

## Coworking giant WeWork will open second KC location



This rendering shows the second floor of the redesigned Lightwell building at 11th and Main streets in downtown Kansas City.

HOK ARCHITECTS

By [Miranda Davis](#) – Staff Writer, Kansas City Business Journal, July 11, 2019

WeWork, a New York-based coworking company, will lease more than 100,000 square feet in the former City Center Square building in downtown Kansas City, the company announced Thursday.

The move comes six months after New York-based Somera Road Inc. bought the building and [announced plans to revamp the downtown office tower](#), which it is rebranding as Lightwell.

WeWork plans to open the location, its second in the metro, in early December, the *Kansas City Business Journal* has learned.

The company will occupy the third and fourth floors of the 30-story, 657,070-square-foot building at 11th and Main streets.

AREA Real Estate Advisors is the broker, HOK is the architect, and JE Dunn is the general contractor and a partner in Somera Road's improvements.

## **An alignment of style and vision**

[Basel Bataineh](#), vice president at Somera Road, said that the company has a pre-existing relationship with WeWork and that the companies are entering and investing in a lot of similar markets nationwide, including Memphis, Nashville and Kansas City.

When Somera Road finalized the acquisition, Bataineh said it started discussions with WeWork because the coworking company's style was well-aligned with Somera's vision for the project, which includes making the building a magnet for Kansas City's technology companies.

"I think WeWork as a tenant embodies the type of environment that we're trying to create throughout the building," he said.

Somera knew that WeWork's Corrigan Station location was performing very well and that it could need additional space in the market, Bataineh said.

## **Talent retention**

Throughout its 40-market portfolio, Bataineh said Somera hears from tenants that the office and amenities provided by a company influence the talent it can attract in a tight job market.

"A recurring theme we constantly hear is that our real estate is increasingly part of our ability to retain talent," he said.

AREA President [Tim Schaffer](#) said the building offers the amenities tech and marketing companies seek — but on a larger scale that can't be done in the Crossroads Arts District because of the building's size.

"We started to reimagine what this building could be and how it could be transformed into a destination for Kansas City's fastest-growing tech companies," he said.

The location offers proximity to financial and legal companies in the Central Business District, Schaffer said. Because the density of tech companies and marketing firms is so much higher than the accounting firms and law practices that used to dominate Downtown's buildings, it was also crucial to have a location with access to different modes of transportation and multiple parking garages. This type of renovation wouldn't be possible in a suburban location, he said.

Schaffer said certain amenity options on the first and second floor remain in the planning phase, including food and beverage. Bataineh anticipates ramping up construction throughout the rest of this year, with the bulk of visible renovations completed by January.

Both men agreed that having WeWork in the building proves the concept.

"Having WeWork choose Lightwell really validates that Lightwell is a destination for tech companies," Schaffer said.

## **A history with KC**

[Somera Road bought Lightwell for an undisclosed amount](#) from NG City Square LLC, an investment group led by principals [Alex Sassoon](#), a Seattle-based real estate investor, and a pair of New York City-based investors, [David Werner](#) and [Elie Schwartz](#). Somera closed the deal Jan. 8.

Lightwell isn't Somera's first foray into Kansas City. In 2016, the company [bought a four-story office building](#) at 300 Wyandotte St., which previously housed Populous' headquarters. It rebranded the River Market building as 3Y and [embarked on about \\$5 million in improvements](#), including additional tenant parking, a new rooftop space and gathering area, updated lobby and streetscape, and a B-cycle bike-share station.

[WeWork entered the Kansas City market two years ago](#), when it opened its Corrigan Station location at 1828 Walnut St., where it leases roughly 45,000 square feet. WeWork also partnered with Sprint Corp. to launch an update and redesign of its Overland Park campus, [which it unveiled at the end of June](#).

According to a release by the company, WeWork's first member at the Lightwell location will be Volly, a Massachusetts-based marketing and communication firm that works with banks and mortgage lenders.