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IN THE REGION | CONNECTICUT

## On Renewing New Haven By LISA PREVOST

NEW HAVEN



Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times

**A MAJOR MAKEOVER** On Temple Street, a long-vacant building (with marquee, above) became 44 rental units with a seven-screen art cinema on the ground floor.

The downtown residential market here has long catered to a reliable legion of college students who swarm the city every fall. [Yale University](#) alone is the source of several thousand graduate students who live in and around downtown, typically as renters.

Downtown living is also gaining new allure among young professionals and suburban refugees, however, as the city's continuing efforts to revitalize the blocks around the historic town green yield airy lofts and stylish restaurants serving exotic cuisine. In one of the surest signs of the central business district's resurgence, more developers are proposing to build ownership housing, a relatively scarce commodity that could help expand and stabilize the downtown population.

Over the past few years, officials have tried to lure the upwardly mobile into the city by encouraging the conversion of underused retail and office buildings into residential units, and nurturing an emerging funky

arts district. Some \$180 million in state bond financing is being used to relocate a commuter college and the [Long Wharf Theater](#) downtown.

And in perhaps the most dramatic demonstration of the business district's makeover, the Veterans Memorial Coliseum, a 35-year-old downtown institution, is being imploded this weekend, to be replaced eventually by a mixed-use development.

[Yale-New Haven Hospital](#) is augmenting the city's efforts with construction of a 500,000-square-foot cancer hospital at its campus at the edge of downtown along Route 34. Behind that structure will be a 200,000-square-foot medical office and laboratory facility to be developed by the Fusco Corporation, city officials said.

All of this activity has private developers "chomping at the bit," said Kelly Murphy, the city's economic development administrator. Nine developers submitted proposals for a 1.5-acre city-owned lot at a vacant corner of State and Chapel Streets. While the pending proposals varied widely — from a hotel-centered project that emulates the historic sections of downtown to a New Urbanism-inspired neighborhood — all involved a significant housing component.

One of the most important residential projects approved to date is College Square, a 272-unit luxury condominium high-rise to be built at the corner of College and George Streets. The developer, Robert Landino, says market studies indicate that a wave of people nearing retirement will roll into the city from the surrounding suburbs.

"New Haven's time has come as the baby boomers get older," said Mr. Landino, who grew up in New Haven and has worked on numerous projects here as the former president of the Meriden-based BL Companies, an architecture and engineering firm. These "move down" buyers will be looking for the kind of energetic "self-contained environment" that a walkable city like New Haven can provide, he said.

Scheduled to begin construction next fall for completion in the summer of 2009, the \$115 million College Square will have about 50,000 square feet of street-level retailing, secured on-site parking and a 24-hour concierge. Condominiums will be priced in the mid-\$500,000 to low-\$600,000 range on average, Mr. Landino said; penthouse units will be closer to \$1 million.

College Square holds particular significance for city economic development officials because it is the largest development to date of new apartments for sale. Though some 1,000 units have been added to the downtown over the past five years, the vast majority were rentals, Ms. Murphy said.

Another local developer, David Nyberg, has proposed about 100 condominiums in the Ninth Square district at the corner of downtown, according to Tony Bialecki, the city's deputy directory of economic development.

That project calls for converting two older buildings, as well as constructing a building on what is now a vacant lot. Mr. Nyberg, whose company is College Street Management L.L.C., has developed several other residential projects downtown, including the conversion of 900 Chapel Street, a former mall and office tower that now houses a mix of stores, apartments and offices.

The Long Wharf Theater is working on plans to move from its current location on Sargent Drive along New Haven Harbor to the former Coliseum site, along Route 34. City economic development officials are trying to link the theater with a major developer who will integrate the new facility into a large development blending retailing, office space and housing on the 6.5-acre site.

These large-scale developments were preceded by smaller-scale conversions throughout the downtown area. The market's ability to absorb the new residences has been aided by the slow and steady pace of development, and the wide range of choices, Ms. Murphy said.

On Church Street, cater-corner to the New Haven Green, the Christie Wareck Company converted two early 1900s retail buildings into 13 SoHo-style lofts priced at \$525,000 to \$849,000. The primary lookers so far have been young physicians and professionals who work in the biotech industry, said Timothy Serpe, a listing agent for the properties at the H. Pearce Real Estate Company.

A block away on Temple Street, the [Manhattan](#)-based Bow Tie Partners converted the long-vacant United Illuminating building, a brick neo-Classical-style structure topped by a clock tower, into 44 luxury rental apartments; a seven-screen art cinema, the Criterion, is on the ground floor. New Haven represented a prime opportunity for this "adaptive reuse" project because of the "paucity of high-end residential" properties downtown and a highly educated population, said Charley Moss, a partner in the company.

All but one of the units are rented. Rents start at \$1,600 for a one-bedroom, \$2,200 for a two-bedroom, and \$3,000 for a three-bedroom.

The area still lacks the range of retailing needed to fully support walkable living — there is no supermarket, for instance.

But with more than 3,700 units downtown now, and another 350 to 500 likely to be created in the next two years, the population density is close to reaching the critical mass needed to support more major retailers, Ms. Murphy said.

"We're at the cusp where they're ready to take our calls," she said.

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