From Letter of Intent to Move-In: How a Tenant Fit-Up Unfolds in the Capital Region

A tenant fit-up is the construction work that turns leased commercial space into a place a specific business can operate. In the Albany area that might be a law firm taking a second-floor suite downtown, a regional insurance office moving into a Wolf Road corridor building, or a service company converting part of a flex building into offices and a showroom. The players and the paperwork are surprisingly consistent from one project to the next, and understanding the sequence helps a tenant avoid the two classic problems: spending allowance money on the wrong things and missing a move-in date.Stage one: the letter of intentMost fit-ups begin before there is a lease. The tenant and landlord trade a letter of intent that sketches rent, term and, critically, the improvement package. This is the moment to get a contractor's eyes on the space. A walkthrough at this point can reveal whether the suite needs new restrooms, a larger electrical service or a reworked ceiling, and that knowledge belongs in the negotiation. Once the lease is signed, every surprise becomes the tenant's problem or a change order.Stage two: the work letterThe lease usually carries an exhibit, often called the work letter, that divides responsibilities. Landlord work might include bringing the base building to code, delivering working HVAC to the suite or finishing common corridors. Tenant work covers the interior layout, finishes, cabling and furniture. Read it slowly. Phrases like "building standard" and "turnkey" can mean very different things depending on who wrote them.Stage three: measuring and documentingDesigners need accurate existing conditions. In older Capital Region buildings, the last set of drawings may be decades out of date. Clifton Construction, listed on its Google Site as Clifton Development Group LLC, uses Matterport scanning and scan-to-CAD to produce as-built drawings of the space. Those drawings are a starting point for the architect and the engineers, not a substitute for sealed permit documents where those are required, but they remove a lot of guesswork about where walls, columns and ceilings actually are.Stage four: design and pricingWith a layout in hand, the contractor builds a line-by-line Clifton Construction general contractor estimate. Good estimates separate landlord scope from tenant scope, so everyone can see how the allowance is being spent. Expect a few rounds. The first layout often has more private offices than the budget supports, and a sharp estimate shows exactly which choices are driving the number: moved plumbing, extra HVAC zones, glass fronts, millwork.Stage five: permits and approvalsNew York's Uniform Code governs most commercial alterations, but enforcement happens locally. A suite inside the City of Albany goes through the city's building department, while a building a mile away in Colonie answers to the town. Some landlords also require their own review of drawings, insurance certificates and contractor qualifications. Build that time into the schedule. Long-lead items such as rooftop units, storefront glass and specialty doors are often ordered during this stage so they arrive when the crew needs them.Stage six: constructionDemolition clears the space. Framing lays out the rooms. Electrical, data, plumbing, HVAC and sprinkler rough-ins follow, then the inspections that let the walls close. After drywall come ceilings, lighting, flooring, paint, doors and millwork. In an occupied building, noisy work may be pushed to evenings, and the crew has to coordinate freight elevators and loading areas with other tenants.Stage seven: closeoutFinal inspections, a punch list walked with the tenant, any required certificate of occupancy, and a package of closeout documents for the tenant and the landlord. Warranties, product data and as-built information belong in that package. They become valuable the first time something needs service.Budget lines tenants forgetAllowance discussions tend to focus on walls, floors and lights. Several other costs arrive later and surprise people:Low-voltage cabling. Data, security, access control and audio-visual wiring are often outside the general contractor's base scope and outside the landlord's allowance.Furniture and installation. Workstations, conference tables and filing systems can rival the construction budget in a professional office.Signage. Exterior and suite signs usually need their own approvals, from the landlord and sometimes from the municipality.Moving costs. Packing, movers, IT cutover and a weekend of overtime add up.Design and engineering fees. Architects and MEP engineers bill separately from the builder unless the contract says otherwise.Overlap rent. If the old lease runs past the new move-in date, two rents are paid at once. If construction runs late, the reverse problem appears.Listing these early, even as rough

placeholders, keeps the allowance conversation grounded in the total cost of the move.Who to call firstThe cheapest time to bring in industrial warehouse renovation contractor a builder is before the lease is final. Clifton Construction focuses on commercial and industrial construction in Albany and the surrounding Capital Region, including tenant fit-ups, vanilla box builds, warehouse renovations and office renovations, and it also takes on residential remodeling. A tenant that walks into lease talks with measured drawings and a realistic scope has a far better chance of getting the improvement package it actually needs.A short timing noteEvery fit-up runs on its own clock. Suite size, the age of the building, design turnaround, the municipality's review queue and equipment lead times all move the calendar. Any contractor who promises a firm schedule before seeing the space and the drawings is guessing. Ask instead for a schedule once the scope is defined, and plan the move around that.

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