

# WHAT I WISH I KNEW...

## A Discussion

An APA Webinar

May 6, 2016

1:00 to 2:30 PM

# DID YOU EVER WONDER WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO WORK IN THE “OTHER SECTOR”?

What would my hours be?

Would my future be secure in a downturn?

Would I earn more money?

Would the work be challenging?

# LEARN FROM FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE

- **Ralph Willmer, FAICP:** Principal Planner/MAPC; Boston, MA
- **Jenifer Corey, Principal:** Zoning Strategies; Phoenix, AZ
- **R. Todd Ashby, AICP:** Executive Director, DMAMPO; Des Moines, IA
- **Michael Jelen:** Vice President of Technical Services, AECOM; Arlington, VA
- **Deana Rhodeside, Ph.D.:** Rhodeside & Harwell; Alexandria, VA

**BUT FIRST A WORD FROM OUR  
SPONSOR...**



# APA Private Practice

**APA's Private Practice Division** is dedicated to meeting the needs of private planning consultants. We offer our members access to valuable networking opportunities, business resources, current information on private practice planning, and technical support.

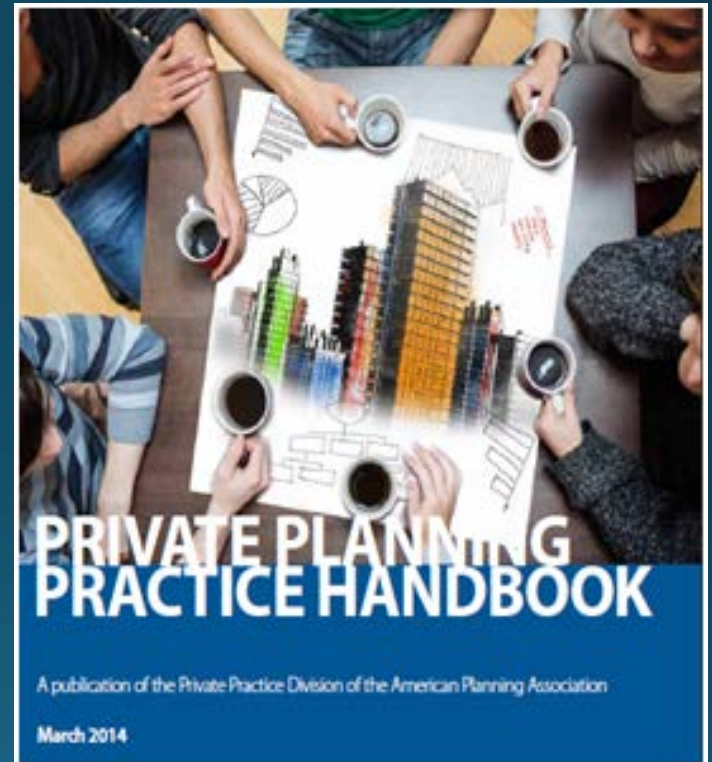
For more information, or to join as a division member:

<https://www.planning.org/divisions/privatepractice/>



# Private Planning Practice Handbook

- APA Private Practice Division has produced an outstanding 49-page handbook that will be of value to all private planning consultants.
- The publication offers insightful information to both novice and seasoned planning consultants.
- We are proud to offer this exciting publication to APA Private Practice Division members as a complimentary benefit.
- For membership information: <https://www.planning.org/divisions/privatepractice/>



**Ralph Willmer, FAICP**

# LEARN FROM FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE

## Ralph Willmer, FAICP

- B.S. in Environmental & Resources Management
- M.A. in Urban & Environmental Policy
- NY Public Interest Research Group
  - Non-profit advocacy organization
- McGregor & Associates
  - Private sector law firm
- Vanasse Hangen Brustlin
  - Private sector multi-disciplinary engineering firm
- Metropolitan Area Planning Council
  - Public sector regional planning agency



# What I Wish I Had Known

- Utilization/billability expectations
  - Different emphasis and expectations
- Marketing/business development
- Internal administrative processes
- Issues to consider
  - Ethics (State and AICP)
  - Public records

# Advice for Making a Switch

- All organizations are different, regardless of sector
  - New systems, people, office culture, etc.
- Expect similar workload, hours, evening meetings, etc.
- Don't assume that job security is more assured in either sector
- Think about professional development and support for outside activities (APA, community, etc.)

**Jenifer Corey, Principal**

# LEARN FROM FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE

## Jenifer Corey, Principal

- Principal & Founder of Zoning Strategies LLC
- Phoenix, AZ based focusing on Zoning Entitlements
  - Property Due Diligence
  - Zoning / Variances
  - Project & Permit Management
- Law Firm of Gammage & Burnham 2003-2013
- Mom 1999-2003
- City of Peoria, AZ Planner 1995-1999
- Arizona State University BS 1995

# What I Wish I Had Known

- Moving from Public Sector Planner to Law Firm
  - You need to log everything you do so you can bill clients (Life changes to .1 hour increments)
  - Style of writing is very different
    - Dry legislative reporting style used in staff reports doesn't work
    - Writing Style changes to persuasive writing
  - Power dynamics change
    - When you are at City, you are being lobbied by applicants.
    - At the law firm, you are now trying to convince the City to approve you.
  - Lack of Opportunity: You can't become partner. Dead end
  - You'll learn a lot!
- Moving from Law Firm to Sole Practitioner
  - Just because you know zoning, doesn't mean you know how to run a business
  - Administrative items (billing, taxes, etc.) take a lot of time.
  - Finding the clients & networking
  - High risk, but great earnings potential
  - If you don't work, you don't get paid!
  - Flexibility in Family – Work Balance
  - Retirement Planning

# Advice for Making a Switch

## Public Sector to Law Firm

- Take a writing class (Bryan Garner's Advanced Legal Writing)
- Lawyers are quirky people
- Go into it knowing that promotional opportunities are limited, but you will learn a lot
- Great career step for public sector if you will eventually go back
- City officials are your new best friend. You need them to approve your projects.
- DON'T BURN BRIDGES.

## Law Firm to Sole Practitioner

- Plan before you jump – what is minimum you need to bill to keep doors open?
- Where will your office be – home, co-working, traditional office?
- Do you know how to run a business?
- Billing & Invoicing Software (Quickbooks & Harvest)
- You need Professional Malpractice Insurance
- Get a good engagement letter & have attorney review it to make sure it limits your liability
- Make friends with other self employed and have them to mentor you.
- Email, websites (GoDaddy)
- NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK

**PRIVATE PRACTICE DIVISION – Become member \$40 & Handbook**

**R. Todd Ashby, AICP**

# LEARN FROM FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE

## R. Todd Ashby, AICP

- B.S. in Community & Regional Planning
- Master of Public Administration
- Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
- MSA Professional Services
  - Private sector multi-disciplinary engineering firm
- Snyder & Associates
  - Private sector multi-disciplinary engineering firm
- CH2M Hill
  - Private sector multi-disciplinary engineering firm
- Mid-American Regional Council
- Missouri Department of Transportation



# What I Wish I Had Known

- Different approaches to business/projects
  - Who is the customer
  - Project Focus
- Administration
  - Billable hours
- Workload similar
- Public Process vs Private Expectations

# Changing Sides

- Expect new systems, process, paperwork-all entities have their way of doing business
- Workload is similar in general, intensity may vary at times
- Keep up on certifications/professional development
  - Stay current
  - May lead to another opportunity
- Salary-Make sure you are weighing all the benefits and salary against each other. Salary may be higher one way or the other, but benefits may not be the same...can make a big difference
- Do things you like to do

**Michael Jelen**

# LEARN FROM FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE

## Michael Jelen

- B.S., Civil Engineering (Transportation/Planning minor)
- U.S. Army Command & General Staff College
- University of Illinois Computer Services Office
- Illinois DOT
- Michael Baker Corp.
- Virginia DOT
- Wilbur Smith Assoc.
- U.S. Army/National Defense University
- District of Columbia DOT (+ 3 Army mobilizations)
- AECOM

# What I Wish I Had Known

- University to 1<sup>st</sup> job
- Making the switch (at different levels)
  - Staff level
  - First line supervisor/leader
  - Department
  - Organization
- Summary of key differences
  - Public sector makes decisions; private sector supports the decision-making process.
  - Public sector jobs generally broad in scope, dealing with large volume of actions.
  - Private sector jobs, relative to the public sector, are generally narrow in scope but responsible for delivering subject matter depth.

# Advice for Making a Switch

- Know what is within your control – relationships, portfolio of work, volunteerism
- All things equal if you are staying within the profession, its really not a big switch
  - Work/life balance
  - Compensation\*
  - Job security
- When interviewing your next employer, research and ask about
  - Mission and mission essential functions
  - Core Values
  - Support for volunteer activities
  - Backlog (private) /Funding stream (public)

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# CONTACT INFORMATION

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