

The Legal Intelligencer

Predicting Boom, Pa. Firms Build Up Construction Practices

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by Lizzy McLellan | March 24, 2017

Case Digest Summary

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Several Pennsylvania firms have made lateral hires in their construction law departments in recent months. At the beginning of the month, Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney [added a new leader to its construction practice](#), Thomas Madigan, who joined from Pepper Hamilton. Madigan will aim to grow a full-service construction group focused on the Pennsylvania and Florida markets.

In February, Post & Schell announced that it [added principals Mason Avrigian Jr. and Jeffrey Wallack](#) to its construction, government contract and surety law group. Avrigian and Wallack, who came from Wisler Pearlstine, focus on public works and institutional projects.

Pittsburgh-based Weiss Burkardt Kramer, which represents public-sector entities, [added of counsel Jessica Quinn-Horgan](#) earlier this month. Quinn-Horgan will maintain her solo practice, firm founder Ira Weiss said, but will counsel his firm's clients on construction litigation and related issues.

And in late December, Offit Kurman opened a suburban Philadelphia location, [adding partner Joshua Quinter and associate Karin Corbett](#), who represent contractors in construction law matters and commercial litigation. The two lawyers came from Kaplin Stewart Meloff Reiter & Stein in Blue Bell.

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Legal recruiter Jason Mandel of Alevistar said the Offit Kurman hires were “a sign of things to come” in construction law. He said construction practices are active and hiring, and at the firms he works with, construction litigation is especially busy.

Edward Seglias, vice president of Cohen Seglias Pallas Greenhall & Furman, said his firm, which started with three construction lawyers, has never stopped growing its construction practice. But he said the firm has increased hiring in response to a growing client need over the past 12 to 18 months.

Industrywide, he said, the real estate and construction market has been active, particularly with regard to institutional projects and commercial space.

“The expectation is that it will continue to grow for the next several years,” Seglias said.

Avrigian, of Post & Schell, said the increase in construction activity is regional, but is especially noticeable in Philadelphia. Moving to Post & Schell allows him to get more of that work in the city, he said. Before he and Wallack joined Post & Schell, the firm had a construction practice in Harrisburg and Washington, D.C., but needed more construction capacity in Philadelphia.

Avrigian said the city is experiencing investment from public entities and institutional organizations as well as private entities. And law firms are trying to attract lawyers who are experienced in working with those investors.

But the trend is not limited to Philadelphia.

Weiss Burkardt, like Avrigian’s practice, focuses on working with public entities in Western Pennsylvania and throughout the state. The firm lacked construction expertise before bringing on Quinn-Horgan as of counsel.

Weiss said Pennsylvania’s requirements for public project contracts can create problems in coordination of work, which can result in litigation.

“We made the determination that it would best serve our clients to have someone affiliated with us who has a strong construction background,” he said.

Madigan, of Buchanan Ingersoll, said the construction industry has benefited from an improved economic and low-interest-rate environment recently, but the credit market has been tight. However, he said, with talk of deregulation, credit might loosen up, further boosting the industry. Additionally, he said, with the new presidential administration’s promises of infrastructure investment, industry observers are anticipating more construction.

Still, “there’s a lot of unanswered questions,” Madigan noted. “The infrastructure plans haven’t taken shape yet.”

