

A True American Planning Hero: Paul C. Crawford, FAICP (1947-2008)

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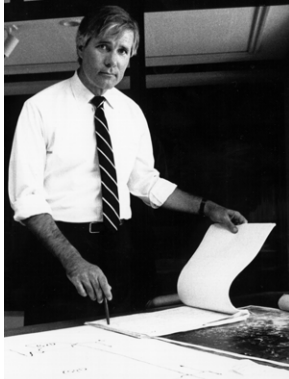


Photo: Courtesy of Chris Clark

Sam: It's like in the great stories Mr. Frodo, the ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were, and sometimes you didn't want to know the end because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end it's only a passing thing this shadow, even darkness must pass. A new day will come, and when the sun shines it'll shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you, that meant something even if you were too small to understand why. But I think Mr. Frodo, I do understand, I know now folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going because they were holding on to something.

Frodo: What are we holding onto, Sam?

Sam: That there's some good in the world, Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for.

Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

The planning profession in its search to recapture the pride and glory of being a city planner needs a hero that inspires us to strive for the good in the world – and have a good time while working hard to make a difference. Paul Crawford was one such consummate planning protagonist that exemplified the best attributes of a planner and set an example of a contemporary American planning hero.

Paul Crawford passed away at his home in San Luis Obispo in May. Born in Chicago, Paul moved to California in the 1950s and graduated from the city and regional planning program in 1971 from California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. At 33, Paul was the youngest county planning director in California. After 10 years in the public sector, Paul co-founded the planning consulting firm Crawford, Multari and Clark Associates.

Paul enjoyed distinctive and livable places and was a true pioneer in crafting policies and over 100 development codes that would facilitate such places. He was generous with his time and offered advice to others who could help make communities better places.

So much of what is happening today in the realm of Form-Based Coding would not be if it were not for Paul laying the groundwork and setting the template. “Few who have rallied around Form-Based Codes have the encyclopedic knowledge of conventional zoning that Paul possessed. That knowledge, and his depth of experience as a planner, enabled Paul to see the true potential of the approach, and create the necessary “conversion kit” to plug form-based codes into the use-based regulatory framework that exists in nearly every US municipality. Years from now, we will look back and see how Paul’s leadership and insight set the stage for this important advance,” said Peter Katz, president of Form-Based Codes Institute (FBCI).

Paul’s ability to speak and write simply allowed him to connect with everyone. You felt important and valued when you talked to Paul.

“His spirit was so generous and infectious that no one could resist responding and joining in whatever task was at hand,” notes Carol Wyant, executive director of FBCI.

“Paul was never flustered, and endured happily in a profession rife with bureaucracy and politics. And I think it was largely Paul’s good nature that allowed him to work so many years on zoning ordinances, a world with few thrills,” said his business partner Chris Clark.

Together with his new urbanist friends, Paul co-founded the FBCI and served as its chairman. With Dan and Karen Parolek he co-authored the recently published seminal textbook on Form-Based Codes.

“Paul embraced life on more fronts than almost anyone I know: photography, spelunking, teaching, good wine and food. Paul had a gift for reducing complex concepts into simple, clear language -- this gift combined with his passion for Form-Based Coding enabled FBCI to accomplish much more in its few years of existence than we could have imagined,” notes Carol.

As planners we work under tight deadlines and are often stretched to the limit. Paul was a self-admitted workaholic. “Paul taught us how to work hard and live the good life. Enjoying the sweet life (La Dolce Vita) at times meant squeezing in quality time during evenings and weekends having a good meal with friends, often at client sites, or more recently going off to Italy for a few months,” recalls Geoff Ferrell, vice chairman of FBCI.

Paul was appointed and recognized by numerous state and national planning organizations. The California chapter of the American Planning Association recognized Paul with its Excellence for Distinguished Leadership as a Planning Professional award in 1998. In 2000, Paul served as president of the California Planning Roundtable. A

year later, he was elected to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Paul's memories will live on in the places that will continue to be shaped by people's lives that he touched and policies and codes he authored. Forever preserved are his wit, presence, knowledge and humility that have left an indelible impression on our psyche for the past 30 years. This is the mark of great technician who fought the good fight and has left the world better than he found it.