

TO: Newton Board of Aldermen
FROM: Srdjan Nedeljkovic – Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council
DATE: August 31, 2014
SUBJ: NHNAC Working Group Response regarding NHNAC's Plan B for Zervas

The Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council recently presented its Plan B alternative site plan for the Zervas renovation/expansion. Some members of the Zervas School Building Committee (ZSBC) / Design Review Committee (DRC) have expressed concerns about Plan B. In this memo, the NHNAC responds to those concerns, with comparisons to the ZSBC's Plan A. The site plans for both are shown on the last page.

1. *Concern: Plan B creates two main entrances, but a single main entrance is better for security and design clarity.*

Plan B has one main entrance, just like the ZSBC's Plan A, but its main entrance faces the pedestrian inflow, not the parking lot. Its north entrance is for buses and employees – and will be locked and accessed by employee cards, just like all the other exterior doors.

2. *Concern: Plan B places the tall 3-story wing too close to the Beacon Street neighbors and Beacon Street.*

A 30-foot-tall school building will cast a shadow of at most 82 feet (when the sun angle is lowest, 23 degrees). The nearest house, 75 feet away, will be touched by the tip of this shadow only on the shortest days of the year. Beacon Street is 150 feet away. But if this really is a problem, then **the wings can be reversed so that the tall one will be in the rear.**

3. *Concern: It's better for traffic congestion and safety if the buses enter and leave from Beacon Street. Plan B retains the current bus entrance from Beethoven.*

Beacon Street is a major commuter route, single-lane each way. Plan A has multiple traffic conflict points. **Commuters will not appreciate the extra congestion of buses entering from Beacon under Plan A.** Plan B uses the current flow of buses from Beethoven to Beacon, which works smoothly. It also puts parking in the back, out of the way.

4. *Concern: To address traffic congestion on Beethoven, the new design should add an extra lane for Blue Zone and right-turning exits, but Plan B does not do this.*

More lanes of traffic means more cars and more cars going faster – a potentially deadly combination by an elementary school Blue Zone. Plan A's dedicated lane for the Blue Zone is not enough to handle the demand, even assuming optimistic turnover times. **The way to address car congestion is to create walkable schools with a focus on pedestrian safety!** If we build new traffic lanes, more car traffic will come.

5. *Concern: It's aesthetically desirable for Zervas to have a presence on Beacon Street, since many students come from that side. The three Beacon Street properties are not an integrated part of the residential neighborhood and do not need to be preserved.*

This section of Beacon Street is residential, and not currently marred by parking lots. It's the trees and green space on the Beacon street residential properties that creates a pleasant neighborhood "aesthetic." **Buildings with parking lots in front are typical of auto-oriented "sprawl" development, and such a presence does not enhance the neighborhood** (see the South Pacific strip mall further down Beacon).

6. *Concern: Newton has a great opportunity to permanently enlarge the school site now because we have available funds from the 2013 override.*

Plan B meets the same educational objectives as Plan A while saving \$2.4M, 45 trees, residential properties, and greenscape. It's not a good idea to sacrifice all of that for 5 additional parking spaces in Plan A. In the future, what will be seen as short-sighted will be wasteful spending and the centralization of Newton's elementary schools into large, petro-vehicle-based masses. Yes, \$2.4M is currently available in the budget, but our city budgets are often constrained, and taxpayer money needs to be spent wisely.

7. *Concern: Plan B should accommodate most staff parking onsite while expanding outdoor activity space. Newton shouldn't have "inadequate" parking at Zervas just because most(or all) other elementary schools have inadequate parking.*

Plan B does accommodate most staff parking onsite, and it has more parking spaces per teacher than all but two Newton elementary schools (and even more than the new Angier). **Plan B shows that we can expand open space (13K sq. ft. more than in Plan A) and create adequate parking without taking the three Beacon properties, chopping down trees, and violating green space.**

8. *Concern: Beethoven residents want the building set back as far as possible from Beethoven.*

The size of the building on the constrained site offers little room for repositioning. Keeping the building as large as 80,000 sq. ft. and three stories will create a similar effect whether it is shifted 10 feet in any direction. From a "walkable schools" perspective, the closer the entrance to the sidewalk the better. Just as with a shopping area, if a front entrance is set back from the street with parking in the frontage, the site is more attractive as a drive-through site. But if the front doors are near the sidewalk, then it becomes a walkable, pedestrian-oriented building on a pedestrian-oriented street. That's traditional neighborhood development vs. sprawl-type development, where people drive from building to building even on the same street (e.g., Needham Street). **The ZSBC's Plan A is a "drive-through" design rather than a walkable design.**

9. *Concern: Plan B extends parking within a required 25-foot wetlands buffer.*

Many people have expressed concerns about such a large structure being built adjacent to wetlands. The ZSBC dismissed these concerns saying that the problems with wetlands can be solved by engineering. This current concern is evidence that "Yes, the wetlands are

actually a major issue in the design of the school.” It remains to be seen what other problems are caused by siting this school so close to a swamp.

The ZSBC’s Plan A itself includes parking and a large building structure within the 100-foot buffer zone and parking within the 50-foot zone. **Plan B actually has a smaller building footprint within the 100-foot buffer zone and less parking within the 50-foot zone.**

[State law](#) allows for up to 5,000 sq. ft. of potential development within wetlands. Plan B includes about 5,000 sq. ft. of pervious pavement for parking within the 25-foot buffer zone, and (of course) none within the actual wetland.

Enforcement in any project is subject to evaluation and mitigation. Currently, there is hardscape at Zervas immediately adjacent to the property line next to the wetland. Recent parking lot projects in Newton have been allowed to proceed adjacent to other wetlands. Pervious pavement and other mitigation measures should be discussed with the Conservation Commission to develop a satisfactory plan.

Which is more environmentally obtrusive?

- Plan A: A larger building footprint within the 100-foot setback and the destruction of dozens of mature trees
- Plan B: Some parking on pervious pavement adjacent to the wetlands, with controlled run-off

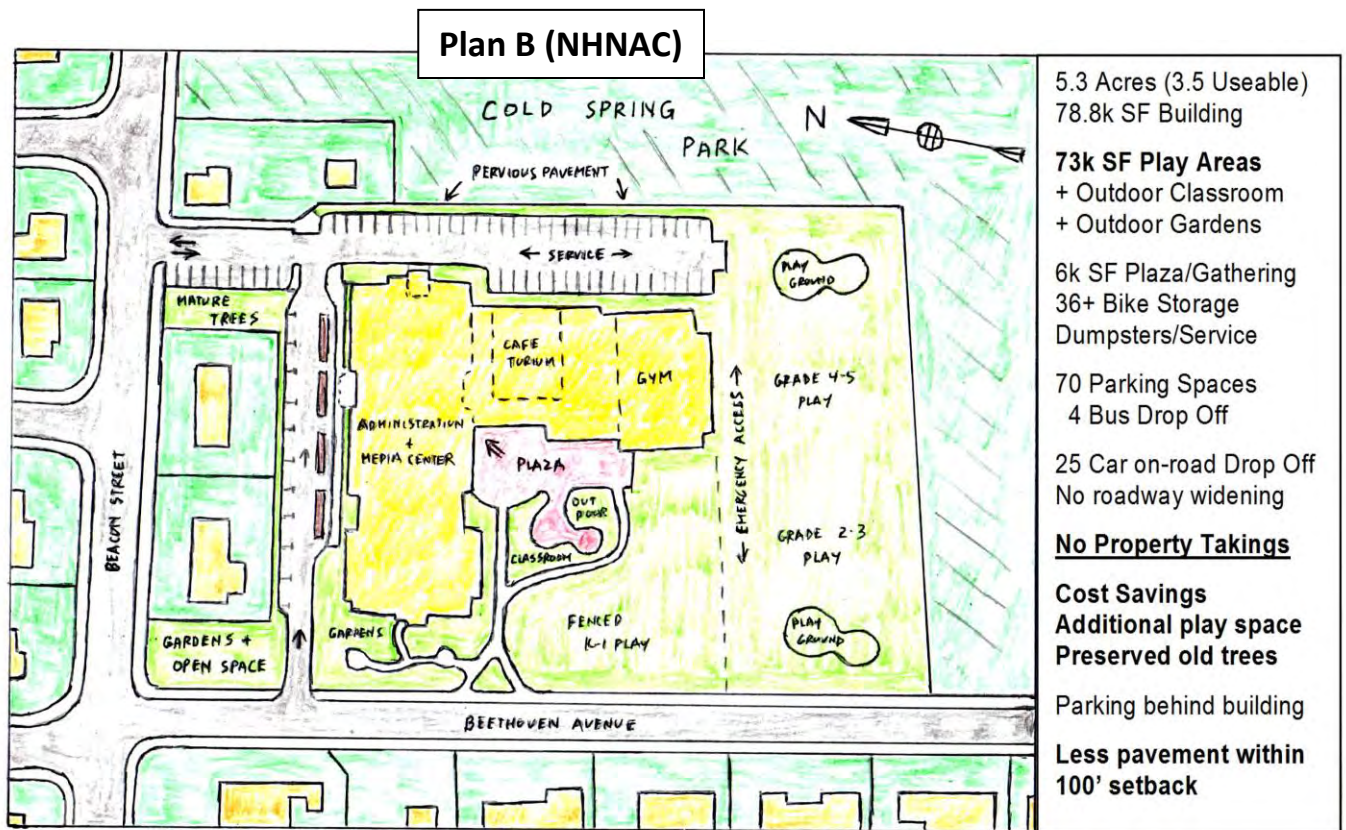
The most environmentally damaging part of the entire Zervas project will not be related to wetlands but rather the carbon penalty for all of the excess driving that will take place to this site.

NHNAC's Concerns about Plan A

The ZSBC's Plan A has additional problems regarding traffic safety:

1. **ZSBC Plan A's ingress/egress driveway is too close to the traffic signal at Beethoven.** With Beacon Street being only a two-lane road without turning lanes, cars will queue up behind left-turners, causing backups and delays. Plan A intends to place an additional traffic light at one of its Beacon Street driveways, a block from the Beethoven light and in contradiction to basis traffic engineering guidelines.
2. **ZSBC Plan A's traffic flow presents multiple new traffic conflicts.** Unlike Plan B, the ZBC plan has cars entering in and out of the parking lots in at least four locations. If a car turns into the only driveway from Beacon Street and there is a bus queuing in the bus drop off loop, the bus can block the car from entering one of the two lots. A quick look at all of the arrows in the Plan A traffic plan shows chaos in the making!
3. **ZSBC Plan A widens Beethoven to make a separate lane for Blue Zone and turning right onto Beacon.** The right-turn lane widens the distance to cross Beethoven at Beacon Street, creating a new environment that is unwelcoming and probably less safe to pedestrians. A wider Beethoven street invites speedier --and less safe-- traffic. The new Blue Zone lane removes about 4000 sq. ft. of open space from the site, in addition to the acre or so of proposed asphalt parking on the site in Plan A.

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| See the next page for a graphical comparison of Plan B (NHNAC) vs. ZSBC Plan |
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SCHEMATIC DESIGN PROGRESS - SITE PLAN

Zervas Elementary School -- Newton, MA
 August 31, 2014

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 Neighborhood Area Council
 Zervas Working Group**



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