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Co-Working from Your Apartment Building

Rental and condo buildings have increased the amount of shared work spaces and also introduced private offices and conference rooms.



Before the pandemic, Tony Dopazo operated his IT company from a Boston office and Brooklyn co-working spaces. Now he runs things from Level, his apartment building in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Tom Sibley for The New York Times

By Jane Margolies

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Before the pandemic, Tony Dopazo leased an office in Boston and used co-working spaces in Brooklyn for his company, Metro Tech Services, an IT provider for start-ups and biotech companies. Then the pandemic lockdown forced him, like countless others, to work remotely. That meant he was on the phone with clients from his apartment building, [Level](#), in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

At first, with the common areas in his rental building closed by Covid restrictions, Mr. Dopazo, 47, hunkered down in his one-bedroom, which was “brutal,” he said, “everything mish-mashing into one big blob of time.” But after the common spaces opened in September, he started going down to a co-working area in a ninth-floor lounge every day.

The arrangement affords some “mental separation” from his home, he said, and, with other tenants working in the same space, he has companionship. When he needs to print or scan something, he heads to the ground-level business center. If he’s hungry, he returns to his apartment to make a sandwich, and for a break, he can take a dip in the building’s pool.

Recently he has noticed that some fellow tenants have swapped their pandemic sweatpants for business attire as they head back to offices. But Mr. Dopazo won’t be joining them.



A co-working area on the ninth floor is where Mr. Dopazo often sets up shop for the day. Tom Sibley for The New York Times

He has terminated his office lease, making his work-at-home arrangement permanent.

“This is the perfect setup for me,” he said.

While many of the city’s office buildings have been empty for over a year, workplaces in apartment buildings have been another story. Their use took off as people fled the confines of tiny apartments — or roommates constantly on the phone or in Zoom meetings.

Building managers scrambled to respond to demand, moving the furniture around to make the spaces more work-friendly while also encouraging social distancing and adhering to capacity restrictions. Some party rooms were repurposed as work spaces to give people room to spread out. And with the warmer weather, rooftops have become another work setting.

It is unclear whether such arrangements will last. Some building managers say the ranks using co-working spaces are already thinning as the city opens up.

But developers are betting remote work is here to stay and are ramping up work-related offerings, including conference rooms and private offices that residents can reserve, even if it means scaling back recreational amenities to do so.

“Ten years ago, all these lounges were put into buildings for parties that never happened,” said Jeremy Brutus, co-founder of [URBN Playground](#), which has run amenity programs in more than 65 buildings in the tristate area and provides office services like shipping and notarizing and can even help arrange in-apartment tech support. “Now lounges are being used for work.”

“It’s a shift in the way space in buildings is being used,” Mr. Brutus added.

The shift had already begun to take place before the pandemic. As companies in certain sectors offered employees flexibility about where they could get their work done, developers of rental and condo buildings responded by adding co-working areas in their amenity offerings.



The co-working space at 33 Bond Street, a rental building in Downtown Brooklyn, has a variety of seating areas, including booths. TF Cornerstone

TF Cornerstone included a co-working space with diner-like booths at 33 Bond Street, a rental building that opened in Downtown Brooklyn in 2017. Out on a terrace, there's a solar-powered table with built-in USB charging.

The co-working space in [the Smile](#), a new rental building in East Harlem, was one of the features that attracted David R. Jolly, who moved into a one-bedroom apartment with his boyfriend in March. The space has a long wooden table, sofas and counters with bar stools.



At the Smile, a rental building in East Harlem, the co-working space has a long wooden table that has proved popular with tenants. Noise

Mr. Jolly, 31, had been accustomed to working from home for his job at a public relations agency. But he has been using the Smile's co-working space daily.

"I call it my office," he said.

In some buildings work offerings are getting more elaborate.



The co-working area at 208 Delancey, a condo building under construction on the Lower East Side, will have a conference room behind a wall of fluted glass, as shown in this rendering. V1

At [208 Delancey](#), a 12-story, 85-unit condo under construction on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, a co-working space will have a 160-square-foot conference room behind a wall of fluted glass.

Farther uptown, [Skyline Developers](#) will devote two floors to work in a 96-unit rental project planned for West 55th Street. Construction will begin in the fall, said Orin Wilf, Skyline's founder and president.

The project, which is being designed by Morris Adjmi, will have private offices and conference rooms on one floor and a co-working space on another.

"Originally we were going to have a smaller office space downstairs," said Mr. Wilf. Instead, his team relocated the space upstairs and expanded it, moving a gaming room downstairs and eliminating a maker space for art projects like painting or working with clay.

The developer and architect have also tweaked the layout of loft-style units to include home offices, shaving a little space off the kitchens and living rooms to do so.

Across town at the Waldorf Astoria, the landmark Art Deco hotel where the top 33 floors of guest rooms are being converted to 375 condos starting at \$1.8 million, residents will have use of a co-working lounge, private offices, board room and meeting rooms in what will be called [The Empire Club](#). The project is expected to be completed in 2023.

But work areas in existing buildings have already been put to good use. At [Hamilton Cove](#), a rental building in Weehawken, N.J., the co-working space even became an incubator for a new business during the pandemic.

Three childhood friends, employed in different fields, live in the building and had been meeting in the space daily to keep each other company while working remotely. But they realized there was nowhere nearby to get a really good cup of coffee.

“We all had Keurig machines in our apartments,” said Joe Graziano, age 27, one of the trio. “But if we wanted cold brew, we figured we would have to go all the way to Hoboken and back,” a 40-minute round-trip walk.

In partnership with another childhood friend, Aaron Smith, they started a pop-up [coffee cart company](#). The four friends wrote up a business plan and chipped in money. Mr. Smith, who runs the operation, built the company’s two carts from scratch.

So far the carts have popped up in three apartment buildings in Weehawken, after which they became permanent fixtures in the lobbies of two of the buildings, one of them Hamilton Cove. The fledgling company also has added a coffee bike with coffee and tea on tap.

“The idea is to grow organically and see what happens,” said Mr. Graziano.

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