

Mayor's Update

Albemarle Site Recommended as Top City-Owned Location for NewCAL Project

The NewCAL Working Group met today to analyze the six city-owned parcels in Newton and has recommended the Albemarle-Gath Pool as the top ranked site. The other five on the shortlist did not adequately meet the Working Group's goals of open space preservation. Albemarle not only works well for the community center focused on seniors – NewCAL – but also for the current uses of all the green space and adds a badly needed update of the swimming facilities. This location for NewCAL preserves all the park and valuable green space; please know that I heard the concerns of so many about the potential loss of park land on the sites.

In the coming weeks and months, the City will work with many stakeholders to confirm this is the right site and to develop the site plan with the help of the architectural team. We look forward to working with the Parks & Recreation Commission, the Council on Aging, the City Council, neighbors and community members from all over Newton through a series of public meetings. We will provide detailed information on the site ranking process and our early ideas on site layout scenarios at Albemarle. We will solicit community feedback and refine the project.

While the Albemarle site will be discussed at length, the City will continue to consider non-city-owned sites until a final proposal is sent to the City Council.

The entire Albemarle parcel is approximately 17 acres in total. It is a heavily used. It includes a football/soccer field, a regulation baseball field, two little league baseball fields, two softball fields and multiple play structures. The July 4th celebration happens here, students enjoy physical activity before, during, and after school, and neighbors enjoy a wonderful open space.

For this project, we're focused on about two acres of hardscape, consisting of two buildings, pool facilities, two tennis courts and a basketball court as seen in the below photo.

None of the athletic fields or current field programs will be impacted by NewCAL. We deeply appreciate all the vibrant activities and daily life at Albemarle, and none of these will be negatively impacted, but rather complemented by this wonderful facility.

This location can accommodate the full NewCAL program, while also resulting in no loss of athletic field space. NewCAL could be either two or three stories. Parking can be added in front of the NewCAL / swim



facility. The existing parking on Albemarle Road will also help address parking needs for the new facility, as well as the other existing uses.

The location is a 4-minute drive from the current Senior Center. The site is close to equidistant between Newtonville, Nonantum and West Newton Square which all have amenities that support seniors. Unfortunately, it is not in a village center nor near public transit and not right in the center of the city.

The 54-year old Gath Pool is heavily used in the summer by both the public and camps. It is badly in need of an overhaul and requires continual investment for leaks and temporary repairs. Simultaneous with the

NewCAL project, we would address the need for a multi-use new indoor/outdoor pool that works for the public, competitive swimming, camps, and for senior aquatics.

The combination of NewCAL with the Parks & Recreation Department programming currently at Albemarle and a new pool facility can be a win-win. We will have capital project efficiencies, operational cost savings, and new opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration. The Department of Senior Services will take the lead in managing the core NewCAL facility. Parks & Recreation will operate the swim facility and the gymnasium when seniors aren't using it. Other departments such as Health & Human Services, Newton Community Education, Veterans Services, Historic Newton, the Newton Free Library, and cultural/arts programs may also be involved in NewCAL programming when compatible with the needs of our seniors.

The NewCAL Working Group has been working on the site selection process for many months, starting with 145 city-owned and private properties. Through the development of the NewCAL program, site space needs, and site selection criteria, we removed all but 24 sites as not being viable. We then analyzed the remaining 24 sites and identified 6 sites that were most viable (these included Weeks, Pellegrini, Newton Centre Playground, McGrath/Warren, Cabot, and Albemarle).

If you would like to stay involved in the NewCAL Project, please email us at NewCAL@newtonma.gov to be included in routine updates and to hear about public engagement opportunities. The next NewCAL community meeting will be on September 19th at 7:00pm in Room 111 at the Education Center located at 100 Walnut Street.

MBTA Approves \$5M for Commuter Rail Design Services

Mayor Fuller Speaks at the MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board Hearing on

Monday, August 12, 2019.
(Photo courtesy MBTA live
stream video)



On Monday, August 13, the MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board voted “yes” to fund \$5 million to complete a full design for accessibility at all three Newton commuter rail stations (Auburndale, West Newton and Newtonville) and to fund a conceptual design study and cost estimate for adding a double-sided platform at one of Newton’s three commuter rail stations.

The MBTA has done early designs to bring accessibility (all three have significant accessibility barriers) to Newton’s three commuter rail stops. As I mentioned in my testimony yesterday, by my count at each of the stairways at the three stations this past weekend, the number of stairs from the street to the train platforms range from 34 to 44 stairs.

In addition to accessibility, I am strongly advocating to increasing the number of trains going to Boston and into Newton. Employees need to get here and we need to get into Boston at all times of day and weekdays and weekends.

Balancing Newton’s desire for accessibility at our three stations and our hope of achieving increased train frequency (inbound and outbound) against the MBTA’s constrained budget, I offered the [following testimony here](#) (first speaker, comments begin at 1:38) at the MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board Hearing on Monday, August 12. This request was further supported at the MBTA meeting by Representative Kay Khan and City Councilor Emily Norton. Thanks, too, to Council President Marc Laredo for joining us.

While this vote was welcome news for all of us in Newton seeking both fully compliant accessible stations and the possibility of more frequent service, the road ahead for this project is not without challenges. We need to convince the MBTA to fund the design of double-sided platforms at all three stations, not just one.

Then, we need to get funding for construction. The estimated price tag for just the accessibility portion at all three train stations is \$46 million. To date, the MBTA has only allocated \$20 million for this project, leaving a gap of \$26 million. At this time, it is unknown what the additional cost would be to provide double-sided platforms at one of Newton’s stations but all three are projected to be another \$83 million.

I will continue to work closely with Representative Kahn and Senator Creem as well as Representatives Balsler and Lawn to marshal State resources for this important project in the coming months. There may well be an opportunity available in Governor Baker’s transportation bond bill which contains a \$300 million set-aside for commuter rail upgrades. We are also looking at Federal mitigation funds as a possibility.

In the meantime, we will work together to decide which station to study for the double-sided track. We will be in touch for ways for residents and businesses to voice their recommendation. We will also continue to closely monitor the progress of the design plans for accessibility at the three stations, which are expected to be completed by the end of this year or early in 2020.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

