

## Press Release

# 5 Partners Join Akerman's Los Angeles Office; Land Use Group Expands California Real Estate Team

August 10, 2016

Akerman LLP, a top 100 U.S. law firm serving clients across the Americas, today announced the expansion of its Los Angeles office with key additions to the firm's Real Estate, Land Use, Corporate and Litigation Practices. Land use partners [Ellen Berkowitz](#), [Lisa Kolieb](#) and [Brady McShane](#), as well as senior urban planner [Ellen Castillo](#) join Akerman's Real Estate Practice Group; partner [Mark Y. Liu](#) joins the Corporate Practice Group, and partner [Michael Weiss](#) joins the Litigation Practice Group. With the addition of these five partners, Akerman has doubled the size of its Los Angeles office to 24 lawyers since 2015.

"Our growing team of lawyers and business professionals in Los Angeles reflects Akerman's core strengths in the real estate, financial services and other dynamic sectors," said [Sue Zabloudil](#), Akerman's Los Angeles Office Managing Partner. "We remain focused on hiring lawyers who can provide immediate value to our clients while contributing to our culture of collaborative innovation."

"The land use group joining Akerman includes professionals experienced in complex projects that are often controversial and require a sophisticated approach to balancing the interests of clients, the community, and governmental agencies in the development and use of land," said [Richard Bezold](#),

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chair of Akerman's national Real Estate Practice Group, which is ranked sixth by *Law360* among the largest teams of real estate lawyers in the United States. "Our Los Angeles office already includes a distinguished and growing group of lawyers experienced in complex commercial real estate transactions, development and redevelopment projects, and litigation matters. These additions are part of our continuing commitment to serve clients in Southern California and throughout the region with on the ground expertise, providing counsel on all aspects of commercial real estate projects."

**Ellen Berkowitz, Partner**

Berkowitz provides land use counsel to clients involved in real estate development throughout California, with a particular emphasis on Southern California. She represents clients before government agencies in connection with land use approvals and compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and also assists clients in related litigation, primarily arising from project challenges under CEQA and other land use regulations.

Berkowitz regularly represents developers and property owners within the retail, residential, and industrial sectors, seeking to make more productive use of their properties. Additionally, Berkowitz has an extensive background in governmental advocacy and represents clients in connection with local government contracting issues, compliance with governmental regulations and political reform for a variety of sectors including airport concessions, billboards, energy, advertising, pipeline franchises, restaurants, health, and sports and entertainment.

Berkowitz is recognized by the *Daily Journal* as one of the 25 best land use lawyers in California and by *Los Angeles Magazine* as one of the "Women Leaders in the Law." She is a founding member and secretary of the Los Angeles Business Council Institute, past president of California Women's Law Center, and serves on the executive committee of the Central City Association of Los Angeles.

**Lisa Kolieb, Partner**

Kolieb regularly appears before planning commissions, city councils, and other governmental agencies in matters involving land use approvals, environmental and regulatory permits, and local discretionary approvals associated with alcohol licensing on behalf of real estate developers, owners, retailers, and other clients. She regularly conducts land-use due diligence evaluations for property owners, developers, and institutional lenders. Her experience also includes substantial work with CEQA, the Subdivision Map Act, the Mello Act, and the Public Records Act. Kolieb represents clients in connection with government contracts and bid protests, and is well-versed in providing political and public relations assistance to both private sector and public sector clients. She also assists clients with land use litigation, defending development projects against CEQA and other land use-related claims.

**Brady McShane, Partner**

McShane advises clients on political, regulatory, and environmental issues involved in developing controversial projects in California. His practice focuses on securing land use approvals, regulatory permits, and environmental clearance from government agencies, directing public policy and government relations strategies, and counseling clients on land use issues pertaining to the acquisition, disposition, and financing of properties. McShane works with developers, landowners, financial institutions, and builders. McShane has extensive experience with CEQA, the Subdivision Map Act, the Coastal Act, the Mello Act, and other local, state, and federal ordinances, regulations, and statutes. Active in the community, he serves on the board of directors and executive committee of the Special Olympics Southern California and is a member of the Southern California Association of Governments Global Land Use Economic Council and Central City Association of Los Angeles.

**Ellen Castillo, Senior Urban Planner**

Castillo has extensive experience in planning and entitling residential development, commercial, hotel/resort, and industrial projects in California. She provides advice regarding local planning and zoning regulations, state land use regulations, including the California Subdivision Map Act and other local, state, and federal planning and zoning statutes. She specializes in due diligence research and project analysis, coordinating and managing project teams, expediting land use applications and permits, and working cooperatively with public agency officials. Castillo also is a U.S. Green Building Council LEED<sup>®</sup> accredited professional.

**Mark Y. Liu, Partner**

Liu focuses his practice on cross-border corporate finance, mergers and acquisitions, private equity investments, and joint venture transactions with an emphasis on Asian markets. He counsels clients on a broad range of corporate, securities, and business-related matters, including public and private securities offerings, corporate governance, Securities and Exchange Commission reporting and corporate compliance matters. Liu frequently counsels U.S. companies looking to expand their footprint in Hong Kong or Mainland China. Prior to joining Akerman, he served as group legal counsel at Amicorp Ltd. He is a member of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles and the Organization of Chinese Americans — Greater Los Angeles. He also speaks fluent Chinese (Mandarin).

**Michael Weiss, Partner**

Weiss brings more than 20 years of experience handling complex commercial litigation. He focuses his practice on real estate litigation, commercial and business disputes, and complex insurance insolvency matters. His real estate litigation practice includes multimillion dollar easement, entitlement, and contract disputes on behalf of Fortune 500 real estate investment trusts, commercial lease and purchase disputes and transactions, and real estate partnership disputes and workouts. On the insurance side, Weiss is among a select group of

lawyers in California who handle conservation, rehabilitation, and liquidation of insurance companies. His insurance practice also concentrates on regulatory matters and reinsurance. As a commercial litigator, he has managed all aspects of litigation, including jury and bench trials, mediations, and arbitrations. Weiss spent four years with the California Attorney General's Office where he served as lead counsel handling complex business, real estate, tax, insurance insolvency, and regulatory cases for the State of California before state, federal and appellate courts.

Other notable laterals who recently joined the Los Angeles office include real estate partners William "Bill" Ellis, Jane Hinton and Herman Enayati; litigation partner Joshua Mandell, and labor and employment partner Rachel Schumacher.

#### **About Akerman LLP**

Akerman LLP is a leading transactions and trial law firm known for its core strengths in middle market M&A, within the financial services and real estate industries, and for a diverse Latin America practice. With more than 650 lawyers and government affairs professionals and a network of 24 offices, it is ranked among the top 100 law firms in the United States by *The American Lawyer* (2016). Akerman also is ranked among the top 60 law firms for diversity in *The American Lawyer's* Diversity Scorecard (2016).