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Evolution of the health club as a tenant: pros and cons

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A health club used to be an unwelcome tenant in any retail shopping center. The traditional thinking was that health club patrons occupied the parking areas at

peak shopping times and for extended periods, and then left without shopping at the other retail stores in the center.

The number of people with a membership to a fitness center or health club continues to grow, reaching 60.87 million in 2017, an approximately 85 percent increase from 32.8 million in 2000. As personal fitness has become the rage, the health club has become not only mainstream, but an anchor store and a requirement in both retail shopping centers and mixed-use and residential developments.

The move toward more fitness centers has coincided with the transformation of the shopping center with traditional big box retail anchors into a destination center with restaurants, green open space, retail stores, and, of course, health clubs and other uses focused on personal fitness and group activities — all things one cannot do on the internet. Circuit City has been replaced by Life Time Fitness, Equinox or other fitness centers.

Though this change may have saved the retail shopping center, as a neighbor the health club can be hard to take. The parking problem continues to be a challenge. Absent a distinct and separate building, the noise and vibration emanating from a fitness center can deprive neighboring stores (next to, above



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and below the health club) of the quiet enjoyment of their space.

The slamming of heavy weights, vibrations and blaring music, all typical in health clubs, can create major disruptions to retail, office and residential tenants alike. Imagine doing eye exams while the walls and floors shake from the dropping of heavy weights, and as heavy bass vibrates through the walls from the cycling class. Would you be seeing eye to eye with the health club?

Landlords must consider the location of the health club — preferably a separate pad site otherwise on grade or below, away from residences and professional (particularly medical) offices.

The onus should be on the health club to insulate the sound and vibration or to discontinue the offending use. Upgrading of walls and reinforcement or

padding of floors and soundproofing of the ceiling may be required. The building structure generally must be considered.

The attraction of a health club as a tenant in a high-end residential or mixed use building cannot, however, be denied. Landlords looking to add a fitness center tenant to their roster should contact their attorney to ensure their lease covers their unique needs of these tenants.

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