

Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) project

Community Meeting					
Date: Thursday, March 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"/>	Joel Bargmann	<i>BH+A</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Alex Valcarce	<i>Public Buildings Dept.</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Dan Chen	<i>BH+A</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Melissa Gagnon	<i>NV5</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Thomas Murphy	<i>NV5</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Josh Morse, the City of Newton Public Buildings Commissioner, opened the Community meeting at 6:32PM. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 public health crisis, the meeting took place virtually, via Zoom. There were 91 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 attendees. 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 March 17, 2022](#). The presentation is also posted and can be found here: [2022.03.17 NewCAL Community Meeting Presentation](#).

Introduction

Josh Morse welcomed participants to the meeting and provided a brief project overview. It was noted the presentation will include a concise high-level presentation on energy and sustainability, familiarizing attendees with industry terminologies, with the plan to review at a greater level of detail at the next DRC meeting on April 13.

Building Design

Dan Chen from BH+A provided a brief overview of design developments relative to the building siting, program, floor plans and exterior elevations followed by a high-level focused update on the proposed building’s energy usage and conservation. Highlights of the presentation are as follows:

Interior

- The proposed building is sited at the former library/current senior center at 345 Walnut Street, at a corner lot with Highland Avenue to the north and Walnut Place to the south. The proposed new building is a 3-story structure with a 2-story wing facing Walnut Street. Above the 2-story wing is an outdoor roof deck overlooking Walnut Street.
- The main lobby is entered off the corner of Walnut Street and Highland Avenue. Pick up and drop off are along Highland Avenue, near the corner, near the main entry.
- The vehicular entrance and surface level parking are at the rear.
- Programming is distributed on three floor levels as follows:
 - First floor – Most public event programs - lounge, library, and reception area, two large multi-function rooms which can be combined into one larger space and kitchen with commercial equipment. The building is organized around a central double height space that serves as the main circulation area with an elevator and the main stair.
 - Second floor – Activity programs – 6500SF multi-function gym space which can be divided into two spaces with a curtain, classrooms, art rooms, conference room and activity/arts and crafts rooms.
 - Third floor – Destination programs – walking track above the gym, game room and a large fitness room. There is also an outdoor deck which accommodates seating as well as a variety of activities, including an extension to the fitness center.

Exterior

Conceptual rendered elevations were presented relative to building organization and programming. Some highlights noted are:

- The main entrance is directly off the street, without any barriers.
- Exterior outdoor spaces along Highland and Walnut Street are easily accessible from both the street as well as from the interior.
- Large windows flood the interior with natural light.
- Visitors will be physically and visually connected to street activities outside of the center.
- The building is layered with a variety of building materials including - stone, brick, metal, and glass - to help bring the new facility to the pedestrian level.
- Outdoor seating and landscape areas are between the building edge and the sidewalk which helps to activate the street edge.
- The proposed roof at the outdoor roof deck will provide partial coverage.
- There are landscaping and seating areas outside of the multi-function room, along Walnut Place.

Energy Model Progress

It was noted that the proposed new building is aimed to be an all-electric, fossil fuel-free facility using renewable energy whenever possible. Per the current energy model, the proposed senior center is projected to use 39% less energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 23%, in comparison with today's most stringent MA Stretch Energy Code. It was noted that the Stretch Code is approximately 10% more efficient in comparison with the base code. Regarding Energy Use Efficiency (EUI), the existing senior center consumes 108 KBTUs/year vs. 56 KBTUs/year which is recommended by the Stretch Code. The current Energy model is based on operating hours at the new facility being 7:00AM-7:00PM, seven (7) days/week in comparison with current hours of 9:00AM-4:00PM (Mon-Fri).

Glazing to Wall Analysis

It was noted the current senior center has approximately 21% of windows (1754 SF) to total wall surface (8,414 SF). Per the new senior center design, the total glazing area calculates to 5647 SF with a total wall/surface area of 24,105 SF resulting in a 23.4% ratio of total glazing/wall surface area. This is well below the prescriptive path of 30% mandated by the most stringent energy code in MA.

Curtain wall areas were calculated as the entire opening, including spandrel area, which provides for future flexibility to change materials. Rendered elevations were presented for all four (4) facades, with glazing surface area annotated as follows:

- North elevation: Roughly 1326 SF glazing/6120 SF wall (22%)
- East elevation: Roughly 2061 SF glazing/2061 SF wall (34%)
- South elevation: Roughly 1388 SF glazing/6120 SF wall (23%)
- West elevation: Roughly 872 SF glazing/5835 SF wall (15%)

It was noted that as the design of the new senior center progresses, the design team will continue to look for opportunities to improve the building energy efficiency and reduce energy use while balancing this with interior spaces that are comfortable, light filled and accessible.

The City noted if feasible, the ultimate goal is to achieve net zero and maximize the solar footprint. This may include racking up above the mechanical equipment in the area, which is not currently designed to be covered, becomes covered, with solar panels.

The current design carries 4600 SF of solar panels. Solar panel technologies will be studied to try to offset as much electric use as possible with greater solar generation. If the building can have a higher output or more efficient solar panel, then this may be more cost efficient as well given the relatively small space. Microinverters will likely be studied depending on shading. Passive house standards will be used as a mechanism to drive energy footprint down as low as possible. Sets an aggressive goal on air infiltration. Making sure the building is very tight will help to drive down the size of heating and cooling equipment which will allow the building to have a smaller energy footprint/intensity which correlates to

lower energy consumption, which is good for the budget. The building will have a smaller carbon footprint and will be closer to achieving net zero.

Public Comment

Questions and Answers

- Q: Is there something in the design goals regarding air infiltration and passive house standards, in response to covid?
- A: All City buildings will meet ASRAE 62.1 so will be providing good, high quality filtered fresh air as it sets air rates in terms of peak loads. Will be judicious in terms of fresh air circulation and filtration.
- Q: Will it be possible to install air purifiers or air sanitizers in the new building?
- A: The Federal and State governments recommend air purification and air sanitizers for buildings that do not have access to mechanical ventilation and/or operable windows. In general, air purification or air sanitization will not be recommended in a well-ventilated building which meets ASHRAE 62.1.
- Q.: Will all parking spaces have charging stations?
- A: There will be charging stations, however the quantity is TBD.
- Q: Are provisions being considered for fresh air to enter the building without impacting energy efficiency in the building?
- A: If we end up with a VRF model system, will have a series of energy recovery units allowing fresh air to enter. Will study packaged heat pump RTUs as well as central heat pump systems.
- Q: What is the height of the railings at the roof deck?
- A: Railings are shown at 42" high which is standard per building code.
- Q: Can plants be used to provide shade on the roof deck?
- A: There will be plants on the deck and can study whether they can be shade plants.

Q: Will the need for NewCAL be re-evaluated with consideration of the new West Suburban YMCA branch location being planned on Wells Avenue?

A: The Senior Services Department provides many services which are not offered at the YMCA. However, there are opportunities for partnerships with the YMCA, similar to the non-profits that exist throughout the City. The YMCA expanding programming with an additional location will be beneficial to the community. This project is about taxpayers' dollars making services as accessible as possible.

Q: It is important to adhere to passive standards for building envelope design. Given limited solar capacity at the site, is there opportunity for geothermal? What is the chance we would be building to the higher efficiency model of the two models presented?

A: It is more likely we would be building to the higher efficiency model. The goal is to be as aggressive as possible. A tighter envelope will yield a more efficient building which will drive down the Energy Use Intensity (EUI).

Geothermal will be studied as part of the systems analysis however in this case it is unlikely that well fields needed will be available to cover the whole building. It could help to drive energy usage down to get closer to net zero. Drilling costs for geothermal are high so the payback tends to be exceptionally long.

Refer to meeting video for more detailed information: [2022.03.17 NewCAL Community Meeting Presentation](#) (31:30 – 37:12).

Q: Regarding solar panels, is it possible the panels could move with the direction of the sun?

A: This technology typically has been seen on ground mounts rather than buildings. We can study whether that option would make sense relative to the orientation of the sun and whether that technology would generate enough solar capacity to make the investment worthwhile.

Q: Looking for accounting relative to the impact to embodied carbons, resulting from taking down the existing building and building a new facility. Will an analysis be done which yields what the actual climate costs will be for the new building?

A: Embodied carbons have been studied regarding new construction vs. an addition/renovation. A full embodied carbon analysis is challenging to create pending finalization of massing and materials. The existing senior center building is small, at approximately 11,000 GSF, plus an addition, yields a total building area of approximately 36,800 GSF. New construction, which delivers the same amount of usable program space is close to 3,600 GSF less.

A: Will study the difference in treated spaces between new construction and an add/reno. The new construction option is smaller from a heating and cooling perspective. The existing building has large space volumes which will need to be cooled in the add/reno option. An embodied carbon analysis will be done for all projects in the City. Also, it is important to consider the construction carbon which can also impact the carbon footprint.

Refer to meeting video for more detailed information: [2022.03.17 NewCAL Community Meeting Presentation](#) (40:55 – 47:32).

Q: Was a benefit analysis performed at the beginning of the NewCAL project back in 2018? If so, the additional YMCA facility was not available at that time. Could there be a non-competitive partnership with the YMCA?

A: Per the last census, there are 25,000 seniors living in Newton (over 40% of the households). In addition to programs, the senior center offers much needed senior centered services. The City will respond further by forwarding information on the decentralized model from the project website and would be happy to continue the conversation.

Q: The Senior Center and the Oak Square YMCA are two vastly different organizations. The Senior Center provides services that the Oak Square YMCA does not provide. Pre-pandemic, approximately 100 seniors were coming through the door at the senior center daily. The YMCA is an independent organization, not connected with the COA. 25% of the City of Newton population are seniors.

A: There are existing partnerships with the YMCA and conversations will continue regarding probable future partnerships with the YMCA.

Q: Will the funds the City received from the federal government open the possibility of sites which may not have been within reach earlier?

A: The City received ARPA funds as part of the federal stimulus; however, the City's CFO would need to weigh in regarding regulations for distribution. Over 145 different sites were evaluated as options for NewCAL. After years of dedicated community outreach, a decision was made to move forward. We are looking to break ground in 16 months (Summer 2023) and cut the ribbon two years after that (Summer 2025).

Q: Can the Albemarle site be reconsidered for NewCAL as part of the Gath Pool project?

A: The Parks and Recreation Commission voted unanimously to send a strong message that no Parks and Rec sites, including Albemarle, can be used for the NewCAL project.

Q: Has dividing the program into two separate buildings been considered?

A: A decentralized Olympic village model was considered and studied back in 2018. Although there were some pros there were a lot of cons and ultimately the concept was unanimously rejected by the Council on Aging. The cons included the inconvenience for seniors to attend multiple programs which may not be in proximity as well as the cost associated with multiple sites. Programs help draw users in to take advantage of services offered. Of the centers visited, not one was a decentralized model. Programming spread throughout the City will undermine goals outlined in the NewCAL Mission Statement. A decentralized model would be counterproductive and would not foster a sense of community.

Q: Will there be a commercial kitchen?

A: There will be a teaching kitchen. For reference, Needham has a similar type of kitchen.

Q: Is there an end date planned for public input so the project can move forward?

A: In the municipal word there are no end dates for public input. Community meetings will continue through construction and ribbon cutting. Technical discussions will continue with the Design Review Committee.

Q: Why not consider the site of the Andover Newton Theological school?

A: This site was looked at as an option back in 2019 and did not receive a lot of support from Newton seniors. Although the site is geographically centrally located, the location itself is not very close to area amenities. The site also has some significant topography challenges. Also, not being a City owned property, the price tag was close to the total project budget. The site is no longer for sale.

Q: Although there are 25,000 seniors in Newton, how many visit the senior center?

A: Based on visits to area seniors, the project team was informed that the new building will yield an increase in participation by 3-5 times, in comparison with the existing. The existing facility limits programs and services.

Q: What is status of the facade development?

A: Roofline and shading options are continuing to be studied and will be presented to the community for feedback as we try to work towards a consensus.

General Comments

- The new design is beautiful. The amount of light coming into the building is wonderful. The present building is so unfriendly. Users cannot see out and no one can see in. The new building will be very inviting. The existing heating and cooling are so inadequate, and the new plan seems amazing. Building systems are breaking down and there is no space for needed classes.
- Process to date is very impressive. The current plan is for a beautiful energy efficient building which will serve 25% of the City's population. The constant push back will only add to the project costs. The project should move forward without further delay, and I would like to be alive to use this new energy efficient building in my senior years.
- From the perspective of a senior Newton resident, the new YMCA facility cannot accommodate the senior population.
- Based on conversations with the YMCA, there would be inadequate parking and lack of social space. Partnership is a great idea however there will be compromises in programs and services which needed for the senior community.
- Social and emotional services for seniors cannot be delivered by an organization dedicated to athletics and services for youth.
- The social and emotional connection, and the feeling of belonging to a community, are created at a senior center and are important.
- NewCAL provides a holistic approach to the possible needs of an individual.
- Many of the neighboring towns are proud of their Senior Centers. Newton is lagging and needs to move ahead, specifically Needham and Wellesley.
- The current site is perfect and is absolutely the right decision. A zillion alternatives have been exhausted and it is time to move forward.
- The City noted the new building will have separate zones so each space will be individually controlled from a temperature standpoint for heating and cooling. The City will be able to control the system from computers and cell phones.
- There will be assisted hearing devices in all the major spaces.
- There will be a lot of time spent reviewing finishes and details.
- The building will be fully heated and cooled with electricity. This will cost slightly more than a natural gas system if the energy efficiency system is mid-range. If a higher range system is utilized, costs will likely break even. BH+A noted with a higher energy efficient system, there may be a 3.4% cost savings in comparison to natural gas.

- The City noted the landmarking conversation is scheduled with the Newton Historic Commission next Thursday, 3/24. It was explained that if NHC votes to landmark the existing building, there will ultimately need to be a public hearing to discuss whether or not to vote to designate the building as a landmark.

The next Community meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 21, 2022 at 6:30PM (via Zoom).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15PM.

Prepared by: Melissa Gagnon, NV5 [End of 03/17/22 Meeting Minutes]