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

Interview with: Ms. Paula Harvey
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WM: This is Bill Mansfield [from the University of South Florida,] talking to Ms. Paula Harvey in the—What building is this?

PH: This is County Center.

WM: The County Center building in downtown Tampa on August 25, 2006. Ms. Harvey we always get people to start out by having them state their name and telling us when they were born and where they were born.

PH: Okay.

WM: So let her go.

PH: Well, my name is Paula Harvey. I'm a native of Tennessee, west Tennessee. In particular, Jackson, [Tennessee], where I was born and raised. I was born there in 1949.

WM: What's your birthday?

PH: May 14, 1949.

WM: Okay.

PH: I was educated in Tennessee. I went to college at Middle Tennessee State University, in Murfreesboro. That's where I actually met my husband. We were married in Tennessee. I have twin daughters, Lori and Renee and they were both born there as well.

In 1980 we elected to come to Florida. My husband was out of work at the time. The economy was not so great, but things were really booming in Florida, so we were told and what we understood. I had a couple of friends who had come down here as well. The job market was very, very good in my field, which is planning.

WM: Uh-huh.

PH: So I came down here and I interviewed in several places and I was offered a job. So we relocated to Florida in 1980. Um—we thrived down here, at least financially, and for our own security, we did. My children were students in the public school system, in Pinellas County. Ultimately [they] went to the University of Florida, both of them did. That's kind of my background, at least personally.

I started to work in Hillsborough County in 1989.

WM: I was going to say, tell me your occupation and describe that for me.

PH: Okay. Well my education is in urban planning. That's what my degree is in. I worked, initially, out of school I worked for the state of Tennessee as a planner, but strangely enough it was actually working in the field of criminal justice.

WM: Um-hm.

PH: The federal government had a federal grant program and we provided assistance, through the governor's office, [for] towns to improve their law enforcement functions, their court systems and the state correctional system as well. That's really where I worked and I worked there for quite a long time.

And then I moved to the Parks and Recreation Department for the state there. I got familiar with the park systems of the state of Tennessee and worked in that area. The importance of that is really, that it was my immediate background when I moved to Florida. The first job I got here in Florida was with the city of Tampa. I was a Parks and Recreation planner. That's how I started.

But I was only there for a very short time, because I was recruited to the city of Clearwater. [It was] in the city of Clearwater where I started working [in 1980] is the area of zoning and land use. I worked as a staff planner there for four years. Then I was promoted, actually to the director of the department.

My predecessor had gone to another organization in Pinellas County and the city manager appointed me in his place. I served as the planning director in Clearwater for five years, until 1989. I [was] offered a position in Hillsborough County as a manager for a part of what was known [at that time] as the Planning and Zoning Department.

Part of that job was dealing with zoning and land use matters. There were other functions that were assigned to the position, but those were the primary things that I dealt with. And within the first two years that I was with the department, there was a lot of reorganization that went on. Our department got larger. [The] building department and planning department merged with each other, as well as another department that was called the development services.

We all merged together into one large department. As a part of that reorganization there was a different alignment made of the management in the department and I was given the assignment, from the county administrator, as the zoning administrator for the county. So, there was a little bit more focus that was given to what it was that I did in my job, but now, all of a sudden I was doing it for the entire county. Before I had only been assigned a particular part of the county to deal with.

I've served in that capacity ever since, but over the years my role in all of the things that I do, my supervisory authority has expanded to where now I'm actually head of one of the major divisions in the department. That's pretty much what I do.

WM: What's your specific title?

PH: I'm the Director of the Planning and Zoning Division of the Planning and Growth Management Department.

WM: Okay.

PH: (chuckles)

WM: That's a mouthful.

PH: It is a mouthful.

WM: Okay. You've talked about how you got to this position, but tell me, describe exactly what it is you do.

PH: Well, there're several things that we do. Let me start with the community planning aspect of it, if you will.

WM: All right.

PH: The community-planning program has been in existence [in the county] now for almost ten years. We [and the Board of County Commissioners] were experiencing concerns by various neighborhoods and community areas throughout the county about, essentially what they described as threads of development that were going to change their lives and the quality of life in their community.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: They were looking for things to protect them.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: To protect them from big developments coming in and ruining things, although we had the comprehensive plan for the county. The comprehensive plan has very broad general policies. It doesn't get site specific or even area specific, per se with what it describes in its goals and policies. We have our own land use map, which brings a little bit more definition about what can go in an area, but even then, those categories are fairly broad.

The next step then for a member of the community is to see what the zoning code would do to them—the land development code, as we call it now. That was a big jump for them, going from a broad general policy into a specific item. It left a lot of room for applicants for zoning to come in and ask for all kinds of uses and changes on the zoning atlas.

I think the citizens really thought things were out of control. They practically begged and pleaded the Board of County Commissioners to figure out a different method, whereby the community itself could be more involved in making determinations about what was going to go on in their communities. So the Community Planning Program was created in Hillsborough County, to do just that.

Essentially, what we have done, and we do this program in conjunction with the Planning Commission—they work on it as well—so it is really a joint effort. The Planning Commission is a—I failed to mention this before, but they're actually a separate entity. They're not under the Board of County Commissioners. They're not under the County Administrator; they are a separate independent agency, that was established by a special act of the [State] Legislature, to provide for an independent review, if you will, of the long range planning of Hillsborough County.

The intent being that it is not necessarily governed by politics. And that's really why the agency was created.

Their responsibility is the comprehensive plan, which has a lot of different elements to it, more than just land use. There are other things that they address in it. But land use seems to be the one that gets the most attention.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: Seems to be the one that people are most interested in. So they play a part in it, they get involved in it. The idea was with the community-planning program that it would be an intervening step. It would be the next level—if you will—of a comprehensive plan and if a community plan was adopted, it actually becomes part of the comprehensive plan. So at that point it becomes regulatory.

The concept between comprehensive plan and zoning is that you can't do zoning except when it is consistent with the comprehensive plan. So, by building in community planning then, you've got zoning that has to be consistent with the community plan. That made the citizens feel like they were in a lot more control than maybe they had been before.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: [At this point, I would say] we are over half done with the county the county, over the ten years we've been working this program, to establish community plans for different areas of the county. In fact the very first plans that were done were actually done in the northwest part of the county and in Lutz, the least urbanized areas—if you will—of that part of the county.

Then we started moving into more urbanized areas. We've been, really, around the Bay with our plans. We've still got one little segment to do over on the water in the very south part of the county, south of the Little Manatee River. That will be coming up in the future.

What happens is we actually garner the forces of the community, we make big announcements that we're going to be coming to their area to work on a community plan. The concept is we get people's attention, they come and listen and decide if they want to participate. What we end up with then is what we identify as a "working committee." These would be [made up of] people from the community who are committed to working with the staff to come up with a community plan. Then take it back to the larger community to determine whether or not they like it or they agree with it or not.

Once that's all accomplished we take it to the Board of County Commissioners for official adoption into the comprehensive plan. But that's pretty much what the community planning staff is involved in.

Now there are a lot of other types of reviews that they do. Besides that main function we have a coordination role with the School Board and their planning staff, which is very important. We also provide, through that particular section the oversight for the Development of Regional Impact Program, "DRI's," which are—statutory defined as "Projects of such a size that they are presumed have impact on more than just one area." So we monitor that program and process the applications for DRI's in this section as well.

The other major thrust of the division that I manage is the zoning section. Zoning runs everything from "officially" rezoning applications, all the way to somebody just asking for administrative review to sub-divide a piece of property into two pieces of property. It includes our processing applications for variances and special uses—um—We do a lot of administrative work. We're authorized, under the land development code to do a lot of review and processing. Ah—it's just a matter of comparing somebody's request to what the regulations are in the code and either approving them or denying them. So we do a lot of that.

We provide ah—we're part of the site development review process. For everything site plan that gets reviewed in the county, the zoning staff is reviewing it to make sure that what's being proposed on a piece of property conforms with all the rules and regulations of the zoning.

The one function that we do that is probably the most time consuming, the one that gets the most public presence and the one that gets the most attention from the Board of County Commissioners is the re-zoning process.

Essentially what happens is zoning defines for somebody what they are allowed to do on a piece of property. It also defines what their development requirements are. Where they can put buildings, how high they can be, things like that. And [it defines] the uses that can go on inside those buildings.

If somebody wants to do something that's different than what the zoning is on their property, they are in a position where they have to re-zone. Because we can't—there is no way to administratively authorize somebody to do something that the zoning they have doesn't allow. So they have to go through a public hearing process. The process that they go through in Hillsborough County is, they file their application. It's reviewed by not only us, but a lot of other agencies besides us. Then it is scheduled for a public hearing in front of a hearing master.

The hearing master conducts a public hearing. All of this is noticed—the surrounding public [is notified]. People come to the hearing, they say whether they like it or don't like it. After that is done, the hearing master himself also makes a recommendation on this matter. So when an application goes to the Board of County Commissioners for final decision it goes with three formal recommendations: one from the planning and growth management department, one from the planning commission (regarding consistency with the plan) and then another one—which is the recommendation of the hearing master.

So the Board of County Commissioners, every second and fourth Tuesday, when they have their land use meetings, they're reviewing applications basically through a record that was established at the hearing, before the hearing master. They are the final decision-makers. They are the ones that are going to determine whether or not it can be approved or not. Then when the board's acted—most of them get approved. (coughs)—I apologize.

WM: That's all right.

PH: Most of them actually get approved. The thing is, for the ones that don't there is either a lot of public controversy attached to them. Somebody's got a lot of money and their paying a high priced attorney to represent them and they are going to go all the way with it, if they can. Or—they're having such a hard time with it in the review process they decided to withdraw it and they don't go any further.

So that is pretty much why I'd say the majority of them do get approved. It's because they are on the docket for consideration by the board, because they don't have public controversy against them. They were basically successful in getting through the process and addressed whatever issues there might have been—if there were any from the public around them, and they are proceeding on to the Board.

When that happens we actually put the m on the consent agenda for the Board of County Commissioners. They are not really discussed at all, they're presumed to be approvable by the Board, because everybody has recommended approval and there is no public controversy against them.

The Board's accepting of that and has their agenda structured so that we put those items on consent. The ones that are not on consent, are the ones that people see on TV, read about in the paper—um—end up having news stories [written about them] And in some cases end up making creating and making new politicians in the process. Because there will be activists and they will be involved in a zoning petition somewhere along the way.

WM: Is there an appeals process from the County Commissioners, or is that the last word?

PH: The only appeal—from the County Commissioners, there's two opportunities. One is actually provided through state law, under what they call a "Request for relief." The Bert J. Harris Act as it is known, that was adopted by the Florida State Legislature in 1995 provides that, if somebody's feels aggrieved by a decision of the government about any kind of permit or development order, they can be heard by a special master. In that process it describes who can participate in the process.

It is kind of a two-step thing. It encourages mediation, if you will. And no matter if it is mediated or not, the final determination by the hearing master is not final. It still requires an approval by the Board of County Commissioners. So it always has to go back.

Actually I've been the county's representative on all of them, since we started having them. About half of them have been approved by the board, when they went through that process. The rest of them, they were still not successful. There is no requirement that anybody has to go through that process but if they do—ah—it doesn't in any way prohibit them from, or keep them from pursuing action in court at some later date.

They all have the opportunity to go to straight to court right after they get a denial from the Board, if they want. They have thirty days to file that request to the court. That's the primary appeal route.

That's pretty much true all across the country. If somebody wants to appeal a re-zoning denial they're going to have to go to court to do it. It's only in Florida we have this unique property rights process that somebody can avail themselves of if they choose to. Some do. Some don't.

Some of them have actually gone straight to court. They didn't even fool with the other part of the process; they just went straight to court.

WM: Oh man, I've got several questions I want to ask.

PH: Go right ahead.

WM: Okay, I'm not sure where to start. I'd like to come back to the property rights process.

PH: Okay.

WM: But you said that the county planning program grew out of members of the community feeling threatened by development?

PH: What they saw was their quality of life deteriorating. You know, they would be in their particular neighborhood and all of a sudden, down the road, they'd find out here was going to be a big shopping center coming in, or a mall. And they had never even contemplated such a thing.

The average citizen does not have any familiarity, at all, with the zoning or the planning process in Hillsborough County. I don't fault them for that. I mean people are busy with their lives. If it wasn't my job I'm not sure I'd get involved with it either.

WM: Uh-huh. (laughs)

PH: It's a lot to know and understand. It's like when most people go and buy a house, they just totally depending on their realtor to tell them everything they [need] to know.

Unfortunately, realtors are in the business of selling houses. They don't lie, but sometimes they don't tell everybody everything that might be of interest to them, like "Oh, by the way, [they are planning on building a mall a quarter of a mile down the road from where you're buying a house.]

[People] find out about these things when the notices go out in the public hearing process from our office. People get every unnerved. They get very upset. They've been there in their nice quiet life on their street and now they realize there's going to be thousands of cars, every day coming into their neighborhood, that they never thought was going to be there before.

This is just an example of the type of thing that can happen. But it's reality and people react very adversely when they get that kind of [information]. They don't understand why we're allowing things like that to happen.

Problem is, from our perspective as planners and the documents that we have that are all public record [show] it was always planned to be [a mall built there]. We weren't hiding anything from anybody, but the average citizen really doesn't know even enough to come and avail themselves of the information that we have.

After awhile they learn. It only takes one time for a citizen to receive a notice in the mail

[about] a re-zoning near by. After that they become very knowledgeable about what's going on in their area. Many of them choose to be more involved, because, they don't want this kind of thing to keep on happening.

For a general term I call them citizen activists.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: It's not a bad term. They call themselves citizen activists too. But some people become very committed in this process, to be involved and know what's going on and to speak against something if they think they need to. Or, in some cases actually work with an applicant, or work with a developer, through their various citizen organization, to come up with a better project than the one initially planned for.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: We have a number of those. Well, we have a lot of those in Hillsborough County. We even provide within our own county government a neighborhood relations office. Its sole purpose is to make sure that the neighborhoods and the citizens in this county are involved [and] have an opportunity to be involved, if they choose to, on things that are going on in county government and in the general area of their neighborhood.

We actually use that office—in some cases to get the word out about things that we're doing with the code. I know the planning commission has used that office to help them in preparing for community events, for things that they are planning on addressing in the comprehensive plan.

So, the county is doing everything that it can to try and get the citizens involved. We have a whole lot of citizens that are involved but not nearly as many as maybe there should be. Because we still get people that call up that are just flabbergasted that somebody would think about doing something in their neighborhood that they cannot just possibly imagine how they would do it, or even ask for it!

WM: Um-huh

PH: This goes on, pretty much daily around here. So we're use to it. We're used to the controversy. We're used to people being very, very upset. And as a consequence, a lot of what we do, a lot of what I'm responsible for is preparing my staff and training my staff to be able to deal with angry and upset citizens. [The] things are not our fault; it's certainly not the staff's fault. But it is our job to make sure that people are properly informed about what it is that's going on.

Rumors get started. People hear things. They hear a neighbor talk about something that they thought they read in the paper, or they heard from somebody at church or whatever. And they are on the phone calling wanting to know, "What's going on?"

WM: Um-huh.

PH: Is it going to be happening? A lot of times they will hear things before we do, before we even have an application filed. We're not about the business of going out and trying to find out what's going on, on our own. We're totally dependent on the application being filed to inform us if somebody has a request in the mail.

But a lot of times what will happen is the developer will go out and they'll do marketing studies. They'll [have] neighborhood meetings. They'll put proposals out in front of the public and say—you know—"We own this thousand acres down here and this is what we're thinking about doing on it. What do you think?" And they do all of that with no one from the county even knowing! They haven't even filed an application yet. So a lot of times the citizens will call us and that's the first we've even heard of it.

Even though there is really something going on out there we won't know until the application is filed. So a lot of times the citizens know before we do. But most of the time they don't. They don't find out about stuff until they get a "Public Hearing Notice" in the mail, or see one of our big signs on the property informing them they are re-zoning that piece of property. They're making a change to it.

WM: But there were just a lot of these objections? Had this been an on-going process, or just all of a sudden, because of growth in Hillsborough County there were a lot of citizens' complaints?

PH: It was growth pressure is what it is. That's what prompted it. It really got started, like I mentioned before, for the northwest part of the county, in Keystone and in Lutz. [They] are rural by nature—at least all of Keystone is and a good part of Lutz [is]. The people that live up there were starting to get pressure from all sides: from Pasco County, for stuff going on in Pinellas County and their own borders from Hillsborough County.

They were getting into a situation where it was like, [at] every public hearing there was another application to re-zone something else in Keystone.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: They'd had it! They'd had enough. I mean these are people that had large acreages'. Not all of them [were] particularly wealthy, they may have had a lot of money. And some of them were farmers. A lot of them—there's a huge equestrian interest in Keystone and so a lot of them had fields for their horses and show areas and everything. They just were not going to see go away and disappear right in front of them. So they fought to preserve what they had.

The Keystone plan—unless somebody changes it at some point in the future—that area will remain rural. It absolutely will. [The plan] actually identifies the areas where there is an opportunity for somebody to do some commercial development they can. But there's no provision for anymore of these—quarter acre lot subdivisions. They will not happen. There is no opportunity for them to do so. Somebody would have to come in and

completely re-do and change their plan in order to open the door for somebody to rezone, to do something else. The rural area of Lutz is the same way. It has the same sort of preservation concepts in it.

What's happen[ed] then is we've gone around the county—take an area like Thonotasassa. Thonotasassa does have a lot of farming, does have a lot of agricultural interest, but what they were getting pressure from was—um—people who wanted to use their land for things like borrow-pits [and] land-fills. The reason they were pressured is because Thonotasassa (I don't know if you know this) has no wetlands. There's lakes in Thonotasassa, but there are no wetlands. It's all sand. It's all high ground. The water table is way, way below ground. I mean—and the soil's very permeable.

Of any place in Hillsborough County it is probably the most attractive for a developer. Because you don't have an environment that you're having to be concerned about and preserve. You don't have to worry about wetlands. You can just develop the entire piece of property, except for putting in your own retention areas. It's a great place to be building subdivisions and all kinds of stuff like that.

But, for the people that have lived there all of their lives and have families that were there all of their lives as well, and own those larger acreages up there, it's farm country. It's a rural area and they want to preserve it that way. They don't want it turned into Brandon.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: In fact they use that, “We don't want to be Brandon.” They've said it over and over again.

WM: (laughs) Um-huh.

PH: So when the Thonotasassa plan was done, it was done as well, to preserve the agricultural and the rural interests that were up there in Thonotasassa. That's in place. You can't even subdivide anything smaller than a one-acre lot in Thonotasassa. It's very clear that their preference is you have five acre tracts or larger. Pretty much the same concept that you have in Keystone.

Um—having those plans in place, what happens is, if somebody does want to re-zone a piece of property there are limits on what they can ask for. They are not going to be able to come in and ask for these small-lot subdivisions. It's not going to happen, because they have that community plan that says they can't. That's the importance of having a community plan.

Now, we have done them on also in Riverview and Gibsonton. They came in and they those processes were going on about the time—uh—about three or four years ago, when all of the development really, really started in the south part of the county.

For the most part—I have to say that the majority of what has been built out there in those areas is reflective of what's in the community plans, anyway. There wasn't that

much that was different, but what they did do, in the areas that had actually not been developed, was seek to kind of “down-plan-it,” if you will, from what [was permissible] before. So they didn’t really take away anybody’s property rights or anybody’s protection for what was already in place. But they did seek to preserve and lessen the allowable density that could be built in the area, if it hadn’t been built yet. That was pretty much the essence.

Plus, they wanted to concentrate, clearly identify where their commercial areas would be. Their little town centers and where they would have public facilities and where they might want to develop areas of community interest. You know—historical preservation areas and things like that. So [community planning is] a very interactive process. It absolutely sets the stage for what we as designing people can foresee and the ultimate development patten in those areas.

We—um—are working right now in the East Lake—Orient area, which is out there around the fair grounds, in that area south of I-4. We’re having a hard time right now getting people in the community interested in it. It’s a neighborhood area that, I think, at one time had a whole lot of viability [but] it’s really almost deteriorated at this point.

WM: When you say, “had a whole lot of viability,” what does that mean?

PH: Uh—it was actually larger, I think, than what it is today. What has happened is that they’ve had a lot of what had been residential, or even on the fringe of agricultural areas, re-zoned away. Now they are huge industrial parks. You’ve got the fair grounds out there. You’ve got the Ford Amphitheater. You’ve got I-4 improvements that have happened. So you end up with a much smaller area that is actually identified as a residential area.

Their identity—it’s deteriorated as well, in terms of being a defined community. We’re trying to resurrect that, because there are some people that have lived there a long, long time. [They’ve] raised their families there and they love that area.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: And they want to preserve it. But there’s not a whole lot of people that are there. And most all of them are working people, so we’re really having a hard time kind of getting the community energized to get into this community planning process. I think once we get enough of their attention to do that, we’ll see more people coming in and showing up.

WM: This like you’re trying to organize a working committee?

PH: Um-huh.

WM: Well that was my—well first one question, right quick.

PH: Um-huh.

WM: Tell me again, about when did this community-planning program [get] started?

PH: Back in 1995.

WM: Okay, 1995.

And putting together the working committee, to help determine the zoning of an area, what kind of people show up? I mean, you said you were having a hard time with this areas.

PH: It [runs] the gamut, really. It's been interesting. Depending on what the community is, and they all vary. They are all very unique. It's been truly an eye-opening process to work through these community plans. You realize very quickly there is no single area of Hillsborough County that's like any other. There is no two alike. They're all different. They are all unique. They clearly have community identity, that you may not even have been cognizant of. If you just looked at a map of Hillsborough County you wouldn't know there were the kind of distinctions that we're finding in places. All of them are interesting. All of them have their own history. All of them have historical backgrounds; major families who settled in the particular area and kind of created the identity of the area in the first place. They are all very, very unique that way.

Um—it's very interesting how those places have all come about. You could spend a lifetime just examining the history of the different communities in Hillsborough County.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: It's just never ending. So what happens though, is when we go out into the community and we advertise that we're going to be doing a community plan—we send out fliers, we put-up posters. We try to make sure we hit all of the community organizations and businesses in the area to let them know. [We] invite them to a general orientation meeting to tell them what it is we're about. We may end-up having two or three of those, depending on how the attendance works.

Most of the communities, actually, in spite of us telling them—Um—“You're going to be so happy when this is all finally over; 'cause now you're really going to have the ability to control some things that are going on in your community.” Most of [the community members] are very skeptical. It's like—um—well; the Wimauma is probably the best example that I can think of, off the top of my head.

In fact I went to the orientation meeting for the Wimauma community planning area. [We were meeting at the elementary school.] I have never seen such a room full. The entire cafeteria was packed! Standing room only. People were so mad and angry that the government was coming into their town and their community to tell them what they could and could not do. It never got violent, but they were not understanding at all of what we

were trying to do. The meeting deteriorated from the moment it started until we finally called it a day.

We ended up having to have two or three of them, just to get people calmed down enough to hear what it was we were saying. They were very, very skeptical of the county coming in and trying tell them what to do.

Well, they've been through that process. It's [been] two years now [since] they've finished their plan. It's wonderful! The plan itself is a work of art, what they came up with, to define their community and to keep it ongoing. Now, they can hardly wait. They are so excited about getting in front of the Board of County Commissioners. It's a total mindset change, from what we started with two years ago.

Really what happens is people decide that they have the time and are committed to wanting to work in this process. They get excited about it. All of a sudden they start seeing possibilities.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: All of a sudden they start having a vision of what could be even better than what they have today? It's not just an issue of preserving the land. Today it's an issue of making better what we have today and opening the doors for some new possibilities.

You know, maybe thirty years ago [they] had a little downtown and it's all since now gone away and they want it back. Now it seems possible again! And they got Hillsborough County to help them do it.

Those are the kinds of things that really spur the community on, that people get excited about. That's **why** we've become successful with this program. I mean we're committed to it. We've seen it work in other areas. We know it can work anywhere. We just need to stick with it.

People begin to see that, that's what they want to be involved [with]. They want to keep on working on it. The working committee ends up being a smaller group. Usually [about] twenty people is how it kind of works out. [They] meet, pretty much every other week.

The staff that are assigned to them, on this case, are all these people from both our agency and the planning commission. They are working with them. They are putting together work products and doing maps and all kinds of data and information [that] they are bringing back to the working committee to review. They are working, literally, around the table with pencils and crayons in hand. They are talking and exchanging ideas. This goes on in that hard working form like that for at least six months. Until they, as a group, feel comfortable enough to say, "This is what we want to present to the larger community as our vision for Wimauma."

WM: I just want to make sure I understand you properly. When y'all first went down there, they thought you were going down to [Wimauma] to tell them what to do?

PH: Absolutely.

WM: But in reality you were going down there to—I hate to use this word, it's such a cliché—but to empower them. To let them know what they could do, to shape their future?

PH: Yes. Absolutely, 'cause that's what the program is about. It is their community plan. It is not the government coming in and saying, "This is what we think and this is how it needs to be done." [That's] the furthest from the truth. We try to go down there with the cleanest slate as we possibly can. If we have anything in our hands it is a map of—"Here are all the current [land] uses out here in your community today. This is it. Now where do you want to go?"

WM: How did you all convince them that it was their "party?" That they had all this input into it?

PH: Well, you don't ever give in to the—uh—to put yourself in the position of even telling them what it is that can be done. What you have to keep doing is asking them, "Well, what would you like to see happen?"

Now sometimes you may have somebody that's got an idea that, for all practical purposes, you know can't be done. It could be something as simple as, "Our commercial is here, but we really want to move it over there." And maybe what's over "there" is really is some kind of environmental impediment. You know? We can't even get there to get to it. If we do it's going to cost us millions and millions of dollars to get the pedestrian, or the road network there for you to even be able to use it. You know let's maybe look and see what we can do with the area that we've got. What can we do with that to improve it, to make it more attractive, more usable, easier to get to, or whatever?

So, yeah—the planners themselves—that are working this process—are very good about presenting—um—developing options for consideration. We'll go through a process many times; in fact most of the planners have done this. What we actually do is kind of a visioning charrette, if you will.

We go in there with a lot of architectural renderings, drawings and pictures of how things are and what they might possibly be. We'll look at them. We'll present options from the perspective of design. It may be nothing more than having a particular themed façade that they want to have on, say buildings in their little town center. You know—"Well do you like it looking like the 1890s or do you want it to look like the 1950s."—I mean—"What is it? How do you identify yourself?"

We don't ever tell them the way it ought to be, or what we prefer; it's of no interest to us. This is their plan. It's their community. They're the ones who live there. So what we do is, once everybody has participated in the type of charattes and visioning processes what

we'll put in from of them, what we do is just calculate the results. Then we bring that back, to them working the committee and sometimes the larger group as well. Because every once in a while you'll still have a large community meeting, to keep them informed about where we are, and what we've come up with.

Are we headed in the right direction? Is there something the larger community knows about that we really need to go back and think about it again or do it differently? So, yeah, we're always touching base with the larger community over the year and a half that we basically devote to an area.

What we'll do is [clears throat]. Once we've come to some decisions on different aspects of design: layout of the community, density allowabilities, transportation patterns, environmental things that you want to preserve, features that the community would want to have added to their community. Maybe they want a library or a community center, or something like that.

Once we've got that then we go through the process of laying things out on maps and getting people to provide—At that point we're asking them to assure us that what we're putting on a piece of paper for them is actually what they meant and what they said.

Finally you do, you get to the point where you come to a conclusion. The working committee is satisfied with what they've done. [Then] you take it back to the larger community. We've been very, very successful then in getting general adoption and compliance. Then, when we actually take these plans to the Board [of County Commissioners] we have members of the community present it to the Board. We don't do it for them. We get them to present the plan to the board. It is their plan.

By working it that way, you have “buy-in.” People believe in it. People trust it. We try to give them the assurance that we're going to follow it as well. And once it is adopted, we do that. Exactly!

If somebody comes in with a re-zoning petition, we review it against that document and against that plan, to make sure that it complies. If it doesn't we tell them, “Sorry, you can't do this. You'll have to find someplace else to do it or forget about it.

WM: You said that if the plan that [the Wimauma Community] came up with was a work of art, you've got to tell me, at least briefly, what their plan is. I'm curious as to how they decided what their future would be.

PH: Well, hum. How can I describe it best?

Wimauma was kind of an area that was lost over the years. I think at one time, back in the early 1900s maybe (You'd have to talk with somebody that has more of a historical perspective than I do). Wimauma was pretty much a farmer's community, but it was a thriving community, unto itself. Everybody knew each other. People would gather together in an area there along the highway that kind of created their own downtown

shopping district for them. There was [a] grocer there and a post office and things like that.

Over the years things kind of started to deteriorate away from that. Some of the people who owned the small business in the community decided to locate in the shopping center down the highway, where their business could grow and be better. Some of the larger family interests that were not as successful in some of their agricultural ventures and so that would start to market their land. Then you'd have somebody come in that wanted to do something different with it than what had historically been done on the property and certainly not farm it. They'd wanted to build on it, you know?

So the community itself—albeit except for some names on the buildings and stuff, in the eyes of somebody driving through, on their way Bartow (or wherever they might be going) you didn't notice that Wimauma was anything unique at all.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: Plus, you had the characteristic, in that particular community (where essentially you had two communities, a white community and a black community). They were divided by the highway. You could easily see the differences from one side to the other. It was really—[the community] was just falling apart. It was a place where nobody wanted to go to any more.

When we started this community planning effort, I realized, right-off-the-bat, when we had the general community plan, we really did have some people who had been down there for a long, long time and they had no intention of leaving. They absolutely wanted it to be better and if they were angry about anything they were angry that they had been ignored. Not that they wanted anybody to come in and tell them what to do. But they sure did want somebody to come in and pay some attention to them.

They had crappy utility services that they wanted to see get fixed. They felt like that had been involved in prior re-zoning petitions emanating from down there, everybody had entirely ignored what they had to say. If anybody want to rezone, they got it. No matter what!

But those were some very strong interest. Now the part about that was, in the room at that time there were a lot of development interests there. Attorneys for developers were in there, that were watching very closely because Wimauma was wide open ground as far as they were concerned. [It was] a new area to be developed, you know? They were starting to fill up Gibsonton and Riverview. Wimauma was the place to go next. So they were very interested in what would be going on with this plan.

And then, surprisingly, very surprisingly to me, you had another element in the room, which were interests in Sun City Center, who were not particularly enamoured with Wimauma, or that community. In fact, they kind of resented [Wimauma]. They seemed to resent that they were even there. Over the years, even more so [now], there's been a

huge Hispanic influence that has come into Wimauma as well. With that came families who are very interested in improvements in their schools [and] improvements in their community. It was their new home. They didn't want it to just get up and go away. So those were competing interests, entirely.

I mean Sun City people actually said that they wanted to have the final say about what got approved for Wimauma. We had to very kindly inform them that this was not their plan. This is the plan for the Wimauma Community. It would be the Wimauma Community that would be making the determination. Sun City Center wasn't really being invited to participate in that process, because it wasn't community.

They weren't particularly happy with that but they didn't get up in arms. They didn't fight it. They knew they couldn't fight it.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: But, yeah, there were a lot of competing interests that were in that room that night. We just made it very clear that our interests were in working with the community, the real community: people who had lived there and had their homes there. We weren't trying to fashion a plan that was going to be of particular interest, one way of the other, the development community. It was there to try to define the community of Wimauma.

The next big argument was "Well, where is Wimauma?" (laughs) That was the next big thing we had to deal with. In fact it even came up the very first night. Some people had an idea about how far west it went. Well it couldn't go further than [Highway] 301, cause that's when you started Sun City Center. So they pretty much defined it to be 301, and then it went to—oh gosh. I can't remember—they are right on the other side.

If I had a pamphlet to give you I would. But we don't even have any printed. They haven't been adopted yet. So I really don't have it. But it took several meetings for them to decide, for the purpose of this community plan, what was Wimauma and what wasn't.

And in fact, interestingly enough, that has been the hottest topic to deal with and one of the hardest to deal with. It's kind of like, once we've defined the area we're half way home. People—no matter where they live—identify themselves as being in a place and get very upset when you tell them—"No you're really not part of this [community]. You live outside of Gibsonton. You're not in Gibsonton." [They'd reply,] "Oh yes I am in Gibsonton." You develop an identity as to what community you're in, no matter where you live. "Don't let the government come in and try to tell me I live someplace else, when I don't."

So, yes, it was a pretty hard fought battle, just to be able to define the community of Wimauma, just like it was. We had the same dilemma in Gibsonton. We had the same dilemma in the Apollo Beach area. We had the same dilemma in Riverview. We even had the same dilemma in [the Tampa subdivision of] Town and Country, trying to define

what was actually the area of Town and Country, and then, “Is this the area we really ought to be planning for?”

So— once you get past that, once you get to know who the real players are, because of the community that you’ve defined, you’re halfway there. That is the hardest thing to get past.

After that things kind of start falling into place, because you’re able to build off historical reference as to where things were, or where they thought they should have been all along.

You know, it’s surprising. Once you get the community defined [and] you know who the players are. The similarities of those individuals really start coming through and they are able to start putting things together.

WM: I guess these are communities without any officially defined boundaries?

PH: They’re not municipalities. They don’t have jurisdictional boundaries. They’re concepts—various concepts.

WM: They’re states of mind?

PH: Many of them actually have—in fact in our initial effort of noticing that we’re going to be doing a community plan we will always include every area that the post office is identified by that name.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: Now the post office isn’t [necessarily] setting the concept of where a community is. They give totally different justifications as to what areas they identify and Gibsonton, versus Riverview [for example]. But it is usually a good start for us. We’ll put that out there as the first notice of where they are. Then we find out later, that there are some people that resent the fact that they were ever even identified that way by the post office, cause [they’ll say] “I don’t live in Gibsonton. I live in Apollo Beach. And I know I live in Apollo Beach.” So they—We’re not abiding by the post office jurisdictional lines, but we use that as a start, to at least to get the community together. The people who live there themselves are the ones who define the community.

WM: So what did Wimauma finally decide for itself?

PH: Well they’ve got a little area that’s there along the highway and off-set from the highway, believe it or not, is a town center. We were able to get them to understand that we were not going to be able to make the highway, 674, go away.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: It's a state highway, a major route over to Polk County. Um—it's just not going to go away. But if you want to have a little downtown area where you can have shops and stores and stuff and people can feel safe walking in it, we really ought to be trying to move to one side of the highway or the other. They actually choose to move, primarily, along the north side of the highway and that's going to be their little downtown area.

WM: So that area has been zoned, set aside for commercial use?

PH: Not yet. It will be.

WM: Okay.

PH: We still have another whole year to go through. Once we go through the comprehensive plan, there may be areas of that, under the jurisdiction of the plan that we'll actually go in and re-zone, to accommodate for future development. That's a working process as well, to go through and make sure you get things defined.

We did that in Citrus Park. It was another whole year, actually after their plan was adopted before we ever got the re-zonings done to define those types of things up there. But they have—um—a trail system that was always proposed to go around through Wimauma—we're showing the connections of those trails to the county system in their plan. —um—They have a community services area that they've identified, I think it's associated with the school. —um—What else?

I think they want, they've got a library or they want a new library down there. They've defined the areas of density, the distinct lines drawing distinctions as to where it will be lower densities and where they will have allowablity for higher densities than that.

But that's the kind of things that they're doing. Almost all the community plans have elements of that in some form, and they will vary in sizes to what they can be. It's all based on what the community envisions for itself as to what those areas will be and what they'll be like.

WM: You mentioned that the developers have attorneys there to—I imagine in a community like Wimauma [the residents] want to keep it like it is. “This is our community and we like it just fine as it is.” But there are real estate people, developers who see potential there to subdivide the land and benefit from that.

PH: In Wimauma, fortunately the community actually saw that there was opportunity for new development. We kind of convinced them that it was going to be coming and knocking at their door. Assuming that it would be, we got the community to design where it could happen and how it could happen. That's how that comes about.

It's one thing for everybody to say “We want it to stay just like it is and nothing else can ever happen.” You take an area like Keystone. Keystone has some areas that are geographically prohibitive for doing development.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: The major well fields for the county are up there, a lot of lakes, a highway system that isn't the best in the world. It's very meandering and rural by its own nature. Those kind of features like that, that are built into the community really do—they are the first red flag for doing a lot of new, large type of development. That kind of prohibition and restriction didn't exist in an area like Wimauma. So—um—you let them know there are opportunities for new development to come in here. In that case there were even interests in the community for new housing, affordable housing, things like that to accommodate the people who live there already. They recognize that.

So what they did do was define the areas where you could have the smaller lots, the higher density. Where they wanted to keep it larger and more estate like, to reflect some of the older—um—styles of plotting pattern that they'd had before, but we got the community to define that for themselves. So that way, somebody from the outside wanting to come in and [proposes]—say a mixed use housing with some townhouses and some single family homes. We can basically say, “You'll only be able to do that over here in this part of the Wimauma Community, because the other part doesn't provide for that mixture of housing.” Or they require larger lots, or whatever, so we're able to guide the development community a little bit better.

WM: I guess that's sort of the stereotypical image where you have the pristine community and the evil money mongering developer comes in and turns it into “any suburb.”

PH: Um-huh.

WM: And I was just wondering how much of a reality there is to that?

PH: It's a very real reality in Hillsborough County, particularly in those areas that are defined to be within the urban [service] area, where you have public water and sewer. It is going to be subdivisions. It is going to be development along the roadways, or town centers that they've established by community plans.

It's going to be developed! It's going to be an urban area.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: The real opportunity for pristine community, if you will, is going to be in the rural area where you don't have public water and sewer. Because of our plan and the fact that we have defined the urban area, versus the rural area. The rural area will not easily become an urban area because the whole plan has to change for that to happen. So we do have a lot of controls in place for those types of issues.

What I find even more interesting, seems to be with the citizens is, “What can happen on that piece of property right next door to me?” That’s where their interests are. People are very concerned about what’s going on immediately around them.

[Quite frankly] if it’s down the road a ways they don’t seem to get too upset about it. It’s like “I want Wal-Mart in my community but not right next door.” You know it’s kind of a NIMBY [Not-In-My-Back-Yard] syndrome.

WM: (laughs)

PH: You know, we know we’ve got to have these types of things we just don’t want them right next door to me.

WM: Right.

PH: So that’s really the—ah I guess maybe in some form some people are even thinking that the reason you do a community plan is to define where the NIMBY’s are going to be and make sure they are not next door to me. (laughs) You know?

Whatever!

I have no idea what it is for individual persons, what is the impetus for them to want to participate or devote the time it takes to participate in the community planning process. But I know it runs the gamut for a lot of people.

WM: But –you talked about the working committees of about twenty people and I was wondering just how representative they were of the community?

PH: They are pretty broad based, actually. They [are made up of] residents who live there. Sometimes they’re business owners.

Citrus Park was very interesting in the layout of their working committee. They had people there that—they had retired people, they had working people. They had people who owned business in Citrus Park, they had people who were just landowners, that were eventually going to sell. So they had some interest in what the economy of the area was going to end up being. Residents—um—it ran the full gamut.

[On the working committee] we try, as much as possible, to not have outside interests; people that aren’t really involved. They are not landowners they don’t live there, they don’t have business there. They’re just somebody, maybe [from] a community down the road who, somehow, wants to have some control over what it is that is going to happen there. We try to keep that out of the working committee as much as possible. And for the most part they quickly become alienated by the other people in the group, because the other people in the group don’t see them as being part of the community either.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: They are there for whatever reason, but they are not really there for them or their community. And they quickly pick-up on that. We've had occasions where somebody will kind of force the issue. We don't have any rules that say you can't [participate in a working committee], but after a while they became so alienated—

side 1 ends; side 2 begins

PH: —or argued against by the other people in the working committee, they were forced out by the people in the committee. Not by staff. We really can't prohibit anybody from being on it. They kind of self-select themselves. It's kind of interesting how the process works.

But we do let them know, if they're on the working committee they're going to be meeting a lot, and that if they are going to have infrequent attendance it's probably not going to work for them. We really do need their attendance at almost all of the meetings.

Everybody understands that you [might] have an emergency that happens or a special event that comes up that keeps you from a regular meeting, or something. But we need that commitment up-front. Because we're going to be relying on them to give us input and we need as much consistency and inclusion of all the members of that group as possible. If [the group] starts getting splintered off we don't get as good a picture of what it is that we need to be doing and putting down on paper.

So we do tell them right up front, "We know you're interested and involved, but if you're on the working committee, you're really going to be working. Do you have the time? If you can't is there somebody else that you can suggest that you'd feel comfortable knowing they are representing your interests?"

You know—"That fact that you're part of the general community [means] you're still going to get to play a role, because we're always going to be coming back to you. But the working committee is really going to be a close working group and meeting a lot."

WM: And these are all volunteers?

PH: They're all volunteers. Nobody is appointed. No one is appointed.

We started out the community-planning program in 1995, actually, with trying to define who needed to be in these groups. We did it by virtue of categories, if you will; a business owner, a property owner a landowner or a developer. Categories of people, because we wanted to have it as broad ranged. We thought we'd have a better product if we did that. We would define that in a working document that we'd take to the board, before we would launch an effort in a community.

We initially did that with Citrus Park, the first time we were there. Oh my God! Talk about a failure! It was terrible. Talk about a disaster. We spent over a year, trying to get this group to work. It didn't work.

In fact we even had a director that (I think) lost her job, because the Citrus Park Plan was going so badly. Um—in the interim, before we got a new director on board, one of the assistant county administrators got assigned to head the department. I think he was advised by the county administrator, “You need to get that Citrus Park plan stuff straightened out. If you don't do anything else, you need to do that.”

So we did, we started over. Now—everybody was upset about it. The board—when I got up in front of the Board of County Commissioners and told them, that we needed to start over, I thought Jim Norman was going to just—I thought he was going to kill me. “I can't believe you're standing there telling me this, that we've got to start over. After all the time and all of the commitment that we've already had from people that have been involved.”

I told him, “Commissioner we don't have results that we can bring to you.” I said, “We don't have any confidence in what it is we've done.” In fact we have no product at this point. It just did not work. We've got to start over.”

“It's not an issue of what they want to do, being something that they want and we don't. That's not it. We don't have a product. We can get the community to jell into a community to get this effort going, so we need to start over.”

So at that point we did and we did it all volunteer. We started out with a whole new notice to all of Citrus Park, that we were going to be restarting the community planning effort and we wanted their participation as much as possible. We forced ourselves to a different mindset about how community planning could work and be successful. That one was very, very successful. After one more year we had a product. They were standing up in front of the Board saying, “This is our plan. This is what we want adopted for our community.” And it was all volunteers.

WM: So, in the first attempt, that sort of failed, you all targeted who should be there?

PH: We targeted interest groups, not persons per se, but areas of interest. We as we had identified that we wanted a business owner in the group and we had three owners come forward and say, “We all want to be on it.” We'd say, “Well we only need one.” It was controlling in a way. But that was how we started. That was how we thought it needed to be done.

We were not telling people “You're no good,” or “You're not important.” What we were trying to do was to make sure we had all of areas of interest represented; so that we would have a broad picture [of the community] and a broad base of interest to work from in developing the community plan.

What we found out was is that is not really the way to do it. [If you want to have a product that represents the community] you really do need to get the people to volunteer who want to become a part of it. And by default, by their own very nature what you end up with [in your working committee] is actually a range of interests. It's not, like, all just citizens. You actually do end up with people—just by volunteers and default within the community you wind up with people who are varied in their backgrounds have different interests in the community. But they are all there committed to the purpose. That what the volunteerism gives you, it gives you commitment to the purpose.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: Then you end up with a group that really does work.

WM: In theory there could be seventy-five people in the working group?

PH: Well we do tell them right up front that it is not practicable to get that many people [in the working committee]. You'll never get any conclusions if you end up with seventy-five people in your working committee. So what we do, say is—you know—we strive to get at least fifteen. We'll go up to twenty, maybe a couple or more. But we really can't go over twenty-five because we won't ever come to a conclusion with decision making.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: We know that, just as a matter of practice. You start getting a group too large you never really get final decisions made.

WM: Do you ever have any problems with more people wanting to serve than you can actually allow?

PH: No. If anything it's the reverse. We have problems getting people who can commit their time to being on the working committee. But once you get that group, once you actually get enough, that we feel like we have a group that we can work with consistently, then—yeah—we've got a good group.

WM: You've talked about the property rights process.

PH: Yeah.

WM: That was what? When somebody is appealing a zoning decision?

PH: Actually what the state law provides for is that any development order issued by the local government. And a development order is defined, by state law, as anything from a real permit that allows you to go and do something all the way up to a re-zoning action by the Board of County Commissioners or the City Council. Whatever the case may be.

So it's pretty broad ranged as to what a development order is, as defined by state law. As a result, what happened—I mean—there's—not too often that people apply for a permit (assuming they meet the requirements for getting the permit considered in the first place). They will get the permit. Where you've got problems is when people come in for re-zoning and they get denied. And for whatever the reasons there might be, they have availed themselves of this process.

I don't think, I really don't think, the property rights act was initially envisioned to deal with appeals of zoning denial. [To tell you the truth] I don't think that was really what was put in place. But the result of it, at least in Hillsborough County, our experience has been, that's what goes through this process. I haven't had any other types of permitting actions, or permit denials on the part of the county, go through the property rights act, only the re-zoning.

So—you know—when an applicant—I guess if they feel like that they have a chance. I've had a couple of attorneys tell me that they believe before they can go to court, in order to demonstrate that they've exhausted all of their administrative remedies. (Which is a requirement for them to file a lawsuit on a zoning case—or any permit case for that matter.). The court considers that the property rights act is one of those administrative processes we need to go through.

So a lot of times they'll go through it. For the applicant, the person that's paying the bills, it is much cheaper than them having to pay all the costs for filing a lawsuit in court. And I guess in their eyes, there is a fifty-fifty chance they'll get what they want. Or at least something close enough to it that they can live with [the decision] if they go through this process and get back in front of the board again.

So—yes—whenever there is a zoning agenda that we take to the Board and there is a denial on it; I can pretty much count on getting a property rights case out of it.

WM: I ask that question because one of the farmers that I've talked to [had] development on either side of his land. He said, "This is great, because it increases the value of my land for loan purposes. When I get ready to retire I can sell my land for development and cash-in in a big way."

PH: Um-huh.

WM: He said, "It's my property and I should be able to do with it what I want." And I was just wondering, like—If it came time for him to sell his land for development and he discovered that he couldn't, would he go through the property rights [process]?

PH: The county is not going to prohibit him from selling his land. What the county may not do is approve the zoning for the person who is potentially going to buy the land and bought it under a contract contingent upon re-zoning. Um—No the farmer himself, although he could, as the owner (because the owner always has to sign the application).

Let's assume for this discussion here that the [developer] comes in for a re-zoning application. He has to have the authorization of the property owner to file that application for re-zoning. The property owner is actually a party to the re-zoning request. If it fails in front of the Board County Commissioners, yes—either the developer or the property owner, or both can pursue the property right process.

There is still no guarantee. Like I said—ultimately it's got to go back to the Board of County Commissioners. They are the ones who still have the final say about it. But—yeah—they can pursue it.

Um—there are a lot of things though. I don't know what farmer you may have spoken to—one way or the other. It is interesting. If they are out in the middle of the rural area—and there may be developments that have gone on around them, but it's going to be fairly minimal at that point. There could be some expectation on their part that they would have the ability to sell it and subdivide it into maybe a large lot subdivision at some point in the future.

And if I were him I'd probably have the same sort of expectations. But in the zoning arena, there is no guarantee about any of that. Yeah—the plan may very well say that there is an expectation in that area it's going to be developed at one unit per acre. But more than likely what happens when you go out there you'll find (on the ground any way) a few lots here and there that are one acre. Maybe even some of them are smaller than that. But the large majority of the area is [divided into] ten acre parcels and bigger.

So what happens is that when this farmer decides that he is ready to get his property re-zoned, he comes in for one-acre zoning and finds all of his neighbors sitting in the room ready to oppose him. They don't want it! They're not ready to sell. They may still be farming their property. They don't want a bunch of one-acre home sites sitting over there. Because all [those home sites] are going to do is bring in people who are going to complain about what they are doing on their farm. So they fight it.

Some of those do get denied, simply because it's—as the Board might say, “It's premature. Most of the area is still large lot agricultural and it shouldn't be changing at this point.” There is just no guarantee to their zoning.

So he may feel that as a property owner that he has every right to do what he wants [to do] on his property. Legally, the argument would be, he has every right to do on his property that the zoning that he's got allows him to do. The zoning today [strikes table for emphasis], not prospective [zoning]. Two different things entirely. [If you're an attorney] depending on which side you're representing, you've got all kinds of arguments [to present] both ways. It's a very interesting process. (laughs)

WM: It's all a much more complex than I ever imagined. And it is about 3:15 and you said that [you had to leave at] 3:30. Oh man—there are many more questions I could ask, but there is one I want to ask before [we] close out.

Another person I interviewed, who is in real estate, talked about an incident where they had some land that they sold. It was land that had once been a farm, but [now] was surrounded by development.

PH: Um-huh.

WM: And they wanted to subdivide it. But the people surrounding the [proposed] subdivision opposed the plan.

PH: Um-huh

WM: I think he said it had been divided—he had divided it into (I'll pick an arbitrary number), forty-five lots. He said it went before the Board of County Commissioners and it ended up the County Commissioners allowed him to develop forty lots, rather than forty-five lots.

PH: Um-huh.

WM: Is that a common [solution]?

PH: Very common.

WM: Who does that satisfy?

PH: (laughs)

WM: He said it didn't really satisfy the people who opposed him and it surely didn't satisfy him.

PH: It satisfies the Board. And I don't mean that flippantly and I don't mean that as a criticism of the Board at all. But I certainly—if I were sitting in their seats I may very well do the same thing. And in some sense, the staff does the same thing when an applicant comes in.

Applications get filed all the time. Typically what will happen the, the application comes in asking for the maximum amount that would be allowed under the plan. We sit there as advisors to the applicant. Maybe even before they've actually filed, but it's still a contest. Then will we'll say, "Yeah, we understand that. But if you look at what's around you, that maybe the smallest lot around you is half an acre. If you start trying to develop lots that are ten- thousand square feet, instead of half an acre, you'll probably going to get a lot of opposition."

So we would suggest that maybe when you file your application you ask for the half-acre lot. At least over on that side of the property so you can establish that you're being consistent with what's already out there.

Okay. Let's say the developer comes in and—whatever his attorney, or planning consultant is, maybe they saw it a little differently, and says [to the developer], “Okay. Well let's kind of play a game here. In stead of you starting out saying you want a half-acre over there, let's ask for ten-thousand square foot lots.” So that's what they come in with.

Well, they go through all the hearing processes. Because maybe it is “R-4” on the plan, or something—whatever in terms of total density of the project. [As long as] they don't exceed two unit per [acre] allowability on the plan the Planning Commission will say it's consistent with the plan.

Staff will look at it. We're kind of afraid, sometimes, to start trying to design somebody's project or them, or tell them that we think they need larger lots (maybe on that other side). To be more consistent with what's over there. But we may not say, particularly, that it must be half-acre lots.

It goes through the zoning hearing and then after a process meeting, the hearing master has recommended that there be half-acre lots “over there on that side.”

[Then] it goes to the Board. The same people who were opposed to it, are still opposed to it. The Board looks at it and they say, “We understand that the plan gives you certain rights to have a certain amount of density. You did ask for ten-thousand square foot lots, but those are just too small. So we'll approve one-third acre lots over there.” And that's what he walks out with.

He didn't want one-third acre lots, he really wanted ten-thousand square feet. The neighbors sure didn't want one-third acre lots. They wanted half-acre lots, or larger, [or none at all.]

WM: Um-huh

PH: The Board struck a compromise. In their minds [the Board] addressed the issues of the opponents to the project, by requiring larger lots. And so when they walk away, they feel like they've actually accomplished a legitimate compromise and that's it.

Now the developers (Not the property owner. For the most part they don't understand all of this.) But the applicant, the developer, will walk away thinking (usually) “Well that's a better deal than I though I was going to get. I cold have ended up only being able to build half-acre lots over the whole thing. So now I'll get more money out of my project. I'm okay with [the decision].”

Usually the developers will have that attitude. However, what happens is they'll go to the property owner and say, “Well we didn't get as many as we thought we were going to [get], so we're not going to pay you as much as the contract initially called for, because we didn't get everything that we asked for. So, we're not going to pay you as much money.”

That's why the owner's disappointed. They don't get paid as much, when they get less out of it than what the applicant originally sought.

The neighbors probably walk away thinking, "This county is going to hell in a hand-basket. They're just approving everything, right and left. Whenever it comes in!"

Everybody has a different attitude about what's going on. I understand **everyone** [with emphasis] of their viewpoints. There is no single right answer. There really isn't. It is a system of compromise. For the most part, that's exactly what it's been.

Is it bad? (chuckles) there are a lot of people that would go out there and tell you that it is terrible. That it is really bad and just getting worse as time goes on.

My perspective on it is that, if it was really that bad, people wouldn't be moving here. People would be leaving. And they're not. They're staying here. They're raising their families here. Their kids are staying here as long as they can find a job.

And we got more people than we know what to do with, coming in from the outside.

It's not a bad place to live. People are very happy. Yes, we do have our problems. We all have our problems. **Every urban area** in this state has problems. But I think we're doing a very good job at trying deal with them. In terms of the decisions that the board makes—um—I got to give them a lot of credit. I think they've made a lot of good decisions as time has gone on.

Most of what you see out there on the ground today would have always been there anyway, just not as soon. If there is anything that has aggravated this County the most is that we have grown as [much] as we have as soon as we have.

The plan always contemplated new development, just out-away, a longer period of time for it to get [here]. [Development] would have always been there.

WM: Do you feel like you're in um—the Board—is in a position to slow development, to manage it more sensibly? Or do you just take what's coming and manage that?

PH: Well, the Board as a group—I've never thought of them as a group [that was trying to] purposely slow down development. That's not to say that there is not, or usually always is, on any given Board, one or two of its members who are consciously trying to do exactly that.

Um—Commissioner Pat Frank, who's now the County Clerk, when she was on the Board of County Commissioners she advocated [slow growth]. She was very open about it. She ran on a platform of "Slow growth, or no growth." Her voting record demonstrated that. She was against a lot of things.

But that wasn't the mind-set of the Board as a whole and majority rules. That's our democratic way of life. That's how it happens. So, things did get approved. And things did grow a whole lot faster, as a result of that.

But the mind-set of this Board of County Commissioners in Hillsborough County—um—takes into account something more than just “How fast are we growing and what is the density we're dealing with out there?”

There are a lot of other things they're responsible for. They have to provide services. They need money to provide services. If you don't have a growing population and a growing tax base, you're not going to be able to provide those services that the people are screaming that they need.

They have an economy to [look out] for. If we do not have a sufficient population base to provide jobs to and for and by, we're not going to grow. We're not going to have a good economy. We're going to falter as an urban area. They can't afford to let that happen. It's not in the best interest of Hillsborough County to have no growth. It's just not.

The real thing that you have to be concerned about and be careful about is where do you let that growth happen?

I would tell you that our best device for having done that in Hillsborough County was establishing the urban area versus the rural area in 1992. That set the pattern for development in this county. Now, a lot of people who live in part of that urban area, at that time was still very rural. In some cases today [that area] is still quite rural. They're in the urban area. That is where the growth is going to happen.

We're targeting it there. No matter when it comes, that's where it is going to [go]. If they want to be in a rural area they need to move to the rural area. If the plan that's says it's going to be a rural area, **that** will be a rural area.

[It will be] at least far enough away from the fringe, because that fringe is going to expand over time as well. But all the other areas, what's in an urban area, it's going to be urbanized. I don't apologize for it. It's been in the plan, it was intended to be.

The biggest gripe that people have about development in this county, at least from what I hear from the hearings I attend, isn't even so much about the density. It's about the fact that the road network hasn't kept up with the growth. That seems to be the biggest problem. Up until the school board was able to get on board and get funds established for establishing new schools, the school system wasn't building along with the growth pattern either.

Those were the two areas, schools and transportation, that are the biggest headaches for us to have to deal with. They're both very, very expensive to run. At this point I'd have to suggest that the school board is probably doing a much better job at accommodating the growth as the transportation is. But—um—the transportation system, it gets more

expensive day by day, because the cost of materials and the cost of property that we have to buy to improve the roadway system. It's going to be very hard for it to ever actually keep up. But that's the biggest challenge that we have to growth.

It's not the fact that the people are actually there. It's not that we're building subdivisions for people who don't work. They're all working. They're all contributing. They're all paying taxes. But they are bringing kids to the schools and they are traveling on the roads. Those two elements are deficient.

The schools will be all right now. The impact fees have been increased. They got new money from the state. The schools are going to be okay. The transportation system [is] faltering. They really, really do need to work on it and have more funds devoted to it. We're probably going to have a whole lot more toll roads than we ever envisioned here in the county, just to pay for them.

WM: Um-huh.

PH: But transportation system is our weakest area right now, for accommodating new growth. That's what we need. But the growth itself has been good for the county.

WM: Okay. Well, I've been asking questions for the past hour and a half. Is there anything you want to comment on that I haven't asked about?

PH: Well, the other day you mentioned to me—you said this [interview] was going to be used for future research. Is this by your student population, or people—

WM: It will be in the Special Collections of the of the University Library.

PH: Uh-huh.

WM: So I can imagine people—um—a planning student looking at it. I can imagine someone who is writing a dissertation, or writing a book on urban planning looking at it.

PH: Oh, okay.

WM: And in order for [people] to have access to [this interview] we need your permission on a release form.

PH: Sure.

WM: Okay. And I've been photographing everybody that I've interviewed.

PH: Oh you have?

WM: Do you mind if I take your picture?

PH: No. (laughs) I wish I had my hair cut, but, no. I don't mind.

WM: (laughs) Okay. Well, let me thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

PH: Sure.

WM: I'll shut this thing off.

end of interview