

Dump the dumpster

By Lois Levin/ Special To The Tab
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A 50s-style ranch is not forever; it is often assumed that it is cost-effective to demolish such homes and rebuild, rather than to remodel in order to accommodate a growing family. But a "tear-down" typically generates mountains of materials, which are placed in a dumpster and hauled to a landfill - at great expense (the average "tipping fee" in this area is now \$85/ton), and at increasingly greater distances from the source, as more and more landfills have been closed permanently.

An environmentalist/entrepreneur from Somerville, Amy Bauman, knows that there is a better and cost-saving way to do a teardown. Since 2001, her non-profit organization, greenGoat, has been "de-installing" a wide variety of building materials and recycling them, mainly by donating them to other non-profit groups.

Until now, greenGoat has focused on large-scale or commercial properties, but last month it assisted a savvy homeowner from Newton's south side to recycle her ranch-style house in order to build a green home on the same footprint. This is not about creating a "macmansion"; on the contrary, the new house will be no larger, it may in fact be smaller, than the original. But the homeowner will pick up a sizable tax credit for having donated a wide variety of reusable building materials to non-profits, in addition to income she will realize from the sale of commonly-salvaged items such as metals. Some materials, specifically flagstones and electrical fixtures, will be reused on site. But wood flooring, cabinets, roofing material, wallboard, carpeting, windows, doors and many other items were quickly disassembled and removed prior to the final demolition and carted off for reuse or recycling.

The basic idea that underlies this work, to design buildings or anything else, with a "cradle to cradle" (rather than a "cradle to grave") approach, is a concept elaborated in the 2002 book "Cradle to Cradle" by University of Virginia architect William McDonough's and Michael Braungart, a German chemist. Their work on sustainable design has been inspirational to people in many diverse fields who are deeply concerned about the Environment.

Bauman, with a background in finance, high tech and product development, is no stranger to cost/benefit analyses. She is committed to reducing construction waste by promoting "design for deconstruction." She also sees enormous opportunity for win-win situations in the business end of deconstructing buildings. greenGoat's workers are often young people learning trades, and they are typically paid \$35/hour to disassemble a building.

This past August, greenGoat, working with the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Conventions (CERC), headquartered in Newton, and with the Fleet Center contractor (Shawmut Design and Construction), orchestrated, choreographed, the deconstruction of the interior structures created for the Democratic National Convention. That operation involved donating large amounts of plywood, masonite, wallboard (50 tons!), carpet, and miles of communications cable to local non-profit recycling organizations, mainly ReStore and Boston Materials Resource Center.

Many local contractors regularly recycle certain materials for which they know there is a market. Some, like Greg Caplan of Living Structures, Inc., Jamaica Plain, who has been recycling since he was a child in Pittsburgh, prides himself on reusing and recycling all possible materials on all jobs. Caplan, (currently remodeling the kitchen in the Newton Center Victorian home of Green Decade Coalition's President Emerita, Louise Bruyn), does not use dumpsters, which, he points out, only encourage waste. In addition to conventional salvage businesses, he works with some innovative companies, such as one that makes flooring from old timbers, and another that makes mulch from wood scraps; and whenever possible, he encourages reuse of materials on site.

So whether you are undertaking a renovation project at home or plan to demolish an entire commercial or residential building, recycling building materials is the way to go. You will be "earthwise" and keep tons of material, including toxic substances, out of the waste stream. You will save money by selling to conventional salvagers. And you will be entitled to a big fat tax break for donating these materials to non-profit organizations.

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