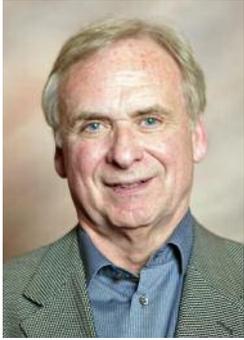


PROFILE | Steve Preston, AICP and Marc Yeber, ASLA



# An Unbridled Enthusiasm for Planning

The following questions were initiated by Steve Preston, AICP for the CalPlanner (CP) with a follow-up interview by Marc Yeber.

**Mingle amongst your colleagues at an APA event and you would be hard pressed to find a seasoned planner who does not know Elwood C. “Woodie” Tescher (WT). He is one of the best known of California’s planning consultants, having produced award-winning plans over more than 35 years in practice in addition to teaching, speaking, and mentoring. Woodie is currently a Principal at PlaceWorks, (formerly known as the Planning Center DC&E) and is based in Los Angeles. He is well known for his endless contributions to the APA California and for his unbridled enthusiasm which is often contagious amongst his many planning associates.**

**CP: What was your first exposure to the architectural/planning profession? What precipitated your continued interest, and how did it unfold?**

WT: My initial interest in architecture evolved from the father of a high school crush who happen to be an architect where I was introduced to the Case Study Houses—experiments in American residential architecture from 1945-1966 sponsored by Arts & Architecture magazine. From there, my high school coursework was designed specifically to enable me to enroll in architecture. At the time, USC’s (University of Southern California) design program was an odd combination of modernism from the Case Study architects (Pierre Koenig, Craig Ellwood, and others) and an innovator in shaping buildings and urban form to the environment. In many respects, this was the precursor to sustainability design, influencing some of my current thinking about place-making. This was followed by a graduate program in urban design at UCLA where the focus was clearly on the larger context rather than individual buildings, which resonated with my evolving sensibilities.

Upon graduation from UCLA, Progressive Architecture Magazine published an article about the new wave of multi-disciplinary design firms and cited this model as the future of the profession, identifying two companies as examples—TRW and Planning Research Corporation (PRC).

As a result of a classmate connection, I was retained by a PRC subsidiary to plan and design a large scale new town on the California coast involving all the disciplines in which we were engaged in during college...that town was Bolsa Chica. Over time the PRC corporate environment had less appeal than multi-million-dollar engineering projects during a deep recession. In

hindsight, my years with PRC were the linchpin for the future of my planning career. During this time, I was able to network with other professionals in allied professions and I was exposed to the “practice approach.”

I had the opportunity to shepherd the Third Street Mall (Promenade) Specific Plan, West Hollywood General Plan, and Los Angeles General Plan Framework arrived, to name a few.

**CP: In forging your personal planning/design philosophy, who would you identify as your ultimate role model and why?**

WT: I’ve been honored to know and work with so many talented and thoughtful professionals over the years, and I can honestly say my career has been enriched by many mentors and colleagues alike. But the person that comes to mind is Professor Emeritus Ralph Knowles from USC, who suggested to me the idea of a 3rd condition when understanding and experiencing architecture. This is where the interface between the built and natural environments becomes character defining.

According to Professor Knowles, the “3rd condition,” is the transition between contrasting architectural conditions such as large-to-small, dark-to-light, loud-to-quiet, and so on. The term is very general and can apply either to contrasting spaces within a building or between inside and outside the building or even to contrasts in the landscape itself. One can make a strong case that how this transition is handled by the designer and how it is experienced by the observer characterizes architecture.

**CP: Can you pinpoint a specific project or a moment in your career where you thought, “this is why I do what I do”?**

WT: The Third Street (Promenade) Specific Plan in Santa Monica was instrumental in shaping my career as it was the first planning assignment that was not just a paper document produced simply to satisfy a legislative requirement. It was a project that led to real, profound and immediate changes to the neighborhood. Developed with an implementation element as the core to the document, the plan was being marketed for potential investment while it was still being drafted. Essentially it was framed as implementation up-front as opposed to making it an afterthought as is the conventionally wisdom. It was a design-build strategy in a grand scheme.

**CP: Is there a particular project which has your planning DNA and that best represents who you are as a planner/advocate for great communities?**

WT: I would say the first West Hollywood General Plan has my fingerprints all over it since it was framed first and foremost by making places. Up until that point and time, General Plans addressed planning from a two dimensional standpoint where zones, districts, streets, etc. were central. However, the West Hollywood Plan was about place-making (which included some of my original sketches). In fact, it was the first General Plan in California that married urban form with traditional land-use planning...what I refer to as place-based planning

**CP: Was there an incident or moment that presented the biggest planning challenge and how did you (and your team) overcome it?**

WT: The failure to positively impact the quality of life, to effectively engage and build ownership of a

▶ P12



“ We are at a very critical moment in the history of planning for California communities. For the past decade or so, the tools and methods for “smart growth” versus sprawl have been broadly endorsed and supported in many of our communities.”

## ➤P11 Financing Infill Development in a Post-Redevelopment World

District (NFSD) mechanism is a special parcel tax in previously developed areas that would:

- Generate new money for capital investments and service expenses; and
- Require approval by qualified voters within the contiguous or non-contiguous district.

### Conclusions

A case can and should be made as to why, when, and where it is in the interest of counties and some special districts to participate financially. Even then, other mechanisms are needed to create new revenue sources. Without common multi-jurisdictional investment in infrastructure to support infill development, informed by good planning, regional goals for sustainable

communities may miss their mark.

**SH, WA**

*The California Planning Roundtable (CPR) is an organization of experienced planning professionals who are members of the American Planning Association (APA). Membership is*

*balanced between the public and private sectors and between Northern and Southern California.*

*Stanley R. Hoffman, FAICP, President, Stanley R. Hoffman Associates Inc., an urban*

### Community Revitalizations and Investment Authorities (CRIAs) Key Features

Community Revitalization and Investment Authorities (CRIAs)	
Authorization and Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authorized under California Assembly Bill No.2 (AB 2)</li> <li>• Authorizes local government to create Community Revitalization and Investment Authorities (CRIAs)</li> <li>• Area must have median income less than 80 percent of the State median and three of the following four criteria:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unemployment 3 percent higher than State median</li> <li>- Crime rate 5 percent higher than State median</li> <li>- Deteriorated or inadequate public infrastructure</li> <li>- Deteriorated commercial and residential structures</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Requires majority protest vote only if 25 to 50 percent of population over 18 and property owners oppose plan</li> </ul>
Funding and Powers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of jurisdiction's share of 1% Property Tax increment; no increase in property tax</li> <li>- 25 percent of property tax increment must be allocated to an affordable housing trust fund</li> <li>• Use of County's or Special District's share of property tax increment is voluntary</li> <li>• Cannot use Education District's share of property tax increment</li> <li>• Does have eminent domain powers</li> </ul>
Potential Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvements to public infrastructure and incentivize affordable housing</li> </ul>

Source: Stanley R. Hoffman Associates, Inc.  
California Assembly (AB) No. 2, Community Revitalization Authority (CRIA)

*economics consulting firm in Los Angeles.*

*William (Bill) Anderson, FAICP, Principal/Vice-President and Director of City and Regional Planning, AECOM.*

## ➤P9 An Unbridled Enthusiasm for Planning

*plan by residents and stakeholders associated with Santa Monica's Bergamot Area Plan—can I say more? To overcome this, it is important to move on and consider the failure a learning moment leading toward more effective communication, education, and engagement.*

**CP: You have a reputation for being an ardent proponent of sustainable, mixed used and transit-oriented development, and have suffered no fools when it comes to communities that relax their densities when they agreed previously to more robust plans. From your perspective, is the profession making progress or going backwards?**

*WT: We are at a very critical moment in the history of planning for California communities. For the past decade or so, the tools and methods for "smart growth" versus sprawl have been broadly endorsed and supported in many of our communities.*

*Changing demographics, an aging population and millennials are seeking to live and work in mixed-use, walkable, and transit-oriented communities. We are now experiencing the backlash—Measure S, the Bergamot Papermate project petition, Santa Monica LVE initiative, and so on. In some cases, the opposition is well founded by such factors as extreme traffic congestion and lack of political will or disregard to carry out and implement plans endorsed by the community.*

**CP: Being a leader in the profession that is constantly evolving can be demanding, and you are known for burning the**

**candle at both ends. What do you do to sustain your interests/motivation and recharge in order to face the next planning challenge?**

*WT: Not unlike many others, I escape from the rigors of work means spending time and dining with great friends, short weekend trips, teaching graduate planning students when students engage, it is exhilarating), hiking and skiing until my knees gave out, bicycling, reading, art museums, LA Phil and Hollywood Bowl concerts, and bad movies.*

**CP: You have a reputation for producing outstanding general and specific plans. Recently, you attended the UCLA Land Use Conference where it was asked whether the abundance of new requirements being placed on general plans was creating a Tesla or an Edsel. What thoughts do you have on this topic?**

*WT: Where new requirements directly relate to the legislative intent of general plans to guide "the physical development of the community," I consider it appropriate. Climate change legislation is directly relevant. GHG reduction strategies relate inextricably to land use and circulation/mobility, and strategies for risk vulnerability and resiliency relate to the Safety Element. However, I question the need to write entirely new elements. The size and content of general plans have become*

*unwieldy, evidenced by the number of persons in the room last week indicating that they never use their general plans. I speculate that if communities updated their general plans more frequently, like Sacramento, they would have greater use. However, they still are too voluminous.*

**CP: What advice would you impart to planning students or emerging professionals as they embark on their planning careers?**

*WT: I never expected to be squarely planted in the planning profession. After all, I thought my path would be as an architect. But my interests changed as did the profession. Planning is a profession that can accommodate a broad set of disciplines, specialties and interests. My advice to someone starting their career is to be flexible and absorb as much varied experience as possible.*

**CP: You are well known by your peers and many in the profession. What one thing (that you are willing to share) either related to you professionally or personally that they might not know about you?**

*WT: I am a food and wine connoisseur and an avid wine collector. I really enjoy having people over for a terrific meal with a great bottle of wine and engaging conversation. More often than not, the topic wound up venturing into planning territory.*

**“ We are now experiencing the backlash—Measure S, the Bergamot Papermate project petition. . . ”**