



RAFAEL F. PIGNATARO

Partner

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Rafael (Ralph) Pignataro is a transactional business and commercial real estate lawyer. He focuses his practice on large-scale commercial development and construction, commercial real estate, as well as related finance and other business transactional matters.

Ralph spent 6 years in the industry as in-house counsel, so he understands there is no “one size fits all” path for clients. Ralph prides himself on his practical approach to practicing law. For every deal or issue he encounters, Ralph tailors his plan to meet a client’s needs. He is known for his ability to develop unique and personalized contracts for each client’s particular situation. He internalizes legal issues clients face as his own in order to effectively reach an efficient economic outcome.

Ralph has been directly involved in some of Western New York’s biggest sports facility leasing and development matters, including the new Buffalo Bills stadium in Orchard Park and the Harborcenter in downtown Buffalo. He represents public and private buyers, sellers, landlords, tenants, and developers in other corporate matters, including the finance and/or purchase of retail, industrial, and office space; residential developments; and other investment properties and 1031 Exchanges.

Ralph regularly counsels one of the largest faculty-student associations in New York State on everything from not-for-profit governance issues to negotiation of commercial contracts to real estate development and construction. Additionally, Ralph leads a team of Hodgson Russ attorneys representing an upstate New York public authority currently developing a large renewable energy warehouse and manufacturing facility. That project involves an in-depth public-private partnership that seeks to utilize public incentives, a large bond issuance and a complicated real estate structure to achieve significant cost savings in the construction of the project.

Ralph also has significant, practical experience in complex liquor license and hospitality-related matters. He represents owners of bars and restaurants in acquisitions, leasing, and alcoholic beverage applications with the New York State Liquor Authority.

The Guaranty Building
140 Pearl Street
Suite 100
Buffalo, NY 14202

Practices & Industries

Real Estate Development
Real Estate Leasing
Arenas & Sports Facilities
Banking & Finance
College & University
Construction
Hotel, Hospitality & Lodging
Land Use & Economic Development
Public Authority
Public-Private Partnerships
Tax-Exempt Organizations
Wine, Beer & Spirits

Bar Associations

Bar Association of Erie County (NY)
Erie County Bar Association (PA)

Admissions

New York
Pennsylvania

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When he is not officially on-the-clock, Ralph takes great pride in being a father of three young boys. He is a youth football coach for West Seneca Little Loop Football and is active in the local youth hockey community.

Honors

- Listed, *Best Lawyers in America* Ones to Watch (Real Estate Law) 2024
- *Buffalo Business First's* 30 Under Thirty Award, 2015.
- Leadership Buffalo Class of 2015 Rising Leaders Program.

Experience

Ralph Pignataro served on a Hodgson Russ LLP team that represented the Buffalo Sabres and its affiliates in conjunction with the development of HARBORCENTER, an approximately \$200 million, 600,000-square-foot sports, retail, entertainment, parking, and hospitality complex. This first-of-its-kind mixed-use facility includes two ice rinks; a 19-story, full-service Marriott hotel; a sports-themed nightclub and restaurant; retail space; and an 800-car parking facility, all of which are connected to the existing Key Bank Center via skywalk. Hodgson Russ has worked with the Sabres on all aspects of this project from its inception, including environmental review, contract negotiations, permitting, construction, economic development incentives, financing, and tax planning.

Ralph Pignataro has represented numerous hospitality, entertainment, and sports clients, including restaurants, bars, apartment complexes, hotels, sports arenas, ski resorts, golf course clubhouses, and other venues that serve or want to serve alcohol, on all aspects of New York State liquor licensing. He understands the legal, business, and practical issues involved with the New York State Liquor Authority and how to avoid potential pitfalls and roadblocks a client may encounter.

Ralph works to help clients obtain a license efficiently in order to keep their business objectives on track. He counsels clients on the types of liquor licenses they require, new application submissions, remedying suspended and disapproved applications, license renewals, corporate changes, license alterations, and additional bar applications.

Whether a client is applying for a full on-premises liquor license, a temporary/special event catering permit, or an outdoor patio approval, Ralph has the experience to deliver the desired results.

Education

Cornell University, B.S., with distinction

University at Buffalo School of Management, M.B.A., with distinction

SUNY Buffalo Law School, J.D., magna cum laude

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Ralph Pignataro was part of a Hodgson Russ LLP team that represented a nonprofit corporation in conjunction with the development and construction of an \$11 million twin pad ice arena in Lockport, New York. This representation includes the negotiation of all construction, financing, naming rights, and management agreements for the facility.

Ralph Pignataro represented a client in the sale of a multi-tenant medical office building for \$18 million. The client then reinvested the proceeds of that sale into the purchase of a retail shopping center in California for \$15 million. Ralph represented another client sell two properties (one in Utah, another in Pennsylvania) for \$21 million, and then reinvest the proceeds via a 1031 exchange for a \$28 million purchase in upstate New York, with title held by three separate subsidiary companies. Known as like-kind or 1031 Exchanges, these complex transactions were structured in such a way as to help the client defer capital gains taxes on the sale of the relinquished property.

Ralph Pignataro has helped clients secure property tax, sales tax, and mortgage recording tax abatements from multiple industrial development agencies (IDAs) across New York State. He has structured payment in lieu of tax agreements (commonly referred to as PILOT agreements) and installment sale agreements that help reduce the property tax and sales tax burdens on newly purchased, renovated, and improved commercial properties.

In the News

State Liquor Authority Forms Committee to Address Application Backlog
Spectrum News 1, November 29, 2023

'Survive on spirits alone!' Liquor store owner decries move to sell wine in grocery stores
May 18, 2023

Press Releases

83 Hodgson Russ LLP Attorneys Ranked in 2024 Edition of *Best Lawyers in America*
August 17, 2023

Publications

New York State Liquor Authority Moves to Tackle Backlog of Items
Hodgson Russ Wine, Beer & Spirits Practice, November 29, 2023

Warning: Don't Ignore Your Customers' Secured Lenders, You Could be Required to Pay Twice!
Hodgson Russ Banking & Finance Alert, March 27, 2023

The Collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank and FDIC Receiverships Generally
Hodgson Russ Banking & Finance Alert, March 13, 2023

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Presentations & Events

Kaleida Ball 2024

"A Night to Remember"

Kaleida Health Foundation, Buffalo Convention Center, March 2, 2024

NAIOP Upstate New York Real Estate Financing & Panel Discussion

NAIOP Upstate New York, Aloft Buffalo Downtown (500 Pearl St., Buffalo, NY 14202), June 1, 2023

Blog Posts

- Alcohol and Taxes in New York

Noonan's Notes Blog, April 18, 2023

Community & Pro Bono

- Ilio DiPaolo Scholarship Fund, Board of Directors