

Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) project

Community Meeting					
Date:	Thursday, October 21, 2021				
Location:	Zoom meeting				
Time:	6:30PM				
Attendees – City Staff and Consultant Team:					
Josh Morse	<i>Public Buildings Dept.</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Dan Chen	<i>BH+A</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Alex Valcarce	<i>Public Buildings Dept.</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kyle Zick	<i>BH+A</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Melissa Gagnon	<i>NV5</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Joel Bargmann	<i>BH+A</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Josh Morse, the City of Newton Public Buildings Commissioner, opened up the Community meeting at 6:32PM. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 public health crisis, the meeting took place virtually, via Zoom. 39 participants joined the meeting. The following participating groups and individuals were represented: Public Buildings Department, NewCAL Working Group, Council on Aging (COA) Advisory Board, BH+A (architects) and NV5 (Owner’s Project Manager). The meeting is being recorded and will be posted on the project website. City noted that questions would be taken following the presentation. Questions can also be emailed directly to newcal@newtonma.gov.

Project Update

Dan Chen, from BH+A, reviewed the proposed schedule for the upcoming Community meetings, with this meeting focusing on the massing and exterior treatment as well as landscaping concepts:

- September – Site Plan Site Features, Building Organization (meeting last month)
- 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 recap of building positioning on the site as it relates to the surrounding streets of Walnut Street, Highland Avenue and Walnut Places as well as within the greater context of Newtonville. Views of the site were presented from Walnut Street (from north and south) as well as from Highland Avenue and Walnut Place. The corner of Highland Ave and Walnut Street is planned to be the main face and main entrance of the new Senior Center, allowing for visual access from Washington Park, Highland Avenue and Walnut Street.

Parking is behind the proposed building entering off of Walnut Place with a one way drive aisle exiting to Highland Avenue. There are 31 onsite parking spaces.

The building would sit back from Walnut Place to reduce the canyon effect to its neighbors. The concept behind the building massing is to respect the granular nature of the smaller scale buildings in Newtonville with two-story volumes closer to Walnut Street and three-story volume behind. Solar panels are proposed on the roof.

Landscape Elements

An overview was provided by the landscape architect from BH+A, Kyle Zick. Landscape design concepts are being developed in concert with the architecture to try to form some outdoor spaces to reinforce streetscape, highlight views and screen some views to enhance the overall site. Renderings presented are early conceptual ideas. The following views were presented:

From Highland Avenue and Walnut Street – entrance on corner, with few benches, ornamental plants, small scale trees, shrubs with ground cover and highlighted paving at entry plaza.

Currently, there are no street trees along Walnut Street, likely due to large existing trees at the Senior Center site. Some trees may be removed given the footprint of the new trees may want to be added to offset loss of some of the existing trees as well as to reinforce the streetscape. A cluster of trees was proposed at the terrace area outside of the Activity Room along Walnut Street. Landscape elements would help to create an indoor/outdoor space offering shade, buffer from road noise and separation from the sidewalk.

Two options were presented to create a buffer at the terrace off the Activity room, along Walnut Street:

- Reuse of wrought iron fence. Provides enclosure and separation although may be over scaled for this location.
- Planters and plantings, without a fence. Creates some separation from the sidewalk.

Many plantings along Walnut Place would screen the view of the parking and provide some separation from the neighborhood. Many of the trees are existing along the back property line.

The following option was presented to create a buffer at the terrace off the Dining and Activity rooms, along Walnut Place:

- Reuse of wrought iron fence. Tables and chairs would be flexible and movable.

Two options were presented for the terrace off the Library, along Highland Avenue:

- Small terrace with benches with plantings along the sidewalk. Furnishings would need to be smaller scaled given tight space.
- No terrace with only plantings along the building and benches along the sidewalk

Programming, Building Plans and Massing

An overview of the program, building plans and building massing was provided by Dan Chen from BH+A. The overall building organization was presented as the following:

1st Floor – Public Spaces (lobby, lounge, administration, multipurpose/dining, kitchen, juice bar, shop)

2nd Floor – Destination Programming Rooms (art and program rooms, administration and gym)

3rd Floor – Activity Spaces (fitness, games and walking track)

In working within a relatively small urban site, vertical programs are organized to allow for the most accessibility with large public spaces on the ground floor. Overall horizontal and vertical circulation throughout the building as well as the overall building massing were reviewed.

Entrance points would be via the main entrance at the corner of Walnut Street and Highland Ave or if arriving by car, via the covered rear parking area. Both entrances would bring visitors to a double height lobby area.

Outdoor terrace spaces are being proposed adjacent to the Library (along Highland Ave), the Lounge (along Walnut Street) and the Activity/Dining area (along Walnut Place).

Potential of a lounge function and seating area will be explored in connection with the Fitness area.

A 2,400 SF roof deck sits above a two-story volume along Walnut Street, overlooking Newtonville. Capacity is approximately 60 occupants. Potential shading and breakdown of the deck is being studied.

Solar panels are being proposed at south facing roof locations to maximize roof area for solar generation, net zero and building electrification.

Entry canopy allows for a shaded entry, protects from weather and provides a sense of welcome.

Entry is at grade making the building fully accessible from both the front and rear entrances.

Lower two story volumes would be closer to Newtonville, along Walnut Street, with the taller three story volumes behind.

There is approximately 9,000 SF of space in the proposed design which can be used for physical activities including the gymnasium, fitness room and activity room.

Community Feedback – Questions and Answers

Questions (community members):	Answers (City/Design Team):
What is the exterior material?	Materials are being studied. Consideration is being made to masonry/brick, aluminum spandrel panels, glass, stone base, fiber panels and corrugated metal. Exterior material review will be a community process.
Are diagonal braces on the corner necessary to support the roof?	Bracing is an architectural gesture to accentuate importance of corner. Based on current design, bracing is not needed for support.
How does the SF of the proposed building compare with the Needham Senior Center?	The proposed building is approximately 32,000SF. The Needham facility is smaller although the exact SF was not readily available.
How does the proposed Fitness room compare with the current space/library where fitness classes take place?	The current space used for fitness is approximately 1100 SF. The proposed Fitness center is 1500 SF plus an adjacent 120 SF storage space and 2400 SF roof. The goal is for as many of the spaces to be as flexible and as fluid as possible as multipurpose rooms. Each room will be programmed and utilized in a way that makes most sense based upon the changing needs of the senior population.
How many occupants could the proposed Fitness room accommodate in moving activity?	Given 6 SF/person, 45 participants could comfortable fit. The gymnasium could accommodate more participants although if the program gets too large it would be challenging to see the instructor and programming will be relocated to another space.
Will there be mirrors in the Fitness Center?	As plan develops, the use of mirrors and storage cubbies will be studied.
What is the vision for a gymnasium in a Senior Center? Interested in learning about how the space will accommodate the needs specifically of seniors and will benefit the population of 75 year olds.	There are many 55+ active seniors who participate in a variety of activities. The proposed gym is a very large multi-purpose room with dividable curtains to separate programs. The gym could be used for an event, TED Talk, etc. being designed to meet the needs of seniors as well as an asset to the Community when not in use by the seniors.

<p>Based on a recent meeting with members of the Senior Center Users Group a number of points were discussed, and consensus was reached. I have been asked to submit this summary to the Community meeting:</p> <p>1) If NewCAL is to be for "Seniors First," then the first thing to be considered in every instance is whether the issue at hand best meets the needs of Seniors.</p> <p>2) As previously stated, if physical exercise classes are by far the most popular programs, the activities should be at the very "center of the Center."</p> <p>We are requesting a large Fitness room on the first floor. The wall between the Dining/ Activity room would need to be solid, and not movable, otherwise the noise from an activity on one side of the divided space would disturb activities on the other side.</p> <p>The desire to accommodate a performing arts event should not supersede the best interests of Seniors. The gymnasium space could accommodate a large event.</p> <p>3) Newton Seniors who currently enjoy the Senior Center do so because of the sense of community it provides them. A lounge area should adjoin a first floor Fitness room. The natural flow should be to encourage and facilitate preserving what NewCAL Guiding Principle #2 describes "as the wonderful sense of community that exists in the current Senior Center." The lounge design should be open and accessible to encourage socialization. Visibility from Walnut Street is not important.</p>	<p>The proposed design has many flexible spaces in the including the fitness room, gymnasium, multipurpose activity room and dining room. The intent of the open and flexible dining/activity room is to create a multipurpose room which can be used for more than a performance space. Programming will be scheduled with consideration to acoustics. The intent is to incorporate seating nearby the fitness room to help create a sense of community and gathering. Consideration will be given to use of the adjacent deck space.</p> <p>There are multifunction rooms throughout the facility and how they are used will be determined by scheduling in terms of what program/activity happens where and when and therefore, labels on spaces do not necessarily reflect the actual everyday use.</p>
<p>Benches and terraces need to be separate from the public sidewalk with non-senior center participants looking for a place to stop and eat ice cream cones.</p>	<p>Options will continue to be studied re: the use of a fence vs. no fence with planters only.</p>

<p>Will the dining area side of the large multipurpose space need to be closed at any time to allow for a large fitness class?</p>	<p>Jayne Colino and her staff will program this building. The juice bar will allow for flexibility for the dining area/multipurpose space to be utilized for a variety of non-dining programs during non-peak times.</p>
<p>Will all spaces have good acoustics and internet to be adaptable for a variety of events?</p>	<p>There will be WiFi throughout with access points to allow for computers with access to WiFi. Larger spaces will have speech reinforcement technology. Will study which spaces are more likely to require acoustical treatment and determine the appropriate design. Details will be studied following site plan approval.</p>
<p>Currently the swing band and chamber of musicians perform weekly at the senior center. Would like to have acoustics improved in the new senior center. Want to maintain performance schedule.</p> <p>Music programs can be loud and may be best located behind a solid wall.</p>	<p>In comparison to the existing facility space, acoustics and availability to programming will be improved overall in the new building.</p>
<p>How much of the roof deck will be used 90% of the year if not covered?</p>	<p>Options are being studied. There are challenges and opportunities with providing more or less coverage. This topic will continue to be discussed at public meetings.</p>
<p>Why is there only one elevator? Having only one elevator has potential to be problematic if maintenance is needed. Library has two elevators.</p>	<p>The Newton Library has a daily occupancy of over 2200 occupants which is less than the expected occupancy at the new Senior Center. Aside from cost, a second elevator will take up SF which could expand the footprint and create site challenges. A 3500lb elevator has a maximum capacity of 26 people. Elevator is sized for a stretcher per MAAB accessibility requirements. The merits and feasibility of a second elevator will continue to be studied.</p>
<p>Will it be possible to have picnics and BBQs? Can there be a grill at the Center?</p>	<p>Picnics and BBQs will be possible. The viability of an onsite grill will be looked into.</p>
<p>The roof deck can be used for fitness classes on nice weather days.</p>	<p>Yes, absolutely.</p>

<p>Is there an option for raised plant beds on the roof deck which can be removed during cold weather months?</p>	<p>Yes. There are opportunities both on the deck as well as inside the building.</p>
<p>Is there any area on the 3rd floor allocated to serving food/drinks/vending machines in closer proximity to the roof deck?</p>	<p>Opportunities will be studied.</p>
<p>A lounge type space carved out of the roof deck it would make the fitness room more appealing.</p>	<p>Comment will be taken under consideration.</p>
<p>Why not put the lounge/café on the third floor? It would work nicely with the roof deck. If on the first floor, participants will be required to eat indoors.</p>	<p>The dining area on the first floor is adjacent to an outdoor terrace for indoor/outdoor eating. Typically kitchens are on the ground floor, for service and deliveries, adjacent to dining spaces. Ground floor area is very limited. There was a lot of early discussion re: the importance of a large multi-use space and a dining program. If there were more ground floor area, more programming would be on the ground floor. The current design is based on early conversations and feedback.</p>
<p>What is the vision for the large dining hall/activity room and what is driving the need for a movable wall?</p>	<p>Going back to early feedback during the programming phase (documents on project website), there are many programs which would benefit from a large flexible multipurpose room some of which could be accommodated in the gym but others, for acoustic reasons, would be better accommodated in the dining room where there will be an assisted listening system. The intent is to be able to divide the large space to allow for two active programs to co-exist with the movable wall closed. It is anticipated this space will be in high demand.</p>
<p>What would be some examples of programming to which would require the combined dining/activity room?</p>	<p>Early on in the design phase, in direct response to the projected increase in the static occupancy of the Senior Center, the size was determined for the new multipurpose space. In the current Senior Center, the dining space is 1000 SF. Half of the proposed combined space, without a dividing wall, would be only 50% larger, at 1500 SF.</p>

<p>How similar is the proposed first floor layout to the first floor at the Needham Heights senior center? The layout in Needham is very satisfactory.</p> <p>Discussion whether movable wall works well in terms of acoustical performance.</p> <p>Is there a lounge to congregate in Needham?</p>	<p>The first floor plan of the Needham Senior Center was presented. The multipurpose room has an acoustical dividing wall w/stage, kitchen area and juice bar. The dividing wall opens up for lunch periods. There is also a billiards/ping pong room as well as a fitness room.</p> <p>Although not sound proof, acoustic separation is achieved.</p> <p>There is no designated lounge space. There is a second floor library and an uncovered roof deck.</p>
<p>Is there a program currently being proposed on the first floor which could possibly be relocated to create some space on the first floor to be utilized for the fitness room?</p>	<p>Of the programs on the first floor, offices and the library would be the only programs which could possibly be considered to relocate however this would need to be reviewed and approved by Jayne.</p>
<p>If fitness room were to remain on the third floor, could the southern portion of the roof deck be taken for a lounge?</p>	<p>This option will be reviewed and considered.</p>
<p>Comments/Discussion (community members):</p>	
<p>Why is it important for the fitness room to be on the first floor rather than the third floor, particularly given limitations on the first floor?</p> <p>Proximity of the Fitness room to the lounge is important. The space that serves the principal activity should be at the center of the center, on the first floor. Perhaps part of the deck could be used for a lounge. Good flow for socialization and mutual support is very important.</p>	
<p>The new Senior Center will be entirely different than the current Center. The lounge being visible from Walnut Street will help to create interest and draw people into the new Senior Center. The gymnasium is important to seniors. A programming desire will be worked out with the Director. The lounge will be open to everyone. The flexibility of a dividable large space on the first floor is being compromised by the need for a large fitness class on the first floor.</p> <p>Fitness is the principal, most popular activity and there is no reason to not be in the first floor. A folding wall may not be necessary. The gymnasium could be used for programs requiring a larger space.</p>	
<p>Some older folks may not want to sit outside on a nice day.</p>	
<p>Participants congregate before and after fitness classes. A gathering space outside the fitness room would be beneficial.</p>	

In summary with regard to the location of the fitness center and program distribution, it was noted that the high level theory is to cluster the passive programming at grade and elevate the active programming. Although the fitness room will be designed for fitness activities, there will be additional opportunities for fitness activities in the first floor dining area. If the fitness room cannot be relocated to the first floor or a lounge moved to the third floor, how can a gathering area be created somewhere near the fitness room for socialization before/after participating in activities? May want to start creating mock programming for a typical week. In addition to assuring folks that the design will work in addition to identifying opportunities to expand programming.

The hot lunch program was discussed, in relation to the service it provides to a particular demographic. The expectation is not that folks who would normally dine in an area restaurant would dine at the center. It is anticipated the dining space will be utilized by folks that are both part of the lunch program as well as for those who are not part of the lunch program.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50PM.

Prepared by: Melissa Gagnon, NV5 [End of 10/21/21 Meeting Minutes]