

## EXECUTIVE Q&A

# Easing the planning process

Geoff Bradley is a principal at the Metropolitan Planning Group Inc., which provides planning services to private firms and public agencies and helps them through the planning process. Bradley has more than 15 years of professional public and private experience working with a variety of architectural, planning and development firms as well as public agencies.

**Q: What is your role in bringing together public and private parties in the development process?**

**A:** For private clients, we will do whatever needs to be done to keep a project moving forward, sometimes serving as the owner/developer representative. A big part of what we do is explaining to applicants the status of their projects. They don't always have a grasp of where they are. Without some guidance, it can be like walking down a dark tunnel, not knowing where you are or how long it will last.

I've always thought the two sides could do better at working together. Applicants and city agencies seem to speak a different language. Sometimes I feel like a translator.

**Q: What trends do you see in Silicon Valley development? What are common concerns for projects?**

**A:** Obviously there's a big downturn in the housing market. On the commercial side, projects are moving for-

ward. It seems that the office market is doing OK. There's also a large amount of public participation in projects and more public scrutiny. Neighbors of proposed projects are often concerned that developers will come in and remake the whole feel of the area. We reach out to these people to explain how the process works and what they can do to be heard. We try to go beyond the individuals who routinely attend public hearings and comment on projects. We have focus groups with homeowners associations, businesses and even teenagers.

Six to eight months ago, we were split about 50-50 on public and private clients. Now it's closer to 90-10, in favor of public clients. Public projects include general-plan updates, housing-element revisions and work on downtown redevelopment plans.

**Q: Coming from a planning department, what insight do you bring to the process?**

**A:** We work with a lot of public agencies. We know that every city does things a little differently — or a lot differently. Our firm can offer different planning departments input on how things might be done more efficiently or better.

**Q: Considering the scarcity of land in Silicon Valley, must developers go for even more high-density to get returns on their investment?**



COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN PLANNING GROUP INC.

### GEOFF BRADLEY

**Title:** Principal, The Metropolitan Planning Group Inc.

**Age:** 38

**Home:** Campbell

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in city and regional planning, masters in architecture, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

**Path to Silicon Valley:** My wife and I moved to Campbell in 1995 to be closer to her parents and start a family.

**First job:** Making "beer hats" by riveting plastic cup-holders to souvenir batting helmets.

**Best biz book you've read:** Anything by Tom Peters

**Biz hero:** T. Keith Gurnee, principal of RRM Design Group, who showed me that you can have fun and build a planning firm at the same time.

**Favorite vacation spot:** San Diego, where I ran a marathon and raised \$3,000 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. My cousin has lymphoma.

**A:** Definitely, that's the trend. Applicants will often aim for at least double what was on the property before. So when a person wants to redevelop a lot that contains a single-family home, he or she often will apply to put three or four units in the same space. A two-story commercial building would be replaced by a four-story building, and so on.

These days, cities are sometimes supporting higher densities than developers, especially when public transit figures into the project. Cities also know they have a limited amount of housing sites, and they want to make the most use of them. This can cause

tension between cities and developers when the housing market is slow, and also with area residents who oppose high-density housing.

**Q: Environmental issues are a growing concern in development. While this is more costly, some believe it's outweighed by the longer-term return on investment. Do you agree with this?**

**A:** I do. Whether or not you believe global warming is caused by human activity, factoring environmental concerns into projects makes sense anyway. It's just good public policy.