



Kevin Daniels, who says that saving older buildings is energy-efficient, is the developer who saved the historic sanctuary of the First United Methodist Church, in background.

Saving buildings can save energy

Kevin Daniels, the Seattle developer who saved the old First United Methodist Church from the wrecking ball, offers another argument for preserving historic buildings: It's greener than tearing them down and putting up something new.

Daniels, a trustee of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, used the century-old Methodist sanctuary in downtown Seattle to illustrate that point in remarks he delivered this past week to Commercial Real Estate Women (CREW) Seattle.

He estimated 80 billion BTUs of energy — the equivalent of 640,000 gallons of gasoline — was expended to build the historic church: extracting and manufacturing the materials, hauling them to the site, making them into a building.

Tear the church down, Daniels said, and all that energy goes to waste. Plus you create 4,000 tons of debris — enough to fill 22 rail cars — and expend still more energy getting rid of it.

Say you replace it with a green, energy-efficient office building of similar square footage. Even with those savings, Daniels said, it still would take 65 years to recover the amount of energy that went up in smoke with the old building's demolition.

It adds up to another compelling argument for saving historic structures, he concluded: "There has to be something we can do with them."

All this doesn't mean Daniels wants to preserve everything. As part of the deal that saved the sanctuary, he was allowed to tear down the 1950 church annex next door to make way for a 660-foot office tower. That's what's subsidizing the sanctuary's preservation.

The annex is rubble now. Daniels said he'll start digging the hole for the new Fifth and Columbia Tower in a couple of weeks, as soon as the city issues a permit.