

TMP-009

Interviewee: Carol Steele

Interviewer: Jessica Taylor

Date: June 17, 2013

T: This is Jessica Taylor and Asia, what's your last name?

A: Alsgaard.

T: Alsgaard, interviewing Carol Steele at 12:30 p.m. at Government Building A on June 17, 2013. Can you please state your full name?

S: Carol Elizabeth Steele.

T: What's your date of birth? If you don't mind me asking.

S: That's okay. Eight, one, [19]62.

T: Okay, where were you born?

S: Durham, North Carolina.

T: What are your parents' names and occupations?

S: My mother's name is Jean and she's retired. She worked for a couple of different industries, mainly in clerical work. And my father's name was Fred and he's deceased. And he was a government worker and a politician and a Jack of all trades. Civil engineer, to start off with.

T: Wow. Do you have any siblings?

S: I have three older brothers.

T: Yeah?

S: I'm the baby.

T: Oh. Do they live in the area?

S: No, they're all three in Carolina. I have two in Greensboro and one in Charlotte.

T: Okay. What do they do, if you don't mind me asking?

S: My oldest brother is a computer guru who is currently out of work and has been

for some time. Not a very good story; my family is a sign of the current economic state of the country. So he's lost his home, filed bankruptcy, maintaining- trying to do some consulting work, and basically living off of his wife's disability check. And my middle brother is a real estate agent. And you know how real estate went and so he's starting to come back with things and he's the one who's in Charlotte. And Charlotte seems to lead in Southeast **sale of** land. So things are picking up for him thankfully. And then my youngest brother is, works for a motorcycle shop selling parts and doing like the repair stuff and it's very seasonal and several times his employer, the owner of the company, felt they were going to shut down so he is barely employed. He lost his other job by lay-off with the economic crisis and now he has to drive an hour to and from work each day for almost just a minimum wage type job.

T: It's a sign of the times.

S: Yeah. He's right now getting ready to lose, I mean he's been on the verge of losing his house several times and his wife's father has bailed him out. So I'm the lucky one who went into the government steady-as-you-go job. [Laughter]

T: Yeah.

S: I may not have made the money my brother- my oldest brother was a millionaire before and now he's nothing, but I'm steady as you go.

T: Right. And when did you come to Gloucester?

S: Twenty-six years ago? Yeah, I've been with the county for twenty-six and a half years.

T: Wow. And why did you choose here?

S: I was in Northumberland County right before I moved here and so it's about an hour's drive away and the job opening came up so I came to Gloucester for the job. It was a step up for me in the department size. I had no intention of staying this long, thought it would be a five-year stint and I would continue to go up into bigger municipalities and fell in love with the area and have stayed and I'm just very content. Right place, right time, you know?

T: Tell me why you fell in love with it.

S: I think for the first moment of coming in to turn in my job application because at that time our HR department was in one of the historic buildings and so I just walked and I saw the court green and I thought, this place is gorgeous! And I had gone to graduate school and had been in Richmond, I grew up in northern Virginia, I'd been in big metropolitan areas and stuff and after living a little over a year in Northumberland where it was a thirty or forty minute drive to a McDonald's, to anything- [Laughter] I mean there was nothing, and Gloucester was huge compared to where I had been. So it felt right, it wasn't too overwhelming and I've lived in the Fan in Richmond and stuff, I'd sort of already been there, done that and this looked kind of like the right-sized community. So it was just really pretty. And a good opportunity.

T: Well, from your job's perspective what challenges does Gloucester face that Northumberland or Richmond wouldn't?

S: There's an identity crisis going on here that Gloucester doesn't know who it wants to be when it grows up. Are we urban? Are we rural? Are we suburban? And I've been complaining about this for a long time wishing that our government leaders

would help the community make that decision and then the policies would fit that. I've been gone for so long but at that time Northumberland knew it wanted to stay rural. They didn't want big stuff coming in. They would have died if a Walmart would have wanted to come. [Laughter] Things may have changed now but Mathews keeping up, I know Mathews better. Still today, they know they don't want but so much development. We have an industrial park, we have a large plant operation there, if we had a train or shipping we would have more industry. People want that. But at the same time they like the rural area, people move here from Newport News, from Norfolk, from Richmond trying to get away, a lot of retirees coming here. So you have this mix of- what do you have? Right now there's a challenge of do we preserve a major strip of land for another alternative route to interstate 64? And, cause there is no exit off of 64 to Gloucester, you gotta go through West Point, you gotta go through Newport News, but if we had through 199 a more direct access through Williamsburg, the county would probably grow in size. So you have some people who are saying, that's a great idea, I can get to work thirty minutes faster, get out of this rat race and the traffic and I can zip over to Williamsburg and people from Williamsburg can come here easier. Then there's another part of the community saying, absolutely don't do that because if you open up that door this county's gonna go boom and explode and we don't want that. So, I think that's probably would you say different from other communities, we face the same challenges from a work perspective, Parks and Recreation's always on the low end of the totem pole. We don't have enough money but that's the same anywhere. But it's an identity crisis I'd say would be

our number one.

T: If you had to kind of describe the different sides, who's on what, not who personally, but what characterizes one side? Is it older people or younger people or newcomers?

S: With stereotyping, most newcomers want more services. Some move here to get away from things but I think they still want the services. I think more of the older people are very comfortable with the way it is. You know, more population means higher crime. Means more traffic. Things that they're not gonna want. What I would like to see is, this sort of idealism that doesn't exist or isn't out there but, when I think about a boss in a Seattle or a Portland or in Atlanta or Charlotte, things that- cities that attract people of y'all's age to come and live here and bring your talents and bring my Social Security check funds as you're employed. [Laughter] Why would somebody young want to move here? And so I would like us to develop with our internet, with our green economy and things so that we would be an attraction for talent. And that means some change. But that does not mean a plant, an industry like that, a factory, a warehouse.

T: Right. How can Parks and Rec help implement that?

S: I think the green spaces, the opportunities for recreation are very important. I went to Seattle with my fourteen-year old last year and exploring some of the parks around and just kind of wanting to get off the beaten path. I'm like, what would it be like to live here not just a tourist? And we went to one park that, it was just great seeing people play ultimate Frisbee right next to people who were

playing football next to these people who were doing, fighting as knights.

[Laughter] You know, jousting kind of stuff almost. I don't even know what you would call it. It was just a great mix. And there were hundreds of people in this park. It's still a small park, it's probably not even a twenty-acre park. And almost everybody was young. There were some young families but there were twenty- to thirty-year olds. And playing all these games and sports together. So I think if we provide the venues, and the leagues then people are going to want to participate. And we have a crazy one going on right now which is kind of the retro- everything goes retro- is kickball. And kickball is big. Young people want to play kickball leagues because you played in P.E. class or something. You have fond memories of it and now you can actually kick that ball far and hard! So if we offer things like that I think it will attract younger people.

T: Yeah. And I know that you specifically have been, I saw the stuff about Woodville Park.

S: Yeah.

T: Do you want to talk a little bit about that? Your vision for it?

S: I talk about my parks, my parks? That sounds very possessive. I talk about the county's parks almost like you do your children. In that you've got one who's got this, that excels in this and one excels in that and one maybe needs a little bit more care right now. When you have to create or divide up the budget it's very hard you know there's moms and dads who say I give this amount of money at Christmas to every single kid and I count all the little dollars cause they're trying to be fair and I find that that's kind of similar to what I do that I'm managing all

these facilities that have these needs and it's hard cause you don't want to choose a child over another one, or you don't want to put one park as a higher importance. But being honest after saying all that, Woodville is my baby right now. Beaverdam Park is the county's, has the largest waterfront, a 635 acre lake and it's established for over twenty years and I was there from the beginning helping, going in front of the bulldozer where trails were gonna go and I had great experiences there. So it's still a wonderful memory and a great facility but right now I'm helping Woodville learn how to walk. [Laughter] And get out on its own. So it's a one of a kind story and we just nominated it for best new park, or best new facility for the Virginia Recreation Parks Society's award process. That went in on Friday so we're keeping our fingers crossed. As I said in the nomination, it's not best new facility for the state of the art type widgets or gadgets and things like that. It doesn't have that. It's best new facility because it was created against every kind of barrier and wall that we could face, number one being funding. And we have a man here in the county who has given over a million dollars' worth of in-kind labor and equipment use to build that park. And without him, it wouldn't exist. Prior to him was the lady who gave the land, who gave a hundred acres of land. And she was inspired by her childhood from a lady who gave land in Nebraska. And she went back and saw this park to take her grandson to show her, oh this is where I played and she had loved this park, her parents were both journalists and they ran a newspaper so she was a latchkey kid back many years ago and very safe, could go to the park every day on her own and just play and everything. She goes back as an adult and she reads that this lady named Grace

Abbott, who was one of the leaders in the playground movement, gave the land. And so she comes back to Gloucester and says, I got a lot of land. I'm a realtor, I want to give land. And we started a relationship and she gave the hundred acres and then through Chris Clifford's talents and time we've been able build it. And then we've put in over two million dollars in with grants and donations and his in-kind time and other people's in-kind time and less than forty thousand dollars in tax dollars. So over two million to forty. Doesn't happen. Unless you get somebody who's really super super millionaire and they just give. A Bill Gates type- who says, go do this, but that doesn't happen. I mean, I love what they give, so I don't mean that in a bad way, but those are people who write checks. This man actually goes out and builds it. He lets his company run itself while he comes and does the work and gets on the bulldozer and the excavator and the tractor. And he's built this for us.

T: So this is Chris Clifford you said?

S: Mm-hm.

T: Okay. What is the name of the woman, the-

S: Arlene Lanciano. And she had four children and one's in Michigan, one's in LA, and, or he's in California I can't remember if he's in LA or just maybe San Diego or something, I can't remember. And then one's here locally and one's in Mathews.

T: Okay.

S: And the four kids, we're still talking with them and continuing hopefully their mother's legacy.

T: That's wonderful. So in between Beaverdam and Woodville how has your vision changed over time?

S: Beaverdam was set as a water access and we still need more of that. We need more river access. We've got a lot of problems where we have these things, what you call end of the road boat landings where the road- when it became state road, VDOT or Department of Transportation owns down to the waterfront and there's enough space that maybe you can get one car in there. We have a lot of NIMBY issues--not in my backyard--where somebody's next to the boat landing they don't want people actually using that boat landing, so the vision of providing broad services were still lacking in there. What Woodville has provided are the athletic facilities in one location. We have other parks where we've got like three fields here and three fields there, but we will have seven fields and maybe more all in one site. You can go to sport complexes anywhere. You just go in and they look like a high school or something, with just fields after fields and a concession stand. Woodville has the pond and a wedding garden and a memorial garden with a raised boardwalk through the woods and plans for an amphitheater and a performing arts barn and stuff. So in meeting needs, it will meet things that Beaverdam never could and the other existing parks we have can't either, because it's this mix of all your fields in one place to attract for regional games and things and then the cultural arts and the gardens that we don't have in other places. It will be a one stop shop.

T: Yeah. Do you feel like use of the parks has changed since you've been here?

S: The athletic and soccer was very much just growing by leaps and bounds when I

came here. It was like how many soccer teams can you have? Now we've gone through field hockey, which has grown and holds its own. We have lacrosse now, coming online. And flag football for adults, and kickball. So there's some trends and things and we try to stay up with them. Because we're more on the rural side, we'll see it happen. Like lacrosse went crazy three or four years ago in Richmond. So you can just kind of expect eventually it's gonna get here and now it is.

T: That's really interesting that they're a little later to catch on to trends.

S: Yeah. People make jokes about Virginia: something will happen and years later Virginia finally gets with the program because we're so behind and so conservative. Well within Virginia, there's Gloucester. [Laughter] So Northern Virginia is going to lead the way and then Tidewater east of us and then we'll finally catch up.

T: Makes sense. Do you feel like the new parks that have these cultural arts and stuff like that, that they fit into the vision of Gloucesterites in general? Can you expect wide-

S: I hope so. I mean it's definitely what I would want because that's something that- I used to laugh at one of my peers who I won't say his name cause I sure wouldn't want it down for the record, but we were speaking together and making a presentation to a group of county administrators trying to explain how rural parks and rec departments go and asking, supporting that other counties that didn't have them form them. And he got up and he said, well I like to program what I like to do. So I take golf trips. You know, wow. He didn't go to school in

recreation. It's not what we want, it's what the community wants and that's why we do needs assessment surveys and we come back continually to make sure we are meeting needs. So having said that, I hope that I'm correct in that there is a desire for more cultural activities in the county. We have a local theater group who's very much supported and they've been trying for years to get their own facility. While I'm saying I want young people, I recognize statistically where we are. Virginia has a higher older adult population than the rest of the country, percentage-wise, and Gloucester has a higher within the state. So we are a place that is aging big-time. I'm hoping to balance that some and I think, you know, where we are there's population growth, not huge amounts but it's steady. So I don't think that, we're not like a dwindling community that's gonna age out and go away. But you've got a lot of seniors here and it's our job to program for them as well. We have a group called Best Year's Club and it's a daytrip group mainly. And we take them to Fredericksburg and Virginia Beach and other places but, to local theater and they love it. Our trips fill up all the time. So that's indication to me, well, if we had theater here or more musical performances...when the symphony does come the once a year, it's packed. I think people do want...

T: Absolutely. And I actually just talked to the other side of that, a ninety-year old woman who loves the cultural stuff that y'all do and is a really huge fan of the parks. She said that she loves the new traditions that y'all have created in the last twenty years and thirty years, like the Halloween parades and the Daffodil Festivals that have gotten larger. Can you comment a little bit on these kind of like year round public events that people look forward to?

S: Yeah, I think it does make a community. I'm glad that she said that and recognized. I think back in my childhood too, things that went on that you do remember. It's kind of like when you ask somebody about your second grade teacher, your third grade teacher, you can remember those things, you can feel the influence they had on you. So special events are part of the community and we hear that people who grew up here, that have been- their entire life, there has been a daffodil festival. And they now come home from college or they come home even beyond the college age because that's what you're supposed to do is the Daffodil Festival, come back home for it. It becomes like, you know, the true homecoming event. That just feels great to hear that. Pride in place is a phrase that Margaret **Perot**, one of our dear friends in Gloucester who moved to Maine be still keeps up with us, she would say we need to have pride in place. I think our festivals do that. They honor our heritage in like the daffodil industry. I think we're very proud of that. Even though you don't see it the same way that it was going on in the [19]40s, we still have Brent and Becky's Bulbs and a lot going on there, many tourists who come to see their place and hear Brent speak or Becky speak. And then I think that the small town kind of thing that you want to feel, that Norman Rockwell, and our main street is this eclectic, architectural, fun street that's got all kinds of generational things going on and so when you have our Main Street Association sponsor the Halloween event and they're closing the road down and they're letting all these kids come out and they're going store to store and stuff- they're gonna remember that all their lives. And they're gonna want their kids to have those same experiences. So it's just neat and we're

involved in a variety of them. The last few years has been a little bit more of a challenge because we were involved in not controversial events but celebrating the sesquicentennial of the Civil War. Our department has been a leader in that, working very closely with the Citizen's Sesquicentennial Committee and we've sponsored a number of events. And it's the first time we've ever had like, different sides and some controversy with it. Most of the things we're doing are so pro nobody can see anything wrong with it. Battle of the Hook is a huge event we held four and a half years ago and we'll be holding it again this October and that's Revolutionary War. And everybody's on board. Hate the British together. But Civil War: we had within our own committee some challenges. We had one committee member who was going to quit and didn't like what was going on so we tried to offer a balance of it. It's been a challenge for me personally like oh gosh I don't- how do you say, if you can just tell people you're doing something Civil War some people don't even want to hear the term. They don't want to know about it. Which is a shame cause it's history. That's been a little different.

T: Mm-hm. Well about the Civil War ses- ses-

S: I had to learn how to say it and I finally did- sesquicentennial. And I learned how to spell it too but it took years.

T: [Laughter] The thing that happened, how does it help develop pride in place for people?

S: We have the product that's gonna come out. This is another thing I like about special events is when you have a lasting impact, not just the memories or the cultural traditions, but we actually have a product that comes out of it. We had our

three hundred and fiftieth anniversary; we did several things. When we've done other events we've had archeological digs or something that would be time that would give up a lasting thing. So with the sesquicentennial, we have a volunteer who's doing a research project that is extensive and we will be publishing his work. And there's stories there that are untold. And he has researched basically every soldier from Gloucester County. And Gloucester wasn't as bad as Bedford was during World War II where Bedford lost so many people that they put the national monument there. But in a percentage-wise kind of thing Gloucester lost a lot of people during the Civil War. And it just, the names are families that we still see today and so people remember this is my ancestor who died, and we have the monument with the names on it. But there's gonna be stories that are gonna come out of that and so thankful that this volunteer took that on, and he's done everything from graveyard, cemetery research and GPSing graveyards that we didn't know existed before. He's got information on different skirmishes. I mean, it will be quite a publication.

T: Wow. Well that's really interesting cause you're coming from Durham but you're also recognizing that a lot of the pride in place is based in family history. Is that something that's sustainable over time?

S: You know, the pendulum will go one way and go another way. I think the pendulum's coming back that families are regrouping out of necessity economically. And so where we used to have generations live together and then everybody's feet got as far away as they could and you know, Skyping back home now. It's changing and I'm hearing and seeing and I'm living proof of it, as

my mother has been with me for a dozen years now- of intergenerational things. So I think if people are together then those stories and those things are gonna stay around a whole lot more than if one person's on the east coast, one's on the west and people don't live together.

T: Yeah.

S: I think as our population ages, which is a reality- and in our study and our profession, there's a lot of different kind of names but it's a tidal wave, it's a silver tsunami that is just coming. We've got to prepare for it and it's a reality and most of us don't want to kick our loved ones out to a nursing home. And when my mom moved in with me she said, I'm leaving this house feet first. [Laughter] Don't go put me somewhere. And it's my intention to honor that, although I've told my kids I'm not doing that to them. But anyway, that's another story. But I think more people are gonna live together because they want to have older people with them. There's so many really neat changes to that; it doesn't have to be a traditional way. There are these little pod houses that- I don't know if you guys have seen them- it's a little pod thing, it's like a trailer and you can put it in your yard. We're not zoned for that yet but this is one of the thing's that's gonna happen, is that you want this loved one but they take it away when that loved one's gone. So you don't have to go add on to your house. It's completely ADA compliant. And they can have all that they need, they're right there in the front yard or the back yard or the side yard with you and they're not in a nursing home but you're not having to make a hundred thousand dollar improvement to your home and they have their own space. So who knows what it's gonna look like but

I think it's kind of...

T: Yeah, I agree.

S: Especially cause nursing homes are outrageously expensive.

T: And there's a lot of problems there.

S: Yeah.

T: How can Main Street better, not be ADA compliant, but better brace itself for the geriatric tsunami?

S: I think ADA compliance is a part of that, and our sidewalk curb cuts and things that we added over time and will improve upon. That's a necessity. The green spaces, little pocket parks and things that have been discussed, I think that will help and that will be for everyone. Where people can walk to the grocery store and from a more modern, not nursing home but... I can't think of the name of what Sanders calls their new facility but it was the first in the state of Virginia, just down the street. And it's a new type of living. It's housing for older adults but it has a new name because it's totally different. To be able walk to the store and all that; well maybe you want to sit down. I think in Northern Virginia where my friends live, going and looking at their little walkable communities, they all have green space and benches and things.

T: Do you feel like Main Street has always been walkable?

S: To a certain degree. And I have fought for the bricks not to be placed within the court green that are lumpy and bumpy. When I go to Colonial Williamsburg, if I am in a wheelchair, I'm not gonna be on their sidewalk. Or if I'm pushing someone in a wheelchair. Because it is just like this the whole way. But it's the

way it was. We do have the street and in their case they can, because Duke of Gloucester is closed so if somebody who needs to ride a scooter or something, I can be right next to it. So I like having it where it's all accessible but I also don't want to lose some of the charm. I think that people have walked Main Street for years and years at least the whole time I've been here, and I think there's more people walking today than there were. I think that's due to the charm, due to people walking for health. There's some conflicts and maybe some of those can be improved upon. Some communities you go the bikes will ride on the sidewalk. We don't have room for them here; they'd run over the people. There's where the bikes go and where the joggers go. So it's narrow sidewalks and if we can make it wider and better, that's great, but some places we can't. One of the surveys I'm trying to think what it was, late one that just came through that talked about the lamp pole in the sidewalk and when they did the Main Street improvement you cannot get a wheelchair- I know what it was. It was on the Daffodil Festival survey, that's where it came from. Somebody was trying to get around and the sidewalk was only so narrow and then you put a lamp pole in it. You kinda got to go around, and you've got this much on this much and this much and it's almost impossible to get around. So hopefully some architectural things will take place with time but the funding is not there so much.

T: Right. Do you feel that the businesses that are there can both attract tourists but also facilitate the population that's already here that's aging?

S: I think they can. I'm gonna go ahead and go out on a limb and share a personal view which would not be appreciated by a number of people. Some of the older

businesses that are on or just off Main Street, I find they're not friendly. They're not welcoming. And in our promoting of tourism and customer service, we try to gently kind of remind people. When you walk into a place for the first time and you're looked upon as like, that's a stranger who are they. And it may be you're curious but your look is not pleasant. [Laughter] It's not welcoming. There's some of that that goes on that I think that needs to change. I am happy with the new businesses that are coming that I'm not seeing that. It's the older businesses that are kind of maybe feeling...I don't know whether they feel pushed out or grumpy or whatever but I've dealt with some grumpy businesses on Main Street. Both as a citizen and as a tourism person, that they didn't like the Daffodil Festival or nobody comes in my store and buys anything that day they just come in here and shoplifting goes up. So I think they all can be more accommodating and it's just whether they want to be. Probably the best thing that has happened has been the Main Street Association, and specifically Jenny Crittenden and what she has done. And when you have somebody who is bright and cheerful and attractive and just enthusiastic, you can't help but get on board. And it's hard to be grumpy around Jenny. I was on the original Main Street Association, or Main Street Committee. And we went through a number of employees, all decent people but nobody pulled it together like Jenny did. And with Adrian and Joseph—Adrienne Ryder-Cook and Edwin Joseph--what they did financially and what they're continuing to do through his legacy and her gifts has made a huge difference. So I'm glad to see change. When I first came here I was the come-here and people definitely giving me the eye. I hope you guys have not faced that as y'all have

walked around.

T: No, definitely not.

S: We want to be a happy tourist place where people are like, hey how're you doing, come on in, have a cup of coffee, have a soda, you know?

T: Yeah. So if you were the only come-here then have you noticed that people have become more accommodating over time? Or is it as more people have moved in they don't really have that sense of suspicion?

S: I think the natives are getting smaller and smaller in population. And sometimes that's gonna make people get more defensive and fight more. But I think that they're a minority now so there have been changes in the county. I joke and say I am a come-here, but my children are native. So, don't mess with my kids, they are from Gloucester. So you can tell me I've lived here ninety-five years and I haven't lived here long enough. Now I've run into people all the time, they'll tell me how many generations their family goes back and you know, it's all a good thing because that is pride in place. They may feel like they have a little bit more ownership or something than you do or than I do. It's still great that they are so proud of the fact that their family has been here that many years. And when I moved here I had lived on Duke of Gloucester Street my senior year of high school and I learned how to say Gloucester and I learned how to spell Gloucester and it was like, oh this is meant to be! It was really neat. It was in Roanoke, the Duke of Gloucester there. I had no idea that I would be coming here; I had never heard of Gloucester County. So, I come here and I find out that two of the most prominent names in the county are Jenkins and Hogge. Well, my grandmother

was a Jenkins and my great-grandmother was a Hogge. So I was like hey, I've come home, I'm probably related to all y'all anyway. [Laughter]

T: What was the experience like facing people that are suspicious of come-heres when you first got here?

S: I think it's been a little bit harder on me.

T: Why's that?

S: I'm a single parent. I've had two children out of wedlock. In Gloucester County. I faced some discrimination that other people didn't. But you know, I made my bed, I made decisions. I'm not gonna let a community put a scarlet letter on me. So, I just kind of felt like my work would stand up for itself and I think it has. I've had written in the paper a couple of different times I should be fired because of personal stuff. Yeah, yeah. I'll tell that I grew up with or tell people in other communities and they cannot believe that there would be such prejudices, but there are. But they're the minority and I think most people who have gotten to know me, even if they may not agree with me on a lot of things, they still respect me. And so we get along fine. But it's a shocker. I had an argument- I had a number of arguments with one of our local newspaper folks. One time I just was telling her how much good she could do. You know, just think about your paper and all the good things you could do versus the bad things that you allow to go on. We had very much a difference of opinion because they have this thing again, small town, you don't have in other places: supposedly Williamsburg has it, which is amazing as big as it is, but where you can do a reader's call-in. And you can say anything you want to say anonymously. This minister's having an affair, I saw

this person doing this and that, and you can just say whatever you want. And because I work in county government they print my name where they won't say other people's names. She just said, you're in this, you're a county official, and I'm like but I'm not an elected official. [Laughter] You know, I didn't sign up to have my personal life in the newspaper. But they do that. So there's good and bad to any community and I would say that's probably a little bit of an uglier side of the county. But it's I think gotten much smaller because of so many come-heres.

T: That's interesting.

S: Some people still read that paper. [Laughter] And some people believe what they read. Well you know, look at what happens with blogs and stuff. And people jump on the bandwagon and it's like, oh my gosh, get to the real truth of something.

T: That's true. It seems to me like Parks and Rec and preservationists can kind of bridge a gap between people that have a very localized and land-based pride in place and then come-heres that wanna enjoy recreation.

S: Yeah, I think that's kind of the everything to everybody. The other thing that we deal with is that if I have something, my needs are met. And so you have these people who have beautiful waterfront properties and waterfront access. Well, do they see the need for a public boat landing? And are they willing to support that? So we've had to kind of work through and educate people about the masses. I've been in front of boards of supervisors who have said we don't need a soccer field. You know, when I was a kid we played in a cow pasture. I mean, I've literally had that said to me. It's like, well, is that good enough? You know, do you settle

for that? That same attitude has been going on with the new middle school. And watching on the outside the arguments of, well, we can just put up this or that and not a roof and it's like well is that good enough? And I think about those gorgeous historic buildings we have. They're here from 1766? What if we'd had just slapped up- oh man, you can just put a little shed up and it'll be fine? It wouldn't be here. I'm hoping we can do things that preserving the land, preserving our historic buildings and meeting lots of community needs and that people will provide for those others even if they don't have them.

T: I mean that honestly sounds like a class issue.

S: Yeah, well we're getting further and further apart between- there's less middle class. The haves and the have-nots have spread.

T: Yeah, I mean do you see that in Gloucester? Do you have to deal with that in your job?

S: We are down in numbers for our youth sports. Part of that may, we have a decline in our involvement, so there's some legitimate demographic changes going on but what we're hearing are the parents saying I can't do both sports. We can only do soccer once a year. Or I can't afford for my kid to do gymnastics and ballet. I have my other lives that I live. I work part-time for Walmart. So I work every Sunday at Walmart and I feel that really keeps me grounded. And I see all kinds of things there. Then, I hear the reports like going into department head meetings. The two jive completely that when they call me up to the cash register to help out, I am seeing so many people who are on the food stamp program called SNAP. I mean, I can't believe how many people, just one after another

coming through on SNAP. And then I go to department head meeting and I hear from our social services director how the numbers are off the charts. So I know the people in need, that population is growing. Then I'll hear about some of the other things that are going on in the- the wealthier people and they're out there. And we have some beautiful estates in the county and some well-to-do people and part-time residents. And so yeah, I think it's here and we are like Virginia and like the country that most of people are just chanting, chanting, one after another, to lower taxes. That's what our candidates are running on. I will not raise the taxes, I promise not to raise the taxes and yet we have these people who don't have. And if we don't, if we are completely what we call in parks and rec, pay to play- if we were not subsidized by tax dollars, our numbers would dwindle and there's a whole lot of children who would not be able to participate in activities. So I'm hoping that our tax decreases don't hurt us any further.

T: Do you feel like a new park with- does have a lot of donations that's subsidized like you said, does that help kids and people from all classes like use public facilities?

S: It should. And I think statistically surveys show that people want to have parks near them even if they don't use them. So even if you have your own waterfront estate or whatever you want something out there. Maybe you want a garden, maybe you want soccer fields, whatever your vision is for the green space in your community, the people do value it even if they don't go there. And then those who do use them, we should have all classes there. And I think one of the ways that I see it, this is maybe stereotyping a little too much but it's with the gardens and

the botanical interest I think that there- from the experience that I've had with the donors and the interest, it is a well-to-do part of the community. Now, the juxtaposition or whatever is fun with this one is that we now have a demonstration garden that's gone in that has a vegetable garden to help the indigent. So here I'm trying to push for this beautiful wedding garden that will bring revenue in as people rent and looking at just having all these beautiful, beautiful flowers and then right over yonder is a vegetable garden where we're growing to give to the poor. So it, that's very accommodating of all classes.

T: Yeah, absolutely. The analogy you made that was really poignant was about putting a metal roof on a preservation building. What do you think that preservationists can do, and I know that you're allied with them on a lot of different levels, what can they do that demonstrates an understanding of, like we were talking about, the times?

S: I think we have to reach out in multiple ways because people learn and appreciate in multiple ways. There's some things you can do on a website that will educate people and then there's other people who hate the computer. The digs that are held publicly and inviting people to come in and see, I think are great. Workshops that people will come in. Maybe somebody wants like Fairfield's done, like how to do different windows or something in restoration. I think those attract people. The stories and stuff I think people- where they go in to a grandma's attic kind of museum and say, well, my grandma had one of those, now I identify with that. So, it's kind of reaching to that heartstring of all the different people in as many ways as possible. And I think Gloucester has that

happening, whether it's the history trails or the history tours, history crawl. That's what we call it. Going around to different sites and even doing things like theatrical performances at Rosewell. A couple years ago, we were having a haunted play there and I was so mad that I missed it. Barbeques that are held there, the different fundraisers. You gotta get people there as much as you can. I am really really excited about what we're doing with Battle of the Hook. I hope it comes to fruition... I need to be able to dedicate more time to it to really be able to push it and nurture it and I'm not. I'm skimping by because I'm being pulled so many different directions. We have an opportunity to do something very unique. We have access to the hundred and sixty thousand artifacts that were a part of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, the VIMS building expansion. So this is from prehistoric to twentieth century, you know, stuff, a lot of Civil War and probably some twentieth, twenty-first century litter too. But anyway, great, great artifacts. And they're sitting in storage. And the sign of the times: the state says, okay. If you want to send that stuff here you're going to have to pay because we can't afford- the state doesn't have money to hold your artifacts, right? You gotta pay. And then VIMS is saying why do we wanna pay you all that money. We don't have the money to do that; we're not about paying the state from one state office to another so they ended up building a storage room and all these artifacts are sitting in storage. They haven't been conserved. And so we, as a part of this Battle of the Hook Revolutionary War reenactment, are fundraising to conserve between a dozen and twenty artifacts and then have them on display at the event. And the same time of having the Fairfield group out there doing a dig of a

place that I know Dave said he's been wanting to get to. And so he knows there's some well site or whatever, so when the public comes in you think, oh I'm going to watch guys run around and shoot at each other and play war and won't that be fun and fascinating, they can see the archaeological dig, learn about what was really here, and then walk into this. Warner Hall itself is just gorgeous estate and they're allowing the west wing to be used as a miniature museum for the event. So you'll go into the historic building, where the general public doesn't go into the building that day. They're all on the grounds, but you don't go in the house. They don't want just anybody roaming around from this event so they're sort of standing guard of whether somebody needs to come in or not. But they're gonna allow the public to come in and they will have on display David Wagner's paintings which were of what happened in Gloucester during the Rev War, the Battle of the Hook, and then go into the side room and see these artifacts. So see the dig- and that's the kind of stuff that again will have lasting impacts and that my hope is that then people are gonna say, well where did these artifacts come from and then they're gonna learn that we need another twenty-five thousand dollars to conserve the other artifacts, because nobody has the money to do it. And maybe somebody's gonna say, we can't let that happen. Then, what we've done too, we've conserved these things that can be transferred to our museum and become part of a permanent exhibit on the Rev War.

T: Wow.

S: I'm blessed in my job that I get to do fun things like that. And I'm working right now on trying to find grant resource to study Woodville. And you look behind you,

the collections we have, the pot up top, the bottles up top- we think we know of at least three home sites that- I wanna tell the story of the Woodville plantation. I don't know whether anybody has mentioned this to you or not about sort of the controversy over the name of the park?

T: A little bit.

S: We, one of the most controversial meetings I've ever been to with the Board of Supervisors, it had been Woodville Plantation Park, a child had named it in a contest after what the original property had been, it could have come up with anything but that was the best thing. The kid got a fifty-dollar check, it became that name, it was never ever questioned. And years into the park's development- I mean it's part of our ordinances, it's listed, it's all throughout, it's been in grant applications- a board of supervisors member brought it to the attention that he thought it was a racist name. And that the park name needed to be changed. All kinds of stuff happens and the end of the story is after a packed house meeting of division, every black person got up and spoke and said I want the park's name changed and every white person got up and said leave history as it is. It was a plantation, don't change the name. The very last speaker was a young guy in his twenties, a white guy and he got up said, you know, after listening to all this, I'm siding with them; it needs to be changed. And the board changed it. So we had to go through all of our ordinances, everything had to be changed. And my argument was, I didn't want the park to feel exclusive and that was part of what the people were saying. They got up and they said when I go and drive down the road and I see this fancy subdivision, the so and so plantation, I don't feel

welcome. It brings back memories and exclusion and things like that and it's just not where I want to go and I don't think a park should have the name plantation. And even though we have like Chippokes Plantation which is a state park across the river. But it would bother people. But my flip side of that was it was a plantation. I went and did research, I followed up on research that had already been done that named the sixty-three slaves that worked that plantation. My elected officials, my bosses, changed the name. I'm fine with that. But I wanna tell the story. I don't have time to do all the research. The guy who owned the plantation, his papers are over at William and Mary. So I went over, did the white glove examination and I was reading things like how he traded slaves with this other person and borrowed for this and that and I will give one the smock, I can't think of the name at the time, but I'll give that and two pairs of woolen socks. I mean, just reading stuff, I'm like my God these are people are they're trading them like animals! And you know, this was real. So I'm hoping to get a grant where somebody's gonna do the full research and then we will produce a monument or some sort of wayside exhibit that will talk about the history of the site. And then we can show what it was like. Then from my understanding, again this is why I want to hire somebody through a grant is, after the Civil War the plantation was burned. There's a story there that his daughter's on the porch step, the Union soldiers come in and try to steal the horse, she shoots at them. In retaliation they burn the home down. That needs to be validated better. Because supposedly she was hauled off in chains and held in Yorktown in jail until the end of the war. But I've heard that same story about another site. So I don't doubt that

that did happen but did it happen from Woodville or did it happen from another plantation further south? All that kind of stuff. So, it all needs to be validated. But after the war the guy comes home. He's broke. He's lost his son- or lost his brother, I think his son was wounded. He doesn't have a home, he has to go live up in the northern part of the county. He doesn't live long. And his estate is in disarray. He owned a lot of land in the county and this guy was the executor and I think he blew it. It took years, and the land gets subdivided. And African-Americans end up owning these different farm vignettes or whatever. And then they lost them through not paying taxes and things. So I want to tell that story too. You know what it's ugly but it's true, if you don't pay your taxes your house can get auctioned. [Laughter] I just, like I said I'm blessed to be able to work on exciting projects like that can bring history out.

T: Yeah. And what do you see as the long-term role that preservationists can play in Gloucester moving forward?

S: Well, I sure don't want to lose anything of value that we regret. I wish I had my Barbies all in their little cases and then I could put them on Ebay, [Laughter] that I hadn't destroyed them. Then, people who've their trading cards and all the different things. I've still got a few Pokemon cards from my kids that I'm thinking maybe someday they'll be worth something. We have some great resources and I don't want to lose anything more. So I think the preservation- is to study what we have, know what we have, educate the public on what we have, and help figure out ways to keep it. And that doesn't mean preserving everything. You know, because we must have had fifty bags of oyster shells down in this one

building that you know had been part of it. Okay, well how many bags of oyster shells do you need? There's got to be some decisions too. And so this has been one of the things we've been facing on one of the committees that several of us have served on, is this new ordinance that allows you when a developer comes in to require a phase one archaeological study if there's an indication that there's something that happened there. So you have to look at this sort of base map: is there an indication of something or not, and then make them do this. And there was just so much back and forth over what's history because every day everything's getting older. So a building that was the annex for the courthouse is now over fifty years old. And that's our modern building. But according to the state it's a historic building now. So I hope preservationists can be reasonable, too. I'd rather air on the side of not being reasonable personally. But, I don't want people to get like the tree hugger thing where people turn against you. And they think you're trying to do too much. As much as can be saved and is appropriate, I hope that will happen in Gloucester.

T: Can it play a role in the tourist economy?

S: Absolutely. Our marketing effort is based on history and outdoor recreation.

Those are the two things we have to sell. And we are trying to continually develop those assets and make more things available. Other localities have different museums. We don't have the Virginia Living Museum with wildlife and stuff here. We've got a kayak trail system that we didn't have before. So we've got this waterway, how do we get people on it? And on that Blueways Trail we have a history thing so you can read about what happened-

T: From your boat?

S: Yes.

T: Wow.

S: Yeah. And we wanted to study- if you're on the water, that's where the plantation was, that's where the people access, those were the front yards. Because there were no roads. And so we want people to know about it and we also included the wildlife component so if they're looking for osprey or whatever fish they're gonna see in that area or that kind of stuff, so we tried to have that comprehensibly. Other outdoor recreation opportunities we're gonna pursue- we're doing more, a new mountain biking trail. And it may be one of these skills type ones with all the crazy boards and jumps and stuff because that makes people want to drive here, and bring your bike and come here. And on the history part, we have the Court Circle as our gem. Main Street as the annex to the Court Circle. Rosewell, but that's limited. And we don't have that many other things and I am hoping, I mean Walter Reed's birthplace, prime example. Great little thing, great little nook and cranny to go to but it's not open to the public but on a rare occasion. We can't market that. We can't say come see Walter Reed's birthplace and frustrate people that they go and knock on the door and they can't get in. So we do market it but it's limited. So I hope we will have new and more historical sites open up.

T: Do you have your eye on anything in particular?

S: Not from a historical. I have to think about that one for a while. From an outdoor recreation we do. It has some history to it but next to Land's End- the county acquired through a donation of- the county didn't Public Access Authority did-

ninety-seven acres on the Severn River. Huge, huge gift. But probably off the top of my head I think about from a historical thing the easiest ones to get hold of are already in public ownership. So, Tyndall's Point Park is underutilized. It's hard to get to, you actually need to go through Robin Hood's Barn to get to it you know, around Robin Hood's Barn to get to it. We used to have the rec Route 17 access- when they widened the highway we lost it. So you gotta go through the neighborhood. But there's some things that we could do there. There really are. From putting some cannons out that kids want to crawl on, you know, the replicas. Just taking the site back, showing the difference, we know that that's what it looked like in the Civil War but visually what did it look like during the Rev War? How different was it? I mean, think about when you drive across the Coleman Bridge and you're driving right in the middle of a fort. You know, it's on both sides of you. And ninety-five percent or higher of the people who cross the Coleman Bridge probably don't know that. So if we can develop that because it's already in public ownership. Werowocomoco would be the next highest on my list and with the conservation easement that's been- or preservation easement I mean- that's been provided over part of that property, that's a great thing.

T: Yeah. Anything you want to add?

S: No. I've probably talked too much as it is.

T: Not at all.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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