

[Whitman Breed Settles Landlord's Suit Over \\$6.5M HQ Lease](#)

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Summary

Connecticut-based law firm **Whitman Breed** Abbott & Morgan LLC has settled a \$3.8 million lawsuit by a commercial **landlord** that feared that it would breach its \$6.5 million office lease after a significant headcount reduction and a partner's alleged claim that the firm would dissolve by June.

Body

Connecticut-based law firm **Whitman Breed** Abbott & Morgan LLC has settled a \$3.8 million lawsuit by a commercial **landlord** that feared that it would breach its \$6.5 million office lease after a significant headcount reduction and a partner's alleged claim that the firm would dissolve by June.

A case flow request filed in Stamford superior court on Wednesday by the **landlord**, 500 WPA LLC, said the "parties have settled this matter and are working on implementing the settlement." A withdrawal with prejudice will be filed before Nov. 16, the company added.

Judge Sheila A. Ozalis filed an order acknowledging the deal, adding that the matter will be dismissed Nov. 17 if no withdrawal is filed.

As of Thursday, **Whitman Breed**'s website still lists the office building in question, at 500 West Putnam Avenue in Greenwich, as its current address, both on its website and in a Connecticut Judicial Branch directory. The firm also lists a secondary office in nearby White Plains, New York.

An attorney for 500 WPA declined to disclose the terms or indicate the status of the firm's lease.

"The case settled under confidential terms to the mutual satisfaction of both parties," said Eric Grayson of Grayson & Associates PC. "I cannot disclose any of the terms of the settlement agreement and therefore cannot comment further."

A representative of 500 WPA, a unit of regional development firm Fareri Associates, did not respond to an inquiry from Law360 on Thursday.

Whitman Breed's outside lawyer and its internal general counsel also did not respond to Law360's requests for comment.

The **landlord** sued the law firm on May 13, alleging one count of anticipatory breach of the \$6.5 million lease and one count of repudiation.

Gabby rosado

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That same day, the **landlord** filed an application for a \$6.5 million prejudgment remedy. The **landlord** eventually dropped the request to \$3.8 million.

During a July 22 hearing on the prejudgment remedy application, Christian M. Bilella, of property management firm Greenwich Premier Services, said he contacted **Whitman Breed** after learning that several partners had left for other firms.

He testified that Cyd L. Smith, a **Whitman Breed** partner and then head of the firm's real estate practice group, told him in a face-to-face meeting in her office on May 8 that the firm was in trouble.

"June 30, we think we're going to dissolve the firm," Smith told Bilella, according to Bilella's testimony.

Smith also told Bilella that the departures cut **Whitman Breed's** revenues by \$3 million and that the law firm "could not sustain the rent," he testified.

Bilella described further conversations with departing **Whitman Breed** staffers and vacant offices within the Greenwich building as reasons he believed that the lease was at risk.

The seven-year lease commenced March 1, 2024, and is scheduled to run through Feb. 28, 2031, Bilella indicated.

James C. Riley, **Whitman Breed's** general counsel and the co-chair of its litigation department, testified that the firm was continuing to operate, but he could not predict for how long.

He also said **Whitman Breed** had no intention to fail to pay its \$80,000-per-month lease, noting that the location would be attractive for other firms interested in tapping the area's substantial wealth.

"I'm in with discussions with other firms about possible combinations," he testified.

He declined to provide specifics, citing nondisclosure agreements.

"Anything is possible if we join forces with other groups who have a desire to be in Greenwich in that space," Riley said.

When the prejudgment remedy hearing continued July 29, Smith testified that **Whitman Breed's** lease payments remained up to date.

She also said her May 8 conversation with Bilella was not as straightforward as Bilella had claimed.

"I did say we were going to continue to pay rent, that we were going to reassess things as of June 30," she testified.

She also said she told Bilella that the firm was weighing its "ability to continue" amid the wave of exits.

In early July, **Whitman Breed's** website contained a 22-lawyer roster. Thirteen are currently listed.

Riley testified on July 22 that 10 attorneys remained, but that soon, there would be only eight.

At least four of the firm's lawyers went to Cummings & Lockwood LLC, he indicated.

One left for Wiggin and Dana LLP, Grayson said in court during the July 22 hearing.

Another is now with Carmody Torrance Sandak & Hennessey LLP, Law360 reported in May.

Smith said she remained a **Whitman Breed** partner but was currently working for Shipman & Goodwin LLP.

The departures cut **Whitman Breed's** revenues by roughly 50%, Smith testified.

Wednesday's settlement occurred before Judge Trial Referee Robert L. Genuario, who presided over the hearing, could issue a decision on whether to grant or deny the prejudgment remedy application.

It also occurred before **Whitman Breed** filed motions to dismiss or strike the claims, though the law firm did file a request July 24 to revise 500 WPA's damages calculations.

Prejudgment remedies are unique Connecticut attachments of cash, property or other assets. A judge can order a hold on an opponent's assets to protect an applicant who shows by probable cause that it is likely to win a lawsuit.

500 WPA is represented by Eric D. Grayson of Grayson & Associates PC.

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Whitman Breed is represented by James C. Graham of Neubert Pepe & Monteith PC.

The case is 500 WPA LLC v. **Whitman Breed** Abbott & Morgan LLC, case number FST-CV25-5032350-S, in the Stamford-Norwalk Judicial District of the Connecticut Superior Court at Stamford.

--Editing by Karin Roberts.

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