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Close-UpBy Rick Bowers
Herald Staff Writer

New director of planning walks tightrope

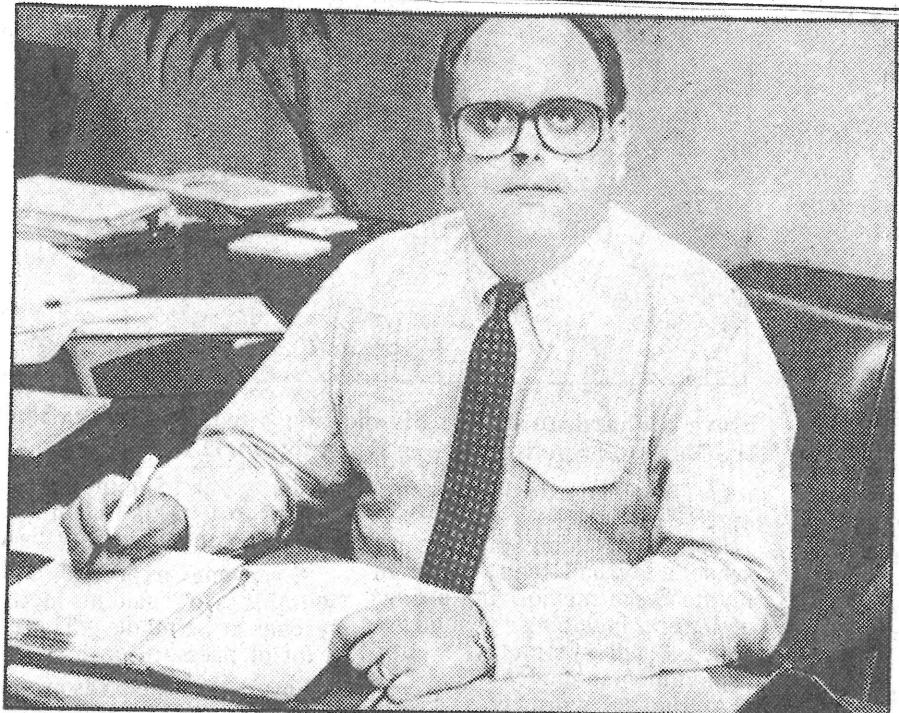
Pines complex OKd / 5BR

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On one side will be the developers, who most likely will view him as a costly burden.

On the other will be the environmentalists, who most likely will take him to task for helping to destroy South Florida's remaining open land.

When B. Jack Osterholt moves into the Hollywood office of the South Florida Regional Planning Council on April 14, he'll be stuck in the middle. As executive director he'll answer to the developers, environmentalists and his real bosses — a committee of politicians



Associated Press

B. Jack Osterholt: 'My style is to work things out with people.'

from three often-divided counties.

"South Florida is certainly a growing, dynamic area. You're dealing with one of the most fragile environments in North America," said Osterholt, currently the deputy director of the governor's Office of Planning and Budget.

"The economic environment is vital, too. This is one of the fastest-growing

parts of the country," Osterholt said. "Our job will be to make sure growth occurs in the areas where it's appropriate."

The South Florida Regional Planning Council is made up of 19 officials and gubernatorial appointees from Broward, Dade and Monroe counties. The panel,

Please turn to OSTERHOLT / 4BR

Osterholt: Man on a tightrope

New planning director must walk a fine line

OSTERHOLT / from IBP

which approves major development projects and advises local governments, is hoping that a new executive director, broader vision and a less confrontational approach will make the agency an effective force for managing growth.

Barry Peterson resigned as executive director in November after a long-running battle with Miami Dolphins owner Joe Robbie over plans for a 73,000-seat football stadium on 432 acres near Lake Lucerne in North Dade. Robbie complained loudly that Peterson wanted him to pay too large a share of the project's road improvements.

Osterholt, 36, a native of Louisville, Ky., with a master's degree in city planning from the Georgia Institute of Technology, started his career as a planner with the regional council in 1974. He worked his way up to become one of Peterson's deputies before moving to the governor's office in 1978.

"Barry was a real professional. Make no mistake about that," Osterholt said during a visit to Hollywood on Monday. "But Barry's style and my style are different. My style is to work things out with people."

A former colleague thinks Osterholt will be able to walk the line between developers, environmentalists and politicians.

"I don't think you can put a label on him. I don't think he's in a position where he has to favor one side or the other," said John DeGrove, head of the Florida Atlantic University/Florida International University Joint Center for Environmental and Urban Problems and until last summer the state's top planning official. "There's a vacuum at the council and he's going to fill it. The whole region is crying out for leadership."

For years, developers have contended that the council subjects projects to unreasonable scrutiny and exacts excessive road improvements and services in exchange for its approval.

The council came under fire a year ago after

Cordis Corp., one of South Florida's biggest high-technology firms, threatened to leave the state because the council recommended that Cordis pay \$600,000 of the \$157 million in road improvements needed in West Dade.

County officials finally agreed to pay most of the cost to keep the company from moving away.

"There's been some chaos. We really need to pull things together," said Frank Callahan, a council member and former chairman. The council also has butted heads with environmentalists, who often charge that it permits development in ecologically fragile areas. Much of the criticism has come from the Florida Keys, where officials and activists press the agency to draw the line against "overdevelopment."

Brenda Marinace, coordinator of the private, nonprofit Environmental Coalition of Broward County, said the leadership change at the council reflects the growing clout developers have over the agency.

An effective regional planning agency is one that views South Florida's natural resources as an interrelated ecosystem, she said. "The environment doesn't end just because there is a change in the county line," she said. Council members also say that development pressures make effective regional planning essential.

South Florida, especially Southwest Broward County, is facing massive growth as development follows the new Interstate 75 and Sawgrass Expressway to areas that are fast becoming ripe for shopping malls, office buildings and housing developments.

The council's 15-member staff currently is reviewing 27 major development proposals, 13 from Broward. And at least five of those are concentrated in the southwest section of the county.

The council's major challenge, Osterholt said, will be to ensure sound development takes place in areas that can stand the environmental stress and where sensitive water supplies, wetlands and beaches won't be

endangered.

As council director, Osterholt will ultimately be responsible for the review of each development plan to come before the agency. He will oversee the analysis of each project and sign off on the staff's final recommendations. Osterholt will answer directly to council members, who hired him for the \$65,000-a-year job.

Osterholt also will complete a regional master plan for South Florida, defining areas that can stand growth and those that may be too sensitive. The plan will also identify regional environmental resources that should be protected.

Osterholt will hire two or three new planners to help with the growing workload, council members said. Peterson's assistant, Sharyn Dodrill, was the only staffer to leave the agency with the former executive director.

DeGrove said Osterholt's knack for walking a tightrope between developers and environmentalists should bring badly needed stability to the council and help to promote a regional approach.

Council critics point out that the agency still suffers from past setbacks, particularly a decision by Palm Beach County to pull out of the pact a decade ago. They say that county should be part of the council because it is part of the growing South Florida region. Palm Beach County now is a part of the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council.

Council Chairman Scott Cowan said that with the new director coming aboard and development pressures increasing, the council finally may begin to view South Florida as a unified whole.

"We've been very parochial. Dade has watched out for Dade, Broward for Broward and Monroe for Monroe," said Cowan, a Broward County commissioner. "We have to become more regional. We have to realize that we're all inextricably attached.

"If the regional council can lead the way, it would be great," Cowan said.