

# BANKER & TRADESMAN

THE REAL ESTATE, BANKING AND COMMERCIAL WEEKLY FOR MASSACHUSETTS

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## IN PERSON

# Making Change One Approval At A Time

BY JAMES CRONIN | BANKER & TRADESMAN STAFF WRITER

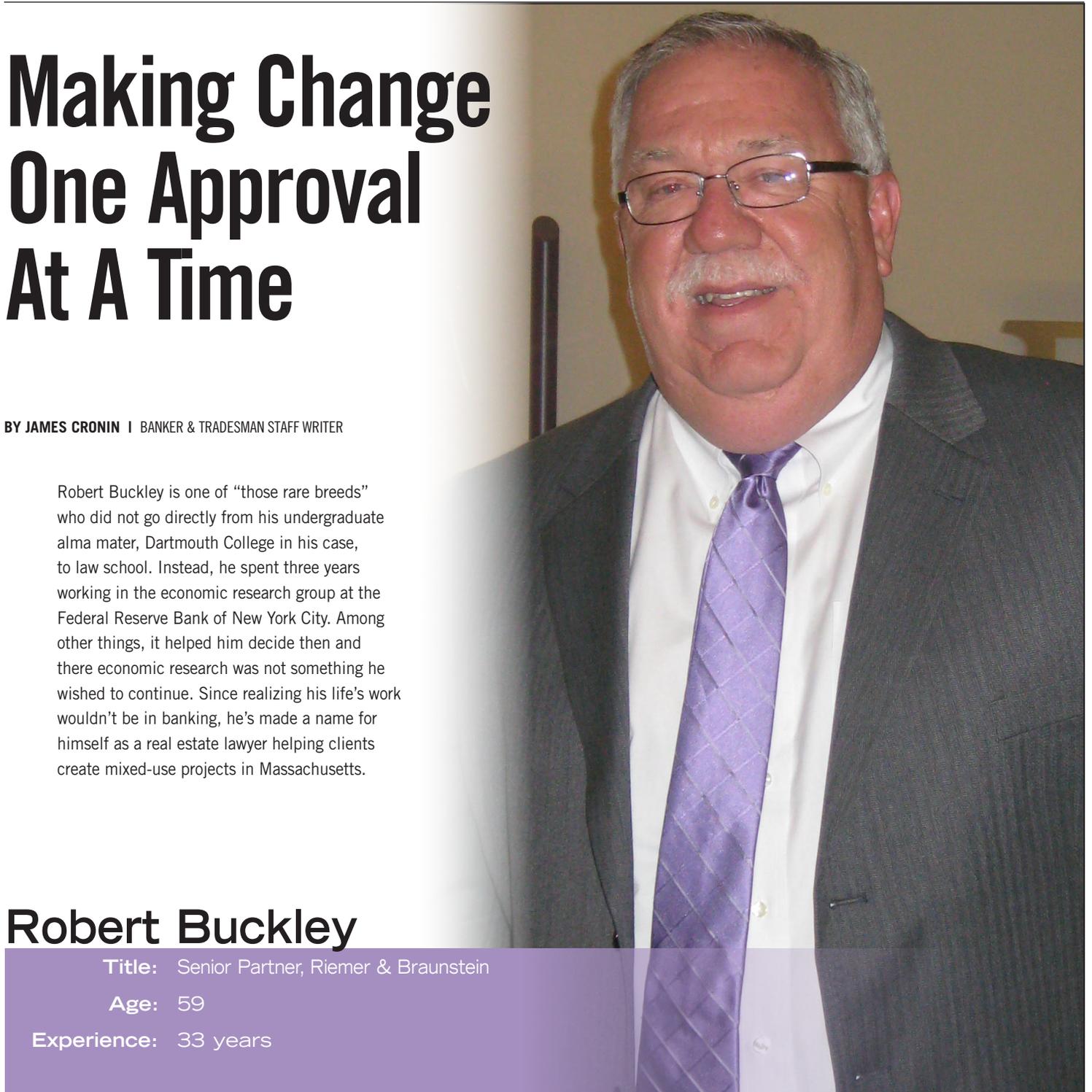
Robert Buckley is one of “those rare breeds” who did not go directly from his undergraduate alma mater, Dartmouth College in his case, to law school. Instead, he spent three years working in the economic research group at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York City. Among other things, it helped him decide then and there economic research was not something he wished to continue. Since realizing his life’s work wouldn’t be in banking, he’s made a name for himself as a real estate lawyer helping clients create mixed-use projects in Massachusetts.

## Robert Buckley

**Title:** Senior Partner, Riemer & Braunstein

**Age:** 59

**Experience:** 33 years



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**Q:** You've been involved in mixed-use projects in the commonwealth for years. What are you working on now?

**A:** We recently got the final vote for approvals for the former 110-acre [Hewlett-Packard] campus in Marlborough. We now have approvals for more than a million square feet of office space. We have Avalon, which will do 350 multifamily homes right onsite. We're going to do a hotel and we'll build retail onsite. We're creating an activity pod right there. We're focusing on things that make sense. We sat down with the city council, the mayor, and my client and said, look, we have property that was built in the '70s that just doesn't resonate with the marketplace. So let's do something creative and figure out what people want today. Real estate is no longer about how much you pay for square footage in a building. Companies want to retain employees after training them. And what do young, talented people want? They want a place to live, to recreate, a place that has access to various amenities, and companies want certainty. We convinced the city council

to create an overlay district that allows a lot of uses as-of-right, not from a special permit that is discretionary and complicated. So we told them that we'd have them at the table, that everything would flow through the city council. But we're going to make it so that if we attract a company there, they'll know that they can grow there and that their employees would be happy there.

**Q:** You're involved with the new Middlesex 3 Coalition, a group of communities including Bedford, Billerica, Chelmsford, Burlington and Lowell, that are trying to increase economic opportunities in those municipalities. What are you focusing on improving in those areas?

**A:** When the governor came to myself and a few others and said, 'We've looked at Route 3 from Burlington to Lowell, and realized this is really a great economic area. We have qualified talent, we have space, a new roadway we put a \$350 million investment in. We'd like to try to do something that spurs that along.' That's where the idea of Middlesex 3 was formulated – take the CEOs and managers of those communities, some business people and the state, and sit together and say, we've

all got skin in the game, how can we make something happen here? Each community has their own identity and issues, but they realize if they work together, then they all benefit. They can all chase a Keurig, for example. But if Burlington gets Keurig, that still helps Lowell because Lowell residents now have a place to work. If housing is built in Billerica or Chelmsford or Lowell, it helps everyone in the corridor. We have two issues to focus on – transportation and workforce training. A lot of companies can't get their employees to the door. They can get them from North Station to Woburn, but not from there to the businesses. If you're a company with great senior level talent, and you have a need for lab technicians but can't find the qualified people, the community colleges should be going to the companies and asking what they need, and building courses around that. If you're a company making a decision, those kinds of things are critical. Certain communities have trouble with infrastructure, because the utilities aren't adequate. Those communities might have a chance to land a big tenant or user, but are being told the utilities are insufficient and it'll take two years to even upgrade them. That needs to change.

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## TOP FIVE FAVORITE THINGS:

- 1** Favorite quote: "Do one thing every day that scares you." – Eleanor Roosevelt
- 2** Favorite activity: Sitting in the white Adirondack chairs at Woodland Golf Club, solving the world's problems.
- 3** Favorite restaurants in the North End: Riccardo's, Limoncello and the North Street Grille.
- 4** Model governing his law practice: There is a solution to the problem on the table and his mission is to find it.
- 5** Personal interests: Anything to do with the Red Sox, and visits to Boston's open artist's studios.

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