



## Landowners hear developer make his pitch

**Renaissance** Downtowns president asks for faith

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WATERBURY — The city's preferred downtown developer was preaching the gospel of new urbanism to a room full of business district landowners on Tuesday.

In his sermon, **Renaissance** Downtowns President Donald Monti implored the three dozen property owners who attended a meet-and-greet to have a little faith and give him a chance to deliver.

"You've got to believe in yourselves," Monti said. "You say to me, 'Why us?' and I say, 'Why not you?' I know it's been a long, hard road, but give me a chance. I believe in you. I'll make believers out of you."

Although there was some skepticism in the audience, at least a few of the crowd, including some of the downtown's biggest players, said they were willing to give Monti's group a chance.

"I have mixed feelings about whether it will work, but it's all we've got," said downtown developer Tom Gessler. "We need someone to lead us to the water because right now we're all dying of thirst."

At least Monti wants to do something, Gessler added.

"I want to believe, really I do, but let me tell you it's so hard," said Joseph Cuda, a longtime commercial property owner trying to bring his West Main Street property back to life.

"Buildings like mine, which used to really be something, are all boarded up now," Cuda said. "Homeless people living on the street. If we were a book, I'd say our cover isn't looking too good."

With last week's approval as the preferred downtown developer, **Renaissance** started a yearlong plan to turn downtown into a mix of high-end apartments, shops and public spaces.

That includes creating a coalition of private property owners that shape and eventually

buy into **Renaissance**'s plan, either by forming a partnership with them or selling their properties to them.

If the city likes the **Renaissance** plan, it can convert that vision to a binding project agreement. If not, the city has the option of sending **Renaissance** packing, at no cost to taxpayers.

The property owners had lots of questions. They wanted to know how **Renaissance** will make its money, what will draw people into the city and whether it will seek to use eminent domain to seize property.

Not every question got a clear answer, and many of them earned a promise of an answer at some point in the future. For example, the firm will cut private deals with each landowner in the coming months.

As to what will draw people to Waterbury, Monti said the country will see incredible population growth in the coming years. He feels it will occur vertically in cities, with amenities a short walk away.

The trick for a city like Waterbury is to be ready, Monti said.

"The market is going to come back, and when it does, it's gonna come back with a vengeance," he said. "And when it does, what you have to ask yourselves is, will you be ready? We'll be the first in line."

Monti said **Renaissance** hadn't had to use eminent domain in its biggest development in New York, although that project isn't finished. Another company representative said it is a tool of last resort.

**Renaissance** Downtowns will hold smaller meetings with groups of property owners in individual downtown districts, such as hospital, entertainment and arts-focused areas, over the next 60 days.