



LEADERS IN REAL ESTATE LAW

PROFILES BY JULIE BROWN

Behind every real estate transaction is a real estate attorney. Often the silent partner in the deal, their work is critical to the structure and success of the transaction. From writing and reviewing contracts to handling litigation if the deal goes wrong, their work is tireless. Meet some of the Valley's top real estate attorneys. They powered their way through law school and have devoted their careers to an industry that's volatile, entrepreneurial and the backbone of our economy. Although their stories are remarkably different in how they came into their profession, these attorneys all share a strong work ethic, the desire to create win-win situations, and a passion for lending their expertise to help shape our real estate market.

A professional portrait of Nicholas Wood, a man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark pinstriped suit jacket, a white shirt, and a blue striped tie. He is smiling slightly. The background is a blurred, warm-toned interior.

Nicholas Wood

Snell & Wilmer

Nicholas Wood grew up in a hard-working family with parents that prepared him for college and a career in medicine. Yet instead of comforting patients' families, he has spent nearly three decades consoling with municipalities, government agencies and neighborhood associations as one of the Valley's most successful and sought after zoning attorneys. He's attentive, responsive and polished like a career politician, which is likely why he's so good at working with opposition.

While pursuing a master's degree in business, Wood decided to get a real estate license and sell commercial property in his hometown of Milwaukee. With a passion for real estate, he set his sights on law school. While his peers joked that he was going to learn how to "kill his own deals," Wood was determined to take his career to the next level. After graduating from Marquette University Law School, Wood went to work for a Milwaukee law firm and even became an adjunct law professor for his alma mater. Interested in zoning and land use, he knew that he needed to relocate to an emerging real estate market. He joined a small Phoenix law firm where he practiced zoning part time and bank work the rest. Years later he was offered the chance to help build a zoning practice at Snell & Wilmer and has been there for nearly 20 years now.

Zoning lawyers are really like lobbyists, according to Wood. "The challenge isn't learning the process, it's working with the people who are directly impacted by the projects themselves," explains Wood. "You have to understand that you're working with people who likely know nothing about what you do or what goes into the planning process. They're worried that you and the developer are going to build this project and walk away and they will be the ones that have to live with the results every day."

The key to success for Wood is to treat people like they want and deserve to be treated. "You have to put yourself in their shoes and be honest and forthright with them," adds Wood. He welcomes and openly encourages opposition to get involved in the process because it makes for a much better project and outcome for everyone involved. He learned early in his career from one of his mentors that the job of a lawyer is to solve problems, not to win at all costs. "If you approach every client with that mindset then you will be successful," says Wood.

He has had his share of projects that have been highly political, public and personal, but they all have taught him important lessons. Those projects included the rezoning of the Arizona Biltmore Resort and a mixed-use project near 44th Street and Camelback. Both highly opposed, Wood and a team of constituents were able to create a win-win for all parties involved. Often labeled an optimist, Wood considers himself more of a pragmatist. "You have to deal with things the way that they are, not the way you want them to be," says Wood. "You have to work towards achievable and realistic goals."

The life of a zoning attorney requires lots of evening hours so Wood cherishes his weekends to spend with his wife and four children. He enjoys being an attorney, the challenges it can present and has no plans to slow down anytime soon. "The day I quit learning is the day I quit practicing law," shares Wood. "A person's character is not measured by the mistakes they make but how they handle those mistakes. If you start thinking your life is perfect, that's when you're in trouble." ●

“Nick Wood has been instrumental in helping us successfully obtain entitlements on three of our land holdings located in Chandler and Gilbert. He has the trust and confidence of Staff and Elected Officials that allowed us to gain access for meetings and to conclude agreements with them, and is a master at strategy.”

**Mark Singerman, Regional Director
- Arizona, Rockefeller Group**

Career Snapshot | Nicholas Wood

- **Current law firm you are at:** Snell & Wilmer
- **How many years you have been there:** 19 years
- **Number of Years Practicing Law:** 30
- **Types of law you practice now/
areas of specialty:** Zoning
- **Favorite aspect of working in real estate:** People
- **Most challenging aspect of
working in RE:** People
- **Three adjectives to describe your work
style:** Honest, diligent and productive
- **Notable clients:** Rockefeller; USAA; First Solar; Marriott; Hilton; Biltmore Resort; Toyota; Ford; Blackstone Group; Alliance; JP Morgan Chase.
- **Number of firms you've worked with:** 3
- **Biggest challenge in RE law now:** Liquidity
- **Biggest opportunity for the industry now:** Someone hit the "reset button" and property values have returned to manageable numbers.
- **If you were not a lawyer, you'd
be doing what:** Pediatrician
- **The one thing people assume about
lawyers that is not true:** The term "honest lawyer" is an oxymoron.