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INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 17, 2024

TO: City of Newton City Council

FROM: Barney Heath, Director, Department of Planning and Development
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director Department of Planning and Development
Katie Whewell, Chief Planner for Current Planning
Joe Iadonisi, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: Chapter 5 §5-58 of the City of Newton Ordinances, request for review for site and building construction at 225 Nevada Street for the Horace Mann Elementary School

CC: Alejandro Valcarce, Public Buildings Department
Design Review Committee
Public Buildings Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Planning Department conducted a Section 5-58 review of the proposed new construction of the Horace Mann Elementary School at 225 Nevada Street. The proposed project consists of two additions to the existing building totaling 27,254 square feet and bringing the school to a total of 77,486 square feet. These additions will maintain capacity for around 396 students with 46 parking spaces while expanding program and accessory spaces to include adding special education, break-out/project space, library, cafeteria, administrative, custodial, and outdoor play areas. The proposed design will make the building fully accessible and the addition will be all electric (no fossil fuels).

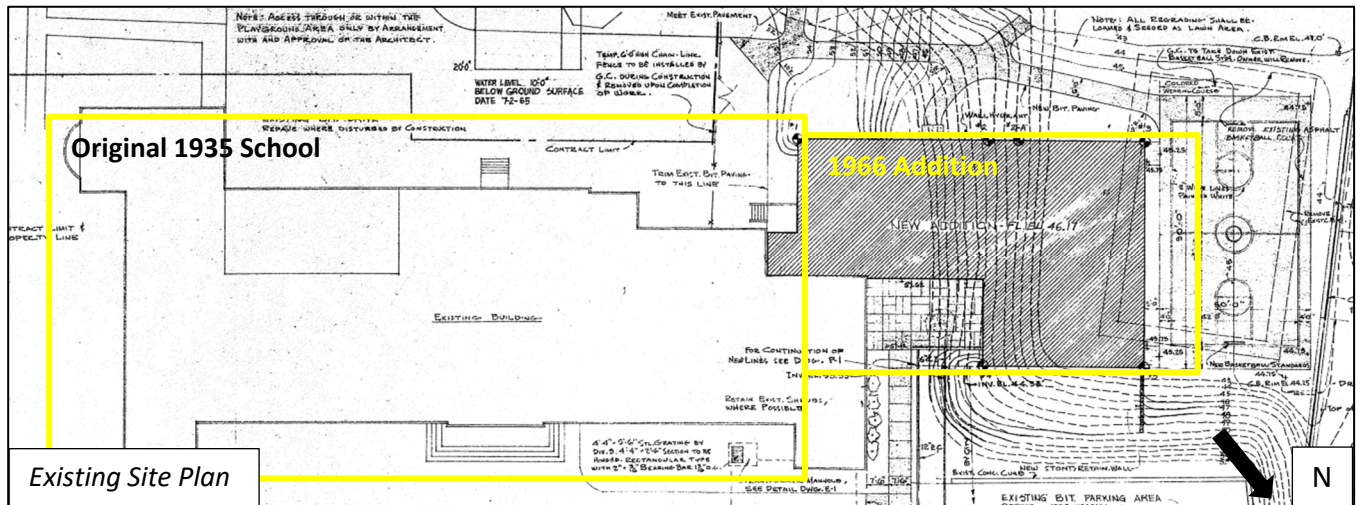


Proposed Additions to the Rear of the Horace Mann Elementary School

Section 1. History and Existing Conditions

History and Past Renovations

The Horace Mann Elementary School was originally constructed in 1935. It has since been renovated in 1966, 1988, 2014, and 2019, including additions and modular classrooms to support the current capacity for an enrollment of 360 students. The 1966 addition was the most significant of these projects, with an addition to the north side of the building with a lower and upper level containing a gymnasium, auditorium, offices, and additional classrooms. Projects in 1988, 2015, and 2019 consisted only of external and internal renovations and the addition of two modular classrooms in 2015 to accommodate the relocation of the Horace Mann School from 687 Watertown St. to 225 Nevada St.



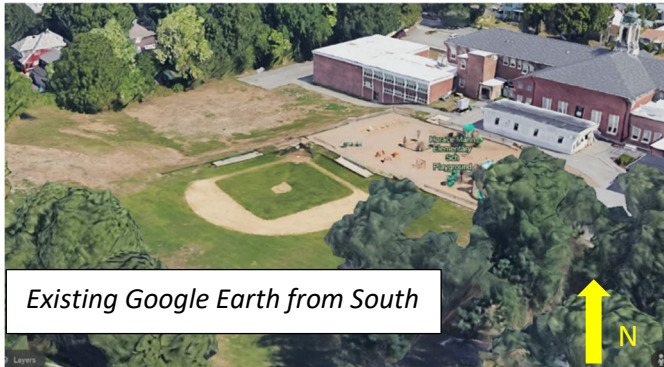
The main school building, constructed in 1935 has a traditional school design with 2.5 stories, red brick facades on all sides, large windows, an entryway with Greek Ionic style columns, and a steeple with copper plating. The 1966 addition matched the red brick facades of the original building while adding a minimalist and geometric architectural style in keeping with the contemporary midcentury modern style.



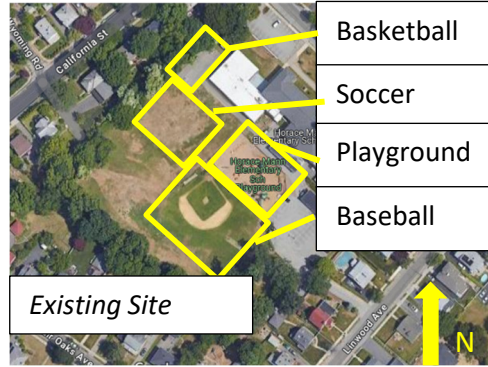
Currently, there are eighteen classrooms providing space for three kindergarten classrooms and fifteen classrooms for grades one through five. Additionally, there are two special education rooms, eleven administrative and program offices, an art room and kiln, gymnasium and storage, music room, media center, library, and nurse’s office.

Site and External Facilities

The Horace Mann School is located on an approximately 340,560 square foot lot. About 129,190 square feet of that lot is recreational space located to the southwest or rear of the school building with a basketball court, baseball and soccer fields, playground, and open space.



Existing Google Earth from South



Existing Site

Parking, Traffic, and Circulation

There are currently 19 parking spaces in the north/front parking lot and 27 parking spaces in the south/rear parking lot which is also where the dumpsters are located. To the northeast/front, immediately in front of the main entrance to the school along Nevada St. there is a bus drop-off lane with the capacity to hold two school buses at a time and a designated drop-off/pick-up area marked by about 100 feet of blue curb but without any other improvements. The intersections of California St. to the north and Linwood Ave. to the east with Nevada St. are the nearest crosswalks for pedestrian access to the school. Crossing guards are typically posted at these intersections and the intersection of Linwood Ave. and Walnut St. about a quarter of a mile to the south of the school. There have been few changes to the parking and circulation of the site since the school's construction.



Section 2. Project Details

I. Site Plan Approval Process

Prior to construction at any municipal building, Section 5-58 of the Newton City Ordinance requires reviews of associated plans by the following:

- The Director of Planning and Development for consistency and compatibility with the Newton Comprehensive Plan and other applicable planning and analytical studies;
- The Design Review Committee for layout, construction, and relationship to surroundings;
- The Public Facilities Committee to provide a forum for public comments and discussion about proposed buildings and their locations, followed by City Council action.

Once the site plans are formally approved by these bodies, they become part of the final set of project plans and construction drawings and cannot be substantially altered without being resubmitted to the Design Review Committee and to the City Council. After the requirements of §5-58(a)(1) through (a)(6) have been satisfied, the City

Council can appropriate funds for preparation of detailed construction drawings.

II. Site Design and Building Design



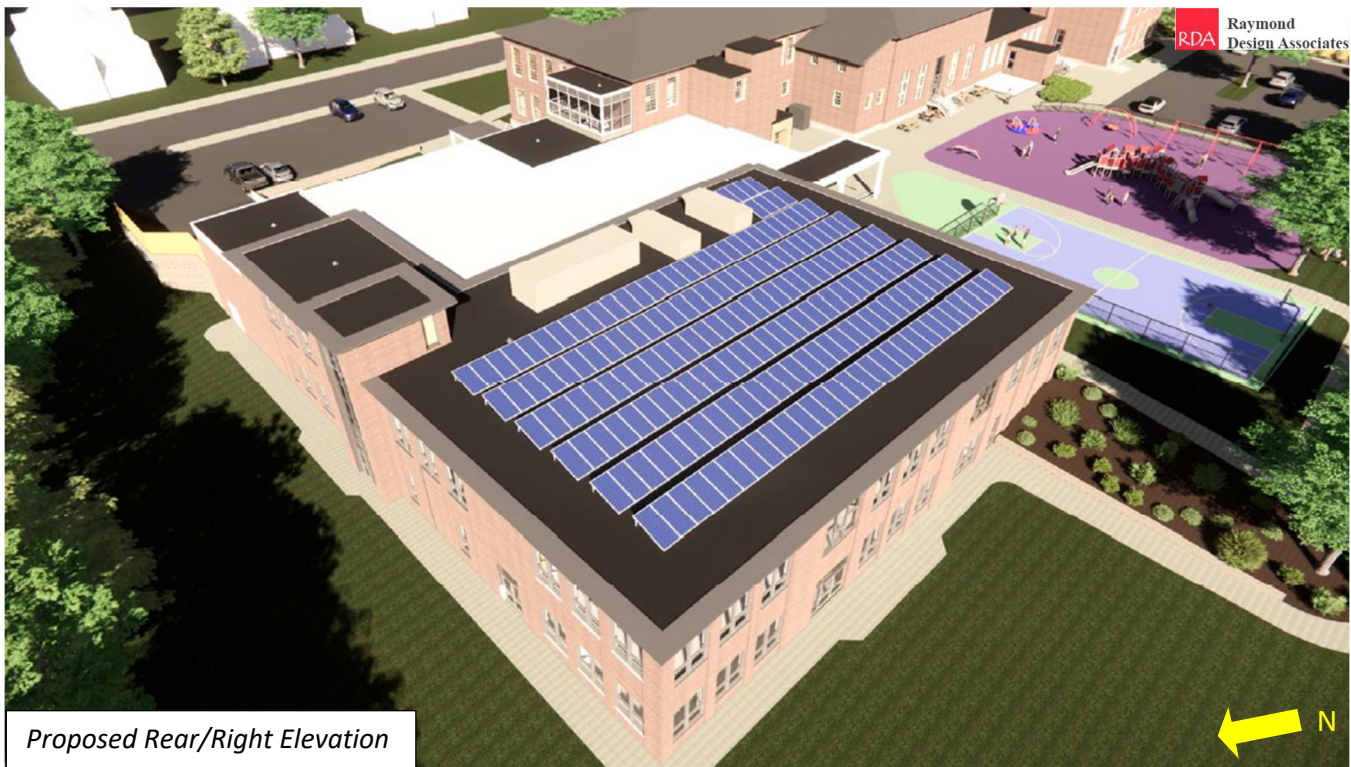
The proposed two-story additions consist of a larger rear addition with additional program space for the school and a smaller entry addition to the front the building. As proposed, the additions will total approximately 27,754 square feet.

Additional site work is proposed which will reconfigure the recreational space layout and includes the construction of new fields, playground, outdoor classroom, and basketball court. There are minor changes to access and circulation for the site with the relocation of the dumpsters and receiving area to the front/north parking lot, the addition of stairs and a new entrance to the new single-story front addition, and improvements to accessibility with a walkway and ramps to the rear of the building. Accessible walkways are planned throughout the site so all may access various areas of the site. The entrance off of Linwood Avenue will be provided with a raised sidewalk which will extend and connect with the access to the fields as well as the front of the building without necessitating crossing through the parking lot (which currently occurs).

The proposed additions will not significantly change the design or appearance of the school. The school will remain a two-story structure. The new addition will appear as a single story from the street as there is about a ten-foot drop in grade from the front of the school to the grade at the lower level of the addition. The addition will also match the brick façade and large windows of the other portions of the school, as demonstrated by the

below renderings.





III. Technical Review of Site Plans Under Section 5-58

1. Location and Existing Site Conditions

The Horace Mann Elementary School is located on a 225 Nevada St. is zoned as Public Use. The surrounding neighborhood is entirely residential and zoned Single-Residence 3 to the west and south predominantly with single-family dwellings and Multi-Residence 1 to the north and east predominantly

2. Proposed Improvements

The proposed additions will increase programmatic space, improve accessibility, sustainability, and the quality of both educational and recreational spaces. Capacity will remain at around 400 students with eighteen classrooms for three classes at each grade level from kindergarten to grade five. Improvements to program space include the additions of project areas for grades one through five, two addition special education classrooms, dedicated occupational therapy and speech space, and group space for kindergarten, first grade, and second grade, two additional music practice spaces, and dedicated gym storage. There will also be significant expansion to the cafeteria and kitchen area, administrative offices, and custodial facilities. The resulting building will also improve accessibility with added ramps to the rear and an added pathway in the rear that will improve access to the new addition for those with mobility challenges. In terms of sustainability, the addition will be LEED Certifiable but will not be certified.

IV. Other Reviews

- **Newton Historical Commission.** On January 30, 2024, the Newton Historical Commission voted to find

the Horace Mann Elementary School historically significant and imposed demolition delay until January 29, 2025. The report is available as Attachment B.

- **City Transportation Engineer.** The proposed project does not change capacity or enrollment so no changes or further review from the City Transportations Engineering is required.
- **Fire Department.** The Fire Department met with the design team and has reviewed the plans for compliance with applicable safety codes. The addition of fire suppression systems and improved access for emergency vehicles improves site safety. However, Fire Safety noted that the project needs to add a bi-directional amplifier to improve emergency communications, revise the turning radius for fire trucks on plans, and involved Code Red in review. The Public Buildings Department will continue to coordinate with the Fire Prevention Bureau to meet all applicable safety codes.
- **Associate City Engineer.** The Department of Public Works Engineering is responsible for reviewing this proposal for compliance with the Stormwater Ordinance and other regulations governing stormwater management. Their review will be made available once complete.

V. Consistency with Newton Comprehensive Plan and Other Plans/Studies

While most of the Comprehensive Plan deals with non-public land and buildings, the Comprehensive Plan specifically addresses schools and municipal buildings in general with regards to environmental protection, energy conservation, and transportation. The proposed project poses no challenges to environmental protection on a local level as the site is free from development restrictions regarding stormwater or riverfront or flood areas and the proposed tree and planting plans will increase the net caliper inches of trees on site. Energy conservation will also be advanced from a climate perspective as the building will be fully electric and prepared to add solar. This is also important as it will improve indoor air quality consistent with the Comprehensive Plan as it states, “controlling indoor air quality is getting a great deal of attention by the Newton Schools Department to address numerous problems identified throughout the school buildings by each school’s Environmental Management Team (EMT).” Transportation will be slightly improved with a dedicated receiving and dumpster area and improved access for emergency vehicles to the school.

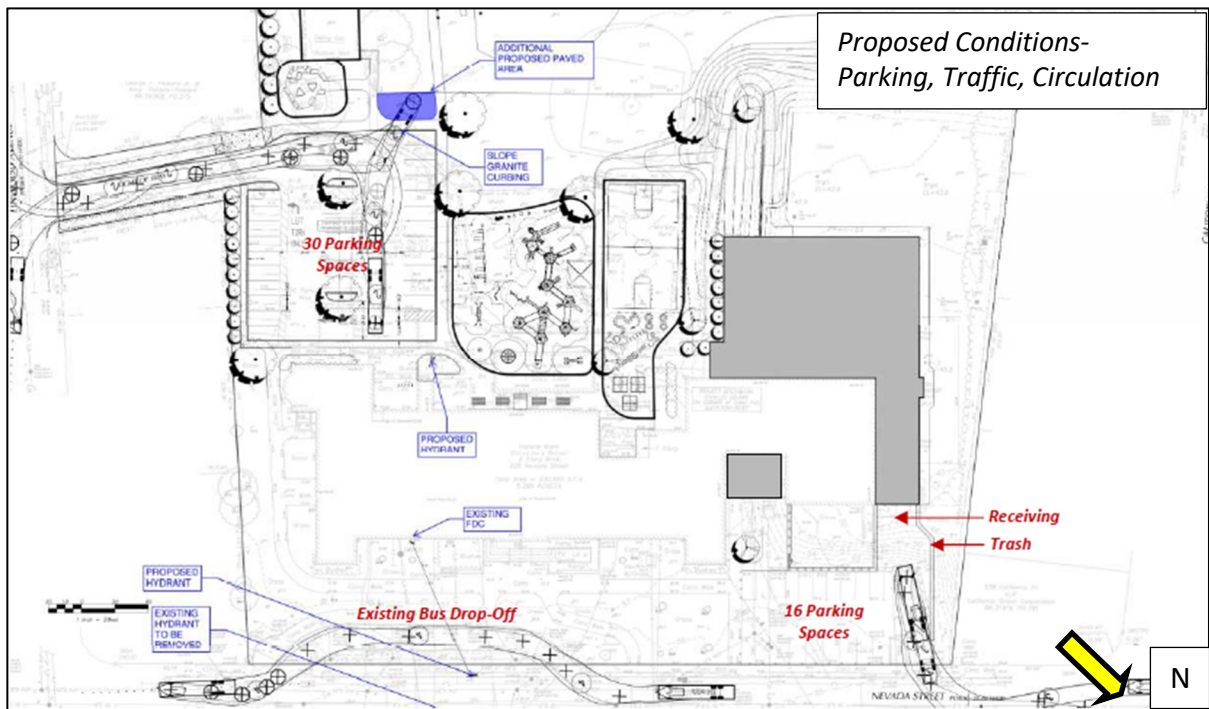
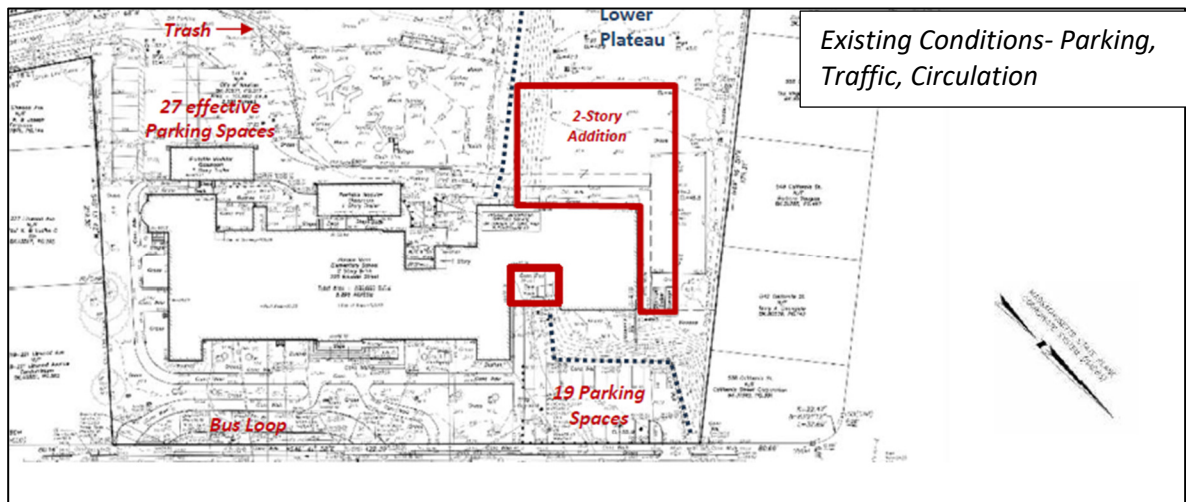
VI. Site Plan Review Criteria

In accordance with Section 5-58, the City has filed plans for Site Plan Approval. These are to be reviewed in accordance with the procedure outlined in Chapter 30: Article 6, Chapter 5, Section 5-58 of the Revised Ordinances. The following is a review of the submitted plans against the relevant criteria established in this section.

A. Convenience and safety of vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site and in relation to the adjacent streets, properties or improvements

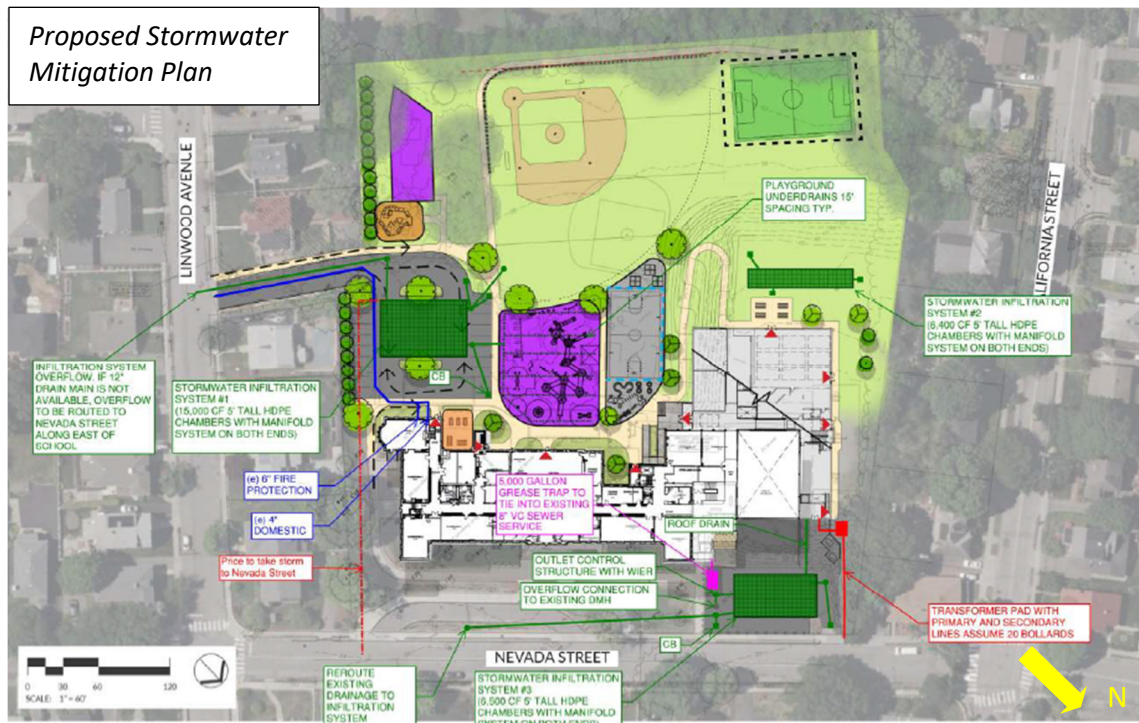
Changes to vehicular and pedestrian movement are minor given no changes in enrollment or staffing. Student loading/unloading areas for buses and vehicles will remain the same and the total number of parking spaces will remain 46. An additional crosswalk is planned for the Linwood Avenue entrance to the school, aiding safety for students walking from the south. The proposal also relocates the loading and dumpster area from the southern/rear parking lot to the northern/front parking lot, allowing for improved access for service vehicles.

Existing Conditions



B. Adequacy of the methods for regulating surface water drainage

The proposal increases the total impervious area by 30,231 square feet to 109,118 square feet with expansion of the building footprint, parking spaces and recreational areas such as the playground and basketball court. The plan to offset these additions includes three improved catch basin and infiltration systems, phosphorus filtration system, and a rain garden. The site has undergone hydrological and geotechnical testing and modeling, designed to measure the current water table and the proposed system’s ability to handle stormwater. With the proposed increase to impervious surface and updated stormwater system, the provided modeling for the stormwater system demonstrates an equal or improved performance for all three improved catchment systems under 2-, 10-, 25-, and 100-year storms.

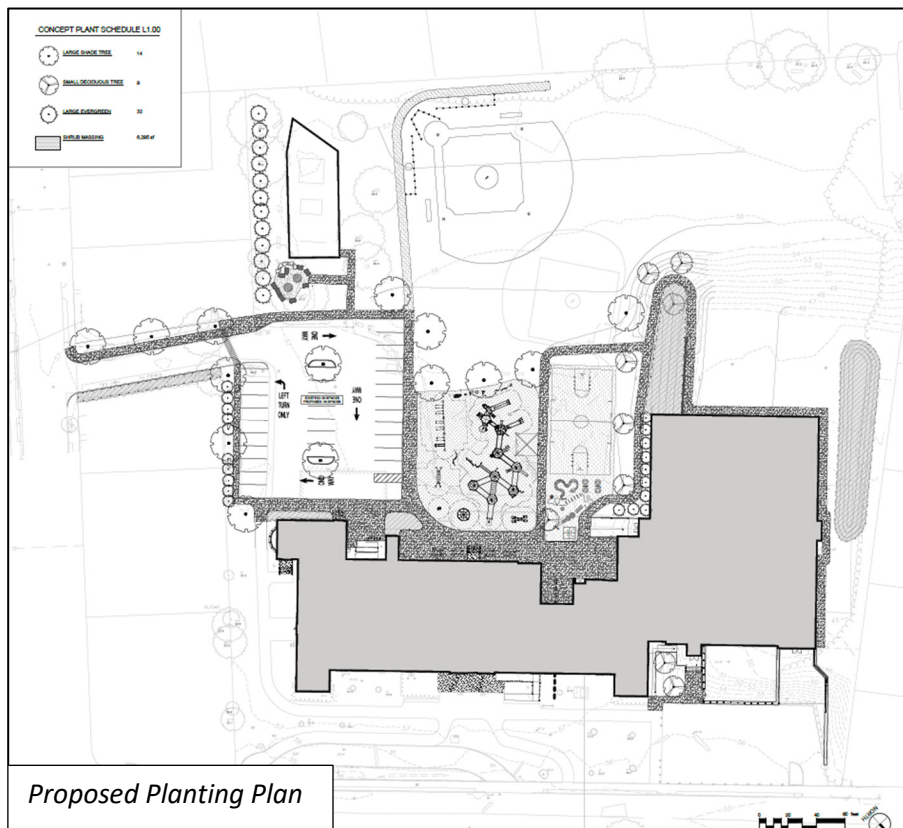


- C. Screening of parking areas and structures from adjoining premises. Location of parking between the street and existing or proposed structures shall be discouraged.

The proposed plan provides some screening with small evergreen trees for the southern/rear parking lot from Linwood Avenue. Provided plans do not depict any additional screening along Nevada Street or at the proposed loading/dumpster area. The design team should consider additional screening for these spaces, but with due consideration for pedestrian and vehicle sight lines as both parking lots are near drop-off/pick-up locations for students and students may be walking through/around these parking lots on their route to/from school. Some parking is located between the street and school, however, Planning does not necessarily discourage this in this context. In the current and proposed plans, play areas are located to the rear of the school. Eliminating the front/northern parking lot and expanding parking to the rear of the school is an option, however this would reduce the play area for students and perhaps increase congestion with only one parking lot.

- D. Avoidance of topographic changes; tree and soil removal shall be minimized.

The location of the additions to the building avoids major topographic changes as the proposed building additions will mainly occur on flat terrain to the west of the existing building. Loam will be removed per the below site preparation plan, however this will not result in any significant change to the quality or quantity of soil on site and should have minimal ecological impact. As the proposed Tree Removal Plan and Planting Plan below demonstrate, there will be a net gain of trees in caliper inches. Six trees, totaling 68 caliper inches of deciduous trees and 16 caliper inches of evergreen trees, are proposed to be removed. In place of those trees, a total of 55 trees, 69 caliper inches of deciduous trees and 48 caliper inches of evergreen trees will be added.



E. Consideration of site design including relationship to nearby structures.

The proposed additions expand the scale of the school, but largely maintain a similar site design. Abutting and nearby properties to the south and west are zoned Single Residence 3 and generally consist of single-family dwellings and abutting and nearby structures to the immediate east/front of the school being zoned Multi-Residence 1 and largely consisting of two-family dwellings. The Nonantum village center is located about a half mile to the east, with a larger mix of zones and structures. The additions for the school will almost entirely be to the rear of the building and will be lower in height than the existing building. Changes to the overall site design are minor with the school and site continuing to maintain the same general layout from its original 1935 construction. The school and overall site remain appropriate for a neighborhood elementary school.

VII. **CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT**

At a January 29, 2024 Newton Historical Commission (NHC) meeting, the NHC found the building to be historically significant and preferably preserved, thus imposing an 18-month demolition delay. Given the imposition of demolition delay, construction may not begin until January 30, 2025, and is scheduled to conclude in the fall of 2026 given a 20-month construction timeline estimate. The majority of renovations, with the exception of some site preparatory work, are templated to occur in the summers of 2025 and 2026 to avoid disruption to education.

Given the three-month bid contract has yet to occur, there is not yet sufficient information on construction management for this project. The contractor for the winning bid should submit a Construction Management Plan ("CMP") to the Director of Planning and Development, the City

Engineer, the City Traffic Engineer, and the Commissioner of Inspectional Services for review and approval before any construction activities related to this project are commenced on the site.

This plan should identify hours of construction, further details on the expected phasing and length of construction, location of proposed on-site contractor parking, and material storage and staging areas. This plan should also incorporate preferences and input from neighbors, and the telephone number for the contractor's primary contact person. Copies of the final approved CMP should be submitted to the Executive Office and each of the Ward Councilors who represent the areas the school serves.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Director of Planning and Development has determined that the preliminary site and architectural plans for the proposed Countryside Elementary School are consistent with the *Newton Comprehensive Plan* and any other relevant plans and studies, including the site plan review criteria listed in Section 30-23. The proposed building offers remedies or improvements to the issues with the current building's lack of programmatic and accessory space that could not otherwise be offered through renovation. The new school should greatly benefit the surrounding neighborhood far beyond the impact of construction or any other potential inconveniences of the new building.

With that in mind, the Planning Department wishes to offer the following items for consideration:

- Consider placing photovoltaic panels during construction for a return on investment for electrification of the building's energy systems.
- Pedestrian and vehicular access appears to have the potential for improvement in the future. Consider soliciting and incorporating feedback from staff, guardians of students, and Newton Safe Routes to School regarding proposed pick-up/drop-off plan and pedestrian access. With no forecasted change in capacity or enrollment, the improvements at the Linwood entrance, Planning does not see any immediate issues with the provided plans. It may be more appropriate to address these concerns at a later time. Planning suggests that the Department of Public Buildings coordinate with the Transportation Division of Public works for pedestrian improvements in the immediate vicinity. Planning staff observed a lack of crosswalks to the south or west of the school along Linwood Ave. and California St. and there may not be sufficient room for traffic to pass by vehicles that are stopped in the pick-up/drop-off area on Nevada St.

If the Council, Executive Office and School Committee choose to approve these plans, prior to applying for Building Permits the Public Buildings Department should submit:

- Attachment A: NHC Letter, January 30, 2024
- Engineering Review Memorandum, when completed