

THE **RECORDER**

'Today's Workplace Looks Different': Willkie Signs Upsized Office Lease in San Francisco

By **Jessie Yount**

July 27, 2023

What You Need to Know

- Willkie is moving into a new office in San Francisco, increasing its footprint by 40%.
- The move signals that the firm is in growth mode and encouraging significant in-person time, leaders said.
- The San Francisco office has 45 lawyers, up from just two partners when it was launched in 2019.

Pursuing the benefits of in-person time, Willkie Farr & Gallagher has signed a lease for a 44,000-square-foot office at 330 Bush St. in San Francisco, increasing its footprint by about 40%.

The move comes at a time when many firms are downsizing their real estate. In Northern California, Farella Braun + Martel earlier this year condensed its space from 15 floors to just two, while DLA Piper cut its Palo Alto footprint by more than half last fall.

In Southern California, Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, O'Melveny & Myers, Orrick and Alston & Bird have also downsized their spaces since 2022.

More recently, Fox Rothschild said it would shrink its Philadelphia headquarters by 40%,



Photo: Diego M. Radzinski/ALM

Willkie Farr & Gallagher offices in Washington, D.C.

while a host of firms in Washington, D.C., have also reduced their space amid the rise of hybrid work.

Willkie's decision to increase its space in San Francisco reflects its rapid head count growth in the region, its continued desire for growth, and its attitude toward the office, according to office leaders Simona Agnolucci and Ben Hur.

Agnolucci and Hur launched the office in 2019, less than a year after the firm planted a flag in Palo Alto. (It now has an office in Los Angeles, too.) Since then, the San Francisco

office has grown to 45 lawyers including its incoming associates, Agnolucci said, attributing the success to a group effort.

“We have fantastic people who we recruited, who then went out and recruited people themselves,” she said.

Meanwhile, the firm has been able to expand its relationships with clients given its growing West Coast platform and develop new clients, Hur said.

The new office, which the firm will move into at the end of the year, has more communal space and single-sized offices for attorneys, Agnolucci said.

“We needed more offices to put people in, and people tend to be here in the office,” Agnolucci added. “Working together has helped us increase our collegiality and reinforce our culture.”

Firmwide, Willkie is asking attorneys to be in the office three days a week. The San Francisco office is following that policy, Agnolucci said, noting that she is in the office almost every day. Most lawyers are in at least three days a week, she said.

Hur said the firm has regular programming including monthly happy hours and lunches. The office recently hosted a “progressive” party, during which partners on each floor hosted attorneys for cocktails and snacks. The event ended with a concert, courtesy of one of the partner’s children and their band, he added.

It was the second year the office held a progressive party, and it “may be back next year by popular demand,” Hur said.

The new office has more collaboration spaces including a large kitchen with banquette seating and more conference space and a centralized conference center, Agnolucci added.

She said that reflects a shift from the old days, when people talked about gathering around a water cooler. “You get that image of a dingy back room where you go to fill a cup of water, and that’s where people gathered,” she said.

“Today’s workplace looks different,” Agnolucci said. “Now you might sit down and have a check-in at a kitchen banquette while enjoying a kombucha.”

Hur said the office is also a signal of Willkie’s commitment to San Francisco for the long haul, despite the fact that the city has been challenged by a number of tech companies and other businesses that have given up their office space.

“Tech may be experiencing a moment of slower growth, but we see tremendous value in being together for a significant part of the week,” Hur said. “We don’t believe the benefits are going away anytime soon.”

From a demand perspective, Agnolucci said that corporate work has gotten busier in San Francisco and across the firm since the start of the year. Meanwhile, privacy litigation in Northern California, regulatory actions and antitrust are fueling high demand nationwide and in California.

“Our new office has plenty of space for growth,” Hur added. “We’ll continue to look to grow in our core practices including litigation, corporate and M&A.”