U.S.

Developer Behind the Buckling NYC High Rise Is Being Sued Over Another Conversion

MetroLoft faces a more than $30 million lawsuit alleging that the roof and walls at a Tribeca luxury building were ‘literally falling apart’

By Nicholas G. Miller, Will Parker and Lily Belle Poling
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The apartment building at 443 Greenwich Street in New York is at the center of another dispute.
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Quick Summary

- Developer MetroLoft is facing a lawsuit of over $30 million alleging construction and renovation issues at a Tribeca luxury building.
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Before the developer of a Midtown Manhattan conversion project was thrust into the spotlight this week, MetroLoft was already battling problems at another high-profile conversion project downtown.

It was at a stately red brick building, known as 443 Greenwich, with oversized curved windows and a Tribeca address. MetroLoft transformed the 19th-century warehouse into luxury dwellings that attracted A-list celebrities, including actors Jake Gyllenhaal and Meg Ryan.

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That building is now at the center of a more than $30 million lawsuit alleging that the developer was responsible for construction and renovation that led to “life threatening” conditions. Condo owners alleged that the building’s walls had loose bricks and leaks, and that on the penthouse level, the roof and walls were “literally falling apart.”

MetroLoft denied the allegations in the complaint, according to court filings.

MetroLoft worked with the same key players on that project as on the Midtown Manhattan conversion of the former Pfizer headquarters that was at risk of partial collapse on Tuesday: Gace Consulting Engineers and an inspection firm, Domani Inspection Services.

In the past year, the city hit the Pfizer conversion project with seven construction safety violations that carried penalties of more than $32,000, including one for an incident in which a metal panel fell 33 stories onto the sidewalk.

Litigation over New York City construction is common. Plaintiffs often sue several individual companies that performed work on a single project. When developers are sued, they frequently bring in their subcontractors, engineering firms and inspectors as third-party defendants.

But MetroLoft’s previous work is facing more intense scrutiny after structural damage imperiled the Midtown office-to-residential conversion, setting off a scramble to stabilize the building that temporarily shut down several blocks in the heart of the city.

The New York City Department of Buildings has said it would review all construction plans at the former Pfizer property, interview witnesses and inspect the site. The investigation will look at whether the construction work matches approved engineering plans and whether construction workers did the work correctly.

That investigation also entails examining the work of several individual firms involved in construction, including MetroLoft, Gace and Domani, according to a person familiar with the matter.

None of those parties have been accused of wrongdoing. In an interview with The Wall Street Journal on Tuesday, Metro Loft's CEO Nathan Berman said the additional load from widening the upper floors caused two columns to collapse. Those columns might not have been properly reinforced to support additions to the top floors, he said.

MetroLoft and Gace didn't respond to requests for comment.

A Domani spokeswoman said the firm "remains committed to maintaining the highest professional standards and providing independent, code-compliant special inspection services."

Gace was founded in 1979. It has won several awards for projects ranging from the restoration of the old George Washington Hotel in Manhattan and the conversion of a former Brooklyn prison into housing for formerly homeless people who are mentally ill.

But in recent years, the firm fell into financial trouble. In 2023, Gace filed for bankruptcy. Separately, it was named as a defendant in at least two construction lawsuits at that time, including one in which construction work damaged a neighboring property.

Around that time, MetroLoft hired Gace as the lead engineer on what would be the largest office-to-residential conversion ever attempted in the U.S., producing 1,600 units plus a pool and fitness center. Gace emerged from bankruptcy in 2025.

Meanwhile, inspectors from Domani Inspection Services were hired to examine construction work at both the former Pfizer and the Tribeca properties.

In the case of the former Pfizer building, Domani inspector John McMonagle is listed on permits as being responsible for the inspection of structural steel and the structural stability of alterations to existing buildings.

The former Pfizer building MICHAEL M. SANTIAGO/GETTY IMAGES

Domani plays a prominent role in New York City's construction industry, alongside a group of affiliated compliance, engineering and construction safety companies, which have some shared leadership.

Its website boasts involvement in projects including the 612-unit office-to-residential conversion at 70 Pine Street and the triangular-shaped building at 625 West 57th Street.

Domani has faced allegations of poor work in the recent past.

Ongoing litigation dating back to 2020 alleges that the firm failed to identify issues with a high-rise construction project that likely caused an unsecured concrete slab to fall off the building and crash through the roof of an apartment building at 200 East 63rd Street.

The plans for that building called for exterior walls above a certain height to be 8 inches thick, but Domani approved walls that were 6 inches thick, according to a violation notice from the city.

In the case of 14 Gay Street in lower Manhattan, owners alleged Domani didn't inform them of the entire north bearing foundational wall being removed without the installation of shoring. The building had to be demolished.

“While we cannot comment on any pending litigation,” the Domani spokeswoman said, “the New York City Department of Buildings issued violations that were subsequently dismissed or resolved in our favor.”

At 443 Greenwich, the offering plan called for a brand new “green roof” with multiple layers of waterproofing, but condo owners alleged that the roof actually installed was a cheaper version. It wasn’t watertight, which allowed water to seep in and damage the concrete, the complaint said.

Developers also advertised a lush, landscaped central courtyard that was a part of the original factory. The landscape architects contracted by MetroLoft to design the courtyard recommended installing additional drainage there during construction, according to the lawsuit.

But the upgrade was ultimately omitted, causing flooding and water-related damage to the building.

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