FPZA

FLORIDA PLANNING AND ZONING ASSOCIATION

Surfcoast Chapter

April 2026
Volume 2

Newsletter

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The President's Corner

Greetings Surfcoast,

It feels like we came into 2026 in 3rd gear and haven't slowed down from there. Here we are in spring, and we've had two great lunch and learn sessions already this year, and we're not slowing down. Next up the Surfcoast is going to host the FPZA State Board and organizational members from chapters across Florida with an FPZA Regional Forum for our April 17th 2026 Legislative Update event in DeLand. For the event, we've partnered with Chris Carmody of Gray Robinson once again to help keep the Chapter in the loop with how the 2026 legislative session affects us. So, mark your calendars and visit the chapter website www.fpzasurfcoast.org to register.

The FPZA's 73rd Annual Conference "Palette of Possibilities - The Art of Planning" is scheduled for May 27-29, 2026, at the Ritz Carlton in Sarasota, Florida. You can still register or sponsor the annual conference at www.fpza.org.

For those of you that attended our January and March Lunch and Learns, please note that there was a hiccup when APA updated their website at the end of 2025 that prevented us from being able to generate new AICP CM log numbers. That has been resolved, so if you attended either event, please use the following log numbers to record your CM hours – January Event: CM# 9326201, March Event: CM# 9326202.

As a reminder, the FPZA revamped membership renewals to be processed on the Statewide FPZA website. Please note that the system is largely automated and is not sending out invoices for annual renewal, but does send out a receipt upon renewal. We're working on seeing if the system can be updated to send out invoices for renewal reminders and will keep you updated.

As always thank you for your support and the efforts that you make to make our community great.

Michael Hanson, President

Hey Surfcoasters!

Let us know if you have had a change in your career or life that you would like to communicate to other Surfcoasters for the Members on the Move page. Send the update to our Newsletter Editor at Weedoxie@yahoo.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS!!!

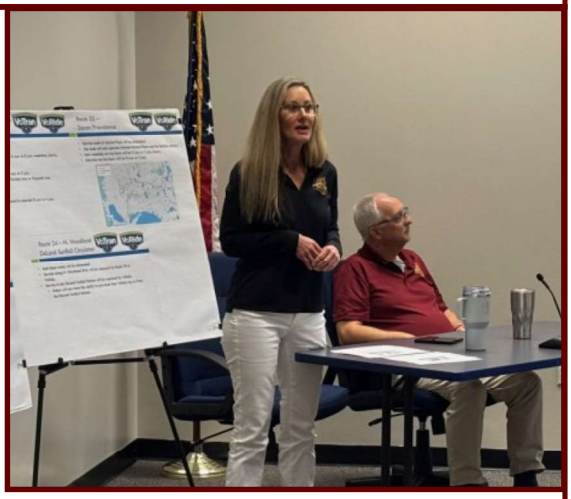
Regional Forum

- *April 17, 2026*
  Volusia Co. TCK Training Rm
  DeLand, FL
  Community Service Project
- *May 7, 2026*
  Road Clean-up, Meet at Murph's,
  Victoria Park Village Center
  Annual State FPZA Conference
- *May 27-29, 2026*
  Ritz-Carlton, Sarasota, FL
  Luncheon Program
- *June 26th, 2026*
  Artificial Ingelligence/GIS
  Lyonia Environmental Center
  Annual Chapter Awards Gala
- *December 2026*
  Stay Tuned for More Info

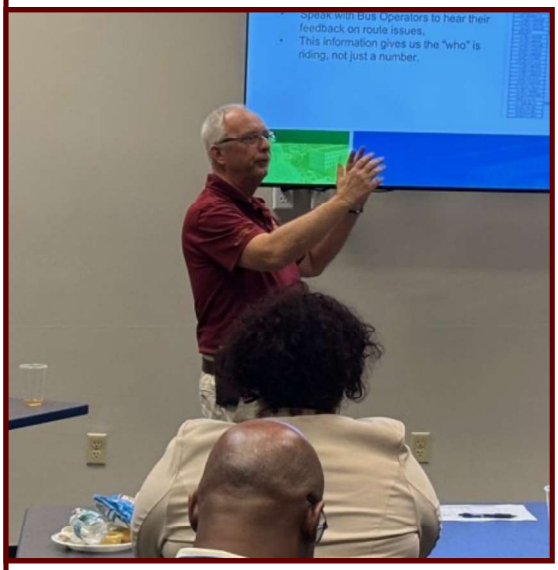
Evolving Public Transit in Volusia County Luncheon Program Overview

By: Natasia Lunceford, Chapter Director

On January 23, 2026, the FPZA Surfcoast Chapter had the opportunity to learn about planning through a different lens, transit. The attendees listened to a presentation about Volusia County's transit system, VoTran and got to have a tour of their East Volusia County facility in South Daytona.



Bobbie King, Transit Services Director



Ralf Hesseler, Transit Planning Manager

During the presentation the attendees learned about the history of VoTran, and new initiatives being taken which better improve mobility within Volusia County. One important topic discussed is how planners can better integrate transit initiatives into projects, as this can be an overlooked but necessary element to planning. One new initiative that Volusia County has implemented is VoRide, a mobility on demand service similar to Uber. The service operates in various zones, replacing underutilized fixed route services. This provides a benefit not just to the riders, but also taxpayers of Volusia County as a whole.

Additionally, during the tour of the facility, the attendees were able to see the maintenance shop, the bus yard, the dispatch office, and a project that is actively taking place at the facility. These elements are often overlooked by those unfamiliar with transit operations. They are essential to keeping the system running smoothly and members of the public getting to places they need to go.

Jacob Lunceford, Special Projects Coordinator, on the far right giving a tour of the VoTran maintenance facility

The Next Phase of Regional Mobility Luncheon Program Overview

By: John G. Thomson, Chapter Newsletter Editor

Sarah Larsen of MetroPlan

The luncheon program was an opportunity to have an in-depth overview of the recently completed 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan for MetroPlan Orlando area. The overview was provided by Lara Bouck, Manager of Project Development, and Sarah Larsen, Transportation Planner with MetroPlan Orlando. MetroPlan Orlando includes the Orange, Osceola, and Seminole Counties.

Lara and Sarah both took turns covering the various aspects of the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Lara started the presentation covering the demographics and economics of the region for the planning period. This included the drivers of change with the expected growth of one million in population and revenues to implement the $35.4 billion cost of the plan. She then went over the five guiding principles of the plan that include Safety, Reliability, Connectivity, Community, and Prosperity.

Lara then discussed the components for expansion of the regional transit system, which includes the Sunrail and Brightline rail systems and the LYNX bus system. She also discussed the emergence of Transit Oriented Development and its future expansion at the various transit hubs in the region. Sarah then focused on how the plan will leverage technology and discussed the new forms of transportation expected during the planning period. Examples included various types of Micro Mobility, Advanced Air Mobility including VTOL, and autonomous vehicles.

Lara Bouck of MetroPlan

Merylene Thomas, Chapter Vice President, Introducing the Luncheon Topic

Lara gave an overview the resilience portion of the plan including such impacts as air quality and expansion of heat island affects. She discussed how these potential threats can be mitigated with the expansion of the transportation system. Sarah then covered the safety aspects of the plan aimed at reducing risk. This included identifying problem locations to reduce the potential for fatalities using a Safe Systems Approach.

All in all, this was a very interesting presentation of the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan and its vision for the future. For more information on the plan go to www.metroplanorlando.gov/plans/2050-metropolitan-transportation-plan/.

APRIL 17, 2026 * 11:30 - 2:00 PM

Our featured speaker, Mr. Chris Carmody, Government Relations Attorney with Gray Robinson will give us an update of the 2026 Florida State legislative session.

Volusia County TCK Training Room
123 W Indiana Ave.
DeLand, FL 32720

- $25 for members/ $35 non-members
- 1.5 AICP credits pending
- Includes lunch
- **REGISTER at: fpzasurfcoast.org**

FPZA
FLORIDA PLANNING AND ZONING ASSOCIATION
Surfcoast Chapter

ADOPTED ROADWAY CLEANUP!

Join us as we volunteer for a cleaner, greener neighborhood!

MAY 7

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

Orange Camp Road

What We'll Do

- Street Cleanup
- S. Blue Lake Ave to Frontage Rd.
- Supplies provided
- Post celebration at Murph's

***Check-in at Victoria Park Village Center (Murph's) 1431 Orange Camp Road Deland, FL 32724**

SAVE THE DATE
Palette of Possibilities
The Art of Planning
MAY
27- 29
The Ritz-Carlton | Sarasota, FL
Florida Planning & Zoning Association
77th Annual Conference
2026

PLANNER PROFILE

The FPZA Surfcoast Chapter Introduces:

Bernice Gonzalez, AICP, CMP, SMPS-CP , Development Services Deputy Director

Give us a little background on where you are from, and how you arrived here. My planning journey has taken me through a variety of places and experiences over the years. Being born in Puerto Rico into an Ibero-Italian family, and having worked in Spain, California, Canada, and now Florida, has given me the opportunity to see how different communities approach growth, development, and public service.

Tell us about your family. My family is a big source of support and perspective in my life. My children especially inspire me and make me want to be a better person.

How did you become a planner? I came to planning through a combination of my academic background and my experience as a Planning Commissioner. My background is in environmental design, architecture, urban design, public art, public spaces, and urban regeneration, and during my time on the Planning Commission, I realized planning was the field that brought all of those interests together. I was drawn to planning's potential to make a difference at scale and to balance vision, policy, and problem-solving. I've stayed in the profession because I truly enjoy helping communities evolve in a way that is intentional, practical, and responsive to local values.

What responses do people give when you tell them you are a planner? Most people either get very interested very quickly, or they look a little unsure at first and then start asking about zoning, traffic, or what's being built nearby. A lot of people assume planning is only about development approvals, so it's always a good opportunity to explain that planning is really about shaping communities — how they function, how they grow, and how they serve the people who live there.

What improvements would you like to see in the community where you live and work? I'd love to continue seeing improvements that make communities more connected, accessible, and resilient. Things like walkability, quality public spaces, strong neighborhood character, efficient services, and thoughtful growth all make a real difference in people's everyday lives. I also think it's important to keep improving the way local government delivers services, so residents and applicants feel the process is clear, responsive, and effective.

What are your hobbies and how do you enjoy spending your free time? In my free time, I enjoy things that help me recharge and stay inspired. I'm drawn to design, culture, and exploring places, whether that means learning about innovative ideas, visiting interesting neighborhoods, or enjoying time with the people closest to me. I also enjoy opportunities to keep learning, especially when it comes to cities, community life, and the ways people connect to place.

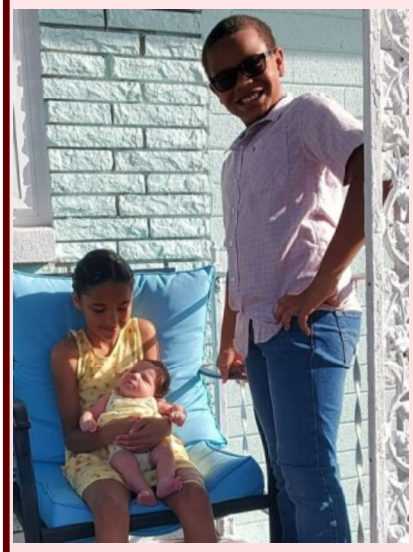
What is your favorite part of your job? My favorite part of the job is helping connect the bigger vision to the everyday work and turning community goals into practical action. I also truly value the people side of the profession — mentoring staff, collaborating with others, and being part of the wonderful team and colleagues I'm fortunate to work with at Orange City.

What is the least favorite part of your job? The hardest part for me is when you can see a good idea or a needed improvement, but it gets held up by outdated processes or systems that just are not working as well as they should. That can be frustrating for everyone involved — staff, applicants, and the community. At the same time, it is also one of the things that keeps me motivated, because when you improve those systems, you can really make a difference in how people experience local government services in their community.

What are the goals you hope to attain in your planning? I look forward to continuing to be involved in planning that helps shape the strategic direction of the community I serve and improves everyday quality of life. I also hope to continue mentoring others in the profession whenever I have the opportunity, because investing in the next generation of planners is one of the most meaningful ways we strengthen the profession.

SURFCOAST MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

Michael Hanson, AICP. *Congratulations to Michael, our Chapter President, and Melissa who welcomed the arrival of Magnus to their family. Magnus will now join her sister Seraphina and both should keep mom and dad busy.*



Rebekah Cottle, AICP. *Congratulations also to Rebekah, our Chapter Secretary, and Andrew on the birth of their daughter Dahlia. Dahlia is shown in the picture being held by her sister Matilda with her brother Samuel looking on with the big smile!*

Dale Arrington. *Dale has stepped up to take on the position of Interim City Clerk for the City of DeLand. Dale previously retired in August 2025, where she served as the City Manager for the City of Orange City for nine years. Her career in public service spans over 40 years including serving as a Division Director with the Volusia County's Department of Growth and Resource Management. Welcome Back!*

Thank You to our 2026 Diamond Sponsors!

Thank You to our 2026 Platinum Sponsors!

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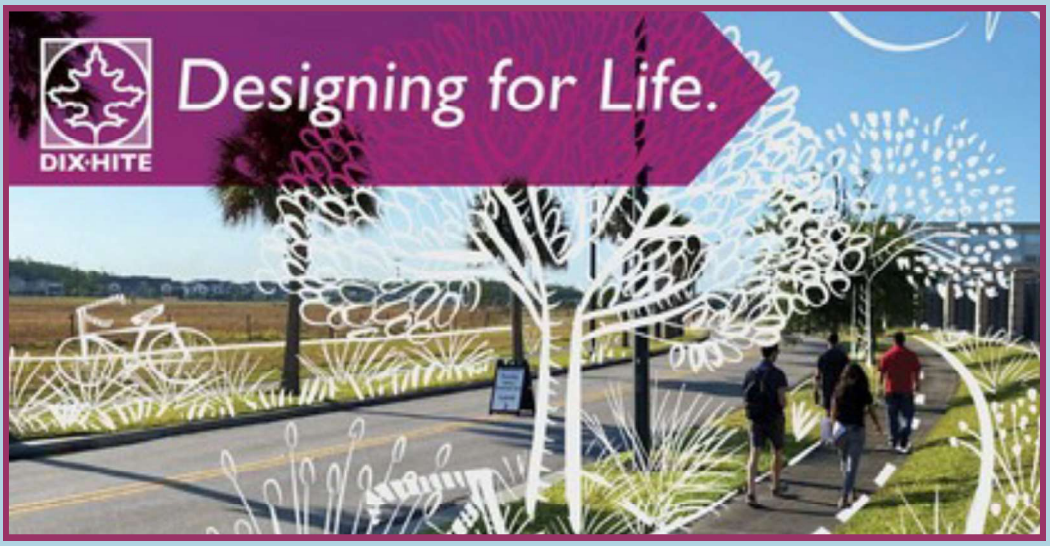

Thank You to our 2026 Gold Sponsors!

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The Surfcoast Chapter of FPZA promotes cooperation among official planning and zoning boards or commissions, civic bodies, citizens, technicians and students interested in planning and zoning throughout Volusia County.

SURFCOAST CHAPTER OFFICERS FOR 2026

Michael Hanson, AICP * President
Merylene Thomas, AICP * Vice President
Rebekah Cottle * Secretary
Becky Mendez, AICP Retired * Treasurer
John G. Thomson, AICP Retired * Newsletter Editor
Danalee Petyk, AICP * Professional Development Officer
Colleen Miles * Immediate Past President

DIRECTORS FOR 2026

Helen LaValley
Natasia Lunceford
Patty Rippey, AICP
Joseph Ruiz

CHAPTER STATE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Michael Hanson, AICP
Helen LaValley

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WWW.FPZASURFCOAST.ORG

Treasurer's Report

Becky Mendez, AICP

Fiscal Year 2026 started January 1, 2026, with a beginning balance of $7,469.75. The ending balance as of March 31, 2026, was $7648.36, which included $937.89, in revenue and $759.28, in expenses, for a net first quarter profit of $178.61.