

**Interviewee:** Dew, John  
**Interviewer:** Brown, Jessica  
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**Brown:** My name is Jessica Brown. I'm interviewing John Dew in his office in Tallahassee. It's October 18<sup>th</sup>, very close to 11 o'clock.

**Dew:** Correct.

**Brown:** You're name is John Dew, yes?

**Dew:** Yes

**Brown:** You're the President of Buck Lake Alliance?

**Dew:** Correct

**Brown:** How did you first become involved with Buck Lake?

**Dew:** Actually, there was a development called Marsh Landing that sprung up in our area, not far from where I live. And a group of citizens were concerned that it was a development that was out of place. So, the citizens got together to fight the development and they formed Buck Lake Alliance. That was approximately 10 and a half years ago.

**Brown:** What was it about Marsh Landing that was out of place?

**Dew:** The property was a farm and the property surrounding the farm consisted of, for example, we have 2 and a half acres, across from the property is probably an acre, acre and a half, and so the developer that wanted to build Marsh Landing wanted to have approximately 4 to 6 houses per acre so it was not compatible to the surrounding areas and... there is a comp plan and comp plan pretty much says you should have compatible development and this was certainly not compatible development so it was a problem.

**Brown:** Now, that was 10 and a half years ago. What is the organization's main concern now?

**Dew:** We continue to work toward responsible growth. Responsible growth means not building things that are not compatible. Not taking things and moving the urban services area outside where it is. So responsible growth. We have a number of things we're looking at now. There's

always a need for an organization like Buck Lake Alliance in a community like Leon County which is continually growing like most of Florida is. So we're looking at some issues like Hill N' Dale, a property owner has a hundred some acres out there and he wants to build 4 to 6 units per acre or three acres and that's a little further out Buck Lake Road and what the developer is trying to do is also move the urban services area out there and again, the purpose of the urban services area is to control growth and keep it within the boundaries of where your water, sewer, electricity is located instead of moving things further out. So that's one area. We're also dealing with Welaunee, Welaunee Plantation, which is a huge development between Miccosukee Road and Centerville Road, Fleischman, just past the interstate. Several hundred acres, several thousand homes, several thousand feet of commercial, and we're working with them on it to make sure it's responsible growth. Those are just two and there are a lot more developments that we're involved with to try to make sure that it's responsible development.

**Brown:** Now, the focus of my interview is Fallschase. What happened when Fallschase was revived, once it got out of all its legal, financial issues, when it became a reality? How did that affect ya'll? Were ya'll happy with it?

**Dew:** I think your familiar with the history of Fallschase, probably having done the research and, as you know, they were actually approved back in the '70s. As a student at FSU, I was familiar with Fallschase because I had driven down Buck Lake Road, you always see the Fallschase sign. Beautiful brick sign, Fallschase, which is now no longer there. So, we would always ask, what is that? What is Fallschase? And, of course, as many citizens do we'd go ride back through that area and see the beautiful land and the lake just, it's a wonderful property. That was my experience as a student with it. And that was in the early 80s. We actually bought property off of Buck Lake Road in the mid-80s as a student which we now, it's where our house is located. So I drove by Fallschase, every, pretty much every day of my life starting in the mid 80s. We had heard rumors that they were going to develop. Then we heard rumors that they weren't. On and off, on and off, and probably when Buck Lake Alliance formed and we got organized, we understood that Marsh Landing was really a small development comparative to Fallschase, so we were tracking Fallschase at that point. There was a lot of talk of Fallschase doing something but it never happened. However, at one point, and I want to say it was probably five to seven years ago, the developer or the owner, Lamar Bailey, went to the county commission and was trying to get some approval to do things. We got immediately involved in the negotiation process. We sat down Mr. Bailey and his attorneys with myself and out attorney to discuss what it is they were going to do and this is only a small section along the lake. We didn't want them building in the lake. He thought he had a right to build in the lake. There were a lot of legal issues. And a lot of irresponsible planning that Mr. Bailey had, such as building in the lake. We know today, that you don't build in a lake bed. Back in the 70s, the commission approved dredged fill and that was the concept. So we actually started negotiating with Mr. Bailey at least seven, eight years ago and that process. And I spent many, many a hour sitting down with him, trying to understand why he thought he could do what he wanted to do just because he had approval in the 70s. It wasn't the 70s when they were going to build. It was the 80s when we understood environmental impact of the things he wanted to do. So, that goes back further than you may want to talk about but that at

least gives you an aspect of the beginning of the negotiations. We continued to negotiate year after year. We actually went to the charette that he had put on about building this town center and this community and we were involved. We met with their designer and planner and we talked them into trying to have a school there. Beautiful idea, great concept but that's really all it was, was just concepts. And I think Mr. Bailey just want to get approval to build and he was trying to convince the community that to get that approval he had to convince us it was going to be a great development. It's another thing to have it on paper and say this is how you're going to do it. And, as you probably know if you've done the research, Buck Lake Alliance actually signed off on the development agreement that required that certain things to be done in certain ways. And that negotiation took at least a year, on a regular, you know, weekly basis. And we, of course, hired attorneys and got the legal persons involved because unfortunately, developers will, some developers will go what they want to do until they get the attorneys involved and then you start looking at ramifications of what can or cannot be done.

**Brown:** OK.

**Dew:** I can give you a little more details as you ask questions.

**Brown:** I'll take all the detail you want. You talked about your relationship with Mr. Bailey. How did Fallschase change, and Buck Lake Alliance's relationship with Fallschase change, when it was bought by AIG Baker?

**Dew:** There you go. That's the answer. The reason, in my opinion, the development got approved is because Mr. Bailey got out of the picture. Why? Why did he get out of the picture? Well, he got a lot of money evidently. I don't know all the details. There was a healthy distrust of Mr. Bailey because of his business dealings in the past. I'm the type of person that if I look at you and say I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it. I didn't get that same feeling with Mr. Bailey and his attorneys and those that worked around him because of things that we saw he had done in the past. So it's hard to sit down across the table from somebody and agree to something when they won't put it in writing but do it verbally when you can't trust that that verbal commitment will be carried through. The other reason is AIG Baker brought into the picture something that Mr. Bailey hadn't and that was, in essence, a lot more money. I don't want to say unlimited resources but I certainly would say a very, very good chance of having unlimited resources to do something correct. Mr. Bailey had approval to build. He had approval to do commercial. He had approval to do residential. We fought on where he could build that residential. We won that battle or we weren't going to allow that to ever happen. We would have taken him to court to the nth degree. What AIG Baker did is they came in and said, we will build a community that will be done in phases and we knew they had the money to do the phases. We negotiated with them, just like we did with Mr. Bailey, where the residential would be built or not built. That's very important. The town center concept would be used and what we had to do, in all that agreement, and it's a negotiation and a compromise. We understand that. And they told us up front that they may have to do the box units, the Wal-Mart. Some of us are not in favor of Wal-Mart because of just the image it has but it was one of those things where that's where they

were going to make their money in the beginning and you give up one thing to get another thing. We see that the Wal-Mart will be built. The, I guess, Costco and sports store, that'll be built but then the town center will be coming right behind that which is going to be I think something this community will appreciate as opposed to just the Wal-Mart. So all that negotiation was done with AIG Baker after Mr. Bailey got out of the picture. And that was one of the things where we talked to AIG Baker and, again, the person that negotiated with us never lied to us, have yet to catch him in a lie, talk to him all the time, that's very important to me as just an individual and my moral compass. And I know they need to make money. That's what developers do but you can still make money by doing it right and doing it responsibly and thus far we believe that's the way they are doing it.

**Brown:** OK. Fascinating. What is at stake with Fallschase? What does Tallahassee stand to gain or to lose from it?

**Dew:** Tallahassee is going to grow. No doubt about it. Florida is growing. You know the numbers, how many citizens are moving to Florida every day. So it's going to grow. You're not going to stop it. So, the gain is that, for Fallschase, it can grow in something that we can look at 20 years from now. That's the way I looks at things. Same like we have with Highway 90. That's a whole other issue and the utility lines and all that. We've been very involved with that. I want my children to be able to drive through Tallahassee and say, I like this place. This is where I want to live. I don't want my three kids to move to Georgia because Florida is all built out like Fort Lauderdale and it's not a nice place to live and things of that nature. I want my children and grandchildren to enjoy where we live. Fallschase will offer the residential aspect, so there will be homes available and there's very few lots or areas of land in Tallahassee. You know, people are moving out to Gadsden and to Wakulla and all that. So it gives an opportunity for residents, for people to live. It also has the opportunity, and of course, I like the town concept. *[stands up]* What you're going to have is, and I'll show you a little later if you haven't seen the drawings, is you're going to have the town center concept. *[sits down]* retail on the bottom and residential on the top, two floors, condo, in a situation like downtown Tallahassee, where you drive through with parallel parking. So you've got that concept there of the downtown, retail and living but then you have the homes, like the town center concept, the further away from the town center, the bigger the homes. Smaller homes, larger homes. So you have that. And that's the concept that Celebration in Orlando started, I don't know, 20 years ago now. And that was seen as a kind of a, some people thought of it as a joke, you know, Disney. Well, if you there to Celebration now, and if you have a chance to, if you do, go look at it. It's really nice. It's the concept if you live close to the town, you walk, you do those things, which that's the way it should be. So that's what it offers. And of course it offers the retail for those that want to zip on to Wal-Mart and do those things which, you know, my wife and kids do but I don't particularly do it but it certainly will offer that opportunity and will draw a lot of people off the interstate to come do that.

**Brown:** OK. You spoke about Highway 90. That's an issue, the congestion that's there now. Will Fallschase affect that? Can Highway 90 handle it?

**Dew:** Highway 90 cannot handle it until they widen it. They will be building, probably a Dillard's out at I-10 and Highway 90 which means when they build that they'll be building other

shopping areas out that. So, the Wal-Mart traffic may not be as strong when they build that. Of course, there is a plan to widen Highway 90. And we've been involved with that for, oh, probably about 8 years. And, one of the, and that's a whole other issue there because we want to make sure Highway 90 east doesn't look like Highway 90 west which, if you go out there you see all the car dealerships and everything else and we've been fighting to make sure it's done right. So, when you widen something, you bring commercial. That doesn't necessarily have to be the case with Highway 90. But, yes, it's going to be bad congestion. Buck Lake Road is going to be congested. Highway 90 is going to be congested. No doubt about it. And that's one of the fights we've had. Reasonable, rational people would say you don't want to do that. But the developer had the right to develop the commercial and the residential that was given to them back in the 70s and you cannot take that right away and we understood that from a legal standpoint. Rationally, reasonably, doesn't make sense. But the law says, if you give a developer the right to do this, they are allowed to do it, which should not have happened. Some of those other developments out there, like Marsh Landing, shouldn't have been approved because we knew Fallschase was coming but, for whatever reason, the, "they" the County Commission, you know, decided let's develop anyway because Fallschase may or may not happen. That was unreasonable and irresponsible. So, yes, congestion is going to be a problem.

**Brown:** OK. Has that always happened with development on Buck Lake Road, that Fallschase has been a factor? Has that happened with every development or have they pushed it back?

**Dew:** They pushed it back. In my opinion, they pushed it back. They, it's called concurrency, and how many cars are allowed on the road. It's a concurrency issue. And they did not, in my opinion, take into consideration all the traffic that Fallschase would have. They just said, well that hasn't happened yet. We would argue that, why would you develop this out here knowing that this has already been approved? And, of course, the problem is that you are, from a developer's standpoint, you are limiting development because of something that may or may not happen. And I understand that argument. At the same time, you know, let's see what it looks like when Fallschase is built and then we've got all the development out there on Buck Lake Road. That's called irresponsible growth.

**Brown:** OK. How important, in your opinion, are citizen's groups like Buck Lake Alliance when it comes to affecting government?

**Dew:** Essential. First of all, let me say, I respect our elected officials. Why? Because someone's got to do it and a lot of people aren't willing to step up to the challenge. I'm not sure I would be because I've got a wife, kids and a job and it would take me full-time to do what they have to do it right and I would do it right if I was elected. So I have to respect the fact that they are giving their time. At the same time, I don't believe that they always take citizen's interest as the number one priority. Why do I say that? Well because when you're in that chair they're in they're getting constantly bombarded by individuals, usually paid individuals, attorneys, lobbyists, for the developers who gives them money to get these individuals elected those who have the money. Who usually has the money? The developers. So there is an easy opportunity for an elected

official to hear one side and to believe that because if you're a developer you're going to tell the one side and you're going to do a good job at saying there's not a problem with traffic, not a problem with getting, you know, individuals that live there into a school system. There's not a problem with water, sewer, all those things. Why do they say that? Because that's how they get their development approved. I hear it all the time. The citizen's groups start to question that and say, why would you want to build this here? Why not over there? Why would you want to have this many homes here? What's the gain to the community? Yeah, it may help utilities and maybe get more money in the coffers but is that the right way to build. And so yes, citizen's groups are essential and Buck Lake Alliance is one of the first and certainly one of the longest standing along with CONA, Council of Neighborhood Associations, that is involved with these things. And what we're fighting out of Hill N' Dale, about the urban services area, affects all of Leon County, not just the eastern side. When they expand the urban services area, they open up the doors for other developers to say, well look what they did over there. And all of a sudden the purpose of your line is no longer being met. So yes, very important to have citizen's groups, in my opinion obviously.

**Brown:** OK. Another issue that has been raise about Fallschase is the environmental impact, particularly the trees that were cleared by it.

**Dew:** Right. Clear cut.

**Brown:** *[laughs]* Is that a major issue, the trees, because they're going to grow back or is that something they shouldn't have done?

**Dew:** Well, I think you have to look at in perspective. Fallschase property is several hundred acres. The amount of area they clear cut is a small portion. Get in a plane. Look at a picture. And that helps put it in perspective. The problem is it's right there on the road. And everybody sees the clear cuts. They think, O Fallschase is cutting down all the trees. No, that's not the case. They've cut down a portion that they had to cut, had to cut. That they need to cut in order to make the project economically sound. You know, we tried to convince them to build within the terrain which would have been very difficult because if you've walked that property, it's hilly. And when you have hills, it's hard to have parking lots and buildings and things of that nature. It's much easier, and I understand this, to go in and take the trees down, take the land, excavate, move it, flatten it out and build the buildings. So they really had to do that from an economic standpoint. One thing they have done, and also this is, and they told us this, they said they would take trees and actually from that area and move them to another area, keep them alive and move them back. And, if you have a chance to go out there, you'll see they've done that. They've actually taken trees and, obviously not a 200 year old live oak, you can't move those, but there 10 year old trees and less, certain diameters that they've moved off the property to a certain other area and they've kept those waters and alive and they will move those back to the property. Something else that age helps with, Jessica, is, I didn't understand this when I was in college and I thought you cut down a tree you just devastate things. Well, now that I've been around a while, I can actually see neighborhoods that used to be pastures where they built houses and go out

there now and there are huge trees. Well, why? Because in 20 years, you can actually grow a lot of trees. You can't replace 200 year old oak trees but you can replace a lot of trees. So was it upsetting to see all the trees cut down? Sure it was. Was it environmentally unsound? No because they kept all these other trees that are out there in residential areas are going to be beautiful with all the old oak trees and they haven't touched anything along the lake bed if you go out there and they're not going to. It's part of the agreement. But they had to do what they had to do with the Wal-Mart area but that's only a small section of Fallschase so upsetting to see the trees cut but the reality is we knew that was going to have to happen as part of the compromise but there will be a lot of trees replaced there and I think if you come back in 20 years, based on the agreement we have with them and what they're required to do for the replantings that it'll be something to will look good.

**Brown:** OK. If you had, in a perfect world, what would the east end of Tallahassee look like?

**Dew:** Well, there wouldn't be a Wal-Mart there. There wouldn't be any development. It'd be all trees. In a perfect world, that would be a park. One thing we did get out of this whole process, which we fought for, was to have the lake be given over to the community and it was. It was given over to the county commission and we're fighting to make sure it's under a conservation easement. If you take a map and you look at the map, the Buck Lake Alliance and other community activist have been able to get from Chaires Cross Road all the way now over to Tom Brown Park and that's Lake Lafayette, Upper Lake Lafayette, Piney Z and between, a trail, a walking area, a bike area. We're trying to get a bridge to go, actually in one area, to across but it'll be a beautiful green space that, that people will move to Tallahassee, just to come and explore that green space and do that. So, I would love to see no development out there. Beautiful property but they have a right to develop from back in the 70s and Mr. Bailey had a right to make the money, you know, that he got, whatever that was. So, in a perfect world, and we thought about this, we tried to get rich people to buy it but we didn't know any rich people that had several hundred million dollars or whatever it cost. We tried to get the land for conservation easement to buy it. They helped buy part of the lake but they couldn't buy all the property. So, in a perfect world, what we would see out there now would be just the way it was a year and a half ago. That's a perfect world. Also, in a perfect world, you wouldn't see Marsh Landing i.e. now it's Goose Creek where it is. There would still be the farmland there and I would still be driving my kids, who are no in college, down the road mooing at the cows that were in the field because it was an absolutely beautiful piece of property that now has a couple hundred homes on it. But also, in a perfect world, you want to have a place for your kids to move. And I want my kids to move out of my house. Two of them already heave. And they've got to go someplace and if they didn't build Piney Z, my daughter wouldn't be living over there and if they don't build Fallschase, who knows, my son may be living there in a few years. So, it's hard to say what a perfect world is.

**Brown:** Right. The greenway you spoke of, is that going to be similar to the one that's on Miccosukee Road?

**Dew:** Similar. Have you been to the Alford property? Because that's part of the greenway too. If you go... if you really want to see a beautiful greenway, the one on Miccosukee Road talking about which surrounds the lake and you can actually go walk along the lake. I mean it's, if you get an afternoon, I would say go, go do it. It's a very beautiful piece of property which is right off of Edenfield, you know Edenfield kind of dead ends into it. Go back down Edenfield and take a left on Highway 90 and then take the immediate right on Pedrick. I don't know if you know where Pedrick is. Go down Pedrick. Go across Buck Lake Road and keep on going until it dead ends. You go past the elementary school on the left, middle school on the right. It dead ends into Alford property which is 800 some acres of beautiful land. It's kind of undiscovered. And it's all part of that area.

**Brown:** Definitely. I think we've about covered it. You're fast.

**Dew:** OK. Well there you go.

**Brown:** Alright. Thank you very much.

**Dew:** Thank you Jessica. I appreciate it.