

**NOMINEES**



# Planning Professional Of The Year



## Overview

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is proud to recognize superior accomplishments and effort by presenting awards for excellence in Transportation Planning achievements in Florida. This program supports the mission of the Transportation Planning Exchange (TransPlex), Florida's premier event for collaborating with transportation planners, engineers, and policy makers to Plan, Connect, and Innovate.

## Purpose

FDOT developed these awards to:

- Encourage innovation in planning
- Foster collaboration and partnerships through planning activities
- Highlight outstanding planning achievements
- Recognize creative planning techniques

## Considerations

The various aspects of planning considered include, were not limited to:

- Advancement of regional planning
- Collaboration and partnerships
- Innovation in public engagement
- Leadership in planning
- Multi-modal planning
- Noteworthy practices
- Planning legislation
- Planning management
- Technological research or advancement

## Eligibility

Eligible recipients are FDOT's Transportation Planning Partners in Florida. Example partners include:

- Federal Agencies
- Local Governments (Cities and Counties)
- Modal Sponsors (Ports, Airports, etc.)
- MPOs/TPOs/TPAs
- Regional Planning Councils
- Rural and Economic Development Initiative (REDI) Agencies
- State Agencies
- Transit Agencies
- Universities

## Categories

Three awards are available. The awards are:

1. Planning Professional of the Year
2. Planning Organization of the Year
3. Planning Innovation of the Year

## Timeline

Nominators must have completed the online nomination form for one or more awards. The activity nominated for the Idea/Innovation Award must have been conducted by a Transportation Planning Partner in calendar year 2019. Nominations were accepted until March 13, 2020. Awards submitted outside of the nomination period were not considered.

## Selection Process

The process for selection was based on review by the TransPlex Award Committee staffed by FDOT Executive Leadership, the Chief Planner, and the Office of Policy Planning Director and Administrators. The Committee reviewed the narratives for:

1. How the accomplishments described supported the award Purpose and Considerations



2. Specific criteria for each award category
3. Completeness of required information

## Planning Professional of the Year

Nominators from organizations across the State submitted planning professionals for consideration to the TransPlex Award Committee.

Nominators described how the individual:

- Was a leader in transportation planning in Florida during 2019
- Made a significant contribution to Transportation Planning in Florida in 2019 or made a continuing commitment to, and significant achievements in, Transportation Planning in Florida over a period of years
- Helped achieve Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) and/or Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) goals and objectives

Additionally, the nominators were asked to share other considerations such as how the person:

- Demonstrated resourcefulness, collaboration and/or partnerships
- Employed cost effective strategies
- Increased safety
- Led to the enhancement of resilience and/or sustainability
- Overcame challenges and utilized opportunities presented by the project
- Reduced congestion
- Supported the integration of new technology

Narratives supporting these nominees follow in alphabetical order by first name. In the table below, the narratives are also linked to their names.

Nominees	Organization
Derrick Harris	Ocala/Marion Transportation Planning Organization
Gary D. Harrell	Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO
Julie Conn Christesen	Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department
Kim Smith	Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization
Pat Steed	Central Florida Regional Planning Council
Ryan Kordek	Polk Transportation Planning Organization
Sarah Kraum	Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization
Thomas Hawkins	1000 Friends of Florida
Valerie Neilson	Palm Beach Transportation Planning Agency
Victoria Peters	FDOT District One



## **Planning Professional of the Year Narratives**

**Derrick Harris**

**Organization: Ocala/Marion Transportation Planning Organization**

Derrick Harris currently serves as the Ocala/Marion County Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) Assistant Director. He is being nominated for Planning Professional of the Year based on his steadfast commitment to service, work ethic and dedication to the TPO. Derrick was a part of far-reaching changes that occurred at the TPO during the course of 2019, in which he served a pivotal role to ensure stability and success.

In early 2019, the TPO was faced with significant leadership and staff challenges, coupled with a high-risk status from serious financial mismanagement. Due to these issues which significantly jeopardized the stability of the TPO, Derrick was asked by the TPO Board to serve as Interim TPO Director. He was also asked to take over full oversight of the budget to solve the invoicing and billing crisis that plagued the TPO. This directive was above and beyond his daily duties as a transportation planner involved with tasks such as the Transportation Improvement Program, Long Range Plan, and local planning studies. Based on his leadership and work ethic, he took on the challenge with open arms. The end results were successful. He was able to bring stability back to the finances of the TPO and helped significantly improve relations and coordination with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). When a new Director was hired, Derrick immediately provided support and counsel, and helped enable a smooth transition by bringing him fully up to speed on everything that transpired at the organization. He was counted on heavily by the new Director to establish relationships and address the challenging issues facing the TPO. The new Director in fact immediately realized Derrick's value and promoted him from a transportation planner/fiscal manager role to Senior Transportation Planner.

In July 2019, by way of a Board decision earlier in the year, the TPO was required to make a major change – from being hosted by the City of Ocala to Marion County. This was an enormous undertaking. In fact, it was the first time an MPO/TPO changed host governments in the history of Florida. Derrick was asked by the TPO Board and new Director to once again serve a pivotal role beyond his daily duties to help with the transition. This included extensive coordination with partners like the FDOT, and the new host government financial and administrative staff of Marion County. As he also combed through the financial records of the TPO, he discovered additional grant monies that were unused. He also restructured the TPO budget and improved the grant invoicing process. By fall of 2019, Derrick was again recognized for his contributions by being promoted to Assistant Transportation Director. By the end of the calendar year, the TPO went from a high-risk organization and in major transition, to highly functional and stable due in large part to the contrib (end of submission)



**Gary D. Harrell**  
**Organization: Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO**

The Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO staff nominates MPO Director Gary D. Harrell as the Planning Professional of the Year. Over almost two decades of dedicated service to the citizens of Charlotte County, Gary has consistently devoted his efforts to the diverse transportation needs of all the area's residents. Following a distinguished military career, Gary and wife, Sandy, put down deep roots in Punta Gorda.

While teaching at Edison College, Gary began his part-time career at the MPO, working primarily with the Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee in the development of the Charlotte Harbor Heritage Trails Master Plan, overseeing the MPO Bicycle Pedestrian map and producing the MPO's 2025 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). Fast forward to the year 2019, where Gary leads a staff of five in the development of the Route to 2045 LRTP. Gary has steadily risen through the ranks from Planner II to MPO Director. Gary was a key player in the survival and rebirth of the MPO when the wrath of Hurricane Charley demolished the MPO Office at the Punta Gorda Airport on Friday the 13th of August 2004. The only other MPO in history to face such a destructive challenge was the one in New York on 9/11.

Under Gary's leadership, the MPO recently partnered with Charlotte County staff to complete the long-awaited Charlotte County Regional Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan. Among the innovative techniques employed in this effort was the use of a Wikimapia interactive tool to allow citizens to identify and comment upon needed projects. Use of this software resulted in a nearly 8-fold increase in public participation from any previous MPO public involvement effort. Together with local bicycle club members, the MPO and its consultant also first utilized drone technology in the development of this plan. Lessons learned during this project are now being applied in the current Road to 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan, the next MPO signature document.

Gary's experience in the development of five LRTPs arms him with a tremendous wealth of expertise in his local urbanized area's unique needs and cost feasible projects. He has been involved so long that in a few short years, he can compare what was anticipated in the 2025 LRTP to what actually happened. Moving forward on the Route to 2045 LRTP, Gary is again spearheading the MPO's involvement techniques, as spokesman in a new YouTube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uM2lvjw879M> which is also available through the MPO's website and the County's Channel 20.

Gary's efforts to advance regional planning stretch well beyond the borders of Charlotte County. Through joint initiatives with neighboring MPOs (Lee County and Sarasota/Manatee), Gary has been involved with fostering key roadway projects along major evacuation routes, such as Burnt Store Road and River Road. Gary also ensures that the Lake Suzy area of DeSoto County falling within the MPO's urbanized area receives appropriate attention.

Gary always enters work smiling saying it is "a great day to rise and shine for Charlotte County citizens." Those citizens' transportation future couldn't be in more capable hands.



## **Julie Conn Christesen**

**Organization: Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department**

Julie Christesen, AICP, is a leader in micromobility, making significant strides in implementing e-bike and e-scooter-sharing pilot programs in Tallahassee, Florida in 2019. As the Principal Planner of Transportation at the municipal planning department, Julie initiated a micromobility pilot program that allows select vendors to supply e-bike and e-scooter options within the City. The program that Julie has created is successful on many levels. By initiating the program, she has created an opportunity for City leaders and citizens to visualize a new approach to mobility in a growing urban environment. She also established management criteria and performance metrics for the program and vendors to monitor things such as ridership, safety, and vendor compliance with City policy. To do so, Julie has engaged with many City partners from the vendors themselves, to local universities, and a committee of citizen advisors called the Bicycle Working Group. The result has been a tremendous success. While the pilot program is ongoing and is slated to be extended in 2020 and expanded to include additional forms of micromobility, it is safe to say that the pilot program has led to significant outcomes that are reflective of the Florida Transportation Plan goals to create a more efficient and mobile transportation system by alleviating congestion on city streets. She has also championed the use of alternative modes of transportation, providing substantial amounts of community outreach and education on e-bikes and e-scooters to make it more user-friendly for citizens in the community. The e-bikes and e-scooters have also been recognized as affordable transportation options, gaining ridership in lower-income and minority neighborhoods in Tallahassee. Additionally, the program has benefited from Julie's utilization of available technologies to geo-fence riding areas of safety, and to monitor equipment location and maintenance through GPS and data collection software.

Based on this evidence, it is clear to me that Julie has been a leader in transportation planning that will shape the future of micromobility in Florida cities for years to come. I'm sure that there are a lot of worthy leaders in transportation in 2019, but I wanted to focus specifically on what makes Julie stand out and worthy of the award: her willingness to share information and resources with other transportation planners throughout the state. Despite demands of singularly leading the pilot program, she always makes time to take calls and answer questions from other transportation planners about their burgeoning micromobility programs. She has shared her findings with transportation planners in Jacksonville, Pensacola, Lakeland, and beyond! I think this comes from a generous spirit and a strong commitment to advancing transportation planning into the future in ways that are responsible, safe, and accessible. With Julie as a leader in the micromobility transportation planning field, I know that we will go far.





## **Kim Smith**

### **Organization: Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization**

It is my honor to submit the nomination of Ms. Kim Smith from the Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization for TransPlex's Planning Professional of the Year award. Ms. Smith has demonstrated her professional skills in planning for pedestrian and bicycle safety as an exceptional educator, collaborator and regional trainer.

As the Education and Safety Coordinator, Ms. Smith works regionally with Central Florida partners and statewide partners to improve safety on our roadways. Ms. Smith is a member of the Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Coalition and was recently awarded the 2019 District Five Bicycle and Pedestrian Education Award. The SCTPO's primary program goal is to improve safety and reduce transportation-related injuries and deaths by educating bicyclists, pedestrians, and motorists on state traffic laws and the safe use of transportation infrastructure.

The school-based education program makes up a significant portion of the SCTPO's education outreach program. To reach as many students as possible, Ms. Smith offers a diverse range of educational programs including the Florida Headstart pre-kindergarten program in Brevard County. As a regional trainer, she trains teachers to administer the state curriculum used in schools. The bicycle trailer program is maintained and used for on-bike based lessons for certified teachers to teach their programs. Ms. Smith has developed a very strong partnership with Brevard County schools and has an impressive history of success in educating students for more than 24 years.

Ms. Smith participates in a large variety of community events from bicycle rodeos to health and safety fairs. She maintains a supply of bicycle helmets to be given to those in need. The helmets are disbursed through schools, law enforcement and other organizations supporting people that may be in need. All helmets distributed must be properly fitted.

In July 2019, Ms. Smith kicked off the SCTPO's Vision Zero Action Plan, which will be completed in December 2020. This will provide a toolkit for each municipality to catalyze and develop their own individual action plans. The Action Plan will be a roadmap leading the SCTPO to its ultimate vision of zero fatalities and serious injuries for all users. This supports the Florida Transportation Plan and the Strategic Highway Safety Plan's goal of zero fatalities on Florida's transportation system.

Ms. Smith's collaboration efforts and successful education programs for bicycle and pedestrian safety is an integral part of the transportation puzzle to include engineering and enforcement. I believe Ms. Smith's accomplishments makes her an ideal recipient of TransPlex's Planning Professional of the Year award.



## **Pat Steed**

### **Organization: Central Florida Regional Planning Council**

Pat Steed has been a leader in regional and transportation planning in Florida for over three decades. She currently serves as Executive Director of the Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) and the Staff Services Director of the six-county Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO). During her career, she has worked at four MPO's, two regional planning councils, a county, a city, and a major consulting firm. She has specialized in bringing visioning to transportation planning, neighborhood redevelopment, economic development, and capital funding to improve communities and regions.

In 2019, Pat served as the Vice-Chair of the Florida Transportation Plan Steering Committee, representing the Florida Regional Council's Association. Supporting the policy implications of Autonomous, Connected, Electric, and Shared Vehicles (ACES), she actively participated in the ACES Subcommittee. As a member of the MCORES Southwest-Central Florida Task Force, Pat represents the Central Florida Regional Planning Council.

Pat has led the visioning efforts for Heartland 2060, which is an on-going seven-county grassroots regional vision initiative. In 2019 the two Heartland 2060 Summits were held with the interconnected focus between transportation, environment, economic development, education, and talent pipeline.

As a thought leader in Florida and the nation, she is a frequent panelist and presenter at conferences and convenings. These vary from presenting at the White House Forum on Regional Innovation, Florida's Model Task Force, American Planning Association's Florida Conferences, and TransPlex. Project teams led by Pat have received numerous statewide and national awards, varying from neighborhood redevelopment plans, complete street corridor plans, public involvement plans to regional vision.

Pat serves on the Board of Directors of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), the Council of Peers of the Southeastern Executive Directors Institute, and on the Council of Peers for RPO America.

The immense efforts of Pat Steed have led to the advancement in regional planning, multi-modal planning, technological research, and advancement in policy planning. Pat's integrity and leadership qualities, combined with her dedication to planning make not just the Heartland Region, but also the State of Florida better prepared for the future. Therefore, it is my pleasure to nominate Pat Steed as the Planning Professional of the Year.





## **Ryan Kordek**

### **Organization: Polk Transportation Planning Organization**

I would like to nominate Ryan Kordek as the Planning Professional of the Year for his exceptional, positive contributions to the multimodal movement. By implementing strategies to program and prioritize multimodal projects in the Polk County Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for neighborhoods in traditionally underserved communities, Mr. Kordek has led the Transportation Planning Organization's (TPO) efforts to be more proactive in planning for alternative modes in the long-range planning efforts. As the LRTP states, "It is the intent of the Polk TPO to continue to evolve to a more balanced approach to transportation projects and programs".

District One has a new approach to the way we look at the roadway. At the direction and development of the Planning Studio, Secretary Nandam's vision is have the local agency's multimodal bicycle pedestrian master plans talk to and inform the LRTP. The objective of this effort being an increase in programmed multimodal projects in the work program and ultimately an increase in safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in the transportation network. The Polk TPO has already adopted this multimodal approach into their network planning in the 2040 LRTP.

Mr. Kordek realizes the LRTP has historically focused on capacity improvement projects for automobiles, stating "it has made it potentially difficult to plan for the needs of other modes (bicycles, pedestrian, and transit) of transportation. As a result, much of the current transportation network serves the needs of automobiles significantly better than the needs of other users." Notably, this is apparent by viewing Polk County LRTP and the refinements that have been made to the traditional model.

During his numerous years with the Polk TPO, Mr. Kordek has refined the model that includes dedicated funding for Complete Streets projects. The model focuses on strategies that are intended for safety, intersection improvements, resurfacing supplements, transit enhancements, and bicycle pedestrian facilities that would improve safety conditions for all users, ease congestion, and increase traffic operational efficiencies. The model ensures stakeholders and residents are involved to provide the input necessary for sound planning solutions. Some of these strategies include Complete Streets Action Plans, Neighborhood Mobility Audits, Road Safety Audits, Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Action Plans and other candidate projects to provide infrastructure for alternative modes of transportation in communities of need.

Importantly, Neighborhood Mobility Audits focus on mobility issues in "underserved" or "traditionally disadvantaged" populations resulting in recommendations of how community residents can safely reach their destinations such as schools, shopping and recreational facilities. The plan shows how Complete Streets Action Plans focus on a system approach to the roadway of context sensitive improvements for a safer network that accommodates all users. In addition, Pedestrian and Bicycle Action Plans are created to address the much-needed improvements in roadway safety and, most importantly, identify and document the actions necessary to reduce pedestrian and bicycle fatalities in Polk County.

Mr. Kordek and the TPO are stellar partners with the Florida Department of Transportation (Department), working together to achieve the goals for Polk County alternative modes. This working relationship has resulted in a clear understanding of the needs in the Polk County community. This helps the Department plan and achieve programmed projects for our vulnerable



users. The TPO goals are aligned to reflect the goals and objectives of the 2060 Florida Transportation Plan, MAP-21 and Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) which gives them a strong foundation of performance measurement. The plans achieve the goals by addressing the four major action areas; Engineering, Education, Enforcement and Emergency Services to identify and generate specific strategies that create short-term objectives and actions that will shape the future of the economy, communities, and environment.

Mr. Kordek recognizes the importance of the role of the LRTP, how it guides the programming of all transportation projects, documents the need and creates a positive direction of projects using these goals, objectives and targets to achieve a balanced network. Their model reflects the context, values, and needs of each community that supports a systemic approach and recognizes the importance that land use plays in the role of connectivity and mobility of all modes. Mr. Kordek understands how the plan must be implemented and accomplished by reviewing and analyzing transportation performance. This involves evaluating how the performance targets relate to the goals and objectives, and how the transportation system and its elements are improving.

The Polk TPO could be the model for Planning Studio to aid in assisting other regional planning efforts in achieving their vision.



## **Sarah Kraum**

### **Organization: Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization**

It is with great pleasure that I submit this nomination of Mrs. Sarah Kraum from the Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization (SCTPO) for TransPlex's Planning Professional of the Year award. Mrs. Kraum has demonstrated her professional skills in planning for multi-modal needs as an exceptional project manager, collaborator and producing noteworthy documents.

As the Multi-modal Planning Specialist, working regionally in the Central Florida area, Mrs. Kraum worked on the collaboration effort of one of Florida's premier trails, the Coast to Coast Trail. She is a member of the Coast to Coast/St. Johns River to Sea Leadership Team, tackling the coordination and planning of filling in the gaps of this cross Florida and east coast trail. She served on the SUN Trail usage pilot project and her engagement continues beyond 2019 into 2020, where the St. John's River to Sea Loop Summit is being held in Brevard for the first time.

Mrs. Kraum has also worked extensively on the topic of resiliency, a Federal Planning factor. Through coordination with the SCTPO Board and its committees, this emphasis area was included in the SCTPO's Boards first Strategic Plan, adopted in 2019. She also worked with the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council to have a high-level Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment conducted for Brevard County. Mrs. Kraum was recognized for her knowledge and interest in resiliency and presented at the Florida APA Conference in September 2019 on this topic. She also serves on the Regional Resiliency Collaboration Steering Committee and will serve as the project manager on the SCTPO's Transportation Resiliency Master Plan, beginning in late 2020.

Coordination with Space Coast Area Transit is also a passion of Mrs. Kraum's. She worked with the agency and managed the development of an update to their ADA Bus Stop Assessment. Following the update, throughout 2019, Mrs. Kraum, along with transit staff, met with local municipalities to coordinate efforts on implementing improvements on bus stops within each agency's jurisdictional boundary. A key accomplishment and noteworthy tool used in these meetings was the creation of a local jurisdictional booklet for this project.

In 2019, Mrs. Kraum managed the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan update, which was adopted in October. An extensive 18-month long process, with a very successful public outreach effort, the Plan document is worthy of an award on its own. Priority lists of bicycle and pedestrian needs were created for each local jurisdiction. Gaps in the system were also identified. Being an area of high bicycle and pedestrian crashes, this Plan prioritizes where projects are needed to improve safety. Mrs. Kraum also conducted a very unique equity analysis to ensure traditionally underserved communities were not overly impacted or overlooked in where projects were prioritized.

I believe Mrs. Kraum's collaboration efforts, her success in making resiliency part of the SCTPO's emphasis areas, and her work in multi-modal planning make her an ideal recipient of TransPlex's Planning Professional of the Year award.



**Thomas Hawkins**  
**Organization: 1000 Friends of Florida**

In his role on the M-CORES task force, Mr. Hawkins has represented the public interested as well as the actual charge of the task force rather than just allowing the process to pave over the state.

**Valerie Neilson**  
**Organization: Palm Beach Transportation Planning Agency**

Ms. Neilson led the creation and inclusion of a connected network of enhanced transit corridors in the update to the LRTP in 2019. Dubbed the 561 Plan, it is comprised of 5 N/S corridors and 6 E/W corridors, creating one connected network. Based on a rigorous GIS analysis of transit supportive land use patterns, the network is supported by an analysis of active transportation demand and a commitment to invest in a priority network of walk and bike friendly complete streets. Ms. Neilson also led stakeholder engagement by conducting an FTA/FHWA peer exchange with other national transit leaders and Florida transit agencies.

**Victoria Peters**  
**Organization: FDOT District One**

Victoria Peters works tirelessly on behalf of FDOT and the communities she serves in order to achieve mutual goals that benefit the public at-large. Time and time again, she has demonstrated her resourcefulness in overcoming challenges, always in the spirit of collaboration and partnership. She brings multiple players to the table and is adept at finding elements of concurrence among disparate points of view, seeing opportunities for compromise and suggesting funding strategies. She maintains her equilibrium and professionalism at all times. Her passion and enthusiasm for public service are sincere and indefatigable. She is one of transportation planning's unsung heroes who make no claims on the limelight, but nonetheless deserve our recognition and thanks.