

NYC Brick & Mortar: Less Space Per Lawyer

Share us on: By [Andrew McIntyre](#)

<https://www.law360.com/articles/1064787/nyc-brick-mortar-less-space-per-lawyer>



[NYC Brick & Mortar: Less Space Per Lawyer - Law360](#)

www.law360.com

Law firms in New York have been slowly shrinking their amount of space per attorney over the past two years as firms look to cut costs and get rid of space that's become obsolete in the digital age. This is the second in a four-part series that looks at how law firms in New York are addressing the question of brick-and-mortar space.

Law360 (September 4, 2018, 12:34 PM EDT) -- Law firms in New York have been slowly shrinking their amount of space per attorney over the past two years as firms look to cut costs and get rid of space that's become obsolete in the digital age, according to a recent survey by Law360 of both small and large firms in New York.



[Fross Zelnick](#)'s square footage per lawyer in New York has declined each year since 2016, from 1,109 square feet two years ago to 859 square feet as of June 1, 2018. (Photo: Fross Zelnick)

As firms reach the end of their leases and look to either renew or move to a different space, they are increasingly eyeing a smaller footprint per lawyer in part by reducing storage and library space. In some cases, the larger strategy of taking less space per lawyer is partially arrived at by shrinking office sizes for partners and associates, although the move to lessen the law firm footprint is broader than that.

Law360 surveyed a range of law firms that have New York offices, from boutiques to the nation's largest firms, and firms of all sizes provided data. Based on responses received, from a group of 10 law firms, square footage per lawyer has been slowly falling over the past two years.

As of June 1, 2016, average square footage per lawyer among the firms that participated in the survey was 875 square feet, while two years later, that number had fallen to 829 square feet. Those averages don't factor in office size for survey respondent [Culhane Meadows PLLC](#), which operates in New York entirely on a cloud basis and therefore ostensibly has zero square feet per lawyer.

Average square footage per lawyer among the firms that participated in the survey actually jumped from June 2016 to June 2017, from 875 square feet to 954 square feet, but that jump was largely a function of [Nixon Peabody LLP](#) losing lawyers at its 100,950-square-foot office, pushing the firm's square footage per lawyer there to 1,427 square feet a year ago.

Among the departures from Nixon Peabody between June 1, 2016, and June 1, 2017, were [Constance Boland](#), a financial services and insurance litigator who left for [Thompson Hine LLP](#); real estate lawyer [Thomas Diorio](#), who moved to [Akerman LLP](#); and tax attorney Alan Cohen, who left Nixon Peabody for [Holland & Knight LLP](#).

Nixon Peabody subsequently shrunk its total footprint to 66,297 square feet, bringing its space per lawyer down to 884 from 1,236 square feet two years earlier. The law firm moved into a new office at 55 W. 46th St. in July of 2017.

In the case of Nixon Peabody, the firm has in part saved on space per lawyer by redesigning common spaces and having walls that can fold out to create various sizes of conference rooms.

"It's been a resounding success. Not only with our clients. [Our lawyers] are proud to come here," said Joe Lynch of Nixon Peabody of the firm's new office in New York.

Fross Zelnick Lehrman & Zissu PC, on the other hand, saw a constant decline in square footage per lawyer over the last two years. In June 2016, the firm had 51,016 total square feet, which worked out to 1,109 square feet per lawyer, while a year later the firm had 41,221 square feet in a new office in Midtown, or 916 square feet per lawyer.

And as of June 2018, the firm had 859 square feet per lawyer in that same 41,221-square-foot space.

That reduction in square footage, both total and per lawyer, has come thanks in part to redesigning office layout by making changes like reducing shelving and storage space. The firm moved to Midtown when its prior lease was coming to a close.

But the firm also hired more lawyers in New York over the past two years, which was also a factor in its reduction in square footage per attorney.

"We've been able to greatly reduce the size of our office space while using a creative and smart design, and not feel cramped. We obviously were able to get rid of a lot of books that we don't need any more," said David Donahue of Fross Zelnick. "There's an ongoing effort to reduce paper files and migrate toward a paperless office, getting rid of files, file cabinets, shelves that hold the books."

"We have an open design at our firm. We got rid of high partitions, cubicles for staff, and went to a more open design. We have glass doors and windows to increase the flow of light throughout our space. It fits with our firm's culture. A collegial culture. An open culture. We bounce ideas off one another," Donahue added.

While law firms not only in New York but across the country are taking less space, firms still have significantly more space per lawyer than do companies in other sectors. Technology and health care companies, by contrast, typically have between 90 and 175 square feet per employee, an executive at [Cushman & Wakefield told Law360](#) late last year.

[Fenwick & West LLP](#) also saw a massive reduction in space per lawyer as the firm increased hiring. Two years ago, the firm did not have a New York office. Last year, the firm had 1,200 square feet per lawyer across 18,000 square feet. And as of June 2016, the firm had lowered that figure to 720 square feet per lawyer, in the same space.

Some firms, though, have found their sweet spot and have not changed over the past two years. [Fox Rothschild LLP](#) has stayed steady at 625 square feet per lawyer, despite moving from 48,500 square feet to 56,133 square feet. The firm added 7,632 square feet to its existing office in 2017.

And [Steptoe & Johnson LLP](#) has remained at 1,069 square feet per lawyer during the period, staying in its 31,000 square feet of space for the entire period.

"As we get closer to the expiration of our lease and we're evaluating new options, we will most certainly take a fresh look at where we are and where we could be," said Mike Miller of Steptoe & Johnson.

[Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr LLP](#), meanwhile, entered the New York market in 2017 with a five-year lease for 6,569 total square feet. The firm took that space in December 2017, and the space works out to 730 square feet per lawyer, which helped to pull the average down.

There have been, though, exceptions to the trend of downsizing.

[Arent Fox LLP's](#) square footage per lawyer rose slightly, from 713 to 791, over the two years, while [Abrams Fensterman Fensterman Eisman Formato Ferrara Wolf & Carone LLP](#) and [Locke Lord LLP](#) saw significant increases, growing from 500 to 750 square feet and 872 to 1,017 square feet, respectively. Law360 will look at these outliers later in this series.

This is the second in a four-part series that looks at how law firms in New York are addressing the question of brick-and-mortar space. The [prior article](#) in the series provided an overview.

--Additional reporting by Bryan Koenig and Dorothy Atkins. Editing by Rebecca Flanagan and Alanna Weissman.