



CONVERSATIONS WITH THE COUNCIL featuring John Flanigan

BALANCING PROGRESS AND PRESERVATION

For more than six decades, John F. Flanigan has watched Palm Beach County develop, evolve, and wrestle with the same essential question: how do you build for the future without losing what made people want to be here in the first place?

It is a question that has shaped his legal career, his public service, and his long involvement with the Economic Council of Palm Beach County.

As a shareholder and member of the Board of Directors at Nason, Yeager, Gerson, Harris & Fumero, P.A., Flanigan practices in the areas of real property law and finance law. The firm has approximately 100 employees and offices in Palm Beach Gardens, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa, and Boca Raton. Through his work, Flanigan has advised clients on matters tied closely to real property and finance law throughout South Florida.

But his perspective has never been limited to transactions or legal documents. Flanigan has always viewed growth through a broader lens: what it means for the community, the environment, and the county's long-term character.

That is part of what drew him to the Economic Council of Palm Beach County. "My longtime law partner, Jon C. Moyle, was EC Chair in 1987. He got me involved in EC issues he was working on, such as the ordinances that created the Business Development Board and the Criminal Justice Commission. Those activities were interesting and brought me into contact with County business leaders. When Jon moved over to the Florida Council of 100, I applied and succeeded him on the EC."

He later served as Chair of the Economic Council in 2009, continuing a commitment that now spans more than three decades, which has provided numerous personal and professional benefits. "I have represented E.C. members whom I met at the E.C., but more importantly, membership in the E.C. helped me to understand what issues are facing the business community and the planning for efforts to deal with those issues. E.C. membership also helped me understand the business people on the other side of the environmental issues I was involved in."

Flanigan believes Palm Beach County must remain serious about economic development, but not at the expense of the qualities that make our area special. "The business community needs to be reminded from time to time that people and businesses come to the County because it is a great place to live. We cannot just pave over the County without destroying what makes people come here. We need to make sure we have enough water to meet all our needs and protect the agricultural reserve, as it seems like every zoning or high-rise application is now being approved. I wonder how long this can continue."

That point of view has made Flanigan a thoughtful voice in conversations where business and environmental interests are often framed as competing forces. "My mentors, including Jon Moyle, Bill Sadowski, Dick Pettigrew, and Nat Reed, helped me understand that economic progress and environmental responsibility can coexist."

The lesson became even more meaningful when Governor Bob Graham appointed him to the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District. The role not only deepened his understanding of water, growth, and land use but also changed the way he listened and led. "While on the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District, I learned to keep my mouth shut until I had heard all the presentations and had all of the facts. There were many times that I changed my opinion during the discussions. So, I learned to speak only when all the facts had been presented. With my team, I tend to interrupt and respond quickly, so I have learned to listen more effectively so that everyone feels heard. I'm sure my family would say I don't do it enough with them."

A graduate of the University of Notre Dame, where he studied English, Flanigan considered pursuing a Ph.D. and a teaching career but chose law because it offered a way to combine language, analysis, business, and problem-solving. He earned his law degree from Duke University School of Law and has been practicing since 1965. "The law teaches a person a new way of thinking; it taught me to be a doubter, which is helpful when you are advising clients, but can get you in trouble with your family."

That sense of humor also reveals another side of Flanigan. While the law has shaped the way he thinks, it's his family that has kept him grounded. He and his wife, Janet, have been married for 58 years. They have two sons and four grandchildren, all of whom live in Jupiter.

Their son David is an undergraduate advisor at the FAU Honors College, while their son Brian built a business working with developers and athletes on website design, development, and product sales.

For John and Janet, one of their favorite places is Key West, where they have had a home since 1987. "The house was built in 1890 and has a historical designation. I enjoy trying to hold it together and keeping the termites from eating it."

He and Janet also enjoy traveling, and one of the more surprising chapters of Flanigan's life began in his 50s, when his interest in archaeology led him to the American Southwest. "Through Sierra Club service trips, I spent substantial portions of summers working with archaeologists on sites connected to the Anasazi culture in New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Arizona. For roughly 12 years, I hiked, surveyed sites, helped identify archaeological locations, and participated in field work tied to a civilization that flourished centuries ago."

It was not a casual hobby. It was another expression of Flanigan's curiosity about how people live, build, adapt, and, over time, leave their mark.

That long view also shapes how he thinks about Palm Beach County. He believes the challenge is not whether we should continue to grow, but whether we can do so without sacrificing the character, natural beauty, and quality of life that have long defined our area. "Florida is famous for its ups and downs, and I wonder how long the bloom will be on the rose."