



Report: Transforming Downtown's empty offices is critical to revitalization

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JAN 30, 2025

3:44 PM

Mass conversion of vacant office space into residential property could drive growth in Downtown and support ambitious revitalization plans, Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership officials said Thursday.

At its first quarterly meeting of 2025, the organization shared details of its new, three-year plan for reshaping the Golden Triangle and revealed findings from a recent study on Downtown property.

Among the key takeaways from the study was that new residential conversions could help drive up Downtown's population.

“A higher Downtown residential population is going to increase both retail and office occupancy, which is ultimately going to stabilize Downtown real estate values and tax revenues,” said Aaron Sukenik, Vice President of District Development at the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership.

According to the study, about 21% of all real estate in Downtown — or roughly 7.9 million square feet of property — is office space eligible for conversion. The majority of that falls into Class B, the second category of office space, reserved for buildings that are old but still well-maintained.

According to Mr. Sukenik, conditions in Class B space are typically “more conducive” to residential conversion. During Thursday’s meeting, PDP representatives said that more than three-quarters of a sample of Class B and C office space in Downtown was apt for transformation into residential property.

Meanwhile, the organization’s report stated that there’s high demand for housing, with 91% of the Golden Triangle’s rentable property occupied as of the last quarter of 2024.

If all vacant office space was converted to residential space, researchers said, Downtown’s population could jump by more than 12,000 people — a game-changer for retailers who consider the number of residents living within a few miles of potential new sites.

Currently, per the study, there are more large retail spaces sitting idle in Downtown than small ones. The PDP projects that bringing in more residents will attract major retailers to those lots, shepherding growth.

“Increasing that ‘live’ percentage is going to be directly impactful for filling the existing larger footprint of vacant spaces in the ‘play’ category,” Mr. Sukenik said, referencing real estate such as hotels, retail, cultural and performing arts venues that make up the “play” bracket of Downtown property.

Over 66% of Downtown’s current portfolio is made up of office space. PDP representatives on Thursday said that they hope to bring that number down to 45%, upping the number of residential and retail offerings in the process.

The Golden Triangle will have to strike a balance between converting empty work spaces into apartments without losing too many offices. That

could be a struggle as more employers move from Downtown to the North Shore and Strip District. In the last quarter of 2024, the number of vacant Class A office space in Downtown spiked as companies declined to renew leases, the new study revealed.

Duquesne Light in 2024 signed a lease on a North Side building and plans to pack up its longtime Downtown headquarters. EQT significantly downsized its office space years ago. And during the last quarter of 2024, the law firm GRSM — located in the Gulf Tower — signed a new 25,950 square foot lease at 75 Hopper Place in the Strip District, according to a recent report from the law firm Cushman and Wakefield.

Plans to convert the 44-story Gulf Tower into a luxury hotel and residences are the linchpin of Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro's \$600 million plan to breathe new life into Downtown. Gordon and Rees was obligated to leave the building due to the project, but chose to exit Downtown altogether.

That exit trend is one reason retaining businesses in the Golden Triangle is a cornerstone of the PDP's strategic vision for the next three years.

At Thursday's meeting, the organization's president and CEO Jeremy Waldrup gave an overview of its plans, highlighting expanded efforts to keep streets clean and support Downtown's homeless population.

The group also hopes to focus on community engagement, with goals to hold more than 500 annual events, including four that attract over 50,000 attendees.

The PDP is working its way through the public approval process for investments in Market Square set to begin this spring, ahead of the NFL Draft, which Pittsburgh will host in April 2026, Mr. Waldrup said.

Quarterly meetings updating members of the public on progress are also a part of the organization's strategic vision — developed with input from over 100 stakeholders, including developers, government officials, nonprofits and corporate leaders.

"We know that we have to work collectively to create a more diverse and resilient neighborhood through the encouragement of office conversions, creating more retail and street front activation experiences," Mr. Waldrup said.

“This is going to require the work of us all.”

First Published: January 30, 2025, 3:44 p.m.

Updated: January 31, 2025, 3:45 a.m.



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