

[Bluffton Today](#) » Wednesday, December 2, 2009

Orlando reshapes Bluffton's growth management arm

By [Frank Morris](#)

frank.morris@blufftontoday.com



Bluffton's Growth Management Department has a new look and refocused direction after a reorganization made by its head, Assistant Town Manager Marc Orlando.

The changes realigned the massive department from three divisions to two.

They were made in conjunction with recent hires in new supervisory positions following major staff turnover in the past year.

Orlando said he made the changes to give the department — which oversees construction, community development, land-use planning and environmental protection — a more integrated and comprehensive environmental focus.

He said the reorganization will allow the town to better protect the May River and other rivers from pollution threats from development.

"We need to be a watershed management-based town," he said. "The water's an indicator. The solution ... lies in the pattern of land use and infrastructure that's put in place."

The new plan does away with the Environmental Protection Department as a separate entity and integrates it with the Planning and Community Development Department formerly headed by Laura Morgan, who resigned.

The replacement is called the Planning & Environmental Sustainability Division. Milt Rhodes, who joined the staff in June, was promoted from principal planner to become its director.

The Construction and Compliance Division remains with Frank Hodge as its director, but with a reorganized structure and Hodge taking on more responsibilities.

"I didn't disband it," Orlando said of the Environmental Protection Department. "What I've done is I've strengthened and aligned the land planning and environmental programs."

"The solutions have a direct relationship, hence the name — Planning & Environmental Sustainability. ... The point is that the solution is to incorporate a watershed-based approach, an environmental approach to all of your land planning and infrastructure improvements."

An upcoming overhaul of the town's development standards and land management codes also will take a more integrated focus. For instance, the now isolated stormwater management ordinance will become part of a new, unified code, Orlando said.

Staffing changes

Jeff McNesby, who directed the old Environmental Protection Division, stays on as the environmental projects engineer, reporting directly to Hodge instead of Orlando.

"Jeff's role as a leader in environmental protection will not change," Orlando said. "I believe Jeff's expertise and credentials will be best utilized in his improved role."

Kim Jones remains as environmental protection manager as part of the new Planning and Environmental Sustainability Division.

She reports to John Carmack, who was hired to become the compliance engineer for planning, a new position. He formerly was a project manager for Thomas & Hutton Engineering Co. of Savannah, has more than seven years of experience and is a registered professional engineer.

The other division also has a new compliance engineer for building safety, Ron Bullman. He reports to Hodge and supervises town forester Barrett Baxter and new compliance engineer intern Sam Connor. Bullman formerly was a development manager for Village Park Communities LLC of Bluffton.

Rhodes is a planner, architect and urban designer with more than 15 years working in the area of low-impact development, watershed management and site design. Orlando said that over time the realignment will bring cost savings by not duplicating support staff for the two combined divisions.

The new Growth Management organizational chart has 25 positions, including one currently unfunded principal planner spot, the open watershed planner job and open planning manager and planning coordinator posts.

This spring, when former Town Manager Bill Workman reorganized the town's staff structure and cut 17.5 budgeted positions to bring the staff size to 94.5 full-time equivalents, the Growth Management Department had 24 employees.

Orlando said the town had six employees in the planning arena when he joined it as planning director in December 2003.

The department has a budget of about \$2.88 million.

The new lineup has Andre White, who became community development project manager in July in the former Planning and Community Development Division, report directly to Orlando. As before, so do executive assistant Kristi Wheat and program and revenue administrator Brie Giroux.

Others in the Construction and Compliance Division include manager Sandy Lesch over permit technician Tara Stimpson, administrative assistant/inspections coordinator Christine Smith, and addressing technician Theresa Thorsen. Also reporting to Hodge are commercial plans examiner George Owens, chief codes inspector Eddie Wilcox and a vacant combination codes inspector post.

Others in the planning and environment arm include Katie Woodruff, who was hired as a current planner in 2007 and became neighborhood preservation planner this year, and Danny Wilson, a former intern hired as a planner in June.

Town Manager Anthony Barrett said the council wants to move from studies to accomplishments, and "my philosophy with the staff has been we want to do things."

Barrett said he asked Orlando, "What would you need to accomplish some of the things you want to do? How would you structure your organization?" This is a result of that."

Contact reporter **Frank Morris** at 815-0813 or frank.morris@bluffontoday.com