

Long-Time Member Profile: Karen Mintzer

By Aaron Gershonowitz

For this issue we have focused our long-time member profile on Karen Mintzer, who is a partner at Mintzer Mauch PLLC, an environmental, land use, and real estate law firm that is certified by New York State, New York City and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey as a Women-Owned Business Enterprise (WBE). Karen has been active in a number of the section's committees. She is currently the co-chair of the Enforcement and Compliance Subcommittee, which sponsored a panel on Civil and Criminal Investigations and Enforcement of Environmental Law in New York State in March 2023, and recently worked with others in EELS to develop the section's comments on the proposed revision to the brownfields program.

Karen's environmental law experience includes both private practice and public service. She began her career as a litigator at Stroock, Stroock and Lavan, then practiced environmental law at Sive, Paget and Riesel, P.C. and Kramer Levin Naftalis and Frankel LLP, where she litigated environmental cases and advised on regulatory matters and the environmental elements of real estate transactions, land use, and permitting. Her public service includes three years as regional attorney at DEC Region 2 (covering New York City) and as general counsel to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). This combination of public service and private practice experience gives Karen a unique perspective when advising clients on environmental matters.

In January 2020, Karen co-founded Mintzer Mauch PLLC. The firm currently represents real estate developers, businesses, not for profits, and New York City and New York State agency clients on the full range of environmental issues, including litigation, environmental review, permitting, defense of enforcement actions, brownfields, and transactional advising. Co-founding a law firm with her partner Helen Mauch was the realization of an idea hatched long ago, while Karen and Helen were associates in "big law." Karen is finding it very satisfying to see this idea of a women-owned environmental, land use, and real estate law firm become a successful reality. Karen noted that several lawyers were kind enough to share their law firm establishment experiences with her and Helen as they were deciding whether to start their own firm; she enjoys paying it forward by speaking to other lawyers who are thinking about following suit. Karen also hopes that the success of her women-owned law firm may inspire other women lawyers to go out on their own.



Karen Mintzer

Some of the more interesting projects Karen has worked on have required a combination of her experience representing private developers and her experience in state government. For example, her current work on the development of the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail, a multi-use recreational trail extending from Cold Spring to Beacon that will be developed on land owned by the state, municipalities, and private property, has required her to combine her real estate development and environmental regulatory expertise with her understanding of how state government works. Karen is also working with New York State agency clients on projects related to the development of renewable energy. Karen is particularly proud of her involvement in the establishment of the new Shirley Chisholm State Park in southeast Brooklyn, New York, while she was general counsel at OPRHP, which involved complex negotiations among OPRHP, the United States Department of the Interior, and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. The 400-acre park was developed on a former New York City landfill adjacent to Jamaica Bay and offers hiking and biking trails, a free bike library, and waterfront access to a neighborhood that was sorely lacking in open space.

Karen loves to travel, most recently to Botswana and Zimbabwe, and ski with her husband and two teenaged sons. Having been exposed to the vast New York State park system while at OPRHP, she is also (slowly) trying to visit the many parks she has not yet seen.

Karen received her B.A., with honors, from Lafayette College and her J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.