

Genmab Transformative Design

August 23, 2021



As developers look for ways to bring more life sciences space to market amid unprecedented demand, office-to-lab conversions are sweeping across the Northeast United States. According to CBRE's July U.S. Life Sciences Midyear Report, five Northeast markets –Boston-Cambridge, New Jersey, New York City, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.-Baltimore – rank among the premier life sciences markets. And with strong and growing demand for lab space stretching along that section of the East Coast, buildings with high ceilings, high floor load capacities and permissive zoning designations are being partially or wholly repositioned into lab space.

One such example of a local office-to-lab conversion in action is the recently completed U.S. headquarters for Genmab by Morristown architecture firm Gensler. Genmab, the Copenhagen, Denmark-based biotechnology company chose the Princeton location because it saw the ideal fit to create the lab as the center of its work culture. The new location also provides access to talent from the region's highly skilled workforce.

The conversion offered the possibility of delivering lab space more quickly than a ground-up construction would. With most lab occupiers looking to take space as quickly as possible, this speed to occupancy was viewed as a major benefit.

Genmab, which specializes in the creation and development of differentiated antibody therapeutics for the treatment of cancer, selected 777 Scudders Mill Road – the former home of Bristol-Myers Squibb, a 1990s-era office building in the Princeton/Route 1 submarket corridor – with the intent to convert it to a facility that supports research and development activities.

Genmab initially planned to have Gensler design and renovate 90,000 square feet on two floors in one of three five-story

buildings that sit on the 125-acre campus. But to accommodate the biotech's growth, the company expanded the project to include a third floor, for a total of 135,000 square feet. The \$20 million renovation included creating cutting-edge office, lab and conference/training spaces, and ample open meeting areas. With commercial, research, development and administrative operations all under one roof.

This task was not easy, as there is more to design and construction for a science-driven organization. Genmab also challenged Gensler to incorporate its scientists with others in the building. They wanted the structure to offer a sense of transparency and connectivity between the lab and workplace. Gensler Design Director Tami Pegos explained how the one-time perimeter office building with an outdated and dreary feeling was transformed into a more modern workspace.

Pegos said the team looked closely at the best way to create a science-focused campus going forward, which was to leave the building core in place on the floors, take everything out and creating a more modern workplace that makes use of the access to natural light. "We really had to gut the space, not only to be able to put the infrastructure in for the labs, but also to come up with a design that responded to what Genmab was looking to do. And really what we see as a workspace was a draw to what everybody is looking for and creating that connection to daylight and nature outside," stated Pegos.

The office is set up with workspace on one side and labs and conference rooms on the other. This layout forces employees to navigate through the social space and lab areas to get to meeting rooms enabling scientists and non-lab employees remain connected and share a sense of collaboration. "Because

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this was a repositioning from an office to a research building, it did not have service elevators. We had to plan for separation of lab materials and waste flow from normal passenger traffic and designate an elevator for lab materials,” Pegos added. “The team upgraded the structural capacity to meet the needs of lab equipment and building systems.”

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Another logistical challenge was implementing increased primary electrical service, backup generation and increased water supply infrastructure. Especially difficult was incorporating an entire freezer area on the concourse level for Genmab’s needs.

In essence, all infrastructure supports were assessed and upgraded to meet the needs of the R&D facility. Turner Construction in Somerset and Vanderweil Engineers of Lawrence Township worked closely on the adaptive reuse of this site, the project team was able to create custom, innovative solutions for the Genmab and establish transparency between the workplace with the labs, which have long been in the back-of-house areas.

Genmab’s labs are now strategically stacked on two floors and adjacent to the center of the workplace and still adheres to requirements for the design of research space. The office features natural materials throughout and evokes a warm atmosphere in the building while incorporating the company’s Danish culture.