MATTHEW WETLI, AICP ‘01

GRADUATE DEGREE: Master of City and Regional Planning
UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE: B.S. In Geography and Planning—The University of Toledo
CURRENT JOB: Senior Associate at Development Strategies

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE OSU FOR YOUR MCRP DEGREE?

To put it simply, I had a passion and love for cities as far back into my childhood as my memory takes me, and from that grew a desire to make them better and more accessible to everyone. Ohio State had an accredited program with strengths in economic and housing policy, and I believed—correctly—that these would help form a foundation of knowledge from which I could engage in a mission-driven practice of professional planning. Columbus was certainly a magnet as well. I knew it would provide a good urban laboratory while in school, and had sufficient momentum and energy to also be a great place to linger after graduation. I caught Columbus on its way up.

DESCRIBE A MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE YOU HAD IN GRADUATE SCHOOL.

The Dresden program was a watershed for me. I made lifelong friends, on both sides of The Pond, and learned valuable lessons about the power of city planning principles when implemented in an ordered society that is supportive of regional coordination. I also came to understand American dynamism and entrepreneurialism, and comparing the relative strengths and weaknesses of these nations’ policy frameworks and cultural tendencies continues to inform my work nearly 15 years later.

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERNSHIP WHILE IN THE PROGRAM?

My internship was an introduction to the art of the possible. I saw smart, hard-working people trying to make a positive impact, often in spite of the economic and political limitations that kept the more comprehensive solutions they envisioned far on the horizon.

HOW DID YOUR TIME IN THE PROGRAM PREPARE YOU FOR A CAREER IN YOUR FIELD?

On a professional level, I was stretched in terms of my understanding of economic, social, and environmental policy, as well as the ingredients that lead to the attractive and functional places—neighborhoods, districts, and public spaces—that enhance our quality of life. This has enabled me to see a broader range of viewpoints and, on my most successful days, assemble implementable plans for people with different skillsets to come together and improve our cities in meaningful ways. With a comprehensive foundation of policy, design, markets, and finance, a planning background helps to see cities as living organisms, and thus understand that what we do on one development site affects the whole in ways that are either positive or negative.

WHAT HAVE YOU VALUED THE MOST WHEN YOU HIRE CRP GRADUATES?

I can teach real estate development skills to smart, hard-working people of any background. But understanding how what we do affects the whole—even in cases where we’re advising on just a single site—requires a foundation of policy, social organization, economics, and physical development that is most readily found in planning graduates. In essence, providing skills to a person who understands why what we do is important is vastly more valuable than simply telling somebody what to do. Planners are both mission driven and pragmatic, and that’s a powerful combination that is necessary to affect change.