



ATTORNEY PROFILE

MICHELLE N. FARKAS

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Though Michelle Farkas has been practicing real estate law at Gravel & Shea for over 20 years, she never planned to be a real estate attorney. As a law student, she interned with the American Civil Liberties Union in Miami, with the Miami District Attorney's office under Janet Reno, and with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Boston. Then, after spending the summer before her third year of law school at Goodwin Proctor in Boston, her original course changed; she discovered that she was especially suited to real estate law.

Instead of the contentiousness of litigation, Michelle was drawn to the art of bringing people together to make deals happen. The most exciting part for Michelle is ultimately seeing the end result of her efforts. "You create a framework for something to actually get built. When you're dealing with real estate, you can see the projects materialize. It's very concrete."

Michelle also appreciates the constant evolution of the law, which keeps it interesting. "There are always new issues coming up and problems to tackle," she says. Most recently, Michelle championed the creation of a blockchain practice group at Gravel & Shea and has worked with national blockchain companies Propy and Consensus on pilot projects in South Burlington. "I attended an ABA blockchain and real estate seminar online recently, and Vermont got a good shout out for our progress in the blockchain arena. We're definitely on the radar for our efforts," says Michelle.

A Miami native, Michelle spent her college and law school years in upstate New York and New England. After one visit to Burlington, she and her husband decided to move to the Queen City, where Michelle found a position at Gravel & Shea.

"At Gravel & Shea, I had the opportunity early on to interact with clients and manage entire transactions on my own. At a big firm, you are often given very discrete projects. I never really felt like I had my hands on the whole deal," says Michelle. Like many lawyers in the Burlington community, she appreciates the camaraderie of a small legal community where repeated interaction with the same lawyers sets a high bar for being respectful and collegial.

Within that community, both clients and other attorneys recognize Michelle's expertise. She was recently named 2020 Burlington Lawyer of the Year for Real Estate Law in *The Best Lawyers in America*®, an honor she also received in 2012. Michelle knows exactly why she's good at what she does. "I am super practical," she says. "I can weigh risks and figure out pretty quickly what matters and what doesn't. Some people get bogged down in details that don't matter, wasting time without focusing on the really big issues."

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Michelle hasn't lost her passion for the issues she championed as a law school intern, particularly equal treatment of women. Since she became Gravel & Shea's hiring partner in 2014, the gender balance in the firm has shifted considerably, to the point that nearly half of the lawyers in the firm are women. "It's not that I'm striving for any particular result, but we're simply being fully open to all candidates. Everyone benefits from having more inclusion in the workplace," she says.

Michelle encouraged the firm to sponsor The Vermont Women's Fund 15 years ago, a cause that has become the firm's largest sponsorship each year. She helped draft Vermont's pending equal rights legislation and got the firm involved in the Business Peer Exchange, a program created by Change the Story to help businesses improve gender equity and inclusion. "It's bigger than the workplace," says Michelle, "but that's one forum that's bringing people together to talk about these important issues."

Whether it's real estate, blockchain, or equal rights, Michelle doesn't shy away from complex problems. Whatever the problem, she focuses on cutting through the noise and joining with others to create solutions that bring real progress. "I really love what I do," she says.

For more information about Michelle N. Farkas, visit www.gravelshea.com/our-team/shareholder/michelle-n-farkas.