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Subject: Public hearing tonight 4/22 on removing Library parking lot trees for solar carports

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City administration pushing ahead with plan to cut Library parking lot trees; public hearing tonight, Wed. 4/22 at Public Facilities (via Zoom)

Despite immense financial challenges that the City of Newton will face as a result of the Covid-19 emergency, detailed in [Mayor Fuller's April 17 Update](#) (higher expenses related to the emergency, and lower revenues from state aid, room & meals tax, excise taxes, and more), the administration is pushing ahead with the Solar Phase 3 carport plan at the Newton Free Library parking lot.

This project would result in all the existing interior trees, and the grass berms they are on, being removed (including the two large oaks that have their own peninsulas). Tonight's Public Facilities meeting, 7pm start, includes a public hearing for the Site Plan Review (the equivalent of a Special Permit public hearing, but for a municipal project). This is your opportunity to weigh in on whether you support cutting trees and spending a large, yet-to-be-determined amount of money to add 21 parking spaces to the existing 185 spaces.

The Public Facilities Committee will hold this meeting as a virtual meeting on Wednesday, April 22, 2020 at 7:00 pm. To view this meeting use this link at the above date and time: <https://zoom.us/j/310773047>

The agenda for tonight's meeting is here:

<http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/102994/04-22-20%20PF%20agenda%20w%20back%20up.pdf>

and includes more options for how to join the meeting, and a Planning Department memo with more details on the proposal's design and parking circulation (but no detail on finances or the promised drainage plan).





How much will this cost?

The capital cost of design and construction is still unknown, and will probably remain unknown until bids are solicited and received. But based on a \$175,000 appropriation approved by the last City Council (Docket #158-19 on June 3, 2019) just for architectural and engineering design (down from an initial request of \$250,000), **I will not be surprised if actual construction costs are \$1 million.**

By comparison, the estimated annual savings to the city in electricity was \$3,403 -- that's plain dollars, when solar contractor Ameresco estimated annual solar output at 415,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per year. The current proposal, which re-oriens and re-sizes the solar arrays, has a lower estimated output, 325,000 kWh per year, so the annual savings would likely be lower.

Other considerations

We lost 45 public street trees just in the recent windstorm. (See recent [Patch article](#).) We have only recently begun to plant as many trees (city and Newton Tree Conservancy combined) as the city loses in a normal year. The city's Forestry crew is already at capacity for how many newly-planted trees they can water for two years, planting about 600 city trees per year. The West Newton Square and Walnut Street Enhancement projects are resulting in the removal of many existing trees (mostly in not good shape) and the planting of over 100 new trees which will also have to be watered.

Thus, the promise of "replacement" caliper inches for trees removed at the

Library parking lot is as close as it has always been. Any replacement trees will likely come at the expense of other trees not getting planted. And the promise is even more vague. Language in the Planning memo now refers to:

"... possible mitigation to limit the net loss of caliiper inches, if warranted."

Climate Action Plan and Parking

The city's [Climate Action Plan](#) talks about the need to reduce paved surfaces and plant more trees. This proposed plan does the opposite.

For those for whom added parking spaces is a plus, the current plan (Alternative 3) selected by the Library trustees add less parking (+21 spaces) than either of the earlier proposals (+35 spaces without pedestrian walkways, or +24 spaces with pedestrian walkways).

There's a lot more news to catch up on, including Zoning Redesign, the Armory reuse, and West Newton Square construction, and I will try to do that in more regular messages, now that I'm furloughed two days/week from my Lowell Sun job! Please stay healthy, everyone!



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