



## Improving curb appeal will help preserve your investment

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Michael Lombardo knows and appreciates the value of curb appeal.

VP of Plaza Realty & Management Corp. owns 50 properties in Fairfield County. Lombardo says that a building's outward appearance can be the deciding factor for prospective buyers or renters. He's also competing with newer high-rise and garden apartment complexes for the same customers and so he recognizes that maintaining and upgrading the outside of his properties helps sustain their long-term value. Â

One such property is Old Greenwich Gables, a 167-unit condo development, situated on 7.5 acres in Old Greenwich, Conn. "A rooftop garden above the garage had been leaking for 30 years," said Lombardo. It is now in the process of being fixed and redesigned, with the help of Daniel Sherman Landscape Architect, PC, a Valhalla-based firm that I recently began working with. "Overgrown trees and shrubbery can cause rot," said Dan Sherman. "Also, only a limited amount of soil can be placed on a rooftop. As trees grow bigger and bigger you sometimes have to pull them out and replace them with something smaller."

Plaza Realty properties range from 20-unit garden complexes to 300-unit high-rises. It has on-going projects that frequently requires the services of Sherman's firm. "Landscapers don't always know all the ins and outs," he said. "They don't necessarily know how big the plants will grow, or what impact the shade or sun will have on their growth patterns and needs. When you're doing a large project, you want a professional landscape architect to create the original design." Although Sherman is knowledgeable about various plant species and his staff includes arborists with expertise on the needs and growth cycles of plants, bushes and trees, he relies on the expertise of nurserymen, as well.Â

Lombardo said that he also "recycles" trees on his properties whenever he can, yet he defers these decisions to Sherman whom he has been working with for at least five years. "Sometimes it's pretty obvious about what can be done to camouflage an eyesore and remedy an over-growth problem at the same time," said Sherman.Â "We had one property where a tree had been planted too close to the side of the building and grew out of control. Besides blocking the unit's sunlight, it posed a threat of structural damage. Not too far from this spot, ugly garbage dumpsters were exposed. We successfully uprooted and transplanted this large tree in front of the dumpsters, solving two problems at once."

Elsewhere, Sherman recommended investing in new trees and a new walkway to replace a row of trees that were pushing up the sidewalk that they lined, posing the threat of injuries and lawsuits. It was a design installation that pre-existed his tenure. His solution included planting smaller trees and paving stones, allowing more room for the newer trees' roots to spread.

Landscaping can be an extraordinary expense for a community association. Plaza Realty has annual landscaping budgets ranging from \$10,000 to \$160,000. Special projects have cost upward

to \$500,000.Â Although Lombardo is not bashful about telling his homeowner associations when they have to finance high-ticketed projects, in this soft economy he has had to put on-hold some new projects of this scope.

To help clients protect their existing landscaping investments, Sherman has recently begun offering an all-natural, deer-control service. Each month a crew will spray plantings with an organic mix of rosemary, eggs, mint and vinegar.Â It's a recipe that sends deer looking elsewhere for their free lunch. "A deer can eat through \$1,000 worth of shrubbery, overnight," said Sherman. Does this mean we'll be seeing Bambi as Jenny Craig's next celebrity pitchman?

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