



MODERN WORKPLACE

▶ GIG WORKERS, freelancers, moonlighters, and independent contractors now account for more than a third of the U.S. workforce, and 42 million Americans are expected to be self-employed by 2020. These statistics reflect not only the swelling Millennial workforce, but the increasing importance workers of all generations are placing on career flexibility, engagement, and independence.

While many of these workers have home offices, more and more are finding themselves drawn to collaborative workspaces. Emergent Research, a research and consulting firm that focuses on small businesses, predicts there will be over 6,000 co-working spaces in the U.S. by 2022, a 116 percent increase from 2015.

That steep upward trend is apparent in the Berkshires as well. At least four collaborative workspaces are under construction, and four

SHARED SPACES ARE HOME TO MANY MILLENNIALS AND SMALL BUSINESSES

—By—

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■ *“Framework is a feature of the economy, not the driver of it,” says Tim Burke, managing director of Mill Town Capital, an investment company that owns the co-working space in Pittsfield.*

others, including Framework, a 5,000-square-foot shared office space on North Street in Pittsfield, are up-and-running.

“We’re trying to bring more young working professionals downtown,” says Tim Burke, managing director of Mill Town Capital, an investment company that owns the co-working space. “Self-employed, remote workers and freelancers in this generation want social interaction, not isolation.”

Framework’s 30 members run the gamut, from realtors and lawyers to web developers. An advantage of co-working spaces—which typically provide high-speed internet, conference rooms, office equipment, and shared desks—is the potential for collaboration. But members tend to “work alone together,” says Burke. “No crossover work or clustering is happening here. The Berkshires don’t have the population density for that yet.”

Unlike Framework, the Berkshire Design Center on Pittsfield Road in Lenox does not have communal workspace. It caters to growing startups that need dedicated offices yet crave shared amenities. In addition to the first-floor kitchen, lounge, and gym, a large conference room can be found upstairs in the offices of Allegrone Companies (pictured left), the firm that constructed and owns the building.

“We expanded our business, added employees, and created a progressively designed space that attracts new businesses to Lenox,” explains vice president Louis Allegrone. At least half the building is lit by daylight, and large panes of glass separate each suite, creating an open environment.

“For the right tenant, that feel matters,” says Jeff Lynch, founder and president of Idle Smart, a six-year-old transportation technology company and occupant of the Berkshire Design Center. Lynch also was attracted to the building’s amenities, adaptability, and community mission. “It was important to us to find a home that can grow with us as we add employees.”

Shared-use and co-working spaces are two types of collaborative workspaces that allow users to grow economically.

At the other end of the shared space spectrum are makerspaces and business incubators, which provide access to space as well as specialty equipment, training, and business support. These resources are critical to the formation and growth of an entrepreneurial economy, something that Berkshire leaders are striving to cultivate.

The Patrick and Baker administrations both included the expansion of collaborative workspaces in their economic development agendas. Since MassDevelopment’s Collaborative Workspace Program was launched in 2014, more than \$370,000 has been awarded to seven Berkshire-based projects, including the Studio for Integrated Craft in Housatonic. Jamie and Asher Israelow are using their \$147,572 grant to transform the former Country Curtains factory into a hub for designers and artists.

“In my industry, there’s a spirit of collaboration because we’re all better together,” says Asher, a furniture designer. “What’s unique about the Berkshires is the creative economy has fostered that mentality here.”

The Israelows will operate their own businesses out of the space and open up a portion of their studios to other

artists in makerspace fashion. They are also inviting local creative companies and collectives to be tenants. “We want to be self-sustaining,” says Jamie. “We’re trying to figure out how to make this plan work lease-wise.”

Last year, the national average co-working space fee was \$350 per month. Berkshire workspaces are much more affordable, from \$150 per month for standard membership at Cloud85 in North Adams to \$235 per month for a dedicated desk at Framework. Reaching sustainable membership levels, however, can still be problematic. Makers’ Mill, a fiber and printmaking makerspace, closed in September 2018 after three years in downtown North Adams. The organization stated it was facing “financial constraints” despite more than 180 aggregate members and support from multiple institutions.

Collaborative workspaces, which are businesses themselves, need to be well-planned to serve an incipient entrepreneurial community. In hindsight, Burke says he would have done more market validation research before opening Framework, although the business is profitable and private offices are consistently sold out.

WORKSPACES THAT ARE OPEN

- ▶ Berkshire Design Center, Lenox, shared-use space
- ▶ Cloud85, North Adams, co-working space
- ▶ Framework, Pittsfield, co-working space
- ▶ The Werkshires, West Stockbridge, shared-use space

WORKSPACES IN DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ Housatonic Elementary School Project, Housatonic, co-working space
- ▶ 789 South Main Street, Great Barrington, co-working space
- ▶ Studio for Integrated Craft, Housatonic, shared-use/makerspace
- ▶ Greylock WORKS, North Adams, shared-use/business incubator
- ▶ Berkshire Innovation Center, Pittsfield, business incubator

