

## MVP: Latham's George Mhlsten

*Law360, New York (December 12, 2017, 2:59 PM EST)* -- Latham & Watkins LLP's George Mhlsten notched several big wins in 2017, from helping pave the way for a massive new residential and commercial development in Los Angeles County that had been bound up in the courts for years to assisting in improvements at Universal Studios theme park, securing him a place as one of Law360's 2017 Environmental MVPs.

### ***HIS BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT THIS YEAR:***

In June, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, in coordination with the California Air Resources Board, approved the 11,999-acre, 22,000-home Newhall Ranch development in the Santa Clarita Valley. In August, Los Angeles County approved the first two villages for construction. And a huge settlement with Native American and environmental groups that opposed the project was announced in September, although two holdout California environmental groups have asked the Ninth Circuit not to end their litigation.

Mhlsten was brought into the dispute two years ago, shortly before the California Supreme Court overturned the project's environmental impact report, ruling that the EIR failed to adequately analyze the project's greenhouse gas emissions.

Representing the Five Point/Newhall Ranch developers, Mhlsten and a team of lawyers in Latham's environment, land and resources department, along with co-counsel from Gatzke Dillon & Ballance LLP and Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP, prepared a revised environmental analysis of the greenhouse gas issue based on a new plan to curb the project's emissions.

Mhlsten said the key to the project was establishing the Net Zero Newhall program, intended to reduce or mitigate to zero all of the project's GHG emissions, and finding new ways to ensure no impacts to a protected species of fish located in the Santa Clara River.

The MVP logo features the letters 'MVP' in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. A red circle is drawn around the 'V', with a red arrow pointing upwards from the top of the circle.

**George Mhlsten**  
**Latham & Watkins**

"Working with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the State Air Resources Board, the County of Los Angeles, and the petitioners who had challenged the project, we were able to establish an innovative program of net zero greenhouse gas emissions for the project, the first of its kind in the nation, and possibly the world," Mihalsten said.

Other projects Mihalsten worked on over the past year include advising real estate company Caruso in land use and zoning matters linked to the development of a new mixed-use high-rise residential tower in Los Angeles, representing Tribune Media in efforts to obtain land use entitlements for a major mixed-use, transit-oriented development sited above a new subway station, and representing Paramount Pictures Corp. in obtaining land use approvals for the 25-year master plan for its Hollywood studio.

#### ***HIS BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS YEAR:***

Mihalsten said the Newhall Ranch matter presented an array of difficulties, from sifting through technical analysis related to the Net Zero Newhall program, to working with all the petitioner groups to develop measures to protect the unarmored threespined stickleback fish — an endangered species — to implementing measures to address Native American resource protection concerns.

"In order to protect the endangered species, FivePoint committed to clear span the wet river channel of the Santa Clara River and implement various measures to protect the stickleback fish from any impact," he said. "The assurance to the Native American community that resources would be protected during construction was also of critical importance. This required significant commitments to resource protection measures worked through the Native American communities."

#### ***HIS PROUDEST MOMENT:***

In addition to the Newhall Ranch project, Mihalsten advised NBCUniversal on the implementation of long-term master plan for the 391-acre Universal Studios site in Los Angeles. The company has invested over \$1 billion in improvements at Universal Studios, including the "Wizarding World of Harry Potter," "Fast & Furious — Supercharged," new studio space, and other infrastructure improvements.

He said he often gets a rush of satisfaction when driving or walking through the city and seeing a project that he and his team helped get approved and built.

"You can imagine the joy of seeing a gazillion people from around the world enjoying the 'Wizarding World of Harry Potter,' knowing that we played a role in making that happen," Mihalsten said.

#### ***WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:***

Mihalsten said getting people with divergent interests to work together to create a great project is a great motivator.

"I get to work with incredibly talented people at our firm, in the community, and with our clients. Every day I get to talk to someone interesting," he said. "It can be a world acclaimed architect, a senior executive of a development company, a community leader, a politician, or an environmentalist. Or a

neighbor who is concerned about an impact on their home or business. We don't always agree, but we work through issues to try and find good solution."

— *As told to Juan Carlos Rodriguez*

*Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2017 MVP winners after reviewing more than 1,000 submissions.*

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