

# From Lord & Taylor to lab coats: Three former Boston-area locations will be converted for life science

Owner of shuttered department stores aiming to ride Boston's biotech boom.

By [Catherine Carlock](#) Globe Staff, Updated July 7, 2022, 9:57 a.m.



The former Lord & Taylor at the Burlington Mall could soon be converted to lab space. SGA ARCHITECTS

Plans are in the works to convert three former outposts of one of America's most well-known department stores into — what else? — lab space.

The real estate arm of Hudson's Bay Co., a retail holding company that also owns Saks Fifth Avenue, is converting the shuttered Lord & Taylor locations at the Natick Mall, the Burlington Mall, and the South Shore Plaza in Braintree into

space designed to house life-science companies. The facilities will each span about 120,000 square feet and be ready for tenants to move in by the end of next year.

It's the latest in a [sweep of conversions](#) aiming to serve the region's booming life-science industry — though many have been proposals to convert office buildings, not necessarily retail space, into labs and other life-science-oriented uses. But the department stores' physical infrastructure, including ceiling heights, high-bay loading docks, and abundant parking, make them “absolutely perfect for lab buildings,” said John Boyle, executive vice chair of Cushman & Wakefield, who advised Hudson's Bay on the deal.

Beyond the physical infrastructure, Boyle said, malls and their surrounding areas have built-in amenities such as restaurants, retail, and hotels that are appealing to life-science tenants, along with abundant on-site parking.

Also appealing: the lesser rent in those suburban locales compared to the urban cores of Boston and Cambridge.

“Life-science companies are examining: where do we want to be, and what is the appropriate expense?” Boyle said. “As it relates to urban, walkable amenities that are affordable — it's a short list.”

Hudson's Bay Co. owns, or co-owns, about 40 million square feet of real estate across North America. That includes many, though not all, of Lord & Taylor's former locations, which the company owns or holds long-term leases on separately from the malls they are attached to. Hudson's Bay sold the Lord & Taylor brand in 2019, and the company that acquired it filed for bankruptcy in August of 2020. By early 2021 all its local stores had shuttered.

When it came to deciding the future of the old Lord & Taylors in the Greater Boston suburbs — at a time when the future of office and retail space is still so uncertain following the COVID-19 pandemic — lab space made sense in many ways, said Jerrold Bermingham, senior vice president at Hudson's Bay Co. Properties and Investments.

“We look at real estate for the long term, and we see ... life sciences as not only a really strong generator for demand right now, but for the future” in Boston, Bermingham said.

Hudson’s Bay expects to get local approvals this year, and start work around September. The conversion could take up to 15 months to finish. Bermingham declined to share the cost of the redevelopment, but did say the project will be “a very high end, significant improvement package” that includes upgrades to mechanical equipment and utility infrastructure.

“We see the importance of this work and the life science industry, and we love the fact that we can provide people with the kind of amenities that they would get nowhere else,” Bermingham said. “That will help employers to retain their employees and help them to recruit.”

One Lord & Taylor location not included in the Hudson’s Bay portfolio is the shuttered Prudential Center store in Back Bay, which Boston Properties owns. Dick’s Sporting Goods Inc. is exploring experiential retail at the location, the Boston Business Journal [reported last week](#). Lord & Taylor had operated at the Pru since the late 1960s and occupies almost a full city block on Boylston Street.

The flagship Lord & Taylor on New York City’s Fifth Avenue, meanwhile, has also changed hands. Hudson’s Bay sold the iconic property at 424 Fifth Ave. to co-working operator WeWork in 2017 for \$850 million; tech behemoth Amazon later bought the building in March 2020 for \$978 million, according to property records.

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