

Interviewee: **Mayor Joseph C. Lomax Jr.**  
Interviewers: **Ernest Demby, Julie Hawkins-Ennis, Linda Moore-Garoute, Noah Waters, Ryan Craun**  
Date of Interview: **January 15, 2020**  
Location of Interview: **Eagle Harbor Community Center, Eagle Harbor, MD**  
List of Acronyms: **ML=Mayor Joseph C. Lomax Jr, ED=Ernest Demby, JE=Julie Hawkins Ennis, LG=Linda Moore-Garoute, NW=Noah Waters, RC=Ryan Craun**

[Begin Transcript: 01:08]

ED: I guess we can start by stating your name.

ML: My name is Joseph C. Lomax Jr.

ED: Thank you for doing this interview is some such short notice. We appreciated it. We've been trying to get people here for days, so thank you for coming.

ML: It's alright.

ED: I guess we'll start out with, when did you first come to this area?

ML: Area of Eagle Harbor?

ED: Yes.

ML: Oh my gracious. Let's see. It's been over.. I want to say around 1980. 1981 or 1982. Around there is when I first noticed of Eagle Harbor.

ED: Did you work around here at that time or?

ML: No, we had to find this place, by trial and error. I was brought down here by the past States Attorney, Mr. Alexander Williams Jr.? First African American to have become a state attorney in Prince George's County. And when he acquired some property here he asked me to come down with him. Because he had never been down here either. So we all came down, and we met the police person of this town.

ED: Do you have a specific plan in order?

ML: A plan?

ED: Or was a mission.

ML: We wanted to find out what was the hype about Eagle Harbor. What do we find? We found, Mayor Coleman who was patrolling the area asking us "What did we want in her town?"

ED: In her town?

ML: Her town.

ED: Was that a common thing?

ML: That was common thing back then, Mayor Mary Coleman.

ED: Okay.

ML: That's right.

ED: Seems like you've stayed for a while, so what was it that attracted you the most?

ML: Well, Mr. Williams acquired a piece of property here. I guess he acquired a piece of property and he wanted to see what the property was all about, so we came down, we looked around and what we saw was really, I mean Eagle Harbor is a special kind of place. When you come down that main road it's a step back in time truly. A step back in time. And he decided well, let's just clean up the property and start using it. So that's what we did. We just started doing things and inviting others of our associates from the county government down to see what a pearl we had found. He had found. And I said we because, the first time I came to Eagle Harbor I fell in love with this, so I said we.

ED: Okay. What's the first thing you started doing when you were?

ML: Oh. Making plans. As to making this the jewel of Prince George's County. We started cleaning up things. Cleaning up the area. Cleaning up over where he was living especially on the water side. And we just started seeing what could be here in the town of Eagle Harbor.

ED: Do you see that plan is still on hold?

ML: No question about it. Eagle Harbor it was a jewel in the rough. That's what I wanted to call it, and I nicknamed it "Paradise on the Patuxent". That was mine. So when we started doing things and, he's a politician so he asked me "Joe! Why don't you run for mayor?". I says get out of here. I'm not qualified to be a mayor. I don't even know what being a mayor is all about. But over a couple of years and he kept asking me and I kept meeting the people here and finding out how special they were, I said, well maybe I can do this. And so, I threw my hat in the ring. It was one of those days and I became the mayor of Eagle Harbor.

ED: Was it a good experience for you or was it tough?

ML: It was a tough eye-opening experience. I learned a lot of things about myself that I didn't know about. And it was just marvelous the way I was accepted by the people of Eagle Harbor. Because, they came and they go, well, they came and they went. When I was asking about how many people lived here? And when I asked, 12, over the year, you stay for all year round, 12 people? And then that number grew, and then we found out that it was more. And it just blossomed into something that an experience that I will never ever forget.

ED: What would you like to see to happen to all the historic places around here? You have a lot of history and a lot of..

ML: Yes. Well, what I want to see happen. I don't want Eagle Harbor to lose its luster. Change to get so big it forgets from where it came from. Eagle Harbor is a special place. It's a like I said, when you come down at that road it's really a step back in time. You can actually say, "Where are we now?". These old houses, old these old roads, and people walked down here, we walked house to house, greeting people. It's a good place to live. It's a good place to raise your family. It's quiet down here. Can I give you this little quick story? When I first moved in Eagle Harbor, and bought this little piece of house and I called it little piece of house because it was falling down around itself. I haven't put a lock on the door for the first seven years since I was

here. No lock on my front door and nobody came in my home when I was not there. The biggest problem that we had here was deer running down across the fields. Dogs would chase them and they would trample the flower beds. You know, things of that nature, but crime wise, not here in Eagle Harbor.

ED: Wow!

ML: It's still a special place with all the history. Hearing about how George Washington and his people, his troops, right down here on the bay, right here in our own. This is our little piece of history. George Washington, the first president of the United States, and his troops right down here on Trueman Point. Wow! So when we walked down in there, we're walking in the back door of history. So, that's we had some claims here. Now we have Coleman Creek, ain't that interesting? Mayor Coleman, first day I met her, made sure, "You wanna to be in my town, you better act accordingly". And she did not play. And she rode around her car like she was the police. Which is fine. "I'm Mayor Coleman" she said. And she was all of 5'2". She was just a proud lady. And she was a lady to be reckoned with. She was an interesting lady. A lot of history in her. I wish that somebody would have come down and put a tape on her back in the 80's. Now I called that 80's and that was young compared to a lot of things, but Mayor Coleman was the history of Eagle Harbor. She knew a lot and she knew who came and who went on a daily basis.

ED: It seems like her vision for this town has stuck and holds true? I haven't had an interview with anybody that we, I mean that we haven't had anybody that we interviewed that say that there is not a tight family around here and everybody is just kind. I think the area itself does that to you.

ML: Yes it does, I mean I've heard it described as one way in, one way out. So when you come across, when you come down that road, leave whatever problems or disappointments back on the main road. Don't bring it down here because, this, it changes you coming down here you know. And, I got to give you this. In the morning when the sun rise, I don't think, I've been almost all of the world with the military and to see the sun rise come up here in Eagle Harbor is just something to behold. It's very soul-stirring.

ED: Yes, good, I like that.

ML: It's interesting.

ED: You mentioned George Washington, were there any other historic figures that you even heard of coming to this area or stopped in to this area?

ML: Well you see when I say George Washington because that was the first one that just pops at me but I also know that right up on top of the hill was where John Wilkes Booth made his run straight down through this road and had it not been for that church there. He went on down to Mudd. He was down here. You're gonna get me stumbling, but other historians, I want to say that. Historians, let say "I'm going to call Mr. Alexander Williams name, first black states attorney in the history of Prince George's County. Now that's not historic, I can't tell you anything else. He owned property here he was, matter of fact, I'm currently in the home that he owned. I bought his house. See so, and I don't know. They sold slaves right here on the point. And we saw that, the little landings that they held at market's on. So, from slavery to first state attorney in Prince George's County. History, we got some history. Mayor Coleman, I don't know, she lived to be at ripe age and I'm not going to say the age but she was a walking book on Eagle Harbor. She knew everybody's first name and Mayor Coleman was amazing. And had it not been for her, I wouldn't have come here because she came to me and told me what she would do to me if I did anything strange in Eagle Harbor. So I said, now this little lady here, I'm a police person I had a gun and everything, and she's telling me what she would do to me if I disrespected her town. That got my attention immediately, so, I give nothing but kudos to Mayor Coleman.

ED: Sounds like she was like kind of a mentor to you.

ML: She was. She was a force to be reckoned with. I learned a lot at her knee, and I have gone on several occasions to sit at her home, and have a cup of coffee just talking to her about the town of Eagle Harbor, and how it came to be, and how things have happened here and how people have come and never left. I didn't say come and go. I'd say, they come and never left. They come here, they just want to be a part of it. So, on town day is when they really show off down here and show their best skirts. It's when people need to, you need to come down and be a part of that. Because you'll find people you've never seen before and people who've been here from day one. I've talked to the guy who put the streets in, whose mama and daddy put the streets in and named the streets and how they did it. How they, from a tobacco farm on the road, close to the water so they can get the boats in and get the back out, to the town of Eagle Harbor. Come on, that's nothing but bliss.

ED: I was leaving yesterday and I said to myself these roads had to be paths at some points. There is no way for this winey road and have been a planned out. A path that became the road.

ML: There you go. No architect did this. This was purely by a donkey pulling a piece of fence on a board and they trample down the grass as they went and they call it road, and since that this is the Patuxent that was came to Patuxent Boulevard. So we're good. It's a lot of history and I'm just bouncing around from things to things but, things that are really stuck with me that impress me was how people accepted you when you come down. What you saw is what you got. And if you came down here looking for bells and whistles, no, it's what you made it. And if you can walk from house to house, talking to people and being friendly with people and I love it. If they got something on the grill, "Sit down, have some", you know, "What's your name?". Invite you to come and sit and eat with them before they even know who you are. As long as you act accordingly, you better act like you're in Mayor Coleman's town.

ED: That seems to be a staple.

ML: It's nothing but the truth.

ED: Like from my past interviews, it seems like that spirit that you are talking about of this town has been here for a decades.

ML: Oh, jeez.

ED: Even a spirit of acceptance. Even in a time where there wasn't a lot of that.

ML: No, it wasn't. I hear where you're going with that, and even then, in the time from Jim Crowe. That's how Eagle Harbor came to be. We all knew. This was just a place that was set aside so that people of color could be with their counterparts in the District of Columbia. That's what Eagle Harbor is all about. They set aside a part and when people from the district came down here to mingle with their friends and when it was safe. Jim Crowe. I wrote a song, believe it or not, about the town of Eagle Harbor. And a little, I will not going to tell you about plagiarizing and all that stuff but I wrote a song and it was about and it was in the tune of "Jesus Loves Me". And, how it came to me. I was just sitting on my deck just looking at the water and came about how Eagle Harbor had become such a, I don't know, a port in the storm. When thing was not quite kosher. If you were a Caucasian, you could not be associated with the people who was in the town of Eagle Harbor as the way they were to you. So this was the melting pot. Eagle Harbor.

ED: Progressive.

ML: You want to call it progressive, fine. But I'm telling you it's.

ED: Ahead of its time.

ML: That's good. Ahead of its time. This was the place to be. I want to go out with my friends to lunch up in the district.

ED: Right.

ML: Come to Eagle Harbor. Snap the flap. Have a toast. Have some food.

ED: It seems like it was a refuge in a way.

ML: It was.

ED: Like we spoke with Ms. Thomas and she said that she felt safe here.

ML: It was.

ED: I can understand how could this be area of safety?

ML: It was. This was the home. And if you're trying to find a word that will fit, family, that's about it. Eagle Harbor was the place to be. As a matter of fact that's the tune, that's a line in my song I wrote. So whenever you get your hands on that, read that. It's about my observation of the early Eagle Harbor and Eagle Harbor today. And believe it or not, my perception of Eagle Harbor in the past is that of the same now. It's not changing.

ED: It stayed true to itself.

ML: It stayed true to its form, did not change a bit. Lot of people have come in here and they want to change some things, they want to make it more modern and they want to put things here to bring you up to speed to make you more on the level of what's going on out here in the towns, the surrounding towns. And, okay fine. We can look at some of that stuff but leave Eagle Harbor alone. When my grandchildren come here they love it. They can take their shoes off, they walk up down the streets unlike in some place. What? Take their shoes off? Now remember now this, it's a hideaway. No it's not the right word, it's just a refuge. It's a place to be and in this whole home's town.

ED: I was going to ask you what you thought of the future would be but you answered the question.

ML: I was an old mayor. Si if you asked me a question, you better be sure you want an answer.

ED: Anybody else have any questions?

NW: I do have a question. I remember back in 1976 I was attending Frostburg and we had a delegate that was a professor and I remember ask him what is the smallest municipalities in the state now? Guess what came up?

ML: The town of Eagle Harbor. That's also a line in my song. "The smallest jewel in the crown".

NW: So when you were a mayor, was it still the smallest municipality?

ML: That's still it is today. The smallest municipality out of the 17 we have in the Prince George's County. So, Eagle Harbor, it is the last one. As you see when you leave Eagle Harbor you're just about out of Prince George's County. You got a little bit road to go. I'd say maybe a mile and then Prince George's County ends, so we called it "The smallest jewel in the crown" of Prince George's County.

NW: As to preserve the town I noticed that the older residents are pretty much not around anymore.

ML: Go ahead and say it. I understand.

NW: Yes, and the younger residents who inherit from the older residents, what do you see as the possibility to maintain the town because of attrition of the older residents dying off and the younger residents needing to participate?

ML: Education. Give me another word. That's it. Education.

NW: So where do they achieve the education? Are they to achieve it at the community meetings?

ML: They can. That's one way, but it's so important for us too. The, what you call it? The generation is dwindling away, to make sure we tell our children and grandchildren what Eagle Harbor is, what it meant to us and the importance of it to maintaining itself. Come and visit because we got a lot of children. We tried the college fund thing situation as a way. Summer help, we started that where children to come down in summer and do summer jobs here. Just to get them aware of Eagle Harbor. So we tried a few things and I don't know what else other do to make sure it's word of mouth or leave some type of educational something. And I'm not quite sure what to do to make sure that the transition is a smooth one. That we can move from us to them. That's what we're trying to do. And I'm thinking educate our babies to understand what the importance of Eagle Harbor is.

NW: I'd like to commend you because I would like to tell you I believe you have done these things and foremost you've help to maintain the town. And it seems here, to be involved in future education and those types of steps seem to progress. I commend your involvement and that you serve as a mayor and you made us proud.

ML: Well, thank you so much. I appreciate you and your comments. I hope that the future of Eagle Harbor (phone rings). I'm sorry, I we are asked to cut phones off but (All interviewer laughs)

ED: Probably checking on you.

ML: (On the phone) (Laughter) Hello! they're talking about you on camera. I'll be right there. Bye. (Puts down the phone).

ED: We thank you for your time so if you had to go.

ML: Keeps me on my schedule.

LG: I have one question.

ML: Yes, Ma'am.

LG: As you know both towns, Cedar Haven and Eagle Harbor was formed at what seemed to be close to the same time. What do you think happened to their relationship, or was that a major, what I'm going to call it.

ML: Puffa!

LG: Thank you. Yes. I mean as honestly as you can.

ML: Before I came to this town I was wondering, "What in the world?". I mean we got a town over here, we got a associates over here. How come they don't come together and be more powerful? Well, what I got was, you ever heard of the expression "the pretty sister and the ugly sister?" That's what I got.

LG: Who was the pretty sister?

ML: See, there you go. Which one was the pretty sister? And what happened? There exactly the same. They're on the same waterfront. It takes the same road to get down in here. And if, can I call it? If that, If that township would come with that municipality, not municipality, with that area they would have such a voting block. They would be a power to be reckoned with especially to anybody who wants to come down and deal with a Ninth County Medic District. If they want. But then we get the people. And that sister situations sticks in my mind because I couldn't understand why. I tried in my administration to bring them together and I even had a meeting in this building and told them that they could use this building as their meeting place if they wanted too, hoping that, well they came over here and enough seen how we live and we came to their meetings and dealt with then on one on one, we would be more friendly to the people who lived next door.

LG: Absolutely.

ML: See, but sometimes old wounds don't heal as well as they should. And that old wound situation was that ugly sister's situation. Now how, who became the ugly sister still sticks in my mind. Who's the ugly sister? Who's the pretty sister? But I am just one, and I've tried to explain to them the benefits but, I thought it was going to work even did several events so that we could come together and see how strong we were and we had politicians coming down. And they want to deal with, both of us and it just kind of went away.

LG: Absolutely.

ML: But I'm telling you that is a very interesting, very good question, and it's a very interesting question, and if they learn what that, we can take and put that ugly sister.

LG: To rest?

ML: To rest. This area would be.

ML: Oh my gracious. Both of them are on a water. We know that people want to come down here and build. We know this. And we know how powerful it could be because if you got the voting block down in there and I'm talking about all of it.

LG: Now. Also the town of Eagle Harbor purchased Trueman Point.

ML: Yes.

W: Which is in the backyard of Cedar Haven.

ML: I didn't call that name, you did. I tried to stay away from that name.

WI: But Cedar Haven offered the grant that's producing this documentation.

ML: Well I'll tell you what, if they would call just sit down and find out what the problem that would be great. Any kind of way we can come together on this thing.

LG: Yes.

ML: We are right here. One road to get to both of us.

ML: And that's all. And it's an absolute truth.

LG: We can work together.

ML: I just hope that there is a way we can fix it.

ED: I personally think it's the history that's going to save it. That can bring them all together. I don't have enough history here myself to even say it. If there is a building block, that's the thing, the one thing that you all share.

ML: Yes it is, and what she just said. We're trickling off and maybe the newer generation is going to see it in a different way but they should take advantage of us old folks, of us people who are seasoned. Know some of the tricks and trades. What's down here. So that when they do, if they do come together they have more information and they have a bigger building block. It starts with one block.

NW: So I have a question about the business commerce in the town.

ML: Go ahead

NW: Thinking back about the efforts you worked on. Do you see an advantage to maybe a revenue source in town? A store, museum type of facility.

ML: Excellent. You don't have to go any further. I know exactly, what's the attraction to Eagle Harbor? You got a whole store, you got a family store. One question, will it be supported by the towns and area around it? Because if the area around the store does not support it, the store will collapse. If you bring any type of commerce down in here will it be supported by those who surrounding it? Will it bring down that one way street? Little sad bar, I even looked into making a road out of that Cedar Haven up back to 381 and found that it's possible, if the people over there decided that that's what they want to do it. But kind of fell on deaf ears when I took it to Upper Marlboro. There's a way to do it because it's just sitting there and all you got to do is to come back up the way. There is one way in and one way out. You don't have that any longer we can make the circle.

WI: Yes.

NW: So sounds like you're suggesting stronger together.

ML: Absolutely.

NW: And the ideas of the bed and breakfast. Those types of things.

ML: Hey, on this water. Come on. That summarizes what I was telling you about. We have to go find it. If you sitting some down place in a boat. That would be perfect.

NW: You can still see the stars at night out there.

ML: Yes, and you could tell ghost stories about what's coming out that river too.

LG: We thank you very much for your time.

ED: Thank you very much for your time Sir.

LG: And can you please give our behalf to your wife.

ML: My time keeper you mean?

WI: Yes.

[End Transcript: 34:49]