

SQUARE FEET Near Yale, a 32-Story Gamble Rises in New Haven



The 360 State Street complex has 500 apartments, including penthouses, and the area's only full-service grocery.

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NEW HAVEN — This city of 123,000 has long struggled to reconcile its two faces: The intellectual oasis of Yale University and the upscale area it has spawned, and a more turbulent side that includes the 1970 Black Panther trials, a recent Supreme Court ruling that white firefighters had been unfairly denied promotions because of their race and crime that still plagues parts of the city.



Bruce R. Becker, the president of Becker & Becker, designed and developed the \$191 million project on the site of the old Shartenberg store.

One potential bridge for that gap is a new \$190 million high-rise project downtown that includes mixed-income housing, street-level stores, indoor parking and what is billed as the country's largest alternative energy source for a residential building, a 400-kilowatt fuel cell that generates electricity.

Called 360 State Street, the 700,000 square-foot 32-story building is in a prime but cheerless pocket within walking distance of Yale. With 500 apartments and luxury penthouses, it is the second-tallest building in the city.

The tower is the product of Bruce Redman Becker, the president of Becker & Becker of Fairfield, which designed and developed the project.

In a world of megadevelopers and celebrity architects (Mr. Becker is not among them), it is highly unusual for one person to practice both disciplines. Mr. Becker, 51, holds degrees from the School of Architecture and the School of Management at Yale.

Becker & Becker has done similar projects in other dense urban areas, including the Octagon Project on Roosevelt Island, the two-mile-long sliver of land in the East River between Manhattan and Queens, and the Fairfield Apartments in Bridgeport, Conn., a rough-and-tumble city near the affluent towns of Fairfield County.

Mr. Becker is hoping to attract about half his tenants from the Yale graduate student and medical community connected with Yale. He hopes the remaining renters will consist of retired professors, empty-nesters looking to downsize and professionals who want to use New Haven as a springboard to New York.

About 50 renters are moving in starting on Sunday, and an additional 60 who put down deposits are signing leases. Mr. Becker expects the building to be fully filled with some 1,000 occupants within two years.

At the city's insistence, 50 studio and one-bedroom apartments will be reserved for lower-income renters, including 20 units to those with Section 8 vouchers, which sometimes go to the homeless; more than 1,000 applicants are already vying for the slots.

For a single tenant with an income of \$43,360 to \$67,368 — at the upper end of the median income level for the area — a subsidized studio or one bedroom will rent for about \$1,000 a month, compared with \$1,350 to \$1,500 for other tenants.

The Section 8 units will cost several hundred dollars, depending on the tenant's income. The market rate for a three-bedroom penthouse with a terrace is \$5,000 — reasonable by Manhattan standards, but high for New Haven.

The subsidized apartments, with granite countertops, sleek kitchen appliances and a washer and dryer in each unit, will be no different stylistically from the market-rate ones. Mr. Becker had to delay plans for a day care center after state subsidies failed to come through.

But will graduate students, who typically seek two-bedroom apartments in the city's East Rock section for around \$1,300 a month, have the money and desire to pay more? "We think they will," Mr. Becker said, citing a downtown apartment vacancy rate of 1 percent.

The project has drawn some critics, who say that a large percentage of low-income residents will not be able to afford even the subsidized units, which are on the lower levels, and that wealthier tenants may not want to walk past discount nail salons and wig shops to reach the museums, fashionable boutiques and restaurants of the city's Chapel Street retail area.

Alan J. Plattus, an architecture professor at Yale and the director of the Yale Urban Design Workshop, questioned whether there was enough demand to support the project. He said the mixed-use high-rise signaled that "residential development, not commercial development, is the future of downtown."

But Professor Plattus, who is not involved with 360 State Street, criticized the decision to build what he called "an aircraft carrier of parking" on the ground floors — "you need to encourage people to be auto-independent" — and the proximity to the noise of State Street Station.

The building, at the corner of State and Chapel Streets, is across the street from the station, a stop for Shore Line East and most Metro North trains. But it is a 10-minute walk from Union Station, the main point from which most people catch the 90-minute train ride to New York.

The high-rise was built by the Suffolk Construction Company of Boston on one and half acres of what had been a surface parking lot for more than 40 years, after the local Shartenberg department store was razed in an ill-fated effort at urban renewal.

Mr. Becker's firm bought the land for \$1, a sign of how eager city officials were to transform the area. Kelly Murphy, the director of the city's Office of Economic Development, said that the tower "represented the future of New Haven."

Then he found a major investor in the Multi-Employer Property Trust, a real-estate-oriented investment fund based in Washington that invests on behalf of union pension plans.

The trust invested \$150 million. The State of Connecticut contributed \$9.9 million for the parking garage; an additional \$6 million came from a new Treasury Department tax credit program for development in lower-income areas; and United Illuminating, a local utility, put in \$3 million. The remaining \$10 million came from Becker & Becker, local community banks and a private equity firm.

Amenities for renters include a yoga room, a library, a film screening room, a rooftop heated swimming pool and five Zipcars, which can be rented by the hour.

The project has 30,000 square feet of commercial space. The Devil's Gear, a local bicycle shop, has agreed to move in, and Mr. Becker said he was working out details for a co-op-style supermarket on the ground floor.

After Trader Joe's and Whole Foods declined space on the ground level, Mr. Becker located at City Market co-op in Burlington, Vt., a hybrid conventional-organic store that has some \$30 million a year in sales, as a model. The version at 360 State Street, the Elm City Food Co-op, will sell conventional food and local items from 200 vendors, and will be the only full-service grocery store in the area.

The Multi-Employer Property Trust will put half of the \$7 million needed into the store, which will open next spring, while community lenders, the Cooperative Fund of New England and private individual investors have promised to invest the rest.

Mr. Becker has waged a battle with United Illuminating over the question of whether the fuel cell's energy will go straight to the residents — his preference — or flow out to the grid and come back into the building via the utility. In the latter proposal, which is under negotiation, the tower's fuel cell, the size of a shipping container, will generate electricity that the utility will buy for about 15 cents a kilowatt hour and sell back to tenants for around 21 cents. Each apartment will also pay \$16 a month for an individual meter.

Jennifer Gangi, the program director of Fuel Cells 2000, a nonprofit environment group in Washington, said that while fuel cells were common in residential buildings in Europe, they were just catching on in America. "This is the way things are going to go," she said.

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