


Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) project

Community Meeting					
Date:	Thursday, November 18, 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 6:33PM. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 public health crisis, the meeting took place virtually, via Zoom. 54 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 all participants have been promoted to panelists and are able to participate either through the chat feature or by raising a hand. It was noted that questions would be taken following the presentation. Questions can also be emailed directly to newcal@newtonma.gov. The presentation is posted to the NewCAL project website here: [2021.11.18 NewCAL Community Meeting Presentation](#).

The City noted that although exterior renderings will be presented, decisions need to be made and the palette of exterior materials has not been selected. The ultimate decision will be a product of community input working with various stakeholders and the City Council. It was also noted that select street trees appear to be missing in select renderings. This is attributed to a layer being turned off in the presentation format so the full building can be seen beyond.

Project Update

Dan Chen from BH+A provided an overview of developments relative to landscaping ideas, building massing and materials, as well as general design updates made since the October Community meeting.

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 Place as well as within the greater context of Newtonville.

An aerial view was presented depicting onsite parking behind the proposed building which is accessible from Walnut Place with a one way drive aisle exiting to Highland Avenue. In addition to the main entrance at the corner of Highland Avenue and Walnut Street, there is another pedestrian entrance at the rear parking area. Several street trees along Walnut Street, towards Walnut Place, are existing to be preserved.

Close up views were presented of the three (3) proposed outdoor terrace areas: Outside of multi-purpose room at Walnut Place, outside of lounge at Walnut Street and near drop off area outside of library at Highland Avenue.

Building Plans, Section, Perspectives and Elevations

Plans have evolved since the October meeting as actual functions of spaces have been developed including ADA clearances, toilet rooms, gift shop, as well as fit out of the commercial kitchen.

An overview of floor plans and building massing was provided:

First Floor

- Main pedestrian entrance and drop off is located at grade with no barriers, at the corner of Highland Avenue and Walnut Street. The vehicular entrance is at the rear.
- Reception is centrally located, visible and accessible from main entrance and from parking area.
- Double height lobby will provide ample light as visitors arrive at the lobby area.
- Commercial kitchen layout and function is in progress.
- Library will have public functions with computers, lounge seating and an area to wait for a ride.
- Lounge area is along Walnut Street with large windows.

Second Floor

- In response to request for art rooms to be larger with more storage space, the classroom and large activity room were shifted to the north side and two art rooms were relocated to the east side. This switch creates larger art rooms with more storage space. A nook in the art room will be designed to provide natural northern light.
- Waiting/gathering area added outside of gymnasium with benches and possible cubbies below.
- Storage room added to the north side of the gym, creating storage at both sides of the gym.
- Monumental stair carries through the building to the third floor, which is helpful in both orientation and wayfinding with stair and elevator being consistently located on all floors.

Third Floor

- Lounge area added near the fitness room for impromptu gatherings and casual conversations.
- Roof deck has three functional areas. Continuing to explore opportunities for utilizing the roof deck and potential functions. North side observation overlooking Highland Avenue and Walnut Street with umbrellas for shading, central area for seating and socializing, and south side for potential connection to fitness room programming. Roof deck covering concepts are being studied.

Roof Plan

- Continuing to explore opportunities for solar panels to help with achieving the goal of net zero.

Building Section and West Elevation

- An east/west building section and west elevation were presented to depict the height of the proposed building, particularly in relation to immediate abutters on Walnut Place. The height is 40' to the underside of the eave and 48' to the top of the roof. The mansard roof will serve as a screen for rooftop mechanical equipment, both visually and acoustically.

Building Elevations and Perspectives

- Conceptual ideas for all four (4) elevations were presented depicting the exploration and study of potential possible materials including masonry, stone, high density fiber cement panels, metal panels, glazing, precast lintels and sills. Conceptual rendered elevations were presented relative to building organization and programming.
- The intent is to break up the mass of the two story volume in contrast with the larger three story volume of the gymnasium. The massing strategy has been to use a lower volume along Walnut Street and at the corner of Highland Avenue and setting the larger three story massing behind.
- Perspectives from the two corners at Highland Avenue and Walnut Street and from Walnut Place and Walnut Street. Intent is to enliven the main entrance area and create a welcoming presence. Paving, seating and signage opportunities are being explored at the main entry. Terraces outside of the lounge and activity rooms were identified.

Existing Trees

BH+A presented a plan of existing trees and pointed out which trees are slated to remain as opposed to which trees will be removed. A diagram was also presented of existing trees with an overlay of the proposed building, with trees slated to be preserved (including two Norway maples at the back of the site) and trees which will unfortunately have to be removed and replaced. The tree on the corner of Highland Avenue and Walnut Street is being studied to determine whether the tree can be salvaged given the current design.

Community Feedback – Questions, Answers and Comments

Questions (community members):	Answers (City/Design Team):
<p>Is there a drop off area along Walnut Street in addition to Highland Avenue? Traffic coming from either the east or the north is likely to be coming southbound down Walnut Street. Even if turning onto Highland Avenue, from Walnut Street, the car will be on the wrong side of the street for the drop off area.</p>	<p>It was explained that as the plan was being developed, Highland Avenue was determined to be the preferred drop off area. Plans are still being developed for both pedestrian and vehicular drop off and comment will be considered.</p>
<p>Is there a reason that approximately only 25% of the land area is used for outdoor parking and floors two and three are not extended over parking, which would add a significant amount of interior space? A single floor deck could extend over parking area would provide cover for parking and protect visitors from inclement weather. Also, the deck would provide good southern and western exposure for outdoor gatherings. Decking over the parking area could allow massing to shift back from Walnut Street.</p>	<p>City looked at options early on for building over outdoor parking. In terms of GSF, the building has not changed and meets the program. Trying to strike a balance to accommodate required building program and being respectful to neighbors on a tight urban site. How the outside of the building is activated needs to be further studied, particularly the southern exposure.</p>
<p>Is a large gymnasium with track necessary?</p>	<p>The gymnasium is a product of the surveys and feedback received from the senior community during the programming phase. The gym is being designed as a senior first gym as a lot of senior programming will benefit from the gym. The City is also looking at expanded hours in the new facility. All meeting minutes and presentations with historical information are available on the project website: https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/.</p>
<p>How many visitors to the senior center are dropped off vs. drive themselves and park?</p>	<p>Approximately 30% of visitors on a daily basis are provided with some form of transportation.</p>
<p>Will there be a roof garden with trees on the roof deck?</p>	<p>Roof garden, yes. Trees are a possibility, depending on the species.</p>

<p>Is it possible for the glass at the stair at Highland Avenue come down to the ground level? The openness of the upper levels is lost with the solid wall below.</p>	<p>Stair design, including glazing, is continuing to be studied.</p>
<p>Would street level terraces be open to the general public?</p>	<p>The intent is to create community accessibility from the sidewalk to at least one or two of the terraces.</p>
<p>Is there a place nearby the fitness room for guests to leave coats and personal belongings?</p>	<p>These details will be worked out as the design develops.</p>
<p>Is the Swedenborgian Church being purchased by the City of Newton or the by the New Art Center?</p>	<p>The New Art Center is working with the Swedenborgian Church to determine if there is a possible. The New Art Center is deep rooted within the City and there are a lot of partnerships.</p>
<p>Is there a possibility for the new senior center to use some of the Church property for additional parking spaces?</p>	<p>The City is continuing to work on a parking management plan. There may be opportunities for potential shared parking between the new Senior Center and the New Art Center when either facility is closed and/or higher/lower demand. The proposed onsite parking is expanded compared with current parking. In addition to the expanded senior parking permit program on Highland Avenue, the City will be looking at parking opportunities in the direct neighborhood and at the Austin Street lot.</p>
<p>Is there a loading dock for supplies, etc. to be unloaded and brought into the building?</p>	<p>Loading and unloading of supplies will be coming through the back area to service the commercial kitchen. The trash pickup area is along the side of the covered parking. A primary area for large truck loading and unloading is across the street, on Highland Avenue, which was created as part of the village redesign.</p>
<p>How many residents use NewMo to get to the senior center?</p>	<p>Current numbers are not readily available however, prior to Covid, the senior center was the second largest destination requested beyond medical appointments.</p>
<p>Is there a time in the process when the City is required to directly communicate with abutters?</p>	<p>From a process standpoint, required to send certified letters as site plan review process approaches. Direct mailings have been done in the</p>

	past for other projects. Given the volume of meetings (approx. 271 public meetings to date), it is important to be selective about mailings to not bombard neighbors.
Question was asked about bargaining between New Art Center and the Swedenborgian Church. Is there a way the City can intervene?	From a process standpoint there are three basic ways the City acquires land: Friendly eminent domain, forcible eminent domain and a purchase and sale. Aside from the forcible eminent domain, would need a willing seller. It is believed that the Church has agreed to not to enter into any other negotiations while the new senior center is in the feasibility center phase.
Is there a gym and track at other senior centers, including the Needham senior center?	Some senior centers have a gymnasium and walking track while others do not. The Needham senior center does not however many other facilities do.
What is the senior center web page?	www.newtonseniors.org
Comments/Discussion (community members):	
A second-floor extended deck would provide more coverage over the outdoor parking area.	
Development of elevations is encouraging. Bracing which support the sloping roofs give the building clear termination also resonates with the design of the Newton Free Library which is a very handsome building.	
A few community members expressed concern about communication to the abutters. It was noted that neighbors should be notified by direct mailings, in addition to the internet.	
A few community members expressed concern that the new senior center is being designed to accommodate physically active programming, and would like the gym removed from the site and built elsewhere. Comments were made that the new building should be for low impact activities and services, designed as two stories with a greater setback.	
Community members spoke in favor of the new senior center having a gymnasium noting that there is a shortage of nearby indoor gymnasium facilities. Eagerness was expressed in starting a senior volleyball league.	

<p>Distress was expressed in response to comments which implied programming events should be less physical in nature given the general fragility of the senior population. Comments were made in support of older residents of the City being remarkably fit and active with the desire for the ability to stay that way and competing with teenagers in the high school gym is inappropriate. Older residents of the City are members of the community. This new facility should be able to encourage cross generation outreach and interaction. The City noted that the senior center is for well independent elders who can function independently with their peers. The facility is not being designed as an adult day center. It was noted that the gymnasium will be a large multipurpose space for many different uses and will provide space for both physical as well as low impact activities.</p>
<p>Community members spoke in favor of the existing location based on years of study of alternate locations. Support was noted in favor of the proposed design, given the urban location. An unabashedly modern and forward looking design is appropriate.</p>
<p>Desire was expressed for the suburban village neighborhood vibe not to be lost to an urban aesthetic.</p>
<p>A select group of community members provided comments, both written (through the chat feature on Zoom) and verbal with regard to dissatisfaction with the physical appearance of the proposed building in particular that the building has too much programming, too much mass, the building is too tall, the building is too close to Walnut Street and more setback and green space is needed to create more meaningful outdoor gathering space, the building is too modern and should have more brick and should be more conservative/traditional in appearance. The building should resonate with the historic imagery of the current senior center as well as other buildings which are more historical in appearance.</p>
<p>Community members spoke in favor of moving the project forward and not being in favor of the building not trying to look modern.</p>
<p>A select group of community members provided comments, both written (through the chat feature on Zoom) and verbal with regard to dissatisfaction of the siting of the proposed building in particular that the site is not large enough for the proposed building program and that there is not enough green space for both the users of the new building as well as for the community.</p>
<p>A select group of community members inquired about the feasibility of the Swedenborgian Church across the street on Highland Avenue. There were advocates in favor of the City acquiring this property, renovating the Church and splitting the NewCAL programming between the current senior center site and the Church site, as a campus, to help reduce the massing of the facility.</p>
<p>The City noted quite some was spent studying a decentralized or campus model and working with the Council on Aging and the community. Ultimately the decision was made that a single central location is preferred. By dividing some program to the Church building across the street, the senior center would be decentralized. It was also noted that the acquisition costs would come out of the City's programming budget. To acquire and renovate the Church to suit the needs of senior center user group would cost a significant amount and would add significant delays to the project schedule. The City would need to review with the Council on Aging the prospect to split programming between the two sites.</p>

<p>A gymnasium and walking track on site is a great idea. Folks will use the gymnasium as well as other senior center resources at the same visit.</p>
<p>The City noted that if the New Art Center relocates to the Swedenborgian Church there will likely be opportunities for co-programming with the senior center.</p>
<p>It was noted there are approximately 600 contacts on the NewCAL list serve. Please send contact info to newcal@newtonma.gov to be added to the project database.</p>
<p>Intent of this presentation was to obtain feedback from the community as to opinion on the exterior building materials which were shown as a palette of potential options as well as massing development. It was noted that something radical may or may not happen and the City wants to be able to respond to the community on as many items as possible.</p>
<p>In response to questions about combining programming with the YMCA and the New Art Center, the City explained that these organizations have overhead expenses which need to be met and need to charge a different level of fees than some residents can afford who come to the senior center. Senior center events are subsidized in some way either through partnerships or through City funding. A community member noted that subsidized memberships could be provided.</p>

The next Community meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 16, 2021 at 6:00PM (via Zoom).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40PM.

Prepared by: Melissa Gagnon, NV5 [End of 11/18/21 Meeting Minutes]