

Frequently Asked Questions

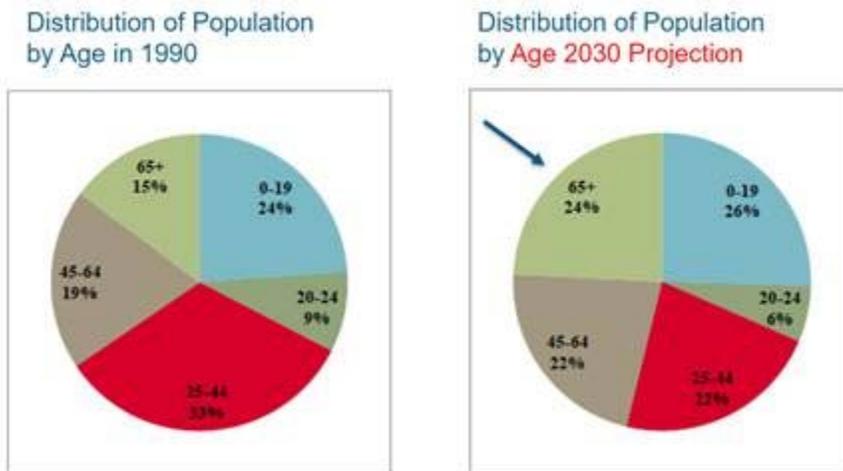
What is NewCAL?

The Newton Center for Active Living is the name given to the project to address the facility needs of seniors in Newton.

Why is NewCAL important?

Already making up more than 15% of the City's population, the percentage of residents who are over the age of 65 is greater than the state and national averages and continues to grow. Newton has been designated as an age-friendly community and as such we have committed to combat ageism, isolationism, and barriers that prevent Newton's seniors from aging in place.

City of Newton Changes in Older Population



Source: Bluestone, B. & Corley, T. (2014 May). Demographic projections for the city of Newton, Massachusetts. Kitty and Michael Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, Northeastern University.



The mission of the Department of Senior Services is to optimize quality of life for older adults and those who support them through welcoming, respectful and meaningful opportunities that engage and value older people and empower them to remain independent and to be important assets in our community.

The current facility, even when using other facilities to compliment it, can no longer deliver the mission statement of Department of Senior Services.

The existing Senior Center is woefully undersized and located on a parcel that is way too small to support the ever-growing program. The existing facility can no longer meet the needs of seniors, and the site does not have enough land area to address these needs. Senior programs have always been offered in buildings throughout Newton, and this practice will continue. This used to be done to deliver programs to seniors who might not be able to access the facility. Now, programs that belong in the central location must be sent elsewhere because there is simply not enough room at the existing Senior Center.

What are we going to do with the current Senior Center at 345 Walnut Street?

This facility will remain a City asset and we look forward to working with the Mayor, City Council, and community to determine the most appropriate use once the NewCAL project is complete.

How will we pay for the NewCAL Project?

The NewCAL project will be paid for within the City budget and will not require an increase in taxes to fund it. Like a mortgage, it will be bonded over a 30-year period, and annual debt payments will come from the City's operating budget. Should the pool facility be included with this project, the funding source would be determined at that time.

Why are we building NewCAL and not a Senior Center?

There is a national movement to transition away from the term "Senior Center." The stigma that some people attach to these locations by name alone prevent them from visiting, obtaining services, participating in programs, and becoming part of the community that exists within those walls. Every space within the current design has been included to meet the needs of seniors. This includes the gym, which will be used for basketball, volleyball, pickleball, badminton, has an elevated walking track, and a variety of other programs that Newton seniors specifically asked for during the community outreach process. The NewCAL Mission Statement also provides insight:

The City of Newton's goal, as an age friendly community, is to build a large, well equipped, comfortable Center to meet the unique interests and needs of older adults, both those currently using the Senior Center and many

others who are not. The Center will foster a special sense of community and belonging for this growing group. This facility will be designed to optimize the quality of life for Newton's older adults and those who support them, through welcoming, respectful and meaningful opportunities that engage, value, and empower older adults to remain independent and important assets in our community.

When spaces within this facility are not programmed for older adults, the goal is to offer well managed, quality and enriching community and multigenerational experiences for all residents of Newton.

Why aren't we pursuing a decentralized or "Olympic Village" model?

The City spent a great deal of time considering this approach and studying a variety of models around the Commonwealth and country. What we found was that the decentralized model was very uncommon in communities of our size. Very large cities have more than one facility that serves seniors, but these are central facilities serving boroughs or large sections of regions within a city. Some smaller towns use the decentralized model out of necessity due to a lack of resources to create a central facility.

Newton is already operating in a decentralized model to some extent. The Senior Services Department already has programs that are offered in a variety of other municipal and private buildings. In some cases, this is done to improve access to programs in areas throughout the City. In many cases, Senior Services is offering off-site programs that we want to be centrally located, but we do not have the available space to offer them at the current Senior Center. This has become increasingly difficult to manage from a staff perspective.

The other challenge with this model is that many seniors are drawn in by fun programs like Zumba, and while at the central location they become aware of financial, social, or emotional services offered by the central staff. In addition, and most importantly, the sense of community that exists within these facilities are a direct result of having a central location where personal relationships and bonds are created among seniors as well as staff. It is this very sense of community that overcomes barriers and helps combat isolationism. In many respects the central location is Newton's 14th village. A decentralized model requires additional staff resources to adequately manage due to patrons being spread out at multiple locations. To create a decentralized model, we would need to renovate and repurpose multiple City facilities which would yield a higher up-front capital

investment, a larger long-term capital liability, and increased operational costs.

Some have asked about the use of school facilities, and we confirmed with the School Department that they have no available space during the day, they permit more than 8,000 off-hour non-school programs each year, and they turn away more than twice that annually due to lack of in-demand space. Of note is that gyms are the spaces in highest demand.

What has the process been to date?

The Council on Aging (COA), City Council, and a wide variety of city staff and stakeholders have been working since the Spring of 2018 to identify the primary programs and services to be provided and determine the types and sizes of spaces needed to accommodate them. Supporting this process are the City's project architectural teams, SBA and BH+A, as well as the project management team, NV5. Over the past 15 months, there have been 35 community meetings, listening sessions, Dialog with the Director meetings, City Council meetings, and many others, to solicit as much feedback as possible to determine the needs of Newton's seniors. The team also received hundreds of responses to the public questionnaire from last Fall.

Once completed, the basic building program was presented to the Council on Aging, Community, and City Council, and the team confirmed the approximate size needed for the new facility. This allowed the City to start the site search process. Based on the building size, anticipated parking, and exterior programmatic needs, approximately 2-2.5 acres of land will be required to deliver the full NewCAL program. It was also clarified that sites with existing parking and/or green space would require less land area for the project.

A database of every city-owned parcel as well as several private parcels was created. Any parcel that was too small to accommodate the full program, or had fixed assets that were not realistically moveable, was then listed as not viable, leaving 24 possible sites. This list and the site selection matrix were presented to the community on 6/20/19 and generated significant feedback on a variety of different sites and criteria. Following that meeting, the team started to analyze the list to determine what sites were viable based on the site criteria. This analysis found that 18 of those

24 sites were not viable for a variety of reasons. (Refer to [Hyperlink to Summary Conclusions for NewCal Sites.](#)) These sites were set aside in order to help focus the site selection process. The 6 remaining sites were then analyzed further, including exploring deed restrictions, impact to open space, site logistics, impact to the existing site programs, neighborhood impacts, traffic and parking. These sites were then ranked based on the site selection criteria and weighting system. Albemarle was the top-ranking site when considering all the factors, and this recommendation was ultimately delivered to the Mayor.

What is the “program” and how was it developed?

The program refers to the activities that will take place at the facility and the space requirements needed to provide those activities. The program was developed by meeting with the users which include Senior Services, the Council on Aging and Parks & Recreation to determine the space needs of the project. For NewCAL, the team started by analyzing the current Senior Center facility, spaces within the facility, and current programs and services offered including usage rates and wait lists. The team similarly analyzed the over-55 programs provided by Parks & Recreation. The team also utilized the community survey results, as well as the feedback from all the community meetings, to determine which programs and services were most popular, which new programs and services are in demand, and what additional building spaces or elements were of interest or needed for the senior community.

Additionally, the team went through a process of analyzing the current facility assets both public and private throughout Newton to determine what spaces were in highest demand, and what spaces might be available to supplement our program demands factoring in the time of day when demand exists. All the activities within the current Senior Center were confirmed as being necessary going forward, so all of these were included and space for them increased based on current and projected future demand. The projected usage rate increase was based on the usage rate increases seen when new facilities were opened in communities surrounding Newton. This step alone resulted in a large increase in the size of the new facility. For the new programs and services to be introduced, and those programs which needed more space based on demand, it was determined that the best way to support these demands was by including

ample multipurpose spaces. This approach was a key lesson learned from the team's visits to other senior and community centers, where multipurpose spaces were in the highest demand.

All the spaces included in the current NewCAL program have been planned to meet the needs of seniors. The gym was included to meet the active recreational programming needs of seniors; demand for these programs already exists but the ability to meet it is limited because of the lack of available gym space at the desired times of day. The concept of an elevated indoor walking track in the gym was another element that was brought up during our outreach. The gym also helps meet the space demands for multipurpose rooms, as it can be used for programs like Zumba, yoga, Pilates, etc.

Once the team confirmed the space needs and developed a draft program, it was presented to the COA, Community, and City Council. With the feedback from these groups, a final draft of the NewCAL program was created and has been posted on the NewCAL website.

Has Albemarle been chosen as the site for the NewCAL project?

No, a recommendation has been made to the Mayor by the project team that Albemarle is the top ranked city-owned site. The City is continuing to explore non-city-owned sites throughout Newton.

If this facility is sited at Albemarle, will it take any green space?

The team deeply appreciates the green space in Newton and is committed to preserving it. Design work emphasizes site scenarios that result in no loss of any athletic green space and will explore a range of options that have as little impact on non-athletic green space as possible, including options that yield no net loss of green space at all. These options will be publicly presented, discussed, and vetted. This process will take some time to complete.

If this facility is sited at Albemarle, will the tennis and basketball courts be replicated?

This will be studied including a demand analysis, but ultimately the decision will be made with the Parks and Recreation Department and Parks and Recreation Commission.

If the Albemarle site is selected, what will happen to the pool?

The pool is more than 50 years old and is well past its useful and projected life. Although many repairs have been made as recently as this year, the pool has deteriorated to the point that it is losing millions of gallons of water each summer. The facility is not universally accessible, the pool deck is crumbling, and the support systems are failing. Beyond the condition, being an outdoor pool, which was not designed to be seasonally covered prevents it from being able to serve residents more than 10 weeks a year. Amazingly, in those 10 weeks more than 30,000 people use this facility. The adjacent field house is more than 60 years old, is in worse condition, and provides the only restroom facilities for Albemarle. If this site is selected, the pool and field house will be replaced, and their programs factored into the NewCAL design. This will provide an opportunity to create year-round pool access for people of all ages in Newton. The project will ensure that no user group sees anything but an increase in pool access.

What are we going to do to address parking and traffic?

Traffic and parking studies were recently completed in this area for the Newton Preschool project at 687 Watertown Street (the old Horace Mann School). This study will be complimented by the NewCAL parking and traffic analysis which will identify options to help alleviate traffic issues and identify parking options. The City is currently working with Newton Public Schools to reopen the Education Center parking lot to F.A. Day staff parking to help reduce the parking demand on Albemarle Road. In addition, options to improve the F.A. Day bus drop-off and pick-up, with options that could replace the use of Albemarle Road for this use, will be analyzed. Ultimately the City will need to develop a parking management plan including all the different demands throughout the neighborhood to strike the correct balance of parking needs and neighborhood impact. Traffic and parking studies and recommendations will be discussed and informed by multiple community meetings and hearings.

Aside from the area where the pool and field house are, how will the rest of Albemarle be impacted?

The pathways leading to F.A. Day will not be impacted. The project will not be impacting the athletic fields. The team will be looking to work with the Parks and Recreation Department and Commission to determine what can be done to help improve the site outside of the direct area of impact. The

City will be working to improve walkability, bike-ability, and accessibility throughout the Albemarle area.

What are we going to do to address the accessibility and transportation challenges for those seniors who do not live close to Albemarle?

Regarding transportation, The City recognizes the challenges of this location, but the benefits are quite attractive as well. NewCAL will be working with NewMO, the senior transportation service program to help seniors from all around Newton get to and from the existing and new facility, as well as other locations in demand for seniors. In addition, we will be working to expand senior programming in a variety of locations with a focus on some of our facilities in the southern portion of the city. The City will also be looking to partner with private locations and institutions around Newton for programs, providing another opportunity to improve access to senior programming throughout the city.

What are the potential legal challenges with the use of Albemarle for NewCAL?

The City's Legal Department is aware of the statutes, regulations and laws that apply to projects of this nature and will advise the City accordingly as the details of the project come to light. We deeply respect Article 97 and Chapter 45, as they apply to our wonderful resources here in Newton, and we will certainly follow all of the necessary steps as they apply to this project.

What is the process going forward?

In the coming weeks and months, the team will be engaging with the community, various committees, commissions, and the City Council to continue to discuss the project, program, and site search process. We currently have close to 500 residents on our project email listserv, and if you'd like to be included please email us at newcal@newtonma.gov. We are still in the site search process, and there are many steps, and many months, left before we can officially select a site. While we continue to search for privately owned sites, we will start to test fit the facility at the Albemarle site to start to show what can be done to deliver the program in a way that respects Albemarle, its uses, the neighborhood, and the community. Ultimately, for this facility to be sited at Albemarle a vote of the Parks and Recreation Commission and City Council will be needed. That

process will take many months. The overall project timeline is 4-5 years to the end of construction, depending on the length of the approvals process.

How can I get involved?

Beyond subscribing the listserv, you can check out the project website at <https://newcal.projects.nv5.com/>. There will be lots of opportunities for public comment in a variety of forums for many years to come. These meetings will be posted and noticed at City Hall, at newtonma.gov, and on the project website. You can also email any questions or concerns to newcal@newtonma.gov, and every one of them will be answered.

Why don't we just buy land for NewCAL?

To understand this process, the following are the different processes Newton could obtain property for a project like NewCAL:

Eminent Domain: The government power to take private property for a public purpose.

Friendly Eminent Domain: Mutually beneficial taking whereby both sides willingly agree to the transaction and just compensation is rendered.

Hostile Eminent Domain: Unfriendly taking whereby private property is taken and just compensation is provided. This is often followed by legal action whereby the court(s) may award additional compensation after the fact.

Standard Purchase and Sale: Buyer and seller agree to terms outside of the eminent domain procedure.

A hostile eminent domain is assumed to be an unrealistic approach for the NewCAL project due to a variety of factors, and a standard purchase and sale is the least beneficial from a compensation standpoint. Therefore, our analysis of these options assumes a friendly eminent domain process.

The site selection criteria we have established as being important to the community, also means that the ideal locations are in parts of Newton that are attractive for several other purposes as well. When land is attractive, it also tends to be hard to come by, and expensive to procure. Since we are looking for 2-2.5 acres of land that is complimented by several different attributes listed in our site selection matrix, the likely locations for land

acquisition would be near village centers, and likely commercial properties. Although a cluster of residential properties could also be combined to create the site, the likelihood of convincing numerous contiguous residential property owners to sell at the same time is extremely low. The most likely property type to meet our site selection criteria would be an institution, commercial, or business property. Making this even more challenging is that we must also keep in mind the programmatic demand for direct proximity to green space. A friendly eminent domain taking of an institution, commercial, or business property would require multiple appraisals based on the fair market value, defined as the highest price which a hypothetical willing buyer would be willing to pay to a hypothetical willing seller in an assumer free and open market. In addition, the seller would be entitled to lost revenue and relocation expenses. To be clear, this is all based on Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 79, so there is very little flexibility with this process.

There are a tremendous number of factors when evaluating every parcel. It is also unlikely that we could find multiple contiguous institutional, commercial, and/or business owners willing to sell. Therefore, we are working under the assumption that we would be looking for a single 2+ acre parcel. Parcels of this size do not come on the market very often in Newton, and when they do, the transaction details are often private. Even more rare are the instances in which the City seeks interest in these properties. One known comparable was relatively recently when the City investigated the acquisition of a parcel occupied by a business in a village center. The estimated cost of this acquisition was \$8M-\$10M, and the lot in question was about 10% of the land area we are seeking for the NewCAL project.

To obtain a parcel large enough to contain the NewCAL project, in an area that meets our needs and aligns with our site selection criteria, it will be measured in the tens of millions of dollars. It is for this reason that our primary focus thus far has been the properties currently under the control of the City of Newton. We have, and will continue to, investigate property acquisition opportunities parallel to the further analysis of the Albemarle site.

Lastly, if we are to pursue the acquisition of commercial or business properties, we must not only look at the capital costs, but also the permanent loss of commercial tax base.

Why can't we use the West Newton Armory for NewCAL?

The Armory location is attractive for a variety of reasons, but it also has some significant challenges. The site is about a third of the land area needed to meet the needs of seniors. The existing Armory is a historic facility that was designed and constructed to stop artillery and therefore is very challenging to be converted to meet our needs, and it's too small. On top of this, about a third of the building is underground with no natural light. We have a great deal more information on this location as we spent many months studying it, but it was rejected due to the size, design, and construction of the Armory, and the size of the parcel.

Why can't we use the old Horace Mann for NewCAL?

The building located at 687 Watertown Street is the previous home of the Horace Mann School. Horace Mann recently moved to the old Carr School at 225 Nevada Street. For the past 15 months, the City and Newton Public Schools have been working on the design to convert this facility into the new home for the Newton Early Childhood Program, also known as the Preschool Program. We are scheduled to start construction this winter. Beyond the use that we are designing for, this facility is under the control of the School Committee, and they have already voted to retain it and use it for PreK.

Why can't we use 150 Jackson Road, the former Aquinas Junior College?

This facility currently houses the PreK program. Once they move to the old Horace Mann School, we will begin renovating this building and site for the Lincoln-Eliot School. The site is quite large, but it has an existing school which consumes about half of the site, and the other half will be needed to create field space, playgrounds, staff parking, bus drop-off, and circulation for pedestrians, bicyclists, and visitors. Although there are opportunities to carve out some land area at this location, the programmatic desire to create new green space and potential athletic fields coupled with the programmatic conflicts that NewCAL and Lincoln-Eliot have, resulted in likely compromises to both programs, and a loss of green space at a site

that desperately needs more not less. It was for all of these reasons that this location was not shortlisted.

Why can't we use the old Lincoln-Eliot School when they move to 150 Jackson?

The old Lincoln-Eliot School is in the custody of the School Committee, so they would first need to relinquish control. More importantly however is the fact that this location will be used at the temporary, or "swing," school that children attend while schools like Countryside, Franklin, and Ward are renovated or rebuilt. Without this flexibility, the city would incur significant temporary school construction costs for many decades to come.

Why can't we use the Education Center at 100 Walnut Street?

The Ed Center is another building under the custody of the School Department which means that the School Committee would need to relinquish control to the City. That said, we have analyzed that location during our Preschool site selection process, as well as during the NewCAL process. The Ed Center has seen very little investment in building systems and based on the age of the building it would require a very significant renovation for any change of use. This would yield a total project budget of appx \$45.5M. In addition, we would need to either lease commercial office space at \$1.25M-\$1.5M annually, or we would need to construct approximately 50,000 square feet of office space elsewhere at an estimated total project cost of \$32.5M, to accommodate all the central school administration functions. Lastly, we would need to find homes for the student programs in other school facilities.

Why was the Newton Centre Triangle Parking Lot not selected at the preferred site for NewCAL?

This is a 2.17-acre site located at the heart of Newton Centre. The entire parcel is 94,742 square feet, but the Newton Centre Green, sidewalks, and berms make up 37,592 square feet of the site. The Newton Center Green itself is deed restricted and has several very mature trees on it. This leaves 57,150 square feet of buildable area. Further complicating this site is the fact that the lot is triangle shaped which makes for an inefficient ground floor design. The only way to accommodate the NewCAL program on this site without a loss of the much-needed parking for Newton Center, would be to construct a couple levels of parking structure, either below grade,

above grade, or both. The ground floor could either be NewCAL spaces, or mixed-use development with all the NewCAL functions on the floors above this. The gym would be difficult, but not impossible, to construct above the ground floor. It is highly unlikely that the proposed gym could fit on the ground floor when factoring in all the site circulation and ground floor needs, but with enough compromises this could be accomplished. The most likely development scenario if this site were to be selected, would be a few levels of below grade parking structure, followed by ground level retail. At the second floor, the building could project out from the first floor to help square off the building slightly for efficiency purposes. This would likely yield the 2nd and 3rd floors for NewCAL programming. Floors above this could be used for residential and commercial purposes. The reason that retail, residential, and commercial is included in this scenario is that any use of this site for NewCAL would be extremely costly. The inclusion of mixed-use development would help offset the investment needed at this site and make the project more financially viable. The benefits of this site are accessibility and proximity to a village center and amenities. The drawbacks are the lack of enough exterior programmatic space to support pedestrian and vehicular site circulation, as well as a lack of green space. Green space could be accommodated on the roof of the structure, but this would add cost and complexity to the project. The other challenge with this site is that the density needed to offset the large development cost could detract from the sense of identity that is a priority. The type of facility and the location would be attractive to some, but also an overwhelming barrier to others. If the development of this site was done strictly for NewCAL while preserving the parking for Newton Center, it would likely be cost prohibitive. If the development were to include mixed-use to help offset the development costs, considerable time would be needed to go through the City's reuse process, engage with a developer, go through design and permitting, and ultimately construct the project. This would likely push the project completion to 10 years from now. Due to these issues and challenges this location was not selected to be further evaluated as one of our shortlisted sites.