

Mayor's Update



NewCAL Update

We are moving along on NewCAL, the new facility being designed to meet the needs of Newton's seniors while providing opportunities for residents of all ages when space is available.

As with any new municipal building, finding the right location is difficult. I am listening. I have confidence that we have a thoughtful process with lots of opportunities for input in place and that the NewCAL Working and Advisory Groups, the City Council, the Council on Aging, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and residents will work together to make the right choice for the City.

The following is the NewCAL project update I sent to a number of councils, commissions and the City Council last week:

Why are we building a Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL)?

Working together, our goal is to make Newton an even better place for our older residents. Notably, the City of Newton's senior population is the fastest growing group of residents. By 2030, the projections show that 1 out of every 3 Newtonians will be age 60 or older. Even now, Newton has the 5th largest senior population in the Commonwealth. This poses a great challenge and opportunity for us. The Department of Senior Services and the Newton Council on Aging has been leading a comprehensive community process for a number of years to ensure that as people in Newton age and their abilities change, they have easy access to services, amenities, and opportunities.

One of the key concerns has been the woefully inadequate Senior Center at 345 Walnut Street in Newtonville. Built in the 1930s as a branch library, it is too small and badly laid out to meet the needs of Newton's seniors. Many seniors are on waiting lists for classes and programs, and there are many opportunities Director Jayne Colino and her staff simply can't offer because there is no space available. Furniture has to literally be moved out of the way daily to make room for the Zumba class and other gatherings. In addition, the spaces in the basement lack natural light, there's little parking and virtually no outdoor space.

We value, respect, engage and include seniors in all aspects of community. We proudly say we are an age-friendly City. Bricks and mortar are a reflection of our values, and the current Senior Center doesn't reflect Newton's values.

In June 2018, Newton launched a process to develop new space for senior activities. NewCAL, an acronym that stands for Newton Center for Active Living, is the working name for the process.

Where are we on site locations for NewCAL ?

The day before yesterday, the NewCAL Working Group narrowed the list of potential locations for the project to six City-owned locations. The NewCAL working group includes a number of members of the Council on Aging and Parks and Recreation Commission, members of the senior and parks, recreation and culture communities, two City Councilors, and leaders from Senior Services, Parks, Recreation and Culture and other City departments.

These six locations were selected after considerable study. The Working Group's original list included more than 145 privately owned and City parcels all across the City. The list was first whittled down to 24 locations in May when parcels that were too small or had insurmountable hurdles were eliminated.

The next phase of the analysis looked at NewCAL's impact on each of the 24 sites, the impact of the site on NewCAL, as well as legal restrictions. The NewCAL Working Group conducted an analysis that included fifteen weighted criteria and resulted in six potential sites, all City-owned:

- Albemarle Playground/Field (on Albemarle Road in West Newton)
- Cabot Park (probably on the northern portion of the site near Newtonville Avenue and East Side Parkway in Newtonville)
- McGrath Park (behind Warren House on Washington Street in West Newton)
- Newton Centre Playground (on Tyler Terrace where the Jeannette West Recreation Center (aka "The Hut") is located in Newton Centre)
- Pelligrini Playground (on Hawthorne Street just off Watertown Street in Nonantum)
- Weeks Playground (off Centre Street in Newton Centre)

The Working Group as well as the Park and Recreation Commission will now thoughtfully and thoroughly analyze each of these sites to consider not just whether the location works for NewCAL but also the impacts of NewCAL on current important uses and open space and the neighborhood around each site. Many others will be involved in the decision, including the City Council, Council on Aging and residents.

Although we are focusing our attention on these six sites, we are also continuing to search for, and analyze, non-City owned parcels as well.

(Photo: A NewCAL Working Group meeting.)

What's the mission of NewCAL and is it exclusively a Senior Center?

The first task of the NewCAL Working Group and Advisory Committees, working with the Council on Aging, was to develop a vision for NewCAL. The Vision Statement focuses on

NewCAL as meeting the unique interests and needs of older adults while providing opportunities for all residents of Newton when space is available.

*NewCAL Vision Statement
(December 2018)*

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.

The NewCAL committees developed additional principles to guide the design. The Center will be designed to promote and support the missions of the Senior Services and Parks, Recreation and Culture Departments.

Senior Services Department Mission Statement: "To optimize quality of life for older adults and those who support them through the 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."

Parks, Recreation and Culture Department Mission Statement "The Newton Parks and Recreation Department will provide traditional and innovative recreation, leisure and cultural activities in a quality environment for all residents of Newton, as well as managing the preservation, maintenance, and enhancement of the natural resources of the City."

Spaces within the facility will be clustered and programmed to preserve the wonderful sense of community that exists in the current Senior Center. The Center will be age friendly, welcoming to everyone, and will be designed and programmed to meet the unique needs of seniors as well as the broader community. The Center will ensure safety and accessibility both inside and outside through thoughtful design and operation. The Center will promote social equality and maximize access to programs and services to those who are unserved or underserved. The facility will be environmentally conscious, strive to be carbon neutral, and will leave a legacy of responsible design and operation.

How is the NewCAL building going to be used? In architecture terms, what is the "program" for the building?

The City's design team, working in detail with many departments (Senior Services;



Parks, Recreation & Culture; Library; Newton Community Education; and others) and the Working Group, spent a year ascertaining the “program” – What is needed to meet the needs of our older residents? They initially considered whether a large, centralized building was even necessary or whether the activities could be spread out across the City in existing or potentially new/renovated spaces. There was strong consensus among seniors and the Senior Services staff for a central community space with continued programs offered in facilities across the City.

The committees then developed the facility program - defined as the number and size of rooms and interior/exterior spaces needed within the NewCAL building. The program plan took into consideration the current program run by Senior Services at the existing Senior Center on Walnut Street as well as additional spaces currently needed for senior programs run by other departments, including Parks, Recreation and Culture, as well as future needs.

The work led to a total area for the facility of approximately 37,000 square feet which includes a 10,000 square foot gymnasium and 27,000 square feet of other spaces. (The current Senior Center which does not have a gym is 10,000 square feet.) The program calls for 13 multi-purpose activity rooms of different sizes available for classes, active recreation (e.g. yoga, Zumba, billiards and pingpong), a library and reading room, art, dining, performance, and function space. The gym is sized for multiple activities including pickleball, badminton, basketball, volleyball, yoga, dance, special events, and performances. Above the gym is an elevated walking track, which has been enormously popular in other communities for four-season use. Common spaces include a lobby, cultural and art display spaces, a Newton Free Library pick-up and drop-off area, and a store. A kitchen and café will be centrally-located on the first floor. NewCAL will also house several offices for providing services to seniors including a health room, social work space, and senior program volunteer-led space.

The Budget and Capital Improvement Plan for the building is \$16 million (and does not include any potential acquisition costs).

Who has been involved in NewCAL?

The project has benefitted from heavy involvement by the Council on Aging, the Parks & Recreation Commission, two City Councilors, as well as the Senior Services, Parks, Recreation and Culture, Public Buildings, Planning Department and the Accessibility Coordinator. There have been 35 public meetings. The team has visited more than ten other senior and community centers to see spaces, programs, design elements, site challenges and parking needs. We have reached out to other communities for “lessons learned” as they developed senior centers and community centers.

There is an upcoming NewCAL community meeting on Thursday September 19 at 7 pm in Room 111 of the Education Center at 100 Walnut Street. Information about the meeting and the project are available on the NewCAL [website](#).

Algae at Crystal Lake

As a precaution, the Newton Department of Health and Human Services issued a public health advisory at Crystal Lake because of elevated amounts of blue-



green algae.

With the current level of visible algae at the swim beach, the City is keeping the beach open. However, no other part of the lake should be accessed, and the status of the swim beach is subject to change.

We are continuing to monitor the lake and this morning the state took water samples. We are awaiting results to determine next steps. We will send out another email if we have to close, or check the Health and Human Services website [here](#).

In the meantime:

- Do not swallow lake water and be sure to rinse off after contact (the Crystal Lake bathhouse is open to all for this purpose).
- Do not allow your pet to swim in or drink the lake water (pets are very susceptible to algae blooms)
- People and pets should avoid contact in areas of algae concentration, including the shoreline
- If you observe an algae bloom, do not swim, boat, or fish

In addition, pregnant women, nursing mothers, people with pre-existing liver conditions, people receiving dialysis treatment, the elderly, and other sensitive populations may be at higher risk of experiencing adverse health effects.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. See you tonight at Captain Ryan Park for games, snacks and a chance to meet our Newton Police Officers at National Night Out, from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. at Captain Ryan Park, on the Corner of Washington and Cherry Streets next to Police Headquarters, in West Newton Square.

P. P.S. This raccoon and our Newton Fire Department went viral. Twitter and Facebook were abuzz, local media and even a reporter from the Washington Post wrote a story that was picked up by news outlets around the world including the U.S. Military's Stars and Stripes and the Wall Street Journal. Mayor Fuller also received a congratulatory email from a man in Anchorage, Arkansas.

Bravo to all the Newton firefighters who responded to the call from a bicyclist who saw the little raccoon clinging to the manhole cover last Thursday morning. With an assist from Waltham Animal Control and a local vet, the raccoon is safe.

