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Barney S. Heath
Director

Walker Center Joint Advisory Planning Group (JAPG)

September 19, 2024 from 4-5:30 p.m.

Virtual meeting: <https://newtonma-gov.zoom.us/j/85752661064>

Meeting ID: 857 5266 1064

- 1. Approval of August 27, 2024, Meeting Summary**
- 2. Historic Preservation**
 - a. Conversation with Barbara Kurze, Senior Preservation Planner, regarding Auburndale Historic District and listings on National Register of Historic Places
- 3. Weston & Sampson Consultation**
 - a. Presentation by Weston & Sampson on drafted materials
 - b. Review of potential site plans
- 4. Site Visit Debrief**
 - a. Member discussion on potential future uses of the site
- 5. Housekeeping**
 - a. Meeting dates:
 - i. Thursday, October 10 from 4-5:30 p.m.
 - ii. Tuesday, October 29 from 4-5:30 p.m.
 - iii. Thursday, November 21 from 4-5:30 p.m.
 - iv. Thursday, December 12 from 4-5:30 p.m.
 - b. Hybrid Meeting
 - c. Next steps



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Meeting Summary

August 27, 2024 from 4-5:30 p.m.

Attendance

The meeting was held virtually on Tuesday, August 27, 2024, beginning at 4:03 PM. All Walker Center JAPG (Joint Advisory Planning Group) members were present: David Boronkay, Rose Day, Tom Gagen, Paul Giragos, Abby Glovsky, Ken Gould, David Hedison, Ken Krems, and Julie Shea.

Also in attendance were City of Newton staff working with the Walker Center JAPG: Shaylyn Davis-Iannaco, Housing Program Manager; Lara Kritzer, Director of Housing and Community Development; Allison McIntyre, Housing Development Planner; Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer; Josh Morse, Public Buildings Commissioner; and Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development.

Guests present included Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, Ward 4 Councilor Randy Block; Jini Farley, Title II ADA Americans with Disabilities ACT Coordinator/504 Coordinator; Larry and Caroline Schwirian; and Amy Zarechian, Newton Housing Authority Director.

Introductions

Staff outlined their roles at the City, and JAPG Members described their backgrounds and interest in the JAPG. Mayor Fuller thanked the members and staff for their efforts and contextualized the Walker Center parcel purchase. Two million, four hundred fifty thousand dollars of American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds were used to acquire the property after the Mayor's proposal was approved by the Newton City Council [in November 2021]. Mayor Fuller emphasized the importance of the conversation around the Walker Center and the site's potential for supporting housing, supporting Newton's historic preservation goals, and supporting children and education at the Williams School.

S. Davis-Iannaco provided the web address for the Walker Center information page, along with the email that members of the public could use to submit questions and comments about the project. These are <https://www.newtonma.gov/government/planning/zoning-and-development/high-interest-projects/walker-center-reuse-project> and WalkerCenterJAPG@newtonma.gov, respectively.

Property Overview

J. Yeo, whose father, coincidentally, ran the Walker Center for a number of years beginning in 1991, recounted the Walker Center buildings' various uses since its beginnings as a social justice organization. The four buildings that comprise what is commonly referred to as, 'the Walker Center,' are Howard House, Hume House, and the Harding Complex (Harding East and Harding West). There is also a singular building also called the Walker Center on the neighboring parcel, but it does not belong to the City and is not related to the work of the JAPG. Members will attend a site visit and learn more about the history of the site at that time.

J. Morse presented facts related to the Williams School. It was built in 1950, and the parcel is 134,887 square feet. The school building itself is 41,700 square feet. Right now, enrollment is approximately two hundred students. According to the most recent Newton Public Schools Enrollment Analysis Report, enrollment in five years will be two hundred students. After five years, that growth will level out. This number factors in a five hundred fifty-unit housing project as part of the Riverside Development Project. Enrollment reached its maximum in 1969, at three

hundred seventy-five students. Enrollment today is about three hundred students. Capital planning projects require approval by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). Projects currently underway in Newton include six middle and elementary schools. J. Morse estimates that the last of these projects would be completed in 2034, and the soonest the design work could begin for the Williams School would be in the mid-to-late 2040s, possibly as late as the 2050s.

At this point, Councilor Block announced his intention to attend JAPG meetings to hear and learn from everyone. His official role begins when the JAPG submits its final report and recommendation. He doesn't think that the timeframe of the capital planning and the state approval process is all that significant.

R. Day asked if there was a deed restriction on the property that would limit the purpose for which the property could be used. J. Yeo replied that there were no deed restrictions on the property.

L. Schwirian asked if there was an approximate date that marketing would begin for new units on the parcel, if the parcel to be used for affordable housing. S. Davis-Iannaco estimated that day would come in about two years. The JAPG process alone is one hundred eighty days.

S. Davis-Iannaco explained that 136 Hancock Street and 169 Grove Street, as well as the surrounding land and attached buildings, are the focus of the JAPG. T. Gagen asked if the JAPG would be precluded from considering the piece of property in green on a map presented by staff and went on to ask if excluding it [the green part of the map] was "a good idea." J. Morse answered that the green portion of the map represented the section of the Walker Center site that has been set aside for future use by the Williams School. The existing Williams School site has some orientation challenges and the City intends to use not less than 10,000 square feet of the land purchased from the Walker Center to address those issues. The 10,000 square feet of land, however, can be flexible and does not have to consider only the area outlined in green on the map. J. Morse stated that the City could contend with any challenges related to construction, including altering the location of the land set aside for that purpose.

The Real Property Reuse Process

S. Davis-Iannaco led members through the materials supplied before the meeting, including a report generated by the City's consultants, Weston & Samson. B. Heath presented a slide deck laying out the Real Property Reuse process and the purpose of the JAPG created by Senior Assistant City Solicitor, Andrew Lee. The JAPG will submit a report and make a nonbinding recommendation to the Real Property Reuse Committee of the City Council. That committee will then make a recommendation to the full City Council on how the property should be reused. The committee has one of three options: (1) It can recommend that the property be retained by the City, (2) It can recommend that the property be leased or sold and provide a minimum sale price or a minimum lease price, or, (3) It can recommend a specific use of the property. Finally, the City Council votes on a resolution to send to the Mayor for the distribution disposition and future use of the property. Passage requires a two-thirds majority vote in favor for the resolution to be sent to the Mayor. The Mayor then carries out the recommendation from the full City Council.

D. Hedison asked whether B. Heath's reference to the options of "lease" or "retain" was because ARPA funds were used to purchase the property, and whether that somehow prevented the City from selling the site. B. Heath deferred to J. Yeo and J. Morse. J. Yeo answered that the use of ARPA funds did not place limits on the City. D. Hedison asked if the project could be two housing developments. Could, he asked, the JAPG consider disposition through a sale of the property? J. Morse replied that the JAPG can make almost any recommendation it wants, provided it's within the purview of the JAPG. City Council will make the final determination. B. Heath commented that it was his understanding that the intention was to hold onto the property long term but confirmed that the JAPG could come to a different conclusion and that that would be fine.

Nomination and Selection of JAPG Chair and Vice Chair

S. Davis-Ianno described the responsibilities of the Chair and Vice Chair. They would develop agendas for JAPG meetings with the support of the staff, facilitate JAPG meetings, count votes during the meetings, and finalize the JAPG report that will be sent to the Real Property Reuse Committee of the City Council. She asked for members to step forward for either position. Ken Krems and David Hedison were nominated and approved as Chair and Vice Chair by a unanimous vote.

J. Fairley had arrived after initial introductions were made and introduced herself to those present at this time. J. Fairley explained her strong interest and expertise in accessibility and noted that historic preservation does not preclude accessibility.

S. Davis-Iannaco presented a slide deck prepared by Andrew Lee on open meeting laws and offered to forward any questions to him (she noted that she is not a lawyer). Importantly, open meeting laws apply to deliberations by public bodies like the JAPG. They are oral or written communication through any medium between and among a quorum of a public body, or on any business within the jurisdiction of the public body. Any conversations or communications made during telephone calls, in texts, in emails, in listserv chains, on message boards, on social media are all subject to open meeting laws if they take place between members, or if another person is used to communicate the message from one member to another. It does not matter if the communication receives no response, it is still subject to open meeting laws. Any email or text message that a member receives about the Walker Center or JAPG business are public records.

T. Gagen asked if members could talk amongst themselves; informally. S. Davis-Iannaco answered that; if there is a quorum present, that conversation is subject to open meeting law. T. Gagen said he was talking about one-on-one conversations. B. Heath said he did not know and said staff would reach out to Andrew Lee for an answer. L. Kritzer recommended avoiding discussing business outside the JAPG meetings. D. Hedison thought that conversations between members of a committee were not generally subject to open meeting laws; if the conversation was focused on a question from one member to another about the other member's area of expertise, or a comment they made during a meeting. S. Davis-Iannaco reiterated that members should direct any questions or communication between members to her for forwarding to the full committee. Questions from the public can be directed to the inbox designated for that purpose.

JAPG members are considered municipal employees under the conflict-of-interest law, and therefore have an obligation to prevent conflicts between their private interests and public duties. The meeting concluded after a few congratulatory and appreciative comments from members and staff.

Future meeting dates: Every three weeks beginning Thursday September 19 from 4-5:30 p.m.

- i. Thursday, October 10 from 4-5:30 p.m.
- ii. Tuesday, October 29 from 4-5:30 p.m.
- iii. Thursday, November 21 from 4-5:30 p.m.
- iv. Thursday, December 12 from 4-5:30 p.m.

Next steps: S. Davis-Iannaco will schedule a site visit after JAPG members complete a Doodle Poll to determine member availability. Staff will forward T. Gagen's open meeting law question to Andrew Lee and convey A. Lee's response to members by the next JAPG meeting. The Chair and Vice Chair will work with the staff on an agenda for the next JAPG meeting.