

Employee Spotlight

Steve Mikulic rejoined Walsh Colucci in 2017 and works in the Land Use and Zoning practice group in the Arlington office. He first worked with the Firm during 2016 as a summer associate. His practice primarily focuses on securing zoning and land use entitlements such as rezonings, special permits, and special exceptions. Steve graduated from the Marshall-Wythe School of Law at the College of William & Mary after earning a B.S. in Political Science from Eastern Michigan University, where he served on the editorial board of the William and Mary Environmental Law and Policy Review.

Originally from London, Ontario, Steve moved to Michigan after marrying his wife, Sara. They subsequently decided to set down roots in usually snow-free Virginia. Besides the law, Steve is interested in political theory, technology, and his home country's national pastime of hockey. In this month's Employee Spotlight, we will learn a lot more about Steve. Read on!

The Land Lawyers: We know you were born and raised in Canada. What do you miss most about Canada? What do you love most about your new home?

SM: There's plenty of easy answers to this question, but the real answer about what I miss is less easily defined. The United States and Canada are so similar, the same majority language (but we add extra vowels into words where we can), similar culture, we watch all of your channels for most of our entertainment, and so on. I think it's that similarity that makes all the tiny things really stand out. You might not notice any of them on their own, but when taken together, it creates a certain feeling.

As for my new home, there are few places in Canada that can match the sheer number of people and things and sights and sounds all in one place like so many great American cities can manage. While we've a fantastic milieu of cultures back in Canada, you do not necessarily encounter it unless you're trying to. Here in the United States, especially in Northern Virginia and the District, I've had the opportunity to experience so many different foods, cultures, ideas, and perspectives. Knowing that I've only seen the tip of the iceberg makes it that much more exciting.

TLL: What did you think you wanted to be when you were younger?

SM: An astronaut. Then, when I learned about how hard it was to become an astronaut, I figured I'd "just" become an astronomer. That sounded really hard too, and then another child accidentally broke my precious telescope, and that was all a bit too much for very young Steve. I also briefly considered writing a note in law school about an aspect of space law. I suppose you could call it a theme.

TLL: What interested you about the legal field?

SM: I learned, at an early stage in life, how much impact the law has on people's lives. Whether seeing it at work in a courtroom, via a regulatory scheme, or in some other form, the law felt a bit like this invisible force that guided what would or wouldn't happen. Knowing and understanding the mechanics behind that always felt really important to me.

So, when I had the opportunity to pursue a higher education, it was really an obvious choice for me. Working in the law gives you the opportunity to understand and use and even help shape those mechanics, and hopefully leave the place better than you found it, in a way that is meaningful to you. That, most of all, is what makes me love this sort of work.

TLL: What aspect of your role do you enjoy the most?

SM: It most certainly is the people. Whether building relationships with clients and other partners in the development process, or trying to understand a community's concern or interest and square that with your client's goals for success — all of this is about, with, and for people. And I'd be remiss if I did not point out that the people I come in and work beside every day are a big factor in making my work as satisfying as it is.

TLL: Aside from a very busy schedule, what do you do for fun?

SM: I'm a techie at heart, and right now home automation and smart home gadgets have been a lot of fun to tinker with. I love a good book, a great meal with friends, playing a nerdy board game, or taking the dog for a nice long walk on a sunny afternoon.

TLL: Where's the best place you've traveled to, and why?

SM: For someone who has spent considerable time living in multiple countries, I haven't spent much time yet traveling to all the places I want to see. But, as a son of the Canadian version of the Midwest, I thought the Great Lakes were the end all, be all. Now that I've spent a few vacations on the coast, nothing beats the relaxing sound of the ocean.

TLL: What is next on your travel list?

SM: We're torn between somewhere with that sort of white sand and crystal blue water they show on TV, or a European tour.

TLL: Any fun plans for the holidays?

SM: I am always a big fan of taking an evening stroll where holiday decorations are set up, and soaking in the sights and the vibe of the season. This year we've planned a nice, and relatively quiet, holiday at home.

TLL: What is your favorite book and why?

SM: I don't think I could claim to have a favorite book. Different books have really stuck with me, or helped define a time in my life, but I rarely find myself rereading even an old favorite. I'm mid-stream on two books that have really caught my attention though, Ronald C. White's biography of President Grant entitled American Ulysses, and Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates.

TLL: What do you like most about working at the Firm?

SM: Well, as I mentioned before, the people make all the difference in the world. I once was with an interviewer who told me, "You can't always choose when you're knee deep in something a client needs yesterday, working at all hours. What you can choose is who you're stuck with." From the top down, our firm is filled with people you'd want to be stuck with. Hopefully, they don't mind when they get stuck with me!

TLL: Thank you, Steve!