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COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

Foodshare breaks ground on "green" distribution center



PHOTO: NICK LACY

Gloria McAdam, president and CEO of Foodshare, says the nonprofit's move to a new building in Bloomfield will help it serve more clients.

By Carol Latter

After several years of planning and fund raising, Foodshare, a Windsor-based nonprofit dedicated to feeding the hungry, plans this week to break ground in Bloomfield on a new, 30,000-square-foot distribution center that is expected, over the next seven years, to increase the amount of food it distributes by more than 50 percent.

And because the building will be built according to an environmentally friendly and energy-efficient design, it can be run for the same or lower cost than Foodshare's current building, which is half the size.

"We're very excited to know that it's finally going to come to fruition," says Gloria McAdam, president and CEO of Foodshare. She says the price tag for the project is \$3.2 million, including all of the state-of-the-art equipment — freezers, coolers and racking systems, for example — that will be installed in the building. However, Foodshare hopes to raise a total of \$4.5 million, which will also cover the cost of replacing two of its four trucks and adding a fifth to its fleet.

Delta Building Corp., a design-build firm based in Cromwell, is in charge of constructing the building. Hartford-based Diversified Project Management (DPM) has been serving as the owner's representative on the project, and will

also help plan and execute the move, she says.

McAdam says the new building — nearly twice the size of Foodshare's existing 17,000-square-foot facility, will provide a couple of huge advantages over its current location, which it has called home for almost 14 years.

"I think first and foremost, it's going to let us be both safe and efficient. We're so overcrowded in our current building that we're often sacrificing efficiency in order to be safe," she says.

The move to a new location is long overdue, she notes. Since 1991, Foodshare has tripled in size, growing its number of employees, volunteers, and representatives of agencies that collect food from Foodshare, but has continued to operate out of the same space.

Today, in terms of people interacting with equipment, she says, the current building and parking lot "are carrying way more than they were ever meant to, and that creates some safety challenges."

The new facility will also allow the nonprofit to grow both its intake and output of food, to more easily meet the increasing demand for its services.

"We turn down donations of food right now because we don't have room," McAdam says. "The new building will allow us to accept more donations — hopefully, everything we're offered." Foodshare has projected that by the year 2012, it will increase the amount of food it distributes to 15 million pounds annually, up from 9.3 million pounds last year.

The organization is aiming for a construction completion date of the end of September, with the goal of moving into the new building by mid-October. McAdam says November is the nonprofit's busiest season of the year, "and

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we want to be in for a few weeks before that.”

One of the most interesting aspects of Foodshare’s new headquarters is that the nonprofit will apply for it to become a LEED-certified building. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, a program run by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Scott Pinckney, project manager with DPM, which was given responsibility for overseeing the design and construction in mid-December, says Foodshare wanted to have an environmentally friendly building and late last year, scheduled a meeting with the Connecticut Green Building Council, which introduced the nonprofit to the LEED program.

“The basic idea is to get an energy efficient building that is also minimally impactful to the environment,” he says. In most cases, such a project would involve reusing existing buildings or taking over a brownfields site — “basically, taking a bad environmental site and trying to make it better.”

In Foodshare’s case, the challenge involved the construction of a new, pre-manufactured steel building, and making modifications to maximize its efficiency and lessen its impact on the environment.

To do that, says Pinckney, “we brought the whole construction team together with the owner, evaluated their goals, and modified an existing design in a building to meet LEED certification. We basically redesigned every system in the building to make it as energy efficient as possible, and also to eliminate any kind of environmental hazards that are typically associated with a new building.”

That meant paying attention to everything from the fumes given off by paints, fabrics, furniture and flooring to re-examining lighting options. “We changed out the entire lighting system and went with the lowest use, highest efficiency lights, as well as motion detectors in certain areas, to shut off lights that aren’t being used.”

The largest potential energy drain,

however, was the building’s refrigeration system. Foodshare wanted a system that could accommodate periodic large donations of ice cream from Enfield-based Hood, for example, without incurring huge energy costs.

Because frozen food is typically stored at 0 degrees but ice cream must be stored at 10 degrees below zero, the designers needed to find a way to store ice cream without keeping the entire freezer system at the lower temperature.

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*–Scott Pinckney,
project manager,
Diversified Project
Management*

The solution? “We put a smaller freezer that only serves the ice cream inside of a larger freezer,” Pinckney says.

Other building tweaks included energy efficient windows, water efficient toilets and modified insulation methods to reduce heat loss through the walls of the steel building.

“It’s been a lot of fun to find all the ways you can actually cut back on energy usage,” he says.

On the environmental side, the building includes an extensive water retention and treatment system that slows down and filters water coming off the building’s roof or parking lot, to minimize its impact on the property’s wetlands section.

McAdam says Foodshare has approached UTC’s Carrier division to

negotiate a deal to acquire and install some of that company’s “Puron™” air conditioning units, which do not use CFCs to cool the air, and therefore are not harmful to the environment.

Pinckney says building a “green” structure involves an upfront investment, and a return on that investment is typically not seen for 5 to 10 years. But he adds that based on projections, Foodshare will likely recoup that investment much more quickly. “I think the return on investment is going to be even shorter than five years,” he says. “They should get back everything they invested in a short time.”

He says Thornton-Tomasetti Group in Shelton is currently developing an energy model for the building, and early results show that Foodshare’s new location will be “30 to 50 percent more efficient than a building using the most efficient codes today.”

Overall, he says, the new design gives Foodshare a building that will work well for them over the next few years, and offers room for expansion as the operation continues to grow.

“It’s a case of form following function. It’s an absolutely functional building for them,” he says.

The icing on the cake, he notes, is that numerous individuals and companies in the region have helped, and continue to help, make this ambitious project a reality. In addition to a long list of monetary donors, many of the vendors and subcontractors working on the project have donated or reduced the cost of their services to help Foodshare realize its dream. “That’s really neat to see,” says Pinckney.

The federal and state governments have also provided assistance, contributing \$250,000 and \$300,000 respectively to the project. That spirit of cooperation has not been lost on Gloria McAdam.

“Just as our hungry neighbors count on us for help, Foodshare counts on community support,” she says. “I want to thank the individuals and organizations who have helped us get this far, and also encourage others to lend a hand. There’s plenty of work yet to be done.” ■