

Sheppard Mullin Eyes February Office Return With 'Intentional Flexibility' and 'Teams First' Approach

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By **Jessie Yount**

What You Need to Know

- Sheppard Mullin is postponing its office return date to Feb. 7.
- After Feb. 7, teams are asked to plan to be together in the office at least three days per week.
- The firm's new 'unplug' program offers 40 hours of billable



Luca Salvi, chairman of Sheppard Mullin.

Courtesy photo

credit for time off to associates and special counsel.

Sheppard Mullin is pushing its official return-to-office date



Photo: Diego M. Radzinski/ALM

Sheppard Mullin's Washington, D.C., offices.

to Feb. 7, due to a combination of the holiday season, travel plans, the omicron variant and guidance from medical experts, according to a memo sent to all personnel on Thursday.

Beginning Feb. 7, the firm is asking teams, including partners, attorneys and professional

staff, to come into the office together at least three days a week, as part of a return plan that prioritizes team-based communication, intentional flexibility and well-being.

It's all part of an approach that takes the learnings and challenges from the past year and

nine months, and channels it into a "collaborative" and "consensus-driven" approach for the future, said Luca Salvi, who succeeded Guy Halgren as chairman of the firm in October. He said "relationships" helped the firm succeed in the past two years.

"Now, we want to take advantage of that flexibility and reinforce that stickiness, that culture and those relationships by getting back to the office with a purpose. When you start to put structure around it and coordinate teams, that is a real game changer," he said.

Salvi continued, "This is about the future, and making sure we are developing professionals for our next generation, and mentoring in a way that young lawyers deserve, so they can look beyond all the tangible benefits and see the huge benefits of having a career that is driven by relationships."

The teams-based approach was developed after months of an "active listening tour," with attorneys and staff, according to chief human resources officer Bess Sully, who noted the firm is looking at return to work through one lens for the vast majority of its personnel.

As for the makeup of individual teams, that remains flexible, Sully said. A team could be a practice group, industry team or client teams made up of individuals who work closely together, she said.

The firm also introduced its "Unplug and Recharge program," specifically for associates and special counsel. These attorneys can use up to 40 hours of time off per year that will count toward billable time.

"We wanted to make sure attorneys with billable expectations understand they can walk away and unplug," Sully said. "This shows them we'll credit you for the time."

"Everybody is working hard all the time," Salvi added. "But in this hybrid world, there's a mental fatigue aspect that is less about the number of hours worked and just as much about feeling that the days are turning into nights, the nights are turning into weekends, and people feel they don't have control over their life."

As part of that recognition, management has worked to set more boundaries, such as encouraging all managers to think proactively about when

they're reaching out, and if it is a matter that is client-driven and truly requires taking time on a Friday night or a Saturday to attend to.

"It's an ongoing conversation, and we're really trying to calibrate what is real, what has to get done, against what we can manage and have more control over," Salvi said.

Sheppard Mullin also announced its bonus program for associates on Thursday, which matches the annual and special bonus standards set by Cravath, Swaine & Moore and Davis Polk & Wardell, for associates who bill 2,000 hours. Associates who bill 1,900 and 1,950 will receive smaller annual and special bonuses as well.

High billers (associates who record 2,200 and 2,400 hours) will receive 110% and 120% of the market-based bonuses. Additionally, once an associate reaches the minimum billable hour requirement of 1,850, any of their unlimited pro bono hours and up to 75 of creditable time for diversity and inclusion, business development and training/mentoring work will count toward the hours-based bonus program.