

CHECKING THE BOXES

10 Questions When Assessing Lab Conversions

Scorecard Addresses Key Questions in Potential Projects

BY BILL OLSON
SPECIAL TO BANKER & TRADESMAN



Bill Olson

In the Boston area, there is no shortage of businesses and institutions that need more lab space - and need it fast.

With the pressures of speeding life-saving drugs to market, the importance of supporting research and development, and an absence of readily available lab-ready space, it is more important than ever to develop a simple yet sophisticated process for identifying and evaluating lab conversion opportunities.

When our clients find a property that might suit their needs, they need to act quickly to assess finances and risk assessment. We are one of the first team members they call to help them make the right decision.

A Deeper Look for Some Buildings

In the local market, including the hotspots of Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Waltham and Watertown, we are seeing some buildings that, at first glance, would not seem suitable. This is where our expertise comes in handy, as we can quickly create a scorecard and help our client evaluate the pros and cons, possibilities and impossibilities in establishing a cost model and schedule.

We use this scorecard at our initial walk-through to evaluate 10 key aspects of the property. We do this alongside a team of collaborative consultants, including design professionals, and trade partners, who recognize the short but critical time frame and understand the client's needs.

We all know our part and scatter amongst the building systems, meeting up later to share thoughts, challenges and solutions as we fill in the scorecard. The process is successful because we each know our roles, responsibilities and what the client needs to inform their ultimate decision regarding acquisition and conversion. We roll up our sleeves and get right to work without a learning curve.

The following list includes the features that we evaluate, and for each one, we es-

A red light does not necessarily mean the project is not viable, but it might translate to a major concession or compromise that could limit potential tenants.

establish of list of observations and limitations. We also create a dashboard on any observed constraints, assigning a green light for items that can easily be solved with typical methods and cost, a yellow light for items that can be solved but would take significant cost or time and a red light for any items that cannot be modified no matter how much money is thrown at the



Photo by Mike Sears | Courtesy

Bringing an existing building up to lab-ready standards often requires installation of additional utility shafts to deliver large quantities of fresh and conditioned air.

problem. A red light does not necessarily mean the project is not viable, but it might translate to a major concession or compromise that could limit potential tenants.

Building envelope: We look at roofing, glazing and waterproofing details, as water and air infiltration within lab buildings can have catastrophic consequences. It is also problematic to have operable windows in the lab space, even if they are in a new condition.

Asbestos, lead, mold or other hazardous materials analysis: A healthy building and environment are critical for human welfare and research requirements. We take samples of all materials for rapid testing.

Structural load sizing: We evaluate the building structure as this will affect equipment areas for both lab areas and MEP systems and might also affect vibration, which could have a negative impact on certain types of research equipment, especially nuclear magnetic resonance or centrifuges. Vibration can come from both internal and external sources.

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LEASE Roundup

Companies are constantly on the move in the Bay State's dynamic commercial real estate market. It's a high stakes game of musical chairs – and the landlords with the best information on who's heading where have an inside edge. Our monthly Lease Roundup aims to provide that edge, offering a snapshot of leasing activity across the commonwealth. The following information was compiled from reports originally published on www.bankerandtradesman.com between Sept. 21 and Oct. 24. It is not meant to be a comprehensive accounting of all leases executed during that time. If you recently signed a new lease and want to potentially appear in future editions of the Lease Roundup, please send all relevant leasing and representation information to editorial@thewarrencgroup.com. High resolution photos and graphics are welcomed in .jpeg and .gif formats.

Address: 137 Barnum Road
City/town: Devens
Square-footage: 19,527
Tenant: CMC U.S. Inc.
Landlord: D'Ambrosio Enterprises
Type of Lease: New
Landlord Representation: The Stubblebine Co.'s Micah Stubblebine
Tenant Representation: Omni Properties' George Properties

Address: 50 Jytek Road
City/town: Leominster
Square-footage: 25,600
Tenant: Urthpact LLC
Landlord: Jytek Road Property Owner LLC
Type of Lease: New
Landlord Representation: The Stubblebine Co.'s David Stubblebine, James Stubblebine and Alan Ringuette
Tenant Representation: The Stubblebine Co.'s David Stubblebine, James Stubblebine and Alan Ringuette

Address: 200 Exchange St.
City/town: Malden
Square-footage: 25,600
Tenant: N/A
Landlord: Berkeley Investments and Singerman Real Estate
Type of Lease: New
Landlord Representation: JLL's Molly Heath, Peter Bekarian, Chris Decembrele and Maggie Dore
Tenant Representation: Colliers' Robin Zellmer, Evan Gallagher and Caitlin Mahoney



137 BARNUM ROAD



200 EXCHANGE ST.

Lab Project Gives Marine Economy Seat at the Table

BY STEVE ADAMS
BANKER & TRADESMAN STAFF

Life science labs and the traditional marine industrial economy have increasingly operated side-by-side in Boston's Seaport District in recent years.

The next major development project would combine them under one roof.

Developers of a 320,000-square-foot lab development at 22 Drydock Ave. are offering public benefits for the neighborhood's marine economy including a research and training center and funding for a new fisheries museum.

The rent-free space for Gloucester Marine Genomics Institute on the ground floor of the proposed 22 Drydock Ave. project is accompanied by a public benefits package that includes an assortment of programs connected to the marine and life science industries. The 7-story project at 22 Drydock Ave. is anchored by Vertex Pharmaceuticals' latest expansion within the Raymond L. Flynn Marine Park.

Developers Related Beal, Kavanagh Advisory Group and the Boston Real Estate Inclusion Fund (BREIF) are partnering on the project, which includes a 60-percent component of minority- and women-

owned businesses in its project team, according to a project notification form submitted to the Boston Planning & Development Agency.

Developers will build out and rent a portion of the ground floor to Gloucester Marine Genomics Institute for a new satellite location and pay \$200,000 to establish an endowment for job training programs for veterans and \$200,000 for a marine biotech program for Boston high school students.

Other public benefits offered by the project include:

- \$2.1 million to be allocated as part of the BPDA impact advisory group's review;
- \$500,000 to endow a STEM program chair at Boston Collegiate Charter School;
- \$250,000 for a location study of an emergency services station in the marine park;
- \$200,000 to establish a fisherman's relief fund for the Boston Fisheries Foundation;
- \$200,000 for initial funding of a Boston Fisheries foundation museum;
- \$200,000 to the No Books No Ball Basketball Program for a scholarship program;
- \$100,000 to math tutoring program PieRSquared;
- \$50,000 for the Boston Seafood Festival.



Image courtesy of SGA/DREAM Collaborative

The development already has landed a major Seaport District tenant in Vertex Pharmaceuticals, which will grow its footprint in the neighborhood to 1.9 million square feet and an additional 500 employees with its new Jeffrey Leiden Center II at 22 Drydock Ave.

Vertex announced the expansion in May, as it opened its Leiden Center for Cell and Genetic Therapies I at 316-318 Northern Ave., which was developed by Related Beal.

The Economic Development and Industrial Corp. of Boston offered the 2-acre

parcel at 22 Drydock Ave. as a redevelopment site in February 2021, stating its goal of positioning the marine park as a life industry rival to Cambridge's Kendall Square.

In April 2022, the BPDA selected a team of Related Beal, Kavanagh Advisory Group and Boston Real Estate Inclusion Fund, led by developer Richard Taylor. Three development teams had sought the designation.

The BPDA has responded to the decline of the marine industrial economy and growing demand for life science facilities with new zoning that allows a combination of industrial and lab space in new projects.

Foundry Projects Reveals 19th Century Details

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Reusing industrial architecture also provides opportunities for found spaces. By reorienting the Foundry entry and transforming Rogers Street, a private alley between two historic factory buildings, into a shared street with trees and benches, we linked the Foundry to a newly-opened city park one block away. Likewise, the full-height Community Hall, surrounded by interior glass walls and welcoming illumination from skylights, creates more usable perimeter space through the insertion of a second story between the ground and upper levels.

Repurposing existing industrial building stock is also environmentally responsible. The Foundry's restoration and reuse of masonry, structure and roofing material saved it from landfills and conserved

energy that would have been used to construct new materials. Further, the exceptionally thick historic masonry facade is shown, through energy modeling, to be effective in dampening temperature swings and to meet energy code without new insulation. Finally, the high window openings and skylights originally installed for work before electrification allow for well-lit spaces with minimal energy use.

Existing industrial buildings remain key to the urban fabric of New England cities. While they present challenges to adaptive reuse, they also provide opportunities for environmental responsibility, found spaces and historic character that can provide new assets for their communities.

Justin Crane is an associate principal at CambridgeSeven.

Renovation Extends Life of Plaza Through Next Half-Century

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The original spalling and slippery glazed brick paving required full replacement with a skid-resistant brick, maintaining original character while meeting safety and universal access codes.

Sustainable design measures include significant reduction in potable water consumption through pool improvements, and groundwater recharge through responsible management of stormwater runoff.

The Christian Science Plaza Restoration and Repair project extends the life of this historic open space into the next 50 years, adapting it to a new social context, keeping it relevant and vibrant. The new design elements respect the original design, while making the plaza more welcoming to all ages, in all seasons, in all times of day or night.

John Amodio is a principal with IBI Group.

Utility Upgrades Can Add Lengthy Delays to Lab Projects

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ADA compliance and other building code issues: It's important to always understand current and upcoming code implications and to examine egress pathways, building access layouts and restroom configurations.

Elevators/loading/circulation: Freight elevators and loading docks are a must for life sciences buildings. If they do not exist, is it feasible to add or modify existing systems?

Utilities and sizing: One of the longest lead items currently is coordinating with utility companies for upsizing existing services. A priority is creating a load letter, submitting it to the utility company, and getting on the engineering queue. This process can take between 10 and 18 months. The first step is to evaluate the existing services to assess if the watts per square foot, and gas and water loads, are suitable.

Shafts and risers: MEP systems for lab buildings typically exist on the roof. Due to the large quantity of outdoor and conditioned air required, shafts and risers between all floors will be required. We assess possible areas for new pathways from lower levels to the roof early to ensure compatibility with future layouts and

structural limitations. We also look at potential side wall louvered locations.

Existing MEP systems: While many existing systems within a non-lab building will not be suitable for some areas of the building, they may be able to be reused for office, support and common areas. We quickly assess the viability of these systems, as anything we can repurpose will save on the project timeline, design costs, demolition, procurement and installation.

Local zoning and historic ordinances: In addition to code issues, it is important to understand specific local limitations. These hurdles can create major obstacles even if the physical building is a perfect conversion candidate. We start by contacting the local jurisdictions to ensure we understand acoustical, use, wastewater, R&D/manufacturing, easement limitations and neighboring concerns.

With the right team in place to assess conditions and opportunities, these 10 concerns are a great place to start your evaluation and create a dashboard for the potential owner's decision process, giving your client an essential advantage in today's challenging real estate market.

Bill Olson is senior director of life sciences at North Reading-based Columbia.

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