

LOS ANGELES
Daily Journal

MONDAY,
FEBRUARY 4, 2008

— SINCE 1888 —

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE LOS ANGELES SUPERIOR COURT AND UNITED STATES SOUTHERN DISTRICT COURT

Industry Watch

Sheppard Mullin Expands Its Land-Use Team

By Maya Meinert

Daily Journal Staff Writer

A group of eight land-use attorneys has left Bingham McCutchen for Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton in Orange County, taking Bingham's entire Orange County land-use practice with them.

Geoffrey K. Willis, 46, who joined Sheppard Mullin as a partner, took his team, which includes partner Deborah M. Rosenthal, 55, to Sheppard Mullin to capitalize on the firm's prominent real estate practice.

"Sheppard's Northern California land-use practice is similar to my own, but in Southern California, in this office, they didn't have land use on the transactional side," Willis said. "They do have real estate finance, construction, a lot of practices that we don't do at all, that are a nice marriage with what we do."

Special counsel Marguerite P. Battersby and David R. Hunt also made the move, as well as associates David P. Collins II, Jessica A. Johnson, Douglas E. Wance and Gregory E. Woodard.

The team's practice is split into thirds, according to Willis. The attorneys handle land use-related litigation and water-rights matters in the Western United States, and compliance and entitlement work for major retailers, shopping centers and developers.

Among the clients Willis' group will be taking to Sheppard Mullin are Central Basin Municipal Water District, Developers Diversified Realty Corp., Oak Tree Financial Services, Home Depot and Allergan. Willis said all their clients will be making the move.

Sheppard Mullin chairman Guy Halgren said Willis' group filled a gap in the firm's land-use practice. He also pointed to the size of the group and its water rights practice, which would be a new addition to the firm, as part of the attraction in bringing the attorneys over.



ROBERT LEVINS/ Daily Journal

Land use and natural resources attorneys with Sheppard Mullin's Costa Mesa office are, from left, Geoffrey Willis, Dan Bane, Peg Battersby, David Collins, Misty Calder, David R. Hunt, Douglas Wance, Greg Woodard and Deborah M. Rosenthal.

"We've got one of the premier land use practices in the state, focused in San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco, but we were missing it in Orange County," Halgren said. "We really believe in land use as a practice. We value it greatly. It's a profitable practice for us, and we wanted to bolster it in the middle of the state."

In May, a six-attorney environmental and land-use team, including partners Judy Davidoff and Arthur Friedman, joined Sheppard Mullin from Steefel, Levitt & Weiss in San Francisco.

Willis, who graduated from Hastings College of the Law in 1986, spent 14 months with Bingham before jumping over to Sheppard Mullin. Before that, he was with Sedgwick Detert Moran & Arnold.

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Sheppard Mullin chairman

very strong corporate and litigation practices, and we will continue to expand the office in these areas."

Los Angeles-based Sheppard Mullin has 480 lawyers firmwide, with 47 in Orange County.

Bingham, based in Boston, has 1,000 attorneys and 14 in Orange County, according to its Web site.

Associates Daniel Bane and Misty Calder also made the move last week. Both came from Sedgwick and had previously practiced with Willis.