

# John Zobler

## PROFILE

Management professional specializing in leading local government operations and administration. Significant residential and commercial development and redevelopment experience and achievements

## EXPERIENCE

### CITY MANAGER, CITY OF OCALA, OCALA, FLORIDA - 2014 - 2019

Chief Administrative Officer of the City. Responsible for all city departments, personnel and budgets. Implements the policies approved by City Council and accountable for all department performances and the specified goals to achieve.

Notable accomplishments include: Public/Private development of an 800 acre distribution center business park. Subsequently crafting Development Agreements with Fed Ex, AutoZone and Chewy for construction of large scale distribution centers. Public/private redevelopment of poorly performing and conditioned golf course into a multi-family and single family development in support of the housing needs created by the newly created distribution centers on a poorly conditioned and financially failing 27-hole city-owned golf course. Public/Private redevelopment of a city owned auditorium into the Riley Arts Performing Center. Public/private development of single family condominiums and an affordable apartment complex on City owned land to increase residential density in the downtown. Construction and complete funding for a downtown parking garage, General Aviation terminal, Community Center, fixed roof Farmers Market, three replacement Fire Stations and two police stations. Renegotiated and settled union contracts for Police, Fire and General Employees. All three unions were out of contract when I arrived and employee morale severely frayed.

### DEPUTY CITY MANAGER, CITY OF OCALA, FLORIDA - 2010 - 2013

Provide management oversight and process and customer service improvement for the Planning, Building and Zoning, Code Enforcement, Federal Housing and Community Development, Fire and Airport Departments.

Notable accomplishments include: Development of an Agreement with the New York Yankees for relocation of their Triple A minor league team from Tampa to Ocala. Negotiated terms included revenue sharing, and development of land, infrastructure, site and stadium. This project consumed a year and a half of time and never came to fruition due to a lack of taxpayer funding.

Through numerous and continuous dashboard measurements and staff accountability, greatly improved plans processing turn-around, inspection frequency and customer service.

ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER, CITY OF OCALA, FLORIDA - 2008 -2010

Provide management oversight and process and customer service improvements for the Planning, Building and Zoning, Code Enforcement, Fire, Airport and Parks and Recreation Department.

Notable accomplishments include: Implemented electronic plans filing, expedited plans review and improved awareness, accountability and created a solutions oriented culture across all reviewing departments. Utilized contract inspection and permit clerk staffing services to supplement existing staff. Development of a "Central Park" in the downtown core with many new amenities and a walking sculpture tour. In partnership with the Chamber, created a small business incubator in a city owned building.

PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR, CITY OF OCALA, FLORIDA -1999 -2008

Provide management oversight and budget control over all city sanitation, streets, stormwater, facilities maintenance, and animal control services in the city.

Numerous Director level positions, Miami-Dade County Florida - 1984 -1998

Chief, Causeways Division 1997- 1998

(Rickenbacker Causeway and Julia Tuttle Causeway) overseeing all toll operations, and bridge and causeway maintenance.

Chief, Animal Control 1994 - 1997

Provide all animal control services for the county managing a large enforcement, shelter staff and shelter facilities.

Chief, Special Taxing Districts 1990 - 1994

Manage a staff for engineers, draftsmen and administrative personnel in support of all special taxing districts created for street lighting, water, sewer, stormwater, security guard facilities and service and street lighting improvements

Chief, Public Works Code Enforcement

Administer the County's Lot, Junk and Trash Clearing Ordinance, Abandoned Vehicle Ordinance and Illegal Signs Ordinance

## EDUCATION

North Adams State College, North Adams, MA, - Bachelor of Science Business Administration

St. Thomas University, Miami, FL - Master of Science Management

## SKILLS

- Community Visioning and Leadership
- Public and Employees Communications
- Team Building
- Employee Development

## REFERENCES

Numerous character and professional references available upon request.



# John Zobler

BY KAITLYN BUTLER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY RALPH DEMILIO

*There are very few times in a government career that a transformational project comes along. Bringing it to fruition takes a team that trusts one another, an inclusive environment, and an exceptional leader—that's where John Zobler comes in.*

Zobler's career began on the streets of Massachusetts, where he served as a social worker to low-income communities after earning his degree in business administration. It was there, working in the welfare department with families, his world view shifted away from himself.

He said the experience taught him humility, empathy, and a lesson in not judging others' situations. Those teachings served him well when he transitioned to Miami, where he and his wife moved following his training in computer electronics.

As a young, fearless couple, the relocation came easy. At the time, Miami was on fire—the race riots were at their height. Despite the turmoil, they made their home in Miami, starting a family and building their careers, one which found him climbing the ladder as a municipal employee.

"There was no diversity where I came from in New England—zero," Zobler said. "Being immersed going from there to Miami, which is so culturally diverse, was an awesome

experience for me. That's really helped me greatly in my government career to recognize and celebrate diversity and what that means."

It was during his 14-year stay in Miami that the future city manager learned the ins and outs of city government. Zobler loved the diversity of Miami-Dade County and the city leaders believed in him. For that reason, he was promoted quickly and bounced around in a variety of leadership roles from animal control to toll operations, until he followed his wife's burgeoning career to Ocala.

He left Miami as a division head and took a job in Ocala as a recycling coordinator—a 60 percent pay cut. Zobler said, it wasn't about the money. He wanted to stay in public service and his experience has been that there will always be other opportunities.

He moved up quickly over the course of his 14-year career in Ocala, working in sanitation, public works, and operations over several departments before becoming deputy city manager. In 2012, during The Great Recession, he decided to hang up his hat and



retire—for two years.

Then, in November 2014, the city started going through management changes. Zobler missed the employees, he knew the city was on the brink of some great things, and he was offered the position of city manager.

The culmination of his experiences in New England, Miami, and climbing the ladder in Ocala impacted how he approaches his current role as city manager for Ocala. His experience working with low income communities made him more aware of how small changes impact everyone, and now he was in a position to make a difference.

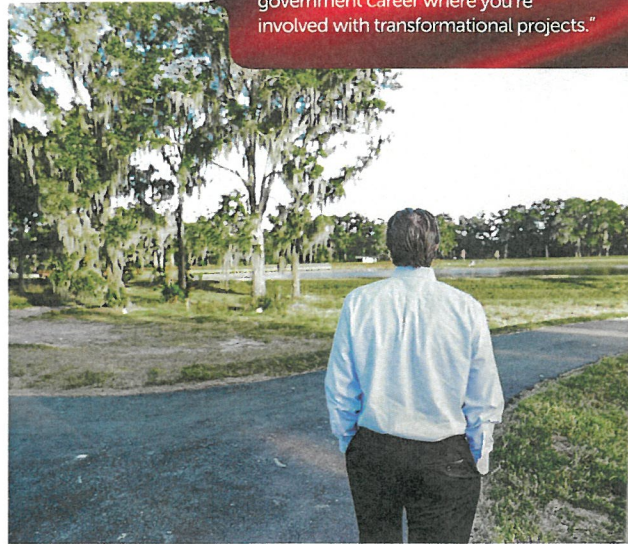
According to Zobler, Ocala has an entire quadrant living below the poverty line, and ways need to be found to ameliorate that particular demographic's way of life. Northwest Ocala is becoming the focus of new development in town.

Last year, Ocala had merely one new residential permit for all of the northwest quadrant. Now it's investing millions of dollars into northwest Ocala to make it an exciting place to live.

"This is a transformational project for Ocala," Zobler said. "There are very few times in a government career where you're involved with transformational projects. Transforming downtown is okay, but taking an area that's depressed and [one] nobody even wanted to drive through it and making it the place to live, that's a massive deal in a government career."

One leg of this project is building new, affordable housing on the site of the old Royal Oak charcoal plant. For 15 years, residents of northwest Ocala fought against the polluting charcoal plant which contaminated clean air in the district. Now the city is cleaning the area, preparing it for a community that will strategically lie near Ocala Wetland Recharge Park and the new industrial plants, which are bringing new jobs to the area.

Additionally, the city is constructing a two-story Ocala Community Center at Reed Place, honoring Ruth Reed, a longtime opponent of the plant. It will include a library, multipurpose rooms for meetings and group events, a large atrium-style common area, a meeting room for seniors, a large multipurpose room for events and more. It will also include a gymnasium with two basketball courts and a running track on a sec-



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ond level around the gym perimeter.

"To take this from an area that was contaminated—we're doing cleanup—to transform it into this," Zobler said. "It's going to make a difference in people's lives."

Another facet of the resurgence in northwest Ocala is a new first responder campus in the 700 block of Southwest Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue. The campus will include a fire station, police station, a community room and a basketball court to help foster interaction between youth and first responders.

The basketball court won't be mere lines on concrete but an art piece celebrating community and cultures, bringing them together to make one city. Painted on the concrete is a mural of hands shaking, one black and one white, layered on a blend of vibrant colors that represents Ocala's first responders.

"We don't have a great relationship with the community and police and fire," Zobler said. "We really need to fix that. Communication, trust—all those things. That's why I embedded it so hard right into the center of the community."

Zobler said these projects are the culmi-

nation of 10 years of planning. His reflection is that previous city councils, elected officials, and city staff have brought this resurgence. Recent projects, like the Levitt Amp Ocala Music Series and the downtown Ocala Downtown Market, are the realization of that work, which stretch the boundaries of where people consider the city—creating a place where culture, art, and music happen.

He says what he's most proud of is his ability to be a cheerleader, for city employees and the city council. Once city council communicates where they want to go, his job is to convince the employees why they're going there and what that means for them.

"Since I've been here, the city council has been totally aligned with city staff and totally supports them in the most generous way [something] I've never seen before," he said. "When everybody trusts each other and no one is looking over their shoulder, stuff moves like that [snaps twice]. I'm most proud of the organization because the employees trust each other, they trust us, we trust them, and it's been great." **OM**