball in the new gym and the size shouldn't be smaller than the proposed 6200SF.

It may be easier to make connections and foster social interactions in a two-story building. The social connection may get lost in a taller building.

The existing building will provide a sense of history and belonging, even with well-done modern addition.

The Needham library is a good example of retaining the existing building with a new addition.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:18PM.

Prepared by: Melissa Gagnon, NV5 [End of 05/21/20 Meeting Minutes]

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Formatted: Font: Bold

Formatted: Font: 12 pt