

# Ralf Brookes: an attorney who follows his conscience

By Tom Vaught  
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When he first appeared before the Bradenton Beach City Commission to interview for the position of city attorney, many people noticed that he was not wearing socks with his boat shoes. Ralf Brookes looked like a real down-home Florida son. After several months on the job, that assessment of the Michigan native appears to be a good one.

Whenever the commission meets, Brookes commutes from his home in Cape Coral in his Honda Element. He unloads a large plastic box with the files he will need and brings it into the meeting room at city hall, laying it on the floor near his feet.

His unconventional manner brings some fresh thinking to the subject of controlling growth, which is foremost on the city commission's agenda these days.

"I fell in love with old Florida; the old downtowns and the old neighborhoods," Brookes said. "These are the areas that are getting torn down and being replaced by developments that want to look like them. I think Florida can grow wiser, not just bigger."

First-term Bradenton Beach City Commissioner John Shaughnessy said he was impressed by Brookes' quick reaction to a commission plan to educate voters about an upcoming ballot issue that would have the city hire a city manager.

"When we wanted to draft a letter to our constituents about the city manager issue, he said we can't express an opinion, just the facts," Shaughnessy said. "He gave us information about other cities who expressed opinions and some of them got into trouble."

After leading a movement to dismiss the former city attorney in Bradenton Beach, Commissioner Anna O'Brien finds Brookes' approach refreshing.

"It's great to have somebody sitting there with some enthusi-

asm to work with us to solve our growth dilemma," said O'Brien.

Attorney Dan Lobeck, who has represented growth management and environmental interests in Manatee and Sarasota counties, was another candidate for Bradenton Beach City Attorney.

"I have a great deal of regard and respect for him," said Lobeck. "I think he was an excellent choice for the city, even though I was also a candidate for that position."

## Fighting for "green" causes

Brookes' resume reads like a "good guy" character in a Carl Hiaasen novel. After tackling field geology studies at the University of Michigan and earning a bachelor of science degree in marine science and geology from the University of Miami, Brookes received a law degree from the University of Florida Law School in 1988. He worked as an assistant geologist with Environmental Science and Engineering in Gainesville, spending two years as a consultant in the oil, gas and petrochemical industry along the Gulf of Mexico.

Brookes began his legal career as a law clerk at an environmental law firm, working on cases involving hazardous waste. He later worked in government and private practices in Miami, Tallahassee, Sarasota, Key West and the Florida Keys in areas of

land use. He prepared and defended growth management cases in Key West and represented or helped groups with cases involving environmental compliance, assessment and remediation of contaminated sites.

"I always wanted to do public interest law," said Brookes. "I'm right where I want to be right now, working with my personal views and perspectives."

Brookes successfully defeated a hotel project in Key Deer habitat on Big Pine Key, fought casino boats on residential neighbor-



Bradenton Beach City Attorney Ralf Brookes is fighting the Perico project.

hood canals and coordinated Monroe County's growth management issues at the Florida Department of Community Affairs and in the state legislature.

As assistant county attorney in Sarasota, Brookes served as staff counsel to the planning council, natural resources department, solid waste and recycling department and citizen's advisory boards.

Now, other controlled growth interests are tapping into Brookes' experience. He has been hired to represent ManaSota-88 in its fight against high-rise condominiums near the shoreline of Perico Island.

"I have known Ralf Brookes for a number of years where we have crossed paths on various issues," said Glenn Compton, attorney for ManaSota-88. "He has been very good in the past at providing us with the advice we needed and he was the logical choice for the Perico case because of his association with Bradenton Beach."

Compton said Brookes helped ManaSota-88 with a different type of case in the past.

"We first hired him to give us some advice on dealing with phosphate mining in Manatee County," said Compton. "He recommended we ask for a moratorium against phosphate mining, and we took it to the board of county commissioners. That's why there is a moratorium against phosphate mining in Manatee County today."

Compton said Brookes will be an asset to Bradenton Beach commissioners, who are trying to deal with the growth there.

"I think they made a very wise decision."

