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

Interview with: Mr. Rich Dugger  
Interviewed by: William Mansfield  
Location: Keystone, Florida  
Date: June 25, 2007  
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Audit Edit Date: December 5, 2007  
Final Edit by: Nicole Cox  
Final Edit Date: December 28, 2007

**WM:** I always put a label on the disc by saying, “This is Bill Mansfield from the University of South Florida talking to Mr. Rick Dugger—Is it Dogger?”

**RD:** It’s Dugger, and it’s Rich.

WM: Rich? I’m sorry, the heat gets to me.

RD: That’s all right.

WM: Talking to Mr. Rich Dugger at his home in Keystone, in Florida on June 25, 2007.

And we always get people, when we start off, to state their name and tell us when they were born and where they were born, so let her go.

RD: All right. My name is Richard Dugger and I was born in Tampa, Florida [on] September 25, 1966.

WM: Okay. And when did you come out here to Keystone?

RD: My parents moved out here when I was one.

WM: Uh-huh. So you’ve been here all of your life?

RD: I’ve spent my whole life [here].

WM: Uh-huh. I guess you like it ‘cause you’re still here?

RD: Yeah, I've lived in a few of the other communities, right here in the [Tampa] Bay area, but I moved back out here, I'd say fourteen or fifteen years ago. Bought a house ten or eleven years ago.

WM: Well, what is it you like about the area?

RD: My family is out here, which is what, you know, brought me here, and they've stayed here. But I think what brought me back was—there's a centralization to it that I really like. You can be downtown, rather quickly and you can be over to the beaches.

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: But the area's different that the beaches or the downtown area. You've got swamps and the lakes and it's quieter and you have a little more freedom out here, I believe. It's nice to have a bit of a yard to wander around.

WM: So there is more space, I guess?

RD: More space and more recreation too. You find that, once you have friends in the community, or meet people, there's things to do outside.

I think, living in town I always had a patio. So if you wanted to be outside you went outside to your patio or you went to a public place.

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: Out here, you get to go—lots of times we spend it on lakes and things and on private property. You don't have to drive that far. You can—it's kind of like when you go on vacation you don't want to have to get in your car and drive a lot.

It's the same on the weekends. I don't want to have to drive anywhere, so most of what I want to do is out here: close.

WM: Okay. Well how has it—you said you've been out here since you were one, how has it changed in that time?

RD: It's changed completely. I mean when we were—When I was a kid growing up out here, it was mainly orange groves. You had orange groves. You had houses scattered here and there. Most of the people who lived out here they were either farmers of some sort, or they lived on a lake.

But even the lake people, they had to come out and fight with the moccasins and the gators and everything else. It was almost like they were weekend people, the lake people. A lot of the lake houses were empty.

But back then it was—not too many people. 'Cause you had huge groves.

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: We'd ride motorcycles along the side of the road, down the road.

Gosh, I remember the closest grocery store used to be at Armenia, that's like half an hour from here. We'd stop at a dairy and get the milk. [It was called] the Plantation Dairy. It was on Gunn Highway. But years ago it was turned into a development. It's a "falling down" development now. It's been caving in for years.

WM: So this was a very rural place then?

RD: Yeah, it was very country. Just about everybody, if you didn't have a grove you have cows.

If you didn't have cows you were—ah—People had horses, but horses are bigger out here today than they were back then. A lot of the transition it's gone from farms to more—

I don't do horses, so I don't want to offend them, but I think of [today's farms] as more recreational farms. We have a lot of that now.

The houses out here now are ostentatious. They are just ridiculous Mc mansions that people turn over—

That's weird having these "two year" neighbors. There're a lot of them out here. They just move from house to house.

They come in—there is this one house out here on Crawley Road that people [sell] it so often. They come in and re-do but it was just done last year, the house changes every year. It's kind of a real stark, in your face example of the constant [flip-] flopping of people. No one lives there anymore. It's not a neighbor.

That, and the roads. The roads out here have changed.

WM: Changed?

RD: In the volume, in the amount of people who drive through this community just to get somewhere else. That's huge. A huge difference. I mean that and all of the houses. The groves are gone. There [are] very few groves left.

It's been the most dramatic; it seems, over the last ten years. I mean the amount of homes that you see going in on small lots and the destruction of the older homes.

The places I think [that] made a lot of the properties out here so quaint and desirable were that they [looked] very natural with a little house on them; some sort of little shelter up there that you didn't really notice it. Now a lot of that's gone. You can get on bodies of

water out here and float along and all you can see stucco [houses], three stories tall and glass. It's not—you know—a lot of the lakes just aren't very pretty any more.

Who want's to go on them? And you can't fish for the jet-skis.

WM: (laughs)

RD: And even to sit in one of these backyards. Several of my friends are on these lakes—um—I never realized [how much noise jet-skis make], it's like having a road in your backyard, whenever it gets that densely populated. There's just traffic right there in your backyard all day.

WM: You mean water traffic?

RD: Boat traffic.

WM: Motor boats and jet-skis?

RD: Yeah, the amount of [traffic] from the amount of people that are on these lakes now. I mean the houses and properties were bought and they would put four houses where that one house was. You know?

What looks really odd out here is to drive along and you'll see a three-storied stucco [house that looks like] something they snatched out of Spain. Then in the shadow of it is a one-story block house. And next to it on the other side is another three-storied Spanish villa. You know, the little house in the middle doesn't even get daylight. Well, maybe at noon.

And these guys will have big gates and all of that. They are very un-welcoming houses. They very much say, "stay out!"

So those types of people, I feel, are people I fight against. While at the same time it's their money that helps protect us. Because once money moves into an area you're going to get better protection, period.

WM: When you say, "better protection" you mean better services from the police and the fire department?

RD: No, I meant development wise.

WM: Okay.

RD: The true beauty of the area will have a better chance of being retained. Densities won't be bumped up any more. We pretty much want the developers living in your backyard because they know what they don't want is what they do everywhere else.

WM: That's an interesting contradiction. That these people kind of change the face of the community while at the same time they help protect it.

RD: Oh sure, they fight not to have what they do elsewhere in their own backyard. I think that's just—well it's just that they've got money. Even if they don't come out. If there is a row of \$400,000.00 homes sitting on a street and an issue comes up, it gets handled differently than if those houses were just little \$100,000.00 homes.

So whenever you hit a region—like Keystone, where so many wealthy people have moved in and the lake property has made the area itself valuable, you end up with a lot of people that contribute to campaigns and a lot of people that can ask for favors.

They [certainly] seem to. I mean you see that—you've been down to Apollo Beach and all that? They basically got what we were able to fight off for awhile. And once they couldn't get in here any more, they concentrated down there. It was horrible to watch.

WM: For the sake of someone who'll be listening to this, years from now, what did they get in Apollo Beach?

RD: They went in and they took a lot of the farmland and just started turning it into these cookie-cutter homes, subdivisions— just massed densities into areas that didn't need it and they didn't put the infrastructure in and they've destroyed neighborhoods, blasting their way to get there. You know, just routing through it.

Um—I think one of the things you wanted to hit on; you told me about—was how to stop the [development]. One of the things we found was the roads. It's the roads that are the big—they seem to generate—well they make [the land] available. If you don't have a road you can't have the capacity, and so everything hinges on whether or not they will make a road wider or not.

Once those roads can be altered, or if they have a possibility of being altered, it is somewhere that developers will look to go, to put in big densities.

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: The more density the more profit. So, like anybody else, they are out to make money, so—that's where I would go.

Out here [in Keystone] one of the ways we've protected it was by protecting the roads. By saying, "Look, you can't use these roads for an interstate. They are not for traveling through. These roads were never intended for that and now you can't just designate it that way because you've been using it that way. Or because it would be a good new use."

You know, to just allow these roads that were built, pretty much just to get people around to be turned into something else.

WM: Uh-huh

RD: As soon as they do—when you double a road’s size, you double the capacity. And it alters all of the zoning. All the zoning changes with the roads. All of the “allowed things” change. People are frequently sold on the idea of getting a road, because they think it is going to lessen their traffic. But they are never told it is going to change all of their zoning.

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: Half of the time people, I don’t think, care too much—They do care but not enough to get involved at the front end of the process. So trying to get people to understand that if they get a wider road, it’s going to be a bad thing, is a hard sell.

Most people, a lot of people, they think if you widen the road it’s going to make the traffic better. They don’t think a thing about it changing what’s on the side of the road. But they are directly related.

With this area—and I have to say, for the record, that I really came in after most of the protections were put into place.

WM: Okay. And when was that?

RD: I think the community plans were put into place a good six years ago, maybe?

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: And when I was actually involved with the [Keystone] Civic Association, I was their president, at the time that we got it, stamped and sealed and all of that, up with the state and our land development code. But all the work had been done prior to me getting there.

But, getting these roads protected was one of the biggest things I ever did. The other thing that was protected out here, that people don’t talk about, and I would never say that a zoning meeting. It wouldn’t help me whatsoever, but it’s just a fact that there is money out here.

You know if you want to go down Crawley Road and widen it, you’re going buying it from quite a few millionaires. And they are not going to give it to you. And you’re not going to intimidate them and take it. They might just fight you until they die.

So that has helped us. And we are unique in that we’ve got so many bodies of water, that even if they could get the right-of-ways, it would be so costly to build the roads around all this water and over this water—That’s kind of like strike two, you know? So between the money being out here and the roads being protected and the roads really wouldn’t make a good choice, that has saved Keystone.

And I think that a lot of the reason that people were really alert and had the gumption to fight for those protections and put them into place early was because of the water issues. Having Pasco County pumping the water out—what was it? Twenty years ago they had the “Water Wars?” A lot of those well fields are right over here and throughout this area. So they had already been through the fight once, you know?

They saw the lake [levels] dropping and their swamps dying and the reports still [stated] that it’s not going to harm anything. So they found that reports can be twisted to [say] whatever they want. That’s frequently how they are surprised by government.

WM: Uh-huh. Well tell me about how you got involved in the civic association. How did that come about?

RD: I called them about this neighbor next door. We bought this house and about a year after—

Before we bought it we looked at all of the zoning, concerned about a salvage yard going in down the street. I know there was one there [a long time] ago. And this [lot next door] was vacant and I wanted to know what it could be.

Well, we found out all of the zonings [and] felt comfortable with it. [We] bought the place and had been here about a year when they started bulldozing the trees over there on Saturday and Sunday. I just figured that was kind of strange, that they would do it on the weekend. But I didn’t know I’d never dealt with development or any of that.

I fought them for about a year, dealing with the county and them.

WM: Wait, they were bulldozing stuff over there and you didn’t think about it so? —You kind of skipped ahead.

RD: Oh, I’m sorry. Yeah. Its been eight years and I’m still dealing with it, so—

What it came out to be, I was told they were going to put a tree farm in, so they would be able to bulldoze all of the trees, it was about ten acres over there. It had never been developed for anything, so it was just all of these oaks. I was shocked when they could take them all out, but I was told they could do it if it’s a farm.

Well it’s going to be a tree farm, so that was okay until about six months in and we never saw any trees. It was just dump trucks coming and going every day, and all of this heavy equipment. Well, getting about a year in they were saying that the dump truck and all this heavy equipment was just there to just to get their property ready to be a tree farm, but they’d been using it for a year as a facility.

So I went to the [Keystone] Civic Association, kind of out of desperation, because I had been told [the civic association], would make you pick up trash and those people are crazy and you don’t want to go down there. They don’t like anybody.

So I was really a little bit spooked. I went down there and met with them and told them [about my concerns] and they said they supported my position and [my neighbors] should be doing whatever it is they are zoned to do and nothing else.

Well, I started feeling like they were pretty normal and was kind of surprised. It's kind of nice to find people that had dealt with this frustration. You know I had never dealt with anything that had so many answers before that just never ended.

And I don't think it took long, about six months later [oh maybe a year] I was president. The guy that had been president had been doing it for six or seven years and wanted out. So I jumped.

WM: Okay, I'm still not clear. [Your neighbors] said that [the land next door] was going to be a tree farm but it wasn't.

RD: No.

WM: They were developing it into a—

RD: Well, they still use it today as a commercial site. There's a distinction between a farm and broker. Brokering would be like Target putting rotisserie chickens out for sale, to let's say Publix. The difference between that and some place where they can grow a chicken and they can cook for you.

Basically, they're not growing any plant material, but because they are holding plant material there they want to claim it as a nursery. As a nursery you get all sort agricultural benefits. If you can Ag exemptions it's a good thing. I always had a problem with fighting with Hughes, because I always agreed with all of the exemptions for the farmers. A lot of people out here care a lot about farms and such, so you know? But the whole thing was whether it was a farm or not.

Well, they have plants and the county would come out and take a look and say, "Well, they've got plants." So it erupted into an entire argument over what constituted a plant nursery.

Well, these guys next door, they've never argued—well they did for a while, they've argued everything. They argued for a while that they were a plant farm, but then they just came along, once they couldn't win that battle and said, "Okay, we are not a plant farm, we're landscaper, so we're commercial. We're a different type of entity, but historically that's what's been allowed on that type of land out here in Hillsborough. So that's what we're going to do anyway." Because of history, you have to allow it.

So they did that argument for a while in lawsuits. I think we're back to the same—now they've applied for a nonconforming use. But they've yet to have to pay a fine. And it's

been seven years and they still operate. Dump trucks will be pulling in there tonight and they'll be pulling out of there tomorrow morning.

So that is what actually got me into it, dealing with this company next door and with the county. Once I—that's where I got into the civic association.

WM: Okay. Again, I'm asking these questions to make sure that when someone comes along and listens to this they will understand how you got involved and how you worked with the civic association.

RD: Oh, no problem. I'll ramble at no end if you just let me.

WM: But anyhow, so the people that told you the civic association was really worrisome, but were concerned about how the land was used, and enforcing the zoning. I just want to make sure I understand.

RD: Yeah. I found that on going to the civic association, I thought, "Oh my gosh! These people probably won't like me." I mean my house has two sheds and this that and the other. And really it wasn't that at all. They were—the thing that they were all upset about was the fact that the county was allowing changes to zoning. That they were allowing changes to properties that they didn't feel were appropriate.

And things, such as the issue I had with my neighbor, were right up their alley. It was property that had all of this intensive use going on and the county was pretty much turning their head to it.

You know, it's development related. [The 'nursery' next door] put plants and trees in for people's new homes. And they work on a large scale with the Polkes(??) and the—who's the other one? The Luttenbergs(??) and the different builders, so once you get into that whole builder ring, it changes a little bit, how they get treated.

You know?

Also as you hit right down in here, they are not right next door to a Mc Mansion, or else they wouldn't be operating to day. [If I lived in a Mc Mansion] I'd have the funds to scare the county to where they would have done something.

But they know I'm not going to sue them, so—they do what they can, when they can and then—

You know I think the county has had eight different attorneys that I've dealt with on just this one thing. It's just the new "bottom guy" gets it. (chuckles) But you know, when I see that the nudie clubs that are shut down and everything else, it is very frustrating.

But what I found more frustrating was dealing with the civic association and trying to represent the community down there and you don't have anyone listening.

WM: Where don't you have people listening?

RD: On the County Commission.

WM: Oh, okay.

RD: On the County Commission and on the Planning Growth and Management Department. Um—they—the changes that they would allow—Trying to understand what set of rules they were going to enforce and that they weren't going to enforce was just impossible.

You've got this huge amount of code and then this governing plan, the comp plan, the comprehensive plan. The comp plan is confusing as all get out, I mean if you just walk in and pick it up.

But if you sit down and spend some time with it you can understand it and see how it works together. The commissioners don't. And the new commissioners don't. A lot of the older ones don't. They don't care. They want to know fiscal, they want to know this or that, but they don't care what's in the comp plan and it changes every six months so they're not going to read it.

Um—it's trying—I just felt like they were all in the pockets of developers, period.

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: That's the point it got to. It doesn't matter what our argument is. It doesn't matter what is better for the land. It doesn't matter what is better for the community. It's, "Who does this guy know?" And, "Has he talked to Jim Norman yet? Does he have the strings to pull to have Jim Norman give him this one or not?"

You started noticing the whole little block of them voting the same, every way.

To this day I get furious reading the newspaper. I can only hear Jim Norman's [voice] as he would constantly approve housing development after housing development. He would praise himself as to how much money that was going to put on the [tax] roll.

"This is money that we're going to have. This is money going in. This is money we'll have on the tax roll."

He would say that as a reason for granting more development. He did it all of the time. Now look at it! This isn't working too good is it Jim? You know? (sighs angrily and shakes his head in disgust)

WM: Okay. I'm interested in what you learned working with the civic association. It sounds like you went in as an ordinary citizen—

RD: The different tools.

WM: Uh-huh. I mean, you saw that the civic association was there and could provide support for citizens like you, to manage growth. So tell me about that learning process.

RD: The learning process was basically diving in—I guess four or five people that worked in the area. We would check all of the permits that came through. All of the application requests. You looked for changes. Just when they were going to change something, or a plan development request came in

The plan developments were the main things that were—um—coming in and wiping out areas. They would come in and ask for this change—

WM: They being?

RD: Developers would come in asking for a change in the zoning. And they wanted to do a plan development, which would allow them a whole lot more freedom to move stuff around and what-have you.

Then there was this whole bartering thing that went on, back and forth. You had to barter to get the developer to do anything that might be nice for the existing neighborhood. To try to get it to jive with the new neighborhood, so it's not just a square hokey box. So it's not just the same thing that they've built down the street that it is going to have something to do with the neighbors.

[It could be] anything from fencing to lighting to—you know—any of these exterior things, from landscaping to how many houses they would get. That's what there bargaining chip always was, they wanted more houses. And we wanted less. So you always went in saying, You know that they were going to start out at twice the amount that they would even really want.

I called it buying the used car, except that you got to start on the very other end of it. Saying, "You want two hundred houses? Well, we're only agreeing to twenty." And then—it's a whole lot of that back and forth between you and them.

The different tools, the things that actually worked were numbers of people. Getting numbers of people educated enough to know and be able to put it in understandable terms, so that they could know what the upcoming requested change was, and what it would do.

You had to kind of tell them the future, a little bit, and what that would do. Once people can grasp what they are asking for, aside from all of this "PDU" and "RES 4" and all of the technical jargon. Then they are willing to go down there and say, "No, that's not what I want. My house is on a half acre. The neighbor's is on a half acre and everybody down

the street is on a half acre. Put these [new] houses on a half acre. We don't want seven [houses] on an acre."

Once neighbors can understand that if you give it to them in kind, then they'll go in numbers. And the immediate are the most important ones. The people that are involved, seem to have a hard time (even if they've been bought, it seems) they have a harder time if you can have the people that are going to be impacted standing there telling them, "I don't want to be impacted this way."

If I went down there and just said that as their [representative] I think would seem a little bit as a political thing, "We really don't want to piss off that association." But if "Susie" is down there, it puts more of a real person to it. To where it's harder for [the commissioners] to not listen to the residences.

But getting the people who were going to be most affected involved was something that I was taught to do very early on.

WM: Okay, you said it was a bargaining process and they will come in and say they want two hundred houses, even though that's more than they actually want. And you all would say, "We'll only let you have twenty houses," even though you know you're going to have to give up more.

RD: Right.

WM: So you all are bargaining, but with who? Who is the intermediary?

RD: The bargaining typically goes on outside of the county, in between planners and civic [associations]—I mean myself.

A lot of times it was e-mails and phone calls.

WM: I mean it's like the civic association and the developers, are you all working through the county commissioners?

RD: No, we'd work directly—

WM: With each other?

RD: With each other.

WM: Okay. Now most of the time—Keystone got to the point where the county got so tired of dealing with us that they would tell the developers, straight out, "You need to go and meet with Keystone [Civic Association] first and then come and apply.

Frequently, I mean lots of developers came through there. They would come and present their little spiel. And then they'd go apply. They'd take our comments or not, sometime

we'd just laugh at them and tell them, "You're crazy!" But if it was a halfway decent project—you know—[we'd listen].

We always had to kind of think ahead and all to think of losing. It's like, "What are these neighbors gonna get if you don't take this [deal]."

But the bargaining would be over nitpicking details.

WM: I'm just trying to get a clear picture of it. So the developers would come in and [tell you] this is what they want to do.

RD: Uh-huh.

WM: And they would talk with you all about that?

RD: They would give a presentation to the whole board of the civic association.

WM: And then they would apply for the permit?

RD: The change in zoning, usually.

WM: Right and if the civic association objected to that change in zoning that would make it difficult for them?

RD: Right. Right.

WM: Okay, I just wanted to understand. That's the picture I wasn't sure of.

RD: If the civic association objects to it, they know they have a really hard fight. The civic association has been very good at winning against a lot of the development.

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: The developers know that too. That's another thing that kind of keeps them—after awhile, if you beat down just so many of them, they see it in the paper and they hear from this attorney and that attorney, that they didn't get it. [The attorney will say,] "I've been out there and I don't want to work out there."

So that helped tremendously after a bit. They learned that it was a hard place to build. You have to work with the community. Where as you can go into the Apollo Beach areas that weren't ready and organized; there was no one out there expecting it.

[It was,] "Take it. Just do what you want. You don't have to say boo to anybody."

WM: If nobody objects to the changes when they go before the county commissioners, but here people will contest [the development]?

RD: Right.

WM: Okay, great.

And the civic association if I understand you correctly was already organized and doing that by the time you joined?

RD: Oh yeah.

By the time I came along there were already three to four hundred members. And like I say, that civic association, this civic association out here, has been around—it's the oldest one in the county. But it's always been strong since the "Water Wars."

Any time there is a real issue, like that, that ties a bunch of people together in a community, as long as some of those people are still around it's always going to be kind of strong. They have something that ties them all [together]. So a lot of people out here know each other because of that.

They keep their ears perked [up]. They might not show up at your Thursday night meetings, where you have a small group of them. But you have them all on a mailing list and a monthly newsletter or a web site, or however it is that you share your information. Whenever something like that comes out, you just print it.

"We're going to go down and we want people to show up and object to it." This is—you know—and they discuss it at the meetings and such so there can be some group, the civic association. People talk about it.

You know we've filled that room down there before. That's a lot of pressure. And it works. But it's hard to fill a room. It's got to be something that's going to have to effect every person out here.

WM: I was going to say, tell me about a typical Keystone Civic Association member. Could you just sort of describe the membership?

RD: Gosh. It's varied. It's—the community is so diversified now. I think the civic association is too. You still have the little mom and pop kind of farmer people out here. But you have a lot of these bigger homes now. You have different farms now; the horse farms and those are people that show up.

But the average member? I would say the average member is pro-nature. They want to see the Brooker(??) Creek preserved. I mean you don't move to where there are no grocery stores and mosquitoes the size of turkeys because you like the convenience of a town.

So I think the majority of the Keystone Civic Association members are all people that don't want to see anymore development. Don't change any more zoning, you know? Don't increase it any more.

WM: You've talked about these instances where you've managed to fill the room, so if you could, give me a couple of examples of where the Keystone Civic Association has come together to contest development. I think that would be interesting for people to know about.

RD: Um—There was, one of the first big issues that I handled was Keystone's—was the Citrus Park Baptist Church.

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: There was a lawsuit and all of that. How much does a gag order keep me quiet on?

WM: I'm afraid you're asking the wrong person. If it's been in the newspaper then I think you're free to talk on it.

RD: That's true.

Let's see, the church [was over in Citrus Park] and they bought property out here. They came in and they were going to put a church and a school on it. Right next to it was the Brooker Creek Preserve. Which the people out here, the water people had done a lot to get that headwater preserved. And they had done a lot on preserving lakes and that sort of thing.

Uh—what were we talking about?

WM: The Baptist Church brings Keystone together.

RD: Getting a lot of them together.

WM: So this church wanted to—

RD: The church wanted to put an eight hundred-student school out here. And they were going to have to have their septic [system] right there. They couldn't have sewer [lines] because we don't have piped water and sewer [systems] out here. You have to be on a well and a septic [tank].

No one wanted that. No one wanted that much septic, or a school coming in and going on a property and not being considered a school. It was kind of being ushered in as the whole thing being a church.

You know a church is fine. [An] eight hundred student school, that's a standard elementary school. That's a big school. That's an impact. So that brought a lot of people out because of just the nature of it. It was going to change something on Gunn Highway.

And I think it also brought of them out because they felt—I think they again felt kind of like the thing was pushed out here and allowed, when it's known that these students aren't from this area. You know they're coming from a different area and it [was] just going to be brushed under the carpet and allowed. You're going to put septic [waste] from eight hundred people on top of something that you've just bought to preserve. So that was a double standard and that was a water quality issue.

Water issues are really big to people out here. And I think a lot of it has to do with—so many of them are on lakes. There is so much water out here, you don't move out here if you don't like it. You're going to be near a swamp or lake or something.

So that brought a lot of people out. And it was a hard one, because you're going against a church. Of course you never look too good.

But by the time I had gotten here Keystone already had a black eye for not looking good. For not worrying about—for not really tipping its hat to anyone. You know, it's this type of use and this is what the books say. That's what you can do. Not that you can kind of do it because you're a church. We'll [not] act like we don't know this is wrong. We still went after them.

Another issue that brought a lot of them out was another water issue. This is a wellhead protection area. That's been another thing that has held [back] growth.

WM: Explain wellhead protection area.

RD: We have wellheads out here that used by Tampa Bay Water, which is a regional water supplier for—what—three or four counties. So they pump the water from out underneath of us.

Now they've got the entire area protected as a well field area because we have well fields all over the Keystone area. There is a linear one that runs all up and down Gunn Highway, right in front to the school I was just talking about.

WM: That school that they wanted to put—

RD: Where they wanted to put the septic. Eight hundred students. On one side you had the Brooker Creek starting point and on the other side you had linear well fields and in between we were going to put eight hundred [students].

But—uh—I don't know if I was the county commission or who, but it had to go through the county commission. [They] came along and decided to update it and when they updated it the protections were only right at the wellhead.

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: I mean it—you had like a five-foot area around it, or something.

So immediately all of these protections, that if you were in a wellhead would say, “You could or could not do this,” were gone. They were just stripped away.

Now, this was a proposal. So when we saw the proposal and told people what it was, when they came out to give their presentation, it was a mob scene. They sent them back home with lots of colorful words and things. I mean, [the civic association] tore them up.

They were telling the people, during the presentation, “You go back up that tower and tell them that this is not going to happen.” I mean they were outraged.

WM: Okay—you received word that they were going to put this church school out here. How did the civic association get that information?

RD: The zoning laws and the county laws and all do require that they, when they apply for these different permits and things, that they notify by mailings certain property owners. And that includes any registered, active civic association. So we actually get all of these different types of mailings on everything that goes through the county. (Well, not everything.)

Everything that they require the neighbors be told about the civic associations are copied on. So you have to go through these, look at them and then figure out what it is. Then sometimes—now a lot of it is on the computer. Back then it required—when I first started they wanted me to go downtown all the time.

But I was the new kid on the block and I was, like, “That’s what FAX machines and e-mails are for. So I kind of changed that a little bit and started bugging the county for FAXes. But you got to get a copy of the plans that have been submitted. And that was a problem.

Lots of times you’d go down to for the plans and there’d be something there. It would be called a plan and it would have a big “squiggly” all around the outside. And that was called the bubble plan. And that would mean that they were going to put stuff in there when they wanted to, but there was nothing there yet. And that was allowed.

But you had to take that information, whatever day that you were applying and just let people know what it was. In this instance it was a change to the plans. So you’d tell a couple of key people and they’ll tell twenty by phone and then—especially for something like that.

WM: Okay, but you found out the school was going to come and somebody said, “Hey wait, this isn’t going to work. We can’t let them do this to us.” Was it like that?

RD: Umm—

WM: I mean, I'm just trying to get a picture of how the whole thing went down.

RD: How it normally goes down and how that one went down is—well—I hadn't dealt with so much on that one. I came in right around the time that they were just going to go ahead and do it. They were either starting to either file a lawsuit and or not. Um—

What happens—the board, the [civic] association board meets and looks at these—talks about the technical stuff. If it is anything more than they can get by going through what is normal zoning—they call it “Euclidean”—what the land is actually zoned for. Then we would tell people that.

You know, if they were to do it normal, this is what they could get. Say they could get forty houses. [If] they are looking at it so they can do it this way, so they can put eighty houses [on the property].

So what we did is we looked at the property there and it's not zoned for a school. It's actually agricultural. So we had to compare and think, “What could you get? What else could you put here?”

Um—now a regular school couldn't go there, because it doesn't have water, sewer, the right amount of space and this and that and the other. But their facility was going to be allowed on there. So we didn't think that was right. You know?

If it didn't meet the same standards that are normal standards, they had to go above and beyond and ask for all of these variances and less room and this and that—we typically would oppose it. At that point we would go in front of our general membership.

At a meeting of usually around thirty people you bring it up for discussion. Everybody usually comes up at discussion and someone would make a motion, or what have you, to: not oppose it, favor it or oppose it. So I'm sure that's probably how that one came about too.

But they go on for months.

WM: Oh yeah, I know they want to drag it out as long as possible.

So the people decided that this school would not be in the best interest of Keystone so they opposed it before the Board of County Commissioners, or the county planners?

RD: This one, actually another thing that opposition to it was that it wouldn't go in front of the Board of County Commissioners. This one was going through a lesser process and I'm sure it was 'cause it was a “church.”

Churches can, to me, have a lot of exemptions and they misuse them for schools, [just] as we have these agricultural exemptions being misused. Once they turn into these profit-generating schools it's a different entity. And it's a different neighbor too.

A school is [a] completely different thing than living next to a church. But they want to use the same facility, then sure. Of course that makes sense for you, but it doesn't make sense for an area. So—

I'm not sure where that point was going.

WM: I'm just trying to get—um—but the people of Keystone opposed them, the church, putting this school here?

RD: Right and they would—at that point, you let them know at these public meetings, when the hearings are going to be.

You would request them to go—um—and you'd usually have a group of people that were living closest to it. Or for whatever reason, were interested in working on, like, a presentation together. You'd have to research the zoning laws and the comp plans. Then you find all of the things that it doesn't match up with. And then you just present all of that—you have to present a lot of information about what the neighborhood is and what the change will be. Those things have to be presented to someone. In this case it wasn't the commission it was just a land use hearing officer, who would be able to decide it.

With the church, it ended up going—um—back and forth with appeals boards so many times. I'm not sure who appealed who first. But the decisions are constantly appealed to court. The Gills Family were appealing it and they own property right next to it. They acted independently of us. (They're the Gills from Dr. Gills of St. Luke's Eye Surgery and I think his father writes religious books.)

But they have a large piece of property that they had purchased back there to live on, before the church came along and it was cow pasture before and now they were going to have ball fields in their backyards. And they didn't want that.

But the land use hearing officers' [decision] were appealed in circuit courts, or civil courts

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: With judges and attorneys. They would throw it back to this land use hearing officer and it would go through that process. It went on for (I think) five years. Back and forth that way, get approved, denied and then if they—

If they were denied there was another process that was going on, the land use appeals board, inside the county, it went in front of that board four or five times. I mean—this

thing went in front of probably fifteen to twenty people. Finally the last judge said, “No, you can’t do this.”

So currently—now they’ve already built the gymnasium, because the county wouldn’t stop them. They warned them, “You may have to tear it down.” It’s happened before, but they went ahead and built their gymnasium and the last round of [appeals] they lost.

So now they are meeting in it as a church, but through the county’s kind of not stopping this, prior, now we’ve got a gymnasium sitting in the middle of a cow pasture. We’ve got a church that is out of a bunch of money. We weren’t interested in hurting them, but it was, “Why don’t you just stop them and tell them this isn’t something you can do.”

The courts recognized it, but instead they let a whole bunch of money and time be wasted. Now the community is still stuck with this giant gymnasium sitting in the middle of this cow pasture.

When I pass it and it’s like, “What is that?”

WM: Maybe the church figured if they went ahead and built it that would give them a good argument to continue with the project.

But it kept going back and forth with appeals and denials—at this point is the issue resolved? Or is it still—

RD: It’s resolved to the point that they can’t use that application any more. No. But they can walk in tomorrow and turn in a different application and start all over again.

They are saying that their gymnasium is a church, so it’s still standing. They will probably apply now for less; for a school of lesser size. I really don’t know what they’ll do with it.

I’m sure they went forward with the building because then it is very hard to get people to—you know, rule against a church. What are you going to do; have them tear down the church building?

And in Keystone, at that point, we were like, “Yes, we will.”

WM: (laughs)

RD: “We’ll tear your church down. Don’t build it there. It’s not a church.” (laughs)

WM: I guess it sounds like a war of attrition where each side is trying to get the other [side] to give up.

RD: There is a lot of that. Especially these guys next to me, Hughes(??), with their business I’m sure they figured that I would have left by now, or shut up, or jumped off of

a building. But I haven't and they're still there. It's ongoing. The county hasn't resolved it.

That's a big gripe [I have] with the county, if they are going to have certain rules and they ask you to participate. I went through the process of—they created a whole other land use because of this company next door to me. And they still won't abide by that one either. I went through that whole process.

But it's still, if they are not abiding with it, they are not shutting them down. I asked them in e-mails, it's like, "Did you all notice they can't have dump trucks out here. That's not part of the business. It's been going on for eight years and regardless of what you say I'm going to wake up tomorrow morning to dump trucks."

I mean we've changed land uses. I've gone through all of these processes and everything and the administrator has the power to shut them down. She could with one action, saying, "You can't operate. Close this business down." And they could shut them down.

But then they will be liable and this company will take them to court and [the county] is not sure if they will win. So—they just let them keep operating as long as they have some sort of filing in. It's a lot cheaper for [Hughes] to operate from there than it is to work from a commercial property. The legal expenses of having an attorney show up at these different things is just part of the running.

One of the things that neighbors and an association and a group can be good for is having them watch for the weekend workers. When they are bulldozing on weekends, it's always bad. Because you can't reach anyone [from the county] to show up to stop them.

What do you do when you come upon a man bulldozing a tree and he's got a bulldozer and you're in your car? Unless you're a crazy tree hugger and want to jump in front of the tree—

So having people alerted to call and ask for permits. Having them aware as to what numbers to [call]. That's important in being able to save a lot of stuff.

A lot of stuff goes in and gets built and then it is after the fact that is it found out. It's very forgiven. Practically all you have to do is get the right permits, even if you wouldn't have been allowed to do what you've [already done.] You just pay the permit price and you're good. It's done.

WM: It's like the fellow said it's a lot easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to ask for permission.

RD: Right. So trying to get a community to know that and to know to call and stop people. There is a reason they are there on that weekend, because there are not inspectors out. There are not people paying attention. They can get a lot done and by the time you get someone out there—even if they do get caught doing it, they've got "X" amount

done. It's not coming back. Hillsborough County is not making you put a tree back in the ground.

It just don't happen! You bulldoze it and when it's gone you say, "Oops!"

Citrus Park, which I feel is pretty tied to that community, it's real close to us, that was, you know, where the town was when we were kids.

But there was a bank on the corner for a long time that had all of these great oak trees. Then Eckerd's [drugstore] came in. They were redoing the whole intersection. Eckerd's came in because [a] school had been built across the street. [It] blew the intersection out. Um—but when they wanted to put the Eckerd's in they bulldozed a grandfather oak. They knew it was [a grandfather oak]. They had it marked and all, but they bulldozed it 'cause it [was] right there in the middle and it would have cost them \$500.00 [in fines]. And then [drugstore] went up. And the [drugstore] was empty in two years, but the tree's gone. The property is trashed. It's got a big old [drugstore] on it. Their job is done and they go.

Those sorts of stamps on a community are really harmful I think. They happen so fast. That was a road issue. That bank was fine until they changed the roads and then it didn't—that corner didn't function any more. They haven't been able to keep any [businesses] alive there since.

And I think they're redoing that whole interchange up there at Sickles(??) for like the sixth or seventh time inside of six or seven years.

You want some more water?

WM: No I've still got some here. This is fine.

RD: I've got plenty, stay hydrated.

WM: Well I'll certainly do that.

So, are you still active with the civic association?

RD: I haven't been. I'm still active in—um—[sighs]—I had to get out of some of the politics of this, to where I haven't been to a meeting in probably a year. But I go to the trash pick-ups. I go to the events. And I hang out with the people who are still at the core group. I also run with people that handle a lot of the zoning, or pay attention and contribute information and thoughts and stuff to the county.

But we don't work directly—we're not—[representatives] for the civic association. It's more fun to do it when you can speak for yourself and not someone else. And it's easier. But—um—you don't have to be so politically correct all of the time and think of everyone's wants. You can just go in there and say what you want.

WM: So you've pulled back from working with the civic association?

RD: Yeah. And a lot of that has come due to the fact that I don't feel there is any reason to deal with the county right now, on any level. I feel that it is so bought and paid for right now that it really is [like] beating your head against a wall.

WM: When you say that it is 'so bought and paid for,' could you explain that?

RD: I mean that the majority of the commissioners, on the board of county commissions are taking money and being influenced bribes and just campaign contributions. I mean, to me the campaign contributions are a bribe. And when everybody knows who "Ralph" is, you know, and the owner of all these companies, like Cass Creek(??) and all. He even sends out his own publications to everyone who is registered to a certain affiliation. It's bad and it's hard to go down there and fight for things when you know there are a couple of [county commissioners] that are listening to whatever he's telling them. But when you know that there are only one or two that are not under his wing, that are not being told what to do by him and you are going to lose—it's hard to devote [any] time and energy to it.

It's like going into a room of pro-choice people all the time and selling the opposite. You can only be beat down so many times and if that room full of people isn't changing, you're not changing their minds.

And you can just watch the climate, you can just look at what they've done. They've taken away EPC [Environmental Protection Commission]. They've made themselves the EPC and now they've dissolved the EPC.

WM: And EPC stands for?

RD: Environmental Protection Commission.

So this board has proven to be very anti-environmental. You can pay them! And that's all there is to it. They haven't seen a development they don't like. They're not above breaking the law to get what they want. The only way they will go to jail is if they get dumb enough to do it and get caught. But they're blatantly bowing to the developer.

I become so frustrated; in the past election they put Jim Norman and Ken Hagen back in. It's like, okay, no one knows what they are doing. People aren't paying attention. Obviously they are just looking at the red, white and blue signs.

It's either that or they want more of what they are already getting. It's like, that's not what they are all saying. They obviously just don't know who these people are and they are checking off these names [on the ballot] 'cause they've seen them before. "Well, it seems that these people are doing a good job."

But when you see them getting voted back in and you know—once you start—the newer commissioner, Blair. It didn't take long to know where he was coming from.

Once you know you've got a board that's all developer weighted—I just can't bring myself to go down there.

I also worked on—I don't know—some stupid thing. They were going to change the way zonings were done. It was a change in zoning. If you wanted to take a piece of property and turn it in to something else—a planned development is what we call them. Hillsborough County wanted to change that process. Because it was no longer being used the way it was supposed to be used. And there was a new guy in—a new administrator and he had some pretty good ideas (He was a zoning administrator.) But [everybody else was fighting him.] His ideas weren't developer friendly.

So he still got this whole thing going to change what all of this planning was and how they set up this entire—process and what it would be. It went on for several years and I think it's still going through some sort of adoption process. But half way through it was, like, taken over by the developers and just stripped, right before a meeting, and that was it.

It was, like, you know, this is crazy. [The Board of County Commissioners asks] people to participate. [They] ask them to come down and then, repeatedly, just ignores them. And that board was doing that to every citizens group and every advisory group they had. No matter what the advisories were. They went for whatever would promote more development.

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: So that in itself pushed me to where I just didn't want to go to the civic association. We were also fighting the county with an elementary school that they did allow to go in on the corner where our town center was supposed to be, in with commercial stuff.

That was very taxing for the whole association. That one—oh I don't know how many—we started with like \$50,000.00 and from there it was just more and more attorney's bills. It finally was settled and they agreed to a smaller school. But—[sighs] I don't want to say any more on that.

WM: Okay. But what I've heard you say is that the current Board of County Commissioners are so pro-development that they disregard what different civic associations from around the county say and tend to do what the developers want. So, it was just too frustrating for you to continue participating?

RD: Absolutely.

WM: Okay.

When did you feel like you pulled out; just to get a time frame on this?

RD: Oh—I'd say about a year ago, when I finally had to just quit paying attention, as much as I could. It took coming to the realization that—that I wasn't talking to anyone. It didn't matter what research [was done] and what was right or wrong. The decisions were made before the application was put in.

You hear some many people say, "You can't fight City Hall." I don't feel that way. I feel like there is still a place, but I feel like now we have such crooked politicians sitting in our commission, that they've found a way to get around everything.

WM: Uh-huh.

RD: They ignore their own staff too. When you see that—if it was just us then I'd have to think perhaps we're a bit too demanding out here. We expect a bit too much. But when you see that they ignore their advisory committees from one end of the spectrum to the other, you know—there's a preference [for development]. They've got a preference for what they want to see and that's what they are going to move forward with.

And they're no [fools] either. They've got to understand that people don't follow this too. You know? That they can keep a certain political face and a certain face out there, seems that— it's good enough to cover up anything to do with development.

How do you tie—you can't go on a computer or anything right now and find out how many votes what commissioners have [cast] on what land use issues. And who would determine for you whether or not they were pro-development or anti-development, or middle of the road, or what have you.

So aside from reading those issues, or sitting through them (my gosh!), you really don't know [how they've voted]. And when it comes out of the commission, it's like there's seven of them and nobody even knows their names if they do read off what's printed in the paper on which ones voted for it and which ones voted against it.

So what you've got to do is to hope that somebody good comes along [to run for county commissioner] and has better signs next time.

WM: Better signs, you mean gets elected?

RD: Yeah. They need prettier red, white, and blue signs to get in.

WM: So what do you foresee in the future? Do you think that Keystone will remain— maintain its integrity? Or do you feel like eroded or—

RD: It's still gotten more development coming in to it. But I don't know. It's something I wonder about. Because there are—there are a good deal of people out here that are new.

And the newer people don't have the same concerns and issues. They probably have a very small lot and they they've probably got flora-chem(??) and fertilize right to the lake edge and then poured sand in [to fill the lake] and pulled all of those nasty leaves—so—I don't know which way it will go. I think it there is a good deal of protection already on top of it. And there are a good deal of people living out here that are devoted to it, that it would take a real split out here—um—and I think the only real issue that would get to them would be roads.

I think over the years, they've learned. They're starting to learn. The more you tell them about watching other areas. All you have to do is to think back a ways. What were East Lake like back when it was just a two-lane road and had houses on it? What is it now? A strip mall from one end to the other. And it's no quick route.

So once they start seeing that those [road improvements] aren't a good thing and hearing that a little bit, and paying attention to it, then you end up with a community that has a little bit of a clue about what they don't want to happen. So at least in that aspect we are at least ready to fight against it.

WM: Okay, you feel like an informed, educated community is the first—

RD: Absolutely.

WM: That's the first step.

RD: They have to know. Yeah, the community has to know what's going on with land use issues. But they have to—um—know. And that's a hard thing to do.

I found that was one of the most difficult things to do was to take all of those applications and processes and hearings and try to go out here and tell "Joe" what was going to happen. And when he needed to act and what he needed to do.

It's going to be so overwhelming if you tell them the reality of what they need to do that then they're not going to do it. (laughs) So you tell them to just show up, you know? And try to give them a clue about what's going on and get up there and tell them what you don't want. Tell them—

I think the tools are having a community that's knowledgeable and that's tricky 'cause you got to keep them all looking at something.

And trying to keep a civic association together is a little bit harder than the homeowners association type thing. [With] the homeowners you kind of got a definition of who they are. They've bought into the same thing. Out here, trying to keep the civic association alive, it's a whole different entity. But the people out here do it and it's always there. It might go down to a low level but it'll [continue]. And as soon as something big comes up they'll all be there again.

WM: So the next time Keystone is threatened or challenged by something you feel the community will rally?

RD: Yes. I think if you see some change to the water—um—if there was any spot for us to a place to scream for them not to do it—you know, something they felt was endangering to the wildlife or nature, whatever. Yeah, [the Keystone Civic Association] would definitely get together.

Any large development would pull a lot of people out. If someone were to come in here and want to change densities, you'd see a lot of people [turn out]. And now what we mainly do—almost all of it—

I've only handled people by phone lately. I've done that for, probably, the last two years. But I'll tell them how to do it. A lot of it is just knowing what processes they to do, or who they need to call and what to ask and who they need to make sure is doing what.

Usually, if you can get people, if they're interested in it, if they're concerned, they'll take it. And if they were just looking for someone to do it, then you won't hear from them again. And you'll see it go through.

And I get loads of phone calls. I can always tell, by the time they hang up the phone, if they are going to do anything or if they were just looking for someone to do it. But, they've stopped some [projects]. You know just a couple of neighbors can make a big difference. But they have to have—

I think it's too hard to call the county and find out. No one is going to give them that sort of tip. But I think if a civic association is going to do anything land use wise, they just need to have a few people that can say, "Okay. You guys come and meet with us and that's what KCA [Keystone Civic Association] does a lot of. The board will have the neighbors to meet, on a different night after they've come together at a general meeting and say, "Okay, this is what you need to do."

What's a little different with us is, a lot of times we don't do it for them, so much. Now we don't even have a group that does the meetings with them. But—um—we would, maybe have one person that could do that for them, you know a [civic] association person. But we'd make them do the rest. We'd just tell them how to do it.

It would frustrate them no end because they would say, "You already know how to do this. Why won't you people do it?" But it's not ours.

You get burned out too. But I'm more than happy to at least tell people how to go fight for their rights. 'Cause the people are looking to make money off of the land, they've paid someone to go in there and do it. And they're going to do a good job of asking for what they want, to get their rights.

If the little guy doesn't know to show up and say something, he gets robbed. He is going to get robbed anyway, right now. (laughs)

WM: Well that sounds like a good place to conclude, 'cause I've been talking to you for about an hour and a half.

Is there anything you want to comment on that I haven't asked about?

RD: I don't believe so.

WM: Okay. Well I always explain to people that the information you've shared with me will be transcribed and deposited in the Special Collections in the library of the University of South Florida to be available to people researching land use issues. In order for them to have access to this information we need your permission to access this interview.

RD: Okay. I give permission.

WM: Okay, great. Well I've got a form for you to sign. But I always like to explain that to people for the record.

And I've been taking pictures of people I interview is it okay if I take your picture?

RD: Sure. But I would have done my hair before you got here. (laughs)

WD: (laughs) Well, let me shut this thing off.

But again, thanks for taking the time to talk with me.

*end of interview*