

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **James David Patterson**

Interview Date: 05/05/2014

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcaba

Project / Group: Interview is part of series: HOW GOVERNMENT WORKS
16 Pages



This oral history is copyrighted 2017, by the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. All Rights Reserved. For information contact: Fort Bend County Historical Commission, Attn: Chairman-Oral History Committee, 301 Jackson St., Richmond, TX, 77469.

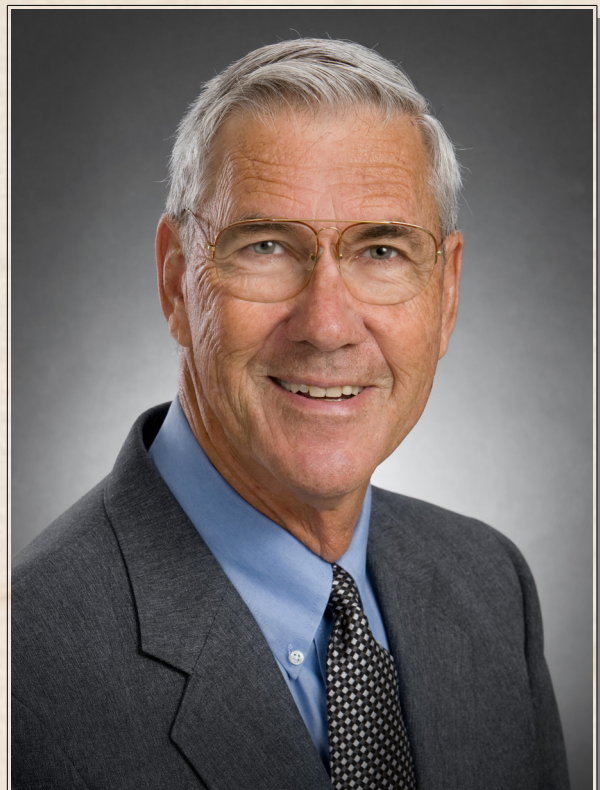
Terms and Conditions

This file may not be modified or changed in any way without the express written permission of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission.

This file may not be redistributed for profit.

Please do not 'hot link' to this file.

Please do not repost this file.



Transcript

GOODSILL: The first topic I want to talk about today is related to the series of interviews we are taking on "How government works". Will tell us about the Fort Bend County Commissioners Court?

PATTERSON: Thank you Jane, The County Commissioners court is somewhat of a misnomer, because people assume the word court means that we have the ability to put somebody in jail. Commissioners Court is a five-member body; four Commissioners and a County Judge. All have exactly the same voting power - 20 percent. You have to be able to count to three to pass anything. Commissioners Court in every county in the state of Texas is the same. Doesn't matter if you're in Harris County which has three plus million people or you're in Love County which has got 85 people. You still have four County Commissioners and a County Judge. In your small counties the Commissioner typically is the person that can operate the motor grader better than anybody else. So they maintain the roads and get the trees off the fences and those kinds of things. In large counties like Harris County you get into huge corporate business. A County Commissioner's budget in Harris County is roughly equivalent to the whole county budget for Fort Bend. A Harris County's Commissioners' budget in 2014 was probably in excess of \$200,000,000 million and one person is in charge of that. So that makes them sort of king-makers, in fact real-king makers.

In Fort Bend County's case Commissioners Court is equivalent to the board of directors of a major corporation. The budget this past year was about \$260,000,000. Commissioners Court sets the budget for all of the elected agencies and managers that are not elected. We have 78 budget managers and they answer to the Commissioners Court. Thirty-eight of those people are elected officials and once they get their budgets set we, by law, cannot mess with their budget, it's theirs. So the Sheriff, the County Clerk, the District Clerk, the County Court at Law Judges, the District Judges, tax assessor all those folks; once their budget is set then we can't come back and say oop's we are going to take some away from you or we are going to change. We cannot tell them after that point HOW they are going to use their money. Once we are through the budget process the elected officials do not answer to us. People will call this office saying I need you to get the sheriff to do such and such or I need you to get the County Clerk to do this or the Justice of the Peace and we have to explain to them that we do not have the authority to tell them what to do.

A County Commissioner doesn't have much power, but a good County Commissioner may be able to mediate between parties. We work together in Fort Bend County. One of my philosophies is you have to learn how to disagree without being disagreeable. As a former High School principal I would work with the students saying, "Part of what you're going to learn while you're in this school is that process."

In Fort Bend County we have a consolidated road and bridge program. It's a unit system, it goes by different names. We have a commissioner that we hire, a general superintendent and he's called the Road Commissioner. The Road Commissioner's job is to evaluate the roads and bridges, signalization, signs etcetera throughout the county and prioritize the needs then try to convince the four of us that he's doing things in right order. We are very fortunate we have got a good man. He's been doing it for lots of years and we trust him. Mark Grant is our Road Commissioner. He's hired not elected. He took over in 2001.

We are one of the only counties in the state of Texas that has a single drainage district. For example Brazoria County has six drainage districts. We have one drainage district and Mark Vogler is our Drainage District Director. He is able to work with all of the different entities; Cities, the Levee Improvement Districts, the MUDs (Municipal Utility Districts) anybody that's involved trying to drain this flat piece of ground called Fort Bend County..

GOODSILL: So there is a road commissioner and a drainage commissioner ... how about a levee commissioner?

PATTERSON: No the Levee Improvement Districts are all appointed by the court. We have several levee improvement districts across the county First Colony, New Territory, Telfair. You go down Dulles Avenue and you're in a levee district and you don't even notice. So many people in this county live in a bathtub and as long as the water is low enough the water runs out the bottom of the bathtub. But if the water gets too high it starts backing up and you have to have a pumping system to keep that bathtub from drowning you. That's just what a levee is.

GOODSILL: And the water would get to high from rain?

PATTERSON: From the Brazos River AND rain. A combination of the two is the scenario that really concerns everybody.

GOODSILL: Let's talk about that.

PATTERSON: If the Brazos River is in a flood stage, in other words it's at a peak as high as it could possibly get, and then you have a major rain in Fort Bend County it could cause big problems. Back in the late '70s there was a tropical depression that sat over Alvin and had 34 inches of rain. Nobody can handle 34 inches of rain in a 24-hour period. The scenario you are concerned about in Fort Bend County is... You may have seen photos of the 1903 flood in Sugar Land, which show deep-water standing where Logene Foster's office is right now [90-A and Ulrich Street]. It came from the Brazos River coming all the way up. I don't think we would ever see that again because you've got lakes on tributaries of the Brazos River like Lake Summerville and Lake Limestone. As you continue up the river the tributaries are designed to hold water. The Navasota River feeds into the Brazos. Lake Limestone is on the Navasota River, Yegua Creek comes out of Washington County and Lake Somerville feeds into the Brazos River. So each one those can hold water for a period of time and then release it a little at a time.

GOODSILL: They can control how much goes from the lakes into the river? Can they shut off the flow if the river is flowing really high?

PATTERSON: To a certain extent they can, at some point they would flood people above the lake. It allows a lot more control than in the 1940s when all the water just flowed through.

GOODSILL: There weren't levees in the 1900's. Imperial Sugar built a lot of them, to prevent flooding in Sugar Land, right?

PATTERSON: Right, the way it works is that each levee has three levee board members appointed by the Commissioners Court. Now you can have a five-member board but they have to be elected and go through all the Departments of Justice processes to make sure that each segment of people (ethnic groups etc.) living in that levee area are represented. We just appoint three people and they don't live in that levee district because when you form a levee district there are no houses and no people there yet. For example you get Bill Little to serve on a levee board, you get Mike Dingess to serve on a levee board and then as the population fills up, what we attempt to do is go back and say okay thank you for your time Mr. Little, your off the levee board and a person that lives there gets on the board. Otherwise it's taxing without representation. We've got a couple of levee boards where the people living there say we do not want you to take Mr. so and so off of that board because he's been there since we started he knows what we're doing, he represents us well, he lives one block outside the levee but we don't care. Everybody is happy and we leave that alone.

We have what we call Executive Managers for the county. We have a Parks Director, a Director of Facilities, Health and Human services, Human Resources, Risk Management, Director of Public Transportation.

GOODSILL: You want to talk about that a little bit?

PATTERSON: In 2000 the County had one bus that had been acquired through the department of aging and that bus was operated by one of our road and bridge hands. When somebody needed folks transported, he got off his truck and got the bus took the people where they needed to go. Today we operate about 37 routes. We have three commute routes. One goes to Greenway; five buses that make two routes in the morning so that's ten routes going to Greenway each day.

GOODSILL: Is that what we would call the park and ride?

PATTERSON: Yes that's part of the park and ride system. But it's a commuter system. We've also got a commuter program to the Galleria and the big one, it's growing every day is to the medical center.

GOODSILL: And they are heavily used?

PATTERSON: The medical center one is. We have five buses that make two round trips so there is ten routes plus we send a smaller bus into the veteran's hospital. We are attempting right now to add buses to that fleet for medical center because it is so heavily used. Mostly the employees that work there use it, but it can also be used by patients. For example a person that is going in for chemo treatment where driving back out is a problem or the other family member or the spouse can't take off work and carry them in but they can get a neighbor or friend to come pick them up at the local park and ride lot.

Bus fare costs \$3.50 to the medical center and \$3.50 to come back. But parking there is \$12 to \$15. The bus has six stops so you're going to be close to wherever you need to be when you get off. You don't have to worry about parking and walking a long way, especially if you are weak from some kind of treatment.

GOODSILL: Does that program pay for itself?

PATTERSON: You've got two things going on there. One is the federal gasoline tax that goes to Washington and a portion of that money comes back to the greater Houston region. We sit down with Metro and with Harris County (a lot of Harris County is not in the Metro service area) and decide what portions of money needs to be in what service area. It's a constant negotiation because the federal transportation act puts some restrictions on how we can use the money. We budget the match dollars from the local ad valorem tax. We also provide what's called demand-response. A person can call with 24 hour notice and say I need someone to pick me up at nine o'clock tomorrow morning and take me to wherever as long as it's within Fort Bend County. We are going to pick you up and take you. It might be to dialysis it might be to the doctor, it might be to the dentist it might be to get your hair done; it might be to go to the grocery store.

GOODSILL: Can anybody apply for those services?

PATTERSON: Absolutely, now the service has to take care elderly and handicapped, but as long as there is a space on the bus anybody can ride it and typically there is room on the bus because there is a very low per-route ridership; typically picking up a person and carrying them to dialysis. There might be a way we pick up another person on the way and carry them to the grocery store or carry them to the same dialysis treatment. This enhances the quality of life in Fort Bend County. In many cases we know that senior citizens are able to stay in their homes because they can use demand-response. Many of the buses are equipped with handicap wheelchair lifts. Our special needs population may need assistance getting to work, there are jobs in our community but getting to that job is a problem. So what we emphasize to the special needs population is try to get your job at an off-hour because at seven o'clock in the morning everyone wants this service. At nine o'clock in the morning we are more likely to get you to where you want to go. So if you're going to work five hours then let it be from nine to two.

GOODSILL: Fairly well used services?

PATTERSON: It is. This year we've provided close to 400,000 rides. The demand-response is \$1.00 each way. So a person on a fixed income is able to afford it. We've talked about increasing that and I was reminded by a senior citizen, if you had to go to dialysis five days a week at \$2 a day, that's \$40 a month and they don't get but a \$125 a month for their social security.

GOODSILL: How long you have been a Commissioner?

PATTERSON: 16 years. I started in January of 1999. In 2000 we had one of the first state mobility bond issues. For county of Fort Bend County's size and population to go out and have a mobility bond issue was a big deal. We were successful because we were very specific in selecting the projects we were going to do. We did them. So in 2007 there was another bond issue and it passed. And again in 2013 with 70+% population support. In our county if you're a developer and you are going to develop a piece of land and a major thoroughfare will be laid out to go through the development. The developer is going to donate the right of way and BUILD that major thoroughfare, that's part of the price of doing business.

GOODSILL: Is it like that in every county?

PATTERSON: Not in every county. That's how we do it. If we didn't do it that way we would have a strangled mess because if you went out and built Telfair or you went and built Aliana ... Aliana is a perfect example. West Airport and West Belfort go right through the middle of Aliana and if they didn't build a thoroughfare you would have congestion nightmare.

GOODSILL: So they donate that right of way?

PATTERSON: They donate the right of way and build the highway. And from then on does the county maintain it?

PATTERSON: Right. Look at Aliana again. There is another subdivision that is a quarter mile east of 1464 and there is nobody to build the connection between those two developments. So Developer One builds a part of West Airport and Developer Two builds a part of West Airport but those pieces in between get left unbuilt. Bellaire is a perfect example. In Alief over the years Bellaire was built and there is no developer to build the next little piece. So somebody jumps in and buys a piece of land and they build another road their section and another one. Part of our 2013 bond issue had pieces of Bellaire, pieces of Beechnut plugged in for mobility improvement.

We are one of the few counties that have a toll road system. I believe, and our Court believes, strongly in a toll road system to provide extra space for the public to travel on. But I truly believe that part of that toll road system should be a plan that you're going to build free roads that are parallel to that toll road so that people can get to point A to point B by choice. They can go on a system that's free but it's got signal lights and stop signs. Or they can fly along.

We just opened the Grand Parkway. I had people tell me, "I am not going to pay \$.35 to go over that overpass!" The same people that said that, just last week are saying, "Oh my gosh, it cut 20 minutes off my trip to A&M." If I heard A&M one time from this particular man I heard it 30 times, and how the Grand Parkway is truly making the difference. And it's the same man that two years ago was telling me how stupid we were for making the choice to take that road over from the State of Texas.

The state legislature had this project out here called the Grand Parkway. Senate bill 1420 said either the state of Texas is going to be responsible or it goes through seven counties and each county can be responsible for their piece of this road. It going to all be 184 miles of road and either the State of Texas does it or the County does it. Whoever does it, the money that's generated from the tolls has to stay in that 184-mile loop. There are pieces of that loop that people are going to drive on like crazy and pieces of that loop that are going to get minimal driving. If you built a piece in Brazoria County today only cows would drive on it. But in Northern Harris County between 290 and 59 North that area would get lots of folks driving on it.

Fort Bend County Commissioners were concerned that if the State of Texas maintained the rights they were most likely going to make a concession agreement and sell the right-to-operate to a foreign country. Throughout the state of Texas many of those are in place. Centra is a Spanish company. They get a 50-year lease and own the right to build. So they build and they set the tolls and they take the toll monies. Our philosophy was that's not right for our community, it's not right for our kids and grandkids and great grandkids not to be in control of funds generated from tolls. We stepped up and said we are going to keep our toll roads.

GOODSILL: Just in Fort Bend County, because you said there was seven counties.

PATTERSON: We had to make a choice, either we said we were going to be responsible for our piece or we gave it to the State of Texas. Every county around the loop except Fort Bend said to the State of Texas, "It's yours." Now the advantage is that the 1420 piece of legislature also allowed the local region to say how TxDot could build the rest. We had a committee that I ending up chairing that was able to say to TxDot, "You're not going to sell." They would tell you it is not a sale it's a 50 year lease. In my terminology you're not going to sell the right to this road. Your either going to build it or not build it. Now the TxDot commissioners brag about this wonderful piece road that they own, okay because they didn't sell it. It is now theirs.

At some point Fort Bend County could turn our segment over to TxDot, I don't see that happening in the next 15 or 20 years until we get everything in Fort Bend County like we want it. But if we get it like we want it and TxDot is running their part right and they are not talking about selling it to a foreign country then I could see Commissioners Court saying to TxDot okay it is a continuous loop, it's yours you shouldn't have this piece in the middle.

But right now there are repairs that need to be done to segment D which is from 59 to I-10 and we need to take the money that is being generated from the tolls and do those repairs because that road was built in the '80s. Also the next step will be to build segment C which is down thru the Greatwood area and on down into the George Ranch area.

GOODSILL: Let's talk about the expanding population and what it means in our county.

PATTERSON: We all have to think about what will cause people to move to an area if there is congestion and no public transportation. And the quality of public schools is what drives any community. That's number one. Throughout Fort Bend County whether it's Stafford and it's one high school/one middle school/one elementary school or it's Needville or Lamar or Fort Bend or Katy, all the school districts have a positive reputation. The next thing that we have going for us is the master planned community's like Riverstone, Siena, Telfair, New Territory, Aliana, Cinco Ranch. The master planned communities in Fort Bend County are different than what the Dallas/ Fort Worth call master planned communities. When Aliana started the person that was in charge came from Dallas. They came up with a plan that was not successful at all because it was a hundred acre or two hundred acre subdivision put down ten time and people were not sure that's what they wanted. People wanted curved streets and amenities like you find in our other master planned communities. They put a new person in charge. He re-platted and made it like other subdivisions in Fort Bend County. Now they can't put the lots on the ground fast enough.

Of course nobody can. It's scary. From 1975 through 1980, I sold real estate in order to be able to afford to be a schoolteacher. People were buying and selling houses every 30 days. At that time north of Sugar Land you could buy a house for \$15,000. In 30 days or maybe six months they would be back in the office saying, "We want to sell this house that we paid \$15,000 for and we want to buy this house over here for \$22,000." We are seeing the same thing now. You saw in the paper probably this last week that in many of the residential housing subdivisions that you have to offer more than the asking price in order to be able to buy. That's not realistic it can't last. The problem that you get into is that the last person in gets burned.

GOODSILL: They bought so high. And they are not going to be able to realize their gains.

PATTERSON: Right. The oil and gas industry in the greater Houston area is going crazy offering people ridiculous salaries! People say to me we need to pay our teachers more. No question. But we don't need to raise the schoolteacher's salary just quit raising other salaries so that everything could stay at a reasonable price.

GOODSILL: Is that ever going to happen?

PATTERSON: No. But you have to explain to people about the realism factor. When I started teaching in 1965 my first contract was \$4,600. Fort Bend ISD recently announced that their beginning teacher is going to make \$50,000. Let's just say they were going to make \$46,000 -- that's 10 times what I was making as a beginning schoolteacher. But hamburger meat has gone up ten times; gasoline has gone up ten times, a car cost ten times as much as it did 1965. And a Schlumberger is not going to let one of their scientist leave to go to a public school to teach and make more money than they would pay them.

That's part of what you're dealing with every day. With population growth we have to try to continue to make sure is that the quality of life is there. We have a library system in place throughout the county that is used more than anybody would believe. The last library we built, I was challenged, "Nobody is going to a library." Okay well let's see. They do, but of course a part of that is that we really believe in partnerships, the County library at the University of Houston is a partnership between Wharton Community College, University of Houston and the County. University of Houston actually pays some salaries of some of our staff there. So it truly is a partnership.

GOODSILL: That's great. Does the Commissioner's Court have anything to do with schools?

PATTERSON: In the summer time much of our Road and Bridge Department work is redoing parking lots for school districts at the stadiums or at a school where they have an asphalt parking lot and it's falling apart. Everybody pays taxes so it's a lot less expensive for a school district to pay for the material and the County to furnish the equipment. We frequently build walking trails on elementary school campuses specifically because none of the schools were built with walking trails. Well that's a perfect way for the community to take advantage of the school property because they can go there and walk and the community doesn't have to build another park or another place to walk. There is an elementary school out in Waterside that's got 1200 students. They need an extra driveway. The County can work with the school district and put in a driveway so that the principal can have half the parents load and unload in the front of the school and half of them load and unload in the back of the school. That's the way we partner with schools.

The new education bill (Bill 5) emphasizes the fact that company's and business need to be involved building scholastic curriculum. For example, what specifically do kids need to know in order to work for a machine shop or at Nalco? Commissioners Court is able to work with the Economic Development Council or the Chamber of Commerce to say to these companies you tell us what you need and we will work with the school districts to make sure that is offered.

GOODSILL: Alright, so now another question. With the growing population how do we supply water for all the people that are moving in?

PATTERSON: Water is a serious challenge. There are several things involved. One is amenity lakes. Up until now those lakes have all been filled by drilling water wells and running them 24 seven to keep the lake full because evaporation takes away the water. We are going to have to do a better job of conserving water. For example New Territory has an election coming up in May that will allow a board in New Territory to take the sewer effluent, treat it, bring it back up to the other end of New Territory and use it to fill the amenity lakes and to water various green spaces. It's not anything new, people in Quail Valley by the golf course have always watered that away. We need to pass legislation that will allow Fort Bend County to require a new developer to put two sets of pipes in the ground. One set to bring water to the houses and a second set take effluent back to a wastewater station to be used for irrigation and filling amenity lakes.

GOODSILL: Are very many counties doing that?

PATTERSON: Not in Texas because in Texas a City can do anything that the constitution doesn't specifically say you can't. A County can only do what the constitution specifically says you can. The constitution does not say you can require this of a developer. Arizona, Florida, California all have it. This is a legislation change that I'm suggesting.

GOODSILL: Would this be something that would be driven by Commissioner's Court?

PATTERSON: Most likely it would have to be driven by Commissioner's Court. Up until now the State Legislature has been controlled by rural legislators. When you start talking about making changes lobbyists go lobby the rural legislator and control what the urban population is doing.

GOODSILL: A rural resident wouldn't be interested in helping to pay for the infrastructure that would be required for a growing urban area.

PATTERSON: That's right. That balance is turning over now.

GOODSILL: Are there enough water treatment plants to provide this effluent water?

PATTERSON: Yes because you don't need the irrigation if there is not a housing population, so when you start out you wouldn't have effluent but as the subdivision filled up you would.

GOODSILL: Is there space being put aside for water treatment plants in each new subdivision?

PATTERSON: Yes, the water treatment plant is necessary now. You're talking about sewer water treatment, you're not talking about the kind of water treatment plant that Sugar Land just built out by Kempner high school. There, you are taking water out of the Brazos River and treating it so you and I can drink it. Sometime when I turn the shower on I get a little bit of a smell that's a little different. It concerns me but it's chemicals that have to be put in there. The issue is that much of the water in the Brazos River is dependent on the treated effluent in Waco and Bryan College Station and so forth. So if you start using that and it doesn't ever get into the river, then the river elevation goes down.

GOODSILL: Very complicated isn't it?

PATTERSON: In my opinion the answer for 20 years from now, 40 years from now, is that we have to push the issue of building more areas to detain water up the river. You can't build anything down here because it's too flat. There is no drainage to it.

GOODSILL: And people up-river are interested in doing that?

PATTERSON: No. Because you're taking away the farmers land, you're building a lake to benefit Sugar Land. When I go Normangee which is Navasota River...

GOODSILL: Which is where you're from.

PATTERSON: Which is where I'm from. I go to the feed store and they are discussing building a lake on the Navasota River. The plan has been there since the '50s to build what's called Milligan Dam. People quickly identify me as the enemy! I'm wanting to take...

GOODSILL: To finish your sentence you're wanting to take their water and their land, for the county where you live now, you're a traitor?

PATTERSON: That's right! I have contended to folks that we have to look at this the same way that we look at mineral rights for oil and coal or lignite. If you're going to come to take oil out from under my property then my kids and grandkids and great grandkids and so forth down the line will always receive some benefit from that. If we are going to take a piece of property to build a lake there should be a value placed on it. The value of that water that's impounded will always be a benefit to the descendants of that person.

GOODSILL: Would this be a legislative change?

PATTERSON: I think it would take a huge legislative change.

GOODSILL: But as water becomes the new-oil, this may happen.

PATTERSON: Have sparked some interest from some folks who work with the Brazos River Authority. That may be a way to get people, for example, in the Milligan Dam group to be able to say yes were going to build that dam. Yes it's going to flood your property but your great grandkids are going to receive a royalty off of that water forever. This might help people that fight condemnation and the ability to take property to work their way through it. But water is absolutely the scary part of our whole life, as our population in Fort Bend County reaches a million people how are you going to have those people have quality drinking water? And at a price you can afford. Absolutely at a price you can afford. But if it doesn't exist there is no price.

GOODSILL: That is sobering.

PATTERSON: Yes. I read in yesterday's paper where Brazoria County has drilled water well that goes down into salt water... they are not getting the water from Gulf which is salt. The water they are bringing up they are having to treat to get the brine out of it.

GOODSILL: That brings up subsidence issues.

PATTERSON: Right. The advantage is that this water that they are talking about is coming from seven, eight, ten thousand feet down. Geologists are saying the makeup of the earth is locked together so that's just going to become an empty hole down there. There is nothing going to fold down.

GOODSILL: We can hope.

PATTERSON: Yea, yea.

GOODSILL: Let's talk about the fact that Fort Bend County was originally a rural county and now it seems to be changing.

PATTERSON: My wife and I moved here in 1965 for me to work as a teacher and coach. In Sugar Land you had one charge account and everything you needed for your life you could get with that one charge account. From buying your car to buying your groceries, clothes, drugs whatever it might be. Highway 6 did not connect north of old Richmond Road. The land north of Voss Road was definitely a rural county. It had just turned over from being a prison to R.E. Bob Smith owning the property. Bob Smith started putting roads through and taking care of it. We still see the vision of the perception for the people who live in the rural community. When you start talking about passing mobility bond issues it includes a discussion of parks and libraries. You have to do a real job educating about what we need for maintaining our quality of life. "Well we don't need a park, you can go out there in the pasture and play." As long as we are able to continue with the master planned community concept and make sure that our infrastructure is in place then the quality of life changing from a rural community to a suburban community will be sustained.

GOODSILL: Is there still very much agriculture still in Fort Bend County?

PATTERSON: Yes, if you look at a map of Precinct One from the Brazos River West and you take from 1093 south and the George Foundation owns over 20,000 acres. One individual out in the Simonton area owns somewhere in excess of 12,000 acres probably closer to 18 or 20. That will eventually be developed in both cases.

GOODSILL: Into homes and development.

PATTERSON: The person that owns the land in Simonton area sees it as the next Galleria 40 years from now 50 years from now. The thing that Fort Bend County and any growing county needs is more job centers. In my opinion we don't need an Exxon and all the things that they are bringing to north Harris County and Montgomery County because it is humongous. We need to continue Schlumbergers and Flour's and Texas Instruments that are the good size companies that have jobs where people in Fort Bend County do not have to go somewhere else for a job.

GOODSILL: That seems to be the thing that makes a livable community; you can work in the same area you live.

PATTERSON: That's right.

GOODSILL: So is there much resistance in the rural areas to the encroachment of the urban areas?

PATTERSON: Certainly. TxDot just let the contract for Spur10, which is a bypass from Rosenberg that goes from Highway 36 down south of Pleak. It comes around and hits 59 out west of Rosenberg and goes around and hits 90-A and Highway 36 dead-ends into 36. It's a way to keep truck traffic from coming into Rosenberg and causing congestion. As you go out into those areas and say to that farmer or rancher we need your property to widen this road. They are not excited. I just talked to a man this morning that's needing to clean up some things because he picked up his bags and moved to Marble Falls. It's going to be their full time home. The Schumann family still owns a fairly large track of land between Sugar Land and Richmond/Rosenberg. Those family members are having to make some decisions because they have a very marketable piece of land today. The price is going up every day, but they also know when that piece of property sells that they really would like to have a piece of property in Normangee or Bedias or Madisonville. And that price is also going up, however it's not going up at the rate the Fort Bend County property is going up. If they sell 40 acres here, they can buy 400 acres there. They are obviously a family that believes in land, they were raised on the land.

GOODSILL: Tell us a little bit about the daily concerns of a Commissioner. How often do you go to the court and what do you do in between?

PATTERSON: We have Commissioners Court every Tuesday at 1:00 P.M. except the third and fifth Tuesday of the month. It's open to the public and its live streaming; you can go on the computer and watch it. We meet at the newly renovated Richmond County Courthouse.

Commissioner 1 is Mr. Morrison. His land is over 65% of the whole county even though his population is 25%. The critical issues for him on a daily basis might be the county road that is running out through the farm. It might be how senior citizens are getting to the Meals on Wheels. It might be dealing with the soil conservation folks.

Commissioner Meyers in Precinct 3 on the other side of the coin is concerned with the growth in the unincorporated part of Katy. It is just astounding!

Much of Precinct 4, my precinct, is inside the city limits of Missouri City and Sugar Land. Some of Riverstone is inside the City Limits of Sugar Land a part of Riverstone is inside the city limits of Missouri City the rest is in the unincorporated. So I am basically the Mayor for that part, trying to make sure that what goes on in there equates to what goes on in the two cities. So if you're talking about a speed limit you're talking about whether we need a signal light or stop sign or whether we need to have the developer redirect where our roads are going to go. You're trying to tie it to these two cities and make sure that University Boulevard becomes one entity and not an entity that is disjointed.

In Precinct 4 one of the major things that we have been working on now since 2000/2001 is the area north of Sugar Land called Four Corners. The Four Corners community did not have drinking water or sewer facilities either one. Commissioners don't have lot of power but if done right have influence. I met with those people shortly after they became a part of my precinct and said to them, "We can get some grants to make this thing work but you have got to stay with me. You've got to trust because what happens in poverty areas is just as you get everything going in the right direction somebody comes along and says I have a better plan. So everybody splinters off." That's what had happened to them. Since 1965 the only thing they had had done is pave some roads, still no water no sewer. The advantage that I had was that I had coached many of the people in that community. When people would start breaking away and I'd remind them to get everybody back together and hold together.

We put together a board and they got a grant from the United States of Department of Agriculture. Rural utilities and the people there pay a higher tax rate water bill than you as a citizen in Sugar Land do. With the rural utilities grant they got the infrastructure in and some three years ago they got the last pipe in and now have drinking water. The next process started was getting sewer pipes. As we are sitting here today they are hooking up people to sewer lines at a fast pace. Within the next six to eight months every person in Four Corners will have drinkable water and be able to flush their commode. That's huge and that is the kind of thing that a County Commissioner needs to be responsible for.

The other thing on a daily basis, I talked early on about the Federal Gasoline Tax money and state gasoline tax money goes away and then it comes back. It doesn't come back 100% but as it comes back it comes back to a central location Houston Galveston area council. I tell folks that gasoline tax money is like an upside down funnel. Its where the bottom of that funnel is that's important. You've got to control that flexible funnel.

GOODSILL: Oh a funnel (chuckling) is moving.

PATTERSON: The funnel needs to move over because the bid was higher than we expected and we can delay a project somewhere else. The project from Grand Parkway to Spur 10 in Fort Bend County, expanding highway 59 to 69, putting feeders all the way is ending up being \$20 million short in that whole project. That funnel needs to be swung and it's important that Fort Bend County have representatives there that are involved and pay attention to what's going on. That dollar that we are getting to help operate that public transportation system from Washington, we need to be there making sure that we are getting our fair share. A couple of weeks ago here in my office we sat down with Metro and talk about how they are the big dog in the room but how the rest of us can make this a seamless system so that somebody can go get on a Fort Bend bus and ride to the West Belfort park and ride lot. Use the same card and step over to a Metro bus and keep going and the rider will not see the difference...

GOODSILL: To make it seamless even though it's a different entity.

GOODSILL: So you mentioned a Mr. Morrison, Mr. Meyers, yourself and there is one other.

PATTERSON: Grady Prestage. And Grady's Precinct #2 has changed a whole bunch in this last redistricting. He's end up with Mission Bend all the way up to Clodine. Part of his job is infilling those Bellaire Boulevards and Beechnuts pockets. Part of the issue that we are dealing with in Fort Bend County if you drew a line down Dairy Ashford all the way to the Brazos River and you looked to the east of that line there is not a single hospital or serious medical facility. If you go back north on Dairy Ashford same thing. There was a hospital at 1092 and Highway 6, Memorial, moved that hospital then there is no hospital facility, now Memorial is building one it's in Brazoria County but its right at the Fort Bend County line, down in 518 and 521.

GOODSILL: How much population is there to serve in that area?

PATTERSON: A large population. You've got Shadow Creek Ranch and Siena. We created a (TIRZ) Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone down in Missouri City to try to help bring a hospital to the intersection of Siena Parkway and Highway 6. We wanted to be able to use the TIRZ to build a parking garage and help reduce the cost of putting in a hospital. At that time Christus Hospital was serious but Christus sold to somebody else and they sold to somebody else and it never happened.

Tax abatement is a totally different topic but I tell people tax abatement is strictly a high stakes poker game. A city or the County can give tax abatements. They are a limited time reduction in tax rates to an investing entity. In most cases in the county, we only abate the value of the building they are building and if you were building a building that had lots of expensive equipment the taxes on that equipment could very well be four or five times the taxes on that building.

Now you can do the personal property or not, in most cases the county doesn't because we have to consider that when a company comes here and they may bring a thousand people here. Then the cities are excited because they are going to get lots of sales tax. The County doesn't get sales tax but we ARE having to furnish more jail space more judges, more sheriff's office, the court system. School districts cannot give a tax abatement so you don't worry about that. Every year we get the Fort Bend Economic Development Council to graph where we are as far as the number of companies and the value of those companies that we gave tax abatement to. And who is still on tax abatement and the companies that are coming off tax abatement – at that point we get 100% percent of their value. We are looking for those companies who are now paying their own way and have expanded and have done all the things that they promised that they were going to do.

GOODSILL: Does it ever happen when they lose their tax abatement that they take their toys and go away?

PATTERSON: Yes, but more likely what happens is somebody says we are going to have \$5 million in inventory which is what we tax and we are going to have a hundred employees which is important to the city. You evaluate at the end of the year and they have got 50 employees and they only have \$2 million in inventory. We say, "You've got to pay your full taxes this year, now next year are you going to make it or not?"

There's lots of companies that have come here as a result of tax abatement and its competitive game. Aldi the warehouse distribution center for all the Aldi grocery stores is going into Rosenberg and it took a package. It took Rosenberg being willing to furnish the utilities.

GOODSILL: Wow, it's complicated all these issues. Each prescient has different needs and so each one is bringing different urgencies to the table.

PATTERSON: The four of us disagree on things but in the last ten years I have never been there when anybody was rude or disrespectful in the disagreement. They can say I disagree with you and I am voting no to your proposal. I disagree with you and I won't support that. Or you really need to pull that off and don't make us vote on that because you're not going to like the end result.

The biggest difference between Cities and Counties is that Cities typically have a City Manager. Allen Bogard runs the city of Sugar Land. City council gives input, they tell him they want; here's the policy we want you to support the policy. Counties don't have that. Judge Hebert said it the best, he said county government is a major corporation that is operated by committee, the Commissioner's Court. That committee has to meet in the open and every discussion has to be in the open. You can't go over here and sit down and say this is the best way to solve this problem because you just violated the open meetings act.

Interview ends.