

Joe Hertzler

How does one juggle a seat on the City of Williamsburg Planning Commission, while serving as president of a landscape and design business and study for his MBA at the College of William & Mary?

Ask Joe Hertzler, who with pragmatism and enthusiasm has a goal to serve the community and the environment where he lives and works. When he became a member of the planning commission eight years ago, his goals were clear.

"My goals were to make Williamsburg a great place to live," Hertzler said recently. "I want this to be a place of beauty, both natural and built. I want to see our communities foster the bonds between family, friends and neighbors. And I want to see our community tread lightly on the environment."

As a planning commission member, he helps to evaluate and make recommendations on how land would best be used.

"We don't micromanage down to the level of being involved when a homeowner wants to do an addition, or if a business wants to install a new sign," he said. "But we direct general patterns. What area would best serve as a residential or commercial district? What level of density would this involve?"

His job as president of Hertzler & George has overlapped with his role in local government, and he admits learning a lot by taking part in various projects.

"The single most important thing I've discovered is that a good plan takes effort," he said. "Whether you're planning a small garden, and new kitchen, a shopping center, a community or an entire city, the difference between a plan that works and one that doesn't is the amount of effort you put into it. Plans that fail to meet the need once they become reality are those that were not thought through. It's not a mystery. It just takes work."

Hertzler became interested in serving on the commission while serving as president of the Skipwith Farms Civic Association. Mayor Jeanne Zeidler asked him if he would be interested, and he accepted.

The city has undergone many changes and challenges, with one of the most pressing occurring now.

"The immediate need of the city will be riding out the economic crisis," he said. "How deep it will go and

how bad it will hurt remain to be seen. But we will survive and emerge stronger."

He is hopeful that the economic future of our area will rebound despite the current economic woes which affect tourism and spending.

"We have so much of what Richard Florida in his book 'The Rise of the Creative Class' says will make communities strong in the future," he said "We have tremendous natural and architectural beauty. We have a powerful source of knowledge in the college. We have a thriving arts community. What we need to continue to build is an economic engine."

And that's where his pragmatism plays a central role.

Parts of Williamsburg are unrecognizable and I believe growth will only continue," he said. "No matter what we may think of it, or how we might miss the way things as they were, change will happen. I've never been one to fight change. I see that it often brings good. The key is to accept that change is inevitable and work to create the changes you want."

—Ann Efimetz

JOE HERTZLER

City of Williamsburg Planning Commission member; president Hertzler & George

Age 44

Marital status Married to Linda Hertzler; daughter Antonia

Favorite past time

Spending time with friends and family. Running. Reading. News junkie. Enjoying the outdoors.

Favorite city in the world

Washington D.C.

What he sees himself doing in ten

years "I fell in love with the environment as a child in the rainforests of Peru and with business as an adult. Now I want to play a part to bring the two together. I'm studying for my MBA because I want to be involved in making green business a reality. Human activity in all its forms is having a greater and greater impact on the environment. If we hope to usher in a world where human activity co-exists in harmony with the natural world, it must make sense in cold, hard business terms."

Photo by Ann Efimetz