City of Newton

Design Review Committee
PUBLIC BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT
Peter Barrer, Co-Chairperson
Ellen Light, Co-Chairperson
Joshua R. Morse, Commissioner
Telephone (617) 796-1600
FAX (617) 796-1601
TTY (617) 796-1089
52 Elliot Street
Newton Highlands, MA 02461-1605

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

MINUTES

February 10, 2021
Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) Project Update
Online Zoom Meeting

Present:

Ellen Light – DRC	Mark Resnick - DRC	Jo Edith Heffron - Resident
Peter Barrer - DRC	Carol Schein – DRC	Julie Joy - Resident
Ambrose Donavan - DRC	Alex Valcarce – Public Buildings	Fred Lewis – Resident
David Gillespie - DRC	Jayne Colino – Senior Services	Ena Lorant - Resident
Tom Gloria - DRC	Jini Fairley – City of Newton	John Pelletier - Resident
Robert Hnasko – DRC	Joan Belle Isle - COA	Joel Bargmann – BH+A
Marc Kaufman – DRC/Community	Norm Meltz – COA/NewCAL WG	Jim Bruneau – BH+A
Jonathan Kantar - DRC	Richard Rasala – NewCAL WG	Dan Chen – BH+A
SigNing Kuo - DRC	Gordon Szerlip – COA Advisory	Deborah Robinson – BH+A
Barbara Lietzke – DRC/Community	Nancy Brown - Resident	Thomas Murphy – NV5
Amy Mackrell - DRC	Sandra Davidow - Resident	Melissa Gagnon – NV5

Absent:

Steve Siegel – DRC	Emily Prenner – DRC *	
Andrea Kelley – DRC *	Josh Morse – DRC/Public Buildings	Barney Heath

* denotes non-voting members of DRC

Alex Valcarce opened up the meeting at 6:05PM. The intent of this meeting is to provide an update to the DRC with regard to further developments of the two design scheme approaches, since the last meeting on

12/16/20. An opportunity for questions and answers was provided following the presentation. There were a total of 32 participants.

Project Update

BH+A provided an update on design progress. Since the 12/16/20 DRC meeting, the Working Group further studied designs which helped to study opportunities and challenges between for the two approaches: Addition/Renovation and New Construction. As the project is approaching the end of the Feasibility Study, three dimensional views and conceptual cost estimates have been prepared. It was noted at this point in the Feasibility Study phase, the estimating process is more of an art than math and science, as cost estimators base their numbers on historical data and professional experience. At this phase the intent of the estimates is to review costs between an add/reno and new construction as the project is closing in on the preparation of the Feasibility Study Report.

It was noted that both the addition/renovation and new construction approaches have advantages and disadvantages. The intent of the renderings and the 3D conceptual drawings is to present both schemes on as level of a playing field as possible, with similar SF, conceptual materials, size of gymnasium, etc.

BH+A presented further developments of the following two (2) aforementioned alternative design approaches. The full presentation can be found on the project website: NewCAL 02/10/21 DRC presentation. Highlights of the presentation are noted below.

Reuse Existing Building with Addition

In response to recent feedback from the DRC, design enhancements have been focused on user group accessibility as well as activating the corner at Walnut Street and Highland Avenue. In the addition/renovation scheme the main floor of the addition is raised 6' above grade to be at the level of the main floor of the existing building. This results in a contiguous first floor plate at 15,000SF. The building is designed with main programming spaces on the first floor, gymnasium/fitness/game room on the second floor and walking track/smaller program areas on the third floor. Administrative functions are distributed on all floors with 2nd and 3rd floor roof decks overlooking Walnut Street.

The main entrance is located at the corner of Walnut Street and Highland Avenue although there is an option to enter via stairs or elevator from the lower parking level. Upon entering from street level, the main floor can be accessed via interior stairs, ramp or lift. Decks on upper floors offer outdoor programming opportunities and overlook Walnut Street to further connect building users to the neighborhood. Floor plans of this option can be viewed here: NewCAL 02/10/21 DRC presentation.

Although 3-D renderings appear real and finalized, the images are conceptual as manifestations of the volumes created by the program. The corner at Walnut Street and Highland Avenue is an opportunity for transparency at the main entrance of the new facility. The intent is to maintain some of the traditional materials and features of the existing building at the volumes of the addition. An option was presented as more of a contrast between the larger volumes in the back with a transition to the existing building in the front. All three conceptual renderings focus on creating a welcoming entry at the corner volume.

It was noted that much of the existing building, which is remaining, will be gutted as it will need insulation, finishes, systems upgrade, etc. The team will study ways for the front windows to extend lower as they currently sit above the bookshelves. The bookshelves in the two wings would be removed to maximize these spaces as multipurpose rooms. The lobby is more likely to remain as is and the intent would be to maintain the character of that space.

New Construction Alternative

The site plan is similar to what was shown at the last meeting with a drive through at grade parking area with the gym volume above and the main program wing of the building fronting largely on Walnut Street. In the new scheme, the building is closer to Walnut Street than the existing, due to the size of the program. Intent is for the main entrance to be at the corner of Walnut Street and Highland Avenue. One of the main differences between the new building option and the add/reno is that with a new building the entrance and parking can all be at grade, at streel level, without having to negotiate the existing raised first floor.

The program in this option is laid out similarly to the add/reno with main programming spaces on the first floor, gymnasium/fitness/game room on the second floor and walking track/smaller program areas on the third floor. Administrative functions are distributed on all floors with 2nd and 3rd floor roof decks overlooking Walnut Street. Floor plans of this option can be viewed here: NewCAL 02/10/21 DRC presentation.

Similar to images presented for the add/reno option, 3-D renderings are shown as conceptual images. The intent is for the new building to fit into the neighborhood context with much of the exterior shown in brick with a pitched roof over the main part of the building. The corner entrance canopy is prominent in all schemes. Corner windows will provide good views to the outside as well as communicate what is going on inside the building to passersby.

The first option depicts the notion of changing the material of the two story volume in the front to perhaps a fiber cement cladding with the taller more prominent volume in brick. The part of the building which transitions to the neighborhood could be done in a softer material with more of a muted palette. A second scheme shows the two story wing more reminiscent of the existing building with tall narrow punched openings. A third scheme is more transparent with maximizing transparency and views of the interior functions, while still maintaining the use of brick on the façade.

The reason for doing these 3-D studies was primarily in response to concern that a new building may not be able to be contextually responsive to Newtonville. The images presented do not represent final designs as they are concepts of a direction which will need to be refined once the preferred option is selected.

Discussion and Questions

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

- How does the new building interact with the neighborhood, particularly with regard to outdoor sitting areas to allow users of the senior center to interact with the community? How does the building relate to the back neighborhood? Is one of these design approaches higher than the other and is one closer to the property line than the other?

  of the The exact positioning building on site will need to be determined. In the add/reno option the existing building sits back from Walnut Street which means more of the new building would be placed in the back, leaving more open space in front. In the new construction option, there is opportunity to be closer to the street with more latitude to move the building on the site in an effort to balance out open space with program space and parking. More of the building face is exposed to the back neighborhood with the gymnasium in the add/reno option vs the new construction which is more stepped back from Walnut Place.

  With regard to building height, both options are three stories. The building height to the eave of the roof is 40’ in the new construction option and is 46’ in the add/reno option. Essentially, the point where the roof springs from is 6’ taller in the add/reno. The overall height will depend on roof style.

- Is the intention for the new facility to be net zero?

  Although embodied carbons will be evaluated, net zero may not be achievable. The design intent however is for the new building to be sustainable.

- Can studies be done of the back elevation, which would face the neighbors at Walnut Place?

  Further studies will be done although the current goal is to determine the preferred option.

- The hope is that we have the flexibility to have a more welcoming streetscape at the main entrance, in comparison with what exists now which is not very inviting.

- In the add/reno option, the circulation at the kitchen receiving area may be challenging.

- In the add/reno option, the site is very constrained and the setbacks are very tight.

- In the add/reno option, there are both real and perceived accessibility issues.

- Specifically with the add/reno plan, emergency vehicle circulation will need be considered. The new construction option has better vehicular flow around the building.

- In new construction option, when thinking about transparency and glass we also need to think about activities happening on the other side and whether window treatments and window frosting may be needed relative to the amount of glazing in proximity to the street level.

- In the new construction option, the breakdown of the massing volumes with the different materials is successful, specifically the fiber cement element and the brick. An option with two different façade materials for two different elements would work well. Also, the roof style in option in 2B works well.

- Perhaps parking for the new construction option could be put below grade.

- General concern about new building being too close to the street.

- How important is outdoor seating? New construction and add/reno both have decks.

- The new facility should engage with the street and the community.

- Appreciate the idea of synergy to engage with the street from inside the building.

- With regard to outdoor green space, there will need to be a trade-off between community engagement and the building users.

- Preferred location of green space needs to be considered, in front along Walnut Street or in the back.

- Outdoor seating areas will be a challenge.

Cost Estimate Comparison Review

The main intent of this high level conceptual estimate is to determine the differential between the two design approaches. The program has been leveled to create two designs which place the majority of program space on one level. The numbers being used are based on assumed real current costs. Escalation will need to be factored in when there is a better idea of timing.

With regard to the add/reno costs, the site work numbers are lower because the parking, foundations and other elements that go into the lowest level of parking are part of the building construction work, not part of site work. In the new construction option, these elements are part of site work, not new construction. In summary, an add/reno may be more expensive by approximately $2.5M, in comparison to new construction.

Final Comments

- Although it would be nice to preserve the existing building, there are many arguments in favor of a new building: parking, accessibility, cost, abutters and energy efficiency.
- A new building would provide opportunity for greater energy efficiency and will cost less. Would like to see more outdoor space, which may be currently underdeveloped.
- Based on constrained site, a new building is preferred. The existing site can be used more efficiently.
- The existing building was not designed for the current user group. The six foot height differential makes no sense for this user group.
- Would like to encourage efforts to create a net zero building. Need to focus on embodied carbons.
- Sidewalks should be wider, to at least match width on either side of the existing senior center.
- Where feasible, existing elements should be incorporated into the new design. Honoring the history of the existing building will add value to the new building.
- The corner at Highland Ave and Walnut Street should be enhanced, to bring community into the space.
- A new building will be more inviting and more transparent.
- A new building will provide a wonderful opportunity to have exceptional architecture in Newtonville.

Based on the aforementioned comments, there was consensus amongst DRC members that a new building is preferred, in comparison with an add/reno option.

A Community Update Meeting is scheduled on Monday, 2/22/21, at 6:30PM.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:45PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Gagnon
NV5, Inc.
[End of 02/10/2021 Meeting Minutes]