

City's Growth Management Efforts Get New Leadership

By [Robert Connors](#)
Managing Editor



Brian Herrmann Will Take the Reins of Former "Development Services Division"

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Brian Herrmann will head the recently-renamed Growth management Division of the City of Lake Wales as the city faces unprecedented development pressure. He is relocating to the city from Crystal River, where he has worked since 2018.

As the [City of Lake Wales](#) faces an onslaught of development proposals totaling more than 14,000 residential units, a responsive city government is making the needed adjustments to meet the challenge.

[veteran](#) planner Brian Herrmann has recently been hired to head the city's Growth Management division, a department formerly known as "Development Services."

The department name change is reflection of the determination of city leadership to cope and direct the unstoppable pressures coming the area surges to the top of growth rates nationwide.

"Growth Management is more reflective of what the city is doing to ensure that future development doesn't outpace our ability to provide services," City Manager James Slaton told [Lake Wales News.net](#), "especially in the rapid-

growth environment here in Polk County."

Herrmann describes his task as "overseeing growth in a responsible way." He admits that he's never worked in a city facing such rapid growth.

His educational background includes degrees in historic preservation and planning from the College of Charleston, and a graduate degree in community planning from Florida Atlantic University in boca Raton.

He is relocating from Crystal River, a town he has helped guide since 2018. While there he helped a "civic master plan" that will continue to guide the town's development after his departure.

His experience includes work in Beaufort, South Carolina, and Thomasville, Georgia, where he previously worked with the city's lead planning firm of Dover, Kohl & Partners. That effort has led to the creation of what he describes as a "thriving downtown."

Victor Dover of DK&P described Herrmann as "a fine choice. We've seen his work in Thomasville and Crystal River," he said, adding that Herrmann "understands what a critical time this is for Lake Wales."

Herrmann and his wife Cindy Vibar, a physical therapist, came to town after researching the area online, a process he said included reading numerous stories on [Lake Wales News.net](#). The couple have a son who is a Junior at South Carolina's Clemson University.

In a sign of his serious commitment to redeveloping the commercial heart of the city, the couple quickly made an offer to purchase a downtown condominium unit within walking distance of the city administration building.

"It's a traditional downtown, and it feels like a traditional downtown. I really love that," Herrmann said of [Lake Wales](#), comparing it to Crystal River, that didn't really have a downtown area.

Herrmann says he is a believer in "form-based" standards that are less rigid than long-used zoning codes, using community charrettes to produce outcomes that are more desirable in a process that's simpler and faster.

"Form-based standards allow a developer to fly through the process quicker," he said, adding that "we want to be as friendly to the development community as we can, but sustain our standards."

Herrmann admitted that he has become "attached to the New Urbanist way of doing things," which include the traditional neighborhood designs (TND) being advocated by DK&P in the development of the [Lake Wales Envisioned](#) plan.

The LWE process is developing proposals that will eliminate the now-disfavored walled communities such as those lining Burns Avenue in favor of TND designs.

"There's a lot of talk about TND," Herrmann said, "but the neighborhood between downtown and the lake fits that," where rear garages and front porches, sidewalks and street trees create attractive, walkable neighborhoods. "It's a great example to hold up" to developers as they come to town, he said.

"I'm excited about what the city is doing downtown," he said, a reference to the \$20 million "[Lake Wales Connected](#)" street redesign now under construction. "It's likely to be a five-year process from beginning to end," he said, but will result in "a significant transformation" of the historic heart of the city.

"You are going to see these vacant lots bought up as more and more residential comes to the downtown area," Herrmann said.

He "looks forward to the Northwest Neighborhood taking off too." That area is also undergoing a planned transformation, with new sidewalks and street trees following the completion of extensive utility work now underway.

Returning to the topic of form-based codes, Herrmann used the example of building height restrictions, currently a fixed 45 feet. He explained that a mixed-use building, which might have retail on the ground floor, may need a few more feet to be financially viable. Deciding what fits by form, rather than rigid numbers, allows "giving the developer more flexibility, and getting a better result."

A building that may have five stories can "taper down to three," he said, and the forms can be applied by street designations.

The six-foot tall Herrmann grew up in the Rockville and Silver Spring area of Maryland and attended high school at St. John's in Washington DC, where he played as a shooting guard for the school's powerhouse basketball team.



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[City of Lake Wales Growth management Director Brian Herrmann explains his allowing philosophical outlook as he faces the juggernaut of development aimed at Lake Wales. Shaping the future form of the city will be a challenge for the experienced planner.](#)