

RECOMMENDED READING

Navigating the Redevelopment Maze

Redevelopment-Planning, Law and Project Implementation: A Guide for Practitioners

by Brian W. Blaesser and Thomas P. Cody, Editors (2008, American Bar Association, 329 pages)

REVIEWED BY MARY C. BUJOLD, CRE



EDITORS BLAESSER AND CODY HAVE put together a number of individual chapters, creating a primer on the redevelopment process. The book is targeted to attorneys acting on behalf of their developer clients or a government entity. As such, commentary in the book is often directed toward an individual or

group that has a legal practice. Despite this direction, there are many components that are important to all practitioners of redevelopment, no matter if they are involved in government, public finance, private finance, urban planning, market research, appraisal or other occupations. There is virtually no component of the redevelopment process that is left out of the loop. Yet, the book is eminently readable and easy to understand.

While the first two chapters of the book discuss the various “stakeholders” in the process and the government regulations that have made redevelopment possible, the meat of the treatise includes information on market feasibility, the design process, land assembly, eminent domain and the often complicated process of public/private financing.

Simply put, the editors have compiled chapters from many authors and have nearly “covered it all.” Features in many of the chapters, such as “practice tips” and a glossary of terms, assist the neophyte in better understanding the myriad details that comprise redevelopment.

Those who have already navigated these waters know that redevelopment is not for the faint of heart. However,

the book provides clear and straightforward counsel about the key areas and issues associated with these complex projects.

Each redevelopment is unique and possesses its own characteristics and challenges. And, many times, the process does not proceed smoothly. Anyone intimately involved with redevelopment knows that the road twists and turns, starts and stops. Sometimes in reading the book you may have the feeling that “redevelopment” is much easier than it is, with each chapter succinctly moving you through the maze. The authors of each chapter often caution readers and practitioners about the pitfalls, what to watch out for, what concerns should be addressed early into the process. The land assembly chapter provides a six-step basic process for land assembly:

About the Columnist



Mary C. Bujold, CRE, president, Maxfield Research Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota, is considered a market expert in the field of residential real estate and in market analysis for financial institutions. As well as providing strategic direction for the firm, Bujold heads project assignments for large-scale land use and redevelopment studies, including downtown revitalization for private developers and municipalities in the Twin Cities and in the Upper Midwest. Her work spans public and private sector clients, including institutional clients. Bujold also regularly testifies as an expert witness for eminent domain, tax appeal and other types of real estate litigation. She holds a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Marquette University and a master’s degree in business administration from the University of Minnesota.

Navigating the Redevelopment Maze

STEP ONE: Stop and Assess the Process

STEP TWO: Secure Control of the Process

STEP THREE: Furnish Proper Tools

STEP FOUR: Instruct the Blind

STEP FIVE: Stay Organized

STEP SIX: Be Fully Involved

This six-step process is helpful, but only provides a very cursory analysis of the many challenges to land assembly.

The chapter on eminent domain is concise, but does not stress enough that the most recent changes in eminent domain laws have made developers and local governments exceptionally cautious when considering eminent domain. In many instances, local governments are so concerned about getting caught up in litigation that they will not venture forth with projects where they foresee that property owners will have any opposing claims. The chapter also discusses situations whereby the current State legislative changes have not sufficiently addressed “blight” statutes, placing a further cloud on the potential to utilize eminent domain. I perceive that local governments now often feel they are “hog-tied” when trying to proceed with even a legitimate case for eminent domain, simply because of the potential litigation that may ensue.

In the chapter on public-driven redevelopment projects, community involvement is mentioned in a short

paragraph. In both public- and private-driven redevelopment projects, it has been my experience that community involvement is often critical to the success of the project and, at times, even to support the project being moved forward at all. While the book tries to cover a significant amount of information in a few pages, my experience with many redevelopment projects has shown that significant community involvement has often been necessary to secure full entitlement for these projects.

I was happy to see that the chapter on Market Feasibility stated that this was a crucial component to any redevelopment project. As my specialty, it was heartening to see a strong proponent of good market research prior to undertaking the redevelopment.

In today’s world, the necessity of making appropriate use of land in urban areas and considering how to sustain and revitalize our communities so that their attributes effectively respond to the needs of residents and businesses today and in the future requires redevelopment. This book is a very good addition to most libraries, but if you have practiced in this area for a number of years, you have probably dealt with most, if not all of these issues many times. ■