

Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) project

Community Meeting					
Date: Thursday, February 17, 2022					
Location: Zoom webinar					
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 the Community meeting at 6:34PM. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 public health crisis, the meeting took place virtually, via Zoom. There were 382 participants in attendance. The following participating groups and individuals were represented: Public Buildings Department, NewCAL Working Group, Council on Aging (COA) Advisory Board, Commission on Disability, BH+A (architects) and NV5 (Owner’s Project Manager).

Participants were offered the option to be promoted to panelists (full participants) or remain as an attendee. It was explained that all panelists would have the option to speak verbally by raising a virtual hand. All participants (panelists or attendees) could submit comments and questions in writing through the chat and Q&A features which would be read following the presentation and verbal comments. Questions can also be emailed directly to newcal@newtonma.gov.

The meeting was recorded and is posted on the project website: [NewCAL Community Meeting Video February 17, 2022](#) . The presentation is also posted and can be found here: [2022.02.17 NewCAL Community Meeting Presentation](#).

Introduction

Josh Morse provided a brief project overview welcoming participants to the 281st meeting of the NewCAL project. It was noted that Josh sent out the project milestone summary to everyone who registered as well as to the project listserv. It was noted that all speakers will have two minutes to allow anyone who wants to speak an opportunity to do so. It was also asked that civil discourse be maintained throughout the meeting. The following milestone highlights were noted:

- The NewCAL project started more than four (4) years ago, at the beginning of 2018.
- 2018 - the City worked with the community to develop a needs assessment, which included visiting several senior centers.

- 2019 - the space program was established which defined the size of the building and site which were needed. Site search and selection process included analyzing and presenting more than 145 sites across the City.
- Summer 2019 - the current senior center site was selected.
- Fall 2019 - a demolition review application was submitted to the Newton Historic Commission.
- Winter 2019 - Summer 2021 - addition/renovation and new construction options were studied and presented to the community, Council on Aging, Design Review Committee, Commission on Disability, and various committees of the City Council.
- Since late 2019 - most residents, committees and commissions came to reject the addition/renovation options and instead were supportive of new construction.
- Summer 2021 – after two years of studying addition/renovation options and after nine (9) months of continued overwhelming and unwavering support, the Working Group announced the plan to move forward with full demolition and a new building.

It was noted that the new senior center will serve millions of older adults over the next century, with most of those adults having some sort of a disability. Therefore, it is critical that the new building be welcoming, age friendly, barrier free, inclusive, and universally accessible.

Age Friendly

City of Newton Director of Senior Services, Jayne Colino, spoke about what it means to be age friendly and noted the following:

- The City of Newton was designated as an age friendly community back in 2016 when the City applied to the World Health Organization (WHO) with a commitment to continue to improve resources, programs, and services for seniors and that allowed the WHO to designate the City as an age friendly community.
- Having that designation obligated the City to continue to engage and to use the WHO tool as a planning tool to help utilize resources towards helping the entire community, starting from birth to death.
- The Americans with Disability Act and Universal Design overlap, through the lens of aging.
- Whatever a community can do to make life easier for residents as they age makes it easier for the community overall.

Importance of MAAB, ADA, and Universal Design

City of Newton ADA Coordinator, Jini Fairly, noted that per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which was passed in 1990, anytime a building is renovated or newly built, the facility must be fully accessible. The following additional points were noted:

- In addition to ADA, the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) 521 has regulations by which the building will need to be compliant.
- The goal is for the new facility to incorporate Universal Design in addition to adherence with ADA and MAAB code requirements.
- The existing building entrance is six' above outside grade which would require a ramp and/or elevator to gain access to the main level – plus, the multiple level changes inside the building would need to be addressed.
- Anyone with a disability needs to be able to access the building and move from different levels just as easily as anyone without a disability.
- According to statistics, 15%-26% of the public has some form of a physical disability.

Building Design

Site Plan and Floor Plans

Joel Bargmann from BH+A provided a brief overview of developments relative to the floor plans and the program. 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. Highlights noted are:

- Main pedestrian entrance and drop off is located at grade with no barriers, at the corner of Highland Avenue and Walnut Street in a zone which is accessible, friendly, welcoming, and social.
- The vehicular entrance is at the rear.
- Reception is centrally located, visible and accessible from main entrance and from parking area, with a clean and apparent circulation system through the upper floors.
- Double height lobby will provide ample light as visitors arrive at the lobby area.
- In accordance with universal design, a visitor can walk via the main set of stairs or take the elevator, depending on physical abilities, and start and end at the same place, with no prejudices to either selected means of travel.
- The proposed design has several casual common spaces with lots of flexibility including the lobby, lounge, library, and multi-purpose room on the first floor.
- The second floor is the more thoughtful floor with classrooms, art room, conference rooms as well as the large 6500SF multi-purpose room which can accommodate lectures, musical events, Zumba, etc. There is service and support programming which includes professional offices, outreach counseling and a tax assistance office.
- The third floor is more of a destination floor with a game room to play pool, a fitness room for an exercise class and a track to walk around for some exercise. A lounge was added near the

fitness room for impromptu gatherings and casual conversation that leads out to the roof deck. Each of the spaces connects to the outdoor roof deck as an extension of the indoor spaces.

It was noted that the proposed building is thoughtfully designed in accordance with universal design with lots of flexibility built into the use and function of the spaces.

Landscaping, Elevations and Materials

Dan Chen from BH+A provided an overview of developments relative to landscaping ideas, building massing and materials.

Highlights noted are as follows:

- Conceptual rendered elevations were presented relative to building organization and programming.
- Modifications to the main entrance including transparent doors, tall glass corner volume and canopy help to create a prominent and distinguishable corner. The large, paved area, with canopy and benches create an unmistakable entrance and waiting area.
- In addition to the covered parking area behind the building, drop-off and pick-up can happen along Highland Ave close to the main entrance.
- The intent is to break up the mass with a lower two-story volume along Walnut Street, to bring the overall scale of the building down to the pedestrian level, in contrast with the larger three-story volume behind, as the building turns the corner along Highland Avenue.
- The options for the roof line were presented: Pyramidal roof which pulls the roof from the third floor, aside from the center section, back from the street and the Gable roof which extends the roof line of the center section to Walnut Street. Options for the roof line above the deck is continuing to be studied.
- Conceptual ideas for all four (4) elevations were presented depicting the exploration and study of potential materials including stone, brick, wood, metal, and shingles as part of the Newtonville fabric which is rich with scale, rhythm, and textures. Conceptual rendered elevations were presented relative to building organization and programming.
- The exterior terrace is just outside of the multi-function spaces and are on the same level being easily accessible from inside to outside.
- The 1938 Connick Studio stained-glass windows were discussed as being salvaged and reinstalled, with the current plan in at the first-floor lounge facing Walnut Street, to increase visibility by both users as well as the public.
- Inspiration is being taken from some of the notable architectural elements of the existing building including ornate iron railing, stone base, cupola, and stained-glass windows.

- Gymnasium windows are up above at the level of the walking track. Window placement will allow ample amount of light into the gym without glass being impacted by activity below.

Public Comment

Council on Aging

COA (Council on Aging) Chair, Joan Belle-Isle, spoke on behalf of the new construction design and noted a new senior center has been a long time coming in Newton. The following points were noted:

- Per the 2020 census report, 80% of the city population is 65 years+ which is a 15.1% increase from the 2010 census report.
- The job of the COA is to address needs and concerns of older residents. One of the biggest challenges is looking forward to changes new seniors bring while continuing to advocate for expectations and needs of older seniors.
- For many years the COA, along with many users, have been lobbying for a new senior center to replace the inadequacies and limitations of the current building.
- Many senior centers across the state were visited and it was disheartening to find that so many other cities and towns from wealthy communities, like Wellesley, have been able to build a new senior center dedicated to their older population.
- The opportunity is now to build a new building designed to be accessible to every older adult, without compromises, large and flexible enough to support older adults with respect and dignity, now and into the future.

Commission on Disability

COD (Commission on Disability) co-Chairs, Anne Marie Killilea and Eileen Sandberg, spoke on behalf of proposed new construction design and noted the following points:

- Per the 1/14/22 COD meeting, the majority of Commission members fully support the current design.
- Need to make sure that all senior needs are addressed.
- As previously noted, an addition/renovation option would require an eighty-two foot long ramp, which is $\frac{1}{4}$ the length of a football field.
- New construction design not only meets accessibility requirements but also provides universal design whereas a renovation will have shortcomings.
- The current proposed design will be unifying for the community.

Support of New Construction

Proponents in support of new construction design option spoke favorably about the current design:

- The main library and the branch libraries have all been replaced by buildings that work. Form follows function. The present Senior Center building is outdated as a library and is inadequate as a center for older adults.
- The process needs to move forward. Speaking as a senior and former senior social worker, it was noted the current design does not meet needs of Newton seniors. The existing stained-glass windows can be salvaged and incorporated.
- Speaking as an architect and 36-yr Newton resident and having worked with renovation/new construction conflicts, it was noted that renovating the existing building would not be a good choice - enormous contortions would be required to make this work for seniors.
- The option of addition/renovation vs. new construction has been discussed and evaluated with extensive public input since 2019. It is time to move on.
- Although the old building is pretty, it is broken and does not work and cannot be made to work.
- People are more important than buildings. The process would be remiss to make a choice which would exclude or deter any resident from coming to and enjoying benefits of the senior center.
- The new construction design echoes the Newton Free Library, pulling together important civic and community centers in Newton. Wonderful!
- It was noted that the quality exterior design and materials presented do not emulate typical new commercial or housing projects. It was noted that the cupola placement should be carefully studied as it may be too small for the building. The cupolas at City Hall and the Library are larger and are more in scale with the overall building.
- Meetings have been public, and the process has been transparent. For the past two years all meetings have been available over Zoom. Time has been put into thinking about the design and use of the space, needs of the community and abutters. The existing building is an encumbrance and has outlived its use. The new design is well thought out. The project needs to move forward as planned. The time to argue for saving the old, outdated, and inaccessible building is past.
- The all-new senior center approach to NewCAL is the only option which allows ground level, universal, and welcoming access for all older adults. Using the existing building as an addition/renovation makes one contend with two major drawbacks: (1) the main floor is six feet above ground level and there is no way to provide welcoming access and (2) the windows in the main rooms of the existing building start six feet above floor level which is twelve feet above grade. Almost no senior is tall enough to see out of these windows. Therefore, seniors in the

main rooms seem totally detached from the community. This design is not supportive of seniors.

- The add/reno option closes seniors in and creates isolation at a floor level which is six feet above grade with an inability to look out windows. The current building interior is oppressive.
- Retrofitting the existing building to be compliant with ADA is going to be difficult and will make visitors feel different, like outsiders.
- The new design will allow seniors to see and be seen and not be hidden away!
- Seniors need a gym for classes and socialization. Over one-hundred seniors have been attending the Zumba class on Zoom. A large space is needed for this activity.
- These issues have been debated for the last three (3) years with hundreds of public meetings. A full-size gym is needed for sports. Other gyms in the city are heavily booked and not available. We must move ahead and build the new Center and not revisit old issues already debated.
- Regarding historical preservation, the interior is as important as preserving the façade. The building has beautiful windows and woodwork which would need to be removed/modified with an addition/renovation. If these features remain, the building is unusable as a senior center. The priority is to create a modern building which welcomes seniors and has space that is bright and open, an uplifting building which will have a profound effect on visitor's attitudes and moods.
- Increasing the amount of glass will help the building mass appear less dominant.
- An addition/renovation would cost more than the new construction option.
- The existing building could be honored with a display at the Jackson Homestead as well as in the new building.
- Meeting the needs of older adults is not just a question of providing the physical program spaces outlined in the project specifications. There is also a question of values that cherish the older adult population and make their access to and use of the facility as smooth and as easy as possible. The relationship of the existing windows relative to the outside grade create access challenges as well as making it fundamentally impossible for there to be any indoor/outdoor connections. The seniors are closed off and its pathetically like their warehouse. Starting with a building that was never designed to be a senior center is just not appropriate. By supporting preservation of the existing building is effectively killing, not promoting, the project because there are no other sites in Newton.
- The primary focus and consideration should be on what happens inside the building as opposed to saving the outside. The existing building was designed as a library and if anything, should be converted back to a library.

Support of Addition/Renovation

Opponents of the new construction design option provided public comments which included speaking critically about preserving the exterior of the existing building as well as about the size of the proposed building. The following reasons were stated in favor of preserving the exterior of the existing building and not building a new building on the site of the existing senior center:

- Historical significance of the current senior center building, formerly known as the Newtonville branch library, includes significance of the stained-glass windows created by the Connick Foundation, inspired by Robert Frost.
- The style of the building is associated with the New Deal era and is characterized by Antoinette Lee, a distinguished historic preservationist of American federal architecture.
- Significance of the park in front of the existing building was noted as a casual gathering space.
- The new construction design is too large for the space. The building needs to be located where there can be outdoor landscaped areas and where more onsite parking can be accommodated.
- The existing building should be repurposed for another use and a different site can be found for the new senior center.
- It may be more practical to create an auditorium style space for performances and presentations rather than a large gym for seniors to play pickleball.
- Architects are professionals but they are not magicians. All problems are not solvable. Accessibility is one of the most difficult issues to solve and if you are not careful, the solution can use a lot of useful space while increasing cost.
- The third floor outside deck space will only be accessible during hours the senior center is open. The current green space on Walnut Street is now accessible 24/7 where people gather, including nights and weekends when the new center will be closed. Outdoor gathering space will be moved to the third level.
- All activities that seniors participate in do not need to be isolated in one senior center. There are other performance spaces available to both young and old, including at the recently renovated Nathaniel Allen House, as well as at select historic churches in Newton which are looking to be available more widely as community performance spaces.

These links were provided in the chat to sources regarding Charles Connick Stained Glass Foundation:

<https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/8W8KCzpBkOlzYNmi7kt4I?domain=cjconnick.org>

<https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/k712CADQpZhV5KJ1fwuOSz?domain=en.wikipedia.org>

The City noted that the project is completely open to working with the Connick Foundation regarding the optimum placement for the stained-glass window panels.

Roof Options – Pyramidal vs. Gable

Comments were offered regarding preference to each of the two (2) roof line options presented – the pyramidal roof and the gable roof:

- The gabled roof appears boxy and confining and does not look good from the street view.
- Both design options are thoughtful with solid materials and are reminiscent of the library as appropriate for a civic building. The pyramidal is preferred as the gable roof design feels heavy.
- The inclusion of a gable design and portico with a modern building seems inappropriate.
- Shading is needed at the outdoor seating areas. Seniors will not be able to use terraces without shading from the sun (check with residents of the Golda Meir House). Shade must be provided, or heat prostration will be likely.
- The gable roof option provides shade and more programming flexibility in inclement weather.
- Can there be a design which covers the deck with a flat roof, without the prominent gable?
- Cupola feels too small and both options would benefit with it being eliminated.

General Design Questions and Comments

Q: Will there be direct access to the building from the parking lot?

A: Yes, there is a direct entrance.

Q: How many cars can park in the new senior center parking lot?

A: The current senior center has approximately 13 parking spaces which will be increased to 30 parking spaces. Onsite parking will be complimented by a senior permit parking program on Highland Ave. which was recently expanded just at the beginning of Covid.

The original identified need for a 2.5-acre site was to accommodate 75 onsite parking spaces, if possible. What was stated was that if there were sites that had complimentary street parking in proximity, the site area could be reduced. The program will not impact any of the parking currently used by the businesses or their patrons to accommodate the needs of the seniors. The average daily demand will be approximately 45 parking spaces with a monthly peak parking demand of 75 spaces and annual peak parking demand of 92 spaces. The drop-off will be on Highland Ave. at the bump in which currently exists.

Q: Where will the senior center staff park?

A: Staff parking will be figured out as part of the parking management plan.

Q: Is there any consideration for covered space for the parking in the back of the building?

A: The opportunity of a small solar car port will be explored, including the study of solar angles.

Q: Will there be charging stations for electric vehicles?

A: Yes, there will be charging stations.

Q: Where are the art and craft rooms?

A: There is a large art room on the second floor, overlooking Walnut Street, immediately off the main circulation near the elevator and the main monumental stair. There is an activity craft room adjacent to the art room.

Q: Will there be solar panels?

A: Yes, there will be solar panels on the building.

Q: Will telecom abilities be available for hearing assistance in all rooms?

A: There will be telecom ability in all the multi-purpose rooms. The plan is for the building to be as flexible as possible. There will also be ability for remote programming.

Q: Has there been consideration for (2) elevators given the (3) levels and differently abled folks?

A: The elevator consultant performed a trip analysis which was discussed and presented to the Council on Aging. Based on the compact nature of the building we are confident that a single elevator will be sufficient. It is not like the current elevator. The City averages approximately one day of downtime, per year/new elevators at the schools. Although the senior center has more demand, the schools have more people so it about evens out.

Q: Will the elevator go to the top floor?

A: Yes, the elevator goes to all three floors.

Q: Will the building consume fossil fuels?

A: Heat pumps, VRF systems will likely be used. The plan for the emergency generator will be worked out as the project moves forward.

Q: Where will the mechanical equipment be?

A: Mechanical equipment will most likely be on the roof. Again, with all electric systems the demand for SF is relatively low.

- Q: How does loss of embodied carbons compare with new construction vs. the existing building?
- A: The loss of embodied carbon through demolition of the existing building is completely offset by the high increase in efficiency, both in the total gross square footage of heating and cooling loads in the new construction model as well as with the increase in design efficiency offered with new construction. Given the small size and inefficiencies of the existing building which requires major modifications, the overall carbon footprint is better with new construction for this project. All information can be verified and is available in the Design Review Committee (DRC) meeting minutes. Note that the DRC just voted again to unanimously support the new construction option.
- Q: How does proposed green space compare with what currently exists?
- A: The outdoor green space along Walnut Street will be much tighter compared with what currently exists. However, the total outdoor green space is very close to what currently exists. Green space will be redistributed around the perimeter because the goal is to optimize use of the overall site.
- Q: Will there be windows in the gymnasium?
- A: Yes, there are clerestory windows. The windows are above, at the track level, which will allow ample light into the gym without impacting the glass from activities below.
- Q: Is there a possibility to increase deck space on the upper floors?
- A: Increasing deck space has been considered however based on feedback received over the past few years this is where the design is.
- Q: As a resident of Walnut Place, there is concern that street parking will be an issue. The street is narrow with a sharp turn near the senior center.
- A: The project is not looking to put any parking on Walnut Place. The parking management plan may need to address no parking.
- Q: Why is a full-scale gym is needed when there are other gymnasiums all over the City. A smaller gym would help the building design to fit better in the neighborhood.
- A: A full size gymnasium is not being proposed. The size is comparable to the elementary school size gymnasiums which is the minimum dimensions needed for a basketball game.
- Q: Did the architects attempt to create a universal front door using the current Senior Center Building?
- A: There is an inherent challenge with creating a universal barrier free front entrance, without ramps, into the existing building. The entire first floor would need to be lowered to address

the approximate six foot height difference, from grade to the first-floor level. Without lowering the building major modifications would be needed to the inside and the outside, including a large switch back ramp system which would be close to one-hundred feet in length. Aesthetic challenges would be created as well as significant barriers. Interior challenges and difficult travel paths would remain with multiple floor levels, including mezzanines.

Q: Why is the City disregarding the opinion of the Newton Historical Commission?

A: There are times when adaptive reuse makes sense such as at the Cabot School where the entrance was at grade, the classrooms were a good size and there was plenty of large windows offering lots of natural light. It was noted that every project is unique and every user group that uses those projects is unique, so the City needs to evaluate the merits of renovation vs new on a case-by-case basis. In this case, there are too many compromises and sacrifices to the program and to delivering a fully accessible welcoming barrier-free and age- friendly facility. In addition to the Cabot School project, adaptive reuse made sense at the former Aquinas school building on Jackson Road as well as at the Fire Station headquarters and at the Carr School.

Q: Highland Ave should have parking on one side only.

A: Parking on one side will be part of the parking management plan analysis.

Q: Will there be mirrors in rooms for exercise classes so participants can see what the instructor is doing when the have their back to the class?

A: Yes, there will be mirrors.

Q: Was a basement considered ?

A: Basements tend to leak over time plus there is less demand given mechanical systems and the roof design.

Q: Where are the seniors going to go at time of construction?

A: Once the design is finalized, the temporary relocation will be figured out.

The following comments were made regarding the possible integration with the Swedenborgian Church and the New Art Center:

- It would be helpful to integrate planning of the senior center with the evolution of the Swedenborgian Church across the street at 19 Highland Avenue. There is outdoor garden space, assembly space, office space and parking.

- It would be good if some of the senior center programming could be housed at the existing New Art Center after the New Art Center moves to the Swedenborgian Church. This would allow the Senior Center to be smaller.

In response to a suggestion to repurpose 100 Walnut Street (Newton School Administration building) for a combination new Senior Center and Gath Pool project, the City offered the following:

The 100 Walnut Street site was studied back in 2018 as part of the site search. The building is 70,000SF and sits on 3.5 acres with close to 200 staff members and multiple educational programs with students in the building and serves as the central hub for IT, including the server room, for the entire school district and houses professional development. The parking lot with about 200 spaces is at capacity on almost any given day and when there is a professional development event, parking spills out into the neighborhood.

The challenge with the Ed Center is that while trying to solve one problem another will be created including finding an alternate location for central administration and all the educational functions. The school department does not have surplus space in other buildings which means the City will need to lease space. An alternate site will need to be found to relocate current functions then the process of adaptive reuse would need to begin or demolishing the existing building and building new. The total cost would be somewhere around \$55-\$60M. The schedule would be very long, and the price tag would be much higher than the cost associated with the current senior center site.

The next Community meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 17, 2022 at 6:30PM (via Zoom).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05PM.

Prepared by: Melissa Gagnon, NV5 [End of 02/17/22 Meeting Minutes]