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Elevating roof heights on old industrial properties is luring new warehouse users

Real estate brokers and owners know only too well that the abundance of existing manufacturing/industrial facilities which were built many years ago, has created a "mis-match" with the current demand for high-cube warehouse/distribution centers. It is intensely frustrating for owners and brokers to find themselves with an "inventory" of structurally sound, but functionally obsolete, low-ceiling-height industrial buildings, that seem destined to remain empty.

But just as usage requirements have shifted, new technology has developed to adapt the construction of "antiquated" industrial buildings, to suit the needs of the current market. In the past, the idea of reconstructing old, low-roof buildings, transforming them into modern, high-clearance warehouses, was often dismissed as expensive and impractical. This situation has changed dramatically.

A process is now being employed which actually takes a building's existing roof, along with all the utilities that are attached and suspended from

it, and lifts it intact to twice its original height. The procedure has proven to be the key to enabling real estate buyers and sellers to fill industrial space that was previously thought to be worthless and undesirable.

The patented "E-Z Riser" roof lifting process was first developed in 1972, and has been utilized to lift roof heights in buildings ranging from 10,000 to almost 400,000 s/f. The technology is sophisticated, but easy to comprehend. Existing vertical steel columns supporting the roof structure are cut at their bases, and encased by new steel "sleeves." Specialized hydraulic jacks atop these sleeves then lift the old columns, at the rate of one foot per hour. The roof rises, along with its lighting, piping, and rooftop equipment, undisturbed. The new height is then enclosed with new upper wall structure. This yields a fresh appearance, and a building that now attracts the active market of high-cube warehouse operators.

The economics of the process are enticing. Because there is no demolition of the old roof, nor its utilities, these items are "recycled," merely moved to a new elevation, so time and expense are minimized. Because there is no new construction of square footage, the cost of lifting upward is often less than 25% of the cost for new construction outward; the smaller square footprint often relates to a lower initial purchase cost; recurring taxes based on floor area are not increased; there is no impact on parking requirements; less area means less travel, for more productive order picking; and the building itself gains increased future value and marketability.

Various applications of the lifting procedure have achieved wide appeal. Brokers are now able to show their well-located, but low-roof properties to warehouse prospects, and sell or lease them with the understanding that limited roof-height is only temporary. Buyers and tenants are now able to expand their search to include those old low buildings, and convert them into the high-cube structures they seek. Owners and developers are now able to re-evaluate their existing holdings, and upgrade them to draw new tenants, or keep their existing occupants by expanding to meet their needs.

Gone are the days when 14-20 foot clear buildings were considered economically suitable for storage. It is now feasible, and becoming imperative, to take a second look at the typical low roof building that sits idle, and consider the ingenious reconstruction process which "elevates" it to the roof-height needed for it to become a sellable/leasable, income-generating property.

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