

Sheppard Mullin Lands Real Estate Ace With Energy Focus

By **Kelly Rizzetta**

Law360, New York (March 29, 2012, 5:45 PM ET) -- Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP fortified its California real estate and energy practices with the addition of a McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP transactional ace who has a background in private equity, Sheppard Mullin announced Thursday.

Tony Toranto recently joined the firm as a partner in its real estate, land use and environmental practice group, based in Sheppard Mullin's San Diego office, according to a statement the firm issued Thursday. Toranto will also be a member of Sheppard Mullin's corporate and energy groups.

Toranto specializes in real property, business and energy transactions, and was prized for the "strong financial and business orientation" he brings to each deal, having previously worked in private equity, according to his new firm.

Toranto will be one of 80 attorneys in Sheppard Mullin's San Diego office and a member of the firm's 70-person real estate, land use and environmental practice. The firm has more than 580 attorneys spread across 14 offices in the United States, Europe and Asia — an overall footprint Toranto described as "considerable."

"I look forward to helping Sheppard Mullin strengthen and continue to build its energy and clean tech practices," Toranto said in a statement.

The new partner laid out his goals in his new role Thursday.

"My near-term objective is to become fully integrated into what is already an excellent real estate practice and platform," Toranto told Law360. "My longer-term objective is to grow the practice — not only in California, but beyond."

The new Sheppard Mullin partner represents clients in a wide range of complex transactional issues and regularly advises on the acquisition, disposition, development, financing and leasing of real property. His expertise includes advising lenders, borrowers and guarantors on loan documentation, workout and loan enforcement issues, Sheppard Mullin said.

In particular, he advises energy clients on real estate, financing and other transactional matters, including the negotiation of power purchase agreements, according to the firm.

"Tony's energy industry and clean tech expertise dovetails well with our existing practices and expands our existing capabilities," Sheppard Mullin Chairman Guy Halgren said in a statement. "He brings a valuable educational and professional background, which includes a mix of significant business and legal experience and accomplishments."

That experience will come in handy, as "real estate development is on an upswing," according to Toronto.

"Sheppard Mullin is uniquely positioned to take advantage of that and serve that market because of our excellence in both the transactional and land use sides of real estate," he noted. "This is especially evident with respect to energy projects, which are typically real estate intensive and have large transactional and land use components."

Sheppard Mullin is not the only firm beefing up its Southern California real estate practice as the market improves. Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP recently rounded out a busy quarter by adding to its Los Angeles office two attorneys who specialize in land use development and related litigation.

The hires included Allan Abshez, a leading authority on land use law and related litigation, and longtime colleague Elizabeth Camacho, who focuses on environmental law.

Good prospects are flying off the market "rapidly," so it is imperative for real estate attorneys practicing in Southern California to be well-rounded, with the ability to close deals thoroughly and quickly, Abshez recently told Law360.

--Editing by Katherine Rautenberg.