

IN ARBITRATION

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA) COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON) C.A. NO. 2012-CP-10-00580

THOMAS H. MORGAN)

Plaintiff,)

v.)

FINAL ARBITRATION AWARD

JOHN L. GILBERT, STUART L. FRED, BELLA)
VISTA PARTNERSHIP, A TEXAS GENERAL)
PARTNERSHIP, BOMASADA GROUP, INC., A)
TEXAS CORPORATION, BOMASADA)
INVESTMENT GROUP II, LLC, A TEXAS)
LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY, LAURALIS)
MANAGEMENT, INC., A TEXAS)
CORPORATION AND 150 BEE STREET, LLC,)
A SOUTH CAROLINA LIMITED LIABILITY)
COMPANY,)

Defendants.)

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SC Court of Appeals

Dates of Hearing: October 31, 2022 – November 8, 2022
Arbitration Panel: H. Brewton Hagood, Chair
Hon. Costa M. Pleicones
Paul A. Dominick
Attorneys for Plaintiff: W. Andrew Gowder, Jr.
Michael T. Rose
Attorneys for Defendants: Henry E. Grimball
Morris A. Ellison
Court Reporter: Judy W. Galuppo, Veritext Legal Solutions

The Panel issued its Arbitration Award on April 10, 2023, awarding judgment against the Defendants, except for 150 Bee Street, LLC, in the total amount of \$2,976,234.00, excluding attorneys' fees and costs. The Plaintiff was directed to provide a detailed summary of expenses,

EXHIBIT B

including legal fees, within 15 days from the date of the Award. The Defendants were given 15 days to respond to Plaintiff's submission.

On April 17, 2023, the Plaintiff sent an e-mail to the Panel requesting an award of attorneys' fees and costs in the amount of \$2,002,805.18 and attached: Plaintiff's Exhibit 202; Schedule 1 Exhibit 220 Breakout; and Addendum 1 Thomas H. Morgan Transaction Report. On May 1, 2023, Defendants submitted a Memorandum In Opposition to Plaintiff's Demand for Attorneys' Fees.

On April 18, 2023, the Defendants submitted a Motion for Reconsideration of Arbitration Award, and Plaintiff submitted a Memorandum in Opposition to Defendants' Motion for Reconsideration of Arbitration Award on May 3, 2023. The Panel will address the Motion for Reconsideration of Arbitration Award first.

Defendants' Motion for Reconsideration of Arbitration Award

Defendants' Motion for Reconsideration presents three issues for the panel to rule upon:

- 1) Derivative Action/Subject Matter Jurisdiction issue;
- 2) Statute of Limitations Issue; and
- 3) Insurance Issue/Claims Arising Out of the Construction Litigation.

The first two issues were raised by previously by Defendants in Motions to Dismiss under Rule 12 and a Motion for Summary Judgment under Rule 56, all of which were treated as having been made under Rule 56 since matters outside the pleadings were submitted when oral arguments were heard by the Panel on June 16, 2022. These motions were denied by Order of the Panel dated July 11, 2022. Defendants renewed these motions following the presentation of the Plaintiff's case during the arbitration hearing and again at the conclusion of the hearing. Defendants assert that the Panel's Order violates SCRCP 52 stating that there were no specific finding of facts and

conclusions of law issued by the panel when the Panel again denied Defendants' motions as part of its Arbitration Award dated April 10, 2023.

The Panel notes that this dispute was referred to Arbitration by a Consent Order agreed to by counsel for the parties and signed by Judge Thomas L. Hughston dated July 9, 2012. Paragraph 8 of the Consent Order stated that "This arbitration shall follow the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure where practical and to the extent not inconsistent herewith". The only provision in the Consent Order addressing the form of the Award is the requirement in paragraph 13 that "The determination shall be issued in the form of an award on all claims and counter-claims". The Panel issued a 25-page unanimous Arbitration Award addressing each of the claims asserted by the Plaintiff in his Second Amended Complaint, except those which the Plaintiff withdrew following the hearing. The Panel did not award any relief to the Defendants under the Counterclaims set forth in the Defendants' Answer to Second Amended Complaint and Counterclaims dated April 26, 2022.

The Panel has considered the grounds and law cited in Defendants' Motion for Reconsideration of Arbitration Award dated April 18, 2023, and the arguments presented in Plaintiff's Memorandum In Opposition To Defendants Motion For Reconsideration Of Arbitration Award dated May 3, 2023. The Panel finds that it is not required to issue separate findings of fact or conclusions of law when ruling on motions presented and ruled upon prior to the hearing which are renewed during the hearing. In ruling on Defendants' Motions, the Panel noted that Defendants had submitted proposed Orders of Dismissal on the Statute of Limitations Issue and the Derivative Action Issue and that it had considered the testimony presented at the hearing, excerpts from the depositions of Jo Ved and Stuart Fred submitted by counsel, all exhibits entered into evidence by the parties and the proposed Orders submitted by counsel. The Defendants presented no new

arguments in the Motion for Reconsideration which had not previously been presented to the Panel at the hearing held on June 16, 2022, after which the Panel issued its July 11, 2022, Order Denying Defendants' Motions to Dismiss and For Summary Judgment. Defendants' Motion is hereby denied as to issues 1 and 2 set forth in the Motion for Reconsideration.

Issue 3 in the Motion for Reconsideration of the Arbitration Award is identified as "Insurance Issue/Claims Arising Out Of The Construction Litigation". The Panel noted that Defendants had not entered a copy of the Westchester Insurance Policy into evidence at the hearing and had only entered a Certificate of Insurance into evidence purporting to list Bee Street Lofts, LLC as an additional insured. Defendants state in their Motion for Reconsideration dated April 18, 2023, that they are attempting to obtain a copy of the insurance policy. Morris Ellison informed the Panel in an e-mail dated May 12, 2023, that they had not yet obtained a copy of the insurance policy. Andy Gowder replied to Mr. Ellison's e-mail later on May 12, 2023, stated that the Panel should not receive or consider the insurance policy if it is located since it is not newly discovered evidence that could not have been produced over the years that the case has been pending. As of the date of this Final Arbitration Award no policy of insurance issued by Westchester has been submitted to the Panel.

The Panel finds that the record was kept open after the issuance of the Award for the sole purpose of allowing the Plaintiff to submit any documents relevant to recoverability of attorneys' fees and costs and Plaintiff's position as to the amounts of attorneys' fees and expenses being sought.

While not separately set forth as one of the 3 issues to be ruled upon in Defendants' Motion for Reconsideration of Arbitration Award, Defendants again argue that Judge Harrington's Order approving the settlement of the Construction Litigation, in effect, precludes Mr. Morgan from

pursuing a claim that the failure of the Defendants to procure a policy of insurance covering 150 Bee Street, LLC caused damages to 150 Bee Street for the amount of legal fees paid to defend itself and the amount paid by 150 Bee Street to settle the Construction Litigation. The Panel has already ruled on this issue and no new evidence has been presented which would cause the Panel to reconsider this ruling.

For the above reasons, the Panel denies relief on all grounds set forth in Defendants' Motion For Reconsideration Of Arbitration Award submitted on April 18, 2023.

Plaintiff's Request for Attorneys' Fees

As directed by the Panel in the April 10, 2023, Arbitration Award, Plaintiff's counsel sent an e-mail on April 17, 2023, summarizing the amounts of legal fees and expenses requested by the Plaintiff and forwarded copies of the following documents to the Panel:

1. Exhibit 202, which was introduced and admitted into evidence during Mr. Morgan's testimony listing attorneys' fees and costs up to the time of trial;
2. Schedule 1, Exhibit 202 Breakout separating attorneys' fees from legal costs; and
3. Addendum 1, which lists legal fees and expenses incurred during and after the arbitration trial which are not included in Exhibit 202.

On May 1, 2023, counsel submitted Defendants' Memorandum In Opposition To Plaintiff's Demand For Attorneys Fees. Defendants agree that SC Code Ann. Section 33-44-1104 of the South Carolina Uniform Limited Liability Act permits, but does not require, an award of Plaintiff's "reasonable expenses, including reasonable attorney's fees" if the derivative action is successful. Defendants argue that the Plaintiff's derivative claims sought damages of approximately \$12,000,000 and the Panel awarded \$2,900,000 in actual damages, which is less than 25% of the amount sought. Defendants argue that Morgan had requested an additional

\$17,800,000 in individual damages and the Panel awarded no individual damages to Mr. Morgan. When viewing the total damages sought by Mr. Morgan, in both his derivative capacity and as an individual, Defendants argue that Mr. Moran was only awarded approximately 10% of the total damages sought.

Defendants then question the proof presented by the Plaintiff since no distinction is made between the attorneys' fees and expenses incurred by Morgan in his individual capacity and those incurred to prosecute the derivative claims.

The Panel has reviewed the evidence and considered the arguments submitted by counsel for the Plaintiff and the Defendants. The law is clear that the Panel, has the discretion to determine the reasonableness of a claim for the recovery of attorneys' fees under the South Carolina Uniform Limited Liability Act. The Panel finds that Mr. Morgan successfully prosecuted the derivative claims and the evidence presented indicates that Mr. Morgan personally funded all of the legal fees and expenses to prosecute these claims. Had Mr. Morgan not done so, there would be no recovery in favor of 150 Bee Street, LLC in the amount of \$2,976,234. The Panel is mindful of the fact that Mr. Morgan did not obtain a recovery of any individual damages but, as counsel for the Defendants note, there is no statutory authority for the recovery of attorneys' fees by Mr. Morgan as an individual.

The Panel finds that since Mr. Morgan advanced the legal fees and costs necessary for 150 Bee Street to receive an affirmative award of \$2,976,234, Mr. Morgan is entitled to a charging lien on the amounts of attorneys' fees awarded by the Panel to 150 Bee Street. This amount should be paid to Mr. Morgan to reimburse him for these advances, prior to the distribution of any funds received from the judgment to the members of the LLC. The Panel has already ruled that no portion

of the recovery from the judgment is awarded to Bella Vista, the Bomasada Defendants, Stuart Fred or John Gilbert.

As to the amount to be awarded, the South Carolina Supreme Court has identified six factors which should be considered in determining whether a request for attorneys' fees is reasonable:

1. The nature, extent and difficulty of the case;
2. The time necessarily devoted to the case;
3. The professional standing of counsel;
4. Contingency of compensation;
5. Beneficial results obtained and
6. Customary legal fees for similar services.

In considering the above factors, the Panel finds that the case prosecuted by Mr. Morgan was a very difficult case which filed on January 26, 2012, and was referred to arbitration by Consent Order issued on July 9, 2012. The case was hotly contested by the Defendants and was originally scheduled for arbitration in May of 2020. The schedule for the arbitration was suspended due to the Covid 19 pandemic and travel for depositions was adversely affected. The case was not heard by the present Panel until late October of 2022. The online file at the Charleston County Clerk of Court's office indicates that Mediation was held on September 21, 2022, with Rebecca Laffitte as the Mediator, and an impasse was declared. Additionally, both sides retained expert witnesses who had to review and opine on both the amount and entitlement to damages.

Although the Panel was not furnished with detailed time and billing records, the summary provided showed that Mr. Morgan initially started with the firm of Clawson and Staubes, and later moved to Pratt-Thomas Epting and Walker. Mr. Gowder, who had been a member of Pratt-Thomas Epting and Walker, took over the representation after he formed his new firm. Michael T. Rose

worked with Mr. Gowder on the case and participated in all pretrial proceedings and the Arbitration Hearing. The Panel finds that the summary provided of legal fees and expenses paid is representative of a case of this difficulty and magnitude and the time devoted to pre-hearing discovery, motions and a contested hearing. The Panel finds that Mr. Gowder and Mr. Rose are well respected members of the local bar who have been practicing law for many years.

As to the contingency of compensation, the submissions indicate that Mr. Morgan paid his attorneys on an hourly basis. Thus, the contingency in this case was not whether the attorneys would be paid but whether there would be an affirmative recovery in a contested case which was unable to be resolved short of a full hearing.

While Defendants argue that there only a recovery of 10 to 20% of the total damages sought, the recovery obtained through Mr. Mogan's efforts and advancement of attorneys' fees costs on behalf of Bee Street Lofts was \$2,976,234, which is actually 48.9% of the claimed actual damages of \$6,080,881.¹ It would be inequitable for Bee Street Lofts to receive the benefits of the award without awarding attorneys fees and costs as a charging lien to the benefit of Mr. Morgan before any amounts are distributed to the members of Bee Street Lofts, other than Bella Vista.

The Panel is required to exercise their collective discretion to arrive at a reasonable amount. After substantial discussion among the members of the Panel following the submissions by counsel, the Panel finds that the below approach achieves a result which is a customary award of legal fees and costs for similar services after consideration of the six factors:

¹ See Plaintiff's post-hearing proposed order in which he claims this amount. See also page 6 of the Arbitration Award of April 10, 2023.

Total Award \$2,976,234.00

Legal Fees

One-third of Gross Recovery = \$992,078.00

Per cent recovered versus amount claimed = 48.9%

Fee Award After Applying Percentage versus amount claimed = \$485,126.00

COSTS

Approved Costs = \$266,746

Approved Cost After Applying Percentage of 48.9% = \$130,439.00

Costs of Arbitration Requested (100%) = \$80,944

TOTAL FEES AND COSTS AWARDED = \$696,509.00

TOTAL ARBITRATION AWARD INCLUDING FEES AND COSTS = \$3,672,743

This Final Arbitration Award, if confirmed by the Court, is intended be entered as a judgment against the Defendants, except for Bee Street Lofts, LLC, in favor of Bee Street Lofts, LLC, except for member Bella Vista Partnership, and John L. Gilbert and Stuart L. Fred, but no proceeds from any recovery on this judgment are to be distributed to the members of Bee Street Lofts, LLC until the charging lien in favor of Thomas H. Morgan has been fully satisfied.

FOR THE PANEL

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