

The MetroGrid Report

Focus on NYC Submarkets

Featured Neighborhood: The Flatiron District

How Growth in Tech-Related Firms Has Yielded Higher Real Estate Prices

The Flatiron District has earned considerable prominence over the last few years as the City's true "Tech Hub" given the number of technology firms that have opened in the area including Tumblr and Gilt Group.

The area has long been a popular place to live and work given its broad base of retail and restaurant offerings, its loft-style buildings and its proximity to Madison Square Park, Gramercy Park and Union Square. But its hip reputation has clearly attracted more and more entrepreneurs over the last few years. The anecdotal reports in the media suggest that creative types prefer to set up shop in close proximity to each other, and they eschew the more corporate environments of Downtown and Midtown.

In fact, a recent diagram in the New York Times that mapped 400 technology start-ups showed that the majority were in Midtown South, "within blocks of venture capital investors and veteran start-ups" (such as Google). The area's lower rents and restaurants and bars were cited as "a big draw."

This "Tech" title is not exactly new; the area had been known as "Silicon Alley" in the late 1990s before the dotcom bubble burst. Few people have opted to re-adopt the "Silicon Alley" nickname given the demise of so many earlier start-ups.

But given the resurgence of the technology industry in New York City together with the waning fortunes of Wall Street as well as the Mayor's drive to attract an engineering school to Roosevelt Island to stir future economic development, the Flatiron District will likely see increasingly more attention. As many look to lease and buy real estate here, the area could become the City's next business hub.

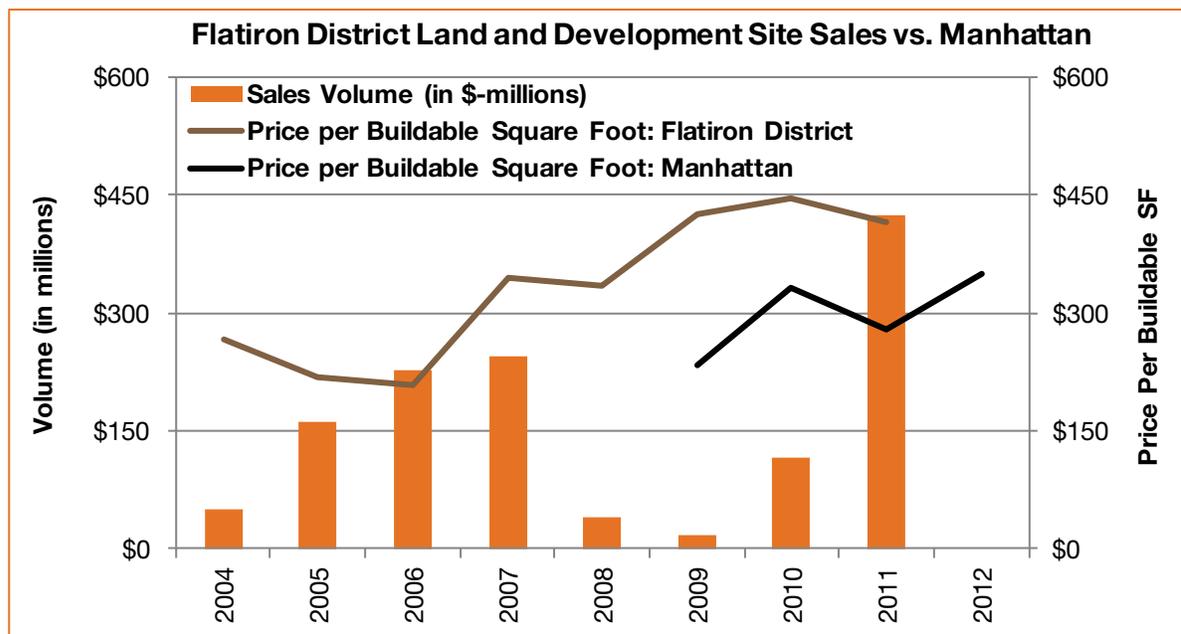
This current issue of MetroGrid covers the Flatiron District¹ and reviews the area's commercial real estate sales transactions. More importantly, we analyze the impact that the growth of technology firms has had on real estate values over the last two years by analyzing the trends against those in Manhattan overall. The results show that the growth in technology firms has indeed strengthened real estate values.

As per Peter Hauspurg, Chairman and CEO, "The growth in the Flatiron District has been stunning. Landlords and investors have taken note of the interest in this area given the tenancy mix, the number of landmarked buildings and the retail offerings. The demand for investment in this area exceeds the supply of available properties by a considerable margin."

Development Sites

As shown in the chart below, the market for development site sales was moribund during the recession. From mid 2008 through 2010, only seven properties traded hands and all of these were small. Last year, however, the market came alive as a number of prominent properties were sold to developers interested in either ground-up development or a conversion.

¹ Because a number of firms have opened not only in the heart of the Flatiron District but just outside of its perimeter, we have broadened our geographic boundaries to include the areas from 14th Street to 30th Street west of Sixth Avenue as well as the Broadway corridor just south of there to Prince Street.



Source: Eastern Consolidated, CoStar, Property Shark and NYC Department of Finance

Note in the chart above that development site sales in the Flatiron District have sold at a premium to those in Manhattan over the last three years, and this premium has held steady. The prices paid for development sites in the Flatiron District averaged more than \$400 per buildable square foot in 2010 and 2011 while the average price paid in Manhattan was closer to \$300.

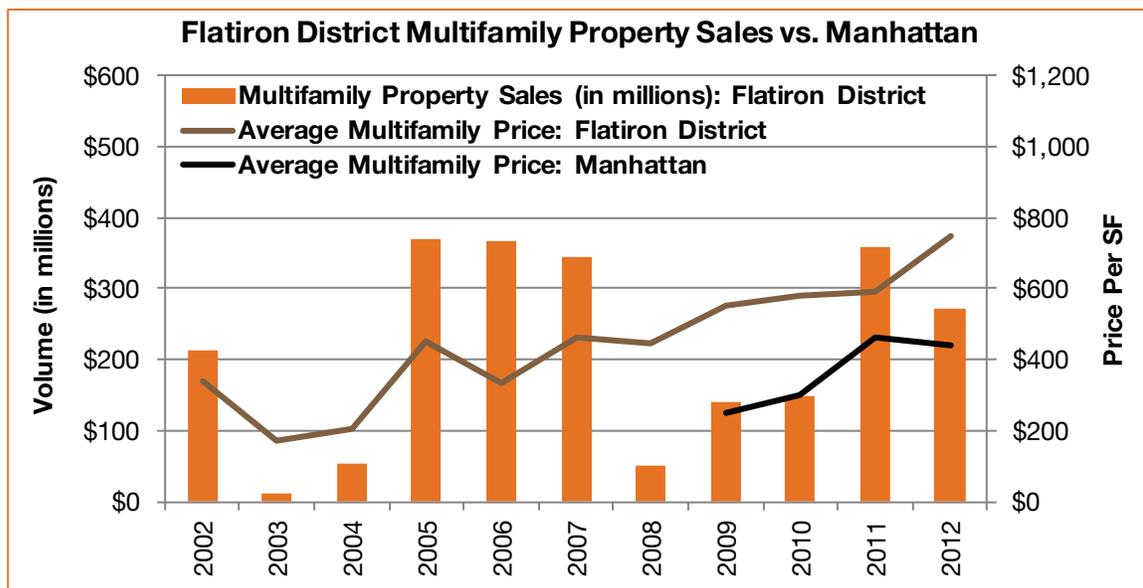
The largest sale in 2011 was for 1107 Broadway, the former Toy Building. The Witkoff Group purchased the building at auction for \$191 million as part of the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy proceedings. Witkoff's plans reportedly include converting the former 16-story, 305,000-square-foot office building to residential condos. Also, at the end of last year, Toll Brothers bought 400 Park Avenue South for \$134 million where they are planning to build a 400,000-square-foot residential building.

The prices paid per buildable square foot for these sites reflect the desirability of living so close to Madison Square Park and near a wide selection of restaurants. The fact that there has not been a development site sale thus far in 2012 is more a reflection of the lack of supply of sites than a lack of demand to construct new buildings. Prices for development sites have climbed in Manhattan already this year. The evidence in other property markets suggests that the price for land in the Flatiron District has likely increased as well in the last few months.

Multifamily

The multifamily market also slowed during the recession years but picked up steam in 2011 as nine buildings traded hands. Thus far in 2012, seven buildings in the broader Flatiron District have traded hands.

As shown in the chart below, the prices for multifamily buildings in the Flatiron District have picked up dramatically in 2012 and at a more rapid rate than in Manhattan as indicated by the flatter black line. This suggests that buildings near the technology corridor have increased in value at a faster rate than in Manhattan overall.



Source: Eastern Consolidated, CoStar, Property Shark and NYC Department of Finance

For example, the leasehold at 2 Cooper Square sold for \$134 million, over \$1,000 per square foot. This new building, built in 2011, is close to Foursquare's current office, 36 Cooper Square, although Foursquare is moving to 568 Broadway in SoHo. Just south of Cooper Square, 640 Broadway at Crosby Street, sold for \$700 per square foot. These buildings are just south of the Flatiron District but are close to buildings with a significant technology concentration.

Further north, Silverstone Property Group bought 501-505 Second Avenue at East 28th Street in February for \$53 million or nearly \$500 per square foot. This is closer to the overall average price for Manhattan multifamily buildings of \$500 per square foot in the first quarter. While the number of transactions are too few to draw many conclusions, these examples suggest that being closer to Broadway and the technology hub raises the value of the property.

In 2011, 30 sales transactions were closed in or near the Flatiron District. The largest of which was for 290 Third Avenue, The Electra, which INVESCO purchased from JP Morgan Asset Management. The sale, for \$122.5 million, worked out to just less than \$680 per square foot and accounted for the jump in the total volume last year. In 2010, 29 transactions were closed but the total volume was half of that in 2011. Note that in 2012, volume has already climbed to more than two-thirds of the total volume in 2011.

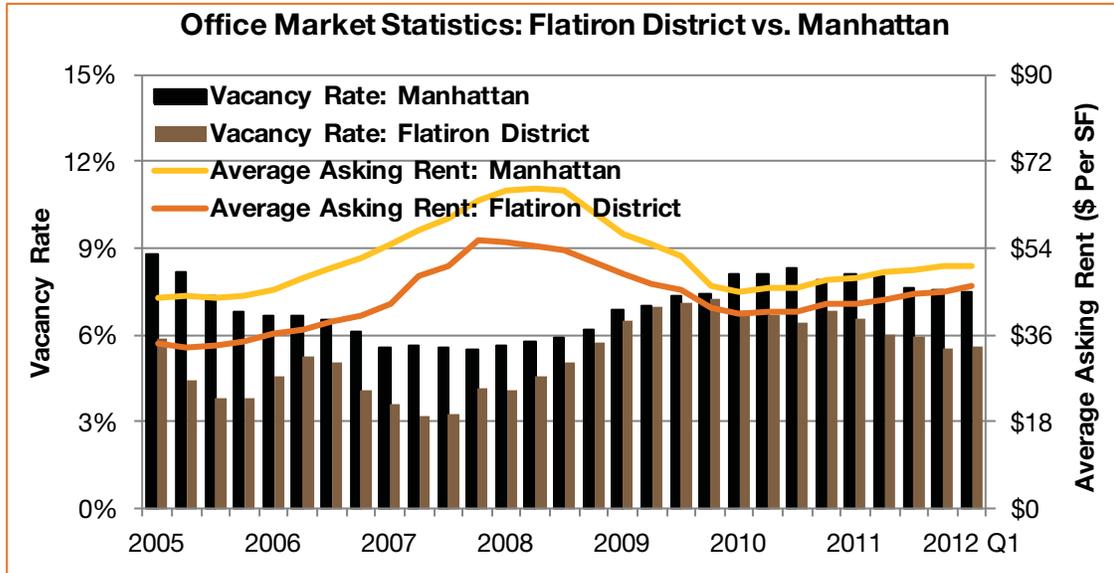
The demographics of the Flatiron District have changed dramatically over the last few years as more and more new buildings have opened and more families now live in the area and take advantage of the many amenities surrounding Madison Square Park. Since 2006, nearly 2 million square feet of residential space² has been added from new construction or conversions and another 1 million square feet of new residential properties is planned for the immediate area. These added residents have not only helped the multifamily market considerably, but they have added a seven-day-a-week crowd to the area boosting the retail and restaurant markets that used to suffer from low weekend foot traffic.

Office

Office properties in the Flatiron District differ from those in Midtown and Downtown in that they tend to be much older with loftier ceilings, smaller lobbies and fewer amenities. As a result, average asking rents tend to be lower than the Manhattan average overall. The chart below shows how the Class A and B buildings in the Flatiron District have consistently earned lower rents than overall Manhattan Class A and B buildings. Currently, the Flatiron District average asking rent is \$46 per square foot which is 8.5% lower than the Manhattan average of \$50 per square foot.

² As per the Flatiron 23rd Street Partnership

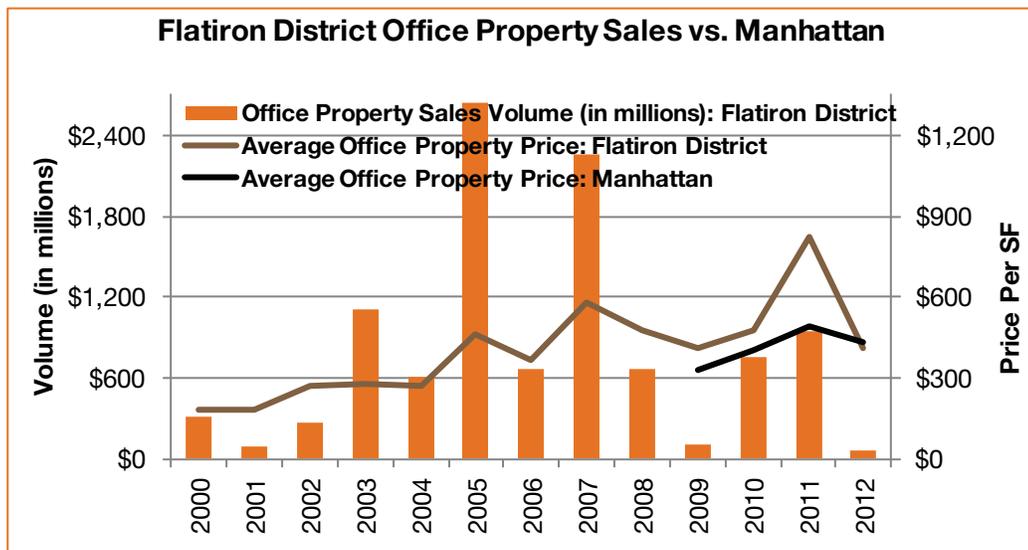
Yet because these lower rents and the retail and restaurant mix in the Flatiron District are “a big draw” as mentioned above, vacancy rates have been consistently lower than across Manhattan. The current Class A and B Flatiron District vacancy rate is 5.6%, considerably lower than the Manhattan average of 7.5%.



Source: Eastern Consolidated and CoStar

Despite the lower rents paid in the Flatiron District, the prices paid for office properties carry the same real estate premium that was apparent in multifamily and land sales, although the premium was less consistent than for multifamily properties. Once again, it is difficult to draw too many conclusions based on the limited number of office transactions over the last few years especially since a few of the properties are at the very high end of the market while a number of class C properties sold as well. In short, while office rents are generally lower in the Flatiron District than elsewhere in Manhattan, the prices paid for office buildings have been higher. This is likely due to the strong retail tenancy in the Flatiron District, but it also suggests that landlords have a more favorable outlook for the area’s future relative to other neighborhoods.

The chart below shows that the average sales price for office properties in the Flatiron District jumped to more than \$800 per square foot last year. This was largely due to a number of high-end building sales. Most notable was the sale of 200 Fifth Avenue that L&L Holding Company bought at auction from the Lehman Brothers estate. The building sold for more than \$700 million or close to \$840 per square foot. In addition to its prime office location facing Madison Square Park, 200 Fifth Avenue has premium retail space including Mario Batali’s very popular Eataly artisanal marketplace. Just across the street, Thor Equities bought out Goldman Sachs as an equity partner in 245 Fifth Avenue with the Moinian Group. The price paid was \$161 million or just over \$1,000 per square foot.



Source: Eastern Consolidated, CoStar, Property Shark and NYC Department of Finance

The average price paid for office properties across Manhattan held steady at \$500 per square foot in 2010 and 2011. Thus far this year, the average has fallen to \$440 per square foot.

Only one significant Flatiron District property has traded in 2012: the commercial portion of 15-19 East 26th Street that Savanna bought from a consortium that included Angelo, Gordon & Co, Belvedere Capital, Metropolitan Realty Associates and Walter & Samuels. The building that has high-profile tenants such as Vera Wang faces the north side of Madison Square Park and features a restaurant on the ground floor. The new owners plan a major upgrade. The other sale, 157 East 25th Street is a Class C office building that needs major capital improvements.

Note in the chart above that while the volume of office property sales fell in 2009, the price held steady. This was due to one sale: Thor Equities sold 901 Broadway, the original Lord & Taylor building built by James Giles in the 19th century, to Karass Broadway for \$24.6 million or more than \$1,600 per square foot.

Hotels

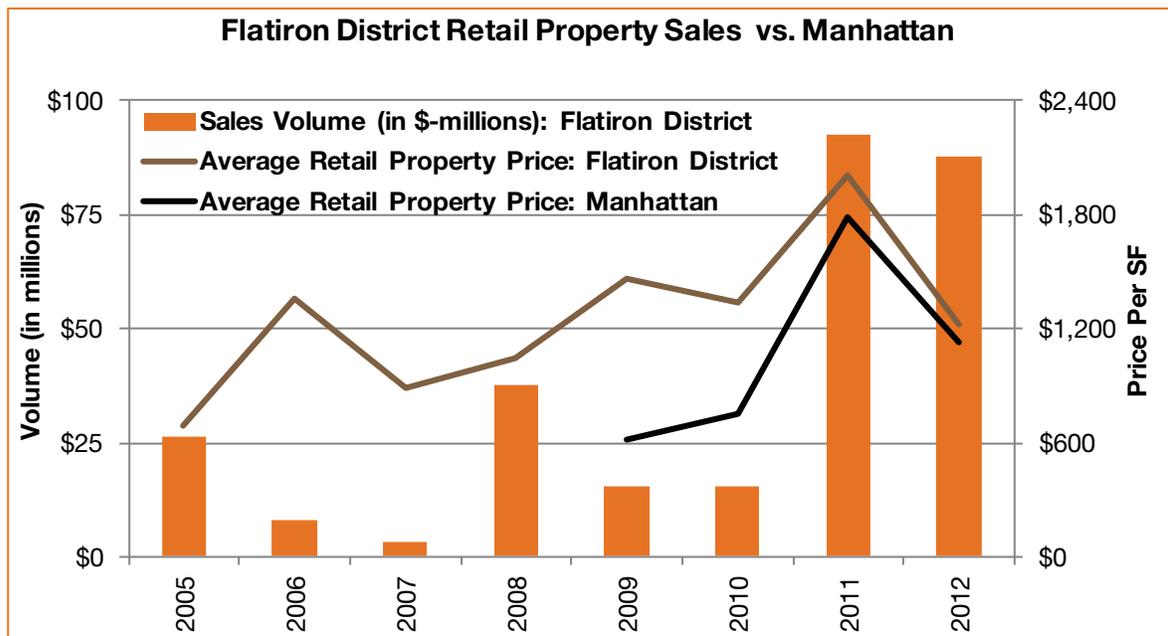
Oddly, there had been only a few hotels in the Flatiron District until a number were opened in the last few years. The Mave Hotel and the Ace Hotel opened in 2009, the Gansevoort Park Hotel opened in 2010 and Hotel Verite at 19th and Broadway opened last year. Finally, NoMad Hotel at 1170 Broadway and the Flatiron Hotel at 1141 Broadway are opening this year.

Because of the relatively limited supply of hotels, the sales of hotels have been few and far between. In January, Marriott bought the “Clock Tower” at 5 Madison Avenue to be converted into a new “Edition” brand of high-end hotels developed with Ian Schrager. This property had been purchased by Africa Israel USA in 2007 for the intention of converting the property into condominiums but the project was never completed. Marriott paid \$165 million for the partially completed property and they hope to have the hotel opened by 2014 according to media reports.

The only other hotel sale in recent years was for the W Union Square that Host Hotels & Resorts acquired in 2010 for \$188 million or \$940 per square foot in an REO sale.

Retail Properties

The Flatiron District is well known for its retail, and recent sales of retail properties show how well valued these assets are. One noteworthy sale in recent weeks was the retail condominium at 141-145 Fifth Avenue. Samson Management bought the 8,650-square-foot condo from SL Green [see Deal is in the Details] for \$46 million or more than \$4,000 per square foot. The property features two tenants -- Cole Haan and HSBC.



Source: Eastern Consolidated, CoStar, Property Shark and NYC Department of Finance

The chart above shows how the volume of retail property sales has soared over the last 18 months, increasing fivefold in 2011 over 2010. Already in 2012, volume has nearly eclipsed that of 2011 based on two transactions for more than \$40 million each. In addition to the sale mentioned above, Epic, LLC bought the retail property at 25 West 14th Street from Vornado for \$41 million or \$670 per square foot. The property includes a tanning salon, a gym and a music store.

Note in the chart above that the “premium” for retail real estate in the Flatiron district has consistently been over \$200 per square foot since 2010. This consistency is surprising given the broad range of retail transactions that have closed both in the Flatiron District and in Manhattan where prices are often very erratic depending on the location and tenancy of the property.

Conclusion

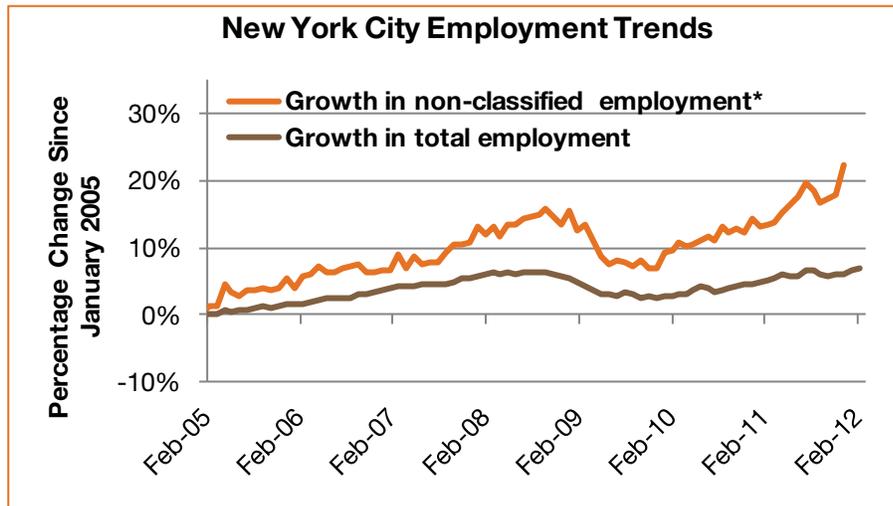
The analysis above shows how property values in the Flatiron District increased at a stronger rate than the rest of Manhattan over the last two years. The overall conclusion to be drawn from the statistics is that the growth in technology companies in the Flatiron District had a positive impact on property sales. Every property type displayed this pattern.

New York’s technology prowess has been covered by the media, mostly in the form of anecdotal reporting on firms that have succeeded here. But there have been very few statistical reports on the impact that these companies have had on the overall New York City economy. Because so many of these companies are new and difficult to classify, capturing them in the monthly employment statistics has been challenging for the New York State Department of Labor. The recent *revised* employment figures from the Labor Department show that the City’s economy added 86,500 jobs in 2011. The original estimate of the number of added jobs in New York City for 2011 was 36,500 jobs. Thus, an added 50,000 jobs were created that had not been captured by the original survey.

The reason why the Labor Department revises its estimates on an annual basis is to align its estimates of employment from its original survey of employers (based on a sample of firms) to the number of employees reported by all businesses required to pay unemployment insurance, which covers the population of businesses. Any gaps in the two series of data are usually attributed to new businesses not captured by the original survey. Thus, the employment count increased dramatically to incorporate the number of new businesses formed over the last year or so.

The breakdown of the data by industry shows that many of the added jobs were likely in technology-related industries that are not adequately classified as per the rigid definitions of the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS).

The chart below shows the growth in employment that was captured in the information and professional business services broader sectors but was not classified as per the NAICS *industries*³ within these sectors. The growth in this non-classified employment clearly outpaced the overall employment in New York City. This strongly suggests that the City has added a number of jobs in technology-related industries, although verifying this premise is difficult to do.



Source: Eastern Consolidated and NYS Department of Labor

³ *Non-classified employment in the information sector includes those that were not captured in film, broadcasting, publishing and telecommunications; non-classified employment in the professional business services sectors includes those outside of legal, accounting, advertising, engineering, computer systems design, management consulting and employment services.

While the jobs numbers are hard to pin down, every week the media reports on another technology-related company outgrowing its space and looking for more or newer space, and the scope of these searches is not wide – firms want to stay in or close to the Flatiron District to retain the energy that the area generates.

Ironically, the office rents have started to rise in a number of these buildings but they have not accelerated as they might have had this been Wall Street firms expanding on Wall Street or Midtown. This is because the overall size of the leases secured is still less than 100,000 square feet and so many of these buildings are old with more columns and smaller floorplates than the traditional office buildings in Midtown and Downtown.

Still, New York City's profile as a technology center has grown considerably following the Mayor's international campaign to attract an engineering campus to Roosevelt Island. The City's effort to court Cornell, its partners and any other institution willing to invest in technology here has spread a worldwide message that New York City will be a center for technological innovation for the next generation.

Thus, the outlook for technology-related industries is more favorable now than it has been in more than a decade. Creative companies clearly prefer to set-up operations in close proximity to each and near neighborhood amenities like parks and nice restaurants, all of which bodes well for the Flatiron District for the next decade.

The Deal Is In The Details: Retail Condominium at 141-145 Fifth Avenue



One of the more noteworthy sales in the Flatiron District in recent months was the retail condominium at 141-145 Fifth Avenue. The property's prime location, situated two blocks south of Madison Square Park, long-term high credit tenancy and excellent visibility made for a unique investment opportunity. An LLC led by Samson Management bought the retail condo in a 1031 Exchange from S.L. Green and joint partner Jeff Sutton of Wharton Properties for \$46 million or nearly \$4,700 per square foot. While the price seems high, the underlying asset clearly justified the price.

Two retail tenants occupy the space bought in the package: footwear and apparel store, Cole Haan, and HSBC Bank. Cole Haan leased 3,200 square feet of space in 2009. Their lease will expire in 2024. HSBC's lease expires in 2022. The two retail condominium units sold include the entire grade and a portion of lower level space, totaling 9,860 square feet.

The buyer was represented by Eastern Consolidated's Vice Chairman, Brian Ezratty. According to Mr. Ezratty, "the buyer was the perfect fit for this property. With a 1031 requirement and strong financials, the LLC met all of the criteria of the seller. And the sales price, which included the assumption of a mortgage, met the purchaser's 1031 requirement of cash, mortgage and a reasonable return on equity."

In September 2005 a joint venture consisting of Savanna Partners, the City Investment Fund and S.L. Green Realty Corp. purchased the property. Savanna divided the building into a retail component (floors 1-2) and a (potential) residential component (floors 3-12) through a Tenancy in Common Agreement with S.L. Green. Savanna assumed ownership of the residential component, and S.L. Green assumed ownership of the retail component. Savanna then converted these upper floors to residential. The conversion took approximately four years, but all 32 units sold by April 2011. The average size of the condominiums is 1,700 square feet.

Few buildings rival the classic architectural splendor of 141-145 Fifth Avenue. Built on the Southeast corner of Fifth Avenue and East 21st Street in 1896 by Robert Maynicke, it was originally the Merchant Bank of New York building. Its white brick, banded columns and distinctive domed roof cupola are representative of the beaux-arts architecture popular in New York City around the turn of the last century. In contrast to the sleek modernist towers rising throughout the city, the building features elaborate terracotta decoration. This is the first building designed by Maynicke to be converted for strictly residential use.

Flatiron Comparables

Land / Development Sites

Address	Square Feet	Date	Price	Price Per Buildable SF
1101-1113 Broadway	329,546	9/27/2011	\$191,000,000	\$580
208, 214-216 East 14th Street	75,044	10/6/2011	\$33,206,500	\$442
60 West 22nd Street	12,610	11/3/2011	\$4,800,000	\$381
400 Park Avenue South	417,000	12/7/2011	\$134,000,000	\$321
530 East 14th Street	20,652	12/21/2011	\$6,600,000	\$320

Office

Address	Square Feet	Date	Price	Price Per SF
3 East 17th Street	5,400	11/22/2011	\$4,400,000	\$815
130 East 16th Street	7,030	12/22/2011	\$4,920,000	\$700
251 Park Avenue South	60,000	12/28/2011	\$19,000,000	\$317
157 East 25th Street	4,542	2/13/2012	\$2,425,000	\$534
15-19 East 26th Street	150,000	2/24/2012	\$57,800,000	\$385

Multifamily

Address	Square Feet	Date	Price	Price Per SF
654 Broadway	18,700	11/30/2011	\$13,300,000	\$711
2 Cooper Square	121,775	1/27/2012	\$134,050,000	\$1,101
12 Fifth Avenue	19,545	2/1/2012	\$12,500,000	\$640
640 Broadway	46,512	2/7/2012	\$32,500,000	\$699
501-505 Second Avenue	108,614	2/16/2012	\$53,000,000	\$488
22 East 13th Street	4,099	3/27/2012	\$4,825,000	\$1,177
321 East 22nd Street	56,877	3/30/2012	\$31,000,000	\$545

Retail

Address	Square Feet	Date	Price	Price per SF
15 Union Square West	14,494	1/20/2011	\$57,880,000	\$3,993
254 Park Avenue South	1,285	12/29/2011	\$2,600,000	\$2,023
25 West 14th Street	62,000	1/26/2012	\$41,500,000	\$669
141-145 Fifth Avenue	9,860	2/22/2012	\$46,000,000	\$4,665