

ROGER STRANDLUND

Removing Hurdles for Community Plans

by Bethany Krajelis

MOLINE—It's just one word, but Roger L. Strandlund says availability is his secret to success.

"The challenge in the private practice of law, no matter what your specialty is, is to make yourself available to your clients," says Strandlund, managing shareholder at **Califf & Harper PC** in Moline.

For Strandlund, availability means returning emails late into the evening hours and getting

Strandlund says of his clients. "My practice does not entail a stream of clients coming into my conference room. My practice is me rolling in and out of my office going to them."

Jeff Nelson is the general manager of MetroLINK, Rock Island County's mass transit district that serves the Illinois Quad-Cities and its neighboring areas. Strandlund serves as general counsel for MetroLINK, as well as for the Quad-Cities International Airport, the i

out in the real estate and development world.

Interested in architecture, Strandlund, a native of Moline, went to Iowa State University to study urban planning and economics. After he graduated, Strandlund spent a year working as an environmental planner for the Bi-State Metropolitan Planning Commission.

"In our world, his urban planning background is advantageous," Nelson says. "Roger understands what the end goal is and that



up before the sun to meet a client at a 6 a.m. breakfast meeting. It also means having an attitude that says, "If you need me, I'll be there. I'll be in your office in 10 minutes."

And he's not joking about office visits. He might use a smart phone, but Strandlund still prefers face-to-face meetings. With a practice that includes commercial transactions, real estate, construction and municipal law, many of his clients come from the public sector and are extremely busy.

"They deserve to be accommodated,"

wireless center, and a local housing authority.

In the 10 years he has worked with Strandlund, Nelson has never had a problem getting in touch with his lawyer.

"He's been very successful, and it's not because he's on an 8 to 5 schedule," Nelson says. "He is available 24/7."

Bringing a Unique Perspective

While there may be other accessible, lawyers out there, Strandlund's colleagues say his education and experience make him stand

helps him blaze down paths that are not traditionally touched by other lawyers."

Nelson says Strandlund has handled some significant development and real estate deals for MetroLINK. He is currently structuring an agreement for a \$30 million maintenance facility.

"His diverse educational background allows him to have a broader perspective on what everyone wants in these types of deals," Nelson says.

Strandlund says his education and experience in planning gives him insight into how the

business of government is run, which he believes helps him relate to his clients. Being part of a planning team made him understand that “there are many hard working knowledgeable people who are really important to align with in order to accomplish success.”

On top of that experience, Strandlund served on the city of Moline’s planning commission.

Jeffrey D. Lester, law director and assistant city administrator for the city of Moline, worked with Strandlund regularly during his more than 20 years on the commission. Strandlund no longer serves on the commission.

“That experience certainly gives him a unique perspective in representing parties that are part of the development,” Lester says. “He has some really keen insight into what the city is trying to accomplish and that gives us a leg up in trying to get developers to understand things.”

Not only was Strandlund’s knowledge in the field helpful to the city’s planning commission, but it was also beneficial to him personally, Lester says.

“Frankly, I can tell you there’s been times he’s saved me time in going to planning commission meetings,” Lester says, explaining that Strandlund often took on the responsibility of pointing out potential legal issues to his fellow commissioners.

Success in the Law

Urban planning is the reason Strandlund went to law school.

Both of his college advisors, one from the economic department and the other from the urban planning department, had law degrees and encouraged him to take the LSAT. He did, but for financial reasons; Strandlund spent a year working before he started University of Iowa College of Law.

“When I went to law school, I went for the purpose of advancing my career in planning,” Strandlund says.

At the time he graduated, his soon-to-be wife, Carol, already had a career in accounting back in the Quad Cities area. The couple, now married 30 years, have two children.

Their daughter, 22, is a business analyst in Minneapolis, and their son, 19, is in college, working on an engineering degree. Strandlund says his biggest pleasure is spending time with his family, usually hiking in the mountains on summer vacations.

Though he went to law school to further his planning career, Strandlund discovered he could combine his interests in the law and planning as a lawyer. He took a job with a Rock Island law firm, where he stayed for about five years before joining Califf & Harper in 1986.

Strandlund handles a variety of matters,

including multi-party land development deals. He often represents property owners, which tend to be public sector entities. Having that familiarity has led him to serving as general counsel for several county agencies.

He jumped into recruiting and management function in the 90s and now serves as managing shareholder for the 13-lawyer firm. He credits the support of the firm’s senior

“He knows how to resolve issues,” he says. “He brings innovativeness to deals and is able to regularly bring his matters to conclusion without turning to the courts”

Strandlund says the way a development deal is structured is critical to its success. He works to avoid litigation, something that is especially true when it comes to representing area entities. “Legal controversies do not sit



Strandlund is the managing shareholder of the 13-lawyer firm based in Moline.

lawyers for allowing him to establish innovative billing practices, which have contributed to the firm’s success.

Lester, the city’s law director, pointed to the John Deere Commons as one of Strandlund’s career accomplishments. That project, he says, involved a more than \$100 million redevelopment in the heart of a vacated industrial site on the riverfront.

Lester says the Deere & Company worked with the city to revitalize the area, which is now recognized nationally as a success story. The Commons includes a conference facility, entertainment arena, hotel, restaurants, stores and an agricultural exhibit, a combination that Lester says has produced a popular tourist attraction.

“Roger was integral in the success of the project,” Lester says, adding that it was a complex deal with paperwork that occupied two large binders.

Strandlund has also helped the city in matters in which his clients aren’t even involved. For instance, Lester says the city went to Strandlund after it was having issues trying to develop property it had bought near the airport.

Strandlund was “very helpful in navigating FAA regulation that we don’t have experience in dealing with,” Lester says.

Focusing on Others

Nelson, general manager for MetroLINK, says Strandlund’s success can also be traced to his strategic thinking.

well with the tax-paying public. All parties will suffer in some measure when a project ends up in protracted litigation,” he says.

Lester says “there’s no doubt about it. Roger zealously represents his clients.”

“He is never difficult to deal with,” he says. “I always feel that when we work together, the final product is better than whatever we started with.”

Lester says Strandlund is an excellent draftsman, very shrewd, professional, and great at issue spotting and strategic planning. On top of his legal mind, Strandlund is a pleasure to work with because he’s a genuinely nice person, Lester says.

When he represents a client, Strandlund works to understand and become a part of the client’s business, helping motivate him to reach the best conclusion possible for his client.

“When you immerse yourself in the operations or the planning aspect of your client’s business, you acquire a sense of duty,” Strandlund says. “That duty is very strong. And if you do everything right, you also get a sense of satisfaction.”

Nelson says Strandlund brings that same attitude to his community.

“He is not just focused on himself or his clients. He is focused on his community as a whole,” Nelson says, pointing to his volunteer stint on the planning commission. “He not only works in the community, but he gives back to the community and brings that vision of the future for the community to see.” ■