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Nashville Legends



By

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A monthly feature celebrating legendary individuals in the Nashville business community.

Land Use Attorney Tom White Plays Key Role in Nashville Developments

As construction cranes dot the Nashville sky, a sure sign of the continued development, it is typically deep-pocketed investors and development companies with multimillion-dollar portfolios that get the credit for Music City's growth. Yet before ground can be broken on a new hotel or retail center, an attorney often has to get approval for the land use. And in many cases, that attorney is Tom White of Tune Entekin White, Attorneys at Law.

After graduating from Vanderbilt Law School in 1972, White became the attorney for the Nashville Homebuilder's Association, representing a number of residential developers and homebuilders in their efforts to create new subdivisions and communities around the city.

White soon discovered that what he did on a

Tom White

By Andrea Williams

repeated and regular basis for residential developments was the same process required for the development of commercial properties. Eventually, his reputation as a property rights lawyer spread, minting White as the go-to attorney for commercial developers planning projects in and around downtown.

"The first thing I consider [when evaluating a new proposal] is the effect on the area in question," White says. "That is, is it consistent with the planning department policy for that area? And then, is it generally something that may not be unanimously accepted, but that would still have a positive effect on property values in that general area?"

The latter point of evaluation is an important one for White, who is a firm believer in property rights.



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Community support for a proposal is important, but if a development can bring value to an area and aligns with local zoning laws, White is more than willing to push for approval even in the face of opposition.

White was largely responsible for the construction of Father Ryan's new campus on Norwood Drive in the city of Oak Hill, which opened to students in 1991 after considerable backlash from neighboring residents.

"There was an Oak Hill ordinance that cited what would be required for a high school to be built within the city's limits, and in my opinion, we met the policy," White says. "We were denied by the city of Oak Hill, so that was a three-year piece of litigation that went from the Chancery Court, to the Court of Appeals, to the Tennessee Supreme Court."

In the end, White prevailed.

More recently, White won approval for the development of the Hoover Materials rock quarry in Old Hickory. Like Father Ryan, the quarry was controversial, but given that the area had been zoned for industrial use for more than 50 years, White wasn't deterred.

"My job is not to be popular or liked by everybody," he says. "I've got a job to do in protecting the client."