

Oral History Collection

Mr. James Mays

Interviewer: Bailey Wilkinson

Date: Fall 2015

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Ms. Wilkinson: Hello. My name is Bailey Wilkinson and today I will be interviewing James Mays, the superintendent of planning and construction with the city of Denton Parks and Recreation Department. We will be discussing issues surrounding Denton's fracking referendum, and will begin by talking about some of his responsibilities.

Mr. James Mays: I really get a great opportunity because I get to meet with the public, I get to go to public forums, at city council meetings we find out what are the needs and the wants of the citizens of Denton, albeit from the senior citizens community, to young children. So it's a multi-faceted

position and it's a position I greatly enjoy.

Wilkinson: You mentioned something earlier about how far parks have to be planned away from well sites. Like, how does that work in Denton?

Mays: Actually, it's still under review. They're trying to come to some definitions of terms, so we're trying to figure that out right now. I think where it's going to land is within 500 feet of the perimeter. So that's, that's all, that would be the perfect scenario, because there's never really a safe place for us to, as human beings or a risk management perspective to say, "We really think it's completely safe for little Johnny to play 800 feet away from this highly dangerous explosive structure."

Wilkinson: Yeah, we're here at your house, and in your neighborhood, and I noticed when we drove up that there's a well site actually right next to your residential area. You can see it from your driveway, and I want to know how you feel about that? How does it affect your daily life?

Mays: The first time it was fracked, it was just an empty pasture. It was incredibly loud. For families screened from the site, at 5 o'clock

in the morning, it was horrible. It was--even as a father, I thought three or four times about calling and pressing disturbance of the peace, because of the activities from that site. There's a twenty foot tall screening wall where I used to see the school, but again, I also have to realize that due to mineral rights issues, and the funds that come from mineral rights, I believe the school district benefits from that operation because, I don't know if it's directionally drilled, but even the parks and recreation department, we can participate in pool agreements and we can derive funds in that way, and we've been able to provide some nice public recreation amenities from those funds.

Wilkinson: Are the funds used by your department significant? Does a lot of the funding come from fracking? Or is it a very minimal amount?

Mays: No. A budget year for park maintenance, park operations, parks recreational, we're floating in right at about \$12 million a year. I think our gas and oil revenue, I haven't looked at it in this quarter, but we're in the neighborhood

of about \$300,000.

Wilkinson: Oh, wow. Not much. [Laughs]. [Break]

Wilkinson: The last thing I wanted to ask you, how did you feel personally about the fracking referendum, and the passing of it? It was pretty well accepted in the city. I want to get your opinions about it and why do you feel that it was so accepted in Denton?

Mays: Well, you've got a very educated public, very young public. And it's something everyone can get behind. It's really hard not to be behind on, "Hey, this is big, corporate America making our kids sick." And, you know there's a lot of conjecture, a lot of subjective information, a lot of stats that are very intriguing. And so, you put that in front of a lot of intelligent, energetic folks, and they're going to get on board with it. Unfortunately, or rather fortunately, for balance, depending on how you look at it, we... we don't have a state that really supports that.

Wilkinson: It sounds like you kind of feel like maybe people should look at their personal lives and the way that they live and a little more

balanced in that way maybe before moving it into this large scale, government and state change. Is that correct?

Mays: Pretty much.

Wilkinson: Yeah? Is that realistic? If, if there is a change on the personal level, will that be reflected, do you think, on the city level and the state level? Or because of the established way of doing things, already at the larger level, do you think it will end up reflecting the personal, if it does change?

Mays: Well, first reason that commerce is involved and big business is involved because there is a lot of money in it. Huge demand. So, if we put our demand in check, there's got to be a better way to do this.

[End of interview]