THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER
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CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

Oral History Interview

with

Rod Kuckro

Interviewer: *Kerry James Reed*

Narrator: *Rod Kuckro*

Location of Interview:
Lloyd House, 220 N Washington St, Alexandria, VA 22314

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Transcriber: *Kerry James Reed*

Summary:
Rod Kuckro reflects on his experiences in the Del Ray Civic Association, including the character and commercial development of Del Ray, helping to initiate the process for Del Rays Historic District Designation, and his efforts to protect the historical structures in Del Ray.

Notes:

Table of Contents and Keywords

General	Historic Designation, Del Ray, Neighborhood, Historic Structures, Civic Association; Journalism; Politics; Newspapers; Cincinnati Enquirer; Oakland Tribune; Town of Potomac; Historic Alexandria Foundation; Del Ray Civic Association; Arlandria;

People	Rod Kuckro; John F Kennedy; Warren Wheat; Tom Luken; Pete Stark; Ron Dellums; Marion Barry; Al Cox; Melissa Kuckro; Lonnie Rich; Jim Dunning; Mike Reiser; Susan Escherich; Jim Moran; Vola Lawson
Places	Del Ray, Town of Potomac, City of Alexandria, Old Town, Parker-Gray; Boston, MA; Georgetown, Washington D.C.; Cincinnati, OH; Oakland, CA; Oronoco St; King St; Old Town; West End; Mount Vernon Ave; East Windsor Ave; Arlington County;

Rod Kuckro: *[00:00:02]* Rod Kuckro. I'm 68 years old, and today is September 26, 2023, and I'm doing this interview at Lloyd House in Alexandria, Virginia. *[00:00:10][8.4]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:00:11]* My name is Kerry James Reed. I am 26 years old. The date is 9/26/23, and we are at the Lloyd House. So, thank you so much for agreeing to be a part of this project, Rod. I really, really appreciate it. It's been a great pleasure getting to know you. We can start with some basic stuff. Where were you born? *[00:00:27][16.4]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:00:29]* Bridgeport, Connecticut. *[00:00:29][0.4]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:00:30]* Bridgeport, Connecticut. And what was your childhood like? *[00:00:34][3.8]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:00:36]* We moved around quite a bit. Otherwise, it was a pretty normal childhood for the 1960s. I was born in Connecticut, but we lived in France for a while, in Paris. And then we moved to Boston and ended up settling in Cincinnati, Ohio when I was in junior high school. *[00:00:56][20.1]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:00:57]* Terrific. Can you describe your parents? *[00:00:59][1.6]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:01:03]* Typical family for that time. My mother didn't work, my dad did. He was of German heritage. She was Irish. They met in New York City and they had my brother and my sister and myself. And it was a fairly, you know, normal existence for the time. They each had their own duties in life. It's not like today's more collaborative marriages are so. *[00:01:29][26.3]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:01:31]* So, can you describe any memories or any experiences from your childhood that might have gotten you interested in being a part of a community, being part of community shaping, anything like that? *[00:01:42][10.7]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:01:43]* Absolutely. And this might surprise you. So when we lived in Boston, we went to church at a little Jesuit chapel in the Back Bay neighborhood. We went there one Sunday and who was in the very first pew, but the first family. It was John Kennedy and his wife and his children. *[00:02:02][18.8]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:02:02]* Oh, my goodness. *[00:02:02][0.2]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:02:03]* And after church, my father sat me up on the stone wall that was right outside the entrance of the church. And Kennedy came out and he was being a good politician. He was shaking hands and kissing babies and stuff. He shook my hand and said, "Are you a Democrat?" And I said, "I don't know." He said, "you should be a Democrat." And, you know, meeting the president, when you're a child, is like a big deal, right? It was only two years later that he was assassinated. But as I got older and got to study history, I mean, what struck me about him the most and sticks with a lot of people, I think is his inaugural address. He made that statement, you know, "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country," and you can just change country to neighborhood, you know? And, you know, that call to public service and to sort of selfless caring for the public good and not your own is something that just stayed with me for a long time to this day. *[00:03:02][58.7]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:03:03]* That's really, really cool. So where did you go to college then, to experience this sense of community? *[00:03:09][5.4]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:03:10]* Well, when I graduated in 73 from high school, it was it was the height of the Watergate scandal. And I always want to be a journalist, a newspaper reporter. And, you know, what better place to come to do that in Washington. So I was at a Jesuit high school, and so it made sense to apply to Jesuit colleges. And Georgetown was one of the choices. And, you know, I was lucky enough to get in. So I just came here and never left. *[00:03:40][29.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:03:42]* Was your major journalism when you entered college? *[00:03:43][1.6]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:03:44]* No, Georgetown didn't have a journalism department at that time. I don't they even do to this day. I majored in English. *[00:03:48][4.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:03:52]* So then how did you get involved in journalism? *[00:03:53][1.6]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:03:54]* Well, I worked for my college newspaper. There were two at Georgetown. And, I mean, that's really what I wanted to do. I probably spent more time doing student newspaper work than I did doing academics, and that got me a number of my first jobs. *[00:04:13][18.2]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:04:15]* What were some of those first jobs? When we discussed previously you mentioned the Gazette I think it was? *[00:04:21][6.3]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:04:25]* I made a point when I was in school to sort of visit the bureau of my hometown newspaper, Cincinnati Enquirer. And the bureau chief and the only person who was there was a guy named Warren Wheat and I would go down to the National Press Building and just sort of talk to him and ask if I could do any work. And he always said no, until one day he called me because his father was dying of cancer. And he said, "Well, you know, I'm in a jam now. I need somebody to be able to do the routine things that that may need to be done." And so I had a stint for about a week while he was back in Kentucky with his dad, you know, sort of covering the hill and doing the things that were demanded of the bureau by the newspaper editor in Cincinnati. And as a result of that, I was offered an internship with the Enquirer the following summer. And when I came back after the

summer to resume my classes, the company that owned the Enquirer had bought another newspaper in Oakland, California. And they said to me, "well, you know, we don't have any money. We don't have a correspondent. They probably thought I was cheap labor, which I was. And they said, "would you like to be the correspondent of the Oakland Tribune?" I said, "Sure." So I was probably 20, 22, 21, 22. I was young. I mean, I was the youngest correspondent I ever saw up in the House press gallery. So that was a start. *[00:06:00][95.0]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:06:01]* What was it like being so young in such a rather prestigious position in journalism? You know, being in the Capital? *[00:06:08][6.5]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:06:08]* It didn't occur to me that was prestigious. It occurred to me that it was good to have the work. Now, the background of this time was that there was a period of very high inflation, high unemployment, and a lot of people were graduating college and graduate school and there were no jobs available. And I just felt lucky to have something to do where I got paid. And it was really like a day-long academic experience. I was learning every step of the way. But I had this fellow, Warren Wheat, who was a mentor to me, and he introduced me to some other newspaper correspondents. And, you know, they were really kind to me and showed me around. But I mean, it's not rocket science, I mean, journalism is not. Probably, my generation, might have been the first generation of people who actually tried to go to school just to study journalism. Before that was pretty much of a blue collar, you know, high school education kind of job for most people. So the business has changed a great deal since the early seventies. *[00:07:11][63.4]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:07:14]* So, you mentioned to me previously that you were the press secretary for several congressmen, do you describe how that came about? *[00:07:21][7.9]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:07:22]* Yeah, well, I was working for the Enquirer in the Oakland Tribune, and I went back home for my, at that time, my best friend's wedding and his family was very good friends with the local congressman, a guy named Tom Luken. And Tom was, in his first term in Congress, he was facing that year a reelection challenge from the State Senate minority leader or majority leader who was a Republican. And he invited me to his house the next morning after the wedding. And he offered me a job as his press secretary for the campaign. And I was working in his congressional office. And so, we won the election. But he was a difficult guy to work with and work for. The only good thing that ever came that came out of that is when I met my wife in his office because she was a legislative assistant there. But as soon as the election was over, I was offered a job by another congressman that I'd covered from the Bay Area of California, a guy named Pete Stark. And he was just a much, much nicer man and we just got along well as a reporter and a congressman and then as his aide. And I did all kinds of things, right? I did some press work in D.C., a press secretary in Oakland, I did a lot of legislative work. *[00:08:46][83.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:08:48]* What sort of legislative work did you do? *[00:08:49][0.5]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:08:52]* Well, he was in the Ways and Means Committee, which is characterized as a major committee. Takes a lot of time. But he was also on the District of Columbia Committee because the chairman of the D.C. committee was a guy named Ron Dellums, who was the congressman from

the next district over in Oakland. And he was always having trouble finding members of Congress who wanted to serve on the D.C. committee, which, as a name implies, oversees the governance of the District of Columbia. And it just so happened that the first year I was there in 1978, it was time to sort of authorize a new bundle of money to build the D.C. metro system, which was only partially built at the time. And to finish it off, they needed $1.7 billion, which at the time was a lot of money. Today it's not a lot of money, but it was then. And so it fell to his little subcommittee and me as the only staffer on that subcommittee to sort of work up this piece of legislation that could get through the committee and through the House. And then go through the Senate. Pete had a really keen instinct for what needed to be done to sell this to other members of Congress. And because he lived in the Bay Area, there was there's a system there called BART, the Bay Area Rapid Transit System. And it had been built from sort of the inside out. They started in the middle of the geographic region and they started building that outward, but all the time that it was being constructed, people in the outer service territory for BART were paying a tax. And eventually they were still paying the tax and they never got it built in their communities. And he just thought that was terrible and people were upset about it. So we came up with a concept where all the local jurisdictions, the district, the counties in Virginia and the cities of Alexandria, Falls Church, and the counties in Maryland would have to have what we call a stable and reliable source of revenue to pay annual operating costs. That garnered us a lot of support from members of Congress so they didn't think the D.C. Metro was coming back to Congress every year for money. You know, to operate the system. So, it's still a contentious and controversial thing today. But that got the bill passed. And so, it was a big deal and I really enjoyed that. And then the other thing that we worked on was that the D.C. committee had jurisdiction over some diplomatic related things. For example, there had been a law passed by the D.C. City Council restricting the location of diplomatic chancelleries and embassies in the city. For some reason they wanted to zone them somehow. Well, the State Department got really upset about this because we wanted to be treated fairly in all the capitals of the world and not be restricted about where we could build our diplomatic facilities. So, for the first time ever, it fell to my boss and our little committee to file a resolution to disapprove that D.C. law, to void the law. It never been done before. And that was really controversial because, I mean, the members of the Black Caucus, Ron Dellums, the committee chairman, were really against interfering with the District of Columbia, which had only had home rule for about 15 years, I think. But we did it and we did on the last night of Congress before they broke for Christmas. And it was very confusing to members on the House floor because you had these two prominent Democrats fighting each other over this this disapproval resolution. And eventually with the support of a lot of Republicans, the law was overturned. And that was the first time that ever happened in D.C. and it's happened rarely ever since. *[00:13:01][249.2]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:13:03]* That sounds really fascinating. What was it like dealing with the community who was actively pushing against a resolution like this? *[00:13:12][8.7]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:13:15]* It was difficult. I remember getting chewed out on the House floor by Congressman Dellums, who told me he was going to ruin my career, you know. And I was really shaken by it because at the time, the district had a very well-known African American mayor, Marion Barry, who eventually got in some hot water of his own. And, of course, it was early in the period of time the district had what they called home rule, where they could do what they wanted for themselves without having Congress do everything for the district. And I think what we did with regard to the it

was called the Location of Chancellery Act had to be done for diplomatic reasons. But yeah, clearly it cut into the authority of the district. And I think Congress learned a lesson there, but I think they did the right thing. Does that make sense? *[00:14:11][55.6]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:14:12]* Yes, it does. Did you ever come to Alexandria while you were working on the Hill? *[00:14:16][4.6]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:14:18]* You know, I'm sure I came here once or twice, experiencing the King Street nightlife. But, you know, I was living in D.C., still around Georgetown. I did eventually move here because it was less expensive to live here because the tax rate in Virginia was less than half of what it was in the district. And when you're not making all that much money, you know, paying half as much every month in income tax to your local jurisdiction can make a big difference. So really, it's when I moved here, that I got familiar with the city and began to appreciate it. But I chose it deliberately because, I mean, the other choices were Arlington County, Fairfax County. They were huge. I mean, Fairfax County even then had a million people. And Alexandria was this distinct, you know, small town feel to it. At the time my roommate and I, we thought this would be a great place to live, and it turned out to be that way. *[00:15:19][60.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:15:20]* What were your first impressions of the of the city when you moved here? *[00:15:22][2.8]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:15:25]* Very accessible, compact, walkable. My first house was on Oronoco Street, not very far from where we're sitting right now. And it was easy just to walk to King Street down in Old Town here for dinner or for beer, to hear some Irish music. And it just, and the metro system of course, was just opened. So it was easy to walk to a station, get on a train and go to DC and not have to drive. *[00:15:54][28.4]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:15:57]* What are your impressions of the spatial limitations of the city? So like living on Oronoco Street, right, like you said, not a far walk from King Street. So, you really get this distinct Old Town flavor from there. So, when you went down to Del Ray at that time, if you ever went there, did you get the sense that you were in the same city? *[00:16:18][21.7]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:16:19]* No. I mean, they're very different. I mean, all the neighborhoods are different. In fact, I'm sure there are people today who live in Old Town who've never been out to the West End of Alexandria and don't even realize there's a part of the city that is much more urban and high density as the West End is. No, the reason I discovered Del Ray is that, after my wife and I got married, we were living on Oronoco Street, it was a rental and the owner didn't want to sell it, even though we probably would have made an offer on it. And one of the more affordable neighborhoods in the city at the time was Del Ray, and it was beginning its turnover from sort of blue-collar rundown, sort of seedy reputation to being a place for young homebuyers to go. That's why we ended up in Del Ray. *[00:17:06][46.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:17:07]* Where did you buy your home in Del Ray? *[00:17:09][1.7]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:17:10]* Our first house was at 216 East Windsor Avenue, which was a block and a half off of Mount Vernon Avenue and directly across from the firehouse *[00:17:23][13.0]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:17:25]* So you mentioned that your growing knowledge of Del Ray and, you know, the town of Potomac came from going out and looking at that firehouse every day. Could you describe that process of coming to an awareness of the history? *[00:17:39][14.1]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:17:40]* I mean, so the Firehouse Number Two, as it's as it's called by the city, is actually the location of the former Town of Potomac Town Hall, fire station, police station and jail and it's carved into the front of the building in concrete 'Potomac Town Hall'. And you'd see it every day. You wouldn't give it much thought until I finally had occasion to ask, started asking people who've been in the community for a long time, you know, what is this Potomac thing about? And they sort of schooled me on the fact that, well, you know, a long time ago, of course, at that time it was only 50, 60 years prior that there had been a small town that existed for a little while. And then it was annexed by the City of Alexandria. And so I learned more about it. I mean, I remember going over talking to the firemen, and they gave me a tour of the building. And upstairs there was a place where the city council would meet. There was a little stage where they would let the local children do their Christmas pageant. And they showed me the jail with the two-cell jail in the back of the building. And, you know, it sort of brought home the fact that this was something very different. This was not built by Alexandria as a firehouse. This was built by, you know, another local government to be, you know, their seat of government. And so what, you know, what did that mean and why was it did this town exist? So there was a lot to learn about. And at the time, it was frankly easier to go to Arlington, to their historical society, to find out about the town of Potomac, because at the time it was part of Arlington County, it was not part of Alexandria. Although to make matters even more confusing, at the time Arlington County was called Alexandria County, not Arlington County. It was only after Alexandria, sort of annexing a lot of parts of Arlington that they decided to name Arlington after Arlington House, which is the Robert E. Lee mansion that's now in the cemetery. *[00:19:42][121.7]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:19:44]* Fascinating. So you said that you went out to the community and they started showing you around, you know, Del Ray, making you aware of the history of the town of Potomac. So, would you say that when you moved to East Windsor, there was already a big awareness within the Del Ray community about the history? *[00:20:04][20.0]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:20:05]* No. No, not really at all. No. I don't think the people who lived in Del Ray for a long time then thought much about it. [Rod pauses] I know when I was asking questions, oftentimes they just, people don't know any of the answers. So, you had to just kind of dig deeper. And that meant contacting people in City Hall. The city at the time had a historian in the planning department. A guy named Al Cox, who I think you know. And there was a historical society that's still active here, the Historic Alexandria Foundation. And then there was Virginia Tech then, and still has, an architecture school satellite campus here. And a lot of what they train people to do because it's located in Old Town is historic preservation related activity and studies. So, I learned more from going to those sources outside of the actual community to learn more about, you know, what the town of Potomac had been. *[00:21:11][66.4]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:21:13]* It's interesting that you had to go outside of the community to learn about the history of the community. We know, the anecdote that you frequently tell me about the town burning all their records because they didn't want to be annexed into Alexandria. *[00:21:26][12.9]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:21:27]* Well, that's true. And in the late 1920s, Alexandria started making noise about expanding its boundaries. And the town of Potomac was a was a ripe candidate for that because it had been, not developed the extent it is today, but largely developed. And the people who built the initial houses were primarily people who were commuting into the district, because they would either take the rail line that went on the western boundary of Del Ray that went through Potomac Yard, or there was a trolley line on Commonwealth Avenue that you could take the trolley all the way from Rosemont into the district. And so it was built as a sort of one of the early suburban commuter suburbs. And that made it popular with people. Did that answer your question? *[00:22:28][60.2]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:22:28]* Yes, it did. So, you mentioned going to the historical society in Arlington or with the, you know, talking to people from the Historical Foundation here in Old Town. When you talked to these people, did they express a keen awareness of the town of Potomac or was the knowledge that you were looking for so kind of novel to them? *[00:22:48][20.3]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:22:49]* It was still novel. I mean, the Historical Alexandria Foundation, God bless them, most of all their work had always been centered around Old Town. I mean, preserving buildings in Old Town, preserving the old commercial and residential buildings, giving grants to the city to help the city do some things they wanted to do. And they had never been approached about doing any kind of preservation work outside of Old Town until I talked to them about getting a grant to do a survey of the town of Potomac. *[00:23:16][27.2]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:23:17]* When did you ask for that survey? *[00:23:19][1.3]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:23:20]* When? It was 1990. Wait, yeah, 1990, I think it was. That was my first year as president of the Del Ray Citizens Association, and we needed money. Because if you were going to establish an historic district, the first thing you had to do for both the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the Department of Interior, which maintains the National Register of Historic Places, you had to sort of prove in argument, a document that what you were claiming was historic, indeed, in their view, was. You know, worth preserving or worth having the designation of historic district. And to do that, we hired students from the Virginia Tech Architecture school under the direction of their professor, a woman named Susan Escherich. And, you know, they went around the neighborhood within the boundaries of the town of Potomac, and they walked every block and took Polaroid pictures of every building. And did the research of the buildings, described the architectural style, you know, when it was built. And so if you go to look at the nomination form, which I think you have, for the historic district there's probably 6 to 10 pages of narration explaining why the nomination is significant. And then there are a couple hundred pages of actual, one page for each structure that's deemed to be a contributing structure. And by contributing, it had to meet a certain age qualification, I think at the time was 50 years, so it had to be at least 50 years old. And then but it also had to have some kind of architectural distinction that prove the point of the argument of why this is a significant place to preserve. *[00:25:05][105.2]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:25:08]* So, this has come up a lot in this project that I was doing, this idea of materially significant architecture, you know. Stuff like, you know, old town growth wood, things like that, and culturally significant architecture, which is, you know, places where, you know, grassroots organizations would have met, things like that. And I know I just sort of laid this out to you, but in that line of thought, how would you describe the architecture of the Del Ray? *[00:25:37][28.9]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:25:37]* Well, I mean, the town of Potomac Historic District is not significant because famous people lived there, or anything, you know, earth shattering or cultural altering of the culture that happened there. The reason it is significant is that it was, you know, sort of the incarnation of early American suburban development patterns. You had two guys from Florida, Florida or Ohio. You'll clean this up. [The original developers came from Florida, Wood and Harmon] And they bought up a lot of land that used to be part of some large local holdings that were part of plantations. And they bought land, it was flat, which made it easy to sort of manipulate. And they laid out a grid pattern of roads and cut it up into lots of the same size. So it was uniform. There was a grid pattern and the size of the lots. And then they just offered for sale the lots to individuals. And people might buy one, two, three or four lots. And then they built the house that they always wanted to live in. And because of that, you had this eclectic mix of, you have the sort of tradition at the time, these four squares, which are essentially, you know, four rooms on the first floor, four rooms on the second floor, front porch; Victorians, bungalows, folk Victorians, farmhouse style. So, you had this interesting mix of architecture reflective of sort of public likes in the, you know, early 20th century from between 1908 and 1930. Most of it was frame architecture. But there are a lot of brick buildings. Some of the buildings were mail order houses that, I mean, Sears used to sell out of their catalog houses that you can have shipped to your community by. By rail or by truck. And then you put it together. *[00:27:34][117.0]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:27:37]* Sort of fascinating. So if I could take us back just a second before we began talking about your work with the Citizen's Associate and the historic designation process. Mount Vernon Avenue now, you know, you drive down it's a very, you know, vibrant, you know, walkable, you know, shopping, you know, community restaurants, area, things like that. What did it look like when you first moved to East Windsor Avenue? *[00:28:01][24.7]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:28:03]* It was just rundown and tired. I mean, it's called Mount Vernon Avenue because in the late 19th century, the federal government wanted to build a road to get people from Washington, D.C., to Mount Vernon, Washington's home. And there were a number of routes proposed for that. And the route the city settled on was what we now know today as Washington Street here in Alexandria and then the George Washington Parkway. But one of the routes that didn't make it, make the last cut, was what was then Mount Vernon Avenue. It wasn't laid out as Mt. Vernon Avenue, just laid out as a road in Arlington, took you from Arlington to Alexandria. And it was primarily first populated with residential homes. It was meant to be the sort of grand boulevard where people would drive, you know, from D.C. to Mount Vernon and go buy nice, big homes. And over time, when it became a commercial town, town of Potomac, there were commercial structures built, the bank and movie theater, you know, a butcher. So, you had a mix of residential and commercial. But when we moved to Del Ray in 1980, there was maybe two places to eat. A lot of exterminators

and auto parts stores and wig shops. There was a TV repair shop, Cotton's TV repair, there was a record store. There was a place called Grace's Sew & Style, where this woman who had been there for decades, you know, she would take in clothing and do women's alterations pretty much and she'd make things, too. But there were no restaurants. There was no nightlife. There were some gas stations that are no longer there. But it just wasn't, there wasn't really much to it. It had just run down over time. *[00:29:53][110.0]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:29:55]* How would you describe the demographics of Del Ray when you first moved there? *[00:29:58][3.3]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:30:00]* I mean, there were a lot of old residents who'd been there for two, three generations, going back to the beginning. Or maybe their grandparents first lived there. It was integrated after, the town of Potomac itself, like most places in the state of Virginia, including the rest of Alexandria, was a place that didn't welcome African Americans as property owners. That all changed, of course, as we got into the fifties and sixties and seventies. And what happened in that period of time is that as the African American population was growing in the city, they also found Del Ray to be an affordable place to move. And so in 1980, it was integrated. I'm not sure the percentage was of any race, but certainly schools were integrated and the churches were. And the neighborhood was. And that was something that not everybody that lived there a long time necessarily appreciated. But, you know, that's just the way things evolved. And it was a good thing. *[00:31:01][61.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:31:06]* So you mentioned that the Virginia Tech students that you hired as part of the survey actually went out and sort of historically and physically mapped the boundaries of the town of Potomac. Are the boundaries that they came up with, is that an accurate physical description of Del Ray right now, or how much has the town of some sort of grown out of that? *[00:31:31][24.9]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:31:32]* Well, the town of Potomac, the boundaries were known. I mean, because you knew what the boundaries were. The Town of Potomac Historical District makes up roughly 50% of what we now call Del Ray. And the reason it's called Del Ray is that one of the subdivisions laid out by Wood and Harmon, they named Del Ray. Del Ray one and then Del Ray two, and they were the largest of the subdivisions that they laid out. There were some others. There was one called St Elmo. So, the Greater Del Ray today is named after the two of the subdivisions that were in the town of Potomac. *[00:32:14][41.8]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:32:17]* So how did you come to be involved with the Citizens Association of Del Ray? *[00:32:23][5.8]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:32:26]* At that time, there was no Internet, of course. They had monthly meetings at a church in Del Ray, the Association would have volunteers drop off fliers to people's houses, you know, saying, 'Hey, come to the Citizens Association meeting. Here's we're going to be talking about this month.' And so, I started going in and I said to my wife, Melissa, I said, "if you want to, you should come to, you know, we'll meet people." And as with any organization, whether it's a church or

a PTA, you know, a new warm body is noticed by the leadership. And, you know, that's sort of how they perpetuate, you know, the success of any organization. And so I was approached after showing up for a number of months by people who were officers saying, "hey, you might want to think about doing a little more, being on our board." And so I met people at the time, Lonnie Rich and Jim Dunning and Mike Reiser and some others who became good friends and sort of I would call them civic mentors. And sure enough, they roped me into volunteering and eventually to sort of serve as an officer of the Association. *[00:33:36][69.8]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:33:39]* So could you describe the sort of social environment of the Citizens Association at the time? Because I know that we've spoken previously about how the social involvement in some of these Citizens Association, at least in Del Ray, has diminished over the years, especially since the pandemic. So, when you went to these, you know, Citizens Associations meetings before you're on the board, what kind of things were discussed? Was it commercial development? *[00:34:05][26.5]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:34:07]* It was primarily, well, there were always several ongoing concerns. One is development. You know, why can't we have more of it? What's going to start happening? Or if somebody was going to build something that needed city approval for planning commission, the council at that time, the way the city worked, the city manager told the planning director to tell developers, 'If you're going to do anything in any neighborhood, don't come to us until you talk to the local Civic group.' They want things to start with the Civic Association. Another big concern always is crime. We always had a report, a liaison for the police department would come every month and sort of tell us what happened the previous month and in the community in terms of, you know, car vandalism, you know, people's bikes being stolen. There was never serious crime for the most part. But it's the kind of thing people who live in a community and talk to their neighbors care a lot about. And people would come there because there was no other way; you couldn't zoom into it or watch a stream. If you wanted to learn what was going on, you had to be at the meeting. So, it wasn't unusual to have 80 to 100 people filling the basement church hall of this Methodist church where we met for years. And they also had in this church hall a kitchen. So it was logical that before the meeting we'd have some kind of social time, a half hour, an hour. People could come and have baked goods and coffee and soft drinks, so it was a social scene as well. And in fact, one of the things that we started back in the late eighties as an offshoot of the association meetings was we used the church hall for a coffeehouse and on the weekends. Coffeehouses were very popular back in the sixties and seventies, and it was a place people would go and listen to amateur musicians, you know, play folk music or tell jokes or read poetry or whatever. *[00:36:01][113.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:36:01]* That's really fascinating. Where was this coffeehouse? *[00:36:05][3.9]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:36:06]* It was in the basement of the Methodist Church, Del Ray. And that lasted for, as these things often do, only for a short period of time. As long as the, you know, the individuals who were involved in organizing it and setting it up and breaking it down and getting the coffee made, you know, once they lost interest after a couple of years, it ceased to happen. But that was one of the sort of social offshoots of the Citizens Association that people seem to like because, you know, there

was no place to go on the avenue. There was like two bars and that was it. I mean, they weren't family friendly. *[00:36:44][38.0]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:36:49]* So you mentioned me that before you were president of the Board of the Association, you had served on a number of other various public, you had served in various other capacities as a public servant. Would you like to talk about any of those? *[00:37:05][15.6]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:37:07]* Well, before Del Ray the only thing I really done, I was on the landlord, when I was still a tenant, not homeowner, I was on the Landlord-Tenant Relations Committee, which is a city council appointed committee, and they had a slot for a tenant representative. And I was, you know, a young tenant. And I approached, at that time, a councilman Jim Moran, who eventually became mayor and congressman and we met and sort of hit it off. And he said, "I'll sign on to sponsoring you for this position." And I got it. But before that, the first thing I really did was my activity with regard to Del Ray. I did things after that, but. *[00:37:54][47.4]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:37:55]* In terms of the landlord tenant board, do you remember any significant projects you worked on while you were on that board? *[00:38:03][7.8]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:38:03]* No. I mean, the problem with, I mean, I'm not even sure why the city has a Landlord-Tenant Relations Board, frankly, because in Virginia, tenants have virtually zero protections. I mean, property owners, landlords in particular have, you know, hold all the cards. The one thing we would do every year is suggest, based on what city staff would recommend to us, you know, what the city guidelines should be for rent increases. And that was like the big thing we would do. And then the city council would take our recommendation and put their imprimatur on it and say, 'Yeah, this is what we suggest landlords do.' But landlords didn't have to follow it. If 3% or 8%, I mean, they'd just do what they want. And of course, as we sit here today, there's been so much press in the past two or three years about rents rising at ridiculous rates in Alexandria and all over the DMV, you know, 5, 10, 15, 20% rate increases. So, they still have Landlord-Tenant Relations Board, but they don't really have much in the way of authority. What they can do is use the bully pulpit and to jawbone sort of really bad actors. Call them in and say, you know, 'we want to talk to you about the conditions in this apartment building.' And generally speaking, the landlords who were complained about weren't a landlord who owned one or two little units. It was like large apartment complexes of hundreds of units where you had chronic issues of, you know, your lack of repair, unsanitary conditions, that kind of stuff. And so you try to shine a spotlight on that by bringing in the owners. And I'm not sure that the board even does that anymore. But at that time, we were doing that because we had good leadership from the city council and the chairman of the board itself. *[00:39:57][113.4]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:40:00]* So we've kind of been tracing a narrative, I guess you could say, from the beginning since that Kennedy anecdote, which was fascinating, by the way. But you continuously find yourself in these public servant positions, you know, almost by providence, though that might not be the correct word for it. But I'm curious as to how you conceptualize public service. You know, you find yourself in all these positions, Landlord-Tenant board, Citizens Association. What does being a public servant mean to you? *[00:40:36][35.6]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:40:38]* Back in the seventies, there was a popular phrase coined by leaders of various environmental groups and it was like, you know, 'think globally, act locally.' And that became sort of a mantra for the generation I was part of. Not for everybody, but for a lot of people. If you try to solve a problem, you know, you start in your own backyard and when you actually can have an influence on how your own quality of life is and the quality of life of your community is it's very rewarding. Because when you're in your early thirties and you're just starting out with family and I'm in a marriage, you're not going to solve the Middle East peace crisis, but you can do something about making sure that, you know, that if there's a new building, a commercial building built down the block, that it's going to do certain things in terms of maintaining its trash collection and making sure that it's well-lit and safe. I mean, you can have you can have an effect on your community that way. And each time you have a success and you don't always have success, sometimes you fail, but every time you have success, it makes you realize you can do that another time and another time, and you keep wanting to replicate the success. And I think that that was the reward for me. *[00:41:57][79.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:41:59]* Terrific. Ok, so now we can turn to the historic designation. I've been chomping at the bit to get to these questions. So when you first joined the Citizens Association, was there a big push to get Del Ray or the town of Potomac recognized as a historic district? Or how did that desire come about? *[00:42:20][21.4]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:42:21]* Well, I was president from 1990 to 1992, and it just so happened that in that period of time, leading up to that period of time, the city was launching a rewrite of its master plan, which is something that all localities in Virginia are supposed to do on a regular basis. It has been probably a couple of decades since we've done it, and it's the last time we, in fact, we did it, it was in 92. So now we're, you know, we're 30 some years later without a new master plan. But the master plan was meant to sort of chart the future for the city and each of its individual neighborhoods. And Del Ray was part of an area at the time that was called Potomac West and essentially was currently day Arlandria and current day Del Ray, and oddly enough, was called Potomac West because the town of Potomac had been there, right? And in both Arlandria and Del Ray were sort of in the same situation economically, you know, still trying to find a way to, you know, get better, become more vibrant. And what the city did, at least in our small area plan for Potomac West, which included Del Ray, as they decide to do certain things to incentivize some kinds of business and to disincentivize other kinds of businesses. One of the things that they did was sort of sunset all the automotive related businesses. Gas stations, used car lots, car dealerships, some of that has gone away. Some of it hasn't gone away even after all these decades. But the other thing they did they downzoned the density. I mean, at the time Mt. Vernon Avenue was zoned for heights of up to 140 feet, so essentially a 14 story building. And they downzoned Mt. Vernon Avenue streetscape to 45 feet, much more in keeping with the current character of the Mount Vernon Avenue streetscape. I think they keyed it to the height of the grade school, because most of the commercial buildings on the avenue aren't even 45 feet. They're more like one story or two stories. So, at the time when they were doing this, that's when I was learning more about the Town of Potomac. And I became acquainted with this woman, Susan Escherich, at Virginia Tech's architecture school. She said, "Well, you know, a nice corollary to the master plan would be to try to establish a historic district." And I'm like, "Yeah, sure. How do we do that?" And she, you know, she was a real driver for it. And she said, "you know, I can get people to do the work if you get the money." So I worked on getting the funding for it and, and getting the association

behind it and getting the local realtors behind it. The realtors loved it because, you know, historic designation of anything, you know, increases the value of property, increases local awareness and pride, community support. So, it wasn't hard to get that ball rolling. And I was surprised how quickly it happened because first you had to do the survey, had to write up the survey, had to write the application to the state and federal government and they turned it around really quick. I mean, it was a matter of like, you know, my term as president, two years they did it all. *[00:45:51][209.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:45:52]* What was the city of Alexandria's reaction to you pushing for historic designation? *[00:45:58][5.6]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:45:59]* Well, at the time, the city manager was Vola Lawson, and she was incredibly supportive because she understood the nexus between historic districts and economic prosperity. Old Town, Alexandria was the great example of that. It wasn't until the district was established in Old Town that you started having, you know, parades and festivals, and they brought in tourists and brought a lot of money in and brought in new restaurants. And so she got it right away. And the entire city council was supportive. I mean, when I went to city council asking for money, it was unanimous and non-controversial. The city was really behind the creation of the historic district. And that was important, because I think if they had not been and they had had a conversation, maybe with the state of the federal government, that it wouldn't have moved as quickly as it did. *[00:46:54][55.1]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:46:56]* So, even though the city was excited about this and the link between economic development, tourism and historic districts seem to be well established within city council. At the time, you know, Parker-Gray had only become a historic district, like maybe eight, ten years before Del Ray. Why at the time did they not extend B.A.R [Board of Architectural Review] protection to Del Ray as they did to Parker Gray and Old Town? Because Parker Gray had a separate B.A.R at this time, as did Old Town? *[00:47:29][33.5]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:47:30]* Right. Well, first of all, we didn't ask for it. And maybe that was a mistake. But at the time, I mean, it was only in my wildest dreams and anybody else's that Del Ray would become so popular and successful that you'd essentially have people tearing down historic buildings. I mean, at the time of the initial survey, I think there were 690 contributing structures, both commercial and residential, mostly residential. And we've lost at least 100 of those now in recent years because if you talk to local realtors, they'll tell you that Del Ray is one of the hottest, if not the hottest, real estate market in the entire DMV. District, Maryland, Virginia, sort of economic area. Why? Because, you know, it's accessible to bus and rapid transit. It's only a mile from Old Town. It's, you know, two miles from the airport and it's four miles to the bridge into D.C. I mean, it's just location, location, location. And as a result of that, you have a lot of people that are tearing down, you know, houses that are contributing structures. Are they remarkable in and of themselves? No, but they are part of the fabric of the suburban small town. That's what the town of Potomac was. But as you lose more and more of those structures, you lose the district and eventually, you know, you take the signs down because you'll have, you know, fewer contributing structures than non-contributing structures and then it goes away. And Alexandria, I don't think, at least at the time, that they envisioned that ever happening, but it's happening now and the current city leadership doesn't seem to be very alarmed about it and I'm not really sure why. But, you know, that's the conversation that's ongoing to see what

we can do to try to protect the historic structures. But at the time it didn't seem as if we'd ever need it because it was just it was such a long way to go to get Mount Vernon Avenue and the community to the place where it is today. *[00:49:25][114.8]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:49:27]* So, how would you say all this, you know, commercial and residential development has affected that neighborhood character that you talked about earlier on? *[00:49:37][10.2]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:49:38]* Well, it's affected in small ways for certain neighbors. In other words, when a residential structure that was contributing is torn down and the family that was there for a while moves out, was bought out, or the owner dies and something out of character with the community is built, you know, it's only the local neighbors who really are concerned about it and maybe some even are concerned about it. But what does concern people is the commercial corner of Mount Vernon Avenue. I mean, if you just walk down Mount Vernon Avenue through the heart of what was the town of Potomac and now the heart of Del Ray, it does feel like a small town because that is indeed what it was. I mean, it wasn't created by Alexandria, it was created by Arlingtonians, who became, essentially separated from Arlington to become, you know, residents of the town of Potomac. And they made this sort of small town. And nothing like it exists within the boundaries of, you know, Fairfax County or Arlington County anymore. They were all, you know, paved over and redeveloped. So that's why it's a unique place that people were I mean, today people bid up houses. I mean, it's hard to find a house anymore for less than $1,000,000, which is crazy because if that same house were located, you know, in Des Moines, Iowa, it would be worth a third of that. But it's because of the location. *[00:51:06][87.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:51:08]* So you mentioned that small town feel in Del Ray in the town of Potomac, that is absent in other areas of Northern Virginia for sure, but in Alexandria as well. So in your opinion, when does it when you're walking down Mount Vernon Avenue, the heart, as you call it, when do you start getting the feeling that you have been, like you're firmly outside of Del Ray? Is it when you know that you're outside the physical boundaries or is there just an instance where you no longer get that sort of emotional feeling that you're in a small town? *[00:51:42][33.7]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:51:46]* I mean, I think that's a hard question to answer. You know, everybody would feel differently about it. I mean, I don't walk the avenue as much as I did when I had children. Right now, you know, I mean, what gives you that impression that it's a small town is best experienced on a Saturday morning. When the farmer's market is operating and all the stores are open and people are, you know, walking their dogs and going out for breakfast and sitting in sidewalk cafes having coffee, reading the paper, you know, in conversation with their neighbors, then that's when you get that sense that this is a unique place. You can't even get that feeling in Old Town. I mean, Old Town has a farmer's market, but other than the farmer's market on the square, Market Square, the rest of old town is pretty dead. But Del Ray isn't. And people come there on Saturday mornings from all over Alexandria and probably outside of Alexandria to have coffee, go to the bakery, fresh baked goods, you know, have breakfast somewhere. It's just a, I mean, that's the vibe. And it doesn't exist all the time, summer is almost over, but on a nice summer evening, you just drive down the avenue or walk

down the avenue. There are so many places that offer outdoor dining in there, virtually all filled, even a week nights. So. *[00:53:09][83.1]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:53:16]* So what would it mean for you, you know, personally, since you were the one that initiated this historic district designation project and successfully did so, I might add, to receive the same level of oversight as Parker Gray and Old Town enjoy? *[00:53:32][16.3]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:53:32]* Well, I don't support the same level of oversight. I mean, I don't think you need the full B.A.R, Board of Architecture Review, treatment for Del Ray. And I don't think a lot of people would like it, but there are gradations of protection a community, a city, can offer its neighborhoods. At its most basic level, the city can have an ordinance just as exists in Old Town, Parker Gray, that says 'you can't tear down or significantly alter a contributing structure without a public hearing.' So people live around it, and the city staff and the historic preservation community can talk about it. It doesn't mean you can't tear it down eventually if you make a good argument, but it means you have to go through a certain amount of steps to accomplish that. Right now in Del Ray, that doesn't exist. Someone can tear down a historic building tomorrow without anything more than what the city calls a grading permit, which means you're going to tear down and grade the property flat. And there are things called conservation districts where the goal of the conservation district is not the same as in Old Town or Parker Gray, it's more to preserve the overall feel of the community and the scale of the community through guidelines for new construction. I mean, so there's a range of things you can do without telling people, gee, you can't, you know, change the color of your shutters from black to yellow. I mean, that's not something I would support or anybody would support. But at its core, the city has to wrestle with how do you prevent historic structures being torn down? And that's what's happening now. So, I mean, if we could just get that smaller and it's passed, I'd consider that a great victory. *[00:55:24][112.1]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:55:30]* Is there a big push among the neighbors or the community for this ordinance? I guess sort of on a broader level, how aware is the current, you know, Del Ray community aware of its history? *[00:55:43][12.8]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:55:45]* Well, I think people are really aware of it, but they're not so aware of the history, but they're aware of the fact when a building that they walk their dog by every day is one morning not there anymore. And all you have to do is look at social media, you know, Facebook or Twitter or Nextdoor, and you'll see commentary week in and week out about that. You know, how'd that happened? How come they could do that? People asking sort of questions to the, you know, to the universe of how can this be happening. So, people are aware of that but they may not be aware that, they may know that this nice old couple lived there for many, many years, and it was a nice old farmhouse and they took care of it. They may not know it was a contributing structure to a historic district. Would they care more? Probably. But there's still a lot of concern about losing sort of things that have been there a long time that were well-used. I mean, 15, 20 years ago, people didn't tear down the houses in Del Ray, they renovated them. And you don't see a lot of renovation anymore because it's cheaper for a builder to knock it down. And that's what a city ordinance could help address. *[00:57:00][75.4]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:57:03]* So how have you seen these, you know, developments, like you said, affect the sort of historical character, I guess, of Del Ray? *[00:57:13][9.5]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:57:14]* Well, I mean, the perverse effect of this is that the buildings that are being torn down tend to be more modest structures, bungalows, one story houses. They're attractive to a developer because maybe when they were built, you know, 80 or 90 years ago the owner had two or three lots. And what they want is the lot. They want the land. And so they'll take the structure down. But as a matter of practicality, the people that live in that little house on those multiple lots tend to be older and they tend to be people of color who have a hard time. Well, first of all, maybe the property might just be turned over to the children because the owners die, or it's hard to turn down $1,000,000 or more for, you know, your tiny little house and you can move to something for half that price by moving across the river to Maryland or moving to Fairfax County. So what's happening is the change, the character of the neighborhood is that we're losing a lot of long time residents in a lot of the African American community that settled in Del Ray in the sixties and seventies. So, you know, two generations of families that are going away. *[00:58:40][86.1]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:58:45]* That's fascinating. How did you come to learn about the significant African American community in Del Ray? Because in an area like, you know, like Uptown, what is now Parker Gray, that community was very much, very close knit and very, well, there were mixed reactions to the historical designation, but it was very much a contentious issue. Did you experience the same thing with the African American community in Del Ray? *[00:59:16][31.4]*

Rod Kuckro: *[00:59:16]* No. I mean, no. And the community is not as large or as organized as it was in Parker Gray. I mean, in fact Parker Gray was called, the neighborhood was called the Inner City. It was the Inner City Civic Association that had, you know, old long term African American residents. And people were gentrifying the neighborhood. And it was the people who were gentrifying the neighborhood, and so the long term residents who understood that wanted to make sure the architecture pretty much stayed the same and that housing stayed affordable. That wasn't the case in Del Ray because the African American community wasn't as large or well organized. And the reason they're in Del Ray, as I think I mentioned earlier, is that as the African American community grew in the inner city and there were no more places to buy close by to your relatives and your long term friends, the next neighborhood over was Del Ray. And the northern part of Del Ray has a fairly high concentration of African American owners. The houses are more like row houses and townhouses, not single family. But you still had African American homeowners scattered throughout the single family portions of Del Ray and living in the apartments. We have quite a few apartment buildings. *[01:00:44][87.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:00:47]* Very cool. Very interesting. So before we get to our closing remarks, is there anything else that you want to mention about your current efforts to get the same protections for Del Ray? *[01:01:01][13.5]*

Rod Kuckro: *[01:01:02]* Well, there was one small success this year. In January, I wrote an application to the group Preservation Virginia, which is the sort of state analog to the National Trust for [Historic] Preservation. It happens to be the oldest state historic preservation group in the country. And every

year in May, which is National Historic Preservation Month, they issue a list of the 11 most endangered places in the Commonwealth. And they do it on the same day that National Trust issues its list of the 11 most endangered places in the nation. And this year on May 9th, they designated the town of Potomac Historic District as one of the 11 most endangered places of the state. So that was very satisfying. The city, as we sit here today, has no official reaction to that at all. They haven't even acknowledged that it happened. They did not inform the mayor. They did not inform the city council or the planning commission members. They just let it sit out there sort of on social media and in the press to let people find out on their own. So the next step, of course, is trying to convince them that they should probably heed the advice. I mean, this group, Preservation Virginia, did not just simply make the designation. They laid out what the threat was. They use data to support that. And then they suggested a solution, which is a collaboration between citizens and city staff and elected officials to figure out what to do to stop these historic structures from being lost. Every week or two, we lose another structure. And the model is there, the model exists in Old Town and Parker Gray, just you can't tear something down that's designated as historic until you have a public hearing. That shouldn't be a hard concept. There's a lot of talk now in Alexandria these days about equity, of all kinds and who can argue gets equity. But it's certainly not equitable that people who live in Del Ray don't have the same rights as people who live in Old Town or Parker Gray. It's just not fair. So I hope this year something will happen. *[01:03:18][135.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:03:19]* Was it was there a moment or a event? Perhaps one of these, of the 690 contributing buildings that got torn down that was sort of the impetus for your contact of the Virginia Historic Preservation Society? *[01:03:36][17.1]*

Rod Kuckro: *[01:03:37]* It was just cumulative. And as I said, it's happening more frequently in recent years because of the value of property. The value of land in the city, of course, is really high. And because the length of the city is 15.3 square miles, and the only way for builders to make any money is to go up because there's no vacant land. And so you tear down something that's worth X and you put up that's worth two times X and that's how you prosper as a developer. And you can't fault them for being capitalists, but you can fault them for sort of not having much concern for the historic character of the community that they're altering because the city has guidance for them. About 20 years ago, the Civic Association convinced the city to embark on what took more than a year to create something they call the pattern book. And it's essentially a digest of architectural recommendations for the different kinds of housing types that exist in Del Ray; foursquare, bungalow, queen and farmhouse. If you're going to, you know, if you're going to alter it or you want to you want to enlarge it, don't tear it down. But here are things you can do sympathetically to the architecture that keeps the building as contributing property, but you can add on the living space you want to have for a modern family. So the city's given the tools to local builders, but the local builders are not obligated to use it. So they ignore it. But that's once again, something the conservation district could put in place as a practice. But it's not going all the way to a full board of architectural review, as exists in Old Town or Parker Gray. There are things you can do that are less intrusive on a property owner. *[01:05:29][111.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:05:33]* So the pattern book. Could you talk a little more about that? Because when I've talked to the historic preservation architects of the city, one of their biggest issues is to not make newer buildings look too historical, I guess you could say. They want to keep things in the, you

know, the sort of the style, I suppose, but not replicated. So with this pattern book, what sort of recommendations do they have for Del Ray? Because would it be reconstructing the same bungalows or? *[01:06:09][35.2]*

Rod Kuckro: *[01:06:09]* It's not a reconstruction. The pattern book says if you want to alter your property, I suppose you could apply the new construction too, but it's primarily meant to preserve the existing structure, the historic structure. And so if you want to add on to it, I mean, there are some really ugly, you know, poorly designed editions I could show you where you have a really nice bungalow and then someone built like a four sided box behind it that's two stories high and just looks ridiculous. Whereas you can do something else using the pattern book as a guide. And there's no similar sort of architectural digest in the city's possession for any other neighborhood, just for Del Ray. The only time it's required to be used is if a new piece of residence construction requires a special use permit, and virtually no new residential construction anymore requires an S.U.P [Special Use Permit]. So, that's why it's ignored by builders. I mean, some of them may look at it, but I'm sure they know it exists because the architects know it exists, but they don't have to follow it. *[01:07:12][62.3]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:07:13]* So when these developers tear down buildings to get access to the land, what types of units are the building? Are they like sort of modern single family homes or? *[01:07:23][9.8]*

Rod Kuckro: *[01:07:24]* Well, I mean, they're building structures that are several times larger. I mean, they're building to the maximum amount of floor area ratio allowed by the zoning envelope in that zone. And after all, why wouldn't you, if you can maximize the amount you can build you can maximize the amount you can charge for it. So that newer houses that are being built have three things in common. One is they are now the largest homes in Del Ray, the newer ones, and none of them approximate the square footage average of what the historic homes are. So they're out of scale and they tend to all conform to what is popular these days in terms of new construction, which is kind of American farmhouse style, and they're not necessarily ugly. They're just out of scale and they're replacing something that was part of an historic district. To some people, that probably doesn't matter. But, you know, that's a matter of personal taste. I just happen to feel differently about it than the guy who tore down a historic bungalow to build a, you know, a American farmhouse McMansion. And so in those cases, this is where you hear complaints from neighbors, is that they'll say, you know, 'before I didn't have this, you know, two and a half or three story building, blocking my light and sunshine on my kitchen or my backyard, and now I have this.' They're living in a different place. And they were living, you know, previously because of the sort of no holds barred aspects of new construction in the historic district. Whereas oftentimes the cases that come before the B.A.R for Old Town and Parker-Gray are exactly that. It's the scale of the building that is argued against by neighbors and by city staff because they want things to sort of remain in scale to what is already in existence. But in Del Ray, you don't have that that sort of protection or interest by the city. *[01:09:31][126.8]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:09:34]* Would you say that the, you know, bungalow style, you know, etc. type homes have contributed to the character of the neighborhood more than the historic district. I guess it's that, you know, it takes a certain type of individual to move into any sort of development. Some people are going to be more attracted to apartment living and some people are going to be more

attracted to single family housing units. So I guess, do you think that, you know, the historic district has helped to shape the current demographics of Del Ray? *[01:10:14][40.0]*

Rod Kuckro: *[01:10:14]* Oh Yeah. I mean, it's the preferred place it seems to sort of start a new family and raise a family. I mean, if you take a Saturday morning stroll there are two characteristics to what you see it. A lot of dogs, but lots of strollers and lots of strollers that have two, you know, two kids and a newborn and a two- or three-year-old. And as a result of that, our local grade schools, you know, are pretty much at capacity. And that's a good thing. But, you know, a lot of families. And it's true on the street I live in, I mean, just a lot of new families that seem to be able to afford paying, you know, 750k to $1,000,000 for a home, which wasn't the case when we were coming up, my wife and I. *[01:11:08][54.6]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:11:10]* So, you know, when you talked about you first moving on to Windsor Avenue, you mentioned it as a good place to raise a family. So you would say that Del Ray has maintained that sort of character since you've moved there? *[01:11:23][13.2]*

Rod Kuckro: *[01:11:23]* Absolutely. Yes. And it's actually gotten better because now there are places to take your children on the avenue. I mean, there are some family friendly, you know, one of a kind restaurants. There's Del Ray Creamery [The Dairy Godmother] where you get the custard, which, you know, is a midwestern kind of ice cream. I mean, lots of places you can take your kids. Plus, the community now has, you know, Halloween parade. It has, you know, all kinds of things that bring families out. I mean, if you're not doing anything on October 29th when we have our Halloween parade, there'll be 10,000 people at that parade. And it goes on for a couple of hours because everybody wants to walk in it with their kids. It's crazy. *[01:12:11][48.0]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:12:12]* When did that parade start? Was that something that was there when you first moved? *[01:12:15][3.1]*

Rod Kuckro: *[01:12:16]* Oh, probably started, I'll say, 15 years ago. It's been going on for a while. But no, I mean, Del Ray didn't generate that kind of local buzz or interest, you know, back in the early nineties. *[01:12:28][12.7]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:12:31]* Very interesting. Ok. What are some hopes you have for the future of Del Ray? *[01:12:40][8.8]*

Rod Kuckro: *[01:12:46]* Well, I'd like to see the historic district, you know, saved, preserved. And I'd like to see the scale of Mount Vernon Avenue, our main street, fully maintained as it is. Right now the city is going through an exercise where they have discussed raising the heights by three or four stories on Mount Vernon Avenue, allowable heights. Which would probably end up resulting in the demolition of all the historic structures. And those developers would want to take advantage of that. So it's my hope that City Council, which is working on this proposal right now to make a decision by the end of the year that they will sort of see the light and not go that route. But that's a political issue more than anything else right now. *[01:13:32][46.4]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:13:35]* What are some hopes you have for the future of the Del Ray Citizens Association? *[01:13:38][2.5]*

Rod Kuckro: *[01:13:40]* My first hope is that they go back to meeting live. The current leadership is happy doing a Zoom call once a month and they get a very poor turnout generally. And you lose the social aspect of being in a large group together. I mean, most of the civic groups in the community during the pandemic went to virtual meetings, they have all gone back to being live now, but not Del Ray. And I think as a result, their influence and the interest in the community has diminished, been diminished a lot because they're not meeting live anymore. So I hope that will happen. I'd like to see them return to being as influential as the Civic Association was for, you know, for several decades when I was involved and after I was involved. They just don't seem to have that kind of. clout anymore within the city. *[01:14:37][57.2]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:14:40]* And then lastly, if you could hold on to one memory forever, what would it be? *[01:14:44][4.2]*

Rod Kuckro: *[01:14:47]* I have no idea how to answer that question. *[01:14:49][1.2]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:14:51]* The Kennedy one seems really cool. [Kerry laughs] *[01:14:53][2.5]*

Rod Kuckro: *[01:14:54]* Well, it is cool. I mean, it wasn't until I was older, and I remember my father saying to me, "do you remember that?" Because, I mean, that's what I want to hold onto forever. So that could be a good closing memory. But, I mean, I got to shake his hand and he looked me in the eye. He was very nice. I mean, yeah, you know, charisma. I mean, my mom was swooning, you know, there was, you know, Jack Kennedy. I don't really have a memory associated with the creation of what is now the historic district that sticks with me particularly. I mean, maybe the day I walked out of city council back in 1991, the city had just given us, I think it was $15,000 that helped pay for the survey. That was pretty good day. I mean, without the money, we couldn't have done it. And it wasn't just their money. We had money from some foundations and also from our own treasury in Del Ray. But when the city said, 'we're going to give you money for this,' that was an affirmation that they cared about it. So that may be the memory. *[01:16:03][69.1]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:16:04]* Well, thank you so much, Rod. This has been absolutely fascinating. Thank you so much for doing this for me. *[01:16:08][4.7]*

Rod Kuckro: *[01:16:11]* I hope it's useful to you. *[01:16:12][1.6]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:16:13]* Oh, it absolutely was. *[01:16:13][0.0]*
[4369.2]