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Recycling a building - Inclusion and integration, but not demolition

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It's an age-old question, often without an easy answer: Should the owner of an older building choose to remodel/recycle - or opt for new construction?

Recycling is commendable, but it still uses energy and creates its own trash. But one of our specialties and strengths is making it work. There are many factors to consider from the earliest planning stage of any project involving architecture, engineering and design. As a LEED AP certified architect, my credentials signify advanced knowledge in green building and sustainable design standards, which can be advantageous for owners of any type and size of property. LEED principles and criteria should be used where possible even if the building is not slated to be certified.

When the owners of the tired Westmeadow Plaza in Westborough, Mass., decided to overhaul and give a dramatic facelift to their retail property to help reposition the property and attract new tenants, they asked DSH Design Group to lead the renovation. It was a \$2 million project designed to transform their 200,000 s/f plaza from an eyesore to an inviting, more pleasant shopping destination. Due to the recession, the owners set the construction budget very low. At the outset of the design, DSH Design Group: (1) conducted an in-depth, as-built investigation of the existing canopy and roof framing to evaluate the capacity and structural properties; and (2) created a new design that would mostly utilize existing elements.

The original 1950s facade had a dated metal canopy. DSH Design Group's focus on inclusion and integration of the old into the new resulted in: a new facade around the existing canopy with minor reinforcements to existing framing. Another challenge was dealing with 1,200 linear feet of old fluted CMU wall on the main facade: demolish the wall, hide it with new material, or integrate and complement it by the new? DSH decided to keep and complement it by new curved decorative motifs on the facade.

These improvements concealed the entire old canopy inside the new upgrade. It also extended the height of the front wall to gain better exposure to the main road without increasing the snow load. A detail was developed to eliminate the need to demolish and dispose of the 1,200 linear feet of parapet and metal flashing.

Our approach reduced demolition costs by about \$200,000 and construction costs by \$400,000 expediting the construction process by two months and meeting the completion target deadline in time for the holiday shopping season. The plaza had a dramatic new look, tenants were happy, and shoppers appreciated the change. Whether it's new construction or a renovation project, our focus is always on efficiency in design. Keeping all aspects of the project simple and practical are our watchwords and keys to our success.

Davood Shahin is the founder and president of DSH Design Group, Newton, Mass.