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Watch Factory Offices defy real estate trends with historic brick-and-beam, river views and campus style

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The historic Watch Factory is not your average mixed-use development. At 400,000 s/f, the development consists of 22 interconnected buildings along the Charles River, originally built over a 50-year period beginning in 1854 by the Waltham Watch Company. Today, the project is in the process of being redeveloped by Berkeley Investments Inc., a strong, local Boston owner. Phase I of the redevelopment offers 160,000 s/f of class A office space along the Charles River walking and bike path with redesigned courtyards, functional outdoor space, a first-class fitness center with showers and lockers, a history exhibit to the Waltham Watch Factory, and convenient on-site parking. In the 18 months since Phase 1 began pre-leasing and just nine months after construction completed, the project has attracted 16 tenants, already leasing 67% of Phase 1 with expectations that the remaining 33% will be leased by the end of 2010.

Illustrating the drawing power and diversity of tenants that are attracted to the Watch Factory, a number of the tenants relocated from other buildings in the Boston area, including Passkey (web-based hotel reservation company) which moved from Quincy, Blitz (a marketing firm) which is leaving Needham, MoreMagic (an application service provider), which is leaving Newton Corner, Wellogic (health care exchange and portal) which relocated from Cambridge, and LittleFoot Energy (energy management consulting) which moved from Somerville. Other companies attracted by the brick-and-beam, loft-style design also include FloDesign Wind Turbine (a wind-turbine design company), software company Mimecast North America, Inc., financial planning and law firms, as well as other advertising companies, web-based firms, and software companies.

In addition to the office space in Phase 1, Phase 2 Watch Factory Lofts, is currently under redevelopment and will provide 96 loft-style apartments in six buildings, a 2,050 s/f cafeteria and a 4,660 s/f restaurant with riverfront dining. Together, Phases 1 and 2 will create the kind of "work, live, play" lifestyle environment that attracts young professionals and creates corporate cultures that foster creativity and productivity, and with nearby universities such as Brandeis, Bentley, University of Massachusetts Waltham and Boston University's Digital Imaging Arts satellite location, there is no shortage of potential renters to target.

The third phase of the project, undergoing analysis, will depend upon market demand, but tentatively, Berkeley plans to add additional apartments in four existing buildings, structured parking and 7,000 s/f of office space in the former central plant building.

Both the office and residential components of the project take full advantage of the town and its location. Waltham is just 10 miles from Boston and has convenient access to major thoroughfares including I-90, I-95 and U.S. Rte. 20, as well as Logan International Airport. The Watch Factory is also a short walk to public transportation, has a shuttle bus that stops at the property and makes stops at area Commuter Rail stops and the Riverside Green Line Station of the MBTA, "Restaurant

Row" and the other amenities that can be found on Waltham's Moody Street.

The high-tech tenant roster and community of young professionals is not surprising. The Watch Factory campus has been on the cutting edge of technological advancement since the Waltham Watch Company became the first company to mass produce a complete watch under one roof, which allowed watches to be sold to a broader population at affordable prices. The property operated as a watch factory until the mid-1950s and then was converted into a multi-tenant office, light manufacturing and warehousing facility. The complex was listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 1989.

The offices at The Watch Factory are currently being marketed by Jack Kerrigan and Dan Krysiak of Grubb & Ellis, Boston.

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