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With embrace of remote work, accounting firms rethink office space needs

By Skyler Frazer

As companies continue to reevaluate their need for office space amid the widespread adoption of hybrid or remote work, many of the state's accounting and advisory firms are doing the same, and some have already begun to make changes.

CPA firm MahoneySabol plans to reduce its Glastonbury office space by about 40%, and CohnReznick said it will reevaluate its existing Connecticut offices, including in downtown Hartford, when leases start to come up for renewal.

The moves align with what companies from myriad other sectors are doing.

In August, UnitedHealthcare and Prudential Financial finalized deals to significantly scale back their office footprints in Hartford. UnitedHealthcare is downsizing from its current approximately

350,000-square-foot office footprint in CityPlace I to around 57,000 square feet of space on two floors.

Prudential Financial currently occupies 250,000 square feet at the 280 Trumbull St. office tower, but is reducing its footprint to around 25,000 square feet on one floor, according to the company.

Also last month, health, wealth and investment company Voya Financial put its 470,000-square-foot Windsor office complex on the market, with plans to significantly shrink its footprint in the building, as it embraces a hybrid work model.

American companies' embrace of hybrid or remote work was reflected in a May survey conducted by business consulting giant McKinsey & Co., which found that 58% of the 25,000 American workers queried reported having the opportunity to work from home at least one day a week, while 35% said they had the option to work remotely five days a week.

Of job holders in the United States, 58 percent—the equivalent of 92 million people—say they can work remotely at least part of the time.

Availability of remote-work options, % of employed respondents (n = 13,896)¹



Note: Figures may not sum, because of rounding.

¹Includes respondents who answered "I don't know" (1%).

²Of 158,105,000 employed people; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Apr 2022.

Source: McKinsey American Opportunity Survey Spring 2022

And 87% of workers said when they have the chance to work flexibly, they take it, according to the survey.

MahoneySabol has about 50 employees based out of two offices, in Glastonbury and Essex. MahoneySabol co-founder Michael H. Sabol said his firm is in the process of downsizing its 14,000-square-foot space at 180 Glastonbury Blvd., by about 40% and changing how the remaining space is set up to be more conducive to a social work environment.

Re-imagining the office

“We’re doing some interior work to open up and have more areas that maybe resemble a living room where you’ll have couches, comfortable chairs and tables, as well as having a lot more bright light, outside light areas for people to work together at conference tables,” Sabol said. “I think we’re trying to make it a little bit more enjoyable at the office and comfortable to bring people in.”

Sabol said his company is about 80% remote and 20% in the office. It’s a challenge, he added, finding a way to bridge the comforts of remote work with the perks of being in the office. Employees like the benefits of at-home work, including the reduced commutes and ability to dress more casually and comfortably, he said.

People in the United States who are younger, more educated, or have higher incomes tend to have more options to work remotely.

Remote-work availability,¹ % of employed respondents (n = 13,896)

Of those with remote-work options, average days per week worked remotely (n = 8,431)



Melissa Ferrucci, Connecticut office managing partner for national accounting firm CohnReznick, said her firm has been operating in a remote and hybrid model and has no plans to mandate employees to return to the office. CohnReznick has about 200 employees working out of two Connecticut offices — one in

downtown Hartford (at the Metro Center, 350 Church St.) and another in Stamford.

She said upper management is assessing all the firm's offices, not just here in Connecticut, based on their need for space as leases expire.

"We have metrics and data in place to determine how many people we have in the office every day, and as we analyze that data it's going to be very useful in making that decision when our lease is set to expire here," Ferrucci said. "But I do think it's really important to make sure you retain the appropriate amount of space you need so people have a place to go for that live interaction."

Erica Marcantonio, human resources senior manager for national accounting firm Marcum LLP, said her firm operates differently during the summer, with many employees taking off Fridays and using more paid time off while the business is outside of its peak season. Regardless, hybrid work has become the norm.

"It's something at Marcum that we've had for quite a while," Marcantonio said. "We've had a hybrid model and remote workforce since before COVID."

She said most of Marcum's workforce is hybrid and "not many" are fully in the office. Marcantonio said the firm has between 270 to

300 employees based out of three Connecticut offices in Hartford, New Haven and Greenwich.

Marcantonio said Marcum has also reevaluated its need for physical office space in recent years as its employees become more flexible, but reducing space in Connecticut isn't on the docket. In fact, she said Marcum has looked at finding more space in New Haven because the office has been so busy. About 80% of associates regularly come into that office, she said.

"In our Connecticut offices, our associates like being in the offices for the most part," Marcantonio said.

Important mix

Sabol said there's a lot of learning that goes on in his firm, and an office environment is important for training. A focus on conference table discussions and in-person feedback between employees is key, he said.

"We're all trying to make a great environment for the workers to enjoy coming in and find it useful and rewarding. ...Being together and working at the office or at a client is enormously beneficial for efficiencies, beneficial for learning and those are very important," Sabol said.

Marcantonio emphasized that hybrid work allows employees to have a better work-life balance by eliminating time eaters like daily

commutes. Ferrucci agreed, and said productivity wasn't down even with that better balance.

"I think the flexibility and the work-life balance that people have experienced through COVID, and currently, is much better than it historically was," Ferrucci said.

Still, all three firms said associates are encouraged to come into the office a few times a week, or when they want in-person collaboration or a better feel of company "culture."

"There's definitely a benefit to being in the office sometime," Marcantonio said.

Ferrucci said CohnReznick's leadership put an emphasis on involvement in their employees' career, so meetups and events are important to the company's culture.

"We have a golf league and activities to bring people together, because I think even though we're in a hybrid environment we are a people business," Ferrucci said.

Client interaction is also important for accounting and advisory firms, Sabol said, so some type of in-person aspect is key.

"So much more gets accomplished when you're sitting there having a conversation with a client —all those intangibles that you don't get from a remote environment," Sabol said.