
ENGINEERS AND THE LAW

Mark Bloomquist: An Attorney With A View On the Future

Meagher & Geer attorney Mark Bloomquist finds himself in a unique position these days. He is literally able to look down on the future from his firm's offices on the 44th floor of the 33 South Sixth Street Building in downtown Minneapolis — and likes what he sees.

A couple of nearby green roofs highlight his exceptional perspective. One is the 2.5-acre roof that covers the Target Center, home of the Minnesota Timberwolves and Minnesota Lynx professional basketball teams. The other is the greenery atop the roof of the Minneapolis Public Library. Bloomquist believes Minneapolis, and the rest of the country, is headed toward a cleaner environment and he has even adjusted his life style to be part of that effort.

Meagher & Geer provide a variety of legal services used by engineering firms. Bloomquist, a partner in the firm, has been with Meagher & Geer 23 years. He stays current with the issues and challenges confronting engineers. He is a past chair of the construction section of the Minnesota State Bar Association. Bloomquist says the continuing movement toward a cleaner environment, often labeled sustainable or environmental design including the aforementioned green roofs, offers significant opportunities for engineers as well as some legal challenges.

Being aware of public issues such as environmental concerns has been part of Bloomquist's life for a long time. A native of Rhode Island, he majored in psychology at Stanford University. Following graduation in 1979, he spent a couple of years working for a group home in south Minneapolis. Bloomquist was in the Twin Cities as a result of his marriage to a St. Louis Park resident.

He eventually made a career switch and attended law school, eventually graduating from the William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul.

Bloomquist was raised in a family that placed a high priority on public service. His father was a Lutheran minister and his mother was a college professor with a doctorate in physical education.

Bloomquist acknowledges his awareness of environmental issues is also significantly influenced by personal experiences. He is very aware of the problems too much carbon, emanating from a variety of sources, can cause. He believes there is a community responsibility to help reduce one's carbon imprint.

He follows through by riding a bike to work three or four times a week. It takes him about 30 minutes to travel from his St. Louis Park home to downtown Minneapolis. He rides to work eight months of the year.

Interestingly, Bloomquist's biking was influenced by the example set by architect Rick Carter, who is a Senior Vice President with the Minneapolis office of the Duluth-based A&E firm LHB, Inc. Carter was part of a panel discussion a few years ago relating to his firm's work relative to green buildings. He arrived at that event on a bike. Bloomquist was impressed. He felt biking was a more healthy and very environmentally friendly method of travel. He eventually became a confirmed biker.

Bloomquist believes there is strong awareness among building owners and managers that providing an environmentally friendly building is appealing to many current and prospective tenants these days. He warns, however, that engineers should be aware legal problems can develop if they promise clients too much regarding a building's environmental or sustainable capabilities.

Bloomquist advises that design professionals should be careful when discussing the "sustainability" of a building. Interestingly, a primary roadblock is the definition of "sustainable" is hard to pin down,

One way to achieve a "sustainable" building is to be sure it meets the standards set by the U.S Green Building Council, a Washington D.C.-based coalition of a various business groups. The group was established in 2000 to promote more environmentally friendly buildings. It sets standards that certify a building has met various environmental standards. The certification process is known as LEEDS (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.)

Mark Bloomquist



Bloomquist notes that buildings today are far more eco-friendly than they were 30 years ago. "There is greater awareness in the design professions now regarding the need to cut back on carbon emissions," he said. Bloomquist cited, as an example, the Minnesota Sustainable 2030 Policy designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in buildings. The plan, the result of a bill passed by the Minnesota legislature in 2008, is to gradually reduce carbon emissions from buildings so there will be a 100 percent cut in carbon producing fuels used for building energy by the year 2030.

Bloomquist notes that European countries have made significant advancement in their efforts to cut carbon emissions. That awareness also has a personal connection. His daughter is currently working on a Master's degree in Denmark at Copenhagen University. He has visited her and seen the progress that has been made in reducing carbon emissions. Part of the reason for the drop is that many residents have opted for bikes rather than cars.

"I think we have the capability of doing that in the United States," the avowed Minneapolis commuter observed. He mentioned, for example, that Minneapolis is considered one of the most bike-friendly cities in the country. The city will soon implement a program where bike commuters will place chips on their bikes to obtain accurate counts of bike traffic volume. The data will be used to support applications for construction grant money. "Engineers have told me they are happy to design bike lanes and bike bridges," he said. "The question, as it often does, comes down to financing. Cities have to decide whether such changes are worth it. I think they are. I remain very optimistic about the future."



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Career Choice Working Well For Attorney Vince Fahnlander

If one were making a prediction 30 years ago regarding the career choice of Vince Fahnlander, a good guess would be the young farm boy might well choose a career in engineering. Three decades later, real life reveals that prediction would have been somewhat close. Fahnlander did begin college with the idea of possibly becoming an engineer. The reality is he became a lawyer who works with engineers.

Fahnlander is with the downtown Minneapolis law firm of Mohrman and Kaardal and specializes in construction law. Fahnlander's recall of his college life at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota draws a chuckle. "I gave thought to becoming an engineer," he explained, "but at that time in my life, I was not willing to make the effort necessary for the study of engineering."

A native of Royal, Iowa, a farming community in northwest Iowa about 40 miles from the Minnesota border, Fahnlander grew up in a farm family with seven siblings. The agricultural background helped him develop a strong work ethic as well as an appreciation for the value of being self-reliant and self-sufficient.

As a youth, he was conflicted about making a career choice. He felt engineering might be a good option. He was also influenced by the biographies he read of famous historical figures. Many had a legal background. He believed there might be a connection.

Fahnlander went on to St. John's. The liberal arts school had a program in which students could study engineering related courses for the first three years and then transfer to another institution to actually obtain a degree in engineering.

A significant part of St. John's appeal was the opportunity to play football at a school with a very successful record in that sport. A high school quarterback, Fahnlander found himself in competition for that position with a fellow named Tom Burnett, a graduate of Bloomington Jefferson High School. They wound up as roommates and friends. Burnett eventually would be the starting quarterback. Fahnlander moved to safety and played on some highly successful teams with the small college powerhouse. Interestingly, soon after Burnett became a starter, he gave up football and transferred to the University of Minnesota.