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The attorneys of **High Swartz LLP's Municipal Law Group** continue the over 100-year-old legacy of resolving complex legal matters for local municipalities and their citizens. page 56



HIGH ground

by Bill Donahue | photos by Nina Lea Photography

The attorneys of **High Swartz LLP's Municipal Law Group** continue the over 100-year-old legacy of resolving complex legal matters for local municipalities and their citizens.

Located in the suburbs of Philadelphia, High Swartz LLP has earned a distinguished reputation that traces back to its inception in 1914. The full-service law firm offers adept legal counsel in just about every legal facet—from appellate work through zoning law. However, it's the firm's municipal law practice that has proved to be foundational to its southeastern Pennsylvania presence.

Essentially, municipal law involves the practice of providing legal guidance to municipalities to facilitate the efficient and effective operation of local government. You'll find attorneys at High Swartz LLP involved in every level of local government—as zoning

hearing board solicitors, general municipal solicitors, special counsel, labor counsel, and conflict counsel.

High Swartz's Municipal Law Group includes nine full-time attorneys, practicing from their law offices in Norristown and Doylestown. The group has the honor of being ranked nationally by *U.S. News & World Report* as a Tier 1 law firm for Land Use & Zoning Law, a big part of municipal work. Although their offices are based in Montgomery County and Bucks County respectively, the attorneys work with townships and boroughs throughout eastern Pennsylvania, and that footprint is expanding.

Partner Gilbert P. High Jr. is a municipal law and estates attorney whose grandfather,

Samuel H. High, helped found the firm. What High likes most about municipal work is the opportunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of fellow community members.

"A municipality is basically a corporation with thousands of shareholders, and you have to deal with and be responsive to their issues," High says. "Municipal law is about being 'of the people, by the people, for the people.' I have a great deal of faith in local government, and I want the residents of local municipalities to sense that."

"Developing relationships is the heart of this work," says David J. Brooman, a partner and the head of High Swartz's municipal practice. "People love to tell their story,



Each of the nine attorneys in the firm's municipal law group has a specific niche.

whether it's about their business or their township, and having a sincere interest in listening to those stories helps you gain trust. If you love what you do, spend enough time doing it, and get to know your clients really well, people will rely on you. That's a responsibility we all take very seriously."

Brooman appreciates the "intellectual challenge" that comes from practicing in areas such as zoning and land-use development and environmental law and litigation. He says the work requires him to be "a skilled generalist—someone who knows a little about everything." Whether a case involves a municipality or a private entity, Brooman immerses himself in the interests of his clients.

"From the beginning when I started practicing law, I've wanted to delve into each client's business—really get to know the senior management if I was going to help them solve problems," he says. "I want to know what's important to them and what their strategic plan is for the next six to 10 years. Clients come to view me as a business advisor—and that goes for townships, too. Before you know it, they're asking you questions that have nothing to do with the law."

Attorney Thomas E. Panzer joined High Swartz LLP in 2015 when his firm, McNamara Bolla & Panzer, merged with High Swartz. Today, as a partner tasked with leading High Swartz's Doylestown office, Panzer maintains a busy practice as a municipal, zoning, and workers' compensation attorney. He attributes the strength of the firm's municipal practice to three essential attributes.

"First is our core competence and being able to offer substantively sound advice," he says. "Second is our demeanor and approach, remembering that we are advisors, not policy makers. Third is the ability to be present and respond to the needs of the people we represent. If we deliver on these attributes, we will continue to grow our reputation as a strong regional full-

service law firm."

Each of the attorneys in the firm's municipal law group has a specific niche. High, for example, has become known as one of Pennsylvania's premier experts on tree law. Although tree-lined streets add to a community's desirability, most Pennsylvania municipalities struggle to maintain so-called "street trees" because of the associated cost.

"Lower Merion Township has something like 18,000 trees that line its streets," High says. "Whose responsibility is it to maintain those trees? You have to sort out, 'OK, what is the law in terms of a limb from a street tree falling on a car or the whole tree coming down?' That has spread out into, 'OK, what is the law in terms of one neighbor dealing with a problem tree on another neighbor's property?' There are so many issues that come up."

Brooman has a keen interest in preservation. He cites a project known as the Mattison Estate in Ambler. Once the personal estate of the late asbestos magnate Richard V. Mattison, M.D., the property fell into disrepair in the years after Mattison's death in 1936. In recent years, Brooman worked closely with Upper Dublin Township to preserve and protect the property's significant historic assets, including iconic Lindenwold Castle. At the same time, he facilitated opportunities for thoughtful residential development as a way to breathe new life into the area.

"The Mattison Estate is an example of what I like best about this kind of work," Brooman says. "It allows for a great deal of creativity in solving problems, and it brings developers, townships, and community groups together to engineer a solution that everyone can support. It's not always easy, but if you work hard enough, you can come to a consensus."

High Swartz municipal lawyers' work doesn't end when they leave the office. All members are active in volunteer and civic organizations including Habitat for Humanity

and The Support Center for Child Advocates. You'll find them in public official positions as well. Panzer, for example, served a four-year term as Bucks County treasurer, completed two terms as a supervisor in his hometown of Warminster, and served a five-year term as a member of the Warminster Municipal Authority Board of Directors.

"We have built a strong, stable, and respected presence in Bucks County," Panzer adds. "I have seen a lot of law firms come and go, and I'm honored to have joined a firm with a 100-year history in and around the Philadelphia region. We can thank attorneys like Gil High, David Brooman, and the firm's managing partner, Joel Rosen, for that."

As High reflects on his storied career with the firm, he cannot help but look to the future. He forecasts continued growth in the firm's municipal practice, among other practice areas, and expects to see the firm's team of attorneys grow along with it. Just as it has done in the past, the firm will grow by attracting talented young attorneys who "appreciate the gratification that can be afforded to them by working in an established regional firm."

"I have been affiliated with this firm for almost 65 years," High adds. "In that period of time, the firm has maintained an ethical integrity and respect for clients, for other lawyers, for the court system, and for one another. That's what I'm most proud of—the standard of ethical integrity I think the judicial system calls on lawyers to maintain—and that's true for every practice area at the firm, not just our municipal practice." ■



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