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**“Building seeks suite spot for small tenants”**

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A pre-built office suite being marketed for lease at 55 Church St. in downtown White Plains. The building's owner and leasing agent hope to boost occupancy above the current low rate of less than 20 percent.

Even as new stores, apartments and a hotel-office complex under construction have reshaped White Plains over the past five years, a half-century-old office building a block north of the downtown redevelopment remains hard-up for tenant businesses.

So, the leasing agent for 55 Church St. has hit upon a new strategy it hopes will boost occupancy in the 100,000-square-foot building past today's dismal rate of less than 20 percent -- namely creating pre-built suites of between 2,000 and 3,500 square feet, ready for tenants to move in their furniture, install phone and computer service and open for business.

"With the change in the downtown, with all the new residential around that building now, the building lends itself to smaller tenants and would work well for them," said Jonathan D. Schindler, managing director with leasing agent Colliers ABR.

Asking rents for the pre-built suites will be \$22.50 per square foot, a similar price to the building's remaining build-to-suit space. That compares with asking rents between the high-\$20s and mid-\$30s per square foot in nearby top-dollar class A buildings.

The suites will feature solid-core wood doors, glass paneling within the walls of the offices and conference rooms, and even pantries with running water, said Michael R.

Norris, another managing director with Colliers ABR. "I don't think it's going to compete with the trophy properties, the true class A buildings. But the small professional service firm that wants to rent in the low 20s, that's our market."

To drive home its message, Schindler said, Colliers ABR has stepped up marketing in part through a newspaper distributed to commuters at the downtown's Metro-North Railroad station and headlined "Why commute when you can walk to 55 Church?"

Colliers ABR and owner Minskoff Grant Realty and Management Corp. have made a total 8,539 square feet of pre-built suites available within part of the second floor of the four-story building. Additional suites will be created if the initial suites sell out.

Today, 55 Church is home to Qwest Communications International Inc., while Priority Home Health Care leases 3,000 square feet for its office. While Qwest occupies the entire ground floor of about 25,000 square feet, it hardly generates much traffic since the space is used to store equipment for its fiber-optic network.

Completed in 1958, 55 Church St. has struggled to replace tenants that left during the early 1990s recession. After the building's tenant roster consisted almost entirely of state government agencies during the late 1990s, Minskoff Grant began promoting the building to technology businesses seeking to house equipment, and completed a \$6 million renovation. But that attempt to cash in on the dot-com boom failed once the industry crashed the following year.

Since the crash, Minskoff Grant and previous leasing agents continued marketing the building, only to lag behind three office sites within two blocks -- two top-dollar class A properties, Reckson Metro Center at 360 Hamilton Ave. and White Plains Plaza, the two-building campus owned by Heyman Properties; and the Renaissance Corporate Center at 235-245 Main St. owned by father-and-son developers Steven and Josh Caspi.

Farther out within the downtown, two other office buildings with large blocks of empty space have lured their own new tenants -- Gateway at 1 North Lexington Ave. and Westchester One at 44 South Broadway. And in 2007, Valhalla builder Louis R. Cappelli will complete his \$400 million Renaissance Square project, which includes 100,000 square feet of downtown office space as well as an as-yet-unnamed hotel and 400 apartments.

"If the market is good across the street at Caspi's building, it should be good on the 55 Church side of the street as well," said Howard Greenberg, president of Howard Properties Ltd. "The biggest issue with 55 Church has been its positioning. There's never been a big push to establish an identity and a marketing position. It's certainly in a good location, and the location has gotten better lately."