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Lafayette's new development chief overseeing planning issues



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Blanchard's role will manage growth

BY HEATHER MILLER Special to The Advocate November 27, 2013

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LAFAYETTE — From street design to drainage to subdivision regulations, Kevin Blanchard is a self-proclaimed "nerd" when it comes to city planning.



Blanchard is roughly three weeks into his new job as the first chief development officer for Lafayette Consolidated Government, a newly created position described by City-Parish President Joey Durel as a one-stop shop for all issues related to future planning and current development.

"As a growing city that's competing with the economy of the future, you want to make sure you're offering a good product to people who can come here and start a business," Blanchard said. "We offer this great, unique culture and way of life and music and food. That's why I've stayed here all these years. But our sense of place, as in how we actually look and the way we function as far as traffic, infrastructure, drainage ... we're failing."

The local attorney and former reporter for The Advocate's Acadiana bureau has spent the past 18 months serving as chairman of the **Lafayette Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee**.

The volunteer group is helping craft a comprehensive plan draft outlining 399 items to guide Lafayette's growth over the next 20 to 40 years.

Blanchard, 38, said his new role with city-parish government will include overseeing the development of the comprehensive plan, portions of which will need city-parish council approval. He'll also be working with commercial and residential to navigate the maze of city-parish departments that must sign off on new projects.

"It's part of my job to make sure that all the right people are at the table," Blanchard said. "Sometimes it's necessary to have someone to make sure this department is working with this department."

Blanchard will also be addressing "recurring themes" of development issues, he said, problems including connectivity concerns among neighboring subdivisions.

"We've got to start making decisions in this parish on how to get around some of those problems we've created," Blanchard said. "It's not a bad thing that new developments are coming and people are moving here and spending their money here. A lot of cities would love to have that problem. But how do we deal with that development pressure with the funding that we have?"

One key component of the comprehensive plan is the adoption of a unified development code for the city of Lafayette and rural areas that surround it.

The code, if approved, would combine various regulations for design standards, utilities, water and sewage, subdivisions zoning and more into one "playbook," Blanchard said.

"That's a big, big piece," he said. "So much of the policies that'll be in place to ensure this type of community 20, 40 years from now are going to come from the unified development code."

Blanchard's new job title was suggested by consultants hired to help with the comprehensive planning process, Blanchard said. They told the committee that a departmental restructuring is needed for successful implementation of the comprehensive plan.

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The opportunity for reorganization happened when **Tony Tramel**, the longtime director of traffic and transportation, announced his retirement about a year ago, Blanchard said.

Officials eliminated Tramel's position after his retirement, and funded a chief development officer title with an annual salary of \$86,000.

"I think everyone would do this job in a different way," Blanchard said. "The way I see it is we have a very competent staff and departments here. I'm sort of here to make sure everything keeps moving. I answer to Joey (Durel) and make sure the ball keeps rolling."

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