



## Planning for Great Vision



### Planners take developers on a wild ride, from planning to permitting to public scrutiny

**G**etting to groundbreaking is easier said than done. Great projects take vision, but land development involves far more than putting plans to paper and firing up the heavy equipment. It's a process that takes a developer – private or public – from planning to design, and then into a bewildering maze of regulation and law and extensive public scrutiny to obtain entitlements to develop land. Yet, the process is necessary to provide information, protect interests and strike a balance between private plans and public goals.

The planning process starts with a developer's dream or vision. R.M. Towill Corporation (RMTc) Planners manage the process to the point where the shovel can hit the ground, but are just one of many team members. RMTc Surveyors map topography, property boundaries, easements, utilities and other site features. Its Engineers and Planners work together to lay out the concepts for the "big three" of master planning: land use, access and open space. Civil and Environmental Engineers design infrastructure improvements such as drainage, roads, water, electricity and wastewater systems. As the designs take shape, Planners guide the project through the regulatory landscape.

Kahalu'u Regional Park is an example of an ongoing development project. In this case, years of community vision and engagement had already been focused into an ambitious park master plan by the time RMTc Planners got involved. The community,

with the help of Planner and Landscape Architect Lester Inouye, had put on paper aspirations for a mauka-makai gathering place with playfields, walking paths, indoor sports center, canoe hale, boat ramp, outdoor amphitheater, comfort station, parking and an integrated wetland flood control system. Their master plan is a celebrated achievement, but it required another type of planning to move the community's dreams from concept to construction.

For the park project, the City and County of Honolulu bought land that was planned for commercial development. However, the area contains a

stream and wetlands, both of which trigger federal regulations under the Clean Water and Environmental Protection Acts. Because it involves public lands and funds, park development requires an Environmental Assessment under State law. The park also lies partially within the Special Management Area, or SMA, a coastal zone subject to special protections that warrant enactment of a resolution by the City Council before development can proceed.

Each of these requirements involves research, community outreach and the preparation of a variety of planning documents for government and public review. The entitlements process also requires a planning strategy and timeline to ensure key information is in place to keep the project moving forward. Depending on the project, the effort can involve tracking a wide range of specialized information. Impacts



**Photos:**  
1. Aerial of Kahalu'u Regional Park Phase I at an early stage of development.  
2. Phase I with sign and comfort station in background.  
3. Kahalu'u Regional Park sports field. Open space is an important consideration in a community.

(Continued on back.)

## RMTC PROFILES

**A**lthough it wasn't planned that way, pursuits as a young adult presented unique perspectives on the world that prepared the way for Brian Takeda's career in urban planning. After earning his undergraduate degree at the University of Hawai'i, Takeda sought two non-academic goals – learning to sail and piloting a sail plane. He admits to being neither a great sailor nor pilot. Of flying, he says, "The view of the ground from the perspective of the air is something you get in no other way." He didn't yet know it would be similar to the aerial photography his future employer, the R.M. Towill Corporation, is known for.



Brian Takeda

Takeda joined the merchant marine, where he saw another perspective over the course of five years. As the cruise ships S.S. Independence and Constitution sailed and anchored off the various islands of Hawai'i, he noticed marked changes to the landscape. From offshore, he saw residential and industrial developments changing the landscape over the span of weeks, months and years. It caused him to question the reasons for the changes and what drove them.

While on the ship, Takeda met many famous actors, actresses and various captains of industry. It was an engaging experience for a young person, but he felt it was time to think about the future. After visiting the University to speak with some of his old professors, Takeda went back for a Master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning. Upon graduating, he worked for the Office of State Planning, which was then under Governor John Waihee.

As Governor Waihee approached the end of his second term, Takeda decided it was time to move on and was hired by RMTC. Today he is thankful that he and his colleagues have the opportunity to work with "some of the best and brightest surveyors and civil engineers in the State."

"One of the things I'm grateful for," says Takeda, "is that [RMTC] has allowed me to serve as First Vice President on the Board of Directors for Ronald McDonald House Charities of Hawai'i. He takes pride in the lodging and comforting environment the organization gives to children with life-threatening illnesses, along with their families. As with Takeda's career in planning, it's all about how to best serve his clients and the community in which we live."

## Planning (Continued from front.)

to wetland ecology are evaluated under the stringent review of the Army Corps of Engineers. Water quality is tested and monitored in streams and near shore waters to ensure that State Department of Health standards are kept. The presence of cultural features and practices requires archaeological study, community interviews, careful documentation and review by the State Historic Preservation Division. View planes, beach access, marine plants and animals, coastal hazards and economic impacts are just some of the required SMA conditions that must be evaluated.

"Because we've been in business since 1930, we've developed long-term relationships with many agencies," says Brian Takeda, RMTC Planning Coordinator, "The trust we share with them isn't taken lightly. It must be earned on a daily basis." Takeda noted that RMTC's experienced planners can help clients navigate through the range of agencies and regulations, and relations with the public, but emphasized that the process serves to strike a fair balance between private and public benefit.

Planners regularly serve as project representatives at government hearings and at community meetings, educating both the public and the developer about impacts and benefits. Although the developer is the client, Planners follow a code of ethics that demands the public interest be served by conscientiously seeking input and understanding. "You have to engage the community early and often for the process to be meaningful," says Takeda. Jim Niermann, RMTC Senior Planner, notes that the planner's role is to explain clearly to the public what a project is about, but also to sincerely listen and faithfully respond to concerns. "By addressing concerns before they develop into conflicts, we're serving the client's interest as well," he says.

In Kahalu'u, a site once used to store dredged slurry from an adjacent flood control channel is now a multi-purpose playfield. Other phases of the park master plan are in design and more are just over the horizon awaiting funding. Many parties, including the prime consultant (Lester Inouye and Associates), the City and County, the former landowner and the community, deserve credit for moving the project forward. Often, not everyone shares the same dream for the same land and scores of issues challenge the Planner's skills. Yet, great vision is realized when Planners, developers and the community learn and work together to find common ground.



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