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Land Use Oral History Project  
Patel Center for Global Solutions  
University of South Florida

Interview with: Mr. Brian Smith  
Interviewed by: William Mansfield  
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**William Mansfield:** This is Bill Mansfield from the University of South Florida's Special Collections and the Patel Center for Global Solutions and I'm talking to Mr. Brian Smith on October 5, 2006. We're here in the planning offices?

**Brian Smith:** Yes, the County Planning Department, for Pinellas County.

WM: Pin-ellas or Pine-ellas?

BS: Pie-nellas.

WM: All right, Pinellas County. And Mr. Smith we always get people to start off by having them state their name and telling us when they were born and where they were born.

BS: I am Brian Smith. I was born August 29, 1942. I was born in London, England. I was registered as an American Citizen, by my mother when I was born.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: Then we came to this country in 1949.

WM: And where did you grow-up?

BS: [I] grew-up in several different locations—um—a lot in the New England area. My father was in the—followed defense contracts; which would only run for maybe two or three years and then you'd change locations. So I lived in Michigan and California and again New England and also in Florida. [Florida] is pretty much where my family settled in, in the early sixties.

WM: Okay. And—um—tell me your current occupation.

BS: [My] current occupation is I'm a county planner. I'm with the County Planning Department and I'm the director of the department. I have a dual role here. I'm not only the county planning director, but also in that capacity I'm the director of what they call the MPO, or the Metropolitan Planning Organization, which is the lead transportation in the county.

Every urban area is required to have an MPO and in our county that's—our department [serves] that function.

WM: Okay. Describe if you will the duties and responsibilities of the County Planning Director.

BS: The County Planning Director—um—we do all the growth management for the county, so we review not only all the development plans, but actually also develop the plan for the county and then recommend it to the county commission. Then, under state law, there are a lot of things you have to do to keep that plan up to date. We do all of those functions.

Our department is the designated local planning agency for the county. Therefore we carry a lot of those functions that are in that State Chapter 163. Then, also, because you're the custodian of a lot of data and analysis and so on—um—as part of the planning we get a lot of other jobs and tasks dealing with using that data, applying to everything from annexation reviews to project and facility reviews.

WM: Okay and (clears throat) development—well maybe I'm getting ahead of myself here but, I've done some research and it talked about the original plan for the county was done in 1979. Is that correct?

BS: Um—the background was, when I started with the county in 1970, there was a very generalized plan that we had on the wall. It would show where future residential [areas were], future commercial [areas] and it was very general. The zoning was much more site specific.

In fact the zoning, I'm told, was originally established in the fifties. We needed zoning and the property appraiser asked everybody what they would like for their zoning. (chuckles)

I'm sure there was more to it than that, but that was pretty much how things got set up. Therefore there were a lot of—you know—a lot of things were established that way. I don't think people viewed zoning [then] the same way they do now.

Then it was just permitting a use thing, but there weren't issues about density control, or things like that. At that time the residential—the apartment—was pretty much whatever you could fit on the property. There weren't any density limits.

Then there was the concern about actually having control and a plan that was to be followed. So they set up a countywide plan, with a special act through the legislature, just for Pinellas County. We actually had a plan adopted in 1974 that was county wide and had the force and effect of law; which was a totally new concept.

Up to that time planning was advisory. It was something you worked toward with the zoning. Um—all of a sudden, when you showed it on the plan as commercial or whatever it was, that's what was to happen. That was a totally new idea. The next year [in 1975], the legislature passed the Local Government Comprehensive Planning Act, they called it the LGCPA. That placed the same requirement throughout the state. It said any plan you adopted would have that effect of law and zoning would have to adhere directly to it.

So it was around the '74, '75 time frame that the rules changed, not only for us but also for the rest of the state.

WM: Well—um—based on what you said, prior to '74 it was fairly lax?

BS: Yes. Probably the people at the time would say it wasn't necessarily lax, it was just a different procedure. It was all about zoning. The plan wasn't really a governing influence in how development occurred. It was more of a futuristic—just a sort of advisory type of a document. It was a guide.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: So—I don't know whether it would be lax or not, it probably depended on the community, how much it was. Because people have always been concerned about what's happening.

You know the whole origin of zoning was keeping neighbors from affecting you and something like that. So—um—it's probably a judgement call about how it was used.

WM: Okay. What kind of reaction was there when it changed?

BS: I would say it was kind of traumatic for more the planners than it was [for] the community. Because all of a sudden we had a plan that had to be followed exactly. I don't think we quite realized that when we put it into effect— how do you work this?

Now, everybody accepts it. The plan is black-and-white, you follow it. But back then it meant that if you had some zoning density that was more than what the plan showed, you couldn't do that. Or if you had a piece of commercial property and you even had commercial zoning, but the plan showed it as residential then you couldn't really do anything with the property, 'cause it wasn't residential. So the planners were the most who had to do a lot of major adjustment and thinking to deal with that.

Now, of course, even in the state, when I said the Local Government Comprehensive Plan Act, that 1975 act, the plans that came into effect under that were around 1980 or

'81. That's when planning in the state started really getting in gear and the plans started really—like you could see, they called the act the Managed Growth Act. So you, really before that, didn't have a Managed Growth Act at all. You just had zoning, looking at adjacent uses and who is going to—sort of minimize the most conflicts.

But the plan started talking about that you need to look at these other elements of the plan: recreation, transportation, water and things like that. Then you would then start developing a plan based upon all of those. So we in Pinellas County did the same thing as other parts of the state. As an example, it was through that procedure that we would start looking at density limits, based upon what we could do—sort of support. So we started ramping down the density requirements quite a bit. We'd even have these low-density categories of one unit an acre, two and a half units an acre, a much lower range of uses. Because we realized we couldn't afford to carry the population that the zoning would permit.

Like I mentioned, you'd have, typically zoning would be R-1, R-2, R-4, R-4 and R-5.

WM: And what does R-1, R-2 and [so on, mean]?

BS: Okay, R-1, R-2 and R-3 were all single-family zones, with varying lot sizes. Anything from six thousand square feet was R-3, seventy-five hundred was R-2 and I think ten thousand. R-1—I think—can't remember exactly the number—it was something larger like ten thousand, I'm not quite sure. Then those that were all 1, 2 and 3, the single-family zones.

Then R-4 was a duplex, triplex zone that you permitted.

Then R-5 was the apartment zone. There was no density statement in it at all. You just permitted apartments and condominiums or anything else you put in there.

Then, to round it all out, the other residential zone was R-6, which was mobile homes.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: That was pretty much the cookbook that not only we used, but pretty much used around in all the communities, throughout the state—a similar number range.

But you could see, there for, that it didn't matter. The apartment had to do what the market wanted, what they thought they would work with it. But it could be anything from a high rise to a townhouse. It was just not that—the zoning didn't limit that.

Now that's a very common—you've got all kinds of specifics about that category now.

WM: Well—the plans that were drawn up, how much local input was there. I mean, 'cause just from hearing you talk I get the impression that people from the state came in and applied the plan to the county. So how did it work?

BS: Okay. It wasn't actually the state coming in. The state had this requirement and the legislature put it in place. There was very little—um—um—engagement from the state side. It was each local government had to figure out how to develop a plan in conformance with the state law.

Actually, because of the flexibility of it, everybody's plan would be quite different. How you did manage growth could be looked at different ways. Actually that was what triggered the update, about several years later, in the mideighties. I think around 1985 the Managed Growth Act went in.

In this case it started really ramping-up the requirements for what a local government had to have in its plan. They started developing a lot more of a specific cookbook, rather than "Thou shalt plan" it "Ye shall plan and do it the following way."

So that's when you got into, not just—um—density and location requirements for land uses, but then that's when you kicked in the concurrency requirements, to where development could not occur until support services were there or were there in a certain time period. That was the 1985 Act. Those plans would have rolled in around 1989, 90, 91, around the state.

But you had what they called a—um—at that point things had ramped up with the state. [They] were now feeling that they wanted to make sure that the local governments did a good on-line plan and so they wrote rules for them. I think it was called 9-J-5 requirements. It was a special rule that the Department of Community Affairs had that said, "This is what's going to be in your plan." Not only [that] but the legislature said with twelve elements but this is what's going to be in each of the elements of the plan and all that. So there was a ramping up of—ah—if you want to say accountability.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: And then your plans had to be sent to the state for them to agree with. If they didn't like it they could tell you so and their enforcement was to hold back some state money or something like that.

WM: The carrot or the stick?

BS: Your usual thing. But the state doesn't have a lot. You would still have a legal plan, it just meant that they would be—and so— Plus, they probably wouldn't have needed that.

Local government isn't going to be adopting something that the state—ah—has said they don't think is good.

WM: So how did you all go about putting the plan together?

BS: Well it was your traditional procedure. What you would do is, and this had to do with even the first plan that we did.

I would say when we really started getting evolved in planning would have been from the mid-seventies, under what they call the Local Government Comprehensive Planning Act, the old LGCPA. That was 1975. That's when we really started planning.

And you had these various elements, so what you did was you would draft up an element and then you'd have community workshops. You'd go into the community and advertise and it'd be very similar to the process we're using now. You go out have informal workshops and you show them draft plans. You listen to what they have to say. You refine what you did, based upon the public comment. Then you start, then, into a public hearing process where you've got a board sitting up front and people commenting.

You do that as your planning agency. Then you make a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners [and they] act on it. Those were all in public hearing process.

But—um—probably I'd say the first one that was done in the early 1980's, like '80, or '81, like that, that plan. We had a lot of people showing up at the hearing because we were still—having a plan that was going to have this—um—effect people's property more than other plans [would].

So, you really had a lot of people—um—that were being affected. So when we adopted the plan we would have a list connected with it of all these people that were property owners that said, "Well, I'm okay with the plan if I'm allowed to do such-and-such for a year so." Like this, the site plans might be active.

So what happened was, to get that plan through you had to do a lot of that. You had to— Now it's more—um—because plans have been in place for a while, it's always about a change on a particular parcel or area. But back then you had the whole county to deal with. So you, therefore, probably had a hundred to two hundred different parcels that we were going to effect, because it just wasn't the right use.

So how do you deal with that over time? How do you phase them out? So they're all case-by-case. So we had a whole folder full of those when we were first doing the plan, putting them online. That wasn't easy. (laughs)

WM: (laughs) I can imagine. You said that—um—at the workshops you had a large turnout?

BS: I would say it was moderate. The reason the turnout was occurring because this was the first time people were being impacted by a plan. A lot of the people that were showing up were people that were affected directly by the plan. There were some people also there that were concerned about the environment and [saying] that we needed to have density controls. There was that part of the community as well.

It was in the early years to where we had a lot of environmental lands that hadn't been threatened with development, but you could still see the handwriting on the wall. So part of the plan was then not regulation, part of the plan was also [about] how to get a blueprint going to acquire and protect properties that we were concerned about.

Actually we had, in the early-seventies developed a list of a hundred and sixty-one properties that we wanted to have preserved. Everything from a whole Grouper Creek preserved to something really small, like a one or two acre parcel.

It was interesting, just a couple of years ago, we re-looked at that list and found that we had actually protected one hundred and sixty [out] of one hundred and sixty one sites.

WM: Wow, that's pretty good!

BS: Which is [pretty good]. We actually got a national environmental award for it. Because—you know—we were able to document it. We had what you call a red-flag charrette program in the early 1970s. We put all the environmentalists together in a room, twenty or thirty people. [We] had all different kinds of expertise. They were out in the field making reports and identified a comprehensive map that listed all of the sites.

It was known that we might not be able to get these right away, but this is a long-term program. Not all of the sites were acquired within a year or two; it was like a pushing thirty years type of program. So in addition to land regulation we were doing that. Which is also a key part. The best way to protect it is to own it. (laughs)

WM: (laughs)

BS: Although I'll admit that is still not without its debates. Because even if you're the owner of it, as the government, people could still be tempted to do things in these preserves. So, you know, it's still—you always have to have your eyes open, even on that side. So we had to then establish control procedures even for public ownership.

So we have preservation category in the plan we put on the property that is now publicly owned and even say what is permitted and what's not permitted in terms of activities.

WM: So like, hiking only?

BS: Yes. There's a lot of debate going on right now with us, with our preserves. Because it was assumed that you would only have, at the most—First of all there is a lot of environmental land that you would not [let] anything to happen to, at all. Apparently you can make an argument that you didn't even want people walking in it. It was that kind of strict.

Then we have passive recreation where you'd have walking trails and things like that. That would be up, but you wouldn't be dealing with ball fields or any of the normal organized sports type of thing. It was just a preserve. And then over the years, I'd say



recent years, as we acquire more and more of this land and you've got public support to do it, the question came up, "How does the public appreciate all of this investment they've got in it?" And you've got to have some form of access for these people to at least know what's out there—what the environment is. So we've adjusted a little bit, that way the preserves are a little bit more open to the public. But that's been more in the last few years.

But up until then it was "put a fence around it; just the birds and the animals in there. No people, because it's that." (laughs) I think that thinking has changed a little bit.

WM: Well—um—I think that if you all preserved one hundred and sixty out of one hundred and sixty one sites, that you thought were important that is something to feel good about.

BS: That's amazing.

WM: But at the community workshops, you said you had the environmentalists, who—I guess—were more looking at the community interests. But the other people were they home owners? Property owners? I mean like rental property commercial folks—

BS: Yes.

WM: Tell me about them.

BS: Well, the kind of the people that would show up, besides the people from the environmental interests—the people from the Sierra Club and the environmental groups like that, and then the Friends of Something. You had also, the people that owned vacant land that wanted to know how much they were going to be limited, what opportunities they had. [They] wanted to be looking out for their interests. Then you had, also—

You didn't have a lot of homeowner group things, because they were already established.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: So I would more say it was groups that had the vacant land, the development interests, the people that wanted to preserve things [and] then you had some people that were just concerned about, say, the impact on the roads system, congestion and things like that.

But, also, when we were doing this we were developing not just a land use component, but you had these basically twelve elements of a plan. So you had people commenting on the transportation aspect, the recreation – open space aspect, the housing aspect. There were a lot of elements of the plan that we were holding hearings on. So it wasn't—I didn't want to over emphasize the land use alone.

WM: Um-huh. You've mentioned the twelve elements of the plan. Perhaps you could list them?

BS: I could go look them up. (laughs)

WM: (laughs)

BS: They're listed in the State Statutes 163, but generally speaking you're looking at a physical based plan, so there are then. There are elements that look at the land development. So you're looking at land use, transportation—um—water, sewer, drainage, these kind of issues; recreation, open space, housing. It's focused primarily on those kinds of subjects. And there is about twelve of them.

The interesting thing is that there were—then you had other optional elements that had been little used. For instance, all the social aspect of our society, what we do that's not required or called for was all focused on the land side of things, land based or physical development.

So, I think that's something, that's something that's ramped up in recent years, now that—for us and probably other parts of the state, which is, “What do we want to do in terms of planning, that should be part of plan for the social side of things.” And that's still an emerging thing.

To give you an example, we recently came up with the thirteenth element of the plan, which isn't in the book, at least in the state's book. As it was we developed an element called planning to stay. We realized, it was a couple of years ago, that all of our planning was based upon—um—a green area, so to speak, where you just had open land, you're working with developing.

But now our planning needed to take into account [that] things were already developed and built out. So how do you protect what's built out and in some cases you might want to have some re-development. But in a lot of it there is a lot more pressure on the environmental land that was left, that maybe wasn't on the “Hundred and sixty list” but there's still more environment.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: How do you deal with the smaller parcels or the environmental land that's an upland area, that wasn't a wetland and things like that? So—um—basically you want to come up with an element that said that you would have—future generations, say our grandchildren, would still want to be Pinellas County to live work and play. Therefore [we need to] set up guidelines in the element for how would we approach future planning, with that assumption in mind.

You could call it sustainable, but actually it was a little bit more than sustainable planning. Sustainable means you're just preserving.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: In this case we're talking about way more than that, someone wanting to stay here, or wanting to come back, if they left, that sort of thing.

Again, for jobs, for living for recreation for quality of life, just all of that and—um—that's kind of been our guideline, now for the last couple of years in terms of our planning.

Our county has—some people claim it's built-out but that's not—You could say, like Manhattan, in New York is built out and yet there're still building things, doing things all the time. So I think that's what we're looking at, is we want to have an economy that's continuing but it doesn't necessarily have to be this extra growth. It could be re-working things, making them better.

Also, an emphasis on the quality of life aspect— we have the Pinellas Trail that we established in 1990. Actually it was part of that whole-managed growth initiative. We had eight million dollars, that was when we first established—um—

Working back a little bit—in 1985 they, when they did that Managed Growth Act, the update and they made a much more comprehensive requirement on us for doing planning. They said you couldn't have development without supporting facilities, the concurrency aspect.

They also put in there the fact that you could go for an infrastructure tax they call it of 1 percent sales tax. That would be the tool that you could get money to build the things you needed to support the development that you'd identified—you know this sort of thing—because if you are required to have all of these improvements then you had to have money to do that.

So what happened was we developed the plan and we developed an improvement list as well. And that was what was taken to a referendum in 1989 and passed. It was one of the few in the state at the time that passed. It passed by three hundred votes or something. But then that's where we got the money to do a lot of, not only road improvements and a lot of park, environmental acquisitions, we also built the Pinellas Trail with that. [It was built] on an existing rail line. I mean an abandoned rail line that the state had acquired.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: The reason I mentioned that is it kind of influenced the whole approach, I think, of the county in terms of development in the future. This was the thirty-four mile corridor through the middle of the county that was continuous and—um—didn't exist anywhere, even nationally. So you have other places where the trail will go from the city out, but in this case it goes through the middle of all our downtowns and the rest, like this. It was like an eight million-dollar ticket that was included in that penny program. We built that and we're now dealing with we're now dealing with extensions in that, but it influences

people's thinking. It's a bike-pedestrian trail in the middle of everything, in the middle of everything—in the middle of downtown, so a community like Dunedin will just eventually work their downtown around it, as a pedestrian friendly environment.

So that's really influenced our whole approach to how we view development, emphasizing the bike-pedestrian [trail]. I don't want to over emphasize all of that because they're still doing a lot of road building. But it's sort of influenced your quality of life concept.

WM: Well, I was going to ask what kind of—you said the referendum to levy the tax for these kind of improvements, passed by three hundred votes, which I'd think would be sort of a slim margin.

BS: It was very slim.

WM: So since that's been in place, from what you've said, I assume it's been successful.

BS: Yes.

WM: So what kind of public support is there for—um—for public space like that?

BS: Well, actually it—one of the reasons people felt the penny [tax] passed was because of the Pinellas Trail being in the package. Then you had a number of citizens who were advocates for that. What we found was that—if you did what you thought were important things, the jails and the court complexes, and the roads in there, people thought that was important but they weren't necessarily going to vote for extra taxes for that. But they would [vote] for an environmental preserve, for open space, for trails. That seemed to be the thing that hit a nerve with people. They would be, "Okay that's fine. We'll do that. They knew that you wouldn't do that without the extra tax.

It was kind of an interesting thought process. It was expected that all of your normal government revenues would handle the basics. Therefore if you came up with something extra like that, they'd be willing to pay for it. But if you said, "I want extra money for the normal things." If you think about that message, that doesn't ring the same way with the public.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: So what you try to do is show that we got everything else covered, but these extra things that raise the bar for the quality of life, we want to have money for those. People bought that message.

Now it was three hundred people at that time in 1989, so it was a ten-year program. As we're getting toward the end of the ten years, around 1997, we wanted to go out, again, for an extension [of this tax] for another ten years. So we put together [a] program; more trail work, more environmental acquisition and other road things. That passed by two-

thirds to one-third vote. Because the public, seeing the benefit, and seeing what's happening they were really supportive of it. Now people call it the Penny, or the Penny for Pinellas has got a really high recognition to it. People just are for that, even if they aren't for other taxes.

So we've now scheduled a third referendum, which is going to be next spring in March. And even though there are all of these tax issues, around about property taxes and the rest, they've done a poll and found that even with all of that debate 63 percent of the people would still vote for a penny extension.

I think it's got a different—umm—I wouldn't say different agenda, it's got a different perception to it. You're focused on things that raise the bar—things that people are willing to really pay for.

But it's a distinction as opposed to those things that you've thought of as basics. They just think they should be covered by (chuckles) whatever money you've got. You shouldn't have to ask for that.

WM: Well it's great to see that there is public support for public space.

BS: Um-huh.

WM: But what about the opposition to that?

BS: Well, in the past there hasn't really been any. Other than someone that—We've done surveys and there would be, basically, a third of the population—I don't want to say this the wrong way—they're always going to be voting against something.

So you know that's the hardcore. We've done surveys there is always the "one-third no," (chuckles). That's pretty much—you're not going to be able—I wouldn't say not be able to change those people's minds. They are just there and that's what they are going to vote for. But I would say, generally speaking, if you work the program right, that's kind of the voting distribution you've got.

WM: Um-huh.

I'm just thinking, some people would think about—you know private interests, like beachfront development, or something—they would want support or permission for that as opposed to a public park. I was just wondering—

BS: I don't think I follow what you're saying.

WM: Well it's—other people I've talked to there are—I guess this goes back to one of the people I interviewed in Hillsborough County who talked about property rights and he said, "This is my property I can do with it what I want. Public development that infringes on my private property is something I'm opposed to."

So I was just wondering, you talked about the support for the public property, the trails system here in Pinellas County.

BS: Um-huh.

WM: And the development interests; I suppose, was that something that was a counter force for that?

BS: Well it probably has a lot to do with communication and understanding. I think is where I see. For instance, on the east side of the county we're doing another trail on the Progress Energy property. We have a lease with Progress Energy for ninety-nine years to build a trail there.

What you're dealing with when your dealing with new trails is your dealing with community impact. Do people think this is a good idea? Now we had the benefit of having the Pinellas Trail in, with a history to it. So therefore it was due to the benefit you can show that it works. There weren't crime issues and the value of land was good. The property [sold] more quickly if you were near the trail, things like that.

However in the new areas, [we've] generally found that development interests want to hook on to the trail and actually build part of it that effects them. So if anything it's been more of that positive side and actually been good. Because when you think about it a trail is not an expensive thing to build as opposed to building a road. (laughs) That's something to think about if you were a developer.

But also there is the amenity and the benefits that you can get from it. You can promote this as something of a selling feature. So on that eastern side of the county we've got several developers that want to sit down with us and find out how they can actually build part of the trail for us.

I'm saying trail stuff, this other thing is the same way. There are all kinds of amenities that you deal with bike-pedestrian, just gathering places. We updated our—

We have a countywide transportation impact fee ordinance. Which is pretty much uncommon. Typically it's jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but almost twenty years ago, now, we established—when the requirement came in—and again from that managed growth act—we set up a transportation impact fee. Used our countywide MPO program to put it together, 'cause we had everybody at the table, all of the jurisdictions.

[We] came up with one impact fee, so there is a chart where how much you pay for a single-family house versus an apartment versus a shopping center will be the same, no matter which jurisdiction you're in. It's all calculated the same.

The reason I mentioned that, so we had in place therefore a countywide ordinance that MPO was the custodian of. Then all the new thinking about livable communities, with an

emphasis on other ways to move around besides behind the wheel of an automobile, that we started realizing that we were doing an update every two years. Every two years we had to update the transportation impact fee ordinance. So what we did with that update [is] set up a special committee of citizens and developers to look at that update, how you could respond to livable community things.

What we developed then was a different approach to the impact fee. You still had all of the typical requirements, but you could also get credit for doing sidewalks, landscaping on the sidewalks. You could do trail work. Also how you could do connectivity from your project to other projects so that you wouldn't have to get out, get in your car, go out of the parking lot, go onto the road, go down three blocks and then go back in again. Like that, in a car.

You'd get credit for doing connections, walking, or bicycling—whatever—connections between your project. You'd actually get impact fee credit for that. It got a little bit of a challenge legally with us to work with attorneys because there were other things like gathering places, which also lend themselves to having people outside walking.

Those were some of the things we couldn't give the developer credit for, but then we were also looking at concurrency is also another tool. Also just basically requiring a developer to do it because it's a good idea. So out of that impact fee update, we developed those three initiatives.

One was, the impact fee ordinance was updated, and whereas a developer you could get credit for doing non-automobile improvements. You could also go identify those things which weren't eligible for the impact fee, then we also had concurrency on the chart, which said some things you could do through a concurrency procedure, and get a sign-off to go forward with your development. The third was there'd be some things for you to do for any development to be pedestrian friendly. So [we] had that in place as well.

That was like a couple of years ago, now. We put that in and that was like the other leg of the stool. Beside us building things ourselves on the public side, and then development over here. It actually made it come tied together.

How many times have you gone by somewhere and you've got a sidewalk in front of a development and there is no way to get from the sidewalk into the development? At best you have to walk through a parking lot, but there isn't any provision to get to the front door of the building. So that's what you're dealing with, so it's kind of ramped up quite a bit over time that's now been viewed as a model ordinance and we've sent it around to a lot of other jurisdictions.

It wasn't easy to do. If you're trying to do something different the pressure is to not do that. The attorney's usually pointing out you can't do it because there is no precedent for it. (laughs) You know—that sort of thing. But we've now got it in place and now we can work in it and improve on it.

WM: Okay. I just want to make sure I understand you, you're using your powers of planning to influence the developers to make things more publicly accessible [and] moving away from automobiles and encouraging [pedestrian traffic]?

BS: Well there are two things. I understand what you're saying now. You're putting the planning creditability in to say this is a good idea. Even that alone would work, because it means that this is supported to say this is a good idea. Even that alone would work, because it means that this is supported by government. But in addition to that we're saying and if you do it on the development side we'll not only support you with approved site plan or [an] approved project, we actually give you some credit. Instead of having to pay a fee for this, you can do this.

It became actually kind of sophisticated because, as an example, one of the things we found instead of the developer paying— lets say— a two hundred and fifty thousand dollar impact fee, which they write a check for and then it's basically out of their development. Meaning [that] it's just a cost of their development. If he took that same two hundred and fifty thousand dollars and invested it in infrastructure around the site, to make the site more pedestrian attractive, it then becomes an asset to them as opposed to something that was paid out, like a cost.

So to answer your question the planning support was a good idea, but also from the other side, the development interests they could see the value of it [and] thought "this makes sense to us." That's why having the developer sitting at the table to put this package together kind of works. Because in the beginning they were saying, "We don't want to do anything new and extra that's going to cost us." But when they realize that procedure, they could have a credit procedure to do something that, even on the development side, they could see the benefit of it.

So I guess I'm saying it was part doing things, coming up with things that the developer gets credit form but also from the planning side, trying to find ways that the community can do things to further what they want. The community meaning the developers and the citizens and everybody at the table, hopefully.

WM: Yeah, it does seem like the developers would view these plans as increasing costs and [making it] difficult for them.

You mentioned that the land use attorney would say, "There is no precedent for this." Tell me about the role of land use attorneys in the planning process.

BS: Um—they're pretty much going to be the conservative ones to say, "You can do this you can't do that." It varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, which is a little bit of a challenge. So, I would say some jurisdictions will strictly adhere to it. If an attorney says you can't do this, they won't do it. Others will take that as a device and proceed forward.

I'm not sure if it limits planning or just keeps it correct. Sometimes it limits you because —ah—there are some things you'd like to do and want to do for the community, [but]



you can't do them because the attorney working with you said no. And yet in the next jurisdiction over, the attorney would have said yes.

So that's probably when the overall body of knowledge moves forward in this sort of ad-hoc way. Meaning that eventually that all becomes one—if enough different—if jurisdictions are doing some different decisions, eventually it gets thrown in the pot and something moves forward, maybe a combination of those in terms of the body planning knowledge.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: So the attorneys are part of it, but I don't think it's just black and white, that whatever they say goes and then you don't go in that direction. Because, typically the attorney is giving you opinion based upon precedent and things done in the past. So, if you try and do something new or cutting edge, you're generally are not going to have the attorney comfortable with it. In this case, say on the impact fee thing, they were not wanting to do this that and the other thing. [There] were several things they didn't like about what we were doing.

We had to then, put it on hold get with the CUTR Group [pronounced "cutter," Center for Urban Transportation Research] at USF [University of South Florida] and do a national evaluation of this that and the other. We did find some examples of almost like what we're doing. We used that to develop a comfort level for our attorneys. Saying, "Look you could do this. You could do that. What we're talking about is slightly like that. A little bit similar to it." So you can edge forward a little bit, without going into specifics on that.

But I think that's what you do is you take these little baby steps forward as a profession, based upon someone does something new here. Then everybody else does something twenty-five percent new, from that—as a group.

WM: Okay. But before I forget you mentioned the CUTR Group at USF?

BS: Okay. I know I can't—um—[it's the] Center for Urban Transportation Research, something like that..

WM: Okay.

BS: They're an institute that operates out of the University of South Florida. Our MPO Program that was running with this, were wanting to have a readily available consultant, to help us, because we're in the middle of this project. Well CUTR, if you tap into them you didn't have to use the consultant selection procedure. That's where you have to choose three—go through advertising and selecting three [to submit bids] and all of that. [With CUTR] you could just contact them directly as the MPO. Also they had an expertise in what we're dealing with. So we were able to get them engaged in just a matter of weeks to keep our program going.

WM: Okay. But you talked about, you know, getting your plans accepted. So I'm thinking you take your plans before the Board of County Commissioners, right?

BS: Yes.

WM: And they are the ones who say "Yes, [or] No"?

BS: Yes.

WM: So tell me about working with the Board of County Commissioners.

BS: You generally find that you work with them at two levels. One as a board, for your appearing before them in a public hearing or a work shop getting readings from them. You also work with them on a one-on-one basis, where different [members] might have more interest than others in specialty areas. So that's also part of the process, but what you also find is that the county commission are—and it's the same as the city commission—they're your policy board that's accountable to the public.

So on the planning side, what we've always found we had to do is you have to come up with things and work with things that you know would work with the board and be acceptable to them, because they're accountable to the public. They're not going to vote for something that isn't supportable by the public.

So some people view that as political. But my own personal philosophy is that's kind of part of the process. That's what they are elected for, so it's not really political. It's just that that is how you get your policy decided. So I more view it as policy.

And that changes. Right now things are very conservative in respect to development. Elective officials, feeling highly accountable for how development works in the community, it can't be just rampantly just approved not matter what. There is a lot more accountability in respect to that in the public. And because the public's concerned about it the elected should be. So that's your atmosphere now.

Now I'm not sure if it was ever drastically different but you would have—you could look at [it] ten years ago, let's say, and probably have a lot more willingness to be approving things, that now wouldn't be approved. There is a lot more concern about density and impact. That's kind of like this statewide trend now, with like this Hometown Democracy thing. But it's got to deal with that citizen base (clock chimes) and what their views are and—

I would actually think a couple of trend things I've noticed would be that I think the public would be more concerned about development in their communities than in the past.

As a result of that, in a short period of time they become more educated about what they need to know to be engaged. They are, sort of, paying attention from year to year [about] what's going on. Therefore your elected official [and] the rest of us are a lot more accountable for what we're doing. You can't just explain something and everybody's [going to say,] "Oh, I didn't know that." And you proceed to do what you wanted to do.

Now they understand what you're talking about and then they'll say, "We still don't agree with that." Whatever it is. Or, "You should do this. Why don't you do this?"

So I think there is a lot more of that going on. That's probably the basis of a lot of this referendum thinking about tying into planning. I just kind of view that as a challenge for the planning profession to figure out, "How do you get ahead of that?"

So how do you really find out what people are thinking? Not just going into a public hearing or workshop and saying, "This is what we think you think." But figuring out a way where it works, because I actually think that people aren't opposed to development or anything. But they may not be supportive of what a developer's development is. (chuckles)

WM: Um-huh.

BS: That's probably the difference. I've heard people say, over and over, "We don't mind this property developed but we have an opinion about how it would happen." So if you don't get ahead of that, there could be no development. People think that's all there is either you develop, or there is no development. I think that's probably where—I would hope that the development community works with on [that]. Because they have taken a very non-negotiable position, you know, "You did this before. You need to do this now." kind of thing.

The public just doesn't buy that any more. Therefore the elected officials aren't able to vote for that. That's probably, I would say, one of the things in the future. The development community kind of being more reasonable with what they're pushing us into.

I'm saying it that way because that's the way I sometimes see it.

WM: Well it does seem, based on my limited research and observations, that the county commissioners often operate anonymously. The public's attention is more focused on state and national issues. Or, that's what is in the press. People will discover—they'll come home from work and a sign in the lot next to them that announces something. Only then do they get involved in public planning.

BS: What's interesting is, now what you have, for instance up in the area where I live, you would have the Ozona community all very focused on an initiative they put together themselves. And they are working with the county on an overlay there. But their thinking is this is not only good for Ozona, they would then like to see other communities doing

the same thing. And they are willing to have some of the people from that community go to other communities to help them do the same thing. So it's not all about—it used to be about—

“Well, I saw a sign next door and I'm going to be—

*Side 1 ends; side 2 begins.*

BS: —and I need to be engaged because I saw [a sign for] re-zoning.”

People now see that what's [happening] down the road somewhere [in] another community, also affects them. And they are willing to be just engaged in that as well as [what's happening with] the next door neighbor. I think that's the more modern situation we're dealing with.

WM: So the public is more, you'd say, that the public is more engaged?

BS: Yes, definitely. More engaged and also more informed. I think the planning people that don't take that into account would be then off the mark when they get to the city commission or the county commission. [They] are making recommendations then they've had some pretty intelligent [people from the] public explaining what their views are and you've got to have to take that into account. You can't just write them off as not being informed or a NIMBY [Not In My Back Yard].

It's kind of interesting. I actually think the term NIMBY is becoming not a relevant term because the NIMBY, they're trying to say that NIMBY would be like Hometown Democracy. Yet, if you think about it, it's so broad you can't call it NIMBY anymore. (chuckles)

It's hard to say, “Well he's only concerned about [what] his next door neighbor is trying to do.” Now when the guy is also concerned about down the other side of the city or the county, you can't call that NIMBY. (laughs)

WM: Well, it's kind of “not in my back yard” by extension, because what happens way down the road will effect what's [in my back yard].

BS: You have to [think of] many ways “for not in my community.” If you think about it, it's got a whole different—it sounds much more enlightened, or something. Which is kind of what's going on.

Of course it affects—if a guy has a problem, or a woman has a problem with the next-door neighbor thing, well, [nobody] else is watching that. Even the city commissioner or the county commissioner, or the general public are going to have a hard time getting engaged in that. But if it's broader discussion then everybody is into it.

WM: Well—um I don't want to put words into your mouth but it seems like you're pleased by that, by more public involvement. Is that a correct assumption on my part?

BS: Yes. That was the reason I got into planning in the first place. I always felt that you wanted to plan for what the people wanted. What you tried to do was sit with the community and figure out where they are trying to go and develop a plan for that. That, for me, I think it's welcome. It's a big challenge because then you've then got to figure out what this room full of people want to do? And you've got to figure that out knowing that there is going to be many different views both before and after the discussion. Not everyone's going to—you're never going to deal with hundred percent of something.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: You kind of hope you can kind of pull it together. But that's what planning is supposed to be.

WM: Well that brings up a question I was going to save 'til the end, but if you could (and maybe now would be a good time to do it) but tell me how you got into planning? What attracted you to it? [What kind of] training did you go through?

BS: Okay. I started out going into college [studying] engineering [but] moved into physics. So I would up with a bachelor's degree from Florida State in physics. As I was graduating I was looking at what to do. Whether to pursue the physics, in terms of a Masters or a Ph.D. Whether to go out into the field and apply that, or do something else.

I started looking at planning as something that [I could do]. I was interviewing and found that when I was interviewing with a physics background that they were only interested in technical things you did. You were viewed as an egghead, or just not—[they didn't consider] any of the human aspect. That started making me nervous, because I also had jobs that were technical jobs where I saw people had changed over time and became more technical, even that started out [as ] well rounded [individuals] and became more technical.

I thought about it [and] though that didn't sound very useful, so I went and looked at planning and did an internship in planning, before I went to the planning school, and found that it was much more based on communication and working with people and that side of things. I also saw, with planning that you had technical parts to it where you didn't have to leave behind what I had already learned.

So I thought that would really be pretty cool to start working with the communities and kind of, sort of fulfilling that option, [and] helping people out. If I had stuck with physics or something it would have been very narrow and clearly defined. Based on what I was doing only and that was it.

So the more I got into the planning the more I reinforced [my decision]. So I got through

A lot of the planning courses in the planning program what were focused on community type things.

But I also found that I never left behind the physics part, especially when I'm in the transportation area, they have all of these computer models. After an hour's worth of explaining and detailing, everyone is pretty much snowed in to what's going on and I'm still there. (laughs)

WM: (laughs)

BS: I'm not snowed. So it has a benefit to it. I can get past the technical stuff and get to what really is a more meaningful decision-making, whatever that might be.

You know—what you put in the computer you get out, you get the influence of that kind of computer. So the technical parts are only a tool, they're not supposed to direct everything. So my technical background is useful that way.

WM: Um-huh. You said you went to planning school? Where was that?

BS: Florida State.

WM: Okay.

BS: I was, at the time I was graduating with a physics degree at Florida State. They were establishing a planning program. It was about one year old. So I just enrolled there and stuck with it. It was a two-year program.

WM: Well it does seem like this would be a good place to combine the scientific and the social aspects of your [interests].

BS: It does and I'm not going to say you couldn't also do that with some other professions. I've been, for instance I'd work sometimes with people in engineering. It's really refreshing when you get with some engineering people, who have that same approach of working with designing a project that [is] people want to do.

You have other engineers come in with their big thick manual and they are going to tell people what it is. So it is not just planning profession that has that reward or opportunity to work with people. Because I've been in the planning side, where you'd have [people] come in and know what they wanted to design for the community and it didn't matter what the community thought. They knew this was what the community would like, if they just understood [the engineer] better. (chuckles)

WM: So when you finished up at FSU did you come right here to Clearwater?

BS: Actually what it was, before I went to planning school I went over to Hillsborough County and had a job there for the summer, as a planning intern. So I kind of saw what

planning was about. Then halfway through the planning program there is what they call an internship, during the summer. I interned at the regional planning council down here, the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. Then when I graduated, my first year out was a year with the regional planning council. Then I got a chance to come here, as the division head for planning.

One of the things I found when I was at the regional planning was [that it was] a good overall view of things, but I wasn't sure if I was going to be gaining more skills after the first year. It looked like I was going to be doing an update of what I did the first year. If you were involved in the local program you were engaged in what was happening. I realized that's [what I wanted]. I mentioned earlier about wanting to work with the committees. When I was in the regional basis I wasn't able to be as engaged in the community as I wanted.

So I realized that your experience would be cumulative at the local level, while your experience at the regional basis would be repetitive. You wouldn't get an opportunity for a new experience. Once you had figured out how to do everything you'd just do it over again. I'm not saying that critically, I was just looking for another level of engagement.

WM: You wanted more of a challenge and opportunity.

BS: A hands-on kind of feel.

WM: So you came here in 1970?

BS: 1970.

WM: Well, this is a big question, but how have you seen this community, I guess Pinellas County, change in those thirty-six years?

BS: Yes, [it's changed] quite a bit, though I think it's all been good.

I'm not going to say it's all because of planning, but there was quite a bit of that. You can see a lot of the things I would've hoped we would preserve [that] we did preserve. We probably did, fairly early on but some density limits in and something's like that, so even though people feel it's congestion and how much development we've had double that very easily. I kind of think that the county's gone a long way in terms of its development and its been an emphasis on quality of life all along, which I feel pretty comfortable about.

Interestingly though, I would think back on—there were some initiatives that I would have been—or we would have been proposing and working with. I'm not sure if we did it, it would have been a good idea or not. I'll give you an example.

In 1972 we had a proposal for a monorail in the county, a complete loop.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: It didn't go anywhere. So you wonder, if we had been successful in promoting that then what would the county have looked like? I'm not sure it would have been good because those things do promote density and things like that.

So you sometimes—kind of realize what you're running with, you have to re-think. I'll give you an example. In the mid-1970s (because I was involved in transportation as well) I was the staff director for (among my normal responsibilities as planning director, and so on) the expressway authority. So we have a major expressway referendum in our county to build a north-south expressway.

I became one of the key people in the speaker's bureau, to go out and present this thing [the north south expressway]. It was voted down 8-to-1. So you can imagine, it wasn't a very pleasant experience being on the speaker's bureau, 'cause you could see the vote before it was going to happen. (chuckles) But that really influenced the county's future development. That meant we were not going to be doing toll roads or expressways through the county.

Then they said, "We're going to focus on [Highway] US-19 and the existing corridor and make that work. That's going to be it." Therefore I was out there promoting the idea of this whole expressway program, but then what you have to do re-think where you are going. So as a professional, you don't keep talking more about expressways. [You say,] "Okay, I understand where we are. We'll move to that."

In 1990, when we put the Pinellas Trail in, or the late eighties, I wasn't really sure it that was a good or not—you know? It was just things, like the width of the trail. It was going to be fifteen feet wide. I was thinking, "That sounds more like a road. It should be narrower, like ten feet wide." I now know that fifteen [feet] is really good because it minimizes conflicts. I also could see the value of a major proponent of the trail. Way back in the beginning I was kind of on the fence about it. So as a planner I sort of adjusted.

Again, with that community engagement you say, "Okay, this is where we're really going." It isn't like I had a major philosophical change. It's more that I just better understood directional changes and think that's where the planer, more than anybody else, has to—kind of have their eyes and ears open and be willing to be flexible and adjust things and to help out with this new direction. "How do you get there?" As opposed to still pointing out to people that it was a mistake, because it's different from before or something like that. It's a real challenge to be open and understand what these new things are, so as to help them.

I must say not all new things are good—you know—you have to work with that and know what—you know—when to make those kinds of judgements.



WM: In talking about how the county has changed overall, one of the things I read is that there were, initially a lot of places for people to spend the winter here and—um—retirement communities, but the county was moving more towards high-wage industry, or something like that. Am I understanding that correctly?

BS: Well, it's really hard to—yeah—we, for instance in the 1970s we were still a major dairy producer. We still had a lot of citrus [production]. Over time the development interests removed that.

But at the time we also had major corporations like Honeywell and industries like that. What happens is, over time (which is something not to many people realize) we have had a focus on tourism and always have. But we've also had a lot of industries in the county. They're not noticeable because they are, like, clean industries. So people don't notice them that much.

We're still like some of the major—um—I've forgotten what categories they are but we're still, like, number one in manufacturing employment of certain kinds of technologies. People don't think of that in Pinellas County. We've got a whole industrial belt in the middle of the county.

Most of our vacant land, yet to be developed, is in the middle of the county, [zoned as] industrial-commercial land. Which is kind of interesting in that (chuckles) your future is still there in terms of the engine you want to run it with.

But I would say we still continue to be really interested in industry. Because we kind of—when I mentioned the whole idea about the element “live, work and play,” the emphasis is on good jobs.

There was a debate a while ago about “Are we doing that? Are we [emphasizing industrial jobs] at the expense of the tourist industry?” I'd probably say, “not.” That's not really going to go away. But it's doesn't have to be an-either-or proposition.

Although some people think, “What are you trying to promote? Where would you put your promoting money?” But you don't necessarily—the money used to promote tourism you don't necessarily promote industry the same way, so I'm not sure the two compete.

But, I think now with our development pressure, there was pressure to say, “Re-zone industrial lands to residential and commercial.” We just recently established a policy saying that we're not going to do that. It has to be highly justified if you're going to move from industrial to something else. You can't put—in our county there is no more elbowroom to put in new industrial lands so you've got to hold on to what you've got.

The pressure was, that there is industrial land that can be used for industry. However—um—if they've got the option of converting it or selling it for high density residential or for Wal Marts and things, then the price of that land is not in the industrial category the price of that land is higher in these other opportunities. What we realized was, if we say

it's off the table for those changes then you make that land more reasonably priced over time, back to the industrial use that you want.

So there are a lot of dynamics that have been going on over the past couple of years in our county on that. Because we want to keep industries and we want to add industries.

WM: Um-huh. You say there is pressure to change the industrial zoned land to [land zoned for] residential. Who applies that pressure?

BS: Two groups, the property owners, that want to make more money off of the land, and obviously the people that are in the condo industrial development business, the Wal-Mart community. Not just them but the commercial people that want to promote that.

So you've got an established industry of developing things and that sometimes a property owner will be sitting there, thinking, "I'd like to do this." And they'll [the development community] come in and go, "Yeah, but you'll get much more, a better return for your land if you do this that and the other thing."

So you've got this development industry group that will always be pushing for the highest and best use (in their mind) of whatever the land is. And it's usually not industrial. You know—you can just do more and sell more.

Therefore if you have it wide open and you keep saying, "Whatever you want to do with that property. We'll have a mixed-use thing where you can do [residential], commercial or industrial. You know you're probably not going to have much industry, because that's not a revenue producer, compared to the others. And yet for the overall community it's probably the biggest revenue producer because it's that's where your jobs are for the long haul, for the overall community benefit.

But for the property owner it's not and for the developer it's not.

WM: So then again that gets back to public versus private interests.

I just want to make sure I understand you but in looking at re-zoning the industrial land to other uses, the planning commission is saying, "No, keep it zoned for industrial." And the others, the development industry, is saying, "No, change the zoning for residential or commercial."

So all of these people are talking to the county Board of Commissioners, right?

BS: Yes.

WM: So, tell me—

BS: So what happened was, we realized that was the pressure that was out there. We realized that the benefit to the to the industrial land was a community benefit. Therefore we needed a community wide policy on that, about preserving it. Unless it had some overall benefit if you were going to change it. But it had to be a benefit, not just to the property owner but, or the people that proposed something. It had to be a benefit to the community.

It wasn't to say we'd never re-zone it. We just said the tests had to be a little bit higher that, oh, "We want to do this."

It had to do with years ago we had a county commissioner, who then went to DCA. Steve Severt(??) He kind of established an approach for the county, which we still run with. The presumption is the plan is justifiable and good, called plan designation. You have to show, as a developer or property owner why you want to change it, why it's a good idea.

Typically you're forced into the other roll. You have to explain to the developer why their proposal isn't good. So they just said the plan's valid that's been in place for twenty or thirty years. Therefore it's good. Justify to me why it's a public benefit to change it?

That I think is a good test and procedure. Or the other way, you can just see it as a trap to get him to, "Well okay, we can't deny your project because—you know—such and such [like] impact on the road, (or whatever)."

What happens is—um—I think the one downside I would say in the whole Managed Growth [Plan's] emphasis on concurrency of facilities and infrastructure is that planning gets trapped into a thought process of impacts, evaluations and mitigations only. You're not looking at what's the appropriate designation for the property in terms of community interest.

You're looking at, "Can they solve the traffic problem they've created? Is there enough water for them?" and all of this. By the time you get in the DRI process (the Development and Regional Impact) it's all about that, the development of regional impact.

So if you can get a—you have a property owner goes in, does the major evaluation of their project; identifies all the solutions for all of their impacts then it's presumed you could approve it—even if the uses had nothing to do with what the community was interested in to begin with.

WM: Um-huh.

BS: So, I think that's what's been the downside of the Managed Growth Act. I think that is the current issue that people now have is, they're more interested in what are the uses of in the community; what's good for the community? Not just the impacts alone, but you know—"Is it good to have this shopping center here when we've got one over

there?” Or even if the roads are good all around it, even if you put it in; would you really need two shopping centers within a mile of each other? You know?

Those kinds of things are things that I think people are more interested in talking about. They're much obsessed in the details of planning in the past last ten [to] twenty years and the detailed process and procedures of evaluations and looking at impacts.

Like I said a developer comes in and he just goes through his checklist of ten or twenty things and says, “I solved this problem. I solved that problem. So what's the planner's problem?” (chuckles) You know?

WM: Also that gets back to property rights where, John Doe, who owns this property which is currently zoned for industrial use, but could greatly increase his profits by re-zoning it for residential or commercial. It's like his advantage versus the community's benefit.

BS: Right. But the interesting thing is it's been a misnomer, a little bit, about property rights. He has the ability to develop his land. You haven't taken anything from him; the re-zoning is not a property issue, per se. If you get into golf courses it gets a little bit tricky about if you've got a standard use it just means he wants to make more of his property.

WM: That was the question I put to him, “Where do your property rights [end?]”—The influence of your property extends beyond its boundaries. Where does one person's property rights start and another's stop?

BS: Yes. I understand and that's when you get the community interest coming into play. Sometimes it's not even adjacent. It could be what's happening on that property may have the community interest attached to it and typically does. But especially if you've got adjacent impacts. But the thing about community planning is it's not about the impacts alone. It's about, “What does the community want there? What is good for the community?” And it may be something that the property owner may or may not have wanted. So—

But you kind of have to work the two together. I don't want to emphasize what's good for the community has to work exactly. It's got to be a blend between the two. It usually does work that well, but the thing is you just can't do the highest and best use. You've got to do what's good for the community, match that against the highest and best use.

WM: I mean, it's a complex issue. Where does one person's rights stop and another one's begin? It's hard to answer that [question].

One of the things I read is that [a] problem around here is affordable housing, for people who work here.

BS: Um-huh.

WM: Do you think that will continue to be a significant issue?

BS: Yes, I think it will be. And I think some change in the thinking is going to start to occur. But it has to do with the whole economics and it has to do with property values going higher and therefore raising the price of land and development. But there are other counter balancing things to that. I definitely think that affordable housing will be an issue in the future. But it could be the idea of we've had mobile home parks that some people would like to eliminate. And yet, if you eliminate them that is affordable force, not just for the retired people but for anybody in any age group.

And the issue was, "We want to eliminate them because of hurricane threats." But then the other side of the coin—we've now just recently released a report that shows how the modern versions of manufactured housing (mobile units) [can] actually withstand storms better than houses that are built on site. So that makes [them] a very affordable option to look at. They're using different materials that are cheaper. You know?

Concrete's the most expensive thing. Wood— even though the whole bottom is dropping out of the market on that. So—depending on what materials you use, and are you in an inflated market or a depressed market? I think there are a lot of options.

But [for us] affordable housing is probably more of a challenge than for some of the others, because we don't have the hinterlands that are cheaper. Unless we sort of get our act together in figuring out to maintain [affordable housing] within (and it's got to do a lot with existing housing stock and, again, replacing old homes and doing things like this.

Some people have criticized the idea that we can approve a project and require affordable housing as part of it. And people have said "That's not fair because one percentage of housing is subsidizing the other percentage of housing in the development project."

So—I don't know. It's a complicated—

WM: Well that's what makes it interesting.

BS: It does.

WM: If it was too simple anyone could do it.

BS: True.

WM: What do you see for the future?

BS: Can I answer that question after I make a pit stop?

WM: Sure. Let me put this on [pause].

*pause in recording*

WM: Okay, we'd asked about what do you see for the future in Pinellas County?

BS: I see, probably much more emphasis on our existing population and our existing uses and how to improve them. I don't see us focused, like some other areas are, on future growth and how to deal with that. It's going to be more on quality of life things; providing things that the existing population really wants. But also focused on, like, better jobs, preserving the environment. Putting facilities in that the people really want.

Also, probably, much more emphasis on listening to the population and working with them. The reason I mention that is if you then got this strong focus on your existing, that means your current community, which means you've got to be listening more to that. Where if you were in an emerging growth area, with all vacant land, it's a little more, "Who is the constituency for that?" You listen to it, it's a little less to be heard, (chuckles) so to speak. I mean you've the environmental groups and so on, but [you probably have] a higher level of accountability if you're built out, like we are and then you have development pressures in areas that are already developed. Established communities and established interests and uses and so on like that.

So—I see much more focus on listen[ing] to the public and working with them on things and hopefully making the county and even better place than it is now.

WM: I mean—you talk about the county is not completely built out, but there is not a whole lot of room to expand into, so they would have to sort of re-define, re-develop what's here. Is that [right]?

BS: I think what it is that, in Florida and other parts of our country we've become focused on development as absolutely necessary. Yet if you look at the history of development in other areas, there are a lot of areas that haven't had a population growth and yet have a vibrant economy. So there is more to it than just bulldozers and putting buildings in. There are some other things that come in and make your economy work. I think that's what—you've got other industries that have jobs producing things that aren't necessarily concrete. So I think there is some of that we'd probably get a lot more into.

Another thing, though that I want to mention that is in the Planning to Stay conclusion is that even though Pinellas County had an established population future, in terms of not expanding. Even more so it's important that we are a major regional player in things. And a player with the entire region in terms of what goes on and what happens.

Not only do we, to go through everybody else to get to Pinellas County, we just have vested interest in what the overall economy is, not to be left behind with all of that. So we want to be engaged with what future jobs there are, because people might live in the other counties and then come here. And there are still those people who live here and work

somewhere else. So it's sort of being engaged in the regional situation, probably even more [now] than in the past. Now we have a vested interest.

When you become a mature economy you sort of have a lot of external influences that affect you. That's what we're conscious of, so we want to be more engaged regionally. Being a regional leader entails everything from rail and transportation and other subjects like environmental protection.

WM: Um-huh. There's been a lot of talk about developing mass transit, at least over in Hillsborough County and like you said, Pinellas would certainly be influenced [by that].

BS: Oh yeah. In fact, one of the most obvious corridors to deal with, is we have the CSX rail line. It goes from Hillsborough County and loops through Pinellas. It's sort of circuitous when it enters the county, but by the time it hits downtown Clearwater, from Clearwater down to St. [Petersburg] it's a diagonal straight line. It's the quickest way to get from Clearwater to St. Pete as the crow flies. One of the corridors that makes the most sense rail-wise, in the region, is the Clearwater to St. Pete line.

Therefore, when the question came up we've pretty much have refocused our interest to actually look at that corridor and talking to CSX about what to do with it.

Also we were talking about doing it in the context of a regional group, a regional authority, knowing that as you look at rail, it's something that needs to be looked at on a regional basis. But if it doesn't happen regionally at least we'd want to do it ourselves. But think we'd want to do it, again that whole thing about wanting to be part of the region, a regional leader, is that we're willing to do whatever it is that works with everybody else.

But it sure makes some sense, in our future, to be finding some other way to move besides the automobile.

WM: Oh absolutely. I could start talking about [the ills of] the car now and not stop. So I don't to do that.

I've been throwing questions at you for the past hour and a half, is there anything you want to comment on that I haven't asked about? I know there is a lot of territory to cover, but—um—

BS: No, I would really say you've covered it pretty well. Probably the only fill-in-the-gaps comment I would make is that therefore in terms of future development, what we see is in the industrial belt area, in the middle of the county. Also, in our downtown areas where we're trying to focus new development and the rest. The advantage to that is being able to do it on livable community basis. Because your downtowns are where you have the non-automobile focus. But if you're going to increase [population] densities there, you need to make sure you've got pedestrian movement, trail connections, transit and

things like that. Therefore, I think our focus of the future is going to be that. Then, how to come up with some alternative ways to move around besides the automobile.

So I think you've pretty well covered the gamut.

WM: Okay. Again thank you for taking the time to talk with me. And I always remind people that the information you've shared with will be deposited in the Special Collections of the University [of South Florida's] Library. I also have a release form that I have to ask you to sign, so that people can have access to this interview.

BS: That's fine.

WM: Okay. And I've been photographing everyone I've interview. Do you mind if I take your picture?

BS: No problem. Sure.

WM: Okay. Great. Let me stop this thing.

***End of interview***