



FPZA

FLORIDA PLANNING AND ZONING ASSOCIATION

Surfcoast Chapter

**January 2026
Volume 1**

Newsletter

The President's Corner

Happy New Years Surfcoast!

On behalf of the Chapter Board, we hope each of you and your families had a wonderful holiday season and made many happy memories.

As 2026 starts we want to keep the momentum from last year's Chapter of the Year award winning programming, so please join us on January 23rd for our first "Lunch and Learn" program for the year: Evolving Public Transportation in Volusia County, registration can be made at the Chapter website www.fpzsurfcoast.org. This year we are planning a large slate of chapter events to help you in your professional development. As a reminder, we appreciate and encourage suggestions for topics and joint collaboration on events.

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. Early-Bird registration is available until March 13th, 2026, and more details will be re-

leased at www.fpza.org in the near future.

Lastly the Chapter is working on getting more connected via social media, so feel free to follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/fpzsurfcoast) and LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com/company/fpza-surfcoast-chapter).

As always thank you, you are appreciated.

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.

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UPCOMING EVENTS!!!

- Luncheon Programs**
- January 23, 2026
Evolving Public Transportation in Volusia
 - December 2026
Annual Awards Gala
- Stay Tuned for More Info

Dark Sky Leadership in Florida: Lessons from City of Groveland

By: Merylene Elizabeth Thomas, Chapter Vice President



On November 14, 2025, the FPZA Surfcoast Chapter hosted an engaging and interactive session at the City of DeBary Council Chambers focused on the City of Groveland’s Dark Sky Initiative. The discussion was led by **Andrew Landis**, Conservation & Strategic Initiatives Division Manager for the City of Groveland, and **Gabriele Huffman**, Natural Resources Specialist with the City’s Conservation & Strategic Initiatives Division, who shared firsthand insights into the planning, policy, and implementation of the initiative.

Approximately 14 attendees participated in a thoughtful exchange on the effects of lighting on human health, wildlife, and ecosystems; light pollution; community character; environmental stewardship; and public health and safety. The discussion also addressed technical and regulatory considerations such as lighting fixture design, ideal color temperatures, photometric reviews, inspections, and the use of sky quality meters—illustrating how these tools support effective planning and enforcement.

Attendees learned how Groveland’s Dark Sky Lighting Ordinance, adopted in 2022, has helped reduce light pollution while preserving the city’s identity as the “City with Natural Charm.” These efforts contributed to Groveland becoming **Florida’s first certified International Dark Sky Community** and the **first in the Southeast United States**, demonstrating how thoughtful lighting standards can enhance safety, protect wildlife, reduce energy waste, and preserve night sky heritage.

The presenters also highlighted Groveland’s commitment to community engagement, including partnerships with local astronomical societies and stargazing events that attract visitors from across the region. The session concluded with an interactive dialogue on how similar dark sky initiatives could be adapted and implemented in other Florida communities, emphasizing the role of planners in advancing sustainability and quality-of-life outcomes through thoughtful lighting policies.



FPZA GALA AWARDS

2025

12 DECEMBER, 2025
HALIFAX RIVER YACHT CLUB

The FPZA held its 17th annual Gala Chapter Meeting and Awards Ceremony on December 12, 2025 at the Halifax River Yacht Club in Daytona Beach. The Gala commenced with a happy hour followed by dinner. The Chapter's President, Michael Hanson, opened the meeting portion of the event welcoming all in attendance and to announce the Chapter Officers and Directors for 2026. The Chapter Officers and Directors for 2026 are listed on page 12 of the newsletter. The 2026 Chapter sponsors were also recognized followed by the 2025 Chapter Annual Awards ceremony.

2025 FPZA Surfcoast Chapter Award Winners



Sustainability Award **City of Ormond Beach- Cassen Park**

In July, the City celebrated the grand reopening of Cassen Park, an iconic Ormond Beach landmark that has served the community for over 50 years. From its original boat ramps to its newly reimagined riverfront space, the park continues to hone the city's heritage while embracing the future along the Halifax River.

The Ormond Beach City Commission and staff worked closely with the project partners to help bring this vision to life, including Zev Cohen & Associates, Hall & Ogle, Marquis + Halback, Inc, Coleman Goodemote, and Ormond Mainstreet.

Pictured from the left are Chapter Vice President Merylene Thomas, Sarah Motes, Ormond Beach Senior Planner, Mark Karet with Zev Cohen, and Chapter President Michael Hanson.

2025 FPZA Surfcoast Chapter Award Winners

Outstanding Innovation & Design **Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Research Park West**



The Embry-Riddle Research Park, which is described as “a technology-focused ecosystem”, has expanded their Research Park West area with the design and construction of the Center for Aerospace Technology (CAT) buildings. CAT I, the Cici & Hyatt Brown Center, was constructed in 2024 and recently welcomed its first tenant – the Boeing Engineering Center which opened this September. The building, designed by ikon.5 architects, uses vibrant colored glass in the façade to create a striking landmark. The second phase of the Research Park West expansion, the CAT II building, was

approved this year and is under construction behind CAT I and uses similar design features. The final building, CAT III, is in the design phase. The goal of the Center for Aerospace Technology, and the entire Research Park, is to increase collaboration between the school and the aerospace industry to drive innovation and economic development.

Pictured from the left are Chapter Vice President Merylene Thomas, Ronnie Mack, Director of Research Park Operations for Embry-Riddle, and Chapter President Michael Hanson.

Outstanding Planning Study Volusia County **Low Impact Development (LID) Program**

From 2023 to 2025, Volusia County (population 590,000), with support from a Department of Economic Opportunity grant, created a comprehensive, voluntary LID program. The process included 18 months of interdepartmental collaboration and review by the Environment and Natural Resource Advisory Committee. The program includes a guidance manual that provides clear technical standards, design specifications and a tiered incentive structure rewarding developers with density bonuses, flexible design standards, and streamlined approvals. This voluntary program transforms stormwater management from regulatory burden to market opportunity. Three residential subdivisions have submitted applications utilizing these incentives, with more anticipated. The manual demonstrates how detailed implementation guidance paired with meaningful incentives drives voluntary adoption.



Pictured from the left are Chapter President Merylene Thomas, Samantha West, Volusia County Planning Manager, Carol McFarlane, Volusia County Director of Planning and Development, and Chapter President Michael Hanson.

2025 FPZA Surfcoast Chapter Award Winners

FOCUS AWARD Dale Arrington



Since beginning her public service career in 1977, Dale has led with integrity, wisdom and commitment to community. Her philosophy of empowering others, rather than leading through authority, shaped a culture of trust, collaboration and innovation across Orange City, DeLand and Volusia County.

Under Dale's leadership at Orange City, the city achieved transformative milestones that have strengthened the community. She championed major projects including Phase 2 of Mill Lake Park, the revitalization of Holly Avenue through the city's first major CRA initiative and the transition of the area from septic to sewer, bringing environmental and community benefits. She also created the Youth Advisory Council, nurturing future civic leaders. Dale's commitment to public service and her vision for sustainable, community-focused growth have made a lasting impact on Orange City.



Dale, pictured to the upper left, retired as the City Manager of Orange City a few months ago and is currently enjoying that retirement by traveling and visiting family at the time of the Gala.

Pictured to the right with Chapter Vice President Merylene Thomas and Chapter President Michael Hanson, is Christine Davis, the new City Manager of Orange City accepting the award on Behalf of Dale. Congratulations, Christine on your well-deserved promotion.



Member of the Year Kelli Cosentino

Kelli Cosentino is the Executive Director of the Volusia County Association for Responsible Development (VCARD). She earned her BA in Business Marketing from Brooklyn College and moved to Volusia County to serve as a Budget Manager and Executive at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Kelli specializes in event planning, communications, and marketing. In her time with VCARD, she has been recognized as a 2024 "40 Under 40" honoree and graduated from Leadership Dayton, Class XLIII (43). She lives in Ormond Beach and is newly engaged to her fiancé, Dan. When they're not busy planning the wedding, they're usually with their two pups, Charles and Sal.

Pictured from the left are Chapter President Merylene Thomas, Carol Macfarlane, Kelli Cosentino, and Chapter President Michael Hanson

Annual Gala 2025



Annual Gala 2025



Gala Attendees



2026 Chapter Board Members



JANUARY 23, 2026 * 11:30AM - 1:30PM

Explore the future of transit in Volusia County- featuring new services, emerging trends, and smarter coordination with development. The session concludes with an exclusive **behind-the-scenes** tour of the transit operations facility, including the Customer Service Call Center, Dispatch Operations, and Bus Maintenance Facility.

SPEAKER(S): Bobbie King, Transit Services Director & Ralf Heseler, Transit Planning Manager

VOTRAN Transit Operations Facility

950 Big Tree Road

South Daytona, FL 32119

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



PLANNER PROFILE

***The FPZA Surfcoast Chapter Introduces:
Michael Lopez, Senior Planner for the City of
DeBary***

Give us a little background on where you are from, and how you arrived here. I'm originally from Puerto Rico, but grew up in Virginia. I moved to the D.C. area right after graduating college and worked in survey/public opinion research before deciding I wanted a career shift towards public service. I left my job to start the MSURP program at UCF, as I had been planning to move to Florida due to having family already living here and in the process of moving here, who I wanted to be around.

Tell us about your family. My mother and father live in DeLand with their two shih tzus (their favorite sons), and my older brother lives in Houston. My parents both work in education, while my brother works as a registered dietitian.

How did you become a planner? During the height of COVID-19, when I was working remotely, I was doing research on professions that can have the most impact and do the most good. Urban planning seemed like a career type which spanned many fields (transportation, environmental protection, urban design, etc.) and had a lot of potential for good. I left my job, started the MSURP program at UCF, and was able to intern at the City of DeBary during the summers, where it was affirmed that I wanted to work in city planning. During the last semester of my master's program, the City of Lake Mary hired me as a planner, where I worked until I came to the City of DeBary!

What responses do people give when you tell them you are a planner? They often aren't familiar with the field right off the bat, but quickly see the importance and understand the impact it has on their lives. It typically also leads to great follow-up questions!

What improvements would you like to see in the community where you live and work? There's always room to improve for transportation, whether it's increasing multimodality, making trips safer, or promoting innovative solutions.

What are your hobbies and how do you enjoy spending your free time? I enjoy traveling and exploring new areas, going to the movies, and hosting or attending game nights. I also collect and build LEGO sets, primarily Marvel and Star Wars ones!

What is your favorite part of your job? The people I work with. I've been lucky that in the past and current city I work for, it's been full of dedicated, smart public servants with great work ethics. I've made what I feel to be lifelong friends in these positions, which I'm grateful for.

What is the least favorite part of your job? With so many projects and assignments to work on, there aren't enough hours in the day to achieve everything I'd like! Urban planning spans so many interesting fields that it sometimes feels difficult to hone in and specialize.

What are the goals you hope to attain in your planning? I'd just like to keep learning and growing as a planner and keep working to make Central Florida a great place to live in and visit.

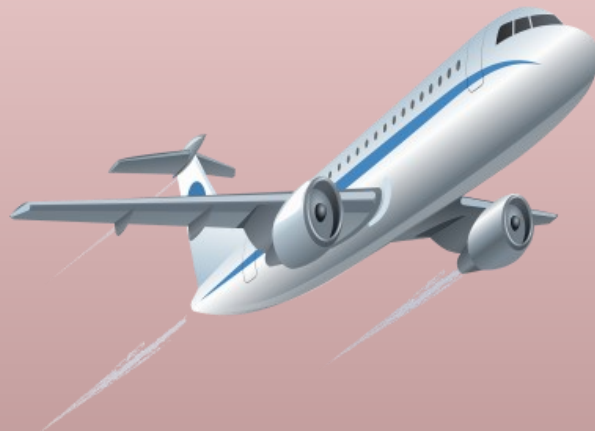


SURFCOAST MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

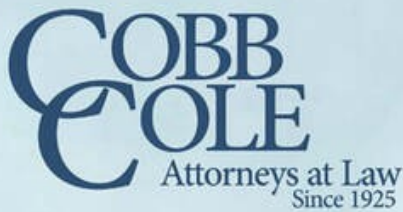
Joseph Jaskula. Is the new CRS Coordinator/Planner II for the Growth and Resource Management Department for Volusia County after serving as a Planner II for the County. Good luck with your new position!

Christine Davis. Christine was promoted to City Manager for the City of Orange City. She replaces Dale Arrington who recently retired. Congratulations on your promotion!

Bernice Gonzalez. Bernice accepted the Deputy Development Services Director position with the City of Orange City. She formerly served as a Principal Planner with the City of St. Cloud in Osceola County. Welcome aboard!



Thank You to our 2026 Diamond Sponsors!



**COBB COLE IS A PROUD SPONSOR OF
THE 2022 FPZA CONFERENCE.**

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For additional information or questions regarding this message,
please contact Mark Watts, Partner.

Thank You to our 2026 Platinum Sponsors!



Thank You to our 2026 Gold Sponsors!





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

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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 2025 started January 1, 2025, with a beginning balance of \$5,860.87. The ending balance as of December was \$7,590.21.