

Supporting Communities

An Interview with Laura Vulaj, Senior Vice President and Director of Sustainability, SL Green Realty Corp.

EDITORS' NOTE *Laura Vulaj serves as Senior Vice President & Director of Sustainability at SL Green Realty Corp. She oversees SL Green's ESG program in addition to executing strategic company initiatives. She is also responsible for developing and managing SL Green's hospitality program, a new concept focused on enhancing the workplace experience for tenants. Vulaj serves as a Board Member for Urban Green Council and a member of the Energy Efficiency & Housing Advisory Panel for the New York State Climate Action Council. She also assisted in developing the Food1st Foundation, a not-for-profit organization established by SL Green to alleviate food insecurity in New York City, provide meals to emergency service workers, and support the restaurant industry. In 2019, Vulaj was an honoree at NEW's (Nontraditional Employment for Women) annual Equity Leadership Awards Luncheon. She earned her BS degree in economics from Northeastern University in Boston.*



Laura Vulaj

motivates employees to push themselves out of their comfort zones. Our employees are our most important asset, so their individual commitment and perseverance is critical to our success. SL Green equips its employees with the tools to thrive in the workplace, whether it is through HR-led development programs, manager coaching and training, or creating a healthy physical workspace. We invest in human capital development and this ethos guides our business.

How important is it for SL Green to be committed to corporate responsibility and community engagement in order to continue to attract and retain top talent?

SL Green is a conscious contributor to our local community and we recognize the impact of our engagement efforts. Corporate social responsibility ranks high among the demands of prospective employees. People want to know that the company they work for prioritizes similar values. We offer our employees paid volunteer days, and to encourage them to take advantage of the benefit, we coordinate

volunteer events throughout the year. Our goal is to partner with a variety of organizations to ensure we give employees the opportunity to commit their time to an initiative they value.

COVID-19 presented challenges to individuals, families, companies and entire industries. We immediately saw an opportunity to give back to our community and began the Food1st Foundation. Our CEO, Marc Holliday, launched this organization in partnership with Chef Daniel Boulud last April to address two problems – ongoing food insecurity for New Yorkers, and the pandemic's crushing blow to the restaurant industry. Seeing our leadership create this vital community asset practically overnight has been inspirational to the entire team and reinforces that community service is central to our business.

You also can't discuss corporate responsibility without addressing environmental sustainability. SL Green is committed to sustainable development and reducing our carbon footprint. We recognize that climate change is an environmental challenge that needs to be fought head on. We strategically make capital investments in our portfolio and continuously improve operating efficiencies to do our part in reducing the

COMPANY BRIEF *SL Green Realty Corp. (slgreen.com), an S&P 500 company and Manhattan's largest office landlord, is a fully-integrated real estate investment trust, or REIT, that is focused primarily on acquiring, managing and maximizing value of Manhattan commercial properties. As of September 30, 2020, SL Green held interests in 93 buildings totaling 40.6 million square feet. This included ownership interests in 29.2 million square feet of Manhattan buildings and 10.3 million square feet securing debt and preferred equity investments.*

Will you provide an overview of your role and key areas of focus at SL Green?

I serve as Senior Vice President and Director of Sustainability for SL Green, Manhattan's largest office landlord. In my role, I oversee the company's ESG program in addition to executing strategic operational initiatives. I am also responsible for developing and managing SL Green's hospitality program, a new concept focused on enhancing the workplace experience for tenants.

How do you define the SL Green culture and how critical is culture to the success of the company?

SL Green is a special place to work – our employees are talented, competitive, and driven. We have a goal-oriented culture, which



All building tenants at One Vanderbilt will be afforded access to an amenities package unrivaled in New York City office buildings, including a 30,000-square-foot tenant-only amenity floor with large format meeting spaces, club-style lounge, curated food offerings and an extraordinary outdoor terrace that faces Grand Central.



Standing 1,401 feet tall and totaling 1.7 million square feet, One Vanderbilt offers an unparalleled package of amenities, innovative office design, technology offerings, best-in-class sustainability practices and a prime location at the doorstep of Grand Central Terminal. The iconic tower is the tallest office tower in Midtown Manhattan.

environmental impact from the built environment. New York City set one of the ambitious climate goals in the world through Local Law 97, and we understand our obligation to meet these goals.

Three of our largest, most recent projects – One Vanderbilt, One Madison, and 185 Broadway – epitomize our commitment to constructing healthy, vibrant buildings that help, rather than harm, our environment. Innovative touches like One Vanderbilt’s use of rainwater and collection treatment system or One Madison’s dedicated outdoor air system (DOAS) HVAC incorporate state-of-the-art technology that people want to work and live in. We are raising the bar for what will become the industry standard.

SL Green is also committed to having energy efficient buildings and reducing our portfolio’s carbon footprint. Currently, 91 percent of our Manhattan operating properties hold green building designations. Our goal is to make that 100 percent among eligible properties. We are also committed to reducing our total greenhouse gas emissions intensity by 30 percent and achieve a 50 percent recycling rate by 2025.

Additionally, since tenants consume roughly 60 percent of a building’s energy, we recognize the importance of partnering with them to achieve meaningful reductions. SL Green is committed to refining our lease language to maximize our environmental stewardship in partnership with them.

Will you discuss SL Green’s focus and commitment to sustainability and its ESG efforts?

SL Green is fully committed to maintaining its position as an industry leader in ESG, and you can see that throughout every aspect of our business. This is driven from the top – we integrate ESG across all business lines and advocate for operational transparency. Annual ESG reporting is a priority for SL Green and since 2013, we’ve adhered to the GRI standard because we feel it is

a consistent measure of performance change. In more recent years, we’ve expanded our annual reporting to include GRESB and CDP and took the important steps of ensuring we are aligned with SASB, TCFD and the UNSDGs. We’re also driven by data and understand the importance of accurate and consistent environmental performance data. This is what helps us make meaningful improvements in our portfolio that reduce emissions, divert waste, improve energy efficiency and keep us competitive in sustainable initiatives.

How valuable is it in your role to have such deep engagement and support from SL Green’s management team in its ESG work?

There’s no question that the ESG leadership at SL Green comes from the top. It’s not simply a side-show – it’s core to everything we do. It takes a dedicated team to develop and execute the vision of our company’s leadership. Programs and initiatives that we implement have to transcend our entire business in order for them to have a meaningful impact on our business operations. This cannot be achieved without having the right people committed to understanding what needs to be done and how. Most importantly, we have a sounding board at the highest levels of our organization and direct feedback from our executive management team and our Board of Directors. This helps us shape our ESG goals while meeting the expectations of our shareholders.

How critical is it for SL Green to build a diverse and inclusive workforce in order to bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the table when making business decisions?

The measurable benefit of having a diverse and inclusive workforce is not a new concept – it is essential for any successful business or organization. At SL Green, we’ve assembled a talented and diverse workforce that exemplifies the spirit of our organization, and we are committed to growing that further. We are currently working on developing quantifiable goals to demonstrate our commitment to a diverse workforce. We encourage a variety of perspectives and alternative solutions, and since employees are the backbone of our company, we want to ensure we have a cross-section of thought representative at all levels of decision-making in the organization.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in a career in real estate?

Never underestimate the importance of hard work and determination at the start of your career. You’re not expected to know everything on Day 1, but if you apply hard work, practical thinking, and a willingness to learn, you will be successful. I’m a big believer in learning through osmosis, so don’t downplay the importance of being exposed to things that may seem like they are out of your realm of responsibility. I joined SL Green in 2012 and worked my way up from Executive Assistant to my current position as Senior Vice President and Director of Sustainability. Going the extra mile will make a big difference in terms of your career growth and development. ●



Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF) Associates is responsible for One Vanderbilt’s iconic design, which comprises four interlocking and tapering planes that spiral toward the sky.