

City of Newton



Design Review Committee
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Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

MINUTES

November 18, 2020
Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) Project Update
Online Zoom Meeting

Present:

Ellen Light – DRC	Mark Resnick - DRC	Fred Lewis – Resident
Ambrose Donovan - DRC	Steve Siegel – DRC	Gordon Szerlip – COA Advisory
David Gillespie - DRC	Josh Morse	Ena Lorant
Tom Gloria - DRC	Alex Valcarce	Jo-Edith Heffron
Robert Hnasko – DRC	Jayne Colino	Alice Ingerson
Jonathan Kantar - DRC	Doug Cornelius – NHC	Naomi
Amy Mackrell - DRC	Steve Siegel – DRC	Joel Bargmann – BH+A
Carol Schein – DRC	Norm Meltz – COA/NewCAL WG	James Bruneau – BH+A
Peter Barrer - DRC	Bea Goldsmith – NewCAL WG	Dan Chen – BH+A
Andrea Kelley – DRC *	Richard Rasala – NewCAL WG	Melissa Gagnon – NV5

Absent:

Barney Heath	Jini Fairley	Tom Rooney
Emily Prenner – DRC *	Stephanie Gilman	Rafik Ayoub
Art Cabral	Anne Cedrone	Tom Enselek
Maria Leo	John Mulligan	

* denotes non-voting members of DRC

Alex Valcarce opened up the meeting at 6:03PM. Members of the DRC, Working Group, COA and consultant team (BH+A and NV5) were in attendance. The intent of this meeting was to provide a Feasibility Study update to the DRC with regard to progress made since the last meeting on 8/26/20. An opportunity for questions and answers was provided following the presentation.

Project Update

BH+A provided an update on the following existing conditions reports: Hazmat materials survey, structural assessment, traffic and parking assessment, geotechnical assessment, and land survey. All reports are posted to the project website here: [NewCAL Existing Conditions Reports](#). Reports are helpful in determining whether it is appropriate to renovate and add to the existing building to take the building down. A few highlights from the reports are: Abatement will be required in both demolition and renovation, there is no existing steel reinforcing in masonry walls and reinforcing will need to be added for a renovation, parking for 70 cars is recommended for a typical day, with 27 onsite, site consists of 3-8' of fill on top of sandy soil which would need to be removed, as new footings would require structural fill, the roof would need to be removed to create a new diaphragm system as part of new roof construction. MEP systems were not surveyed in a detailed manner as in the event of renovation, the building would be gutted and systems would be replaced. Additional points extracted from detailed reports are listed in DRC meeting presentation which is posted on the project website here: [NewCAL 11/18/20 DRC presentation](#).

BH+A provided an overview of various schemes being studied. The presentation was organized to include a summary page for each option: Retaining the existing building with a new addition as well as demolishing the existing building and building new. Each option was prefaced with advantages and challenges which can be found on the project website: [NewCAL 11/18/20 DRC presentation](#). The following six (6) options were presented and discussed:

Retain Existing Building and New Addition

- Option A (keep both wings and central cupola, parking entry from Highland Ave, 3 story)
- Option B (keep south wing and central cupola 3 story)
- Option C (keep north wing and central cupola, 3 story)
- Option D (keep central tower only, 3 story)

New Building

- Option E (new bar building, 4 story)
- Option E1 (new L-shaped building, 4 story)

Advantages of new construction include doubling the amount of onsite parking, providing appropriately sized lobby/lounge area with large program areas/social activity spaces accommodated at grade.

Discussion and Questions

Following the presentation, Committee members asked questions of the design team. A general overview of the Q/A is as follows:

- An off street drop off area for NewMo and other vehicles shall be incorporated into the site design.

- With regard to snow removal, the distance of new construction from the existing building will be considered. Heat tracing will be incorporated.
- A 3-story building distributed more comfortably across the site with below grade parking should be considered.
- Option E1 with at grade access and partially covered parking, may be as expensive as below grade parking.
- Perhaps the mezzanine level with walking track could be better utilized.
- The gymnasium could be designed as transparent and inviting.
- A new building should have traditional detailing and a cupola and be contextual with the neighborhood, similar to the main branch library.
- There is opportunity to improve connections with Newtonville. Business owners would like NewCAL and Newtonville to support one another.
- The site can function as a bridge between the commercial area and the high school/residential area.
- A desire of NewCAL project is to create a better synergy with the Newtonville community.
- Taking the building down and building new creates a lot of opportunities which preserving the existing building does not. The need to utilize as much of the site as possible is paramount and a new building would offer the most flexibility.
- Lots of design contortions need to be done to reuse the existing building.
- Wayfinding for this particular user group will be challenging and is very important to consider. Despite appreciation for the existing building, the project is about what is best for the user group.
- If the goal is to save the existing building at all costs, it can be done, although the gesture could be gratuitous. It will be preferred to enter the building at grade, rather than at 6' above grade.
- By retaining the existing building, programming is squeezed to fit on the site, and encroaches upon backyards to the west and to the south, close to abutters. Therefore, preserving the building may not be a worthwhile gesture.
- Embodied carbons will need to be evaluated in terms of how much goes into an add/reno vs. new construction. Carbons can be calculated by SF, footprint, number of stories and construction type.
- With regard to traffic, one way in and one way out should be considered in future schemes. Traffic congestion in the area is a concern.
- With regard to Option E1 (L-shaped), strategies should be considered to help reduce massing at the south side. Parking could be complicated to navigate.
- The idea of literal transparency at the corner of Highland and Walnut is intriguing. Perhaps this would be a good location for existing stained glass windows to be repurposed.

- As options are studied, it will be important to understand relationships of the floor levels at the existing building to the levels at an addition as well as to the existing community.
- With regard to siting, the question was asked whether it is advantageous to be closer to the street and create more parking behind the building or create a greater set back with more open space along Walnut Street?
- In an effort to create more of a buffer from the neighbors to the west and south, it may be more advantageous for the building to shift closer to Walnut Street as well northward. This shift would also bring the building closer to Newtonville businesses. A section cut would be helpful.
- A balance needs to be reached between outdoor gathering space and parking.
- Knitting NewCAL to the fabric of Newtonville is important. Green space for the community to come together needs to be retained. The new facility could be a very nice space for the new Center as well as for the Newtonville community.
- Green space at the corner of Highland and Walnut, with the building entry lobby, would help to connect the Center with Newtonville.
- The City noted that the NHC vote to preferably preserve the building does not delay the project. In addition to providing guidance as to whether to renovate or build new, the NHC can provide insight and influence the design of a new building.
- If a new facility is constructed, an exhibit can be created to pay homage to the existing building.
- For future presentations, it would be helpful to have a very short summary of all options.
- For meeting format, the chat should go to one person to not be distracting.

The next scheduled meeting is on Wednesday, 12/16/20, at 6:00PM.

Meeting adjourned at 7:50PM

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Gagnon
NV5, Inc.
[End of 11/18/2020 Meeting Minutes]