

West Newton Armory JAPG
Notes from January 21, 2020 Meeting
Newton City Hall
7:00-9:00 pm

JAPG Members in Attendance: Barry Abramson, Kelley Brown, Mitch Fischman, Jonathan Katz, David Koven, Anita Lichtblau, Ted Hess – Mahan, Sue Parsons

Others in Attendance: Amanda Berman, Director of Housing & Community Development, Eamon Bencivengo, Housing Development Planner, Josh Morse, Commissioner of Public Buildings, Councilor Vicki Danberg, Councilor Deb Crossley, and members of the public

Meeting called to order at 7:05 p.m.

Presentation by Josh Morse, Public Buildings Commissioner

The National Guard Armory offered to the City of Newton by the State, offers both opportunities and challenges for the City of Newton, according to Josh Morse, Newton's Public Buildings Commissioner. The JAPG in considering the State's offer of selling to us for \$1 if the Armory is turned into 100% affordable housing, or a portion of its fair market value, if used for municipal purposes, will need to consider several unique features of the Armory: its two-foot thick brick walls, narrow windows, limited outdoor footprint, historic nature of the building and potential remaining hazardous materials. At the same time, several communities in Greater Boston have succeeded in repurposing their Armories, or are in the process of doing so.

The JAPG members asked Josh a series of questions on the historic designation of Armories, and whether others in the State had been repurposed or demolished to meet municipalities' needs. Josh replied that there have been successful Armory projects - Newton's may be more challenging to retrofit. He cautioned the JAPG not to compare with other Armories with renovations over ten years old, since current building codes will "require significant investment." He also encouraged us not to simply consider the bottom line, since "public use brings public benefit."

JAPG members asked about the City and State's timeline for decisions on purchase of and uses of the building. The City needs to close and take possession from the State before there is a "deal." The Committee asked what City programmatic needs may be met by the Armory, and whether any use would require substantial work. Josh called the Armory a "mid-sized building, not small enough for some uses, but not big enough for others, such as a school, or fire station.

Councilor Vicki Danberg was now available to welcome the JAPG members and briefly discuss the Armory project. Councilor Danberg thanked JAPG members for volunteering for this project and pointed out the wealth of housing and other expertise represented by committee members. The JAPG then discussed with Councilor Danberg other funds that may be available for an affordable housing project - such as CPA and various state grants. Cl Danberg pointed to the \$1

cost for affordable housing use, and the \$.25 to the \$1 cost if the City were to purchase for another municipal use. She encouraged us not to be initially constrained in our considerations by the cost. The one municipal use so far suggested by David Olson has been for storage of City archives that will need to be moved from the library for safe storage.

The JAPG continued its discussion on the opportunities and challenges presented by potential uses. We will need to explore and understand the historical significance of the building and what the State and Federal agencies overseeing historic designation may approve and deny. We should pay attention to the City of Lynn's outcome on this.

Other questions covered the challenges of creating adequate parking at the site, having a discussion with R. Korpff about the adjacent 40B development, whether the drill shed can be repurposed and even torn down, identifying roadblocks to other building uses, such as any remaining asbestos on the site, as well as hazardous waste from the oil tanks and lead from firing range ammunition.

The previous meeting's minutes were distributed and discussion and approval were moved to the next JAPF meeting on Feb. 4 since members were seeing them for the first time. For this meeting, Sue Parsons will take minutes which will be distributed with the Feb. 4 meeting agenda before the 2/4 meeting. Both summaries will be amended and approved at that meeting.

Discussion on City's grant award from the State's DHCD for exploration of potential use of the Armory for housing. Newton is one of 20 communities who won grant awards of up to \$250,000; Newton's is for \$200,000. The Planning Dept has been working on the RFP for many months. Members of the JAPG asked questions about the status of comments and suggestions solicited from the JAPG, particularly given the number of members with expertise in development and affordable housing. Members stressed the role that a strong, clear RFP has in attracting and hiring a skilled consultant to examine and make recommendations that the JAPG can use to inform our conclusions on best use(s) for the Armory.

Members then discussed the most useful outcomes of a consultant's study:

- examine what the City is trying to accomplish with the Armory and whether these uses can be accomplished efficiently using public funds
- the consultant can only examine its use for housing; the JAPG must consider whether to recommend its use as housing or for another municipal purpose
- within the Armory's use for all affordable housing, what are the choices the City can consider for funding the project; for partnerships for its funding and development; for supportive services, etc.

Finally, the JAPG briefly reviews how the RFP will be distributed. Bid lists will be notified; the RFP will be posted on the central registry; it will be emailed to stakeholders to post to their lists. JAPG members have and will notify Eamon of other suggestions to revise the RFP. Members also requested that the JAPG be part of the selection review process, and discussed how we will work with the consultant, hoping that the consultant will work directly with our committee. The

Planning Dept. responded that there will not be a disconnect between the JAPG and the consultant. Planning will discuss with the Legal Dept how to consider the advice of the JAPG in choosing the consultant.

A JAPG member asked for an update on the status at the Massachusetts legislature of the DCAMM request to offer the Armory to the City for affordable housing or municipal use. The Legislature has voted the request out of committee. The end of this session occurs June 30 and the hope is this will be voted on by then. The Planning Dept. clarified that the City can request an extension beyond June 30, 2020 to notify the State and DCAMM of our decision on whether the City accepts the Armory, as long as we have made demonstrable progress in our work to that end.

The JAPG then considered other Armories to research, particularly in eastern MA, that have been considered for housing and other uses. Tentative plans will be made to invite the Lynn group to meet with us, and to possibly tour that and other Armory sites.

Upcoming meeting dates were set:

February 4, 2020

February 25, 2020

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 pm

Submitted by Sue Parsons, JAPG Vice Chair