



## CITY OF BARTOW

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### **PRESS RELEASE**

For immediate release

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## **City of Bartow Appoints Stephen Walker to Chief of Police**

(Bartow, FL – November 19, 2024) – Bartow City Manager Mike Herr announced that Stephen Walker has been named Chief of Police at yesterday’s City Commission meeting. The announcement follows a months-long search after the retirement of former Police Chief Andy Ray in April. Walker was promoted to Deputy Chief nearly a year ago and has served as acting Chief since Ray’s departure. The appointment went into effect this morning.

“During his time as Deputy Chief, Stephen Walker led our department with character and respect for all sworn officers and non-sworn employees. Chief Walker has never expected more work from those he works with daily than he does himself and has fostered a culture of respect and professionalism in our Police Department,” said Herr.

“Through his current efforts and goals stated in the interview process, Chief Walker has shown a progressive vision to meet the needs of a maturing department as well as a growing community,” Herr added. “Stephen is very qualified to lead the men and women of our department now and into the future.”

Prior to joining the Bartow Police Department in 2022, Walker spent most of his career with the Lakeland Police Department, where, starting in 1990, he served in roles that included Captain and Commanding Officer of multiple divisions, including Special Operations, Uniform Patrol, and Support Services. Walker holds a master’s degree in criminal justice, and a bachelor’s degree in criminology. He is a graduate of the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) Senior Management Institute for Police, the University of Louisville Southern Police Institute Administrative Officers Course and has earned the designation of Certified Public Manager (CPM).

“I am truly humbled and honored to be selected as the Chief of Police for the City of Bartow,” said Walker, who noted that the selection process was incredibly thorough and brought very talented applicants to Bartow.

"I have been, and I remain committed to the citizens of and visitors to Bartow, to the City of Bartow as an organization and to the members of the Bartow Police Department," he continued. "I am looking forward to continuing to work with the outstanding men and women in the department, in partnership with our citizens, to reduce crime and improve the quality of life in our community.

"I am also committed to having a service-oriented, highly ethical, well-trained, and accountable workforce, that represents the diverse community we serve. We will be transparent and open in our interactions with our community and ensure we earn their trust and respect every day," Walker added.

The City was assisted by SGR, an executive recruitment firm based in Texas, in conducting the search, which produced a strong field of candidates comprised of 49 law enforcement professionals from 17 states.

Walker was the top pick from four finalists, including Greg Goreck, who has served in Florida law enforcement for more than 30 years, most recently as Chief of Police for Haines City, FL; Javaro Sims, who has served in numerous capacities with the City of Delray Beach (FL) Police, and Theresa Odum, who currently is the Chief of Police for the Forest Preserve of Cook County (Illinois) Police Department.

Chief Walker will be sworn in at 3 pm on Dec. 6 in the Commission Chambers at City Hall, 450 N. Wilson Ave.

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