

# Snapshots of Non-Traditional Paths to Careers in Commercial Real Estate

*An interview with*

**Lee Cranmer**

Senior Director, Development

The Howard Hughes Corp., Honolulu, HI



**Campus Outreach Toolkit Subcommittee**  
Q1 / Q2 2019



**Lee Cranmer**  
Senior Director, Development  
The Howard Hughes Corp.

**Please provide a brief description of your academic history. What was your graduating major in Undergraduate school and in Graduate School (if attended)?**

Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering, University of Delaware

Masters of Science in Architectural Engineering, University of Texas at Austin

Masters of Business Administration, Shidler College, University of Hawaii

**Did you practice professionally in the degree that you first majored in? If yes, how many years of experience did you gain before your move to a career in RE?**

I joined the U.S. Air Force directly out of undergraduate school and spent 2 years as a Civil Engineer designing building, site, and traffic improvements before being given the chance to supervise a construction management office. The Air Force paid for my masters at UT-Austin and gave me increasing responsibilities as an engineering manager. Immediately upon separating from the Air Force, I had to start again as a Project Engineer, however, I quickly earned a promotion to Project Manager and took a job with a Los Angeles General Contractor who built office and retail product.

**What prompted your move into Real Estate development?**

While working on a Santa Monica office building, the project's developer spirited me away from working for their contractor and into the role of Development Manager, focused on design and construction management ["DCM"]. My move into RE development occurred 14 years into my career.

**Did you have to take any additional courses of study specializing in RE to enhance your knowledge in this field?**

In the 14 years between undergraduate school and entering RE development, I gained invaluable skills

in business communications, team formation and leadership, and a broad experience base across multiple disciplines involved in land development and vertical construction. However, I lacked specific financial analysis skills. It wasn't until I returned to school, earned my MBA, and understood financial proformas and debt & equity origination, that I was able to break free from the DCM role and fully move into the role of Development Director.

**What was your very first position/ role when you began your career in RE? Could you describe your day-to-day responsibilities and tasks at that time?**

My first role was an extension of my earlier work experience – in-house DCM, sometimes referred to as "Owner's Representative". Day-to-day responsibilities were aligned with those of a Project Management Professional ["PMP"] - project initiation, planning, execution, monitoring & control, and project close-out. Key knowledge areas required: Team Building, Scope Management, Schedule Management, Cost Management, Quality Management, Resource Management, Communications Management, Risk Management, Procurement Management, and Stakeholder Management.

**Early in your RE career, what type of projects did you find most fulfilling?**

Large mixed-use projects requiring complex project teams.

**How has your role or area of focus in RE evolved over the years? In what ways did your experience and knowledge in your previous professional degree bring value to your role in RE?**

The combination of my early educational background and my career experiences best qualifies me for a role in Land Development – urban & master planning, due diligence, zoning & entitlement, subdivision, infrastructure development, transportation network integration, site development, public amenities and parks and open space delivery.

**How many years have you been in the CRE space?  
What are the most rewarding aspects of your work?**

I've been directly engaged in the developer role for 14 years, only settling into the position where I can add the most value in the last 3 years.

The most rewarding aspect of the job is being able to contribute value to a team who: discerns a vision, massages the vision into a workable financial model, translates the financial model into a development program, sells the vision to financiers & approving agencies, develops the vision into a set of construction documents, sees the vision be physically built, and finally sees the vision fulfilled by being filled with individuals living in and enjoying the created space. I'm blessed to be able to create the spaces where people meet, fall in love, raise their families, and celebrate their lives.

Thank You!