


Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) project

Community Meeting					
Date: Tuesday, January 5, 2021					
Location: Zoom meeting					
Time: 6:30PM					
Attendees – City Staff, Working Group and Consultant Team:					
Alex Valcarce	<i>Public Buildings Dept.</i>		Norm Meltz	<i>Community Member</i>	
Brooke Lipsitt	<i>Community Member</i>		Richard Rasala	<i>Community Member</i>	
Jayne Colino	<i>Senior Services Director</i>		Sue Rasala	<i>Community Member</i>	
Jini Fairley	<i>Working Group</i>		Susan Albright	<i>City Councilor</i>	
John Rice	<i>Community Member</i>				
Jonathan Yeo	<i>Chief Operating Officer</i>		Melissa Gagnon	<i>NV5</i>	
Josh Morse	<i>Public Buildings Dept.</i>		Joel Bargmann	<i>BH+A</i>	
Nancy Scammon	<i>Parks & Rec Dept.</i>		James Bruneau	<i>BH+A</i>	

Alex Valcarce, the City of Newton Public Buildings Deputy Commissioner, opened up the meeting at 6:30PM. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 public health crisis, the Community meeting took place virtually, via Zoom. 100+ participants joined the meeting. The following participating groups and individuals were recognized: NewCAL Working Group, Council on Aging (COA), Advisory Board, Jayne Colino (Director of Senior Services), BH+A (architects) and NV5 (Owner’s Project Manager).

The intent of this meeting is to provide a progress update to the Community since the last meeting on 10/01/20. BH+A will present two approaches being studied: An adaptive reuse of the existing facility as well as building an entirely new facility. The project is currently in the feasibility level of design. When a design approach is selected, the project will move into schematic design when program locations and space adjacencies will be studied more closely. The plan for tonight is to solicit feedback and discuss opportunities and challenges of the two approaches.

BH+A reviewed existing conditions at 345 Walnut Street, which is a 26,000SF site at just over ½ an acre. Highlights of existing conditions assessments and findings were reviewed. There are 15 parking spaces behind the existing facility, 25 spaces along Highland Ave and 125+ spaces at the Austin Street lot (shared with NNHS and the NV commercial district) which collectively total 170+ spaces.

Over the past few months, approximately 18 different options were studied for both add/reno and a new building. Two of these options have been determined by the Working Group to best demonstrate the promise of each approach. The program spaces and overall size of the buildings have been designed

equally for the two approaches. A decision should not be based on which approach works best programmatically but rather which works best functionally on the site. The approaches are:

- Reuse Existing Building with an Addition
- New Construction

The current setback from abutters was measured from two points: 63 feet from the rear SW corner to the property line and 83 feet from the main entrance (rear) to the property line. Setbacks will be compared with approaches being studied. The existing building is an important component of the City's history, not only for its role as a public library and now senior center, but also as a cornerstone of Newtonville. It is distinctive with a handsome appearance.

Reuse Existing Building with Addition:

Only the front portion of the building would be retained, not the back service portions. The main core building has two large reading rooms and a center atrium. The entry off the atrium is not handicapped accessible and is no longer used; the door is four feet above grade plus another two feet to the main floor; the main floor is six feet above grade which is not accessible to anyone with physical or mobility challenges. Currently, the front door is in the back, at grade with an elevator to the main level.

If renovated, the building will have to be structurally graded plus the roof will need to be removed and replaced. A fair amount of the interior historic fabric will be impacted with select features repurposed.

In addition to the main floor level six feet above grade, the existing basement level is six feet below grade. The first floor at the addition would be raised to be continuous with the existing building. This would create a 16,000SF first floor plate bringing together large public components of the NewCAL program including activity rooms, dining room, kitchen, juice bar, fitness room and administration spaces.

Given location of nearby parking, the main entry is conveniently located at the north end of the site, near Highland Ave and Walnut Street with stairs, lift and ramp inside the building. The second floor has destination type spaces: gymnasium, classrooms, reading room and conference rooms. The third floor has one classroom, walking track and a 2,500SF south facing outdoor deck for passive use activities. The majority of programming is consolidated on two floors with primary public programs on the first level.

With the first floor of the addition raised, there is space below for parking. Per existing conditions geotech report, the first 7'-8' of fill needs to be removed and re-compacted. Hence, there is opportunity to remove the first 3'-4' of fill and create partially below grade parking. In addition to creating 24 covered parking spaces onsite, structural refill would not be needed below the addition. Parking entry/exit is off Walnut Place with elevator and stair access from the lower level to upstairs. There is additional storage space in the basement.

A downside of retaining the existing building and adding to the back, is that the building is pushed closer to the abutters in the rear, whereas a benefit is that the front yard is able to be maintained.

New Construction:

A primary benefit of new construction is that the entrance, first floor and parking can all be at the same at grade level which eliminates the issue of the first floor of the existing building being up several feet, which is the case with the renovation approach. In the scheme presented, parking is at grade, which is partially covered by the second floor gymnasium. There are 33 on-site parking spaces, which one is able to drive through by entering on Walnut Place and existing through to Highland Avenue.

The main building entrance is at the corner of Highland Avenue and Walnut Street on the prominent urban corner with main types of programming spaces easily accessible on the first floor: activity rooms, dining room, kitchen, juice bar and administration spaces. On the second floor are more destination type spaces including the gymnasium (above parking) as well as large program spaces including fitness, activity rooms and additional administration spaces. Similar to the renovation scheme, the third floor has a walking track, smaller program spaces, administrative offices and a 2,400SF south facing outdoor deck for passive use activities, which overlooks Walnut Street. The intent is to distribute administrative programming throughout the building, to have a staff presence on each floor.

Two subtle differences were studied for siting this option, both with an entrance at the corner of Highland Avenue and Walnut:

- Gym volume located more towards the rear of the site, approximately 13' off the property line with the 2-story volume approximately 63' from the property line.
- Sliding the building closer to Walnut Street would allow for a greater buffer (30') to the rear property line although would provide less of a generous entrance and less of a front yard along Walnut Street. Moves front of new building to be more in line with buildings on Walnut Street.

For both the renovation and new construction approaches, diagrammatic aerial massing perspectives were presented with programmatic spaces labeled.

Big picture thoughts and questions about keeping the existing building:

- What is the value of historical asset vs. what it may cost to keep/preserve the existing building?
- What is the value of historical asset relative to the encroachment on abutters?
- Is accessibility reasonably solved in the adaptive reuse approach?

Community Feedback

RESUSE EXISTING BUILDING WITH ADDITION – Comments:	
Retaining the existing building has great value to Newtonville history and to the memories of its inhabitants.	
When visually important buildings are lost, the neighborhood could lose its character and identity.	
It would be great if the front portion of the building can be preserved.	
Perhaps raise the deck to the top level so more spaces can be built. Keep the old front, and do all changes in the rear and sides and even add more floors.	
A closer study needs to be done re: proximity to the rear property line.	
Current green space in front as well as the character of the existing building would be compromised. With a new building, green space would be compromised.	
Significant development has been made to reuse option which solves many of the issues raised in the previous presentation although there is still concern about the proximity to the direct abutters behind.	
This option is much preferred. New construction appears cold and doesn't fit into the neighborhood.	
Questions:	Answers:
How is the parking garage accessed?	The entry and exit will be via Walnut Place. There is a basement level stair and elevator to the upper floors.
If the building is reused, is there a plan to replace sewer lines and building utilities?	The interior would look completely new as the building will be entirely gutted, including an MEP system upgrade.
Will the ramp be covered or will it be subject to weather (i.e. snow)?	The ramp is completely interior so there is no exposure to weather elements.
Size of primary program areas in the current center are inadequate. Rooms in the new facility should be configured differently to accommodate larger groups.	In addition to the reuse of the two reading rooms on the first floor, there is a 1500SF dining room, 1600 SF activity room, and 6300SF gym (six times the size of the current multipurpose room) all of which can be subdivided.

Why not consider raising the addition component a full story above grade rather than a half story above grade?	Going up a full story may not gain more parking. The first floor of the addition would be higher above grade which would not align with the existing first floor.
Concern was expressed with regard to ramp safety for older individuals. A change in vertical height is not ideal, either by ramp or stairs. Visitors to the center should be able to walk in directly at grade. Are there any senior centers in the area which require a ramp to enter?	Ramps are needed to create a non-mechanical means to ensure accessibility for those who cannot walk and need to use a wheelchair or another mobility device. No other senior centers, which were visited by the team, have a ramp or stairs when entering the building.
How can the existing building be transformed to look alive as opposed to simply a piece of historic architecture?	The goal is to shift the primary entrance to the corner of Highland Avenue and Walnut Street to draw visitors in however it will be challenging to open up the front of the building.
Is there a direct entrance from the parking garage, which would alleviate needing to use the ramp, lift or stairs?	There is elevator access from the parking level to the main floor.

NEW CONSTRUCTION - Comments
A new building offers more flexibility and parking and provides more freedom for program design.
Setbacks are concerning with the adaptive reuse scheme. The new building approach is more “friendly” to the abutters and is much more preferred as it is less intrusive to the neighbors.
The new construction approach is preferred for traffic flow and accessible spaces, plus there seems to be more space.
The new building design will need to fit into the neighborhood.
A building where visitors can walk directly in, without needing to go up a ramp or lift, may be more inviting and welcoming.

Questions:	Answers:
Will there be a basement in the new building?	The design is slab on grade so there is no basement. Storage areas are incorporated in upper level spaces.
Is there zoning impact to the neighborhood and the existing building?	Typically zoning aspect is handled through site plan approval. Relationship to property lines and setbacks will be studied. Will work with abutters to determine landscape, screening, planting elements which may be needed. Existing building will need to be upgraded to meet current codes which will require structural frame reinforcement as well as replacing the roof.

GENERAL COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS	
If the gymnasium roof were flat, the overall height would be reduced plus there would be opportunity for a roof garden.	
More development of the entrances is needed for both schemes. Love the large decks.	
If the deck was raised to the top level (½ deck and ½ garden) more programmatic space could be accommodated.	
The final decision should be based on which approach would have the least environmental impact.	
With regard to sustainability and LEED, a new building is probably preferred although would need to aesthetically fit into Victorian context of Walnut Place.	
The design should look forward and emphasize the NewMo system rather than be so parking focused.	
Questions:	Answers:
Although both design proposals seem good, what is the cost difference?	Costs are currently being evaluated with independent cost estimators. Typically, renovation projects cost more although to what degree is to be determined.
What is the difference in the total parking count between reuse and new building approaches?	Add/reno: 24 onsite parking spaces (incl. 4 HCP) New construction: 33 onsite parking spaces (incl. 4 HCP)

Has there been consideration of a second story parking garage?	A second level becomes very expensive and the existing foundation could be undermined.
Can either or both approaches meet LEED certification or other environmentally green measures?	Both reuse and new construction design approaches can achieve LEED certification at any level the City chooses to aspire to.
It would be unfortunate to destroy the entire building. Can the front façade be retained even with new construction? Will there be any brick if a new construction option is selected?	To save only the front façade would be very expensive relative to the project budget. There can certainly be a brick façade on new construction and can be designed to be very traditional to fit into the neighborhood. Also, if only the façade were retained, it would not align with new floor levels and would become very complicated.
When this process began, the group had comparisons with Needham, Waltham & Wellesley Senior Centers. How do the two models compare in terms of SF space allocation?	If the gym and walking track are removed from the equation, other program components are level with Needham which is 22,000SF, and are slightly larger than Wellesley. Also, a significant expansion in hours of operation is being considered. The gym can be subdivided into four smaller spaces which offers growth opportunity.
A tight building is being designed on a limited site. Has the City reached out to immediate abutters?	The City has begun to open lines of communication with direct abutters, of which several are in attendance this evening.
Is the track around gym area hanging, similar to the West Suburban YMCA?	Yes, the track is a hanging track.
Has a sound proof room been considered for musical performance with great audio set up?	There is opportunity in the dining area to be a flexible space. Also a good opportunity to create a mid-sized performance venue to showcase the senior center band. Intent going forward is to broadcast performances and events virtually in addition to in-person programming.
Are funding options being considered?	Fundraising options are being looked into. If anyone is interested in helping out with fundraising, please contact Jayne Colino at the Newton Senior Center.
How do the proposed schemes compare with the size of the current facility?	The current building has approximately 8000SF of usable space whereas the proposed options are close to four times that size.

<p>What is the environmental impact of each design approach? Which would have a lower impact on the environment, during construction, as well as re: energy usage going forward?</p>	<p>Embodied carbon and long term environmental impacts long term can be considered. Both buildings can be made equally efficient with enough effort although may be more simple to achieve with new construction. From an energy performance standpoint, the approaches can be very similar. In new construction there is more embodied carbons, whereas in an add/reno the embodied carbon already exists. However, new construction gross SF would be smaller in comparison with add/reno.</p>
<p>Is there an advantage between the two options, between state and federal funding options, or is there no difference?</p>	<p>At this point, although we are looking at local funding, an add/reno option could potentially be eligible for some historic funds from CPC or other historic resources. There are some sustainability grants and rebate programs which could apply to both building types.</p>
<p>Presuming the design approaches have taken into consideration the current pandemic situation, which design is better suited for the current times?</p>	<p>Technology and ability to have a program online and stream out to the community is very important. A building which is significantly larger will be a huge benefit. Plus, there will be opportunities to go above and beyond in terms of ventilation improvements.</p>
<p>Do either of these design approaches allow for future expansion?</p>	<p>No. The site is tight. Future expansion could be accommodated by means of property expansion, tear down and start over or even further expanding hours to accommodate increase in program demands. A 600% increase in participation and building use is anticipated. Online programming will also be factored in.</p>
<p>Will there be a traffic study done to determine how many cars will be going down Walnut Place? Walnut Place is windy and narrow and can be difficult to navigate in bad weather.</p>	<p>Traffic studies will be done. Need to factor in pandemic so measuring actual counts may not be representative although simulations can be run. The windy and narrow nature of Walnut Place will be taken into consideration.</p>
<p>What is the comparison of the total usable SF between the two approaches?</p>	<p>The total SF of usable program area and the size of each room is identical in the two schemes with exception of 2000SF of storage space in the basement of the existing building. In the new scheme, storage areas are distributed throughout. There is more storage in the add/reno.</p>

<p>Is the overall 18-24 construction time frame the same for both approaches?</p>	<p>At this point, the same amount of time is anticipated for both approaches, although an add/reno could take longer. Could be a faster timeline with new construction. In the event an add/reno option is supported by the Community and the NHC, the 18-month demolition delay could be waived. Regardless, the design process will likely take the full 18-month time frame.</p>
<p>Has the church across the street been considered re: potential for NewCAL expansion?</p>	<p>The Church property is on the City's radar. For either approach there may be an opportunity to lease parking space from the Church which could be mutually beneficial.</p>
<p>What are next steps in the approval process? Will the Council be asked to endorse one of these approaches? How and when will this decision be made?</p>	<p>The process is really about consensus. An update is being presented to the City Council tomorrow, 1/06, and to the COA later this month. The Working Group will ultimately make a recommendation to the Mayor, and then the Mayor will recommend to the City Council. Additional design funds will need to be docketed for the next phase. In the event a new construction option is selected, the design will be continue to be developed and may look different than the approach presented.</p>
<p>What is the URL of the NewCAL website?</p>	<p>https://newcal.projects.nv5.com</p>

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:23PM.

Prepared by: Melissa Gagnon, NV5 [End of 01/05/21 Meeting Minutes]