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Construction & Design

Owners spending big bucks altering properties for tech, media tenants

New York City's private and public building owners initiated \$5.7 billion worth of alteration and renovation (A&R) projects in 2013, a 5 percent increase from 2012, when A&R starts totaled \$5.4 billion, and a 25 percent increase from 2011 (\$4.6 billion).

The upward trend has continued through the first six months of 2014, with A&R construction starts valued at \$3.6 billion, according to a New York Building Congress analysis of McGraw Hill Construction Dodge construction data.

The data used in this report encompass all alteration and renovations to existing structures started between 2009 and June of 2014. The data reflect the total estimated value of each initiated project through the entire period of construction.

Office alteration and renovation work accounted for \$2.1 billion in construction starts in 2013, a 66 percent increase from 2012, when A&R accounted for \$1.2 billion in starts. The trend has continued over the first half of 2014, with office A&R accounting for \$1.2 billion worth of new projects.

"Office A&R is a massive yet largely invisible segment of the New York City construction market," said Building Congress President Richard T. Anderson.

"While great attention has justifiably been paid to the new office towers rising at the World Trade Center and Hudson Yards, it's important

billion in A&R starts in 2013, led by public and private schools, which initiated a combined \$738 million in starts last year. Hospitals and healthcare facilities accounted for another \$312 million, while amusement operators, which encompass sports, entertainment, and cultural venues, initiated \$259 million in new A&R projects.

Apartment buildings accounted for \$870 million in A&R construction starts in 2013.

As of the end of June 2014, each of the major categories of construction spending

to note that practically three-fourths of all office construction work since 2009 has been devoted to alteration and renovation of New York's vast supply of existing office space."

While some of the work in the office sector represents regular maintenance, lobby modernizations, and upgrades to mechanical and technology systems, the recent increases in investment are also a result of changing office user demands and increased competition from recently constructed office buildings.

"The trend among office tenants, especially in such emerging sectors as technology, advertising, media, design, and the Internet, is to create spaces that are far more efficient, flexible, and collaborative, and to devote considerably less square feet per worker than previously allotted," added Mr. Anderson. "It is this new office paradigm that is motivating landlords and businesses to invest heavily in their existing spaces in order to remain competitive with the new spaces that are being added to the office market."

Commercial buildings in general accounted for 53 percent of all A&R construction starts in 2013. In addition to office buildings, hotels (\$478 million in 2013 starts) and retail (\$442 million) are prominent sources of A&R projects.

The institutional sector accounted for \$1.8

are on pace to meet, and in most cases, exceed their 2013 totals. Anderson concluded, "In a mature city such as New York, where precious few new development opportunities exist, A&R is always going to play an essential role, especially in the private sector as well as disciplines such as healthcare and education that must constantly incorporate the latest advances in technology.

"That dynamic, coupled with a strengthening economy, has led to increased levels of A& investment across multiple sectors of the economy."