

Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) project

Community Meeting					
Date: Monday, February 22, 2021					
Location: Zoom meeting					
Time: 6:30PM					
Attendees – City Staff and Consultant Team:					
Alex Valcarce	<i>Public Buildings Dept.</i>		Melissa Gagnon	NV5	
Josh Morse	<i>Public Buildings Dept.</i>		Joel Bargmann	BH+A	
Jayne Colino	<i>Senior Services Director</i>		James Bruneau	BH+A	
Jini Fairly	<i>Commission on Disability</i>		Joel Bargmann	BH+A	

Alex Valcarce, the City of Newton Public Buildings Deputy Commissioner, opened up the meeting at 6:33PM. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 public health crisis, the Community meeting took place virtually, via Zoom. 51 participants joined the meeting. The following participating groups and individuals were represented: Public Buildings Department, NewCAL Working Group, Council on Aging (COA) Advisory Board, Jayne Colino (Director of Senior Services), BH+A (architects) and NV5 (Owner’s Project Manager).

Due to Zoom a recent Zoom bombing incident at the Design Review Committee (DRC) meeting last week, all participants were automatically muted upon entry tonight and remained muted in order for the City to maintain control of the meeting. Participants were unmuted upon requesting to speak.

The intent of this meeting was to provide a progress update to the Community since the last meeting on 01/05/21. In addition to design documents previously presented, BH+A prepared additional information with regard to the following two approaches being studied: An adaptive reuse of the existing facility and an entirely new facility. The plan is to present conceptual renderings to help the Community better understand what the facility may look like in 3D form. The presentation will include a brief overview of conceptual costs depicting the order of magnitude cost difference between the two options.

It was explained that the project is approaching the end of the Feasibility Study phase when a decision will need to be made as to whether an addition/renovation or new construction is the preferred approach. Based on feedback received from the various committees including the DRC, Community, COA, COD and City Council, the Working Group will ultimately make a recommendation to the Mayor.

BH+A presented Feasibility Study level plans, which aid in making big picture decisions. There will be many opportunities to take the conceptual design to the next stages of development. In summary, the site being studied is at 345 Walnut Street, on the corner of Walnut Street and Highland Avenue, which is home to the current Senior Center in a former library building. Although there are onsite parking opportunities, there is also availability along Highland Avenue and the Austin Street parking lot.

Intent is to present both schemes as equally as possible so the benefits and drawbacks of each option can be understood. A quick overview of the two options is as follows:

Addition/Renovation

For this option, there would be an addition onto the existing building. The main issue with the existing building is that the main level is 6' above the outside sidewalk grade. The main windows are 6' above the floor in the main reading rooms. Also, when entering via the former main entrance at Walnut Street, there is another couple of feet to access the main level of the building.

The rear portion of the existing building would be removed. The front yard would be maintained with the new addition all to the rear. Distances from the property line to the building addition vary from 5' to 22.' Raising the first floor of the addition would create 16,000SF of a contiguous floor plate at the main level with parking at 4'-5' below grade. The 24 car parking garage is two way, with entry and exit via Walnut Place. When arriving by car, the building can be entered from the basement/parking level.

Pedestrians can enter via the corner entry at Walnut Street and Highland Avenue and can access the main level via a stair, lift or ramp to get from the sidewalk level up 6' to the main floor level. Building program is organized with larger scale activities on the first floor, gymnasium and smaller more destination type of rooms on the second floor and the walking track with additional smaller activity spaces on the third floor. Plus, 3000SF of outdoor deck space on the third floor. The center of the senior center is a circulation zone with a stair and elevator.

Three conceptual renderings were presented depicting variations in materials and roof styles. A mostly transparent corner entry volume will serve as a connection between the front building and the addition. Materials will be studied to determine whether a darker or lighter color is preferred. The building height to the eave on the add/reno is 46' on the three story volumes and 33' on the two story volumes. Pitched and flat roof rendered options were presented.

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

In order to gain as much space as possible between the building and the neighbors to the rear, the building is shifted closer to Walnut Street. The entrance remains on the corner of Walnut Street and Highland Avenue, connecting to Newtonville. Although the building is closer to Walnut Street, the set back from the neighbors is exactly the same as it is today, minus the gymnasium volume. The new building entry is at grade removing barriers to building access. Program distribution is similar to the add/reno option, with larger, more public spaces on the first floor, gym on the second floor and track on the third floor. Upper level outdoor programming space consists of a 2400SF south/east facing deck.

Both design options would present themselves as primarily brick community buildings with similar scale and detail. The intent is to show transition between two and three story elements. Variations show change in material in the volumes showing varying levels of transparency with a nice connectivity to

Walnut Street. The renderings presented show different options which can be developed pending selection of a preferred design approach. Primary differences between the two options are as follows:

	Addition/Renovation	New Construction
Onsite parking	Parking is two way, partially below grade. Due to grades, enter and exit via Walnut Place. 24 onsite parking spaces.	Parking is one way, at grade, enter via Walnut Place and exit to Highland Avenue. 33 onsite parking spaces.
Setbacks and front green space	The addition is completely in the back and new building is closer to neighbors in the back. Existing green space in the front is maintained.	Although the building is closer to Walnut Street, setbacks from the rear property line are similar to what they are today, minus the gym volume. There is less green space in front.
Entrance and first floor access	At grade entrance is 6' below main level. First floor is accessed via stair, ramp or lift.	Entrance first floor and parking are all at grade level.

Cost Review

Different categories are included in the construction number, including A) Direct Trade Costs which is the cost of building with various trades such as brick, roof, windows, etc., B) Design and Pricing Contingency which factors in unknown costs which are unknown at this time (contingency is reduced as the design develops and becomes more defined), C) Indirect Trade Costs are costs which the general contractor carries to cover general conditions, liability, performance bonds and fees. Based on this conceptual estimate, the cost difference between the two options is \$2.4M with \$18.5M for add/reno and \$16.1M for new construction. The main differences are the add/reno has semi underground parking as well as additional costs associated with removing/replacing the existing roof. There are conditions with the existing building which would increase the construction cost in comparison with a new building.

Community Feedback

RESUSE EXISTING BUILDING WITH ADDITION – Comments:
When visually important buildings are lost, the neighborhood could lose its character and identity.
It would be great if the front center portion of the building can be preserved with new addition creating an entry courtyard. This would be an appropriate nod to the existing building.
The existing building is a smaller scale and has more articulated shapes and provides modulation between the street and the large building behind.

NEW CONSTRUCTION - Comments:
A new building offers more flexibility and parking and provides more freedom for program design.
New construction is more welcoming. A new building where visitors can walk directly in, without needing to go up a ramp or lift, may be more inviting and welcoming. At grade street level entry would be much more welcoming and more inclusive.
New construction fulfills the function of a senior enter to make it easier for seniors to use the center.
New construction would be nicer, better and more welcoming.
A covered drop-off/pick-up area is needed, protected from inclement weather.
Need to consider location for bus pick up/parking area for day trips.
New construction has better traffic flow and the greater number of parking spaces. Needing to back up in parking garage could be problematic.
New construction has better functionality, cost and timeline. New building is less expensive.
Function has to be the #1 consideration. New construction has better drive through parking and ease of at grade entry. The new building being closer to the street creates more of a village connection.
More thought should be given to alternate transportation options, beyond car accessibility. Electric bike parking areas.
New construction will have greater flexibility to support greater capacity for future potential users. More building flexibility and more parking.
A new building gives an opportunity to create a more transparent, open and more permeable type of structure. More flexibility in space design. Opportunity for a green energy approach. The building should be made transparent to the village community and closer to the street. The building becomes open and accessible to the village center which is important as seniors continue to be part of the fabric of the village community.
New construction has potential to be inclusive, accessible and green. Energy should be put into a covered drop-off area in lieu of more onsite parking.
New construction will not need to make compromises with features of the existing building.
Love idea of movable walls in exercise rooms.

Hope to engage with younger community, and not just be a senior center.	
There is a possibility to capture some outdoor seating in front, similar to what currently exists.	
Building height and setback: A portion of the new building which faces Walnut Place is a combination of two and three stories. The gym is almost 100' set back from Walnut Place, which is 40' high to the eave. The set back on Walnut Street is 15'+/-. There is some opportunity to move the building a few feet back from Walnut.	
Questions:	Answers:
Is there any opportunity for more onsite parking?	New construction option does provide more ground floor and site area to work with. There are trade-offs to balance between more parking and green space.

GENERAL COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS	
Would like to see inspired thinking, particularly around space which may start as parking space and could evolve into another space use as future parking demands evolve and potentially lessen.	
Important design items to consider: Heaviness of doors, push buttons at accessible doors push, parking area call button and accessible curb cuts. The City noted this project has to fully accessible and has to be fully compliant with MAAB and ADA and moreover the building needs to be welcoming and inviting and eliminate real and perceived barriers. There will be car chargers.	
Questions:	Answers:
Will the size of the various programs rooms be the same, with an add/reno and new construction? Will the rooms be larger than what exists now?	The program is neutral between the two schemes. A selection does not need to be based upon the program. The rooms will be larger than what currently exists.
Where would drop off and pick up happen, without causing traffic concerns, at either the add/reno or new construction options?	Drop-off and pick up options will be studied further, whether at Walnut Street or Highland Avenue. Intent is there will be a designated drop-off/pick up area. The new scheme offers drop-off/pick up at the parking garage.

<p>Has the possibility been considered to tap into historic credits or any others ways to reduce the costs of reusing the existing?</p>	<p>If it was determined that the building was eligible for historic tax credits it would be impossible to remove the rear portions of the building that are required to make the program work and fit onto the site. Also, historic tax credits typically do not favor the addition of programs which are being proposed. In the event, an add/reno option is preferred based on challenges and opportunities presented, CPA funding can be pursued.</p>
<p>How much will construction encroach upon Walnut Street and Highland Ave and how will that be managed?</p>	<p>Construction boundaries will not impact Walnut Place, Walnut Street or Highland Ave. There will be traffic in/out. Same hours of operation will be followed as a private contractor. Pre-construction surveys can be performed at direct abutter's properties, if neighbors are inclined. Construction will be confined within the site boundaries.</p>
<p>Is the overall construction schedule the same for both approaches?</p>	<p>Schedule: An add/reno will require some phasing which may push the schedule to a 24 month timeline vs. new construction which may be achievable in 18 months.</p>

At the end of the meeting, there was a show of hands for the two design approaches: Add/reno and new construction. There was an overwhelming majority of participants who spoke in favor, and informally straw voted in support of new construction.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50PM.

Prepared by: Melissa Gagnon, NV5 [End of 02/22/21 Meeting Minutes]