

# MVE Sees Building Projects Moving Ahead

## ARCHITECTURE: McLarands finds work outside OC, state

By PETER J. BRENNAN

During the 2008 Great Recession, Irvine-based architecture firm **MVE & Partners Inc.** was able to survive by finding work in China, where it designed 18 million square feet of projects—including more than 10 million square feet in the now infamous city of Wuhan.

Nowadays with the Chinese market evaporated and California hobbled by the pandemic shutdown, MVE is once again seeing work elsewhere, this time in states such as Utah, Colorado and Arizona.



**MVE Chairman, CEO Carl McLarand**

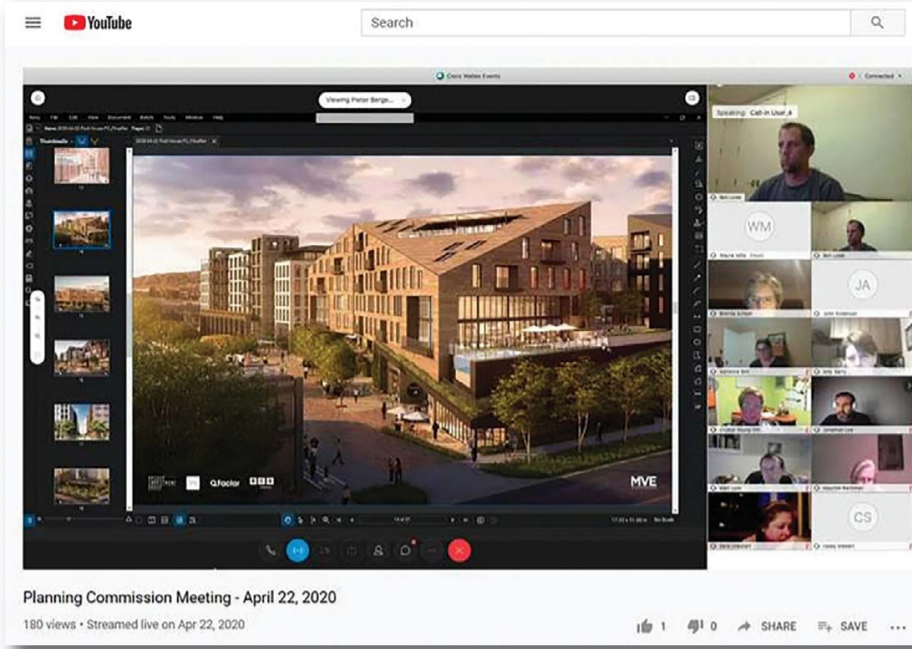
“Part of our success is that we are working in many states not as affected as California,” Chairman and Chief Executive **Carl McLarand** told the Business Journal in a recent interview.

“Our workload was solid and has increased since the pandemic,” he said.

“Things have changed. Our firm seems to be doing reasonably well.”

McLarand, who founded MVE in 1974, became an architectural legend by designing some of Southern California’s most iconic projects, such as Water Garden, a 1.2 million-square-foot office that is the largest ever approved by the city of Santa Monica.

Since 1977, it has worked closely with **Irvine Co.** to design multifamily buildings like the Westview apartment complex near the San Diego (405) Freeway next to the Irvine Spectrum and the Villas Fashion Island apartments in



**MVE's Pieter Berger (not pictured), while sitting at home in Santa Ana, won approval from a planning commission for a 580-unit project in Salt Lake City**

Newport Beach.

The fact that MVE continues designing is an indicator that large buildings projects are not being postponed.

MVE’s clients are bigger entities that have the capital to withstand the economy’s temporary shutdown, he said.

“Our client basis is rock solid,” McLarand said. “These organizations have substantial financial resources when others don’t. That’s why we are getting the go-ahead.”

During the coronavirus pandemic, the company has boosted its employee count from 71 to 75.

### Shift Home

When the coronavirus struck in March, mem-

bers of the architectural firm began working from their homes.

“The good news is [as] we were going into pandemic—we were on pace for a record year,” said President **Matt McLarand**, the son of Carl McLarand.

“We were fortunate to have a backlog of work coming into this pandemic.”

An indicator of current trends was a presentation to the Salt Lake City Planning Commission about Post House Apartments, a mixed-used project with 461,921 square feet of residential space in 580 units, and another 26,833 square feet of retail.

The hearing was broadcast on **YouTube**.

“**Pieter Berger**, a senior associate partner

with MVE, made the presentation from his home in Orange County and received a 6 to 1 project approval for his streaming presentation,” Matt said. “It demonstrates that you can really work in remote locations quite efficiently.”

### Springboard

In recent years, the firm has transitioned into designing “larger, more intense, more complicated structures” such as high-rises in downtown Los Angeles, Carl McLarand said.

For example, it’s designed a 43-story tall project called the 1111 Hill Street Tower that includes 26 stories with 319 residential units, a nine-story hotel and a six-story parking garage.

“In the past year, 1111 was a springboard” to other projects, Matt said.

The firm is now working on other tower projects in Los Angeles.

“Negotiations are still ongoing during the pandemic—we’re still having the dialogue,” he said, noting that clients with entitlements don’t want to wait for the pandemic to end.

One advantage might be a drop in construction costs as fewer projects move forward.

It still has its fingers in multi-family complexes, particularly since the “housing crisis is still in play.”

“People still need to live somewhere,” Carl said. “There’s been a shortage of housing in Southern and Northern California for some time. There will be demand when the coronavirus fades away.”

### OC Still

While it’s looking outside the state for work,



**MVE President Matthew McLarand**

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1111 Hill Street Tower was a springboard to other high-rises in LA



4th & Main: pair of 7-story residential towers planned in downtown Santa Ana

MVE is continuing its work in Orange County.

The firm is currently working on several large-scale master planning projects that it plans to publicize in upcoming months.

Additionally, the firm is working on existing projects such as the **Toll Brothers'** 4th and Main Street project in downtown Santa Ana.

The project is going up at the current site of the First American Title plaza building in the city; it will include 220 units in two buildings running seven stories each, according to plans.

The architecture for 4th and Main "draws inspiration from the historic district, utilizing traditional materials in modern ways," according to the firm.

Features will include street-level retail and extensive sidewalk dining areas to activate the pedestrian experience, "while a rooftop terrace will provide residents with a social gathering space unlike any other in the city," it said.

**Collaboration Key**

While MVE employees working from home was more efficient than their executives

**MVE & Partners Inc.**



- **HEADQUARTERS:** Irvine
- **FOUNDER/CHAIRMAN/CEO:** Carl McLarand
- **PRESIDENT:** Matthew McLarand
- **NOTABLE:** a decade ago, MVE designed 10M square feet in Wuhan. "We've never been back to see it and probably never will," Carl McLarand says. "Wuhan was a beautiful city, much nicer than Beijing."

expected, they also say companies will still want to have their employees come to their offices.

The executives downplayed speculation that the efficiency of working from home may lead to a reduced need for office space.

"There's still going to be a preference to work in a communal area to share ideas with each other," Matt said.

"It's a little bit more difficult to be collaborative on a computer at home." ■



Prior work in Wuhan totaled 10M SF



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