

Two prominent Norwalk office buildings under consideration for apartment conversions, city planner says

By **Alexander Soule**, Staff Writer
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The 101 Merritt 7 office building in Norwalk, Connecticut, on Tuesday. Commercial real estate broker Choyce Peterson reported in July that 101 Merritt 7 and the adjacent 201 Merritt 7 are no longer available for new tenants, raising questions on their future use.

A pair of prominent office buildings in Norwalk could become apartments if the owner pushes ahead with discussions after moving major tenants elsewhere in the office park.

Broker Choyce Peterson reported 101 Merritt 7 and 201 Merritt 7 are no longer available for lease, in a [mid-year report](#) on commercial real estate in lower Fairfield County. The two buildings are located in the Merritt 7 Corporate Park, which Norwalk [appraised last year](#) at \$150 million.

The office park's owner is exploring apartments for the two buildings in the northern portion of the office park, confirmed Bryan Baker, principal planner in Norwalk Planning & Zoning Department, in response to a CT Insider query.

"They came in and met with us," Baker told CT Insider on Tuesday. "They are definitely looking at converting two of the buildings to residential, but nothing's been submitted to our office."

Early this year, Datto parent Kaseya took a new lease at 501 Merritt 7 for less than 30,000 square feet of space, according to the commercial real estate firm Newmark — a big reduction from its former office at 101 Merritt 7. Multiple smaller organizations continue to list offices at 101 Merritt 7 on their websites.

Merritt 7 has also lost corporate tenants over the years, including [Frontier Communications which moved its headquarters](#) to Texas; and [FactSet which moved to the nearby Towers office complex](#).

"The lower Fairfield County office market is increasingly complex these days," said John Hannigan, principal of Choyce Peterson, in commentary accompanying his firm's report. "Behind the scenes, several buildings are being auctioned for sale, others are being withdrawn from the market for adaptive reuse, and still others — previously taken off the market — are now being reintroduced."

Owner Merritt 7 Venture could not be reached immediately Tuesday on any plans for 101 Merritt 7 and 201 Merritt 7, and the larger complex.

Merritt 7 Venture has landed a number of new leases in the past few years for other buildings, including [Terex](#) and [Commonfund which is relocating from Wilton](#). Hearst Connecticut Media, publisher of CT Insider, has had its main office at 301 Merritt 7 since 2017.

Others [have moved within the complex](#) including [Xerox](#), which had its headquarters at 201 Merritt 7 before the company moved two doors over to 401 Merritt 7. Other 201 Merritt 7 tenants moving within the larger office park include RX US, the convention organizer formerly known as Reed Exhibitions whose events include New York Comic Con; and [ginger beer and soda brand Reed's](#), which landed at 501 Merritt 7 after relocating to Norwalk from California seven years ago.

In July, [Gov. Ned Lamont signed legislation](#) intended to make it easier for owners of commercial properties to convert them to residential use. Wilton [has seen several such proposals](#) the past several years, including for the former [Commonfund building](#) along the Danbury Road where Toll Brothers is planning a new apartment complex.

Also [being readied for a residential conversion](#) is [535 Connecticut Ave.](#), close to where [Wegman's opened its first Connecticut supermarket](#) last week, which Choyce Peterson confirmed is no longer available for office leases.

Norwalk has seen [an apartment boom for the past decade](#), amid [an extended stretch of higher rents](#) landlords have been able to command.

Building & Land Technology had been planning a massive new development called North Seven along the Metro-North commuter rail corridor opposite Merritt 7, only [to withdraw an application](#) for an initial apartment building after a city requirement to bury utility lines. Separately, BLT has pursued permitting approval to convert the former Pitney Bowes headquarters in Stamford's South End to a residential complex.

The Lamont administration has been working to interest more developers in building residential complexes near rail stations, including at the [Merritt 7 stop of Metro-North](#) where the state funded construction of a [pedestrian bridge](#) linking the complex directly to a new station there.

Merritt 7 Corporate Park was built in phases by [the late developer Albert Phelps](#) during the [heyday of suburban office development](#) in Connecticut, starting in 1980 with construction of 101 Merritt 7. The building at 201 Merritt 7 was completed two years later, and the final building at 601 Merritt 7 in 2002.

Merritt 7 Venture LLC's investors include Albert D. Phelps Inc., which lists a Fairfield address as its main office, and the New York State Teacher's Retirement System.

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