



Sandy McNair

## What Drives Office Rental Rates?



There is an answer and it is not as simple as you may have hoped for nor as complex as you may have feared. Success in real estate, including commercial real estate, is based on a wide range of factors impacting at different points in the business cycle. An overview of these key factors along with their dynamics follows.

**1 Business Confidence:** Leading indicators include changes in GDP, population, employment and office jobs.

**2 Migration:** Can be toward or away from downtown, Class A or B, newer or older buildings, single or multiple locations.

**3 Velocity:** Deal flow or the pace of leasing activity is a key driver of both rent increases and declines. Even in markets going sideways or softening, velocity will be a key factor driving rents up or down. A tight market with very low velocity will see declines in rent, whereas a soft market with high velocity will likely see rent increases.

**4 Density:** How occupants use space changes over time. Changes in how much space is used per person drives rent by impacting the demand for space, just as much as new construction and demolition impact supply.

**5 Absorption:** Changes in occupied or vacant (unoccupied) area indicate momentum, be it stronger, weaker or static. This measure is the delayed result of the four leading indicators listed above.

**6 Tenant Options:** Occupants' needs vary widely – small, medium, large and very large-sized firms need different amounts of space. Changes in the number of options available for lease for each size of occupant drive rents for each sector of the market. At different points in the business cycle and in different markets the number of options changes dramatically. When tenants have few options of a size appropriate to them, the rental rates are impacted, even if there are lots of options either much larger or much smaller.

**7 Availability Rates:** The total amount of space available for lease in a specific building or portfolio can be very different from the overall market and can impact rental rates specifically, but not generally. The averages are dangerous and can mislead rather than inform, especially as the denominators grow larger. Specifics and details matter.

**8 Sub-let Space:** As distinct from space that is available directly from the landlord, sub-let space has a finite (and usually, but not always shorter) term. The financial stability and urgency of the sub-landlord and the quality of the

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improvements in place, along with the term, all play a key role in driving rental rates for sub-lets. If a specific market is flooded with sub-let options of various sizes and durations, the direct leasing rental rates can be impaired materially.

**9 New Supply:** Excess new supply has historically resulted in steep and multi-year declines in rental rates. In extreme cases, significant new supply is unintentionally timed to arrive at a downturn in business confidence, velocity and absorption, resulting in a spike in tenant options across all sizes, availability rates and sub-let space. Alternatively, when markets are in balance, the new supply is met with demand for new space and its distinct attributes. Here, the key metric becomes the backfill – the space left behind by the occupants who moved into the new buildings. At the bottom of the chain may be some buildings that are approaching the end of their lives and should be replaced rather than improved.

**10 Energy Consumption and Costs:** Not all buildings, owners and managers are the same; they have different attributes and different strategies. As we look ahead, the cost of energy and electricity, in particular, is expected to increase sharply – perhaps even soar. Less efficient buildings will have much higher costs and this will ultimately impact vacancy and rental rates. Remember, even among the very best buildings in each city, there is a first quartile and fourth quartile for energy efficiency and the operating cost delta between first and fourth is going to expand rapidly. Energy efficiency will become a key segment in the market, driving very different rental rates for those who have invested wisely in their assets, programs and people.

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## President & CSO's Report **Business Tax Redux**

By Bill Partridge, CAE, President & CSO

It happened in early 2000. It happened again in mid-2003. And yet again in 2008. Here it is, two-thirds the way through 2011 and the elimination of business tax is back on the table once again.

One more time, the non-residential taxpayers are faced with a sizable tax increase should the \$200+ million be transferred to those non-residential taxpayers. To say the property tax system is complicated is an understatement. To say people would look for ways to simplify taxation is rather obvious. But most would want to pay less in taxes too.

Doing away with business tax would simplify the tax system simply by getting rid of one additional layer of taxation. Some seek elimination of the tax altogether, but that is just a non-starter: The city will just not relinquish that amount of revenue.

BOMA's issues are very precise and solutions to these issues have been elusive. To be fair, this time around we do not have the benefit of knowing exactly what the city may be proposing. We will have to wait and see. This fact alone speaks volumes about the city and its

efforts to affect transparency, openness and accessibility of process. That is another topic entirely.

Simply put, building owners need real answers to the matters of:

- Adjusting for vacancy
- Adjusting for vacant land and buildings under construction
- How to address gross leases
- How to address fixed cost leases, typical in retail situations

While the interest is to simplify the tax regime, a concept to which BOMA is agreeable, there is always a downside. One significant downside to consider is the fact that business owners will lose the right to appeal a portion of their taxes. There would be no business tax to appeal assuming it would be bundled into property taxes.

It is doubtful that there would be any meaningful administrative savings through harmonization either, although we will look to the city to define potential savings. In the past we were told by the city that administrative changes would be in the order of \$1 to \$2 million. That is less than one per cent of the present business tax. Further, we



were told that staff engaged in business tax would be reassigned to other work within the department. The personnel costs will shift to other areas and generate no savings at all.

After meetings with the city, we understand a draft report will be available towards the end of August. This will trigger an industry meeting in the first week of September to fully assess the implications to the business community and determine whether or not BOMA will support this latest attempt to simplify the tax regime.

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- Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium, Alberta Infrastructure, Level 3
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- Dalhousie Station, Bentall Kennedy (Canada) LP, Level 3
- North Hill Centre, Bentall Kennedy (Canada) LP, Level 3
- Canterra Tower, Oxford Properties Group, Level 4



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## New BOMI Graduates

BOMA Canada's affiliated organization, the Building Owners and Managers Institute (BOMI) Canada, produces materials for the Real Property Administrator (RPA) and the Facilities Management Administrator (FMA) designation programs. Congratulations to the recent Calgary and area graduates of these BOMI programs.

Jacelyn McCartney, RPA  
 Melanie Matthews, RPA

Bonnie Cooke, RPA  
 Russell Rousseau, FMA

## Welcome new BOMA Calgary members!

**Leyla Delici**, Alberta Glass Company Ltd.

**Lee Thiessen**, MNP LLP

**Darren Zabel**, Albrite Wholesale Lighting Distributors

**Janine Mitchell**, Newell Rubbermaid

**Brad Flock**, ComplyWorks Ltd.

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Robert Overbeck, Bentall Kennedy LP, accepts the BOMA BEST Level 3 Certificates for Dalhousie Station and North Hill Centre.



Greg Condon and William Phan of Tonko Realty Advisors accept their BOMA BEST Level 1 Certificate for Great Plains 1 - Kraft.



Peter MacHardy, BOMA Chair presents Melynda McDiarmid, Marvin Adolph and Mustaque Hossain, GWL Realty Advisors the BOMA BEST Level 3 Certificate for Stantec Centre.



Rod Olsen, Connie Wallace and Brenda McManus, Bentall Kennedy LP accept their BOMA BEST Level 1 Certificate for Commerce Centre.



Garth Adams, Melissa Gorman and Laural Unwin, GWL Realty Advisors accept their BOMA BEST Level 3 Certificate for Watermark Tower.



Don Fairgrieve-Park, Bentall Kennedy LP flips a mean pancake at the BOMA Stampede Breakfast



Chris Howard and Wendy Cardell enjoy the summer at day at the BOMA Stampede Breakfast.



Victoria Shearer Gryffin, Cygnus Signs, Steve Pollard, Cleanmax, David McCallum, and Cory Stichel, both Edgewood Matting at BOMA Stampede Breakfast



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# One Culture

## How one company decided to make their corporate culture a priority

By Lia Robinson, BOMA Staff

Corporate culture is a critical part of attracting and retaining employees; it also affects your ability to gain and keep clients. Some companies likely believe their corporate culture is already clear; others may have policies that help to define it. For many it remains an elusive part of their organization. One company decided to make their corporate culture a priority and they share some tips on what it takes to make it work. BOMA Calgary News (BCN) sat down with Bill Arnott, executive vice president and chief operating officer at Skyline Roofing Ltd., to find out how it all came together.

### BCN: What would you say is your leadership philosophy?

Bill Arnott: Show your staff that you care about them. Do not put them in situations where they will fail or have them do something you would not do. You can be a manager but that does not mean you are a leader. Leadership comes first.

### BCN: What prompted you to bring clarity to your corporate culture?

BA: There were a number of areas in which we needed to get a lot better at. 1. Do not accept unacceptable behaviour within our ranks. 2. We realized that this must be a place where people earn their place on our team. 3. Be

more focused on the service requirements of our clients. 4. Hold all of our people – including us the executive – accountable both for serving the needs of our clients and serving the needs of our employees and colleagues. Break down all of the silos and become one Skyline!

### BCN: What did it take to make this happen?

BA: It took eight to 10 months of long days and discussions to understand and communicate the vision for the company. We worked with a development coach to assist the executive team in formulating the vision for the organization and how best to implement and articulate that vision. A coach is only as important as the company and its employees want him or her to be. No matter the size, the corporation's executive must all be onside with bringing in a coach and trust that the coach is there for one reason – either fix what needs fixing, and there might be some huge repairs required, or just do some fine-tuning. The one thing that is really important to note is that if a corporation does not have a clear culture laid out and is looking to put one in place, it will take no less than one year to build and along the way there could be a number of casualties. Once a corporation starts the process they must ensure they stay the course. It is important to note, that to build a clear and precise culture the organization must have a strong vision.

### BCN: What is that vision or culture?

BA: The Skyline vision is "Setting New Standards in Service" and also includes key phrases that support this vision. As well, the culture is defined through phrasing under the



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three sections of We Are Accountable, We Are a Team and We Are Optimistic. We have this on placards around the office, and it is a great tool to have for interviews. The culture revolves around the employee. It is the job of the executive team to serve the employees as they will then share that culture with the clients. The team is the most essential part of our organization and we are all accountable to each other.

**BCN: What would you say are the greatest benefits you have achieved from having a strong corporate culture?**

BA: Low employee turnover. We have committed staff who go above and beyond to get the job done. Our vision has become their vision and they are an engaged part of the team. By being clear about our standards and expectations for our employees we are attracting quality people. When you empower your team, good things happen. As well, we are able to deliver on-time service and high quality to our clients and that is what differentiates us from others. We train



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**BCN: What would you recommend companies do if they want to redefine or reinforce their corporate culture?**

BA: You need a strong, committed executive. The message must come directly from the owner or ownership group. I can tell you that once the vision and culture has been built the majority of the employee group will applaud it as long as upper management lives it. Take the time to understand the vision of the company you want to be. Make sure you are willing to walk the talk, because if you come across as hypocritical, it will not work. You must coach your staff on what you believe yourself. Identify and take care of the front line first. Empower your employees, do not micro manage; teach them to be assertive and set attainable goals for themselves.

**BCN: What's next for Skyline Roofing?**

BA: With our corporate culture set, we will begin re-branding and continue to expand and bring our business units together. We will continue to offer service quality to our clients and to our team.

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# Clear Thinking Needs to be Order of the Day

By David Parker

Change is a word we use over and over again; we change our minds, our clothes, our diets, and often our tune. For the most part it tells of something positive as we perhaps ponder a decision and then correct it to what we believe will be for the better.

After much deliberation and pressure we are changing our provincial leader, who seems to be making all kinds of decisions before he leaves office that are more in keeping with someone trying to get re-elected.

Health care has been a thorn in everyone's side, but he has announced the spending of a ton of money on new hospitals – as well as a multimillion-dollar museum in Edmonton.

But it's the changes that have had me scratching my head. Who would have thought two years ago after stating the deal was dead, we would have the same premier quoted as saying the ring road through the Tsuu T'ina reserve is now, "Looking pretty good"?

And after much aggravation and a lot of real concern, the decision that would have turfed two dozen residents of the Colonel Belcher Care Centre has been overturned thanks to a change of heart between the owner and the province's health authority.

*Health care has been a thorn in everyone's side, but he has announced the spending of a ton of money on new hospitals...*



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This city has gone through a number of changes already this year that we hope will be for the good.

Chief, of course, has to be the 'do we/don't we' airport tunnel. Personally I am not convinced of the need, but at least we have a mayor who is looking to the future and not just for today. He agrees it may not be a necessity right now but says this is the time to build it.

I remember we thought the building of Little Ralph's Train (LRT) was a huge chunk out of city coffers at the time – but thank goodness we went ahead with it.

Then there was the flip-flop on paid parking at LRT stations. Wonder what the cocooned ticket machines cost us?

There have been recent changes in private sector development plans that make a lot of sense to me.

Birchwood Properties, new owner of the triangular piece of land at 24th Avenue and Crowchild Trail NW, has changed the previous design of an office complex into residential apartments. A wise decision as the closeness to the University of Calgary and two hospitals, and being almost next door to the Banff Trail LRT Station, should make for quick sales.

Another reversal will take place at the much distressed site on 10th Avenue and 4th Street SW where the problematic condominium towers development has been purchased by Centron Group with plans to apply for re-zoning to build an office tower instead.

City hall will no doubt be thankful to have that headache solved at last.

Changes usually come as a result of wrong judgments, and I do hope that a number of important decisions to be made in the not too distant future will be the result of the right research.

One that city hall must ponder soon is the location of a new downtown library. I am a big fan of the library and a huge supporter of public buildings being showcases of good design.

We are told that the choice is down to two sites and one that keeps cropping up is East Village. It would seem to me that after all of the work that has gone into reclaiming that area it should be a no brainer to sell lots to the private sector. It was redeveloped on the assumption that it would attract buildings that would generate lots of taxes – libraries don't pay them.

If that decision is made then I trust that corporate properties would sell the current site across from city hall – I would hate to see it turned into a bicycle parking lot.

And we await with much interest the decisions to be made on a much-needed larger convention centre that would enable us to attract bigger events, as well as some rethinking as to the future of Alberta College of Art and Design.

The latter half of 2011 requires some clear thinking time. Like "where will the next downtown office tower and hotel be built?"

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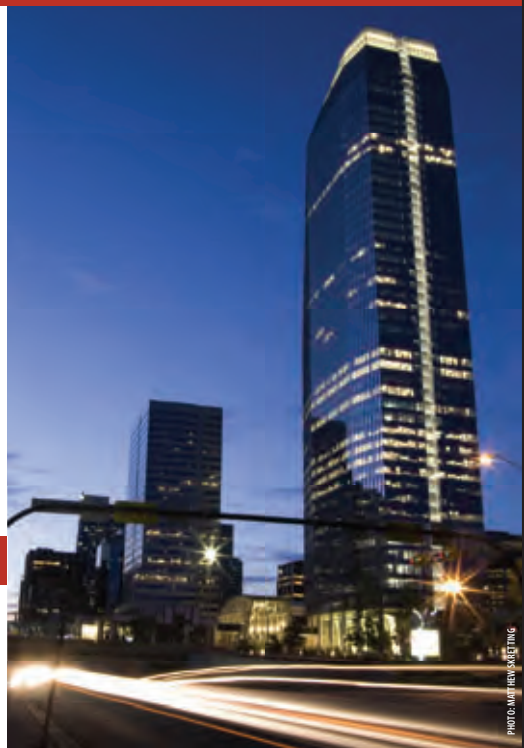


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