

**Interviewee:** Sandra Clary  
**Interviewer:** Esther Berumen  
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**Berumen:** How did you first hear about the Fallschase Development project?

**Clary:** Well, I live in the area, of course, it's right up the road and I pass every time I go to work and, and what have you, and it was starting to make headlines in the papers and then it kind of died off and you didn't hear a whole lot about the latest development, just that something was going on and gearing back up. Fallschase is a neighborhood that for a variety of reasons, just never really kind of took off, they kind of encountered I guess some permitting problems and it never really went anywhere, there was just the one or two houses scattered out there. And it was just one of those quiet little, back in the woods, kind of thing and then all of a sudden it's back in the spotlight again.

**Berumen:** Okay. So what time period would you say that you first noticed...?

**Clary:** The earlier part of this year. It would have been after Christmas break, that it really kind of made, the big, you know...

**Berumen:** Started making more headlines?

**Clary:** Yeah, started making more headlines, and people started to become more aware that the development was actually going to take place, and you know, there was the rumor it was going to be a Wal-Mart – no, it was going to be something else – no, it was going to be just houses, and nobody really kind of knew for sure, I think because you don't know that it got a lot of the public. I think by the time the public found out about it, it was pretty much well on it's way into whatever it was going to wind up being. I don't know how much. I certainly don't know how much the public wound up being notified early on as to what the negotiations were going to include and what have you. I was unaware of it. Admittedly, it's kind of like going, "Yeah, it's Fallschase, they're always talking about something and then nothing happens." And then they talk and nothing happens. I imagine a lot of people felt that that was kind of the same thing happening. Yeah, they're talking about it again but nothing's going to come of it. So, it would have been after Christmas though, of last year.

**Berumen:** And why did you find this important to your class?

**Clary:** Well, interestingly, you know, as oftentimes when you have your lesson plans... so we had been talking a lot about the environment. I always include an environmental unit in geography and just the impact of development, to the large scale, you know, what we do to our

world and kind of leaving our global footprint, so to speak. So we had been talking about that and, you know, as in geography we're always talking about government issues and, you know, different forms of government and what a representative democracy means and, you know, if you don't like something, how do you go about changing things. And I had a lesson plan set that had nothing to do with...it was an environmental issue, but nothing to do with Fallschase. And I get to school, and there was the newspaper for the day and it was front and center talking about Fallschase, so I kind of changed my plans around last minute, and we just had a class discussion about it. Because my students all live in that particular part of town they're either...some live in the Weems plantation, which is going back up...you know, right up to Fallschase, and they pass by it and they have friends who live in the area. So they were very...all of a sudden it was important to them, you know, what's going on. So we were kind of doing some fact finding and going with what the newspaper had stated, and trying to find some more information out about it, how big it was going to be. We started talking about any time you have a development, there are times when development is good, you know, you're building a school, you're building a hospital, or what have you and you have to balance the needs of...is this what the community needs? And is it worth what you have to do to change that environment, the loss of habitat, the possible issues with drainage, erosion, and...do we need this new shopping center or not, things like that. So we just had a very good class discussion and I had a number of students who were getting very...almost emotional about it.

**Berumen:** Really? Okay.

**Clary:** Saying "what can we do, what can we do, what can we do?" So then it kind of evolved into a little mini government lesson on...you know, well, when you're dissatisfied with the actions taken by local government, how do you respond to hopefully make change? So I said, "These are your options, you can write letters and things like that". I had a student who said, "We need to write letters. We just need to write letters." So that's kind of where it took off is that we had this letter writing campaign. And it started out really just as a class assignment; we were practicing persuasive essays as part of the sixth grade curriculum. \_\_\_ [??] we can persuade...if you were going to try and persuade the county commissioners not to build it or to build it, how would you go about doing that? And it just kind of all snowballed and steamrolled and wound up being, "Well, who can we send these letters to?"

**Berumen:** So in essence, you were able to incorporate geography and writing, English...?

**Clary:** Absolutely, if it came to – you know we were talking everything from square footage of how big the facility was going to be and how many parking spaces and roughly what is the acreage of the forest land that was going to wind up being changed. Long term impacts, short term impact, and like you said, incorporating different...everything...science, I guess we didn't do too much with math, mostly just geography, science, and language arts and writing letters and editing letters. How when you write a persuasive letter you don't want to be insulting because nobody's going to read it and you don't want to upset them before they get started. How do you go about persuading somebody to agree with your point of view? It was quite fun and it really [chuckle] like I said, it just...turned into a lot more than I ever imagined it was going to become.

**Berumen:** Right, right. And how did you go about doing your research and gathering information – you mentioned square footage and the acreage – and that kind of thing?

**Clary:** Like I said, we started with what was in the newspaper. Once it became just a writing assignment...and like I said originally it was going to be...you have this writing assignment, how do you feel about Fallschase and are you in favor of it, yes or no? And then you had to write a persuasive essay. I had no intentions of those essays being anything more than a writing assignment in class. And then when a student asked, “Is there anybody we can send these letters to? Because we want to change their mind...we don’t want this...I don’t want this in my neighborhood.” And some felt that they were all excited because it was going to be a Wal-mart right next door, because they shop at Wal-mart and they thought it was a great thing. We decided, well, if you’re going to do this and...your letters have to be more than just...”I don’t want it or I do want it.” You’re going to have to find out some information. So most of these did that on their own. They went home, they talked with their parents. Some talked with neighbors and got their opinion. Some went online. The idea that a Costco was going in...we’ve never had a Costco in Tallahassee, so nobody knew what one was.

**Berumen:** Oh really? Okay.

**Clary:** So we went online and we were looking up: What is a Costco? What do they do? What do they sell? And they said, well, “That’s just like a Sams. And we have a Sams right here, so why do we need a Costco?” And I said, “Well, let’s see, do they sell the same things, is it different things?” So we were looking at the different things that you could buy at a Costco. And they thought that it was very interesting that you could actually buy caskets through Costco.

**Berumen:** Really? I didn’t know that.

**Clary:** You can, and they will ship it to you. I guess in the event when you finally get to the point that you need one, they’ll send it to you within a few weeks.

**Berumen:** Might be a little too late by then.

**Clary:** Exactly. And they thought it was utterly amazing that you could buy a casket from Costco. And they felt...well “I guess you can’t get one of those from Sams as far as we know.” Just with the different kinds of stores were going to be. How much of it was retail? How much of it was new housing development? Most of that information they found on their own.

**Berumen:** Oh, okay.

**Clary:** They would come back in and say, “Did you know....?” And they would share a lot of information with me.

**Berumen:** Okay. And specifically, who did you direct these letters to?

**Clary:** Well, when it kind of turned into this...I'm not sure I want to call it a campaign, because it didn't really go beyond just my students, it wasn't a school-wide issue or effort. The first thing I went to was my administrator and I said, "This is an issue they obviously have very strong feelings about and they have written these letters, both sides of the opinion. And they're wanting to know next step what can we do with these letters." So I needed to make certain that they were aware of that and that we had their permission, that they felt that this was...this can't hurt anything to let the county know what's going on.

**Berumen:** Let the county know...

**Clary:** We're a group of eleven and twelve year olds that are a part of this and we have feelings, too. We want our voice heard...because according to the Constitution, I have a voice and it should be heard. So I started just doing inquiries as to...we talked about the Leon County Planning Commission, the developers of Tallahassee. I called the Planning Commission through Leon County and wanted to know where would I send it and I got the address. It wasn't at that point so much a specific name as it was just sending it to the city planners. And then they directed it on. And I'm drawing a blank on the woman's name, right now who responded to me in an e-mail and said, "We got your letters, we're so excited about this." They made copies of the letters so that they could distribute them to the different commissioners, so that they would see what the students wrote. I made copies of each letter myself. Not every letter went. They were screened as far as making certain that there was...you know as much as you try and tell an eleven year old...don't be insulting...and say "Whose lamebrain idea was this?" I said, "No, we can't say things like. You have to speak truly from yourself." Rather than attacking, or what have you. I made a lot of analogies like if you wanted your parents to do something special like let you go to the movies over the weekend with your friend, you're certainly not going to make your parents angry, first off. You kind of have to approach it in a special way. So the letters were screened. Any letters that had not been edited, that the students just went off, half measure, we're pulled. Students were given the opportunity then to edit their letters, add to them, re-write them and clean them up. We didn't type them or anything; they just went in on notebook paper...

**Berumen:** Handwritten....

**Clary:** Handwritten form. Students signed their letters and.... The ones that wound up going on...and there were probably about, maybe 60-70 letters I guess that went on...50, something like that, were well written, from the heart. Some of them went on for pages. Some of them even made mention that you could buy a casket from Costco in their letter [laughs] which I thought was kind of funny.

**Berumen:** [laughs] That is funny.

**Clary:** And I sent them on in to the county, to the city planners, and they forwarded them to the different commissioners who were involved. We did get a response and they were very happy that this had turned in basically into a civics lesson as well as an environmental lesson. All from

one newspaper article....

**Berumen:** Right...

**Clary....**on a Tuesday morning, when I had to...I said, "Well, this has kind of changed the plans." It turned into being about a two-week process, I guess, by the time the final letters were edited and whatnot. We'd been involved. And there were some parents who specifically said that they understood it from the assignment standpoint and the grade it was going to get for that, but did not want their child's letter to be sent on. Which was fine. I did send a letter home to the parents letting them know that this is what we were doing and they certainly have a right to say yes or no. And the students knew too, that whether or not they sent a letter on to the commissioner, that this writing was just a writing assignment and that's all it counted for as far as a grade went. The number of students that really got involved in the excitement and conversation was something that you don't get very much from eleven year old students, because they're just not that tuned in typically to what's going on. They'll tell you if there's a new Hollister going in at the mall, or something like that. But they were worried about the poor little squirrels and turtles, or anything else that might lose their habitat...really listened well to a lot of the impact of what this was going to do for the neighborhood, as well as we talked about the benefits, the increased number of jobs that would be created in the neighborhood and in the community. I really did try and stress the positive outcomes of what this would be. In my own heart I'm not in favor of all the development going in and it's very distressing to me now, driving by and seeing such dramatic change to the area. And I've had some of my students, they're all seventh graders now, come back and..."Oh Ms. Clary, have you seen what they're doing? Our letters didn't stop it." I tried to tell them, that by that point...by the time it was in the paper, we were involved, it was a done deal. However, the information that we were going on at that point was that it was only going to be only the 500,000 square feet. Truly, once it jumped up to the 750,000, very quickly, without any other discussion or dialogue.

[Interruption]

**Berumen:** My next question for you was...did you happen to get any kind of specific responses to the letters that they sent out?

**Clary:** No, the only one was just from the person who first received them, who expressed, she was very happy to see the students getting involved in civics and understanding that, throughout the course of any time when there is a community event, or action like this, you know...and the community needs to be involved, this is a positive way to get involved, is the letter writing of course, to express your feelings both positive and negative. I didn't get anything back from any of the individuals, planners or commissioners or what have you. And it would have been nice, but at the same time, I really didn't expect it. I think, had it not already been pretty much a done deal and the die cast...

**Berumen:** It was too far in advance...

**Clary:** I might have at that point. But yeah, I think that at the advance state of where the talks were and you know, at that point it was set. They were going to build it and it was a matter of time. Just really at that point, waiting to break ground. And we were really...probably from the time the letters were sent in, until they got out and started to clear the first few trees, was just a matter of weeks. Not a lot of time, you know.

**Berumen:** Do you think if you had maybe thought of this project with more time or had some more time to think about how you would approach and what you would do, do you think you would have involved some of the commissioners or some of the developers?

**Clary:** Oh absolutely! We talked about that in class. And I talked about that with my administrators as well.

**Berumen:** Maybe have them come into and talk to the class?

**Clary:** I would have liked to have invited one of the city planners to come in...one of their environmental people that they talked with and see...to explain what the environmental impact was going to be and how they kind of...maybe either resolved environmental issues or how they kind of said, "Well, this is not as much...the impact isn't so great that it offsets going through with this construction." I would have definitely liked to – would have liked to have it not been also getting close to the end of the school year, would have liked to have maybe have something done up on a post, you know, even afterwards. But timing-wise and organizing it all it was truly...the fact that we even got to that point surprised me. I was just really kind of floored that they...the students. I honestly was expecting after the class discussion that one time, with them going, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." You know, it's a new Wal-Mart, it's another store. That I had that many students feel that strongly about it...and like I said, I had a number of students who were very positive towards it, and um...it was very hard. But I worked very hard at making certain that I wasn't necessarily giving them my opinion.

**Berumen:** Being impartial

**Clary:** As a teacher, it's not always an easy thing to do. Particularly with something like social studies. There is always going to be a side to pick. No matter what, there is always a side to pick. I worked really hard at not doing that. I don't know how effective I was. My voice kind of came through on that, but I hope not too much. I know that a lot of students when it first came up knew or had at least heard about it. This was not completely something out of the blue for them, because they had heard their parents talking about it and went back home – and I had gotten actually a number of emails from parents saying, how excited that "y'all are talking about this and we've talked about it quite a bit at home around the table" kind of thing. And I encouraged them to go home and "talk to your parents, find out how they feel about it. But understand that your opinion doesn't have to be the same as theirs. And it doesn't have to be the same as mine. Your opinion is yours and yours alone", but eleven year olds are very easily influenced. Particularly by their parents, as it should be. As it should be.

**Berumen:** My next question, what would you say were the main concerns/worries of the students with this project?

**Clary:** Because we were coming off of a fairly big push on – unit on the environment, we talked about everything from deforestation in certain parts of Southeast Asia that caused massive problems with flooding and erosion and loss of habitat. And a portion of that time had been discussed with carbon emissions and green house gasses and all that goes with it. Pollutants in the water system, so we were talking about this structure going in. And any time you clear a forest and put down a pavement and put down an asphalt or concrete – when it rains all the water has to go somewhere. Where does it go? And what does it collect along the way? And we talked about a car sitting in the parking lot that’s dripped oil onto the pavement that gets caught up in the water that winds up in the drainage pond that gets taken to – leached into the soil or taken to a water filtration place. Where does that water wind back up? So, the original conversation was talking about other parts of the world and issues that they’ve dealt with, with environmental controls. And they really just took it that step further and were able – I was excited to see them make the connection of, “this is my backyard and so these issues aren’t far from me.” It’s not like, yeah a forest in South America versus a forest a half a mile down the road, kind of thing. So, a lot of it just kind of launched from our discussion with the environment already. And we’d already had discussions and a unit on government and different forms of government. You know, what a representative democracy is versus a dictatorship, and the people having a voice. You’re trying to understand that your representative though is one voice that tries to carry the weight of all the voices that they represent and it may not be your – the way you would like it to go. They found the process frustrating too in that if the people in the neighborhood didn’t want it then why were they still building it. If there were enough voices that said, “No, we shouldn’t have this”, why was it still happening? So they found that part of it actually quite frustrating. They were only eleven years old and they couldn’t bring about change like they would have liked to. I said, “But the fact that you’re learning this process now, you’ll know in the future when issues come up you do have a say and there are avenues to take, there are ways to go about it and ways not to. Some people might chain themselves to a tree and it might be effective in the right environment, but most people frown on chaining ourselves to trees. That might not be the way to go, and in this case it certainly isn’t the way.” And we talked about how if we had been able to get started on the process earlier, would it have made any difference. Who’s to say? I doubt a few classes full of sixth graders would have made that kind of difference but at least it would have let the commission know and the city planners know that this impacts a lot of people including eleven year old kids.

**Berumen:** Which they probably don’t consider very often.

**Clary:** Which they probably – yeah they probably don’t take into consideration that much or well in the grand scheme they’re looking at them as future home owners and you know, people who are going to be shopping in this area and what have you. And like I said, I had a number of students who were so excited that it was going to be a lot closer that they didn’t have to drive all the way to the Wal-Mart on the Parkway. And that it was going to be much closer to them.

**Berumen:** You mentioned that you didn't get much of a response from these letters and all, would you say that in the end this project was successful/unsuccessful in certain ways?

**Clary:** Absolutely it was successful. When we went into it, like I said, it just started out as a simple class lesson and when we went into it, I told them up front, I said, "The fact that – the way that it's been worded in the paper at this point, you know, this is going to happen. But there's no reason why you can't even – even knowing that it's not going to have much change, that you can't let them know how you feel." So from that perspective and the fact that the students were able to make the connection from a global to a local, which is very difficult. Typically, eleven year olds, twelve year olds, tend to see what's happening on the other side of the world as being "it might as well be on a different planet". Often times they've never been there, they can't imagine it, they can't picture it. Or "that affects other people, and I'm all about me." Which a sixth-grader is typically "I'm all about me". So the fact that they were interested in something other than just themselves and wanted to – and would have liked to have seen – they were more concerned about their environment and their community than just themselves. And that they were able to take something that we've been talking about on a different part of the world and apply it to something local, and make that connection and say, "Oh, now I understand what you mean by erosion, because now that these trees are cut." Later as the year progressed, they would see where they had put up the plastic walling and what not to hold the soil back from having it wash onto the road or what have you. And they could see that erosion kind of happening first hand and they were able to say, "Well, this is water that is coming into my neighborhood now. This is water that is draining into my water system." So it made a global issue much more personal. And from that perspective it was very effective and a success. From the point of understanding how bureaucracy works or doesn't work as the case may be. And appropriate ways to involve yourself in a bureaucratic process. Understanding that you're going to get frustrated, understanding that your outcome, your wish, may not be the final outcome. But that there are appropriate ways to bring about effective change and inappropriate ways. And really try to kind of stress, you know, constitutionally you have a right to say this and you can say it any way you want but if you want it to be effective, you need to, you know, understand your audience and \_\_\_\_ [??] if you want somebody to hear you and listen to you and take you seriously, you're going to have to think about how you say it. And they – those who felt the strongest about it, really put a lot of thought into their letter, very respectful, and you know how to approach their city planner, things like that; dear commissioner. So they had a specific targeted audience and they were able to voice it and they were able to, you know, improve through the editing process, so you had the whole language arts part of it brought into it. So that – yeah, I would have considered it a big success.

**Berumen:** So in the future, do you think that with another development this is a project that you would take on again with a different class?

**Clary:** Absolutely. I would like to get started on it earlier. Again, not so much, you know, to voice my opinion of this is right or this is wrong, but for them to understand again the process and to take that global picture and apply it to something that maybe they can have an impact. And if nothing else, when they're, you know, eighteen years old and they're old enough to vote,

that they think before they bubble, just a little bit. Maybe that, if this person really – does he have my best interest at heart? What's the process? Just understanding the process of local government and national government and the process as you can imagine now as the year progresses, those are the issues that will be coming up as we study government and the voting process. \_\_\_\_ [??] you just move on to whatever that hot issue is of the day.

**Berumen:** Right, because there's always something. So lastly, my last question is kind of similar to this one that I just asked you. How important do you think it is for students to be aware of environmental issues in the community?

**Clary:** Oh, I would put it right up there at the top of the list. After all they have to live with it. I mean, we all do, but they're going to be living with it longer than I am. Whatever comes about from our actions today, they're going to be around after I'm gone and since then – and kind of as a side note, our school has started a – we have a green club this year. A couple of the science teachers and other teachers have kind of spearheaded this and it kind of came on the heels of last year. We were setting everything in motion last year so that we could have it going this year, and they're doing everything from recycling drives and what not, and this particular club, it's probably got, I don't know, maybe thirty students involved. The message is kind of getting out to other students in the school, just the idea of environmental awareness and what can what one person do. And while one person certainly can't bring about global change, you know, every person's actions can be positive or negative. And so it's not necessarily launched from what we did, there may be no connection whatsoever actually, but that there is something continuing. \_\_\_\_ [??] that they may or may not be involved in such as the Fallschase that they're going to have to live with it. And then maybe in a couple years or in ten years even, another development such as this comes along – maybe they'll be a little bit more active from the very beginning and a little bit more vocal and a little bit more aware of what the long term and the short term are going to be. And who knows. \_\_\_\_ [??] but you know is working towards the green revolution, I don't know.

**Berumen:** That could be, you never do know. Alright, well thank you.

**Clary:** Thank you.

End of Transcription