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

Interview with: Mr. Dennis Carlton
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Location: Dover, Florida
Date: June 27, 2006
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Audit Edit Date: November 28, 2007
Final Edit by: Nicole Cox
Final Edit Date: December 06, 2007

WM: This is Bill Mansfield from the Patel Center for Global Solutions talking with Mr. Dennis Carlton at his home in Dover, Florida on June 27, 2006.

We always have people start off by having them state their name and telling us when they were born and where they were born. So let her go.

DC: All right, Dennis Carlton. I was born in 1952, Tampa General Hospital.

WM: What month?

DC: May, May the 14th.

WM: So you're a native Floridian?

DC: A native Floridian.

WM: Good. I like talking to local folks. What's your current occupation?

DC: I'm in the citrus and cattle business and in the real estate business.

WM: A lot of the citrus people I've talked to said they were in the real estate business because with canker and everything else it was worth their while to sell off some of their acreage.

DC: Right canker and "greenie."

WM: Chip Hinton said I should talk to you because you were on the Farm Bureau. [See Chip Hinton interview with Bill Mansfield 2-28-06.]

DC: I'm a member of the Farm Bureau, past president of Hillsborough County Farm Bureau and with Chip, I'm on the Soil and Water Conservation Board and also the Agricultural Economic Development Council.

WM: Uh-huh.

DC: And on the Federal Land Bank Board, which is a leading agricultural leader and also on the Valrico State Bank Board.

WM: I guess we can start out talking about the Farm Bureau. My first question on that is, who makes up—who are the members of the Farm Bureau in this area?

DC: You want the names?

WM: (laughs) Not the names—and I should say that some of these questions might sound kind of foolish and simple [to you], but I figure a historian fifty years from now might [be glad I asked them].

DC: (laughs) Okay. The Farm Bureau is all encompassing, in the fact that it [includes] all commodities. It's a member organization. It's the largest agricultural—mm—what would be the proper word? I don't want to say lobbyist group.

WM: Advocacy group?

DC: Advocacy group, there we go. Because it [represents] all commodities, all agricultural commodities.

WM: Uh-huh.

DC: And part of that—uh—under that umbrella comes policy, which is made by the members. A lot of what the Farm Bureau does, obviously is it's an advocate group for the farmers. They're very active politically. They have a full time lobbyist, both in Tallahassee [Florida] and Washington [DC] and [they] look after the agricultural interest of the people in Florida. It's policy driven, by the members. So they're not off—the staff is not off running around doing what they think they need to do, they are instructed by the membership as to what is of interest to the organization. That's the way that thing works.

WM: Sounds like the way most things ought to work.

DC: That's the way they're supposed to work. (laughs)

WM: So tell me what the Farm Bureau does, and I'm speaking locally, than state wide and nationally, but tell me what you all do here in Hillsborough County, to effect land use policy.

DC: Typically you will find people on most boards, and this is true of the Farm Bureau, are people that are interested, And they are interested in land use, water use, environmental issues, things that revolve around the land. Because, obviously, the common denominator amongst all of them is the land.

Farm Bureau, on a local level is very active politically. I think part of that is just, obviously, is because of the make up of the board. Over the years [it] has worked diligently to know the different county commissioners; know the legislators, and to interact with them on issues that are important to us. That can be anything from taxation to land use. So—uh—I guess the big common denominator is that they are all landowners or people who have interest. You wouldn't have to be a landowner to be a member, but it has assimilated into that. I guess they are stakeholders, is what you'd call it. They have a true stake in the community.

WM: Uh-huh.

DC: Farm Bureau also has an insurance side, where they sell insurance. A lot of the farming community buys insurance as a member service.

WM: But you said, because of the membership—well I guess you answered that question, because they are farmers. But is there any kind of average farmer that's a member of the Farm Bureau?

DC: You don't have to be a farmer to be a member. You can be a—anyone can be a member of it. But most of the active membership are farmers. Okay?

WM: I can imagine, like an equipment dealer would be a member.

DC: Absolutely. He'd be a member of Farm Bureau. He may not own an acre of land, but he could be [a member]. But what I'm trying to say is those that are most active in it typically are the true agriculturist.

Insurance is a big part of what Farm Bureau does and you have to be a member in order to buy the insurance. Okay, so they may sell a homeowners' policy in Brandon, and that person has to become a member of Farm Bureau in order to buy that insurance. So in that sense you will have a lot of people that are members, but they are not truly the active members. That's the best way to say it.

WM: Okay. How would you describe the average active member? Would you say they are cattle people, citrus people, big farmers, small farmers—

DC: Woo! No.

WM: tropical fish farmers—

DC: All of the above. There is no such thing as average.

WM: Okay.

DC: You know you've got people that have got—I think about nurserymen. I know one of the past presidents was probably one of the largest nurserymen in Hillsborough County. Yet we have people on the board now that are very small nurserymen. So you've got both ends of the spectrum, large and small. From a board perspective, you're trying to find people that want to be engaged and want to make a difference. [People] that are willing to spend some time at it.

WM: You said that you worked to get to know the county commissioners?

DC: Yeah, the thing is—and this is where you're going to end up at some point today—is that the land is owned, at least out in this part of the world, primarily by the agricultural community. They've got a big stake in what happens as far as real estate is concern.

WM: Uh-huh.

DC: I've often told people, and I'll tell you this, [the] local county commission has more influence on my life (speaking financially) than does my state senator. The reason being is all land uses are local. So everything that happens locally goes through downtown Tampa. [It] goes through the planning commission. [It] goes through the county commission. So, obviously you've got an interest. You need to know your commissioners, so that they know who you are and can respect you, so you can have some influence with them. I don't mean that influence in a bad way; I mean that in a good way.

WM: Right. Lobbyists have a bad reputation, but what they do is often educate people about what's going on.

DC: Right! Absolutely.

WM: So would you say the Farm Bureau helps educate the county commissioners?

DC: Absolutely. They do a tremendous job of that. I'll—one of the things that has nothing to do with it and its kind of a side note—When you came in you heard me talking on the phone. I was talking about Stephen Gran. [See Stephen Gran interview with Bill Mansfield 6-28-06.]

Stephen Gran works for the Hillsborough County Agricultural Economic Development Council, [which] is the offshoot of a task force we started in 1996, that dealt with taxation. What that taxation did—and I don't know how far you want to get into this. If I ever start somewhere that you don't want to go just tell me.

WM: I'll do it.

DC: But the taxation was—The general premise of the public is that the farmers get a tax break on their real estate, because it's "green belted." Well, we did a study to find out about services. What services were required by the rural community and what the taxes were.

What we found out, in '96 (the numbers have changed a little [since then]), but for every dollar worth of taxes sent in to Hillsborough County, we received sixteen cents in services.

Well, the first thing that somebody would ask you or me is, "How could that be?" And my common answer is, "Cows don't go to school." The only [service] you're supplying is a little bit of sheriff, a little bit of police [protection]. Some education, very little.

WM: You can't teach a cow very much.

(laughter)

DC: No. So it's a matter of requiring [very few] services. It was a positive influence financially. It was a very eye-opening experience to Hillsborough County. They began to see the importance of agriculture, not only from job creation but also from taxation. Okay? And from that we started the Agricultural Economic Development Council, which came two or three years later. And it's still with us today.

In that Council, Stephen Gran keeps the agricultural informed as to what's happening in Hillsborough County. Sometimes we will have—we will be asked occasionally, by the Commissioners [something like] "What can we do for agriculture?"

They understand that it supplies open space, water recharge, and wildlife habitat. All the things the people of the community want, the ag-community supplies at no cost.

WM: Uh-huh.

DC: So those are things that our commission understands, while in most urban settings, the commissioners do not understand.

WM: One of the things that Chip Hinton said was that most people think agricultural land is agricultural land because you can't think of anything better to do with it.

DC: Yeah.

WM: But that brings me to a question, I've read that cities want to expand because when they take in territory, that increases their tax revenue.

DC: My take on that?

WM: Yes.

DC: The reality is—and the cities are beginning to figure this out, that’s not always the case.

For example, Plant City was wanting to annex a pile of land. They had somebody go and do an economic feasibility study. It came back, basically, that wasn’t going to work. The reason it wasn’t going to work, if you start supply –if you start incorporating a bunch of land and you’re going to have to supply sewer and water, police and fire [protection], you can’t make it pay with those services.

The homeowner—I’m going to say it—I’ll go out on a limb and the average price home in Hillsborough County [and] take the tax bill, it will not cover the cost for the services it requires.

People think they pay way too much in property taxes, but if own a home, you’re getting a heck-of-a deal. Because the guy that’s paying for it is the agricultural community, which on the big scale, not many dollars, but the commercial entity is the one that’s really paying for it—paying for those services. Because that’s where you’ve got all of the assessment.

WM: The commercial entity?

DC: Warehouses, restaurants, strip [malls]. You know? All of those things [are] what fuels the economy. That’s what fuels the tax revenue

WM: How does the Farm Bureau shape the land use policies of the—

DC: The Farm Bureau won’t shape the land use policy. The land use policy is shaped by the planning commission. The planning commission—do you know, or care to know about land use or how it operates?

WM: Sure that would be great.

DC: Okay. In Florida we have something called the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. I’ll simplify it and say it’s a map over view of each county. That “Comp plan” is made up by the people. In this case the people of Hillsborough County have a plan; they send it to DCA, the Department of C—I can’t remember the—I know it’s DCA but I can’t remember what it stands for.

WM: (laughs) Okay.

DC: The Department of Community Affairs. [The plan] goes to Tallahassee and it is either approved, or not approved.

And if it's approved and then comes back, then you have an "approved Comprehensive Land Use Plan." That "Comp Plan" then designates what can happen in certain areas, what is possible. Doesn't mean that it's going to, but it's possible.

For instance: If you're in an AR zoned property Comp Plan.

WM: And AR stands for what?

DC: AR [agricultural residential] would be one [housing] unit for five acres.

WM: Okay.

DC: You can't even apply for zoning of one unit per acre. I mean you can't even apply for it. In order to apply for something the Comp plan has to allow for it.

For example, in the area where I live the Comp plan calls for one unit per acre. So if I had forty acres, the highest density I could even ask for would be forty houses. So it's kind of an over-lay.

From there you go to a zoning [plan]. So you have your Comp plan, with an over-lay then you go before the County Commission to rezone something. And that's the way the land use process works.

Now when we start talking about shaping policy, Farm Bureau would have some input in some respects, but not typically on the Comp plan. It would be more with the definitions within each category.

I got involved in land use issue that dealt with nurseries in a residential area. In trying to come up with a guidelines, I had some input on that and you might want to talk with Stephen about that—what they did to come up with some language. Where the Ag-Economic Development Council (some of the members that are on that) a lot of the members that are on that [council] are old Farm Bureau members. It just happens to work that way.)

But we had an issue with the fruit stands, panhandlers, peddlers, if you will. The county would ask for our input. "We've got a problem. How do we solve it? What do we need to do? Where should they be allowed? Where should they be prohibited?" So they'll ask for input from the Ag-Economic Development Council. So I would say to you, the Farm Bureau is important but the AEDC is where the County goes for information concerned with agriculture.

WM: I guess I was thinking, say they were planning to re-zone some area for (speaking hypothetically) an industrial park. The agricultural people say, "That's going to impact our water supply and our land use." So how would you all go to try and effect change in zoning regulations?

DC: Here's what you'll find out, and it deals with property rights. Most agriculturists, most people that own land, feel like the other man should, pretty much be able to do what he feels like is right. If you're not affecting me, if you're not depreciating my asset, if you're not hurting my land, I'm all right with it.

Now you'll run in to the flip side of that, when the ag-man goes in there to re-zone, everybody in the neighborhood is raising Cain about it. They have a different thought process when it deals with property rights. I don't fully understand why, but it's just the way it is.

WM: But there could be instances where the other man's property would negatively impact your property.

DC: Then, if that'd be the case, what you're talking about, if you're going to change it, you're talking about a Comp Plan change. You would go before the Planning Commission and speak at the planning commission, in opposition to it. The Planning Commission would then make a recommendation that comes to Hillsborough County. At that point you could talk to your County Commissioners and they could either [give you] a thumbs –up or thumbs-down on the Planning Commission's recommendation.

WM: You talked about how the County Commissioners affect you more than the representative in Tallahassee and in Washington.

DC: Absolutely.

WM: Tell me more about that.

DC: All land issues are local. So any zoning, which gives you the ability to do something with your land, is done on a local basis. So the people you elected to the county commissioners are the ones that approve or deny zoning. Zoning creates value.

The interesting thing is and this is something that comes out, you'll have other people tell this—remember I talked about the Comp Plan?

WM: Uh-huh.

DC: Within a Comp Plan you're able to ask for a certain amount of density. If you call the Planning Commission and ask them, "How many units do we have that we can build within the urban service areas?" They will give you a number. (I don't know what it would be.) But whatever the number is, I'd tell you; "It's in the urban service zone. It's in a land use category. We've got the comp plan. Now we're going to go zone it."

When we go to zone it, we go down to the county commission and everybody speaks and talks about it. And, hypothetically, it may be a "red –6 area," allows up to six units per acre. The Comp plan says "This is where we want the growth and this is what we think is

applicable.” (Not always but most of the time.) When it gets down there the public sentiment will drive the Commission to, almost always give less density.

So, —I ’m rambling a little bit here—but what I’m showing you is, while we have the Comp Plan, when it gets time to zone, if you’re not careful they’ll fold because of public outcry. No matter what you do, nobody wants increased density in their area. I don’t care if it is one unit to five acres, or ten units to the acres. Nobody wants it to happen. They want to be the last person here. That’s just human nature.

So you need commissioners with plenty of “back bone,” that are willing to do what I best for the area, follow the growth plan that’s set out and utilize it.

WM: But aren’t there other interests that would want to see more density. When I say that I think, home builders associations.

DC: Yes and they will ask for it. Typically the planning staff will say, “This is consistent with the Comp Plan, and we think it’s appropriate.” But all of the neighbors will stand up and say —

I’ll give you a real life story, which puts it all in perspective.

WM: Great.

DC: We had a piece of land in downtown Brandon. It was approximately 100 acres. It had development on four sides. It is what is considered an in-fill piece. It was a beautiful piece of land.

When we wanted to sell it, and it was time to zone it, the county staff recommended so many units [per acre]. We had a tremendous neighborhood outcry. People left it like [it was]. They wanted the Parks Department to make a park out of it. They wanted one unit to five acres. They didn’t want any density. They didn’t want any townhouses. There was absolutely no support [for this] within the community. The reason being more traffic, it absolutely did, but it was in an area [where] growth is supposed to take place.

We got it zoned. I don’t remember. I don’t think we got as many units as was allowed. But we got pretty good density on it, and sold it.

But my point is everybody that lived in those subdivisions lived on a piece of land, just like this was, but they didn’t want any more [development] in the neighborhood. This is typical of what you see. I understand that.

I mean, I live where I live here and I don’t want to see any more houses. But I realize people have property rights and that’s what supposed to happen and what will happen. You try to plan and do the best you can for it.

WM: Now in that example that you just gave, was that you as a realtor selling that land?

DC: No. It was land we owned.

WM: Okay. So the local people were against it, but it was in your interests to sell it with denser population on it?

DC: Yeah. Density creates value, within a certain reason. In that case we were in an area surrounded by subdivisions. Well, the highest and best use, the most appropriate use for this land was a subdivision and that's what went there. The only point that I was making, the point that I was really trying to make was, while the urban service area calls for a certain density, that is not what always takes place, because of the outcry of the community, not wanting it. And that's what causes urban sprawl. That's a whole different issue.

WM: (laughs) I appreciate you bringing that up, because that puts faces on [what is often an anonymous drama]. Tell me, in more detail, about the hearings that took place.

DC: We had tremendous opposition, so we had town hall meetings, to get with the neighbors to try come up with some resolution. And basically what it was, was trying to negotiate something that made everybody happy. Which we, obviously, did not do.

WM: Uh-huh.

DC: What we did was take some density and put it inside the subdivision and had the bigger lots on the outside of the subdivision. Just some planning techniques that are pretty common. We do [that] all the time any way.

WM: Kind of creating a buffer?

DC: Yeah, and maybe having some buffer. [It's one of the] things that you do. But you always have the people (and I just did a rezoning up north of here, a classic case.) You do the buffer and all; they still go to the mike [at the public meetings] to say " We don't want any more zoning here. We don't want anymore houses. We want it to stay rural. " In that case in Brandon, the family (this was my wife's family's property) had owned the land for 70 or 80 years. A lot of the neighbors that were complaining about it were on land my wife's family had previously owned. But when it got down to the last piece, they didn't want it zoned. They wanted to leave it like it [was].

We're all guilty of that.

WM: Change is hard to take.

DC: Yeah, change is a hard thing.

WM: The people who came to oppose this, did they have any kind of organization?

DC: Oh yes. Oh yes. They hired a lawyer in this case.

WM: Was it like a homeowners association?

DC: What it is, is a group of people will get together and kind of form—and they'll come up with a name. "Down-south County Save Our Bay," or [something like that] and they'll have a group. They're learning. The people are learning about being able to, to—and this is a good thing, provided the motive is right. Get together and come forth with a plan, or come forth on an issue.

Now what happens with those things, and this is a whole different issue, is anybody can speak before the commission and say anything you want to say. I mean you can say the most outrageous thing in the world and it doesn't make any difference. So when ever you're dealing with those issues, I'm very careful about what I say. I want it to be very factual. You're not going to call me back and say this was a lie. That ain't happening. So I'm very careful.

For those kinds of organizations people will get up and make very general, broad based statements that are not correct.

WM: They're more emotional than factual?

DC: Absolutely. Absolutely. And some of them will come forth as though they are facts, but they're just not! I think a lot of that—it won't be their sources but maybe—They will state their opinion as though it were fact.

WM: When something is important to you like that— it can cloud [your thoughts].

DC: Yeah, that happens sometimes.

WM: You talked about you're doing some re-zoning here in the county, or working on it? Could you tell me about that?

DC: Absolutely.

WM: Okay.

DC: [I] had a forty-five acre tract that was in a Comp plan of one unit per acre, which would allow you to ask for up to forty-five units. We worked with county staff. I don't do this, but you hire engineers. (I don't do this it's not my area of expertise.) The engineer that I hired came up with forty units, which is less than the [maximum] but very acceptable. Had the lay out. We had tremendous opposition from the neighborhood.

What was interesting, I don't want you to think that I'm—I think everybody's got rights, but you've got to be careful about what you say.

This was forty-five acres and we were doing a “PD” which is a plan development. This allows bigger lots here, smaller lots there. The interior, ones—like we talked about—are smaller. Bigger lots on the outside, We drew this “PD” up, where the lots on the outside would be the width, or wider than all of the adjacent lots. Lots in the middle are smaller. The word got out on the street that there were going to be ninety lots!

I had the land under contract and I had a man call me and say, “What are you doing?” [I replied] “Re-zoning it.” He knew that. He asked, “How many lots are you getting?” I said “Forty.” He said, “Everybody told me you’re going for ninety lots!”

First of all under the Comp plan, you couldn’t even have asked for ninety lots, so I said, “No, we never have.”

This thing took on a life of its own. The [Tampa] Tribune even wrote an article. Wrote two or three articles. Never did get it correct! Never did get it correct! [They were] talking about the number of lots in this subdivision and what was taking place.

I don’t usually get too excited. I don’t get excited about these things. I don’t let them [bother me]. What happened is what happened. But it was interesting at the zoning [hearing]. This lady came up to me and was just chewing me out.

I’m telling you this to kind of set the stage so you’ll understand.

We had a big audience there, and when she got through I asked her, I said, “I want to ask you one question.” She said, “What’s that sir?” “I want you to tell me how many lots are in this subdivision?”

Now we had already been through the whole process saying there’s forty lots, okay? I knew that she might think there was ninety. At the end of the day, she didn’t know how many lots there were. But she was mad. Everybody was upset. And you could not get the truth. You could not make them understand what the truth was. They were angry. They wanted no more density in their area and it didn’t make any difference what you were doing. We never did make them happy.

It ended up [getting] approved for thirty-six lots. The reason for thirty-six lots? Because there were a lot of people there complaining. And the Zoning Hearing just [cut] it, by four lots. He felt like, “Okay, I’ve got this pressure. I’m going to give up on the density just a little and make them happy.” They could not have [denied the re-zoning] because it met all of the requirements.

You had sheriff’s [department protection], schools, fire [department coverage]. All the agencies were fine with it. The zoning staff recommended approval for forty lots. But at the end of the day, I still lost four lots. Still lost some density.

Tape 1, side 1 ends; side 2 begins.

DC: And that's what I'm talking about, when I refer to any project that you do, they'll always whittle at you on the density.

WM: I can only imagine that you weren't pleased with losing those four lots.

DC: I wasn't pleased and the reason I wasn't pleased—and I'll tell you this, economically it made no difference, because the man who owned it understood you needed a density and he cut the price. So, that came directly out of his pocket.

I was a little upset with it was absolutely arbitrary. It should not have been done. There was no claim. Nobody ever gave any reason for why, thirty-six was the right number and forty wasn't.

WM: It sounds like they were throwing a sop to the people who objected.

DC: Absolutely. Because all of the lots on the outside were going to be the same width or wider than any lot that touched it. I told the commission and I told the audience I said, "I promise you, if you ride through that subdivision, you can't tell me whether there're thirty lots or forty in that subdivision." You can't do it. You can count them but you can't walk out there and look and say this looks like a thirty-lot subdivision or this looks like a forty-lot subdivision. You can't do that.

WM: Somebody said that's what a compromise is, a solution that satisfies neither party.

DC: Right. And I told the audience, "Well, I'm not happy and you're not happy. I guess this makes the commission happy."

WM: Oh, but it's interesting. Now you talked about the sheriff's department, the fire department—

DC: These are all people who make comments in reference to a project, whether [or not] they have the capacity for the different issues you've mentioned.

WM: So they all weigh-in, to the decision?

DC: Yes.

WM: And then public sentiment comes into it too?

DC: Right.

WM: What about, I was talking to Mr. Hugh Gramling [See Hugh Gramling interview with Bill Mansfield 6-26-06] and he was talking about water usage as being—ah—check and balance on development and agriculture too, for that matter.

DC: Yeah. The Southwest [Florida] Water Management District is in charge. Originally it was a flood control agency and now they're in charge of water. All of our water is metered. There are certain areas of the county where you cannot get any water. There is an ongoing challenge to agriculture to have enough water. The Water Management District is deliberately (and I'm not saying whether it's good or bad, I'm just telling you what the facts are) trying to cut the amount of water that agriculture has [access to]. I base that on the fact that any time you change a commodity, you automatically lose 10 percent [of your water allocation], period. That's a 10 percent reduction because of the change.

WM: When you say "change of commodity" [what do you mean]?

DC: Citrus to strawberries.

WM: Okay.

DC: It doesn't mean that you're asking for more water. You're just changing and they whack you, period.

WM: So if you turn your citrus grove into a strawberry field, you're going to lose 10 percent [of your water]?

DC: Yes, 10 percent. If you change commodities, there's a whole modeling process that goes with this. In certain areas—now you may lose 10 percent of your permit, but you might get a permit to drill another well, for some more water. Okay?

Or you might not, depending on the location where you are. But in south [Hillsborough] county, some of those areas are in the most impacted areas, you're not going to get any more [water]. What you have is all you're going to get.

Now you can transfer water. I told you that when you change commodities you lose 10 percent. It's when you transfer water you lose 10 percent. In other words, if I've got two properties and I'm going to move this water from here over to here; even if it's the same geographical location they're going to cut this permit some. They're not going to let you just take it all over here.

Ah—the biggest problem in Florida is not water. We've got all of the water in the world. It rains fifty-some inches [per year]. But it's distribution. That's the biggest problem.

We have a phobia about wastewater in the sense that nobody wants to drink the water that comes from any kind of wastewater. I will tell you that in the Mississippi River that's been—when you start at the top of the Mississippi and by the time it gets to the Gulf [of Mexico] it's run through about forty people.

WM: (laughs)

DC: 'Cause every little town's got a pump on this side, where the water comes in, and another on the other side, where they treat it and put it back in. But here in Florida, at least in the Tampa Bay area, we can't seem to get that done.

WM: But, I've read about salt water moving into the aquifer, because the fresh water has been pumped out.

DC: Salt water intrusion, yes.

WM: And sinkholes developing because the water table's been—

DC: Dropping.

WM: So it doesn't support the ground.

DC: Municipalities, agriculture and mining [are] the big users of the water. I think the municipalities use more water than anybody does now. The problem we have had, and we're getting away from it, 'cause they finally just couldn't do it any more, because of environmental issues. They pumped all the water that was used for municipalities came from ground water. Now with the new reservoir, with the desalinization plant, some of that is changing.

But for years, every drop [of water] came from the aquifer. That's where the problem came [from]. We just sucked it dry.

WM: Uh-huh

DC: All of this new growth requires more water. So we're going to have to continue to supply [the water]. No, how are you going to supply it? You can't pump it out of the ground. It will be another desalinization plant or another reservoir. That's what it will end up being.

WM: It seems like that the agricultural interest, there is sort of an adversarial relationship between the agricultural interest in water and the expanding municipalities.

DC: Uh-huh. Well, because it finite. You can't put but so many— it's like Gerald Davis told me (he was chairman of SWIFTMUD at one point), "You can't put but so many straws in the ground."

So you're right. There is, sort of—I wouldn't call it adversarial, but it borders on that. What we've had happen in the past; is the municipalities (they won't do this as much now) but they will come out in a rural area and buy an acre of land, put a well that big [holds up hands to indicate a large well] in there and suck all of the water from out of the ground. That's where the adversarial situation has really come in.

But with the fact that they have to permit this water now, we're not seeing that as much. That's the reason I refer to the reservoir and the desalinization plant [as the solution].

WM: Chip Hinton said that was something that helped organize—

DC: What it did out in this area is it helped organize the farmers. [They] had to get together; 'cause they were going [to be driven] out of business. Agriculture with no water is worth nothing.

WM: (laughs)

DC: It's just that simple. It ain't going to happen. An agriculture is a big part of our [economy]. People don't realize that. It's not [just] the growing the crop, it's all the labor, all the transportation. [It's] the packing houses—you have all that labor in the packing houses. Ah—the retail side of agriculture. Then you've got the brokerage houses, right on down in to Publix and Winn Dixie, etceteras. It's a big part of what we do.

Then you've got the suppliers to agriculture. The irrigation people, the fertilizer sales people. All the jobbers that make it work.

WM: I'm very much aware of what agriculture contributes to the community, but it does always seems like if a place they can replace agriculture with [manufacturing] that's what they want to do. Industry gets a lot more support than agriculture does and that always puzzled me.

DC: Yes. You made a statement earlier on, that people look at the land and think you grow something on it because that's all you can do with it.

Well, that's not the case. I mean right where I'm living I made a conscious decision that I don't want anything to happen [to my land]. I'm going to keep it in groves. And I've got the strawberry field over there and that stuff. Well there are other things I could do with this land, but I don't want to. That gets to be a personal choice.

WM: Uh-huh. But I guess its like Chip Hinton said there is sort of a natural bias against agriculture.

DC: Yes, I would say that is true.

WM: Who would you say are the different groups working [to] affect land use? I mean the Farm Bureau is one. The homebuilders association would be another.

DC: The Sierra Club would be one.

WM: Uh-huh.

DC: Sierra Club, homebuilders, the Farm Bureau, obviously. You've got individuals owners, big landowners. Robert Thomas would be one. Robert had worked on some land use deals. I'm not that big of a landowner but I've worked on these different issues, both Comp plan issues and zoning issues. Then you've got different civic associations. The Keystone Civic Association, the Balm, Seffner, all have associations that have a lot to say about land use.

The homebuilders association understands the issues and they understand how it works. A lot of the civic associations (Boy, this will get me in trouble.) don't really understand it.

WM: Uh-huh.

DC: They're mad. They don't want anymore growth and they'll just stand up and make big broad generalities. But [they] don't really understand the issue. The only issue they understand is that, "We don't want anymore houses in our neighborhood. We've got enough traffic. I don't want to see anybody else come in here. "

WM: That's kind of a "Not in my back yard!" mentality.

DC: Absolutely.

WM: Part of it is people move out to the country to get away from the city and—

DC: The city comes to them.

WM: And they object to that and they want to build until they're finished and then nothing more after that.

DC: Right!

WM; I want to ask this, before I forget, but the homebuilders association, who would be a good person to talk to in the homebuilders association?

DC: Ah—I can't pronounce his name. Ask Stephen Gran. It's Joe, and it begins with an "N" and it's "sky" [pronounced ski] on the end of it.

WM: Okay. One of the problems I have is trying to pronounce names.

DC: Oh, this one is [difficult].

WM: What do you see happening in Hillsborough County? How do you see the growth and land planning playing out?

DC: (sighs) The urban service area is going to continue to get the majority of the density. That's the way the system works. The rural area breaks down into two categories.

The first one in the area that is zoned one unit per acre, which is all of that [area] between Tampa and Plant City. Okay. I should have said Brandon and Plant City. That land is going to continue to be busted-up and sold in one acre tracts as fast as people can make them. As fast as the demand will allow. The land out in the rural areas is going to be developed in those long thin five-acre blocks that cause urban sprawl. You can't legislate where people live.

DC: And if a man wants to live out in the woods, out in the AR category (one to five units per acre) and have a few horses and cows—

A lot of people, [who] want to live out there, don't want the horses and cows themselves, they want to be around it. They'll buy five acres, build a house and just let the rest of it grow up.

WM: Uh-huh.

DC: But you're going to see this land—you will continue to see smaller and smaller and smaller parcels [of land].

I've been in the real estate business about thirty years. What we have seen is—and I won't bore you with this, but I can think of lots and lots of places that were [once] big acreage, that are now little acreage.

A hundred-acre parcel in south Hillsborough County is a pretty big parcel. At one time that would have been considered a very small one. If you take out what the phosphate companies own, the rest of that land is rapidly being urbanized, in sprawl—five-acre blocks.

WM: Everything I have read about sprawl says it's not good.

DC: No, it's not.

WM: How do you see controlling that?

DC: You can't, because people want to live there and you can't tell them they can't live there. There are things that can be done, and they are doing some of this in Pasco County. And some of the owners are raising Cain about it. It's a tough issue. That deals with clustering density.

In other words, telling a man, "Okay, your land is good for twenty units. Instead of using a hundred acres we'll go over here and take a ten-acre block and put acre home sites on it." If you could cluster and do some things like that.

But even with that, the problem is everything needs to get back to economics. And when the guy transfers his density—at the end of the day, he can't sell it for as much money as he could, if he sold it in five-acre blocks.

So you don't have any economic incentives for him to cluster a whole lot.

WM: I don't want to put you on the spot with this question, but I feel obliged to ask it.

DC: Sure.

WM: We've talked about property rights. You can't argue those. But it seems like it reaches a point where the individual property rights begin to affect the collective.

DC: Absolutely.

WM: So—

DC: What do you do? (pause) I don't have an answer for that. We talk about transferring densities. Whatever is done needs to be economically based, incentive based.

Now if you're going to collectively do that—and they've talked about it and nobody's ever been able to make this work. But to take density for example, they talk about density credits, a man selling his density down in a rural area for a guy to take it into an urban area to get a little increased density. But the demand is such that he can't transfer the density and come out whole.

What I mean by that is, he's still better off to sell it, in place where it is, than to—He can't get enough money for those credits. Nobody has come up with a plan, that I've seen, that takes care of the problem. And then you've got the problem of other people raising Cain about; "I want to live out there, why can't I live there?" I don't have a very good [answer] for that.

WM: I've read that [in] some places where water usage can limit [growth].

DC: But it won't in a rural area. Those are big parcels and they are not going to use that much water.

Another interesting thing that people don't think about—I'm going to use my house for example.

WM: Okay.

DC: If I give you a glass of water that came out of the ground, when you flushed the toilet in there a little while ago, that water came out from up the hill there, a couple of hundred yards. And it went back in the ground right here by the house. You just borrowed a little bit of [water] for a while.

Where you live in Tampa, when you flush [the toilet] it goes to the treatment plant, a long way off and [it] either ends up as reclaimed water somewhere or it's discharged into the by-pass canal.

So when we talk about water issues there's a difference there too. Water coming in and water going out. Most people don't ever think about that. In those rural areas, we're talking about, where everybody's got a private well, they'll have figures about how much water a home uses. A man will pull out his calculator and say, "The average house uses 150 gallons of water a day and you're going to have twenty houses. You're burning up 3,000 gallons a day."

Well, no. Not really I'm pumping it out of the ground, taking a shower and putting it right back in the ground. So that part of it is a little different.

WM: It's a complex issue and people sort of understand it and yet we still haven't found [a solution].

DC: It's so complex nobody can figure out how to solve it.

WM: I hope they can figure it out while I can still participate but I don't know that they will.

I've been throwing questions at you for about the past hour, or so. [looking at notes] Let me make sure I've asked the ones I want to.

I'd like to ask a little bit about the policy, the planning that goes on and is submitted to Tallahassee and they approve of it.

DC: Uh-huh.

WM: Who makes those decisions? How does that work?

DC: The planning staff.

WM: The planning staff?

DC: Yeah.

WM: And they come out of the county commissioners? They are part of county government?

DC: Right. They are educated planners that, I guess take input from citizens. At least they're supposed to, I don't know how much they take.

WM: (laughter)

DC: Then [they] come up with recommendations for a plan.

WM: Uh-huh.

DC: Some of that stuff gets to be very academic and not very practical.

I don't know how much you heard me talk to the gentleman that called me about Stephen Gran?

WM: You said that he [Stephen Gran] worked hard and knew what he was talking about.

DC: Basically, what I was saying, and I think I told the man, Stephen can take information, discern facts from fiction. In other words, if somebody is blowing smoke. And take that information and make practical use out of it. There is a great deal of difference between idealistic issues and realistic things. Planners, sometimes, can get very idealistic and not very realistic. Ah—and sometimes that gets to be an issue.

WM: There's a big difference between theory and reality.

DC: Absolutely.

WM: Sometimes that does get to be confusing.

DC: I'm not saying that's the case all the time. They work hard and try to listen to the people. Typically planners have very little appreciation for property rights. And I don't know that they are supposed to, okay? But I would say that they have very little appreciation for them. They are drawing lines on a map and those lines have tremendous impact on people, economically. And they're just drawing a map, anyway they go.

WM: It's very abstract to them?

DC: Very abstract!

WM: That's one of the things that Mr. Gramling said yesterday, is that this tension ultimately benefited people. It [helped] organize the farmers and who had people participating in democracy.

DC: Yeah. That's exactly right. They get involved in the process. Absolutely.

WM: You were talking about things are going to keep getting smaller. That the urban service area, the rural area would be divided up into smaller lots, rather the zoned land would be cut up into smaller and smaller lots.

DC: Absolutely. Smaller pieces of property. The big parcels—and we're seeing this now, you see this right now. Our land has appreciated in the last three or four years.

No, let's look at it this way, our land has appreciated in the past five years, 300 or 400 percent. It hadn't appreciated that much in the last forty years. We had this BIG upswing in value. Now all of a sudden—

Obviously commodity prices (strawberries, oranges, etc.) some of them have gone up, some of them have gone down—but basically haven't changed any. (That's a broad statement, 'cause oranges are better.) But basically they haven't changed. So your rate of return on your assets (Your ROA [rate of return]) have really shrunk. So you take a man that may own forty acres and all of a sudden he's worth a million and a half, or two million dollars, that was worth four hundred thousand dollars, five or six years ago? He's beating his head against the wall trying to make a living? He's got to make a—He's going to stop and say, "Is this what is best for my family? Or should I cash this chip in and do something different?"

WM: Some of the orange growers I talked to said the exact same thing. They hated to sell but in a way they had to. It was the best opportunity they had.

DC: Right.

WM: You said that the ROA. That stands for?

DC: Return on assets.

WM: Good. That's a new acronym to me.

DC: Well that's a banking term.

WM: Okay. Then I shouldn't be surprised that I don't know it

DC: Well that's all right.

WM: So you figure it's just going to get smaller and smaller. What about agriculture? What's going to happen with that?

DC: Agriculture, the dollar volume will continue to increase. The land base will continue to shrink. What will happen [is] you will see a conversion from low intensity agriculture, and I'm going to call citrus low intensity. Pasture is really low intensity, but we'll call citrus low intensity. Those commodities are going to leave.

Hugh Gramling's group [nursery growers] and Chip Hinton's group [strawberry farmers] are going to take over (that being the strawberries and foliage people, nursery people). Especially in the urban service area, they are the only ones that have a Chinaman's chance of making it. There's no other commodity—

Now you're going to have oddity like me. That land that I told you I was rezoning? I have no intention of selling that land. It's an orange grove and I'm going to either fix the grove or lease it to a berry grower. But it will stay in agriculture.

But that's kind of the rarity, most people won't do that.

WM: I interviewed Mike Lott [see Mike Lott interview with Bill Mansfield 6-23-06] He said, "I'm a farmer, not because I'm getting rich but because this is what I like. It's a way of life more than making a living."

DC: Yeah! I mean it's just like here where I've bought this land around here. This is personal, but I don't mind telling it. You asked me what I did and I told you that I was in the citrus, cattle and real estate business. Well the citrus business and cattle business ain't what bought this stuff. It's the real estate business!

That has enabled me to continue to enjoy what my family has done for generations and that is agriculture. Otherwise, there ain't no way you could ever buy this stuff [land] and keep it in agriculture. So that's a life style commitment that I've made. (If I was a bit smarter—[chuckles].)

WM: (laughs) Well how has—you said that the land appreciation has really gone up in the past five years. What are some other changes that you have seen?

DC: I've seen the land prices go up and I've seen the land usage change. In the—What part of the county do you want to talk about? If you want to talk about the south part of the county, there has been more change in the last five years, from River View, south to the Manatee County Line than there was in the last five hundred years.

What that change has been is hose agricultural areas, the [?Dickman?] Family, the [?Lyces,?] the [?Ellsburry's?], the [?Councils?]
—all of these families that I'm naming are no longer in agriculture. (Some are still farming in a limited way, but most of them are no longer in agriculture.) They all had land that became so valuable that they couldn't stand it. They had an economic opportunity to do something there and have done it.

That's the biggest change we've seen. All of that land use, because it's in the urban service area and that's where they want the density and that's where the density has come.

And it's a generation change. The fathers and grandfathers that bought that land and made a good living growing citrus, or tomatoes, or whatever they were doing, the younger generation comes along and all of a sudden, they couldn't make a living.

I will tell you that a man in 1950 that owned a hundred acre orange grove was [a] wealthy individual. I mean he drove a new Cadillac, if that's what he wanted. He was a wealthy individual. A man that owns a hundred acre orange grove today is starving to death. That's the difference.

WM: Could you explain that?

DC: Yeah, the cost of the commodity, over the last fifty years has not risen as rapidly as the costs have. In citrus the main cost is the labor. The cost of picking that citrus today—

We've had a big increase in citrus prices in the last year. Three years ago, two years ago it took fifty percent of what an orange was worth, just to get it picked. I'm not talking about raising it; I'm talking about harvesting it. It was that large a part of the gross revenue.

That's changed some, now its probably thirty-five or forty percent, but the commodities—It's just like food in America, it's way cheaper today than it was twenty years ago, on a percentage of your income. The net profit is such that you can't make a enough money to keep a hundred acre orange and make a living out of it.

WM: That's what I've heard [that] labor is the biggest—expense.

DC: Labor is the biggest issue. And it's going to get—we've had the shortest [orange] crop we've had in twenty-five years. One-hundred-fifty million boxes of oranges. And we're still picking oranges and it's the end of June! We should have been through a long time ago. But it's a labor issue. Had we had the average two hundred million boxes of orange crop, there'd be twenty, thirty million boxes of oranges that would have never gotten picked. And I don't see that changing based on what I see.

Talk about border patrols and things.

WM: I've heard talk about trying to develop mechanical harvesters for oranges, but I just don't know if that's going to work.

DC: They have them, but—I'm not going to say that they're not successful—

Tape 1 ends; tape 2 begins.

DC: —most of the fruit is still picked by hand. So that will tell you something.

WM: You talked about the changes in the south part of the county, what about other parts of the county?

DC: That was the southwest part of the county. The southeast part of the county is still owned by phosphate industries. As we go north, the Keystone area (that's the northwest now)—the Keystone area all over there on the western side, that land has become developed. Up Van Dyke Road, up Dale Mabry all up in there [it's] pricey, pricey, pricey!

The land in the Plant City area, the land that was \$10,000 an acre, five years ago, is now \$40,000 to \$50,000 an acre. So it's seen a tremendous increase in price. We're seeing— Ask Stephen [Gran], he can get this information for you. How many permits have been pulled, how many more houses are in this area, than there were five or six years ago.

You can run right down this little road here, Moore's Lake Road and see all the new houses, little subdivision's springing up everywhere. It's a matter of people wanting to live a little outside of town. [They] want a little bit of land. They got I-4 to go to town.

WM: (laughs) They can get on I-4 to sit in traffic.

DC: Right, that's what you do.

WM: That's one of the things that people have talked about, growth in Florida has just amazed everybody. Folks still keep coming.

DC: They still keep coming. The housing market backed off some. Slowed down some. There will be some slow down, but if you look at the long term, if you look curve, the curve is going to remain pffft [makes a whistling sound to indicate rapid acceleration] going up, when you talk about the density of people moving to Florida. As long as that sun is shining and it's snowing up north, people are coming this way.

WM: (laughs) I can understand that.

Well, I've been throwing these questions at you the past hour, is there anything you want to comment on that I haven't asked about?

DC: I don't think so. I mean you're—I think the highlight of what we're talking about—with land use, you've got to balance property rights issues with issues that are of concern to the general public. The man that owns the land needs to be compensated for it.

When we talk about density we talk about the urban service area. We need to realize that the reality is while it may call for a certain amount of density, public outcry will be such that the [county] commission will weaken and that density will not go in those areas to the point that staff has recommended. You're going to see a continuation of [parceling-up] of properties outside of the urban service area. They are going to continue to get smaller and smaller and smaller.

We're going to continue to have problems with water. The major problem of water is not the amount but it's going to be the distribution and holding of it. How [can we] capture the resource, whether it be through desalinization, whether it be through reservoirs? We can only pump so much and we've probably already maxed that out.

We've talked about agriculture. I guess we're going to see a continuation of agriculture. We're going to see a continued increase in dollar amount, but we're going to see a change in crops from low density (we're talking about citrus, sod, pasture) those things

are going to go into foliage—nursery, ornamentals and strawberries. That’s where we’re going to see agriculture go. It’s just the nature of the beast.

Twenty years from now we’ll still have a vibrant agricultural community here in Hillsborough County but it will have a different face. And that’s it.

WM: Well I want to thank you for talking to me. I’m sure I’ll go back and listen to this and this will raise some more questions.

DC: What you’ll do is say, “This guy rambled for an hour and he hasn’t said anything.” (laughs)

WM: Oh no, I wouldn’t say that at all. And when you get the transcript of the interview you’ll be able to relive this moment.

DC: (laughs) Yeah.

WM: But I always remind people that the information you’ve shared with me will be deposited at the Special Collection Library at the University of South Florida and we’ll need permission.

DC: I understand, you’ve got that. No problem.

WM: Also I’ve been photographing the folks I’ve interviewed. Do you mind if I take your picture?

DC: No.

WM: Okay. Well let me turn this off.

End of interview