

Florida Commercial Real Estate Loans: Tightened Lending and Increased Delinquencies

Article
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The commercial real estate (CRE) market in Florida, like much of the nation, is navigating significant challenges. Rising vacancy rates, increasing loan delinquencies, and tightening credit conditions have created a more difficult environment for both borrowers and lenders. While transaction volumes have seen a modest uptick due to lower interest rates, the broader outlook remains uncertain.

Florida lenders, in particular, need to stay vigilant as these trends impact the lending landscape. Insights from the October 2024 editions of the Fed's Beige Book and its Senior Loan Officer Opinion Survey on Bank Lending Practices (SLOOS) provide crucial context for understanding how these developments are influencing CRE loans.

Rising Vacancy Rates

In Florida, as across the country, vacancy rates are climbing in key CRE sectors—especially office, industrial, and multifamily. The office market, in particular, is struggling with continued shifts to remote and hybrid work models, reducing demand for traditional office space. Meanwhile, both the industrial and multifamily markets, which had been relatively strong, are also experiencing growing vacancy rates. This trend not only signals potential long-term shifts in demand but also puts more pressure on landlords to maintain cash flow and meet debt obligations.

Increasing Loan Delinquencies

One of the most concerning trends is the rising rate of loan delinquencies, particularly in the office, multifamily, and hotel sectors. Non-bank lenders have reported an uptick in defaults, a result of higher interest rates and the increasing difficulty of refinancing maturing loans. Florida's CRE market is no exception, with property owners struggling to refinance or restructure loans in a tightening credit environment. This growing volume of distressed assets is a red flag for creditors, signaling that additional foreclosure and collection actions may be necessary as more borrowers fail to meet

obligations.

Tighter Lending Standards and Weaker Demand for CRE Loans

According to the October 2024 SLOOS, banks reported tighter lending standards for commercial real estate loans in the third quarter of 2024. While large banks in Florida may have left their lending standards relatively unchanged for certain types of CRE loans, smaller institutions and foreign banks have reported stricter requirements across the board. These tighter credit conditions mean that borrowers face higher barriers to securing new financing, whether for new projects or for refinancing maturing debt. As a result, many property owners in Florida may struggle to access the credit needed to maintain operations or meet loan obligations. This only increases the likelihood of defaults and foreclosures.

In addition to stricter lending standards, banks are reporting weaker demand for CRE loans. Banks attribute this decline in demand to a combination of lower customer investment, reduced financing needs for inventory, and decreased activity in mergers and acquisitions. For lenders, this means fewer opportunities for new lending while simultaneously facing increased borrower defaults.

Preparing for the Future

As a result, Florida lenders should be prepared for potential increases in distressed loans, especially as maturing loans face refinancing difficulties. As these trends unfold, lenders will need to remain proactive in managing their portfolios and be ready to take action on defaulting loans. This may include considering more aggressive collection strategies or preparing for potential foreclosures as the market continues to adjust to these ongoing challenges. At the same time, this may present opportunities for strategic acquisitions of distressed loans or properties by investors looking toward the future.