

Step toe is first law firm to achieve Fitwel certification

December 2020

Law firms are increasingly focused on the environment they are providing their attorneys and staff. Driven by the impact of COVID-19, the importance of health and wellness in the office has become a critical issue for recruiting and retention. One firm, Steptoe, recently became the first US law firm to earn a Fitwel rating for its 300-attorney Washington, D.C., headquarters office and was pleasantly surprised to find that, after building out a Class-A law firm space, it qualified for the rating without a lot of additional changes.

Fitwel is a building rating system for existing and new buildings, including interiors, that provides guidelines on how to design and operate healthier buildings. In a matter of months, Steptoe secured a 2-Star Rating, which, on a scale of one to three stars, is roughly equivalent to a Two-Star Michelin restaurant.

Steptoe's groundbreaking certification was based on a number of design and policy strategies that support the physical, mental and social health of its employees. These features include natural daylight throughout the majority of the workplace; sit/stand desks; staffed exercise room with showers; a bike storage room; a multi-purpose room for wellness activities; an indoor air quality policy; and one certified first responder per 100 people.

Savills Legal Tenant interviewed Vince Falcone, Steptoe's Senior Director of Facilities and Administration, US Offices, and the firm's outside advisor, Christopher Tacy, Senior Project Manager, Sustainability, with UL, about the process they went through and what was involved.

VF

Vince Falcone

Steptoe's Senior Director of Facilities and Administration, US Offices

Q: What motivated Steptoe to pursue a workplace wellness certification in the first place?

Vince Falcone (VF): Following a comprehensive building renovation at our Washington, D.C., offices, our chair, Phil West, asked me to look into programs to score how well our company was doing on health and wellness. I started pulling information on programs to do that and found Fitwel, one of the leading healthy-building certifications, a program with which UL, our long-time building advisors, were experienced.

Q: How did you undertake the certification project?

VF: We teamed up with our landlord Boston Properties and an internal team. UL did all the heavy lifting for the process, and [Fitwel's] program and grading system were very thorough. The data we were pulling was very specific.

Q: Why Fitwel and not one of the other healthy building certifications?

VF: There are several reasons why we chose Fitwel over WELL. First, achieving WELL is more difficult post-occupancy whereas Fitwel can easily be done after a tenant moves in. Furthermore, the fee is very affordable compared to WELL. We found the Fitwel program to be very credible, and we thought that achieving 3 Stars would be a slam-dunk. But it isn't – it takes a lot of work.

Q: What is involved in achieving the Fitwel certification?

VF: When we started our renovation in 2015, we hired the design firm, Studios, and HITT as general contractor. Our design committee helped guide the process, and Chair Phil West was a strong advocate.

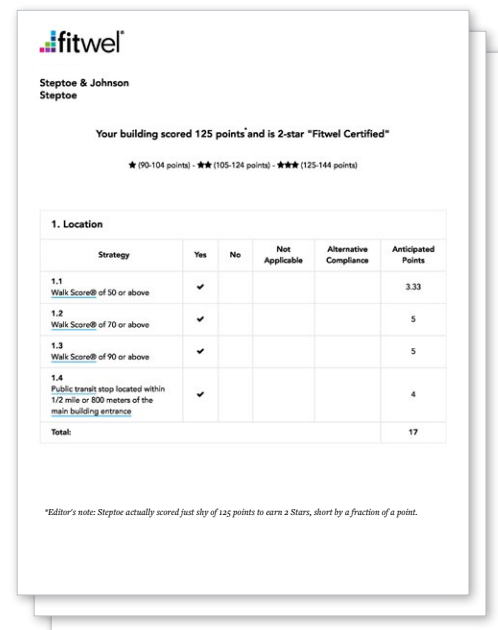
When we were in the early stage of our design process, Fitwel didn't even exist. It was founded in 2016 and became an option for us after we were done with the renovation. The process of pursuing Fitwel took about six months – there's a substantial amount of data and information to gather for the Fitwel certification. The certification costs, in 2019 pre-COVID-19, were approximately \$10,000, plus advisory fees to UL.

Most of the certification grading in our case was based on what we already had put in place from the 2105-2017 renovation: sit/stand desks, showers, glass partitions to let in more natural light. Most of the choices we made were items that were already included on the Fitwel checklist.

It would have been helpful to know what the rating criteria consisted of from the start of a renovation, but we were able to achieve a 2-Star Rating through good design. We didn't have to throw a lot of money at the project to achieve extra points.

Q: What would it have taken to earn the top rating?

VF: There are over 60 criteria to pursue, each worth a certain number of points. Steptoe scored just shy of 125 points to earn 2 Stars, short by a fraction of a point. To earn three stars would have required additional construction that was cost prohibitive once in occupancy. (To give a sense of what points Steptoe earned, the scoring sheet is linked [here](#).)



fitwel

Steptoe & Johnson
Steptoe

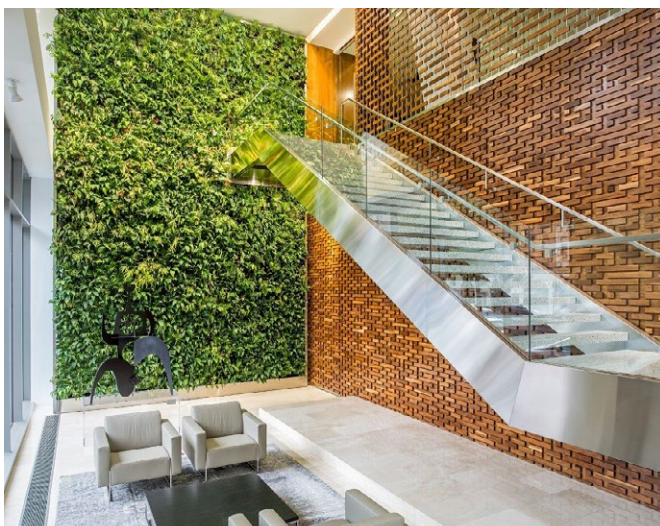
Your building scored 125 points and is 2-star "Fitwel Certified"

★ (90-104 points) - ★★ (105-124 points) - ★★★ (125-144 points)

1. Location					
Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
1.1 Walk Score® of 50 or above	✓				3.33
1.2 Walk Score® of 70 or above	✓				5
1.3 Walk Score® of 90 or above	✓				5
1.4 Public transit stop located within 1/2 mile or 800 meters of the main building entrance	✓				4
Total					17

*Editor's note: Steptoe actually scored just shy of 125 points to earn 2 Stars, short by a fraction of a point.

Click on the above image to view the scoring sheet



Q: Would you recommend undertaking a healthy building certification to other law firms?

VF: Steptoe is a firm that makes the safety and wellness of our employees a priority. The Fitwel certification process was a positive experience that demonstrates Steptoe's commitment to creating a working environment that promotes safety, wellness and inclusiveness. I would strongly recommend to others to consider Fitwel as a future initiative. Having a service provider like UL to help is terrific. They kept the trains running, leading the project, so all I had to do was provide data points. It was a win-win process.

Q: How are your employees responding?

VF: It's been getting rave reviews. However, we are now in a very different environment with so many people working from home. We are currently focusing on putting out a lot of information for employees on COVID-19 safety. And as we plan for a post-COVID-19 occupancy, this is more important than ever.

Q: Ultimately, how would you sum up the benefits of wellness certification?

VF: The main takeaway is that if you follow best practices during a space renovation, you can achieve this, too. You may already be qualified or closer to it than you think.

CT

Christopher Tacy
Senior Project Manager,
Sustainability, UL

Q: First, why should a law firm focus on workplace wellness?

Christopher Tacy (CT): Many studies have measured the ROI associated with a healthy work environment. It reduces absenteeism, lowers healthcare costs and boosts productivity. Earning certification provides validation of your workplace's existing wellness factors. The points value assigned to each strategy for Fitwel were determined by a scientific advisory group of public health researchers assembled by the CDC.

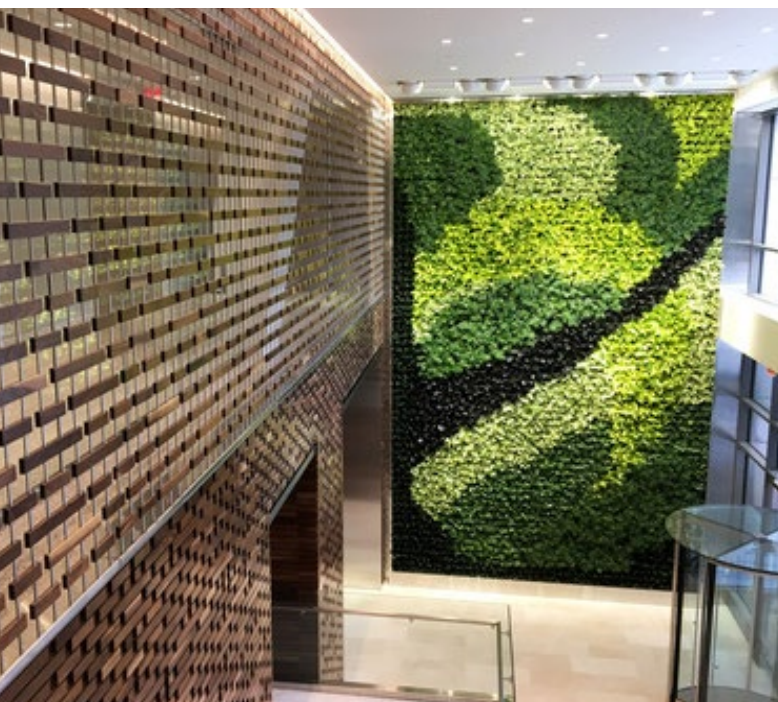
A wellness certification is a good way to make the invisible visible and to raise awareness of the ways that the built environment can affect the occupants' physical and mental well-being. It says that coming back to the office is safe because of the factors identified in the certification process.

Q: What exactly does a wellness certification measure?

CT: Wellness certification measures the qualities of a workplace that encourage or promote better health outcomes. Fitwel, for instance, measures seven health impact categories, from access to healthy food and encouraging more physical activity, to reducing morbidity and absenteeism. [See the [Fitwel Seven Health Impact Categories](#), and the [certification worksheet](#)]

While some factors – like a building's location – are out of a tenant's control, certification can point out what you do have control over or can influence. The process also highlights policies and factors that are already in place and shows what you can improve on.

There are a lot of strategies a company can put in place to earn certification. Even pursuing Fitwel's 1 Star Rating will highlight all the things that matter that you can work on, such as internal operations, policies and amenities. Food is a big factor – what you're offering in terms of better-quality food choices and access to hydration. It all leads to reduced absenteeism, and your people will be happier.



Q: How much of the certification depends on external factors outside the tenant's control?

CT: Location is a big component for many of the certification programs, WELL and Fitwel. The rating systems reward buildings for walkability and mass transit access, but buildings that provide access to outdoor spaces and lots of natural light can make up for not being in a mass transit zone.

Q: What are the key differences between Fitwel, WELL and LEED certifications?

CT: Fitwel is more occupant-centric, WELL is more data-driven and building-specific. Fitwel is a more economical way to highlight your existing efficiencies and also to discover steps you can take to improve wellness at your facilities. LEED really puts energy efficiency and asset performance at the forefront as opposed to occupant health and wellness.

Q: When is the best time to undertake a wellness certification?

CT: Fitwell offers different certification processes, with one pathway for the built environment – for building owners and tenants – and a separate one for the design stage. Obviously, in the design stage you can influence many more factors. But even in the post-construction environment, like Steptoe's was, an advisor with wide experience with different projects can recommend the various amenities and policies that can be layered on without too much cost to meet the criteria.

Q: What is a typical time frame required to earn a wellness certification?

CT: In all, it generally takes six months or less if you're organized and committed, but if not, it can take up to eight months; it also depends on how many strategies you're focused on. It takes a varying amount of time to gather your data, then you submit your initial documentation to Fitwel, and there's a four- to six-week review period. Then, after you receive review comments and a request for additional documentation, you gather and submit additional documents back to Fitwel. Then, it can take another four to six weeks for a final assessment. The timeline is roughly the same for the other healthy building certifications.

Q: What does the process cost, typically?

CT: For each of the certification programs, there are sliding scales for fees based on the size of your space, location, certification level and chosen wellness strategies, for each of the certification programs, plus the advisor's fees. [[WorkDesign Magazine published this guide.](#)]



Size Range (square feet)	Registration	Fee	fitwel Consultant Fee Range	Registration	Fee	WELL Consultant Fee Range
0-19,999	\$500	\$5,500	\$5,000-8,000 sf	\$1,800	\$5,500	\$5,000-\$17,500 sf
20,000-49,999	\$500	\$5,500	\$0.40-0.90 sf	\$1,800	\$5,500	\$0.60-\$1.00 sf
50,000-99,999	\$500	\$6,000	\$0.36-0.70 sf	\$2,800	\$8,750	\$0.40-\$0.80 sf
100,000-249,999	\$500	\$6,500	\$0.28-0.60 sf	\$2,800	\$8,750	\$0.30-\$0.70 sf
250,000-499,999	\$500	\$7,000	\$0.20-\$0.48 sf	\$2,800	\$43,750	\$0.25-\$0.60 sf
500,000-749,999	\$500	\$7,500	negotiated	\$4,200	\$82,500	negotiated
750,000-999,999	\$500	\$8,000	negotiated	\$4,200	\$116,250	negotiated

* Excludes required construction upgrades. These fees will vary based on selected features.

* Prices subject to change.

Learn more about the companies profiled:

In more than 100 years of practice, Steptoe has earned an international reputation for vigorous representation of clients before governmental agencies, successful advocacy in litigation and arbitration, and creative and practical advice in structuring business transactions. Steptoe has more than 500 lawyers and other professional staff across offices in Beijing, Brussels, Chicago, Hong Kong, London, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. For more information, visit: steptoe.com.



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Generated by expert analysis of 5,600+ academic research studies, Fitwel is implementing a vision for a healthier future where all buildings and communities are enhanced to strengthen health and well-being. Fitwel was originally created by the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention and the US General Services Administration. The CDC remains the research and evaluation partner for Fitwel. The Center for Active Design, a global not-for-profit organization, was selected as the licensed operator of Fitwel, charged with expanding Fitwel to the global market. To learn more about Fitwel, visit: fitwel.org.

As this industry-wide discussion unfolds and firms learn more through trial and error, Savills Legal Tenant Practice Group will continue to monitor and report on best practices. For more insights, please visit [The Legal Tenant](#).

Wendy Feldman Block
Senior Managing Director

[Click here to view Wendy Feldman Block's profile.](#)

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Your building scored 125 points* and is 2-star "Fitwel Certified"

★ (90-104 points) - ★★ (105-124 points) - ★★★ (125-144 points)

1. Location					
Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
1.1 Walk Score® of 50 or above	✓				3.33
1.2 Walk Score® of 70 or above	✓				5
1.3 Walk Score® of 90 or above	✓				5
1.4 Public transit stop located within 1/2 mile or 800 meters of the main building entrance	✓				4
Total:					17

**Editor's note: Steptoe actually scored just shy of 125 points to earn 2 Stars, short by a fraction of a point.*

Appendix

2. Building Access

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
2.1 Provide a direct, <u>accessible</u> pedestrian route between the <u>main building entrance</u> and <u>public transit</u>	✓				1.33
2.2 Conduct an annual <u>occupant commuter survey</u>		✓			0
2.3 Provide <u>secure and covered bicycle parking</u> within 100 feet or 30 meters of a building entrance for a minimum of 5% of <u>regular occupants</u> or exceed demand as dictated by occupant survey by 1%	✓				1.33
2.4 Provide showers with lockers for <u>regular occupants</u>	✓				1.33
2.5 If parking is provided, charge <u>fair market value</u> for parking utilization	✓				2
2.6 If parking is provided, assign a minimum of 5% <u>priority parking spaces</u> or exceed demand by at least 1% as dictated by the <u>occupant commuter survey</u> for carpools and vanpools, whichever is greater		✓			0
Total:					6

Appendix

3. Outdoor Spaces

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
3.1 Provide an outdoor space amenity accessible from a building entrance to all regular occupants	✓				1
3.2 Provide a walking trail of at least 1/4 mile or 400 meters on the building site/campus accessible to all regular occupants				✓	1.33
3.3 Provide permanent fitness equipment in outdoor spaces accessible to all regular occupants		✓			0
3.4 Provide a restorative garden amenity accessible to all regular occupants				✓	1.67
3.5 Offer on-site weekly sale of produce or establish a farmers market in a location accessible to all regular occupants				✓	1.67
3.6 Support an on-site fruit and vegetable garden that is at least 1 square foot or .09 square meters per regular occupants, accessible to all regular occupants , and maintained weekly		✓			0
3.7 Establish and adopt an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Plan	✓				2.66
3.8 Provide context-appropriate lighting at all pathways and parking areas	✓				2.66

Appendix

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
3.9 Adopt a tobacco-free policy for all outdoor spaces	✓				1.33
Total:					12

Appendix

4. Entrances and Ground Floor

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
4.1 Provide <u>permanent signage</u> at all building and/or campus entrances publicizing a <u>tobacco-free</u> building and site	✓				0.67
4.2 Provide at least one additional building entrance, other than the <u>main building entrance</u> , oriented towards an outdoor <u>pedestrian route</u>	✓				1.33
4.3 Locate the <u>main building entrance</u> oriented towards an outdoor <u>pedestrian route</u>	✓				1.33
4.4 Provide <u>context-appropriate lighting</u> at all building entrances	✓				2.33
4.5 Provide at least one <u>publicly accessible use</u> on the ground floor	✓				2.33
4.6 Provide a permanent dedicated display in a location <u>accessible</u> to all <u>regular occupants</u> advertising <u>amenities</u> within 1/2 mile or 800 meter walking distance of the building		✓			0
4.7 Employ <u>entryway systems</u> that are maintained weekly at building entrances	✓				1
Total:					9

5. Stairwells

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
5.1 Provide at least one stairwell <u>accessible to regular occupants</u> that connects relevant building floors	✓				4.33
5.2 Locate an <u>accessible</u> stairwell equally or more visible than any elevators and/or escalators from the <u>main building entrance</u>	✓				4.33
5.3 Implement <u>active design strategies in stairwell design</u>	✓				3
5.4 Place permanent <u>point-of-decision signs</u> promoting stair use at elevator call areas		✓			0
5.5 Make the <u>accessible</u> stairwell clearly visible with code-compliant glass	✓				2.66
Total:					14

*Appendix***6. Indoor Environment**

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
6.1 Adopt and implement a tobacco-free building policy	✓				3
6.2 Certify that all asbestos has been properly abated throughout the building	✓				4.66
6.3 Adopt and implement an Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Policy	✓				4.66
6.4 Adopt and implement a Green Purchasing Policy		✓			0
6.5 Provide separate ventilation in all areas with chemical use or storage	✓				2
Total:					14

*Appendix***7. Workspaces**

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
7.1 Provide <u>natural daylight</u> in a majority of the workplace	✓				2.66
7.2 Provide <u>views of nature</u> from a majority of workspaces		✓			0
7.3 Provide <u>operable shading</u> in all regularly occupied workplaces	✓				0.33
7.4 Provide access to sufficient <u>active workstations</u>	✓				1.67
Total:					5

Appendix

8. Shared Spaces

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
8.1 Adopt a regular cleaning schedule for bathrooms	✓				1.67
8.2 Provide permanent educational signs promoting hand-washing in bathrooms		✓			0
8.3 Provide common break areas accessible to all regular occupants that can accommodate lunch-time activity	✓				2.66
8.4 Adopt regular cleaning schedule for refrigerators and freezers in break areas	✓				0.33
8.5 Provide a dedicated quiet room accessible to all regular occupants that can be used in private		✓			0
8.6 Provide a sufficient number of dedicated lactation rooms or stations accessible to all regular occupants	✓				5.66
8.7 Provide a multi-purpose room that can be scheduled for wellness activities or on-site exercise by all regular occupants	✓				2.33
8.8 Provide a dedicated exercise room accessible free of charge for all regular occupants	✓				2

Appendix

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
8.9 Provide a dedicated, staffed <u>fitness facility</u> with subsidized or below market rate membership fees for all <u>regular occupants</u>	✓				2.33
Total:					17

9. Water Supply

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
9.1 Provide at least one <u>ADA compliant water supply</u> on relevant floors	✓				3
9.2 Provide <u>water bottle refilling ability</u> at a minimum of one water supply on every floor and at all water supplies within the workplace	✓				1.33
Total:					4

10. Cafeterias and Prepared Food Retail

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
10.1 Require a healthy food and beverage standard at least as rigorous as the Fitwel Food Services Standard in leasing agreements with food service providers	✓				5
10.2 Incentivize healthy food selection with choice architecture practices	✓				5
10.3 Encourage healthy food choices through pricing incentives		✓			0
10.4 Provide access to free water in cafeteria and prepared food retail areas	✓				4
Total:					14

*Appendix***11. Vending Machines and Snack Bars**

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
11.1 Require a healthy food and beverage standard at least as rigorous as the applicable Fitwel Food Services Standard in all vending machines and snack bars	✓				2
11.2 Incentivize healthy food selection with choice architecture practices	✓				2
11.3 Encourage healthy food choices through pricing incentives		✓			0
11.4 Provide access to free water near vending machines and snack bars	✓				1.67
Total:					6

Appendix

12. Emergency Procedures

Strategy	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Alternative Compliance	Anticipated Points
12.1 Create and maintain a database of emergency equipment and supplies	✓				0.67
12.2 Install an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) on each floor and adopt a regular testing schedule		✓			0
12.3 Ensure that there is one certified first responder (CFR) per 100 regular occupants present during work hours	✓				1
12.4 Provide an emergency address notification system	✓				4.33
Total:					6

	Total Points
Total:	125*

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