

Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) project

Community Meeting					
Date:	Thursday, September 23, 2021				
Location:	Zoom meeting				
Time:	6:30PM				
Attendees – City Staff and Consultant Team:					
Josh Morse	<i>Public Buildings Dept.</i>		Joel Bargmann	<i>BH+A</i>	
Jayne Colino	<i>Senior Services Director</i>		Dan Chen	<i>BH+A</i>	
Thomas Murphy	<i>NV5</i>		Kyle Zick	<i>BH+A</i>	

Josh Morse, the City of Newton Public Buildings 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. 60 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). The City noted that questions would be taken following the presentation, via the chat feature as well as by panelists raising their hands. Also, questions can be emailed directly to Josh Morse or Jayne Colino or be submitted to the project email at: newcal@newtonma.gov

Project Update

Joel Bargmann, principal architect from BH+A, provided an overview of the proposed schedule for the upcoming Community meetings, with this meeting focusing on the site:

- September – Site Plan Site Features, Building Organization
- October – Massing and Exterior Treatment Concepts
- November – Exterior Facades, Proposed Materials and Landscape Development
- December – Site Plan, Building Plans, Sustainability and Renderings

Site and Building Orientation

The presentation began with a review of building positioning on the site and the relationship to the adjacent buildings. It was noted that in addition to widening the sidewalk along Walnut Street, the recently completed Walnut Street improvement project created four parking spaces in front of the building as well as at four spaces at Highland Ave. It was explained that select spaces at one of these parking areas could potentially function as a new drop off area. Either of these locations would take a visitor to the main entrance at the corner. There is also drop off opportunity at the rear covered parking

area with an entrance directly opposite the main entrance on Walnut. Widening the sidewalk has had a beneficial impact which includes more green space.

Siting and adjacencies will play a role in the influence of the massing organization of the new building. Views of the site were presented from Walnut Street (from north and south) as well as from Highland Ave and Walnut Place as well as proposed building images from each of those vantage points with an explanation of the design concepts and the goal in the building will address the specifics of each approach. Design goals were discussed for creating buffer zones from bordering streets, defining edges of the public vs. private zones, the drop-off approach and the scale of the proposed building as well as the surrounding buildings. The intent is for the new building to be sited so it maintains a neighborhood scale and feels like it fits into the site.

The prospective main entry to the new building is at the corner of Highland Ave and Walnut Street, referred to as the “hot corner”, as a visible and active corner, easily connecting to Austin Street and Highland Ave parking areas. The location is a prime drop off area. In addition to the 32 onsite parking spaces, there are approx. 125 municipal spaces within 250’ of NewCAL, approximately 50 spaces along Highland Ave and metered spaces along Walnut Street.

The building would be oriented parallel to Walnut Place with the onsite parking entrance off of Walnut Place. A benefit to this orientation is that the building very slightly adjusts itself to open to the corner of Highland Ave and Walnut Street, creating an embracing and friendly entrance visible from Newtonville, creating opportunity for an active front along Walnut Street. The building would be set back from Walnut Place to reduce the canyon effect to its neighbors. There is also interest in maintaining the wrought iron fencing to create a buffer zone.

Landscape Elements

Kyle Zick, landscape architect from BH+A, provided an overview with regard to proposed plantings and hardscape, identifying different personalities, garden spaces and outdoor rooms at various areas around the building as they relate to different functions within the building. In addition, there is also the upper level roof deck that provides a different experience. As the design develops, there will be discussion as to the appropriate size, amount of garden area and furniture.

A proposed planting plan was presented with the proposed plan and existing trees. Some existing trees are within the footprint of the proposed building, others around the edges of the site would remain and others would be proposed. Planting approach would be to have as many trees as possible from a shade and comfort perspective as well as to reduce the scale of the site. It was noted that (16) existing trees were identified on the current site and that the proposed design was saving six of those trees. The remaining trees were proposed to be removed due to conflict with the new structure or assessment of the relative health of the trees. The trees would continue to be evaluated as the design progress and some trees could be transplanted but any tree greater than 1 foot in diameter would be difficult to

transplant. Depending on the particular size and species, it will be determined whether a tree could be salvaged and replanted.

In addition to trees, existing memorial plaques have been identified on the building, benches and garden features. Will need to determine whether each of these items is salvaged and reset or whether there is one common new feature created in recognition of past memorial tributes.

Feasibility will be studied with regard to retaining and repurposing some of the existing streetscape elements particularly wrought iron fencing, granite curbing and granite piers.

Programming, Building Plans and Massing

Dan Chen, principal architect from BH+A, provided an overview of the program, building plans and building massing. Overall building organization was presented as the following:

- 1st Floor – Public Spaces (lobby, lounge, administration, multipurpose/dining, kitchen, juice bar, shop)
- 2nd Floor – Programing Rooms (art and program rooms, administration and gym)
- 3rd Floor – Activity Spaces (fitness, games and walking track)

Design concepts were highlighted as having a prominent, welcoming entry, transparent edges in some areas to engage with the neighborhood with less transparency in others and a two-story transparent entry space. Parking is one way entering via Walnut Place and exiting to Highland Ave. Potential drop off areas were depicted either on Walnut Street or Highland Ave plus at the covered rear parking area. The lounge along Walnut Street would be transparent with the intent of creating engagement with the community. Outdoor terrace spaces are being proposed off the Library, Activity Room and Dining spaces. Overall horizontal and vertical circulation throughout the building as well as the overall building massing were reviewed. The roof deck sits above a two-story volume along Walnut Street. It was explained that breaking down the scale of the building is in response to working with the existing granular nature of Newtonville. The small scale elements along Walnut Street are recognized with a two-story volume along Walnut Street and a three-story volume behind.

Community Feedback – Questions and Answers

Questions:	Answers:
What is the expectation for Senior Center parking stickers to be valid on the streets surrounding the project?	Stickers were recently created, valid for Highland Ave. The City is exploring the possibility of Walnut Street being available as well. It was noted that the Austin Street lot has 125 municipal parking spaces.
What will the roof be used for?	Program space (deck space), solar panels and/or mechanical units.

<p>The drop off on Walnut Street will only work for cars coming from the North. Will cars be able to go through the parking lot to drop off?</p>	<p>Walnut Street would be the public drop off although it is expected many users will drop off in the parking lot and enter through the back. The 1st floor main entry corridor, from back to front, was reviewed. The design team noted the parking layout will continue to be developed to support drop off in that area.</p>
<p>The natural entry protocol for users is to enter the building, visit with other users while preparing for their activities and then enter the class/activity. How will the building design support this progression?</p>	<p>The design team noted the circulation corridor at the entry includes space for seating and furnishings and that circulation on the upper floors is sized to accommodate socialization. The City noted the team will study entry areas and circulation in 3D format to ensure areas are designed with ample gathering space in mind.</p>
<p>Can there be volunteers to welcome people?</p>	<p>The design team noted staffing falls under an administrative decision however the design can accommodate volunteers. It was noted the two-story entry space would provide a visitor visual orientation to the spaces/programming on the floors above.</p>
<p>It was suggested that the Walnut Street “granularity”, which was discussed as the context, may eventually evolve to a more multi-story development. Therefore building massing should not be designed too closely to the existing context.</p>	<p>This statement was acknowledged as being accurate.</p>
<p>How many trees will be lost?</p>	<p>Trees needing to move will be transplanted judiciously, when feasible, however all lost caliper inches of trees on site will be replaced.</p>
<p>Why is this building proposed to be open in 2024 when schools are built in 12 months?</p>	<p>The City noted school projects typically take 5-6 years with 18-24 month construction durations. The sooner the design process is complete, the sooner construction can begin and the new building can open. The process will move as fast as possible.</p>
<p>There should be spaces for active and healthy activities for seniors, especially in spaces protected from weather. Will there be such spaces?</p>	<p>Every space will be multipurpose, in addition to the designated Fitness room. The covered parking area could be used for activities as well as the rooftop deck and terraces.</p>

<p>What cost controls are in place?</p>	<p>The City noted the project scope will be defined and aligned with the budget. A 5% construction contingency is typically included in the budget and based on past City projects, there is usually an average 1.7% contingency. Newton projects are 98% on time and on budget adding that the Cabot project was slightly over the project budget although the cost to the City was under budget, the difference being made up with MSBA funding.</p>
<p>How do the number of programs and program rooms compare to the needs of the current users, noting there are non-senior spaces and senior space in the design.</p>	<p>The gymnasium (large multipurpose room) can be used for more than one program at once, separated by a divider curtain. With movable partitions, smaller rooms can be connected and larger rooms can be subdivided. Larger spaces can be managed with staff. The new facility is 33,000SF which is greater than the existing facility which only has six usable program areas. The increase in SF, as well as operating hours, will allow greater availability of program spaces. While there will be Community use of the facility, programming will be scheduled around the senior schedule with priority going to senior community use. Jayne Colino noted the new facility will bring an opportunity to expand senior programming and use without increasing Senior Center staff.</p>
<p>Can the building be used to host events?</p>	<p>Yes. All programming and event scheduling will be coordinated by the Senior Center staff.</p>
<p>How large is the rooftop deck?</p>	<p>The deck is designed at approximately 2400 SF which can accommodate 60 people.</p>
<p>The green space in the front of the building seems narrow. Could that space be better utilized for pedestrian and drop-off activities?</p>	<p>The design team will continue to study this area. The goal is to maximize both hardscape and green space and to find the proper balance.</p>
<p>Are the corridors wide enough to accommodate seating?</p>	<p>Seating can be developed in the corridors with benches. Nooks, crannies and alcoves can be developed into seating areas. Seating areas will be created where needed, both inside and outside.</p>

<p>How much onsite parking could be accommodated if the building were to be raised up on columns?</p>	<p>Currently, 32 parking onsite spaces are planned. 47 spaces could be accommodated if the building were raised. A raised building would create a situation with no ground floor/at grade access, which the community was reluctant to accept with an add/reno option. Also, raising the building would be much more expensive and would create a disconnection between the building, activities on the ground floor and the surrounding neighborhood. Visitors would need to navigate stairs and a ramp when entering.</p>
<p>What will the hours be at the new Senior Center?</p>	<p>Although exact hours are TBD, there will be expanded hours. Staffing and programming resources will be used to accommodate the demand for more evening hours. The Center will utilize as much of the space and hours as programming and staffing resources allow. Opportunities for seniors will be increased.</p>
<p>How many feet are from each entrance to the elevator?</p>	<p>The elevator is located 30 feet maximum from both entrances.</p>
<p>Keep the pedal to the metal.</p>	

In summary, the City noted the more presentations that happen with more consensus from the Community, the faster the project will move forward. The faster the project moves ahead through the design process, the faster ground will be broken and the sooner construction will commence. There have been many meetings and the project has been moving quickly to gain consensus through design. Particularly, during more recent meetings there were no fatal flaws identified from the community so it appears the project is on the right track to continue to move forward.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:32PM.

Prepared by: Tom Murphy and Melissa Gagnon, NV5 [End of 09/23/21 Meeting Minutes]