

TENANT INSIGHTS

West, Lane & Schlager Realty Advisors

OFFICE TRENDS

How COVID Continues to Shape the Way We Work

When approached with optimism and innovation, a challenge can cultivate creative solutions. This past year gave us plenty of opportunities to forge new, imaginative ways of working! Within the commercial real estate sector, several distinct office space trends have emerged as a result of the pandemic's impacts.

However, with the spread of the omicron variant and spikes in COVID-19 cases, the beginning of 2022 brought additional challenges. This latest hurdle has paused returns to the office for the short-term, but we see companies continuing to design plans to ensure employees' safe return to the office for the long-term. As chief researcher with Gartner Brian Kopp remarks, "Do we need to respond to everything, or learn to live with it and consider it endemic? That's the basic question that's being asked now." [Omicron Deals Another Blow to The Hard Return-To-Office Date](#),

Let's examine a few of the changes that came about and seem to be here to stay.

Hybrid Working

Remote work has become the norm and, in all likelihood, businesses may never return to the way things were before the pandemic. How can we adjust to these changes? Offices must be re-engineered to accommodate employees who work remotely as well as on-site teams to facilitate a hybrid space that allows all team members to collaborate despite the distance. Our expert Logan Gradison wrote a workplace strategy guide that is essential to a successful hybrid work environment. Let us know if you need a copy.

Reservation systems like Joan and Robin have helped employers manage the movement of employees in a dynamic workspace. On top of this approach, online apps such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams continue to innovate their virtual meeting environment so that everyone is comfortable, whether they choose to work in the office or remotely.

COVID-friendly Buildings

OSHA and the **CDC** have outlined specific guidelines for offices and buildings regarding COVID-19 safety. Shared surfaces and touchpoints like doorknobs and elevator buttons are bacterial breeding grounds and pose risks to the health of employees. To mitigate this, landlords have prioritized easy-to-clean surfaces and automated access to reduce cross-contact. Building ventilation has also become a major focus. Open windows with fresh air circulating through the space are now priority along with air filtration systems.

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Many landlords are now offering reservable conference rooms for additional flexibility. The trend towards meeting in-person while in-office is likely to increase as employees try to make the best use of restricted time. Because of this, the use of conference rooms will need to be managed more closely. Tools for safe physical distancing can help configure floor plans, while conference room booking software can transform any space into an ad hoc office meeting space. This combined strategy is essential for companies looking to save money on conference room space.



Architectural & Design Trends

ArchDaily defines trends in the architecture not only by what is recurrent and popular but also by what has proven to be “relevant and substantial.” Office layouts have become more flexible and open to allow employees greater space and mobility. Furniture and finishings have become lightweight and easily movable so that floor plans can be adjusted and items can be sanitized quickly and efficiently.

Outdoor spaces such as rooftop terraces have also become popular. In some places, plans for permanent outdoor working spaces have been introduced. Additionally, landlords are working to create new enticing building amenities to persuade employees to return to the office. Some offices now offer attractive additions such as in-house baristas, high-end coffee stations, or quiet areas to relax.

COVID-19 and its variants have forced those of us within the commercial real estate sector to transform the way we think about buildings and office space. These changes could completely reshape the trajectory of the business. With the steady increase in vaccinations and slow rollback of restrictive COVID-19 regulations, we will keep an eye on how the rise of people returning to the office will affect office trends and strategies in 2022.

About West, Lane & Schlager Realty Advisors

West, Lane, & Schlager Realty Advisors (WLS) is a leading tenant-only commercial real estate specialist ensuring breakthrough results in tenant representation, strategic planning, investment services, construction management, and lease audit.

Through our negotiation expertise, our transactions are consistently **8.5% less costly for WLS clients** when compared to our competitors in the Washington metro area. That's a direct savings to our clients creating a long-term partnership of successful real estate decisions.



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