

Rachel Economy- Brown University student in Environmental Studies, taking part in Annie Valk's Fall 2010 class "Community Documentary and Storytelling"
Transcript- Interview with David Riley, Co-Chair Friends of India Point Park

Interview Date: Wednesday, Dec 1, 2010, 4 pm, at the home of David Riley in Fox Point, Providence, RI
Transcription Date(s): Thursday, December 2, 2010

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DAVID RILEY (DR): Now let me ask you another couple of questions.

RACHEL ECONOMY (RE): Sure.

DR: Now this project has been going on for a couple years—

RE: It has. I think this is its third year.

DR: Uh huh. On- focused on Fox Point.

RE: Mmmhmm. Yes. Oh here, this is over here [*moves microphone*].

DR: And what happens to- are these things being kept in the library, or what's the deal?

RE: That's a good question. So, they have been in a digital archive through the Brown library, and they're going to be on—the archive's being digitized, I guess, so it's on a computer but it's going to be put into the library resources so that all students can, or it's sort of a general access kind of archive. And then the transcripts are also in the archive of the interviews. And then within the class, we do projects, each course is a project with any of the interviews from their year or the years before.

DR: I see.

RE: So this year we'll be doing- it's like a walking tour on Wickenden, with cell phone call-in sites. And then there will be sort of, vignettes of different people talking in reference to that particular site from the different interviews that we've collected to sort of try to capture the different uses and histories of certain places.

DR: That's interesting, so you're going to – are you going to advertise that in the community?

RE: Yeah, I think it should be up for about six months but you're absolutely invited, I'll send you and Marjorie emails about this, to the initial sort of presentation, which is on the 16th of this month I think.

DR: Ah.

RE: But it should be up for a while.

DR: And, are you working in conjunction, or is Annie—let me think of the name- Claire Watkins, Andre Watkins is the Cape Verdean- she's done a lot of research on the Cape Verdeans in Fox Point.

RE: It's very possible. Was she involved in the "Some Kind of Funny Puerto Rican?" Yeah, I think we have talked to her, yeah.

DR: Okay.

RE: Yeah. So I'm going to just introduce us to the record- to the recorder and then we'll forget about it, but just for the transcript. So I'm Rachel Economy, this is David Riley- do you prefer to go by David or Mr. Riley?

DR: David.

RE: Okay.

DR: Please.

RE: Yeah. David is the co-chair of Friends of India Point Park and I am a senior at Brown University, I being Rachel, and today is the December 1st, 2010.

DR: And I'm also co-chair of Head of the Bay Gateway.

RE: Oh great, okay. Yeah I would love to ask you about both of those. Well, so starting off, did you have anything else you wanted to ask me?

DR: I don't think so, thank you, except well I'll ask you whether you usually get interviewed like I interviewed you?

RE: I think one of the hard things about an interview is, that feels totally natural to me for it to be an exchange of questions, and having to force it away from conversation where it's a one way thing is really awkward sometimes.

DR: Yeah.

RE: Because I would rather have a conversation.

DR: Right.

RE: But it's not useful later- not as useful, it's still useful. So—so I was wondering if you could start off just telling me about how you got involved or started Friends of India Point Park.

DR: Sure. Sure. I went to a meeting of the Fox Point Neighborhood Association. It was then called the Fox Point Citizens' Association, which was started, as you may know, in the '70s I think, some years ago, initially over a dispute with Brown about the parking lot on Brook Street. And Brown wanted to put up a parki- a big parking garage and the neighborhood objected, and that's why you see that parking lot on over there that doesn't go above ground level. – So right before I got here, we moved here in '98 from Washington, DC and my wife and I started going to some of the Neighborhood Association meetings and there was one meeting when the Rhode Island Transportation Department spoke, particularly (CHECK NAME) who's the liaison, community liaison with the transportation department, about the relocation of 195, and you know, India Point Park is just five blocks away, at the foot of India- at the foot of East Street, and I'd gotten attached to it, and I said, at the meeting— maybe there should be an organization that advocates for the park, especially during this relocation. Because trees don't vote. And they need advocates. So that's what started Friends of India Point Park, which started in January of 2000. There were a few people who signed up at that meeting to come together and discuss it

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And we had a meeting right in this room. And that's how it started.

RE: And they were all volunteers? You were all volunteers?

DR: Oh yeah. Still are.

RE: Okay. So does that include you and Marjorie Powning, the other co-chair?

DR: Mmhmm, mmhmm. Yes.

RE: How much time have you, over the years, what did it look like initially, and how much time has it ended up?

DR: Well, it's varied some, it's taken a lot of my time. Our first battle was not about the relocation, which hadn't really started. But we heard, I guess through the newspapers, that Brown wanted to put a seven layer, seven floor parking garage at Gano Street, at the foot of Gano street, right by the park. Right where the, I don't know if you know, there's some Brown warehouse buildings there. And we thought that was a terrible idea, and a terrible location for a parking garage, right at the waterfront next to the park. So we fought that for, I don't know, a couple years, we had a petition, we had eight hundred names on it. We found out that Cornell had

also had a parking problem, as Brown has, still has, and that rather than build parking garages, they developed this innovative and award-winning system of public transportation where they- and including incentives, like you could get, if you carpoled you'd get a cheaper parking space, and if you parked more on the outskirts of the university, you'd get a cheaper parking space, in fact, you'd even get paid if you carpoled and took the parking space more on the outskirts. And, they, they saved ten million dollars by not building parking garages. So we publicized that, and I think it kind of made Brown go back in their cage, and give it up.

RE: What was that process-

DR: In all honesty, it's not totally analogous, there are differences between Cornell and Brown, in terms of topography and geography and town and so forth. But it seemed to work. They gave it up.

RE: Just through that petition being-

DR: Through the petition, through talking about Cornell, through getting some people influential from people. India Point Park was created in 1974 through the vision of- stop me if you already know this- through the vision of Mary Elizabeth Sharpe, who was for many many many years, I think several decades, the landscape architect for Brown. Her husband, Henry Sharpe Sr., was a trustee I think for many years. And she was driving by, she and her husband were driving along the waterfront in the '60s one day, and Henry Sharpe Jr., who we work with closely, and who is their son, was in the car, and he remembers it. And Mrs. Sharpe looked out, and she said, 'This is a shame.' At that time there were railroad yards, and a scrap metal dump on the waterfront. And she said, 'this is crazy. This is such a lost opportunity, this should be a beautiful park.' And then she- and on our website there's the story, great paper written by a Brown student some years describing, it's called "The Creation of India Point Park" and it explains how that happened. Which I can go into more, but maybe you don't need that now, it's on the website, friendsofindiapointpark.org. And anyway, we work very closely with the Sharpes, Peggy and Henry Sharpe, really since we started. And they are, they have a lot of connections to Brown, I think they were helpful in Brown seeing the light.

RE: Great. What—I've got a couple places I could go from there. I was thinking, what are some other specific battles that you fought over the years, and has the process been different in terms of those volunteers- I think you said there were eight people involved at the beginning?

DR: Uh yeah, something like that.

RE: Has that- that's grown?

DR: Well, the steering committee is not much bigger, it's about- it's like eight or nine. It's changed a little bit, or quite a bit actually, the makeup of it. But we have a mailing- email list of, I haven't counted it, but probably 300 or so. And we send out

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alerts and things like that. I should have, I don't have it with me, we have a one page sheet of what Friends of India Point Park has done, which I can give you a copy. But over the years- so that was our first battle, and our next battle was to try to get the power lines buried, they go across the park. They actually go across three parks, three waterfront parks. And you probably know, they start at the power plant and go like so across this part. And-- basically, we were told that it was too expensive to bury them, and we said, 'look, if you're going to relocate the highway, do all this construction, why don't you bury the, bury them at the same time.' 'Oh, no, we can't afford it.' So that was a huge, it still is an ongoing battle, a huge battle, we got 35 local and state organizations to write letters of support, and hearings with the state of Rhode Island attorney general's office has been extremely supportive, Rhode Island's attorney general Patrick Lynch has been fearless. The powers that be, including National Grid, went to him and said, 'drop this.' He said, 'no, I'm not going to drop it.' And so that's- through, with their help, we've identified fourteen-and-a-half- million dollars from various different sources, including then Senator Chafee getting a two-and-a-half-million dollar federal earmark, and various other sources. It's an expensive job, because the power lines have to go under two rivers, as well as under the park, so under the Providence River, under the park, and then under the Seekonk River. So it's about nineteen-million, and a couple of years ago we finally got the legislature to pass a bill, which said that if the city council of Providence and East Providence approved, the final shortfall, about four- or five-million, could be raised by a surcharge on rate payers, which would come to about sixteen cents a month for the average rate payer in Providence, and East Providence. We're still fighting that battle. It started in I think '02, so eight years later. I'm still hopeful it'll happen.

RE: That's really interesting to hear about the government being such an advocate for this park. What's the process of getting in there as a, as a volunteer organization?

DR: Part of the government.

RE: Mmmhmm right.

DR: Another part of it drags its feet. Well, what happened was that we presented this idea of getting the power lines buried, I remember it was a cold, rainy, snowy, sleety day in February and we invited people from Senator Chafee's office, Senator Reed's office, Congressman Kennedy's office, I think the governor's office and the mayor's office, to- and the attorney general's office- to come to meet me down there at the park, where I could show them what we were talking about. Well the only person who showed up- well, I shouldn't say- a couple people did show up, but the only

person who showed up and really took an interest was a guy named Paul Roberti who was at that time the public utilities staff person for the attorney general. And he and I worked together, he told me not too long ago, he'd gotten a thousand emails from me over the years. And he's been incredibly supportive. He's now a public utilities commissioner, and was appointed a year or so ago by the governor. So they took it on, and Patrick Lynch to his credit said, 'yeah, this makes sense.' There are examples of other cities where power lines were buried in waterfront parks, and it's had a huge beneficial impact. Two particular cities are Chattanooga and Louisville, where the waterfront parks there, in part because the power lines were buried, have become major, major attractions and economic engines for making those areas a destination. That's what this could be.

RE: The power lines being buried sort of corresponds to a higher use by people of the park?

DR: Yeah. I mean some, a lot of people say, 'Oh that's just aesthetics.' You know, 'we need affordable housing, we need jobs, aesthetics is a fringe.' But as I point out when I testify to the EFSB,

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what's it called—it's part of, it's sort of related to the PUC, the Public Utilities Commission, I forget what it's called now- Energy Facilities Siting Board. In this day and age, aesthetics and economics merge. What is Waterfire? Is it an aesthetic asset or an economic asset? Clearly both. What is preservation on Benefit Street, is it aesthetics or is it economics? Clearly both. And this would be too. As it has been in those other cities.

RE: Right. Yeah, that makes, that totally makes sense.

DR: It's interesting because power lines are something that, you know people get used to them, people say- you know I kind of do too- you say, 'Oh well those-' you know, 'you don't see them after a while.' And so it's hard to make an argument. It's hard to tell people, 'this is going to be great' when you don't see it. But it's been proven to be so in other cities. It's also, the other important point, is that the waterfront for a couple of hundred years, starting when John Brown created a sea port there in the late eighteen, late seventeen-hundreds, and some of those pilings down there date from the 18th century, I was just told that by the historical society. And- or at least early 19th century, probably the 18th century. And so waterfronts, understandably, they were the place where you did your trade, that's why it's called India Point because the boats, you may know, went to the Indies, they were called Indiamen. And then after that, you had steamships, and you had the railroads, you had shipbuilding and all that. So waterfronts over the last couple of hundred years, at least, in the case of Providence the last 300 years, have been industrial, vital industrial resource- as it still is, on the working waterfront. But right here it's not

that anymore, and can be, as it has been in other cities, a different kind of economic asset. And you know without railroad yards, scrap metal heaps, and power lines.

RE: Right. What—what kind—not what kind, but where do the folks who are invested in this from the point of view of the Friends group come from? Like are they all Fox Pointers, are they coming from particular communities, particular demographics?

DR: Both. Both. The interesting thing about India Point Park is that it's a neighborhood park but it's also a regional park and a city park. I mean, the Mexican soccer league is from all over the region, and they have like a thousand people every weekend there, playing and watching. So we initially- actually I think the first letter of support we got for the power lines was from Save the Bay, which is a statewide organization, but we certainly had neighborhood groups and granted neighborhood people were the catalyst, but there were thirty-five- letters from thirty-five organizations. And way beyond the neighborhood, there were nonprofits, the West Providence Neighborhood Association on the west end, the Summit [?] farther north here, on College hill, a bunch of others- jewelry district. So it's both. And the same is true with the Head of the Bay Gateway, I mean the- Mayor Cicilline has said, and other people have said, 'oh well that's just the east side, that's just for rich people and white people, and other parts of the city need parks and we don't want to put more resources into that.' And the answer to that is, 'well, it's not just for the east side.' And in fact there was a study done by URI of the location of parks in the city and the east side is sort of average. There's big parks in other parts of the city, very big ones. I mean it's a little complicated cause if you count the green space at Brown, which you probably should, but there's also green space at Providence College and Rhode Island College. There are some parts, some small parts of the city, like part of the Southside, that do need more, I mean everybody needs more parks. We're not against it. The point is not just to- and if you go to India Point Park on a summer evening, especially during the weekend, you can't tell the dominant language. It's as much Spanish as English. So what more do you need to know about how homogeneous- you know it's not homogeneous.

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RE: Now I'm wishing it was a summer evening and I was in India Point Park. That's one of my favorite things. Can you tell me a little bit more about the Bay Gateway, I don't know very much about that-

DR: Well so in '07, we got word that- we actually, if you go on the Friends of India Point Park website you'll see a paper that we wrote, one of the first things we wrote in 2001, first year we were operating, second year I guess, arguing for expansion of the park, including the Shooters site, which was bought by the transportation department in 2000 and closed, cause they needed the land for ramps, for on and off ramps. And we said, this should be, the park should be expanded for all the reasons that I'm saying. Cause it's an economic asset and a civic asset. And, it kind of stood there for a while. We did have a battle, at one point the parks department-

transportation department got, I forget how much money it was now—and I don't want to say but, a fair amount of money, to put up a visitors' center right on the shoreline, on the park. And they wanted to make it- right at the narrowest part of the park, right next to the Community Boating center right here, right there- and they wanted to make it a visitors' center and a ticket office for the ferry. And we fought that because as much as we'd like to have the ferry there, as much as we'd like to have a visitors' center there, we said to put another building right on the shoreline at the narrowest part of the park with this amazing view when you don't know what's going to happen to Shooters is crazy. So we got our legislators to shout and scream and they, we stopped it. And then it kind of sat there, then it started to come back another time, and we stopped it again. And the idea, then we were focused on the power lines, and then in '07 we got wind of the fact that the transportation department was talking about selling Shooters imminently. So that's when we started Head of the Bay Gateway, making the argument that that is a terrible place to- if you sell, you lose control of it, you can have condos there, it's outside the hurricane barrier, it's at the bulls eye of storm surge, historically, because the storm surge comes up the bay, which is funnel-shaped and it hits there the hardest. And you got all this land inside the hurricane barrier that's going to be available, and put your condos there.

RE: That will be available with 95 moving.

DR: Yes exactly. It's going to be- it's a total is 35 acres. About 19 of it will be available for development. The other part will be streets, and there's some riverfront parks that [RECORDING GARBLED] could be put in as well. And our argument is, I mean it's nice to have the inland parks but this is a dynamic place, this is the place that has the view of the bay.

RE: This being where the boathouse is and-

DR: Right, where Shooters is. And also, the new 195, which goes right by Shooters, is travelled by 10 million- 10 million travelers a year pass in on 195 on their way to and from the Cape. This incredibly visible, incredibly visible, accessible location. For a public destination.

RE: And the Shooters, that battle has recently sort of come to a head with the November election.

DR: Correct.

RE: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

DR: Sure. I'm just going to point out some- India- Narragansett Bay is funnel shaped, and in fact the city's comprehensive plan makes that point, that as the storm surge in '38 and '54, especially [RECORDING GARBLED- word "circuit" is heard], as it builds, it- the funnel intensifies it, and it hits here the hardest. And then it happened even

more so now because since '54 and since '38, a lot of wetlands and lowlands have been filled in with development, so the final effect's even greater. So yeah we had a lot of hearings and workshops, we had a workshop in the spring of '08 at the Radisson Hotel right next to India Point Park, and we hired the Project for Public Spaces, which is a national organization that argues for the economic benefits of public space, dynamic public space, gives people lots of reasons to go there. And we had hearings and workshops and so forth. And then we got the legislature in the spring to agree to put on the ballot the Open Space Recreation Bond, and wisely they

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tied 3.2 million for keeping Shooters in the public ownership, in other words- what happened was the federal highway department, the federal highway administration said to the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, 'you've got to put the current fair market value of Shooters back into the highway program, you can't just give it to the state. Or to the Department of Environmental Management. So that's why got the 3.2 million on the Open Space Bond, which since it's passed- it was passed by every town in the state, including towns in the very western and northern part, except Woonsocket, where it failed by 38 votes. So it shows, clearly, there's very broad statewide support and understanding of the importance of public access to and use of the bay. Providence passed it by 77.7%, the highest in the state. Which shows how much support there is for this concept. So anyway now that it's been passed, we're working with the Department of Environmental Management and DOT to get them to transfer it, for DOT to transfer it to DEM as soon as possible. And then we've done- we got some money and we did a pretty extensive, hired some consultants to do an extensive report on the maritime, on the marina, potential for a marina in this area. There used to be a marina there when Shooters was operating, and we've talked to restaurant, major restaurant groups about how a restaurant could be there, an event space and so forth. And so we're actually in the process now of finalizing a development plan which shows the economics of how this could work. And we'll be getting that to the DEM, and hopefully we'll inform the RFP, and we've got strong support from Mayor-elect Taveras and Governor-elect Chafee, who've both explicitly endorsed it.

RE: Great. So that's moving forward in the direction that you'd like to see it.

DR: Right. And that's what takes up most of my time now. Friends of India Point Park is- I'm going to resign from co-chair of that hopefully fairly soon, and we have new people who are taking that on.

RE: What is it, sort of on a daily basis, what does your work with it end up looking like? Is it a lot of sitting at desks or is it a lot of knocking on doors?

DR: Uh it depends. Most of it's email at my desk, and phone calling, I would say. But during the election, we talked to Rotary Clubs in Newport and East Greenwich and

Providence and northern Rhode Island, and we were on the radio, WRNI, I don't know if you saw the YouTube talking about this.

RE: I haven't.

DR: If you go to YouTube, India Point, save our shore, or maybe my name, you'll see it.

RE: Great.

DR: Save the Bay put it on. So- and that's been, you know it's been definitely organizing people, urging people to come to hearings and workshops and so forth.

RE: And how does the governance of the group work at this point- are there weekly meetings, are you in charge of every body else?

DR: No, well, there's a Friends of India Point Park steering committee, which Marjorie and I are still co-chairs of, but we're withdrawing from that, stepping back, have about eight or nine people. And then there's the Head of the Bay Gateway steering committee, which I'm also co-chair of with Harry Billodeau, I don't know if you've talked to the Billodeaus, but you should because they, Harry lives up here at the corner of Hope and Power, and they've been here since the '70s. And Harry Billodeau for, I don't know, maybe ten years, was the president of the Fox Point Citizens Association. And Arria has been very involved for, you know, I don't know, twenty or thirty years, with the preservation society. And she's been very active working with me on this. And also John Roney- have you talked to John Roney? He's has an office on Wickenden Street, and he was for many years a state senator from this area, and he continues- he was also, succeeded Harry as head of the Fox Point Neighborhood Association, they have much more, a much longer history than I do.

RE: What sort of background- speaking of history with this- what sort of background did you bring, it seems like you came in with some know-how about this political process, where did that come from, especially from a parks point of view?

DR: Well, it actually goes back

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I think to, I went to a boarding school, Hill [?] school in Pawestown Pennsylvania, I graduated 1960. In the spring of my senior year, I spent a weekend, a work weekend, staying in a settlement house in Philadelphia, in a low-income part of Philadelphia. And that was a real eye-opener, because I hadn't been exposed to that kind of life very much. We actually picketed Woolworths, which was segregated at the time, Woolworths Five and Ten. And did some work in the community, and went to a black church, a Baptist black church, that was an eye-opener. And went to drunk, what they call a drunk court. I remember when I got off the train, to get to the

settlement house, I asked the bus driver, you know, I said, "I want to go to Diamond Street," he said, "Diamond Street, are you sure you want to go to Diamond Street?" So that led to, I think that and then when I was in college, at Middlebury College, at that time they required six, you had to either go to church or a church lecture six times a semester. So I went my sophomore year to hear William Sloane Coffin, who was the Chaplain at Yale, and a very very dynamic person. And I went cause I had to. But he changed my life. He, I mean one of the things he said was, he'd just come back from a program called Operation Crossroads Africa, which was a forerunner of the Peace Corps, they took students to Africa to do work projects in the summer. And he said, "How many Jews are there in your parents' country club, and if you don't know, why not? Why don't you know?" And that was- really changed my life. And I immediately applied for Operation Crossroads Africa, and went that summer, summer of my sophomore year, to Senegal. We built a school dormitory in a fishing village, and that was really my first extended exposure to African Americans, or Africans, to black people. And then I spent my junior year in Paris, and came back and got involved in the civil rights movement. I went to Mississippi as a civil rights worker in '64, and that's where I got the bug.

RE: Oh, I just want to ask you all about the civil rights work, which is pertinent I guess to campaigning here but-

DR: It is.

RE: You think it's informed-

DR: Well, yeah, I think it led to a commitment to social justice. I mean, after that, then I went to law school in Washington and I was involved in the arms control movement, environmental movement and arms control movement, and I think- it was very very exciting to be part of the civil rights movement. A little dicey, and very exciting. And I felt like we were really- which I think, which we did, making a major contribution to really American history. I mean the theory of it was that blacks in the south were getting deprived of voting and literally killed, and the country didn't pay attention to it. And the idea was, if you get some white students down there, especially, not too much in my case, but some cases, the sons and daughters of Congressmen and CEOs, the country's going to pay attention, which it did. - I forgot my train of thought there, let's see—so, what was your question?

RE: Just how that informed-

DR: Yeah

RE: I think you sort of answered that.

DR: Yeah, there was something I was going to say. God I forget what it was.

RE: Take your time.

DR: Yeah, it's okay. Anyways, so, yeah- oh I know what I was going to say. So that, being involved in the civil rights movement was, it was a very vibrant, it really felt so fully engaged, and then we started a newspaper, a community newspaper, which went for a couple of years, reporting- you know blacks weren't reported in the white newspaper unless they were committing crimes, and when they were a part they were never given any, you know it was first name only and so forth. So we started a paper, and then later after I got involved in the Civil Rights Movement, I was very involved with the Nuclear Freeze Campaign,

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which was an effort to freeze nuclear weapons. And that also was very exciting, I was co-chair of the national committee and in both cases, they were very energizing, and really activated me and so forth. But doing this in some ways is even better because even though it's on a smaller scale, it's in my community. When I was in Mississippi, it wasn't my community, and certainly arms control, it's the world community, but it wasn't where I lived in the same way that this is. So I find this very engaging and energizing. And also it's very challenging because, as in the case of the arms control, and any kind of political organizing really, I see it as this gigantic puzzle. And you have to figure out, how can I phrase something, how can I simplify something and phrase it in a way that'll be on a one-page fact sheet that people who are busy will get the essence. So I end up revising fact sheets over and over, people kind of make fun of me for constantly revising them. And how can I figure out who to talk to, or who should talk to somebody. If so-and-so is really important and they don't know me, or they're kind of full of themselves and they wouldn't listen to me even if they did know me, who *can* talk to them? And so it's this human and advocacy puzzle, both for getting people to make things happen, and using images and words to make things happen.

RE: Have you- how have images played into the India Point Park-

DR: Well the images have been critical. These maps that I'm showing you, we use these all the time. An image- a picture's worth a thousand words. We hired a, we got some money and hired an architect to do a rendering of what Shooters' could look like as a destination. This has been invaluable. We have it on a brochure which I can give you a copy of, it's on the website's saveourshorerhodeisland.org, it links to our website, which is called makeshooterspublic.com, which the Fox Point Neighborhood Association put together for us. So yeah, images are critical. And one thing to understand right now, this is, I have these large posters, which you know, in this day and age people think 'posters? What do you mean? Why don't you have a PowerPoint?' Well a PowerPoint would be good too, but there's something about this, somebody said to me, in a way it's almost better, it's like it's more, I don't know, more immediate or something. And we use both.

RE: It's very tangible.

DR: It's tangible.

RE: I'm biased, I also like to be able to hold the thing, I mean even just my reaction to the- I get excited when I can see, actually see what it would look like.

DR: Yeah. People need to be able to visualize. In some ways this is easier than the power lines because it's a concrete thing, and people say "oh yeah that'd be great." Whereas the absence of wires is a little harder to- although we did use visuals with that too. We took pictures of the, I don't know if you know, but the Washington Bridge across the Seekonk River from India Point Park to East Providence is going to have, and we give the transportation department credit for doing this, eventually it's going to have a separate bridge for a pedestrian walkway, a pedestrian park and the bike path. Right now you take your life in your hands if you take the bike path over to East Providence. And we took pictures, at risk of life and limb, from the bridge showing how much more dramatic the power lines will be when that bridge, when that park opens, Linear Park opens. And also the pedestrian bridge now is much more dramatic than it was then, the view of the power lines, so we use visuals with that too.

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Now I want to make one other point about the human puzzle. When I worked in arms control I was director of the national campaign to save the ABM treaty, which was a treaty that actually Nixon negotiated for limiting anti-ballistic missiles. It was a very important treaty, and I worked with the ambassador Gerard Smith who worked under Nixon and negotiated the treaty. And we had like eighty people

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on this committee, including Jimmy Carter, and Nixon, and Robert McNamara and former secretaries of state, former secretaries of defense, et cetera. I remember some- the degree of self-importance and the degree of approachability of these guys, we had to get their approval on a bunch of things, mostly guys, was not directly related to the degree of eminence. There were some people who, like Nixon you had to get, you had to go to two or three people to get to him, there was no way he would talk to me. Whereas Cy Vance who was secretary of state under Carter, I think, was like a regular Joe. You know I called him up, and—but it was always, it's similar now, I mean not quite the same level, but you got to figure out who can talk to who. Or in other cases you can talk to them directly.

RE: And do you feel that sense of the excitement of that puzzle with the Head of the Bay and with India Point-

DR: Absolutely. Yeah, I mean and people get very excited about its possibilities. Which is great, it's gratifying that our vision has currency, a lot of currency. Yeah it's

very engaging. I mean it's a challenge, it's a big challenge. The poet, I don't know if you know the poet Robert Hall- have I got the right name? –Donald Hall. Donald Hall is a poet who did a series of interviews with poets and artists, and he interviewed one time Henry Moore the British Sculptor, and Henry Moore said to him, "you want to know the secret of life?" And of course doing the interview, he said, "yeah, what's the secret of life." And the secret of life, Henry Moore said, is to find something that you're totally passionate about, extremely engaged in and passionate about, and that you can never fully achieve. Which is true in a lot of fields, it's true for artists, your never going to make the ultimate sculpture or painting or whatever. And it's kind of like this. I mean, hopefully we will achieve this, but there will always be something else in terms of making it a better community.

RE: And that's part of that drive, it sounds like, part of that excitement is having something else to strive for.

DR: Yeah, yeah I think having a vision, and believing in a vision, and a vision that makes some sense, and then persuading other people to see it and advocate for it and vote for it is exciting. Yeah.

RE: I wanted to ask you a little bit about-

DR: And that does go back to the civil rights movement, and the arms control- same idea. Just different, different subjects.

RE: Getting people excited, and engaged.

DR: Yeah. It's something that's in their self-interest but they may not see it initially.

RE: Is there a lot of, is there on-the-ground campaigning as well, just within the neighborhood, or has it been more useful to just leverage the larger sort of political-

DR: Well yeah, I mean we work very closely with the Fox Point Neighborhood Association, and they have public meetings twice a year, we often speak at those meetings, and they distribute flyers in every house. And we've done some of that, we've done some distributing of flyers. We had flyers for the workshops we've done. So yeah, part of it's getting out there, definitely.

RE: You said you came to Fox Point in '98? And what was your sense of the neighborhood when you got here, what was it like moving in, how did you come to choose to live in Fox Point when you moved to Providence?

DR: Well my wife and I, we kind of put our finger on the map. We were in Washington DC, we were, my wife and I were childhood friends, not romantic but close friends and married to other people for 25 years. And we got back together, and she was living in Portland, Maine at the time and I was living in Washington and I said, "would you come to Washington," and she said "would you come to Portland,

Maine,” and I said “well,” my son was with me half time, living with me half time, just starting high school, I said “no I can’t leave.” So she came to Washington, and then when he graduated, we spent a lot of time in Maine in the summer, she’s been there her whole life in the summers, and so we wanted to get back to New England and closer to Maine,

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and I really liked being by the water and I wanted a city, but a more manageable city. And Providence is great that way. So we spent a week here between Christmas and New Year’s staying in her sister’s apartment on Benefit Street, in-- that would have been ’97. And we just kind of fell in love with it, and we looked around for houses and we, this house was on the market for one day. And we got it. Right after we got it somebody who, one of the buyers who didn’t get it offered to buy our contract for 20,000 dollars. We said no. And it’s a great area, because we can walk, you can walk to movies, you can walk to, I don’t know, 20 restaurants, you can walk to the park, you can walk to two rivers, parks on either side, there’s like three parks around here, at least. And Fox Point, has it changed since ’98? Yeah I guess it’s changed. Our part, this part of Fox Point is different from three or four blocks that way, to the, to the west, because you go over by Benefit Street and Thayer Street and it’s more historic, and more upscale. You go three or four blocks that way and it’s less historic and less upscale. We’re actually just outside the historic district here.

RE: Which parts of Fox Point fall into the historic district, do you know the boundaries of it?

DR: The boundaries, it stops very close to here, I think it stops at Hope Street. When we, before we saw this house my, I asked my brother-in-law to drive by, and his report was, a little simplistic, but his report was “it’s half in the historic district and half in the Portuguese slum,” well its not really a slum but- which we like. It’s got some diversity. Not anymore, but we had neighbors who didn’t speak English, spoke Portuguese.

RE: Do you feel like there’s been a shift even since you’ve been here towards sort of a less Portuguese and less Cape Verdean-

DR: Well yeah, there’s not a lot of Cape Verdeans, although there’s a lot of attachment to Fox Point by Cape Verdeans. I mean the Sheldon Street Church is I think mostly Cape Verdean, used to be right across the street here. This was a Baptist Church, what I should say is, the Baptist Church here had a dwindling, right across the street, a dwindling congregation, so they merged with Sheldon Street. And this is now, it’s a beautiful building inside, they’ve got the stained glass windows in its condos, but that was before we got here. So, I guess there’s been change, I haven’t noticed it a lot. Well, except that we did have Portuguese families next door who didn’t speak English and now we have, well there’s some who don’t speak a lot of English either but they’re not Portuguese. But they’re still, the

Portuguese Social Club is still here, Holy Rosary is a huge presence, Sheldon Street Church is a big presence. Our meetings are often in Sheldon Street Church. So it's not the same as it was, certainly, but I certainly wouldn't call it all homogeneous either, not by a long shot.

RE: And is that represented in the Neighborhood Association to some extent? Or does that tend to be more-

DR: To some extent-

RE: -white, upper-middle class.

DR: Yeah, it tends to be more middle class white. Not entirely, but I would say it tends to be, yeah. I mean we—we work some with like Johnny Britto, I don't know if you've interviewed Johnny Britto but if you haven't you should.

RE: I think I have actually met him, I think he's, I know he's in the interview archive.

DR: So when we go to Sheldon Street we're friendly with the minister there, and friendly with some of the people who work there, and we make a point of going there on Mother's Day when they have their brunch. And so we're friendly with them, certainly.

RE: And—one thing-

RE: I mean it's interesting, one interesting thing about that is that this neighborhood is pretty diverse. I mean not necessarily as much racially but ethnically certainly. And, which is a good thing, there is a downside, which is that it's not as much of a neighborhood feeling as it might be if it were less diverse. There's certain streets, like maybe in College Hill, which I don't want to live in, but you probably

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would see more- we keep wanting to have a block party, which, we had one once but it was, it was too late in the year to get a lot of people. And if we had one I'm sure people would come, and we will sometime have one. But we're all for diversity, and I'm certainly for diversity, but there is a tradeoff too, it's not as- there's some inhibitions for neighborhood interchange that there wouldn't be, might not be if it were more homogeneous.

RE: It's not an automatic.

DR: Exactly.

RE: It sounds like there's a possibility for it, but it's maybe not automatic.

DR: I mean it's richer if you can get it.

RE: Oh, I was going to say something, what did you just say about—block part- oh, do you think some of that comes from the students moving in and out of the neighborhood as well? Does it still feel like a transient space to you?

DR: No there's certainly some students, we haven't- I mean, we haven't been bothered by a lot of- there was one party with students a couple of years ago which was pretty bad but, and we sometimes hear it, but I don't think it's too bad. I'll tell you, my pet peeve, I don't know if you saw the editorial in the Providence Journal a little bit ago, a week or so ago, but we have kids, my wife and I have three kids each, and they've got spouses and we have grandchildren, we love the younger generation. And, I'm not accusing you, most of the students, I'd say close to 90% of the students, when you come to a crosswalk, if you're in a car and you're, I mean the sense of entitlement and the lack of courtesy- I'm happy to stop for pedestrians, I like pedestrians, I don't like cars. But when you get no wave or no look, or anything, it's like, it is irritating.

RE: I absolutely agree with you. I'm from Atlanta, and if you don't wave at a car it will run over you, so I'm always the person at the back of the group of friends who doesn't want to go in front of the moving vehicle. It's- I'm flabbergasted.

DR: Yeah, I mean one really nice thing about Rhode Island, one of the many, is that people do, cars let other cars in, which is so nice. I mean you go to Boston, they don't do any of that, but—anyway.

RE: What do you- I mean speaking of transportation, since you're sort of involved in this spatial, environmental planning, do you see potential for Providence to be—for such a small city it seems very car-dependant, and I wonder if you see potential for it to be less so.

DR: Yeah, well one of our arguments for the Head of the Bay Gateway is that it would be an ideal intermodal center. I mean you got two interstates coming together, you've got the three major bike paths of the state will eventually meet there, and the East Bay Bike Path meets there now, the Blackstone Bike Path is on its way and so's the bike path from the Connecticut border. And you've got potential for these ferries, which would be great. We've been trying to get the state to at least study the subject for god's sakes. And RIPTA is hopeless so far, maybe they'll change, but they won't even study it. There's federal money out there that they could get to do a study of ridership and the various issues involved in ferries, we've talked to people who've done those studies in Boston where they have quite a few ferries. So yeah, it doesn't need to be- I mean the hill is a little bit of a barrier in terms of bikes and I guess walking to, and people get around it, but downtown is flat. That should be, I mean ideally it should be free buses downtown, and then—course you know money is the big issue. There are these trolleys as you know, and one of the arguments we would make with the Gateway, Head of the Bay Gateway, is parking's going to be an

issue. There is parking, but not as accessible as it could be, probably not as much as you would need if it becomes the kind of popular destination we want it to be. We would certainly, if that begins to develop, we would go to the city and say, "look you got to have more public transportation down there," which hopefully they will. And they're talking about streetcars.

RE: Which would be great. I just rode one of the new trolleys, I think I was telling you, and it's just a bus. It's not a trolley, and it doesn't fit the trolley route. So I would hope that they would move towards the studies that you're talking about.

DR: Well they are doing those studies, and they are moving toward streetcars

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but they haven't yet studied ferries, but we're working, we've got some people who are advocating for it. And we talked to the RIPTA board, made some noise.

RE: Can I ask you about these paintings and photographs, which are lovely and I think are of India Point Park, is that right?

DR: Well the paintings are my wife's.

RE: Oh really?

DR: Yeah she's an artist, that is, that's India Point Park, the pilings, and this one here is, we had a poster made of that, we had an art show in the, '08 I think it was, or- yeah '08, at City Hall, of paintings, artwork from India Point Park. It was great, we had like 30 artists and paintings and photographs and we did that in conjunction with, that neighbor knows a guy who's in that- Johnny Britto's in that, as a kid. In that poster.

RE: And it says India Point, 1943.

DR: Yeah. So—there's lots, I don't know if you saw the pictures, the picture in the Providence Journal about, a couple weeks ago of a red tailed hawk in the park? And there's been dolphins out there, and great blue herons, and swans and so forth.

RE: What do you see as the environmental responsibility of the park, or the Friends of India Point Park association?

DR: Well, to- I mean I think if you go on our website you'll see that we wrote a statement of purpose which we haven't revised since we started saying that our purpose is to promote and defend and advocate for the park, and for its informal natural identity. Before they did, I don't know if you were here when the old pedestrian bridge was there, but there was like brambles of forsythia and we've been working for five years with the transportation department, which to their

credit put a million dollars, over a million dollars into the landscaping, which is beautiful. But we were I think rightfully concerned that they would do kind of tacky landscaping, as you often see along highways, where everything's in a row and they didn't. I think they did a beautiful job, there's grasses and there's forsythias and there's- it looks great. Yeah our responsibility is to- you know it's not to, there are different kinds of parks, I mean there are some parks that are kind of orderly, you go to Paris and everything's perfectly, I mean they're beautiful parks but they're not as natural as this. And then you have to balance also use like the soccer field, which I think is great, although people might say it should be more natural, but it's great, especially because it's used. The parks department at our urging did a little survey in '04 estimating that a hundred thousand people use the park a year, and that that would double when the highway relocation is completed. I don't know that it's doubled, but I don't know if you were here on July Fourth, I wasn't, but there were like, I think 10,000 people there watching the fireworks. And then there's been also concerts now, an increasing number of concerts this summer there's a bunch. We had some community celebrations, in 2004 we had a 30th year anniversary of the park, which coincided with unveiling the mosaic mural, are you familiar with the mural at the playground? Showing maritime history. And there were two ceramicists who had, who came to us, we met in this room with the idea, Peter Gizer and Mika Seeger, who've done a lot of other great mosaic murals around the state, Mika Seeger happens to be Pete Seeger's daughter. And so they had this idea, we endorsed it, we had like 15 community workshops with people, seniors and kindergarten kids making pieces for that mural. When we unveiled it in September '04, Pete Seeger came, sang, we had a version of "This Park is Your Park," like "This Land is Your Land." It was great. And then we had a celebration of the reopening of the pedestrian bridge a couple of years ago.

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So we have our annual cleanup, which is a great event, we have a little treasure hunt for kids of all ages with the mosaic mural.

RE: That's really great. Great, well, I'm thinking that I'm sort of at the end of my preordained ideas of questions.

DR: And I'm getting hoarse.

RE: Not horse, maybe like pony. – The terrible puns are coming out, you know it's time-

DR: No I like puns, I like puns.

RE: Is there anything else you can think of that maybe you expected me to ask, or that you'd like for me to ask that I didn't think of?

DR: I can't really. The- we have this page which I should have given you before, it's actually on our website too, I think, of what we've done so far, and it kind of breaks down into three areas. One is advocacy, which I pretty much talked about, and one is activities in the park, which I just talked about, and then one is maintenance, which we've done a little bit of also. No it's been great, it's been fun, been gratifying, and it's been taking up more of my time than I would like, so I'm looking forward to having a little more time to do poetry. And I do mediation too, I want to do more of that. So I'm looking forward to that.

RE: Cool. And do you know who's going to be stepping in yet?

DR: Well we have a lot of new people on the steering committee. I think the Gateway steering committee will probably, well we'll see whether it dissolves or not, I mean I think we definitely need to watch the developers, big time, so it's not going to dissolve anytime too soon, but I think if we can get a developer in here that will create the kind of dynamic public destination that we were looking for, that would be great. And no I don't know who's going to be the co-chairs yet, but hopefully some new people will take over.

RE: Great. Well thank you so much.

DR: You're welcome. I've enjoyed.

RE: Yeah.