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Barney S. Heath
Director

Walker Center Joint Advisory Planning Group (JAPG)

October 10, 2024 from 4-5:30 p.m.

Virtual meeting: <https://newtonma-gov.zoom.us/j/82201488973>

Meeting ID: 822 0148 8973

- 1. Approval of September 19, 2024, Meeting Summary**
- 2. Site Visit Debrief**
 - a. Member discussion
 - b. Civico plan
 - c. New site plan by Weston & Sampson
- 3. Review of Layout Options**
 - a. Presentation by Weston & Sampson team
- 4. Funding Sources**
- 5. Housekeeping**
 - a. Meeting dates:
 - i. Tuesday, October 29 from 4-5:30 p.m.
 - ii. Thursday, November 21 from 4-5:30 p.m.
 - iii. Thursday, December 12 from 4-5:30 p.m.



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Meeting Summary

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

Attendance

The meeting was held virtually on Tuesday, August 27, 2024. 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: 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; Jini Fairley, ADA/Section 504 Coordinator; Barbara Kurze, Senior Preservation Planner.

Guests present included Ward 4 Councilor Randy Block; Ward 3 Councilor Julia Malakie; Susan Mara, Weston & Sampson; Sandi Stroud, Urban Focus; Matt DeCotiis, CICADA.

Approval of Meeting Summary

K. Krems welcomed all to the meeting and asked JAPG members for a motion to approve the August 27, 2024 meeting summary. T. Gagen made a motion to approve, seconded by D. Hedison. All members present voted to approve the meeting summary, with no abstentions.

Historic Preservation

S. Davis-Iannaco introduced Barbara Kurze, Senior Preservation Planner for the City, to the meeting and noted that she is the staff person for the four local historic districts in Newton, including the Auburndale Historic District.

B. Kurze gave a brief presentation regarding local historic districts and their processes.

B. Kurze noted that the Auburndale Historic District was established in 2005 and there were 300 properties included within the historic district. B. Kurze explained that the districts look at each individual property's own merits to protect and preserve distinctive characteristics. Any proposed projects are reviewed to ensure they are in keeping with the historical characteristics of the property and how the proposed project would relate to other properties in the neighborhood vicinity. Local Historic Districts are generally encouraging compatible design to maintain consistency within the district. B. Kurze noted that the district commissions have approved additions in the past and that total demolition is almost never approved. B. Kurze pointed out that the local historic districts operate under the legal framework of Massachusetts General Law (Chapter 40C) and governs how they must operate. B. Kurze then explained the application process for the historic districts as well as what can be administratively approved.

D. Hedison asked if B. Kurze played a role in the allocation of historic CPC funds. B. Kurze responded that they do not directly.

T. Gagen asked if the City Council could override the restrictions or the decisions of the local historic districts. B. Kurze tentatively responded “no” though noted that all decisions are appealable. She did not know whether the City would take that next step, however. T. Gagen noted that the City Council regularly passes special permits that exceed zoning requirements. B. Kurze expanded to say that generally, the historic district commissions are the first step in the process. The applicant would then take the plans approved by the local historic district and apply for a special permit. B. Kurze noted that there may be exceptions if there were stricter safety and/or code requirements not considered previously. B. Heath clarified that the local historic district, in the short answer, is generally the final authority, though appeals are possible.

D. Hedison asked if 100% affordable housing projects would have to comply with the local historic district’s restrictions despite being potentially short on funding and a great asset to the community. B. Kurze responded that this was correct.

P. Giragos asked if there was a scenario where the properties would be destroyed for the school to be expanded. He noted that there were a couple of properties next door to the Zervas School that were removed to expand the school. P. Giragos asked further if the Williams Elementary School’s footprint was always going to be constrained by the presence of historic properties. B. Kurze explained that it is very unlikely and unusual for historic district commissions to approve demolition. She noted that they have approved a building being moved within the same lot, though this is a rare occurrence. J. Yeo noted that the Williams School project is about number 8 on the Newton Public Schools list currently and that the renovation is at least a couple of decades out. J. Yeo explained that, when purchasing the property, the City worked hard to leave enough room on the adjacent site for future school expansion needs. P. Giragos explained that he understood that the school renovation was decades out but wanted to anticipate any other future needs.

T. Gagen asked if the historic district commission voted in favor of the demolition of the cape-style house on Grove St. B. Kurze explained that yes, this demolition request was approved, because the house was not in great condition and noted that it was not integral to the Walker Center’s history.

R. Day asked if the JAPG could recommend that the City Council propose an override to retain the buildings for school use and renovation needs. J. Yeo explained that an override would need to come from the Mayor’s Office and that the School Committee would need to be supportive. J. Yeo noted that while the Williams School does need repairs, they are 8th on the list and underwent a Tier I renovation in 1990.

P. Giragos asked if the historic district commission considers the aesthetics of the home. B. Kurze noted that the commission looks at each individual property is reviewed on its own merits and as its own entity.

R. Day clarified that the local historic districts would not approve any major additions and renovations to the buildings. B. Kurze said no, the commissions have approved additions and renovations in keeping with the individual property and local neighborhood. The addition would need to be subordinate to the existing structure. R. Day clarified that the same restrictions apply to all properties under the historic district commission’s purview. B. Kurze answered yes, that was true.

R. Day asked if the funding would come from the City. L. Kritzer responded that we will have a better idea of funding when we understand what the project will look like.

K. Gould noted that, on the site visit he attended, there was discussion about potentially removing the hallway connecting the Harding Complex to the Hume House and potentially adding an addition there. K. Gould acknowledged that B. Kurze could not answer on behalf of the district commission but asked if an addition there would be worth exploring. B. Kurze answered yes, that is a potential option, and the commission may be open to dependent upon the design and how it fit in.

J. Morse noted that while the JAPG can make whatever recommendations they want, in the hypothetical scenario where the JAPG makes the recommendation to explore demolishing one or more homes on the site, there is no project or funds identified to demolish the property/properties and they would remain vacant and in limbo for a long period of time. B. Kurze noted the district commission will only look at an actual project with a firm set of plans.

Weston & Sampson Consultation

L. Kritzer explained that the City was able to contract with Weston & Sampson because of the Housing Choice Grant, which was received in 2022 to explore affordable housing options on the site.

S. Mara (Weston & Sampson) gave a brief presentation around the existing conditions of the site as well as their scope of work.

M. DeCotiis (Urban Focus and CICADA) gave a presentation on preliminary site plans. S. Stroud briefly explained assumptions made, including assessing the site for affordable housing, making it larger, family units given the location and neighborhood, etc. M. Decotiis explained different parking options, using the assumption that some paving could be put on the 10,000 square feet of land reserved for future school expansion purposes. S. Stroud explained that, with additions, approximately 11 units could be fit on site with a 1:1 parking ratio.

T. Gagen asked if there had been any discussion about how much this project could cost. S. Stroud said there is a list of potential funding sources in addition to early discussions about project cost. T. Gagen asked if the consulting team could give a cost estimate. S. Stroud responded that she could not. T. Gagen asked if the houses would need to be completely gutted. S. Stroud responded yes, they would need to be and that it would be expensive but noted the opportunities and need for affordable housing in Newton. T. Gagen asked if this was the best use of affordable housing funding. B. Heath answered that there are not a lot of opportunities to spend affordable housing dollars in Newton and that there was not another project to direct funding.

A. Glovsky clarified that the only way to provide parking for the units is to create a driveway that goes through the school property. S. Stroud answered that this was accurate and that their understanding is that the land will not be school property for many years. A. Glovsky clarified that the parking will still directly abut school property. S. Stroud responded yes, and that it would need to be addressed.

D. Hedison noted that, estimating this project may cost \$1 million per unit, funding could be spent to redevelop and expand Newton Housing Authority units. He requested a pro forma with an operating budget of 20 years. B. Heath noted that we are at an early stage in terms of discussing financing. B. Heath further noted that Weston & Sampson's charge was to look at what exactly is feasible on the site. B. Heath explained that there is a long way to go with the JAPG and a permitting process that will come after as well that may result in other changes.

P. Giragos asked if the City would retain ownership and redevelop the properties. S. Stroud explained that there are a variety of potential options and B. Heath clarified that it was unlikely that the City would redevelop the homes but would retain ownership through a long-term lease. P. Giragos mentioned that it was his understanding that the 10,000 square feet of land reserved for the school would be transferred automatically and that the fence could be moved almost immediately to allow for expanded school use and that it does not depend on the expansion or redevelopment of the school. J. Yeo explained that moving the fence and expanding the playground would be a multi-million-dollar project that is not envisioned for some time. P. Giragos expressed concern that this was a change in how he understood how this land was marked in the past.

D. Hedison noted that the JAPG could recommend that the 10,000 square feet of land be open green space without being part of the school budget.

K. Krems asked if the parking requirements were 1:1. S. Stroud responded yes. K. Krems asked if the units in the proposed additions would be smaller. M. DeCotiis responded yes, they were envisioned to be two-bedrooms. K. Krems noted that the parking lot only cuts into 10,000 square feet a little bit. S. Stroud responded that this was accurate. K. Krems clarified that this would not go through school property. S. Stroud answered yes. K. Krems asked what the JAPG's role was in determining how much the project would cost or if this would be up to a third-party developer. B. Heath said it was fair for the committee to at least consider the financing, though noting this could change.

K. Gould expressed interest in learning more about other alternatives to the site. K. Gould expressed interest in the ground lease in lieu of the City redeveloping the site itself and mentioned this would take some of the construction costs from the City. K. Gould said that the ground lease could be 49 years to free the property up in the timeline for Williams School. K. Gould reiterated that he would like congregate housing to be further explored, as there is a great need for congregate housing for various populations of people.

T. Gagen asked if the driveway pictured was on City land as opposed to the adjacent site. M. DeCotiis responded that the pictured driveway is on the City property, but the existing driveway is largely owned by the adjacent site. T. Gagen asked if the consulting team had an idea of how much of the school land would be taken up by paving for parking. M. DeCotiis said that he can provide this information.

L. Kritzer noted that because the units are in the Auburndale Historic District, they may be good candidates for Community Preservation Act funds. L. Kritzer noted that the commission has been supportive of City projects and lengthening the life of City-owned buildings, although it is expensive to maintain a building in the historic district.

P. Giragos expressed curiosity in purchasing some land from Civico to create a new driveway and asked if this was something the JAPG could recommend. B. Heath recommended not throwing out any possibilities as the developer still has a ways to go in terms of amending their special permit with the City.

M. DeCotiis referred back to T. Gagen's earlier question and noted that it would be about 1,500 square feet of parking within the reserved 10,000 square feet.

D. Hedison noted that the one-way access parking may pose a risk in terms of fire and safety. He also clarified that he thinks this could be a good affordable housing project, just maybe not 100% affordable. A 30-40% set-aside of affordable units may be more attractive to a private developer. He noted that a range of affordable housing may be best. S. Stroud noted that one of the reasons for 100% affordable housing is a result of the luxury housing proposed by Civico Development on the adjacent site. B. Heath and S. Davis-Iannaco clarified that there are affordable housing requirements on the adjacent site (2 of the 16 units at 80% AMI).

K. Gould mentioned that this project does not have to be one thing and recommended workforce and affordable housing. He recommended looking at this project flexibly.

Councilor Julia Malakie asked what would happen to the paved portion of the 10,000 square feet that will be used in some way when the school does get land. B. Heath noted that City staff have been looking at the parking as an interim use but have not worked out the details and structured to ensure that whatever is put there is temporary in nature. Councilor Malakie noted that parking for construction vehicles sounds temporary but parking for the future tenants of the property does not. J. Yeo noted that the consulting team was looking to maximize the number of units in the drawings, but there are scenarios where there are fewer units which would require less parking. B. Heath further noted that the land reserved for school expansion has the potential to become a new or expanded parking lot for the school in the future.

S. Davis-Iannaco recommended the JAPG conclude this meeting and push the site visit debrief to the following meeting on October 10, 2024.

Future meeting dates:

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