

360 State Hailed As National Model

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U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd took a look at the panoramic views. Then he checked out the thermostat in the seventh-floor one-bedroom apartment that tells you how many watts you're using. He liked the 50 affordable apartments, Zip cars, the grocery store selling local fresh vegetables that may be on the way, and the proximity to the train station.

To Dodd, it all added up to not just a neat new anchor in downtown New Haven—but a green, “living model for what can happen all across the state.”

And across the nation as well.



So Dodd proclaimed after touring the soon-to-open 360 State Street development Monday morning with developer Bruce Becker (pictured. by the thermostat), the mayor, and other officials.

Dodd was in town to tout U.S. Senate Bill 1619, the Livable Communities Act, which he introduced in August.

The bill proposes to fund challenge and other grants to the tune of \$400 million over four years. Their aim: to advance “green” projects such as 360 State as well as town and regional planning.

Praising Connecticut’s under-appreciated big cities, the key words Dodd used to describe his proposed legislation were “weave” and “knit.’

That is, the bill’s aim is to coordinate the government’s policies on transportation, housing, land use, and economic development in a long range and coordinated manner, with a long horizon that keeps in mind future lives of the participants’ grandchildren.

To that end, Dodd’s bill calls for creation of an interagency council from the federal departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development, along with the Environmental Protection Agency. It also requests an Office on Sustainability to be established at the White House.

“We’ve done a great job on housing and transportation individually, but we’ve never knit them together,” he said.

Dodd said his legislation provides “the energy piece, transportation, affordable housing, the food, all the elements of a livable community.”

360 State developer Bruce Becker, who chaired the press conference in his just-opened rental office at Chapel and Orange, praised the the bill’s long-range approach. “Only by changing patterns of development can we find [buildings like his 360 State], a half acre, a green roof, [with] recovery of water, occupant sensors,” he said.

Becker reported that his company has signed leases with 14 renters, up from five when last reported a few weeks ago. They’re working on another 600 viable leads.

He said that with its fuel cell and 34 other energy-saving technologies, and environmentally advanced features, 360 State will produce half the carbon footprint of a comparable code-compliant apartment building.

In answer to a question as to whether there’s sufficient train service at the nearby State Street station to inspire and sustain diminished car use, Becker predicted that Metro North service will follow the ridership demand: “When we have 1,000 people living in this building, you’ll see more trains servicing the station.”

The 360 Grocery Mystery: Ongoing

Becker said that the city and his investors are still weighing two options for the grocery store promised for the building in the development agreement. Although Becker is leaning toward a hybrid co-op model that features locally grown food, a more conventional model is still in the running.

That there will be a grocery is not in doubt, he said. He cited a study he commissioned showing that sales in the first year of his 360 grocery would add up to \$20 million.

“You can’t truly have a green building without being able to get groceries without getting in your car,” he declared.

“Urban groceries,” are a challenge,” said city Economic Development Administrator Kelly Murphy. By terms of the development agreement, she said, Becker was not required to achieve that aim until three years after certificate of occupancy.



But Becker said he's in more of a hurry than that. With the vacancy rate in New Haven today less than it was a year ago, he said he would like to have his grocery in place and selling those locally grown sprouts by the end of 2010.

Mayor John DeStefano (pictured with HUD Deputy Secretary Ron Sims) said he doesn't see that grocery filling the gap created by Shaw's closing over on Whalley. Rather, he envisioned each neighborhood relying on a grocery store suitable to its character. He said replacing the closed Shaw's on Whalley will be "a challenge."