

**From:** Julia Malakie <MalakieWard3@gmail.com>

**To:** Julia <malakiephoto@aim.com>

**Subject:** Coming up: NewCAL (new senior center) siting; Washington Place bait & switch; short-term rental update

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Happy first day of summer (tomorrow), but unlike in past years that seem very distant, you can't count on things slowing down in city government. There's a lot to pay attention to. Here are some upcoming meetings and issues you may want to weigh in on.

## **Quarterly NewCAL community update tonight, 7pm at Ed Center; must new Senior Center come at expense of open space?**



This may not be on your radar if you're not a "senior" or close to it, or it may have been eclipsed by more urgent issues, city or personal. But our current Senior Center is considered inadequate for a growing senior population. Other towns' senior centers have a much higher ration of square footage to senior population (although this may not fully reflect space elsewhere in Newton, like the Albemarle Field House, used for senior programs). So the administration is

proposing to build a new senior/community center which they are calling NewCAL -- Newton Center for Active Living.

### **Why should you care if you're not a senior?**

I don't expect to take advantage of either the current or future center anytime soon, since I'm still working and don't know when I'll feel I can afford to retire. But in my job as a photojournalist at the Lowell Sun, I visit many senior centers in the towns we cover and see what a great resource they are for seniors to stay engaged and healthy. And with about 2/3 of city spending related to schools, it's both fair and sensible to give seniors a reason to stay in their houses and in Newton. We can't afford to be a city where people come for the schools and leave when their kids graduate because they feel they're not getting their tax money's worth in services.

### **What's the status of NewCAL?**

An appointed Working Group, in conjunction with city departments, has been studying programming desires and space needs, and comparing the current Senior Center to nice centers in six other towns. This information is in a presentation included here in the [May 29 Finance Committee agenda](#). They're now at the point where they need to narrow down the list of possible locations to about 3-5 sites, before more than \$150,000 of an approved \$400,000 appropriation is spent. The aforementioned presentation includes a "short list" of 24 potential sites, narrowed down from an unspecified list of 145 sites. Like many other people, I'm concerned that almost all of this [short list](#) (18 sites) involves cannibalizing park or playground land. Two more sites, the Newton Centre Field House on Tyler Terrace, and the Lower Falls Community Center of Grove Street, are buildings which might need to be enlarged onto park space, since the Working Group estimates 2.5 acres would be needed. Two more involve buildings the city doesn't own (the YMCA, and Solomon Schecter school). The remaining two are the Riverside and Northland developments.

With the pressure of growing population, and private development that's eating up green space with larger building footprints, I believe it's essential to preserve all the open space we have, whether it's parks, playing fields, passive recreation space, or wooded areas, and add more -- not chip away at what we have for the sake of expediency. I would question the adequacy of 'rearranging' parks to ensure no net loss of active field space, as suggested in the [May 29 Finance Committee Report](#):

There was a question on the site selection process because it seems like the only options included the loss of parks, which is a concern because of the

importance of parks. Commissioner Morse responded that one of the primary goals is to not produce a net loss of active field space. The compromise the Administration would likely seek if one of the park sites were selected would be more optimally utilizing passive green space, or park master planning and reconfiguration to facilitate the project without the loss of primary park features. The taking of any land by the City will be controversial. If a park site is selected, it would need the support of the Council and the community.

More insight into city councilors' concerns can be found in the [April 17 Public Facilities Committee Report](#). I look forward to learning more about the site selection process at tonight's quarterly update meeting, June 20, 7pm, Room 111 at the Education Center, 100 Walnut Street. Please consider attending if you're able, or writing to the mayor, [rfuller@newtonma.gov](mailto:rfuller@newtonma.gov), and city councilors via City Clerk David Olson -- [dolson@newtonma.gov](mailto:dolson@newtonma.gov) -- with your thoughts.

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## Washington Place 'bait & switch': it's still being built, and already they want to change the special permit to allow a bank



Yes, it's not even built yet, but Mark Development, after agreeing to not lease to banks as a condition of the special permit for Washington Place, is now requesting to amend the board order to allow them to lease 3,800 sf of commercial area to a bank! The [Electronic Posting Board](#) notice for 6-25-19 Land Use public hearings contains this item:

#179-19 Petition to amend Board Order #96-17 to allow bank use at Washington Place WASHINGTON PLACE OWNER, LLC petition for SPECIAL PERMIT/SITE PLAN APPROVAL to amend Special Permit Council Order #96-17 to allow modification of Condition #34 to allow the petitioner to lease commercial space to not more than one commercial bank with a total square footage not to exceed 3,800 sq. ft. at 845 Washington Street and 245 Walnut Street, Ward 2, Newtonville, Section 21 Block 29 Lot 10, containing approximately 123,956 sq. ft. of land in a district zoned MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT. Ref.: Sections 7.3, 7.4 of Chapter 30 of the City of Newton Revised Zoning Ordinances, 2017.

Words are inadequate to express my disgust at this maneuver. Most people feel that Newton's village centers have an excess of banks, especially with so much banking done online. That was the reason for this condition in the first place, to help win approval of the special permit. The developer agreed to the condition in 2017. Now, based on a comment by Jim Cote on the Newtonville listserve, I suspect the argument by Mark Development and their supporters will be that collecting higher rents from a bank will allow them to charge lower rents to local businesses like The Barn. It's hard to overstate the cynicism of this argument. If councilors were concerned about keeping local businesses in Newtonville, they should have rejected the rezoning and special permit, and we'd probably still have Newtonville Camera, Karoun, Boston Ballet School and the other small businesses. Secondly, it would be in Mark Development's own interests to give The Barn an affordable rent anyway, as businesses like The Barn may be the only reason many of us would have to visit this building. Thirdly, there's no guarantee that whatever local business we were promised would still be there in 10 or 20 years. Finally, this is just the latest example of a developer agreeing to a condition and then attempting to weasel out of it when fewer people are paying attention, and it's a practice that should be discouraged, not rewarded. If Mark Development has trouble filling the commercial portion of its mixed use buildings, that's important to know before approving any more of this type of rezoning.

Please attend the public hearing if you can, or write in opposition to this request, to the City Council via city clerk David Olson at [dolson@newtonma.gov](mailto:dolson@newtonma.gov) referencing #179-19 in the subject line.

**Short-term rental ordinance undergoing further revision; that, Riverside and**

# Inclusionary Zoning at June 24 ZAP

The [June 10 Zoning & Planning public hearing](#) on short-term rentals (STRs) heard from many Airbnb operators concerned especially about the proposed 45-day per year limit, as well as the 2-bedroom limit, and that limits would affect their ability to afford to remain in Newton. The committee also heard from residents adversely affected by a large, non-owner-occupied Airbnb on Dudley Road. The committee asked the Planning Department to look at what other communities are doing about limits of number of days, number of bedrooms rented, and number of guests. It should be noted that the city specifically reached out to STR operators through Airbnb and other platforms. There was no indication of outreach to abutters to STRs. ZAP will discuss this item further at their Monday, June 24 ZAP meeting. Other important items on [that agenda](#) include the competing Riverside rezoning proposals, and revisions to the Inclusionary Zoning ordinance.

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