

GOLDMAN & PEASE LLC

Legal Services with a Personal Touch

by Pamela Schweppe

The letter of the law may seem cut and dried to some, but Howard S. Goldman, of Goldman & Pease LLC, never forgets that there are human beings behind every issue. And, it's the challenge of helping them resolve their conflicts that invigorates his practice of the law.

Goldman began his career in his home state of Rhode Island, where issues sometimes cross the border into Massachusetts. After being admitted to practice in both states, he began working for a firm in downtown Boston, where one of the associates was a young, up-and-coming attorney by the name of Cameron C. Pease. The two discovered they shared a common philosophy and complementary legal skills. For roughly 10 years, they have been working in partnership, and a year ago, that partnership was formalized as the law firm of Goldman & Pease LLC.

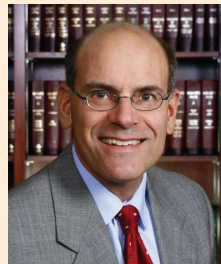
The firm is located in Needham, Mass., where the partners are “closer to our clients along the 128 belt,” as Goldman puts it, referring to Routes 95/128, which run concurrently through that region of metrowest Boston. “It’s perfect for our clients,” confirms Pease, who specializes in condo-related civil litigation in the courts of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Middlesex counties.

The firm consists of three attorneys and two support staff — large enough to provide the services needed, yet small enough to keep the service personal. “We’re smaller, so we can be more hands on,” says Pease. “In larger firms, clients are sometimes stuck with junior associates, but here, Howard and

I put in a lot of hours. We’re very dedicated to our clients.”

Grounded in Personal Experience

It takes someone with an in-depth understanding of the unique problems facing condominium associations to be successful in this particular legal specialty. Goldman gained a firsthand understanding of these special needs in 1990, when he purchased a condo-



Howard S. Goldman



Cameron C. Pease

minium himself and was elected to the board. “I saw the issues involved — cost overruns, special assessments, loud parties,” Goldman says. “I saw that it was a growing area of the law, and I decided to go in that direction.” Today, he and his partner work with property managers, trustees, developers, general contractors, financial organizations and others on a wide range of issues — from landlord/tenant issues to condominium law and zoning. “Whatever comes up,” says Pease, “we’ve probably seen it before, because we specialize in it.”

Part of the philosophy shared by Goldman and Pease is a focus on resolving disputes by leveraging their clients’ position, so they are working toward resolution from a position of strength.

Mediation is often an important tool in this process.

“People need to live and work together,” says Goldman, who has been certified as a mediator for condominium issues. “We look for ways to resolve things short of litigation.” He cites a case where construction defects led an association to aggressively pursue a claim against the contractor. Goldman was able to persuade the parties involved to “sit around a table” with an outside mediator in an effort to reach a resolution.

In cases where litigation is required, however, an attorney provides the client with a realistic expectation of the outcome, the options available to them and the estimated cost — always keeping in mind that the goal is a financial one. “We don’t want ‘paper judgments,’” he explains. “We want to make sure that it’s collectible.”

“If costs are going to outstrip the damages, we look at other ways to resolve the issue,” adds Goldman.

One particularly tricky case that only those with a keen understanding of the quirks of condominium law could handle involved Highlands West Condominiums of Walpole, Mass. Built in three phases over the course of a decade, the complex consists of three separate condo associations — Highlands West, the Village at Swan Pond and the Homes at Swan Pond — all sharing a common clubhouse, two swimming pools, two tennis courts and a basketball court.

A conflict among the three separate associations arose when one of the developers installed a pump to prevent the spring-fed pond on the property from running dry. Because their homes

didn't front the pond, most of the owners of the Homes at Swan Pond were unwilling to chip in on the electricity needed to keep the pump running. "Howard was very responsive, very helpful," declares Nancy Servais, a trustee of Highlands West. "I'm in the real estate business, and I know that attorneys can be very unresponsive. But any time we called with a question or problem, we always got a call back." The issue was resolved in March.

Clients Are in the Loop

That case illustrates another of the distinguishing attributes of Goldman & Pease: a belief that effective communication between lawyer and client is fundamental to successful representation. "We work at being responsive to the legal issues that affect our clients," Goldman says.

A case in point is that of River Crossing Condominium Trust of Norton, Mass. According to trustee Joe Puccia, one of the unit owners simply walked away from the property and stopped paying monthly fees. When the bank took over the unit, it failed to maintain it properly.

In a condo complex especially, letting one unit deteriorate isn't an isolated incident. "People are living together in close quarters," Goldman says. "They share common area, and a problem in one unit can immediately impact the unit next door." Which was exactly what worried the trustees of River Crossing Condominium Trust. Their concerns were realized on the day that they inspected the abandoned unit and discovered that the pipes had burst.

By the time Goldman & Pease became involved in the case, the non-payment of fees had been dragging on for "about two years," according to Puccia. The lawyers proved themselves "very informative, very respectful and professional," Puccia says. "You always know what's going on."

Two months ago, the issue was resolved. "You really have to know what you're doing in the condominium

market," Puccia says. "We've had very favorable results so far."

Real Help

That personal touch is especially important in today's economy — as are reasonable legal fees. Even given their level of personal attention and the hours they put in, Goldman & Pease are committed to providing high-quality legal services at rates that are competitive and cost-effective, even for the most complicated matters. According

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to Goldman, the firm always reviews projected costs with the client from the start, so there are no surprises. "We offer big firm experience at suburban rates," he says.

Just ask Matt Page, senior property manager for Boston Realty Works Inc. When he became responsible for the management of a complex in Chelsea, Mass., a year ago, he discovered that many unit owners were not paying their special assessment fees. Already short of cash, the association board was concerned about paying the legal fees that would enable them to pursue the delinquent accounts.

"Howard was like a breath of fresh air," says Page. "He came in and told us there would be no upfront legal fees. 'I'll get paid when you get paid,' is what he said. You never hear that!"

Throughout the collection process, Page was impressed by Goldman's confidence, intelligence and responsiveness. "He constantly gave us updates and even came to the monthly trustees' meeting," Page reports. "It was awesome."

Of the 20 or so units that were delinquent when Goldman came onboard in mid-September, only five remain in arrears. "He gives us peace of mind, that's for sure," Page says.

Another client who benefited from the ability of Goldman & Pease to col-

lect funds in difficult economic times is Rich Piltch, president of ARS Services, a professional restoration firm. In one case, Piltch's company had provided emergency restoration services after a fire. The insurance company sent the check to the couple whose home had been renovated, and, while they were extremely happy with the work that had been done, personal issues involving a divorce prevented them from turning the money over to ARS Services. Goldman & Pease helped to straighten

out the situation quickly and efficiently, according to Piltch. "They were very diligent in their perseverance," he says. "They were very hands on, very responsive and proactive in collecting the funds, and they really kept us in the loop about what was happening."

Keeping It Personal

A sense of community remains a force in the attorneys' personal lives, as well. Each is an active member of the Community Associations Institute, submitting articles for publication in *Condo Media* regarding condominium living. In addition, they join various seminars and presentations to condominium owners, managers, vendors and trustees; participate in the Attorneys' Committee of CAI; and serve as a resource to other attorneys in their particular practice areas. In addition, Goldman serves on the zoning board of appeals and the economic advisory council for the town of Needham, Mass., where he now resides.

It's just another way that Goldman & Pease gives condominium law that personal touch.

For more information about Goldman & Pease's personalized legal services, call (781) 292-1080, or visit the company's Web site at www.goldmanpease.com.