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Project of the Month: Anthropologie joins Bedford Square in Westport, Conn. - A historic 110,000 s/f downtown transformation

June 25, 2015 - Retail

The heart of the downtown area will soon be transformed. It is known as the Bedford Square Project, and has been in the making for more than a decade.

The Bedford Square project involves completely renovating and repurposing two historic structures - the 1924 Bedford Building, which was built for the YMCA 90 years ago and housed its operations up until last November, as well as the adjoining Firehouse - and adapting them for reuse as the centerpiece of a 110,000 s/f mixed-use redevelopment.

Bedford Square is a new project combining residential, office, retail and restaurant uses. It incorporates outdoor public spaces, wide pedestrian corridors, properly scaled buildings and onsite concealed parking to integrate the once-isolated Church-Main-Elm area with the rest of downtown.

Bedford Square is the result of a collaboration of two leading local real estate development firms - David Adam Realty, Inc., whose president for the last 24 years is local resident David Waldman, and Charter Realty & Development Corp., led by partners Paul Brandes and Dan Zelson. They are joined by Lance Sauerteig, president of BLS Strategic Partners, who prior to becoming part of Bedford Square was Waldman's partner for over 15 years, as well as two of Connecticut's top architectural and engineering firms, Centerbrook Architects and Planners and Langan Engineering.

This month, after more than a decade of planning and approvals of every major board and commission in Westport, the team has broken ground on the Bedford Square project, with construction expected to be completed at the beginning of 2017.

"These truly iconic buildings represent the character of the downtown as a whole, and we are significantly adding to their existing architectural appeal thru the additions designed by Centerbrook. The downtown commercial district is already one of the most successful in the nation, but our project will not only enhance the community's enjoyment of their local shopping and dining experience, but do it in a sensitive and celebratory manner," said Brandes.

"Having been involved in Westport's downtown redevelopment for the past 20 years, this interaction of Main, Post and Church has always been viewed as the gateway to the downtown," said Waldman. "By preserving and re-purposing the historically significant structures into a thoughtful and architecturally beautiful mixed use addition, we are opening up the gateway and connecting it to Westport's future."

The team's vast experience, inside knowledge of the local market, and prior execution of a historically significant adaptive re-use played a significant role in its being awarded the bid, and that commitment will ultimately drive its completion.

"These historic properties have long been underutilized assets; our team developed a vision to creatively and appropriately incorporate them back into the downtown area," said Zelson.

Centerbrook has submitted this mixed-use project for a world architect award, and it has thus far made the short list of potential winners, the partners added.

"Where others may take the approach of, 'If you build it they will come,' our approach is, 'This is already here and the people truly want to use it,'" said Brandes.

As ground is broken, that uniqueness will soon become evident. Bedford Square Associates envisions this "Golden Triangle" (Main/Church and Elm) of downtown being augmented with features people here have never seen.

"In addition to the retail, restaurants, housing and below-grade parking, the project's finer touches and details, coupled with its outstanding visibility and location, are what really set this apart," said Zelson.

With the addition of Anthropologie as a 40,000 s/f anchor, Bedford Square has solidified its ability to remain the center of downtown. This new format is going to be one of the first two in the nation. The other is in Palo Alto Calif. The large format store will include the namesake in 20,000 s/f and will be surrounded by Anthropologie Home and Beauty. The beauty section is likely to include a small salon portion within it. Also included in the mix is one of only eight BHLDN stores. BHLDN is the parent company's (Urban Outfitters) wedding concept which has been very well received.

Lastly, they will run a full-service restaurant in the fire house fronting Church Lane and the inner piazza. Bedford Square was designed for that exact concept. Anthropologie understood how the project melded with their own internal thinking, the Westport market and their customer base within it, and proceeded to anchor the project.

With 30,000 s/f of additional commercial space being newly marketed, Bedford Square has undoubtedly become the focal point of this vibrant retail market.

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