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# Coversations with alumni: Spotlight on Norm Allinder

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## Conversations with Alumni

### Spotlight on Norm Allinder

Master of City and Regional Planning, Cal Poly, 2002

**Focus:** *Why did you choose CRP?*

I finished my architecture program at Cal Poly in 2000 and decided to go for my MCRP right away.

**Focus:** *Why a planning degree?*

I wanted to transform the state of suburban development.

**Focus:** *Can you talk a little about your professional career?*

**Norm:** My first job was working at the City of Fresno in current planning. After a couple of years I went to work for RRM Design to work on neighborhood design projects. After a few years designing neighborhoods I went to work for Kemp Land Company building new neighborhoods. When the recession took effect, I had to seek other opportunities for the first time in my career. I was lucky enough to be offered the Planning Director position in Madera County and have been there since.

**Focus:** *What were the most rewarding professional experiences that you remember?*

**Norm:** Each of them has had their own rewarding experiences and I highly recommend some form of public sector experience early in your career.

**Focus:** *Can you talk a little about your current job?*

**Norm:** In addition to being the Planning Director, I also have the administrative title of the Chief of Development Services. In that role I oversee three departments, including Public Works, totaling over 160 employees.

**Focus:** *How did you end up taking it?*

**Norm:** The Board of Supervisors offered me the expanded position after the previous Public Works Director resigned.

**Focus:** *What are your responsibilities?*



**Norm:** I oversee the Water and Natural Resources Department, Public Works Department and Community Development Department, which includes Planning, Code Enforcement, Building, the Fire Marshal's Office, and Environmental Health.

**Focus:** *How is it working in the public sector as compared to the private sector?*

**Norm:** Public sector positions are not as flexible as the private sector.

**Focus:** *Do you prefer the public over the private sector?*

**Norm:** Each has its own advantages and challenges.

**Focus:** *Can you tell us how is it that your department is organized and its main mission?*

**Norm:** As Chief of Development Services, I oversee the Community Development, Water and Natural Resources, and Public Works Departments, which cover most of the development related activities in the County. My staff facilitates development in the County, overseeing county wide zoning, development review and public improvements, coordinating with other agencies and jurisdictions, and ensuring that the County's interests are represented when implementing mandated regulations.

**Focus:** *Did you conduct any reorganization when you came in?*

**Norm:** I have participated in two major reorganizations in my seven years at Madera County.

**Focus:** *What gets you excited about your work?*

**Norm:** Finishing a task on time and under budget.

**Focus:** *Can you describe the most exciting projects you have worked in your career?*

**Norm:** Every project no matter its size is exciting and important. The most exciting projects are those that get built.

**Focus:** *What are the major plans and projects that your department is involved with now?*

We are beginning the implementation of a new town. It was planned twenty years ago and construction began earlier this year. It is very exciting to implement a new city.

**Focus:** *What gets you frustrated in your job?*

**Norm:** Closed minded public and territorial government officials.

**Focus:** *Can you share with us some of these frustrating moments?*

**Norm:** When it comes to the public it is very difficult to overcome misinformation, which has its own inertia in the community.

**Focus:** *How does your education reflect in your work?*

**Norm:** I always try and consider the finished product, what gets developed and built. That is the only way to know when you have got it right or wrong and always provides new learning experiences.

**Focus:** *Do you feel that what you got enough from the MCRP program to start you off in your professional practice?*

**Norm:** Absolutely.

**Focus:** *From the perspective of a former student, what do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the department?*

**Norm:** Applied learning has always been a strength of the program. More outreach to alumni would be welcomed.

**Focus:** *What was the most challenging aspect of moving from the CRP program to professional practice?*

**Norm:** Remembering that it is not your town, but everyone's.

**Focus:** *What are the critical skills/tools for planners entering the field?*

**Norm:** Graphic and design skills are always in high demand.

**Focus:** *What do you see as planning's big challenges over the next 5-10 years, and what does Cal Poly need to teach students so that can successfully engage in these challenges.*

**Norm:** Know and understand water rights.

**Focus:** *Any other suggestions to our students?*

**Norm:** Always continue learning.