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## Downtown Developer Wants To Be Green

By Kristiana Glavin  
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Going "green" is not just creating an energy-efficient building; it's the thought process behind the design.

That was the message from downtown property owner Tedrowe Bonner on Monday night when he presented his tentative plans to transform the building at 94 Elm St. into New Canaan Village Plaza. This generally met with positive feedback from the audience of town officials, business owners, environmentalists and preservationists.

Bonner is a New Canaan native and serves as principal owner of Rubicon Seven a "green" focused development firm. The company was formerly known as J. Elliott Smith Realty.

"What tonight is about is creating a village plaza," Bonner said in his presentation at the New Canaan Historical Society. "We can slap up a green building, but it doesn't create a community."

The building at 94 Elm St. houses Bank of America with a small parking lot and alley running behind it. The alley spans from the back of Starbucks Coffee and down to MacKenzie's.

Bonner is working with Regenesys Group, a consultant firm based in Santa Fe specializes in regenerative planning, land use and development.


"Everyone is coming around to this whole

notion of green building to try to effect change," Bonner said. "It's not a trivial movement. The industry realizes this is where we are going."


Ultimately the plan is to update the building and beautify the area. Bonner said he wants to respect the original design. The architecture dates back to 1938, and the back of the property especially needs attention. The alley has a dreary appearance with asphalt paving, dumpsters, a chain-link fence, concrete wall slabs and doors spray-painted with graffiti. The alley sits about 500 feet away from the train station.

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"There's been no community reason to take care of the space," Bonner said. "That's why it's been called New Canaan's version of urban blight."

He said that along with improving the look of the asphalt alley, he also wants his project to help other town troubles. He mentioned the town's inadequate affordable housing rates, the lack of young professionals living in town and the current economic strain on local business owners.

Nationally, Bonner said the country is struggling with the effects of global warming, obesity and

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high oil demand.

"So how do you take our piece of property and address these problems?" he said. "Our philosophy is all ideas consider all.' If we do this right, we can actually rebuild the fabric of our community."

Bonner's plans suggest a third floor to the building that could house senior residents or young professionals. The conceptual draft also includes an underground parking garage for about 176 cars, walkways and a common area to congregate.

"The whole idea is to create a community place," Bonner said. "People don't shop from their cars, they shop on foot."

A green building also saves money. Bonner said the cost to create an environmental-friendly building is slightly more than a traditional design, but ultimately reduces costs by cutting water, energy and operating expenses. He projected an annual savings of \$132 in the water bill; \$2,205 in building operation and maintenance; \$3,109 in energy costs.

Bonner said a green building also boosts productivity. He said employees in such a building take fewer sick days, work more efficiently and stay with the company longer. This equates to a yearly savings of \$85,421, Bonner said.

"Once you go into these buildings, it feels different," he said. "It's experiential."

Creating an energy- and resource-efficient building is only part of the project, said Regensis consultant Bill Reed. The main mission, he said, is capturing the community's identity in the plans.

"We're not treating this site as an isolated piece of land," Reed said, adding that the group will look at how the parcel ties into local transportation, rent and character. "This process to make a green building is really about finding out who we are."

The basic principle the group intends to follow is Leadership Energy Environmental Design (LEED) guidelines, which sets benchmarks to rate sustainable green building and development.

"LEED is the entryway," Reed said. "What makes this green is the thought process going into this."

He said that when that process doesn't happen, developments such as the new building on Pine Street in the former Shaw's Supermarket lot happen.

"I'm not saying there's a problem. New Canaan is a great town, but you'll end up with this," he said, flashing a picture of the new development.

This elicited a groan from the audience.

New Canaan local John Engel summed up the dislike of the new building with the comment, "It's an out-of-town-owner, designed by someone out of town and inhabited by out-of-towners. It wasn't conceived by anyone in this community."

Environmentalist Richard Stowe praised the effort of Bonner in his group in reaching out to the community for its input.

"To me, this is a groundbreaker in New Canaan," he said.

Fire chief and longtime resident David Jonker also lauded the group's ambition.

"I applaud you for this," he said. "For a longtime I've felt that New Canaan lacked a vision We should be able to control the image of this town and not just have indiscriminate development."

Others in the audience remained more skeptical about the plan's aspirations.


"You're going to have to codify this with state and local regulations," said Environmental commissioner Toddy Turrentine. "You can't do this on a kumbaya basis."

Reed said that his group has completed projects in communities that originally thought wouldn't be able to happen. Their work frequently exceeds environmental regulations and benefits the area.

Over the next three months, Bonner and his team plan to meet with community members and officials to discuss pre-design plans. Bonner said he will take the next three months to talk with seniors, teens, officials and "anyone who can give us a sense of what New Canaan is."

Then in eight to 12 months, the group will craft formal design plans.

"If we take our time and really thoughtfully think of what we're doing, by the time we get to construction plans, it goes so much more smoothly," Bonner said in a later interview with the *News-Review*. "It's the benefit of good green design."

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