

ABSTRACT: Sadara Barrow is the Executive Director of the Port Towns Community Development Corporation. The Port Towns CDC is a non-profit organization tasked with advocating growth and development for the towns of Bladensburg, Cottage City, Colmar Manor, and Edmonston. She candidly relates the issues that are currently surrounding the Port Towns and the organization. Sadara is confident that the community has improved and will continue to improve with programs such as: health initiatives, Anacostia River management, the Anacostia River Education Center, mural projects, tours, and community activities. As a long-term resident of Colmar Manor, she has stories and memories about growing up in the area as well. Living and working in the Port Towns has let Sadara see the many facets of the Port Town communities.

Sadara Barrow on Port Towns History: “I went on this tour. I lived in Colmar Manor at the time for 18 years. They took me on this tour including Colmar Manor and showed me the Dueling Grounds and the Market Master’s House and the George Washington House and we walked through it. We walked to Bostwick. I was like, “What!” I had no idea that I was living amongst the history. I live on the battlefield. I didn’t know that. And literally I live on the battlefield. It was amazing to me the idea that so much history can be right around you and you just don’t know it at all. And it just shouldn’t be allowed that young people can live in a place and people live somewhere and just don’t know the role that it played in country, especially when it is as significant as it is here.”



Colmar Manor Ball Fields



Shoppers – Colmar Manor

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Port Towns Interview Project
Suzanne Stasiulatis interviewing Sadara Barrow
Interview at Port Towns Community Development Corporation Office
4217 Edmonston Road, Bladensburg, MD
February 12, 2008

Suzanne: Please state your name, age, where you're from and your organization.

Sadara Barrow: I'm Sadara Barrow. I'm 45. And I'm from Colmar Manor, Maryland. I work for the Port Town Community Development Corporation.

Suzanne: What do you do for the Port Towns CDC? What is your title?

Sadara Barrow: I am the Executive Director.

Suzanne: What does the Port Towns CDC do for the Port Towns?

Sadara Barrow: Basically, the Port Towns CDC advocates for the growth and development of the Port Towns: Colmar Manor, Cottage City, Edmonston, and Bladensburg, Maryland. It does this through advocacy, public infrastructure, public policy, real estate development, business development, assisting in small businesses and their growth and development, and community development by bringing public services closer to the community, so they know about things they may not know about otherwise, community events and other types of things. Also, it helps to preserve the history of the area. It's an overall community development. It's the whole thing.

Suzanne: Why was the organization started?

Sadara Barrow: In the early '90s, there was a something called Commission 2000. They did some studies on what was happening in the inner beltway communities. They decided to plant themselves in different areas of the inner beltways to assist in the growth and development of those areas. The Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Neighborhoods Division, which doesn't exist anymore...the north team was stationed here to look at Bladensburg. They looked through their analysis. They looked at the situation and the market and also some studies from the University of Maryland that indicated that it made more sense to look at this area as a larger community than just Bladensburg to promote and attract new development and new businesses. So, they came up with the name Port Towns, because the Port of Bladensburg on the Anacostia River was a major port in the 1700s and these were port towns. People came here, because there was a port. They lived around it, because it was a port. So, they came up with the Port Towns. During their planning of the community, they came up with an action plan, which included several activities from restoring the Bladensburg Port, which is now the Bladensburg Waterfront Park, to moving the train to getting new schools, to a lot of basic community things like putting up signs and banners to prove pride to the community. One of the action items they had was to develop an organization to take on that charge of

moving forward. And that was to develop a community development corporation. That's how it came to be. They worked together to incorporate it.

Suzanne: How has it helped the community as a whole to develop?

Sadara Barrow: There is a lot that has happened. But, you can go out to our area and still say, "Oh my god, this place still needs a lot of work." But when you unpeel the reality of where it was 10 years ago before the CDC was developed, you'll see that the county brings most of their events to the Waterfront Park, which is a staple for the county now: Gorgeous Prince George's, Earth Day, ATHA bike ride, that was the biggest anchor. The second thing that you will find is that 10 years ago the area had about 50% vacancies on the whole corridor on Bladensburg Road and Annapolis Road. There are almost no vacancies now. One or two tend to pop up every now and then and they tend to get filled right away. You have the façade improvements that happened at the Bladensburg Shopping Center in Colmar Manor and the Port of Bladensburg Shopping Center in Bladensburg. Those monies to those facades came through the assistance from the Port Towns CDC. Those were important to anchor and keep things stable, so you can bring in smaller things as you go along. The other thing was streetscaping, streetscaping Bladensburg Road. The pedestrian bridge allows you to go from the Anacostia Trails System to the Bladensburg Waterfront Park. Lobbying for the Elementary School, that was a big deal, bringing the Port Towns Elementary School to the area. The CDC played a role in all those activities. We can't really take credit for the Bladensburg High School being redeveloped, because the kids did that. But hopefully it had something to do with the pride in that was being built in them in the community that made them stand up and say, "We deserve more." And hopefully that was coming from this whole Port Towns movement of bringing low to moderate income people into a place that they deserve. The biggest thing is the train overpass which has been the biggest fight the entire time and even before. There was a campaign years ago, even before I came on. They went out with pickets, "Stop the pain, move the train." They actually went out to stop the train out by the tracks. They did that a couple of times. Since I've been here, I've spent time at the state house, discussing this with the different Senators and delegates. So, that's been our biggest accomplishment is actually getting that overpass started. It's supposed to be completed next year.

Suzanne: 4 or 5 times a day.

Sadara Barrow: No. It's 20 to 30 times a day. You probably catch it that many times. At night too, I bet you hear it.

Suzanne: So, we are doing research on the history and development of the Port Towns. Can you tell me how history is a part of every day activities in the Port Towns?

Sadara Barrow: Well, we have our events and so forth. We always focus on the history of the Port Towns. It's bringing forth things that people are going to remember. The Battle of Bladensburg, which is the most significant event that happened in the Port Towns. We bring in the re-enactors. We keep trying to remind people. It's a war that the

country decided it just didn't want to remember. I don't know if there are any others across the country. But I've heard it's really the only one. So, we are always bringing that forward. Even when we go to the Maryland Municipal League Conference in Ocean City every year that's what we push, the history of our area. Our theme is, "Discover the history, experience the revival. So, history is the basis of everything we do. It's the history of this area. And making people remember that this was a place that had a significant impact on this country. The things that happened here were a major part of what happened in our country. We want to bring tours in. We assist our partners in restoring the houses, because the houses have not been taken care of, the ones that are left. The Bostwick House. The George Washington House is now being renovated by the Anacostia Watershed Society. If we could help financially, we want to help with the façades. We have some façade money to assist with that. We also provided some façade money for the Market Master's House and façade money for the Magruder House to assist in keeping the properties up. We celebrate it and we also try to assist with it financially if we can.

Suzanne: What's on tap for future projects involving history?

Sadara Barrow: Well, the big one, again, is the Battle of Bladensburg. We have a facility which we would like to get built, which was recommended by the University of Maryland architecture students. It's called the Anacostia River Education Center. The river is a huge part of our charge here as well. We do a lot of lobbying for the health of the river, storm water management, and leaky pipes from the USSC. So, that's a part of what we do too. This building would be an education building, and we're working with the University of Maryland. It is similar to what is happening with the Bostwick House now. So, the University could come in and use this facility as a teaching area. Also, they could have research done by researchers who are interested in understanding what is happening to this urban river. They could offer an introduction to the environmental aspects of the river, the history of the river, and the role that it played at its peak and what happened to it over the years. And also, the Battle of Bladensburg. We are hoping to put an interpretive center inside this building, which would be the Battle of Bladensburg Memorial that just doesn't exist today. It would be a platinum LEED building, which should bring people just for that. It's sort of like marrying multiple things together in this one facility that will show many points of view from the future, our knowledge of green, and from the past, what we lost because we didn't think green. The river is the right place for that. It was a vast, huge thing in history that brought a lot of commerce to this area. Because of what we've done to this area, we can't navigate it anymore. It's where we were, where it's taken us to, and how do we strive to get back there in this one facility.

I'll also add that we will have on our list to do a Battle of Bladensburg mural hopefully on the shopping center in Colmar Manor on a whole wall on a CVS depicting the history of the Battle of Bladensburg. These are things we'd like to see by the 200th Anniversary, by 2014. Not by '12 when the war started but by '14 when the battle happened. So, those are things we want to move forward to.

Another large initiative is a health initiative that we are now starting with Kaiser Permanente. Their Community Health Initiative has selected the Port Towns as a major health initiative. So, we are going in the direction of health in terms of social, physical, emotional, and mental health. We can also use that as a theme for the health of our history, because without watching out our history will die. The Kaiser initiative is really focused on human health. We are also going to focus on health as a major part for what we are doing for our history. So, that's the initiative. That's a 7 to 10 year program that they're coming in here with.

Suzanne: So, are you personally interested in history?

Sadara Barrow: I am like most of the people who live in this area, in that I grew up not paying any attention to history, not paying attention to the environment. You just go day by day with your basic things in life. You go to work. You come home. You take your kids to track practice. You go shopping and you do your thing. You just think about what your area looked like and whether or not you feel safe in it. But you are not paying attention to any assets that are there. What I think made me feel important and get more and more involved in this process was because when I discovered it I realized how much I was missing by not recognizing it. I really know how people who are not recognizing it think. So, I am a good candidate for being able to translate and push that information forward. Getting involved here started with my daughter and my son being selected for the Port Towns Youth Council. I didn't know what the Port Towns was or the Youth Council. I barely paid attention to my mayor and council. One of the things they did with the kids was to take us on a tour. I went on this tour. I lived in Colmar Manor at the time for 18 years. They took me on this tour including Colmar Manor and showed me the Dueling Grounds and the Market Master's House and the George Washington House and we walked through it. We walked to Bostwick. I was like, "What!" I had no idea that I was living amongst the history. I live on the battlefield. I didn't know that. And literally I live on the battlefield. It was amazing to me the idea that so much history can be right around you and you just don't know it at all. And it just shouldn't be allowed that young people can live in a place and people live somewhere and just don't know the role that it played in country, especially when it is as significant as it is here. It's just not acceptable. So, I am and I can say yes now, I am very interested in history. I believe history tells us what we need to know, in order to have a better future. And if we don't know our history, we are bound to repeat it. And for us to put our heads in the sands and not know what's going on is just not OK. But I remember when I didn't think that. But we evolve as human beings.

Suzanne: What do you feel is the character of the Port Towns?

Sadara Barrow: Country urban. I came up with that just this past several months. We would go out to Ithaca to visit my daughter in school. It's very similar. There were a lot of homes that need to be repaired and helped. A lot of automobiles on lots and things like this. But you drive through and you say this is charming. But you say, "Well why is this charming, but it's the same kind of things I see in the Port Towns and it's not charming there." It dawned on me. It's a country feel there in Ithaca. It's the space that makes it

OK. What we have here is an urban type of situation, but the people and the living and the habits are more countrified, a more laid back relationship with their house or whatever. It doesn't have to be pristine. They're just down home livers. So, I coined the phrase country urban. That's what it is.

Suzanne: What started the idea of the Port Towns in the beginning? Was it an idea before the Port Towns CDC?

Sadara Barrow: It was there before the Port Towns CDC, because of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning being here. It was the community groups that the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning put together. They looked at their assets, and based on the history, came up with that name.

Suzanne: How do you feel about the term Port Towns? Is it an effective tool in drawing history to community?

Sadara Barrow: Yes. I definitely think the first thing it tells people is something that they didn't know, that this was a port. Most of our locals can say to somebody else why it is the Port Towns. And you wouldn't have known that. I was shocked. We did some improvements on my house, several years ago. They told us we lived in a critical bay area. We asked why. They said, "Well, you're next to the Anacostia River." I said, "River? What river? You're kidding right? That's not a river." And that was long before all this was going and the river was in bad shape. Now people know. That is a river and they know it was a port.

Suzanne: How did people view area history before the idea came about?

Sadara Barrow: I don't think they paid attention to it at all. It was close to 0. There was this house. I can't remember the name of it. I think it's in Columbia, Maryland now. It used to be just where the entrance to the Waterfront Park is now. It sat where the pawn shop and the old liquor store is on Annapolis Road. If you think about it, there was a house there and they were going to tear it down. I've seen pictures in *The Pictorial View of Prince George's County*. And they have a picture of the house in it. And the house is like Bostwick. And it sat right there in a perfect location, the entrance to the port. And they wanted to tear it down. There was a historic group who said, "You just can't tear it down." So, they took down the house piece by piece and then they rebuilt it. It could be in Baltimore County or somewhere in Maryland. If you think about the fact that folks could have thought about the idea of tearing down a historic site to put up a pawn shop and a liquor store. It sort of gives you an idea of how much people thought about the history here. Who knows why? It's hard to go back and know why someone decided to just throw this space away. It happened, you know. You can just tell.

Suzanne: Do you believe people today are attracted and move into the community because of the history?

Sadara Barrow: It's starting to happen. You'll find more people now than 20 years ago who will say, "Oh yeah historic place, charming community, people oriented." You get it now. It's starting to happen. It's a piece by piece process. I think in the next 10 years, if we can complete our Riverview, residential facility, and this platinum LEED building. I think in 20 years, even 10 years from now, we're going to have people saying, "Oh yeah, this is where I want to live."

Suzanne: How is history presented to the community or taught?

Sadara Barrow: Well, every year we have Port Towns Day and then there are multiple events at the Waterfront Park. And at every one of those events we attempt to impart the education on the history on the community. We hand out flyers and programs. I think right now that's the biggest way we do it. We are hoping in a little while to bring in a tour guide for the houses. I spoke to Dick Charlton and AWS and I know Bladensburg is also willing, when the house is in a position to be toured. I talked to some of them about if we were able to supply a tour guide would they allow people to visit the houses. They are all quite willing. They can't do it as they run their businesses in the houses. But they would be willing to have a tour guide in there. So, if we could find the funding for that, it would be our next step in this process. Because one of our difficulties in bringing people here is we don't have access to the restored houses in a way that we can let the public see them. So, there just here. Then, we have to figure out how to make that sustainable. You get a grant for like a year, but you permanent flow that will allow it to be sustained. This year, maybe next year for that. The other thing is actually to do tours. We do it a lot for architects, the Secretary of Transportation, many government officials, Councilman Manholland, and Councilman Winn. We did it for Martin O'Malley before he was Governor. It was the tours that got me involved. That's the thing that attaches everybody to the place. You go on the tour. You see all these different perspectives. You have the ball fields in Colmar Manor. It's not just about the history. It is about the place, the coziness of it, the way people live, the stories of the kids walking out of school, and seeing that. It's just this whole thing that people attach to. So, that's another thing that we are going to start doing, the tours.

Suzanne: How do people respond to this?

Sadara Barrow: We do a lot of marketing. We really try to put out, "Hey, this is who we are. Hey, we're here. Hey, look at us." One of the things I have found really interesting is that Shoppers Food Warehouse has started this neighborhood program, and so they're selling shirts, jackets, hats that have the community's name on it. And everybody in Colmar Manor is walking around with their Colmar Manor jacket and Colmar Manor sweatshirt. I wouldn't expect it for people to attach and say this is my community. It's funny, because I was at a meeting in Cottage City, a business meeting over there. They were like, "We were having a serious conversation with Shoppers, because we were expecting to have Cottage City hats and shirts." I said, "That's OK. We'll lobby for it."

Suzanne: Do people attach to the idea of their own towns or the Port Towns in general?

Sadara Barrow: I think it really sways both ways. I think it all depends on what you think the perception the person has of where they are. Because if you say you're from the Port Towns, in some cases...In this day and time, it's still better than saying you're from Bladensburg. It's not a fair representation, but it's a perception. Because truth of the matter is, if you live in Bladensburg and you call the police you have a response in 1 minute to 2 minutes. You live in an unincorporated area you have a response in 25 to 45 minutes. So, from a safety perspective, the ideas that people have about the communities are wrong. But still, people think of the Port Towns as this place with historic value. Recognizing that it is in Bladensburg isn't something that they seem to notice. They don't separate the two. So, I think you get it both ways. I think it's a lot of work to build pride in the community. I think that you'll find you get it a lot more in the single family housing areas than the multi-family housing area. I guess that is just because of the transient nature of things sometimes. You'll find it really in Cottage City. They connect to Cottage City a lot. I think you've got more in Colmar Manor. Bladensburg, they sort of bounce back and forth. And Edmonston, because they are still new, they're still strongly Edmonston. So, we're really working on getting them really connected to the Port Towns.

Suzanne: Tell me about revitalization in the community?

Sadara Barrow: In the action plan, they looked at the strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities and restraints. It was basically a decision to focus on government infrastructure issues, because you are really putting in...a private investment revitalization that's how there was a lot of other things were taken care of. The river, for one, was absolutely a hard mess. Also, the roads and the streets, the new bridge that crosses from Colmar Manor to Cottage City. The bridge, literally, had to have a police car that parked his car behind the huge pothole that would come back every winter, every winter for like 4 years. Somewhere, towards the middle of the winter they'd patch it and patch it and it came back out again. They literally had to block it with a car. And some people would ride over it. Department of Transportation came in and said, "You're approved to get a new bridge. You know what, even though you're approved to get a new bridge next year, we are going to fully re-pave this bridge this year, because this is ridiculous." So, they spent the money to re-pave a bridge that they knew they were going to be removing in a year. But getting the new bridge was the big thing. We needed that. Our streets and roads are horrible. WSSC has come in and dug up all our streets recently and re-piped sewage pipes, because the infrastructure here was just so old. Things are just falling apart. So, from a revitalization perspective that was the initial focus. Focus on infrastructural things. New schools. People don't come in where the schools are suffering. Getting a new school doesn't automatically help getting the grades up, but it does play a role in it, if you've got schools falling apart around you. So, that's where we've been in the past 10 years. In the last two years, we've been focusing on actual real estate development, looking at some of the commercial sites. The new sector map amendment was approved for Bladensburg Town Center. They're currently in the process of doing a sector map amendment for the whole Port Towns. And those are really the next step. We have to have those changes in our zoning. Now, OK focus on bringing in investors to do real, physical building revitalization. The role has been infrastructure and also educating the community about themselves, so that they have a buy-in to their own

community. That's a part of revitalization, the energy you get from the community. And now we are focusing on real estate.

Suzanne: Can history contribute to revitalization?

Sadara Barrow: As I explained, history is a huge part. In the whole Anacostia Heritage Trails Area, certification is all about that. It's all about utilizing our history and tourism. Tourism is a major economic market. When you look at a bedroom community, as Prince George's County has come to be known, its historic value towards economics is a really smart place to start. It's not like we are going to be bringing in huge corporate giants with their big businesses and so forth. They have planted themselves in other places. But we have a unique opportunity. Not that other places don't have it. It's just that, because we are so residential, it is a smooth transition into historic tourism. It plays a major role. Our Anacostia River Education Center is a way toward revitalization.

Suzanne: Is there racism in the community?

Sadara Barrow: There is racism all over the country. I think this community does extremely well. I get really excited when I go to the shopping center and see how diverse the community is. We moved here in 1983. This was a predominantly White community. So, I actually watched the evolution of the change in race. I can't say there's not racism, because it wouldn't have happened that way if there wasn't. There was the White flight. Quite literally, I came in at part of the beginning of it, the first 10 years of it. My parents move to Brentwood from D.C. when I was 13. It started right there and then. And you had and you still have flavors of that, "I need to move away, because these other people are moving in." I can't say I haven't seen that happening as more Latinos are moving in, the Blacks move. You can't deny it when you look at the patterns. When I look at the people here who are happy to be here and stay here, and when I go to the Bladensburg Waterfront Park or my shopping center, I see this diversity and people getting along. We're getting to the point where people want to live here and stay here there won't be racism. My point is, if you need to move away, go please. It's not a lot that surrounds us, but there are flavors of it still here.

Suzanne: How long have you been a resident of the area?

Sadara Barrow: I've been a resident of Colmar Manor for 25 years this year and before that I lived in Brentwood since I was 13. You do the math. I already told you how old I was.

Suzanne: What was your favorite teenage memory in the area?

Sadara Barrow: I ran track at Northwestern. I had to switch legs, because I was too short to compete against the girls on the 100 meter hurdles. I ran hurdles. I had to switch legs in order to be competitive. I was known as the girl who switches her legs. Most people could only use one leg to run hurdles. It's one, two, three, up, one, two, three, up. I had to run one, two, three, four, five, up, one, two, three, four, five up. I wasn't

competitive at all, so I learned to go one, two, three, four, up, one two, three, four, up. It was an exciting thing for me, doing something strategic in the sports world. Other people started switching legs after that. That was at Northwestern High School in Hyattsville.

Suzanne: If you were writing a history of the Port Towns what would you include?

Sadara Barrow: What sticks out for me is the Battle of Bladensburg, just imagining it. And the second thing is the Dueling Grounds and just imagining it. Because even though we have historic homes and everything, it's imagining and visualizing in your mind the events that took place. The first unmanned balloon ascent. I imagine the crowd looking around, going, "Oh, look at this go up." I look at the place that these things happened and I try to imagine it historically happening. There are a lot of them. The three that I mentioned sort of stick out in my mind.

Suzanne: What were your experiences when you first moved to the Port Towns? Socially? Politically?

Sadara Barrow: We were fortunate. My husband and I got married in 1982 at 20. We were fortunate enough to find a house we could buy, a house we could buy at 20 years old. It was there. It wasn't something we were looking for or expecting. My husband was delivering carpet and this guy said, "Hey, I'm fixing this house up to sell it." He was born and raised in it. My house only had one previous owner. He said, "We're selling this house. If you want to buy it, I'll sell it to you without any of the broker fees." We started working, running around trying to find the money for the down payment for this house at 20 years old. We were able to buy it. We wound up here by fate. It just happened. My husband was delivering carpet to a house and a month later we were buying the house. When we got here, mostly old people lived here. It was a very racially Caucasian community, a lot of older people. We started having children. We were one of two families that had kids in the area. Now, you can't walk down the street without stumbling over a kid. It completely turned over to a family community around that period of time. For my kids, it was perfect. We were in town. You lived a half a mile from the District line. You were in town. Just like any other town in the country or the mid-west or whatever. You're right next to D.C., which is the convenience of it all. But really being in a town, there are a mayor and council. Folks you can go fuss at. You know, about stuff, "My trash didn't get picked up." That, I would have to say, is the uniqueness about it. We didn't even realize it that much until my sister moved to an unincorporated area and it snowed. She called, "Now I understand what the difference is living in a town and living out of it." Snow removal, it's as simple as that. Your town takes care of it. There's the guy who lives around the corner. He comes out, sticks the shovel on the truck, and goes around and does it. Not like the news you see every night, "Virginia, Maryland... They all got their trucks up and ready to go." No, it's the guy. So I think that's the most unique thing, in town.

Suzanne: How have the Port Towns changed since you've been here?

Sadara Barrow: There's a lot. When I first moved here, we were on the edge of the end of what was a large urban renewal project in Colmar Manor. So, all of Bladensburg Road on the Colmar Manor side was raised. The only thing that was there was the Burger King. There were a couple of shops standing that were supposed to go inside the shopping center, when it got built. To ask me what has changed, everything. I moved into a neighborhood that had houses and nothing in its commercial corridor, except one building. You wonder, "Why are you moving to a place like that?" It was in the beginning stages. It was home ownership that was my main point. Later on, I realized I'm in a town that I enjoy. I have seen many changes: the shopping centers go up, the smaller one, the larger one, all of the fast food restaurants, which probably wouldn't have been my selection of development if I was part of the process back then. But, at the same time, they make money, and if that what economically works at the time...it brought some economic vitality to the community. Seeing the evolution of the Port Towns movement, watching the people start to take on the idea that, "Hey, I'm in the Port Towns." I saw the trails system start getting paved. It starts in Colmar Manor and then goes out. All that happened during the time I was there. The Bladensburg Waterfront Park was being developed. It just wasn't there before. The river was in horrible shape. I watched the train bridge come up. My kids had to go to Dewey for four years, while the brand new building was being built. I have experienced the transformation.

Suzanne: Where were you born?

Sadara Barrow: Washington D.C.

Suzanne: And you moved to Brentwood when you were 13?

Sadara Barrow: Yes.

Suzanne: Why did you decide to stay in the area?

Sadara Barrow: I think I acquired a kinship to the area. We lived in D.C. till I was 6. We lived just across the District line. We used to walk to Mt. Rainer, the Safeway in Brentwood that's right at 38th and Rhode Island Avenue. That's where we used to walk often to go shopping. We used to live 2 blocks across the District line in D.C. So, I was still close to Maryland. My kinship to Prince George's County had a lot to do with town life living in Brentwood and then again in Cottage City. I lived in these towns. I knew the city, because I came from the city. And we spent a lot of time in the city, even after we moved. I was familiar with the city. It was like having this extraordinary opportunity to be close to a metropolitan place, but still have this countrified living experience. I went to Prince George's Community College. I was a part of the place where I lived. I never got involved in politics or community development until 7 years ago now. It's still where I like living. It's regular people. Some people call them, "not the plastic people." But I know who some of the people they call, "the plastic people," and they're not so bad. I don't want to live in the other communities. These beautiful houses with the beautiful lots. It's the brand newness of them. It's not the size of them. I do love big beautiful houses on beautiful lots. Houses that all look the same. That was a big one for me. I

couldn't even imagine it's like dressing the same. You know, like dressing like everybody else everyday. You know if you have a choice would you want to wear a uniform? Probably not. You want your individuality. I never quite got that.

Suzanne: What is your favorite spot or landmark in the community?

Sadara Barrow: My favorite spot is the Colmar Manor ball fields.

Suzanne: Do you go there?

Sadara Barrow: Yeah, just to go there. I don't think you can find another place like it. One of the unfortunate things about the place is that it was a landfill. How anybody could put a landfill on a battlefield, I have no idea, but they did that. I don't know this for a fact, but people have told me that it's difficult to plant a lot there. So, to be able to put up a lot of trees is not possible. I don't know if there is a place like it. You go and it's so open. In a very, very tiny way...I have been to the Grand Canyon before and when you go to the Grand Canyon and you go down into the canyon and sort of look out it's this vastness that you see. Now, this is not like your seeing out into a canyon of sorts, but it's still that airiness that surrounds it. If you go to Greenbelt Park, everybody loves trees, so they're full of trees. Still you can only see the distance between trees. There, at the ball fields, because there are so few trees, it's just...And if you want to see trees, you can go on an edge close to the water. And you have a little forest back there too. It's a different kind of place. I'd love to promote it as a place for people to just experience not to necessarily play ball. It's like standing on a mountaintop.

Suzanne: What are the major political issues in the past or today?

Sadara Barrow: The main political issue of this place is smart growth development and whatever that means. The idea that our tax dollars have to go, in order to create infrastructure for homes that are built and take up more of our green land and more of our resources. It seems utterly ridiculous. It's a political issue. It may not be easy for everybody to figure out why. I call it ridiculous. You literally, have failing infrastructure here, pipes and electric. But because whole bunch of people moved out and took a whole bunch of resource and land and now they can't get to work without being stuck in traffic, you've got to build a highway called the ICC. The amount of money that's spent on that highway, what could that money do to restore and help the people of the failing areas down here? You think about homeownership in the old communities, there are issues. There is no air-conditioning in most of them. A lot of them need upgrades in their electric systems and so forth, in order to have amenities. Should there be a program within smart growth that offers assistance to homeowners of older homes to assure those homes stay active and competitive to the market instead of building and tearing up new land? This is the issue here. I don't see that there is anybody who has tackled it thoroughly enough at this point. I know we have some smart growth laws that allow for variances to zoning for older buildings. There is some incentive funding to get people to come to the area. But it's not enough to be competitive to what the business market produces. People all function on the market. The market says buying empty land and building on it is less

expensive than buying something that exists and knocking it down or renovating it. So, they say, "I'm going to do what costs me the less." It's up to our politicians and our government to come up with ways to allow for a better protection. This is the job of the government to protect. That's why producing incentives, in order to protect the older communities, is important. So that's a bigger argument that ties into the environmental argument. More specifically, to this area and this watershed is the Anacostia River, bringing attention to it, figuring out ways to clean it up, and figuring out ways to manage it. Storm water management is a big issue for urban communities. Storm water is one of the most damaging things to the river. The more we build even further and further out, the more runoff we have. If you've already got it all built here, let's try to figure out how to fix the impervious surfaces that are already here, instead of spending more money building new impervious surfaces. It's a double negative. It still stands around smart growth.

Suzanne: How are women important to the community? What is it like to be a woman in the Port Towns?

Sadara Barrow: I just have to say women are the most vocal around here. Anyway you look, there are a lot of leadership positions. We have some men. Bladensburg has three council members and a mayor that are male. Edmonston has a male mayor and that's it. In Colmar Manor, we have one council member who is a female. Cottage City is male, female, and a female mayor. I get the sense here, nobody cares. I totally don't feel a gender issue around here at all, if you step up and everybody respects you. I know what it feels like. I worked in corporate America for 20 years. I know what the gender thing feels like. The gender thing for me in corporate America was worse than the color thing. There are unwritten rules. I would still say there were more Black men who moved up more than women did. Not here.

Suzanne: How do children fit into the story of the Port Towns? Do children who grow up here stay here?

Sadara Barrow: So far, the ones that I can see. It's a young community for the children. When I moved here, there were hardly any children. So, my children are the oldest the children around. There were a few from that age group. I see them. My son is 24. I know a couple, whose parents moved and sold their house to their kids or left their house to their kids. There's a handful of those that are in that age group. They're here. I know that when we have certain events, there are kids who come back. It's a young group to answer that question clearly. What will happen, I don't know. My son is still here. I have a 23 year old daughter and she is still here. At Christmas time everybody comes back. We have a train that comes through our house at Christmas time. I have 5 kids. What will happen? I don't know. I have one at Cornell and she's getting ready to go to medical school. I know what happens. A lot of people stay where they go. Once they go past undergrad, they often stay where they go.

Suzanne: How is the town connected to other communities?

Sadara Barrow: We basically have a sister relationship with the Gateway Communities. We are very close with Mt. Rainer, Brentwood and North Brentwood, and then parts of Hyattsville, the part of Hyattsville that is closer attached to Edmonston and Bladensburg. Our six communities are very close. It also has to do with ATHA, which brings these communities together, even though it still goes up the corridor. We have a relationship participating in each other's festivals and events and things like that. We use Gateway artists for our murals. And we do an urban edge conference together with Gateway and Hyattsville CDC. So, yeah, we are the urban edge.

Suzanne: How are the Port Towns as a whole unique? How are they special?

Sadara Barrow: It's the port that was here. That is its unique factor at this point. What we are hoping for when we are taking on this health initiative is that our uniqueness will become being a community focused on the health of a community: social, physical, historical, diverse health. Focusing on being healthy through community, as opposed to just being healthy as an individual. Health through community involvement. That's what we are looking for that story to be later on. Mayor Ortiz would say, "Bringing upper class amenities to a middle class community." It's really about a healthy economy that brings those things to you. And a healthy economy brings you healthier businesses. Healthier business brings you a healthier physical life. A healthy river brings you a healthier physical life. A healthier environment. So, what it is all about is doing it at a community level, as opposed to an individual level. We are hoping people are going to see us as, "Wow. Look at that. A little moderate income community and they can do all of these progressively healthy things in some of the different areas." And anybody can.

One of the things that I didn't say in any of these things, before I actually came onto the Port Towns CDC, the Mayor of Colmar Manor...she wasn't the Mayor at the time, she was going to run for Mayor...approached me about me and getting involved and running for Council in Colmar Manor. I am a Councilmember in Colmar Manor. So, actually I ran for the Council before I came onto the board of the Port Towns CDC.