

Mark J. Bennett, AICP, FRA-RA

Experienced Professional in urban planning, zoning, and land development, both in the public and private sector. Proven leader, manager, and entrepreneur. Veteran with 30 years of military service.

Professional Goal – Create Better Communities!

Education:

Student, International Development Doctoral Program, University of Southern Mississippi (current)
Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, Graduate Certificate - Stability, Security, and Development in Complex Operations

Royal Military College of Canada, Toronto, ON, CA, Master of Defence Studies

University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, Master of Public Administration

University of South Florida (USF), Tampa, FL, Bachelor of Arts - Major - Geography

Memberships (current):

American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) - Certificate Number 11241

Florida Redevelopment Association – Certified Redevelopment Administrator (FRA-RA); Member, Board of Directors, Chair, Education and Professional Development Committee

City of Lake Wales Code Enforcement Board

Polk Vision - Leadership Polk Class XV

Haines City/Northeast Polk Chamber of Commerce - Leadership Class X

Senior Army Reserve Commanders Association, Reserve Officers Association, Military Officers Association of America - Imperial Polk County Chapter, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, 1st Cavalry Division Association

Memberships (previous):

Summerlin Academy (military-oriented public school of choice) Advisory Committee, Bartow, FL

USF School of Public Affairs Master of Urban and Regional Planning Advisory Council

Polk County Affordable Housing Advisory Committee

City of Lake Wales Planning Board, Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) Advisory Committee

Polk Transportation Planning Organization – Technical Advisory Committee, Joint Airport Zoning Board

Central Florida Development Council - Investor

Professional Planner Experience:

Senior Planner, Land Development Division, Polk County Board of County Commissioners, Polk County, FL – February 2023 to Present – Conduct long-range planning, development review activities, and special projects. Previously served from February 2006 to March 2007 as a Principal Planner. Initially hired in January 1989 as a student trainee, was promoted to Planner I, II, III, and Senior Planner before leaving in January 1996.

Development Services Director, City of Lake Wales, FL - July 2020 to February 2023 - Department-level position manager responsible for planning & zoning, building permitting and inspections, code compliance, and support of the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) for a city of 17,000+ residents and 20 square miles. Previously served as the City Planner from July 1998 to November 2000, Acting Community Services Director from March to June 1999, and the Development Services Director from January 1996 to June 1997.

Deputy Director of Development Services/CRA Manager, City of Haines City, FL – July 2017 to July 2020 – Responsible for the City’s CRA, community-development related activities, and special projects for a rapidly growing city of 25,000+ residents comprising 20 square miles. Served as Director of Development Services in absence of Director. Previously served as City Planner from November 1997 to July 1998, and Planning Manager from March 2007 to April 2015.

Planning Director/Principal, Ridge Professional Group – April 2015 to May 2017 – Responsible for all urban planning and zoning functions for an eight-employee land development consulting firm specializing in permitting and engineering design. Also, part-owner of firm, with additional duties of marketing, sales, and public relations.

Urban Planner – Bennett Consulting Services - July 2001 to February 2006 - Owner of urban planning consulting firm, specializing in subcontracting work for planning & civil engineering firms. Projects include processing Comprehensive Plan Amendments, Planned Developments, creation and implementation of annexation and sector plans, due diligence analysis for prospective land purchases, and property development potential analysis. Served as City Planner for Frostproof, FL from March to August 2005. Provided subject-matter expertise/testimony for clients before Polk County, Lake County, Lakeland, Winter Haven, and Lake Wales.

Planning Services Manager/Business Development Manager – M. T. Causley, Inc. – October 2002 to June 2003 - Contract position, responsible for urban planning services and business development activities (including sales, marketing, personnel and project management) for central Florida area.

Site Acquisition/Zoning Specialist – iTactical Services – November 2000 to October 2002 – Contract position, responsible for selection, acquisition/purchase of property, and obtaining zoning/development approval for placement of communications towers.

Zoning Specialist, SBA Communications Corporation - June to November 1997 - Responsible for siting, zoning, and permitting 20 sites to establish the Sprint PCS network in the Tampa Service Area.

Military Experience:

US Army Reserve (Retired) - April 1989 to May 2019 – Final Rank – Colonel. Key Assignments included Civil Affairs Planning Team Chief, 350th Civil Affairs Command, Pensacola, FL, with duty at US Southern Command, Doral, FL; Commander, 3rd Battalion, 349th Regiment (Logistics Support), Camp Shelby, MS; Commander, 5th Battalion, 95th Regiment, (Civil Affairs/Psychological Operations), Lubbock, TX; Civil Affairs Analyst, US Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL; Battalion Executive Officer and Commander, A Company, 478th Civil Affairs Battalion, Perrine, FL; and Public Works Officer/Essential Services Team Leader, 1st Armored Division/1st Cavalry Division Governorate Support Team, Baghdad, Iraq.

Significant Awards and Decorations include the Combat Action Badge, Bronze Star (Meritorious Service) and the Parachutist Badge.

Resume of Service Career available upon request.

Hobbies/Personal Interests:

Reading, attending University of South Florida athletic events, and spending time with wife Melissa and their two children.