

Capitol west sets a precedent for all other residential developments in downtown madison, wis.

Environmental Design and Construction Online Magazine

June 1, 2006

http://www.edcmag.com/CDA/Articles/Feature_Article/224e1b76f1ffb010VgnVCM100000f932a8c0

When Randall Alexander surveyed an area west of the Capitol in downtown Madison, WI recently, he saw more than a real estate development opportunity, he saw a chance to bring striking architectural improvements and additions to a dated and aesthetically challenged site, all through environmentally sensitive construction techniques.



The Owner and President of The Alexander Company (www.alexandercompany.com), a real estate development company specializing in urban revitalization and historic preservation, has taken a site fragmented by a mixed bag of buildings and parking facilities, and united it into Capitol West--a high-caliber, eco-friendly housing and mixed-use development just blocks away from the Wisconsin state capitol and intermingled in the University of Wisconsin campus. The Alexander Company wanted Capitol West to set a precedent for all other residential developments in downtown Madison, as well as the rest of the country.

Given the scope and significance of the project, it was determined that an all-encompassing approach to planning and architecture should be engaged. From conceptualization through planning, The Alexander Company focused on making Capitol West (www.capitol-west.com) an eco-friendly project. To facilitate this endeavor, they enlisted the services of Madison Environmental Group (www.madisonenvironmental.com). Indeed, Capitol West has made a reality of what have only been academic exercises in planning, design and construction.

“Reuse efforts and deconstruction recycling on a job is the first step towards responsible green building and thus responsible development,” said Sonya Newenhouse, President, Madison Environmental Group. “Not only did we divert 56 tons of fixtures, furniture, building materials, and ceiling tiles from the landfill, but the reuse efforts at Capitol West created tons of goodwill in the community at large: from individuals furnishing their new apartments to non-profits receiving much needed materials.”



Demolition of the existing buildings on-site was orchestrated with recycling in mind. To date, over 95% of the materials resulting from the demolition of buildings has been recycled – over 13,000 tons. That includes over 983 tons of metal, 12,700 tons of concrete, brick, and block, and four tons of wood. In addition, the massive shell of the former Meriter Hospital is being reused as the core of one of the new condominium buildings.

A public sale was organized to clean out the existing buildings on site to avert as much material as possible from the landfill. Prior to a public offering, various charitable organizations were invited to come through the buildings and take what they needed. A set of surgical table lights were sent to Honduras, while over 100 hospital beds were sent to areas of the country ravaged by Hurricane Katrina. In all, over 42 tons of material was spared from landfills during this process.

Green building materials, such as wood from certified forests, VOC (Volatile Organic Compound)-free paint, water-based floor finishes, formaldehyde-free insulation, low emission carpet, and water-based adhesives will be used to reduce the impact of the construction on the environment. Energy Star certified appliances will be standard in every home. Other environmental concerns that will be addressed include the use of recycled carpet and fiberglass insulation, and locally manufactured windows and plumbing fixtures to alleviate freight fuel usage. The inclusion of green roofs and potential rain gardens will reduce the impact on local lakes by storm water runoff.

Capitol West also promotes an eco-friendly lifestyle for its residents. It is conveniently located near Madison's mass transit system, and covered bicycle parking for residents and employees of the site's commercial space promotes the use of bicycles over automobiles. Capitol West also offers the opportunity for its residents to utilize Community Car, a local car-sharing program aimed at reducing people's reliance on a second or primary automobile.

"Capitol West represents an excellent opportunity to show how architecture, development, and the built environment can blend with their surroundings," said Tom Miller, the Development Project Manager for Capitol West. "By taking a comprehensive approach to planning and design, we were able to create a development that embraces a neighborhood dynamic while offering cutting edge design and a truly urban lifestyle – all of it friendly to the environment."

The Alexander Company has made a name for itself pursuing such environmentally friendly and community friendly development projects. Another current project, Novation Campus in Madison, WI involves the redevelopment of three former landfills: two construction debris landfills and a fly ash landfill. The 75 acre site is being transformed into a high-end business park that has already attracted a number of growing technology companies. With one-third of construction complete, five new buildings have been built and hundreds of jobs have been created. Once completed, Novation Campus is expected to house over 1 million square feet of space.

"The key to this type of project is a public sector that is willing to take a proactive role in the redevelopment, while helping to offset the risk taken by the private sector," said Matt Meier, Development Project Manager for Novation Campus. "This type of public assistance can be really helpful on the front end to clear the way for redevelopment. It makes sense to reuse these properties to ease the pressure on the ever expanding suburbs. In a way, it's the ultimate recycling."

Whether it's brownfield remediation, recycling demolished materials, or creating communities that promote a greener lifestyle, The Alexander Company is preserving the past and building for the future.

"In order to preserve and enrich our communities, it is of the utmost importance that we keep ourselves focused on the principles of recycling, green building practices, and urban infill rather than urban sprawl." said Randall Alexander. "We strive to achieve something that is currently lacking from many developments – a sense of responsibility."

For more information about Capitol West, please call (608) 268-8130.

About The Alexander Company

Founded in 1981, The Alexander Company specializes in urban infill development, urban revitalization, and historic preservation. Nationwide, The Alexander Company gives new life to historically significant buildings and once-vibrant downtown neighborhoods.

For more information on the Capitol West project, call 608.268.8130 or visit them on the web at www.capitol-west.com.