



Wake County

Director of Planning and Development Services





The Position

Wake County (County), one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation, is seeking its next Director of Planning and Development Services. The County welcomes approximately 25,000 new residents every year, and the moment calls for a leader who can shape the County's growth with clarity, consistency, and vision. The Director of Planning and Development Services steps into a rare opportunity: to serve as the founding director of a newly established department, build its culture, and guide Wake County's approach to land use, permitting, and environmental stewardship at a pivotal point in its history. For the leader who thrives at the intersection of complex regulatory work, community engagement, and organizational development, this is an extremely compelling opportunity.

The Director leads a department of approximately 100 staff organized across four divisions: Administration, Planning, Building Permits and Inspections, and Watershed Management. The department serves as Wake County's primary authority for administering land development regulations, guided by the County's Unified Development Ordinance, Comprehensive Plan, Stormwater Regulations, and the North Carolina Building Code. Wake County does not exercise zoning authority over municipal jurisdictions, which shapes how the Director engages with the development community and neighboring governments: less as a traditional regulatory enforcer and more as a convener, a resource, and a partner in responsible growth.

The Director has four direct reports (division-level leaders) and is a member of the County's Senior Leadership Team, reporting directly to the County Manager. The Director shapes department strategy, develops and executes the annual business plan, oversees budget planning and fiscal accountability, and monitors state and federal legislation for regulatory impacts. The Director also represents the department in public forums, before the Board of County Commissioners, and in ongoing relationships with municipalities, regional transportation and environmental agencies, homebuilders, and other development stakeholders. Success in this role requires someone who can translate technical complexity into accessible language, who applies rules fairly and consistently across all customers, and who is equally comfortable defending a difficult decision before the development community as they are mentoring a new division manager.

The incoming leader inherits strong foundations: well-regarded regulatory workflows, high-quality staff with deep expertise, and established relationships with the homebuilding community and partner jurisdictions.

Priorities

- Planning and Development Services officially becomes a new department on July 1, 2026. Building on a strong foundation and a shared culture across four divisions that have distinct histories and work styles is a top priority. The Director should prioritize visible, consistent leadership, clear expectations, and an environment where employees look for ways to get to “yes” for the community they serve.
- The Director must be proactive and visible across all of these relationships, building credibility through consistent communication, responsiveness, and a demonstrated willingness to engage even when the answer is complicated.
- Wake County has emerged as a leader in navigating the policy and land use implications of large-scale data center development, a topic drawing significant attention at the state legislative level. The Director will serve as the County’s primary thought leader on this issue, developing consistent, well-reasoned policy responses and staying current with how the State’s legislative posture on data centers evolves.
- Several active and high-stakes projects require sustained Director-level attention in the first year and beyond: completing the update to Wake County’s transportation guidelines; completing the seven small area land use plans currently underway; advancing updates to the Flood Hazard and Stormwater Control Ordinances, which directly affect the homebuilding community; moving forward the One Water Plan, which addresses water and wastewater resources in an integrated way; and supporting implementation of the newly adopted Farmland Preservation Plan. Collectively, these represent the concrete work through which PLANWake, the County’s comprehensive plan, is actualized.
- The department’s regulatory workflows are strong, and the Director should protect what works while identifying where technology can improve service delivery, reduce processing times, and help staff work more effectively. This includes a thoughtful assessment of permitting and inspection technology tools and a willingness to invest in systems that support both staff capacity and customer experience.

The Successful Candidate

Wake County’s growth trajectory demands a Director who is visible, present, and actively engaged with the municipalities, developers, environmental advocates, and community members who interact with the department every day. The next Director of Planning and Development Services is a grounded, relationship-driven leader who brings both the technical credibility to lead a complex regulatory department and the interpersonal range to serve as a trusted convener across a demanding stakeholder landscape.

Above all, this leader is a skilled communicator. The Director routinely translates dense regulatory material, land use policy, and environmental science into language that elected officials, applicants, and the general public can understand and act on. They are equally effective when providing technical briefings to the Board of County Commissioners, during neighborhood meetings or a candid conversation with developers. Consistency and fairness are non-negotiable qualities: staff, applicants, and partner jurisdictions should understand how the Director will apply regulatory rules, and they should trust that those rules will be applied consistently.

The successful candidate is a natural culture-builder. Planning and Development Services is a newly consolidated department. Therefore, the Director will need to earn the confidence of four divisions that bring distinct histories, workflows, and professional identities. This requires patience, genuine curiosity about how each part of the department operates, and a commitment to creating shared values without erasing what already works.



This leader is also comfortable navigating conflict. Wake County's development community is active, well-organized, and accustomed to direct engagement with department leadership. The Director must be willing to hold firm on regulatory decisions, communicate those decisions clearly, and maintain productive long-term relationships. The Director should always be looking for ways to improve the customer experience without compromising regulatory integrity.

Externally, the Director is the department's primary relationship-builder with the County's municipalities, regional transportation and environmental agencies, the homebuilding community, state agencies, and state legislators. Wake County's land use decisions do not occur in isolation, and the Director must understand the regional system, stay current on state legislative activity that affects the department's regulatory authority, and proactively position Wake County as a thoughtful and responsive leader in the growth conversation.

From an organizational perspective, the ideal candidate brings demonstrated experience managing large, multi-disciplinary teams and a track record of developing division-level leaders. They understand how to build and execute a departmental business plan, manage competing workload priorities across staff, and maintain accountability. Experience with budget development, capital planning, and technology-enabled service delivery improvements is important. The Director should also be comfortable engaging with state and federal funding streams and understand how regulatory programs intersect with grant eligibility and compliance requirements.

Qualifications

Minimum requirements: A bachelor's degree in urban planning, public administration, environmental science, civil engineering, architecture, or a closely related field, combined with at least eight years of progressively responsible experience in planning, land development, permitting, or a related regulatory function, is required. A minimum of four years in a senior leadership or management role overseeing professional staff is also required.

Preferred qualifications: A master's degree in planning, public administration, or a related discipline is preferred, as is American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) certification. Candidates with significant demonstrated leadership experience and a strong track record in complex land use or regulatory environments will be considered.

Prior experience in a county or regional government setting is a plus, particularly in jurisdictions that manage growth pressures, intergovernmental coordination, or environmental regulatory programs. Familiarity with North Carolina land development law, building codes, and stormwater regulations is beneficial but not required.



Inside The Organization

Wake County is governed under the county manager form of government. The Board of County Commissioners serves as the County's legislative and policy-making body, comprised of seven members elected by district to four-year staggered terms. The County Manager is appointed by the Board to serve as the County's chief executive, responsible for implementing Board policy, overseeing County operations, and directing the senior leadership team. The Director of Planning and Development Services reports directly to the County Manager and serves as a member of that senior leadership team alongside the directors of other major County departments.

Wake County is home to more than one million residents and remains one of the fastest-growing counties in the United States, adding approximately 25,000 new residents each year. The County seat is Raleigh, the state capital, and the County encompasses 12 municipalities, including Raleigh, Cary, Apex, Garner, and Morrisville, among others. Wake County's economy is anchored by a strong higher education presence, a thriving technology and life sciences sector, and a quality of life that continues to attract residents and businesses from across the country.

The Wake County Planning & Development Services Department exists to ensure that growth and development are managed responsibly by preserving the outstanding quality of life that all Wake County residents expect. As the population and economy continue to grow in Wake County, the need for this approach increases. The Department is the County's leading resource for administering the County's regulations pertaining to land development. This work is guided by the County's Unified Development Ordinance, Comprehensive Plan, Stormwater Regulations, and North Carolina Building Code.

The Department includes various work groups to advance development in Wake County's jurisdiction. Those groups include building permitting and inspections, stormwater, watershed management, planning and zoning. The department is also instrumental in convening stakeholders that have common interests in advanced land development projects. The stakeholders may include regional agencies related to transportation, stormwater, watershed management, or other planning efforts. The Planning & Development Services team recognizes that community engagement and stakeholder feedback are a critical step in any planning process. As such, team members are skilled at outreach and engagement practices.

The Community

Wake County sits at the heart of North Carolina's Research Triangle region, one of the most dynamic and desirable places to live and work in the United States. As the largest county in North Carolina, and in the Triangle, Wake County is home to Raleigh, North Carolina's state capital, and serves as the anchor of a regional economy that has drawn residents, businesses, and investment from across the country and around the world. The area offers a rare combination: the cultural amenities, career opportunities, and energy of a major metropolitan region, with the livability, natural surroundings, and community character of a place that still feels like home.

A Place People Choose - Wake County is home to a population of approximately 1.18 million people, and the growth shows no sign of slowing. The region adds 64 new residents every day, 43 of whom move here and 21 of whom are born here. Wake County offers an ideal blend of cost, comfort, and culture, plus thousands of diverse jobs that continue to attract young professionals, families, and people at every stage of life. The median household income in Wake County is \$105,768, and the County remains one of the most educated communities in the nation. As of 2024, 15.1% of Wake County residents were born outside the country, reflecting the global character of a community that draws talent from every corner of the world. The County's population includes significant Black or African American and Asian communities, and approximately 11.6% of residents identify as Hispanic.



Education and Schools - Wake County is served by the award-winning Wake County Public School System, the 14th largest in the nation. Higher education is a defining strength of the region. Proximity to top-tier research institutions including NC State University, Duke University, and UNC-Chapel Hill fuels a highly skilled workforce and creates a robust pipeline of talent for employers across every sector. The largest universities in Wake County include North Carolina State University at Raleigh, Wake Technical Community College, and several other degree-granting institutions, ensuring that residents have access to continuing education close to home.

Economy and Innovation - The Research Triangle region is a hub for innovation, anchored by corporate giants like IBM, Cisco, Red Hat, and Lenovo, and has evolved into fertile ground for startups and emerging technologies. Wake County is one of the best places in the U.S. to start and grow a business, fueled by top-tier research universities and company headquarters across technology, life sciences, and financial services. This dynamic region is home to a wide range of businesses, including Fortune 500 companies and thousands of small and mid-sized firms in life science and technology. The County's economic strength is not concentrated in a single sector; it reflects a deliberate, decades-long investment in building a diversified, innovation-driven economy that has proven resilient through national economic cycles.

Recent recognitions include being named the Top Innovation Hub in the South, Best State Capital to Live In, and Best Performing City by the Milken Institute, among many others. Raleigh has also been recognized for offering the best quality of life on the U.S. East Coast, ranking among the top cities for STEM workers, and earning recognition as one of the top job markets in America.

Arts, Culture, and Recreation - Wake County and the greater Raleigh area offer a cultural scene that far outpaces what the population size alone might suggest. The region is home to the North Carolina Museum of Art, the North Carolina Museum of History, the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences (the largest natural history museum in the Southeast), and a thriving performing arts community anchored by venues ranging from intimate neighborhood theaters to major concert halls. People are drawn to Raleigh for lower cost of living, higher quality of life, arts and culture, education, and proximity to both the beach and the mountains.

Raleigh alone features more than 200 parks with classes and programs, art centers, athletic facilities, community centers, lakes, nature preserves, dog parks, greenway trails, historic sites, and open spaces. The broader county offers an extensive greenway system, reservoirs, and natural areas that give residents easy access to the outdoors year-round. The Atlantic coast is roughly two hours to the east, and the Blue Ridge Mountains are two to three hours to the west, making Wake County a genuinely central base for outdoor recreation in every direction.

The Triangle's food, beverage, and festival culture has grown alongside the population, with a thriving local brewery and restaurant scene, multicultural festivals, outdoor concert series, and farmer's markets throughout the county. For a leader relocating from anywhere in the country, Wake County offers a quality of life that is genuinely difficult to match.



Compensation and Benefits

The expected hiring range is \$158,953 to \$222,533, depending on qualifications. Wake County offers a comprehensive total compensation package that reflects its commitment to recruiting and retaining exceptional public sector leaders. Learn more about our options and employee-based benefits [here](#).



How to Apply

Applications will be accepted electronically by Raftelis at raftelis.com. Applicants complete a brief online form and are prompted to provide a cover letter and resume. The position will be open until filled with a first review of applications beginning **July 9, 2026**.



Questions

Please direct questions to Pamela Wideman at pwideman@raftelis.com and Kelsey Batt at kbatt@raftelis.com.