

Apr 3, 2008

Fixing 'blight': Developer has 'green' plans on Elm Street

By Kimberly Nevas

The owner of 94 Elm Street is quick to point out what's wrong with his property.

Expansion projects that have favored functionality over form, neglected alley ways, and a sink hole in the parking lot, town native Tedrowe Bonner said, have made the rear of his Bank of America building "New Canaan's own version of urban blight."

But the sociologist and principal of sustainable development firm Rubicon Seven has big plans to re-style his one-story, 79-year-old building as New Canaan Village Plaza: a "green" downtown center and pedestrian hub he claims will be the most ambitious project of its kind in the state.

Part of being green is engaging the community, said Mr. Bonner, who hosted an informational meeting at the Historical Society, Monday, March 31. Audible groans rose from the audience when he cited the construction of the future home of Walgreens on Pine Street as an example of failure to connect with locals and the character of existing architecture.

Flanked by "regenerative development" consultants from Massachusetts firm Regenesys Group, Mr. Bonner shared his vision of a sustainable, pedestrian-friendly downtown center, but stressing that any development was still in a very conceptual stage.

An artist's rendering showed a second-story addition to the existing bank building, which Mr. Bonner said should provide housing for seniors and young professionals. He and his colleagues said they planned to pursue Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

A well-planned, green building, Mr. Bonner said, can cost roughly the same as traditional construction, lower energy bills, and even lead to improved employee health and productivity.

An outdoor courtyard would give shoppers and residents a place to relax, and could double as a venue for small performances, Mr. Bonner said.

Perhaps the most dramatic element of his plan is a 200-car underground parking garage, which was given a primarily favorable reception by audience members.

First Selectman Jeb Walker, whose name appeared on invitations to the event, said he does not endorse private developments, but attended out of a general interest in green building.

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