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Bob Harrell oral history interview by Robert Kerstein, January 10, 2006

Bob Harrell (Interviewee)

Robert J. Kerstein (Interviewer)

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BH: …more comfortable if I get some of these disclaimers out or something, like that. You’re not going to edit this?

RK: No, because everything you say is for history.

BH: That’s great.

RK: And everyone knows that you would want everything for history anyhow.

BH: Right.

RK: This is January 10, 2006. This is an interview with Mr. Bob Harrell. We’re at the Lazy Days—what’s it called?

BH: RV Super Center!

RK: That’s where we are. Thanks a lot for meeting with me sir.

BH: My pleasure.

RK: Can I ask a little bit about your personal background?

BH: Sure. I was born at a very early age. I’ve had a hard time keeping a job, and my mother never found it ironic to refer to me as a son of a bitch, but I guess that’s not really germane to your question.

I was born in the, on the East Coast—the Atlantic coast of Florida in Fort Pierce. Went through school there, went to the Community College there; went to the University of Florida in Gainesville, as a junior. Got an undergraduate degree in Political Science. [I] went to graduate school and got a Master’s Degree in Public Administration, specializing in state and local government. I did an internship while I was in graduate school with the City Government of Tampa in Personnel.
RK: When was that about, roughly?

BH: Seventy—latter part of ’74. I went back to Gainesville, finished my degree, and started working for the City of Tampa in 1975. And other than a couple of time-outs that I took, [I] worked for the City of Tampa, boy, almost the whole time through the Freedman administration. Worked in personnel initially; from personnel I went to a rather odd duck organization called Administrative Services, I was the manager there and had insurance claims, safety, risk management, printing, mail, telecommunications, building maintenance, and a bunch of other odd stuff that nobody wanted to deal with which was great fun. I think I was 29 years old and because of the, that was when insurance prices were starting to go through the roof, we had big budget for that period that was over 20 years ago. But our budget was over 12 million bucks a year and we had no adult supervision. It was a nice situation.

RK: So initially sir, you were with the Poe administration is that correct?

BH: Right. I was with the Poe administration, and then the Martinez administration, and the Freedman administration. I worked also after Mayor Freedman, I worked for Mayor Greco for a little over a year, and then for Mayor Iorio for about seven or eight months I guess.

RK: What position did you hold during the Freedman administration?

BH: Initially I was the Director of Business and Community Services. [I] was there for a little over six years of her—her tenure was a little over eight years because she, she came into office and filled the unexpired term of Mayor Martinez when he resigned to run for Governor. I was there for a little over six years. And that organization had the city’s, all of the city’s construction regulatory agencies, plans examination, permitting, inspections, another division that was responsible for land development regulations, subdivision of real property, developments of regional impact, zoning, and other land use regulatory matters. Had a division that was responsible for code enforcement, vacant property standards, existing structural standards—commercial and residential. Housing and commercial buildings, made sure they were kept in compliance with the minimum standards code. Had another division that was responsible for real estate, the acquisition and disposition of City of Tampa real property and real property interests—if we were buying property for street, sidewalk, waterline, sewer line, some municipal facility of any sort, or disposing of property that we had that was surplus, all of that was—went through that division. And we had a historic preservation component within the organization that came into, into play when Mayor Freedman was in office for the first, passage of the first historic preservation ordinance.

RK: Now, can I ask sir, some suggested that the Freedman administration wasn’t as business friendly as perhaps earlier administrations. And I think some who would suggest this are in the business of building and developing. Were there changes in the codes or in implementation of the codes during the Freedman administration that some might of
BH: Well, in terms of changes in the code, my—I can’t disagree with that more. This mayor, Mayor Freedman brought into play a complete revision of the zoning code. It was just an antiquated mish-mash of rather confusing, in some cases contradictory regulations. And she went through all of that, I mean that had started in, but without a lot of—it hadn’t been pushed hard in the prior administration, but Mayor Freedman did push it very hard. We completely rewrote the subdivision code. Now keep in mind that during the prior administration, the City of Tampa had added half again to its land mass, with the annexation of the, what is now called New Tampa. It’s that area—that entire area that’s north of the University of South Florida, and now goes all the way to the Pasco County line in some, some places.

Well we hadn’t had much subdivision of real property because the, that other, what is now about two-thirds of the city was pretty well built out, or at least subdivided if it wasn’t built out. But here, we’re dealing with big tracks of raw land, in many cases, vacant. It was pasture land that was being developed into subdivisions. And our, we, our subdivision code, was just totally inadequate to deal with that—that was completely rewritten, and it was rewritten by a group, we had a consultant, an excellent consultant, Rick Smith, that was running point on that along with some very, very, capable city staff members. But we invited to the table in that process a number of industry representatives: engineers, developers, land use attorneys, that were integrally involved in redrafting the subdivision code—and were supportive before City Council when it was, when it went to City Council.

I don’t, you know I heard the same thing when I was in the Freedman administration, that she was not—and, and I don’t quite—well, I’ve got some theories about it—but that’s not, I’ll get back to that. But in addition to that, one of the complaints that we had from the development community was the difficulty in getting permits and getting, just getting through the regulatory process. Well that was a system that had been in place for a long, long time that we inherited. It was completely revamped. I mean we went through that from end to end—replaced some people that we thought needed to be replaced [and] acquired a new facility.

Now there was some disagreement on the part of some of the downtown interests, but, because one of the complaints that we had from the contractors, the developers, the subcontractors, was that it was difficult to dash in and dash out and get a permit, or, or submit paperwork or, or pull something that needed to be acquired on a short—parking was just inconvenient downtown. We got a facility that was dedicated to nothing but the regulatory process, the construction regulatory process. And not only did we move out all of our people out there, but other people external to the organization for which I was responsible had a place, an appropriate place in the development review process. People that had to look at, how are we going to get water to a development? How are we going to get a sewer line or a storm water line to it? How are we going to deal with the transportation issues? And those are folks in other department. We moved all of those folks out there also. And it, and we put it into a spot that was convenient—it wasn’t far
from downtown, but it had plenty of parking, all of the parking was free, you could get in, you could find everybody in one location that you wanted to deal with. And in terms of—that, that became a model. I mean there were people who would come from all over the state looking at what we did there, and how we did that, and how we routed our paperwork. We put in a whole new computer system, we, we installed the first—we did the first—the ability to use credit cards, that we had been told by some of our financial people, well, no you can’t do that because of this restriction or that restriction. We got some creative legal minds to take a look at that, so, so we could. We could establish accounts, we could charge, we could charge for plans examination fees, or permit fees or some of the other regulatory fees that were there.

We established the first voice interactor system. So that a person could, after hours, through—by way of a telephone, this predates any of the widespread use from the internet, where you could go in by a telephone and call up an inspection. If you’re ready at six o’clock and our offices are closed, but you’d like to get an inspection the next day, you could at seven o’clock, key in through a telephone and get an inspection performed on your jobsite for the next, for the following business day.

So, a whole lot of things that were put into affect that I don’t think that she got appropriate credit for. Now, why do you think that might be? Well, a couple reasons. One is that the Mayor, Mayor Freedman had a significant interest in promoting positive development. She also had a significant interest in making sure that the private sector beneficiaries of that development paid a reasonable fair share for the city services and costs that were tied to it. And that was—she was, she’s a liberal. Prides herself in being a liberal to this day. She’s not one of those folks who sees that as a dirty word. She wears it as a, as a badge of honor. Financially she was quite conservative, and looked at things from the perspective of a reasonable rational person that says, OK, these are the guys that are with the people that are making money off of this stuff—they ought to be paying for what it costs to provide those services. So some of the folks didn’t like that. They didn’t like having to pay some fees that were higher than they had been in the past.

Part of it, quite frankly, is that, this was the first female mayor that the City of Tampa had ever had. And these guys just weren’t accustomed to that. It was, probably the last bastion of folks that dealt almost exclusively with men because they—you don’t find a lot of electrical contractors that are women. You don’t find a lot of masons or a lot of, a lot of folks that do screen enclosures on pools or, or do carpentry subcontractors that are women. That’s just—the folks that these, the development community dealt with were by and large a group of other men. And so there was this, this sort of lack of an understanding, and anticipation that this person wasn’t going to be as receptive as one of the good old boys.

The other part is that while she was, while Mayor Freedman was very pro-development, she also cared about a whole lot of other folks that might not have received nearly as much attention in prior administrations. I don’t know that’s—no, I do know that’s the case. I mean I can say that I didn’t, I wasn’t there at the same level in the prior administrations where I worked, but I know that this mayor made a concerted effort to
reach out to the citizens in our community. She would take the entire staff, her entire senior staff, at least once a month, would go out into the community, to speak at a neighborhood organization, a civic association, some crime watch crew. And where we would find a part of the city that didn’t have any kind of organized group, we would make an effort to get them organized.

The mayor established the first Office of Neighborhood Relations or something like that, and, and put a senior—a person that was on her staff to run that, establish that. And where an organization didn’t exist, she would set one up, knowing full well—the interesting part is, because we talked to her about it. I thought it was great idea, but at the same time we also recognized from the inception; it wasn’t done blindly—that in the course of creating these entities we were establishing powerbases that would not necessarily agree with the positions that we would take. So we were, we were creating what would we, knowingly we were creating organizations that we knew would constitute the opposition in, in some cases. That’s OK. Golly gee whiz, wouldn’t it be awful if everybody agreed with everybody else.

But the mayor was very, very interested in, in reaching out and taking people. That had never been done before, to these neighborhood organizations—and, and I hate the damn word—empowering. But going to these folks and letting them know, here’s how you can influence your government. Here, you know...She went out the first couple of times by herself talking to these folks, and then somebody would ask a question about, well, when is this road going to be cut through? We see on a map that there’s a right of way over there, but are you really going to cut that through? Well, she doesn’t know, she doesn’t know about every doggone thing that’s on the, on the 25 year transportation plan. So the next time that she goes out, she took everybody. And then we went with her every other time. She would take the head of transportation, she would take the head of the water department, the head of the sewer department, she’d take the city attorney, the director of finance, her chief of staff, the fire chief, the police chief, and typically, some of their underlings in the areas where we found we were getting the most questions. If we were getting a lot of questions about code enforcement, as we typically did, then we would start bringing one of the code enforcement—one of the senior management people in code enforcement along with us. If we had a lot of questions about crime, crime prevention, and we frequently did, then the police chief, in addition to him being there, would have the major or the colonel that was over the crime prevention bureau in the department.

So having those folks, and being up there, where you’re just totally exposed—it was good for us as the executive branch of government, the management of the government—in the executive branch to have to look eyeball to eyeball with a lot of the folks that we get buffered from through our subordinates. That we got a better feel for what the people, our citizens were interested in, cared about, wanted to see us doing. It was, I—and it’s been—what’s interesting is that every mayor since then has continued to do that, Mayor Greco and Mayor Iorio—and have continued to strengthen that entire outreach effort in that, in that development of the opposition, in, which is what we’re doing in many cases when these organizations are created.
But these guys, that was unheard of when she came into office. And when the business community sees her doing that, and doing that every bit as much as she’s going to the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce, or meeting with a business group, or meeting with an industry organization, and she sees that happening—or they see that happening, and then they’re going, well, I don’t know, this person—the last guy didn’t do all that kind of stuff. Then this person is a woman, and she’s only five feet tall, so she must not be—she doesn’t look like a business person… So I really think that was big part of it. Plus she wasn’t going to be bullied by anybody. And some of these guys, it’s the—I don’t know, it comes with the testosterone or something. But some guys would try and bully her, she didn’t respond well to that. I mean, I’m six feet tall and weigh 240 pounds, and boy she could look up at me and just chew me out and I’d be sweating bullets as I, as I start to make my, when I start backing up. When she decided she wanted to tear into somebody she could do a good job of it. But, [she] was a wonderful woman.

RK: Did you also have to appear before City Council frequently?

BH: Very often, yeah.

RK: And were ordinances changed that affected your departments?

BH: Well I think I mentioned the zoning code, a complete rewrite of the zoning code, a complete rewrite of the subdivision code. A number—we put in the first water conservation ordinance that the mayor started, I was going to say “harping on”, but she started, she raised it as an issue about the first day that she was in office. She wanted a water conservation code for the, the City of Tampa. So we, we put that into, into effect and that was, interestingly enough was quite a controversial issue with the—when you, when you start restricting the, the type of fixtures for instance that can be installed. At the time, most toilets were 3.5 gallons a flush. Our new code called for 1.6 gallons per flush. Well, what do you—what’s the guy at the plumbing supplier do with all his three and half stuff, what’s the plumber do with all their 1.6? What about the plumber that doesn’t think the 1.6 works, because they tried it back in 1951, and it didn’t work and so…. We had a bunch of plumbers upset with us, and a bunch of—some, and we worked through all of those issues.

But that was a significant, that was a significant change. And the, and the precursor to what we see now in the, in the city and across the nation, the way water conservation requirements. I put through the first historic preservation ordinance in the, in the history of the city and established the first landmarks, city designated landmarks in the city’s history.

RK: Do you know what motivated that? Was that the mayor or was it certain groups?

BH: Well there was, there were people that were interested for quite some time. Now [the] mayor as you know was on City Council, was the Chair of City Council. And, and was quite aware, and was a member of Tampa Preservation Incorporated, which is the,
the organization, the local organization that was most involved in promoting preservation of the, of our significant historic buildings. They—she was a member of that so she had an awareness and a sensitivity to it coming into office and, and certainly there were others in the community that were, that were interested in pushing that. She saw it as something of, of value that warranted some of the effort that she put into it.

RK: Were you involved with the controversy of the, with the Lykes family and the two buildings?

BH: That was occurring just as I came in and, and she came in. And it was really dealt more with in legal. It was a real, that was a real ugly situation. And went on during, gosh I think the entire administration. It was not settled until after Mayor Freedman was out of office. It was actually settled during the early parts of the Greco administration. It was really bizarre law there that—and there was a settlement in that case that was, that restricted—like a, like you would settle a suit. So you had an agreement to settle a suit. There was an agreement to settle this thing. Part of what that agreement did, and actually does, it’s still in affect, is restrict what the City Government of Tampa can and cannot do, and must do with regard to historic preservation! Right down to the structure of the organization. Well, I don’t know, I’m no damn lawyer, but it seems to me that you can’t restrict what a—all those guys are gone now! That you can’t, by agreement, put confines on the administration of government by virtue of an agreement. I don’t know, that’s just—I questioned it, at the, [laughs] from the get go. But hell, everything’s still out there, Bob.

RK: In your capacity as head of the different departments, you dealt with many business leaders, I would guess.

BH: Oh yeah.

RK: Can you give me your impression of who were the dominant business leaders in Tampa during these years?

BH: That’s a, that’s a very good question. And what’s interesting is that Mayor Freedman came into office at about the time that the existence of major, really major business players in Tampa was kind of going away. Now, there was a time before deregulation when the local president of General Telephone, the precursor to our current, I think it’s Verizon or something—but before deregulation, and then following deregulation, there was this whole, this whole busting up of the telephone companies. But the head of General Telephone was a major player in the community. I mean a major influential person in the community. That, and the last one of those was a guy named Fred Leary.

There was a time when banks were predominantly local, and two or three bankers would have great influence because of their longstanding place in the community. Well the banks started going national, they started getting bought and merged, and became more nationalized, based out of Charlotte or New York or someplace external to Tampa. So, I
mean, local bankers were not what they used to be. And frequently, if we were dealing with one, in six months or a year, they were gone. Didn’t used to be that way.

The law firms, similarly, there was a time when there were a couple of big law firms in town and their, and their, principals, their managing partners were very, very influential people in, in local government, local business. Well, those—they get absorbed, they get bought, they—different, it was a rather different time.

But with all of that said, Ken Goode, who was the head of Tampa Palms Development Corporation at the time, was certainly a person that, that had the mayor’s ear. The person who was the publisher of the Tampa Tribune had a man named Doyle Harvill at the time, carried some significant influence in the community. A couple of the developers, most notably probably Dick Beard, who was head of the Paragon Group, was a person with some significant influence, and in the community. And I say that—I keep saying within the community. These are people that could get things done, and keep and—it’s also significant [because] these are people who can keep things from happening. Influence on the government, I don’t know.

I don’t know what it was like in the prior administrations, because I was not as close to the mayors. I was not in a position at the level, I don’t think that we got it on tape, but in the last year and a half of the mayor’s administration, I was the Director of Finance. And in the last, probably four, five months of her administration, the Chief of Staff had left, and, and I had that position as well. So, throughout the entirety of the mayor’s administration I was very close to her as we went further and further towards the latter part of her administration, [and] I got closer and closer. But I never saw any of those folks having—there was not a kitchen cabinet to this mayor. I don’t know if there was to other mayors, I don’t know if there was a group of people that, that pulled strings of those mayors or not, I don’t know. I know that, that weren’t any with this one. And that might be one of the reasons that, an additional reason why, why some of these guys didn’t feel like she was as business friendly, or whatever—that she was not, she was not—she wasn’t going to be intimidated, and she wasn’t—she was going to give everybody a fair hearing. She was going to listen to a whole lot of different sides before she made a decision.

RK: Were you involved with the controversy over impact fees?

BH: Oh yeah. The, impact fees were—it’s, it’s an interesting, very interesting sort of, phenomenon. We, gosh I guess it was during this, Mayor Freedman’s administration that the first impact fees were put into effect for transportation, and then the first connection and capacity fees for water and sewer.

The newspaper loved them, the media loved them, the planning commission, and in Tampa, there is, what is allegedly an independent planning commission that is responsible for the ultimate submittal development of the comprehensive plan that’s applicable to the City of Tampa, Hillsborough County, Temple Terrace, [and] Plant City. The planning commission loved impact fees, and by and large, people liked impact fees.
The citizens liked impact fees. That’s a very, a very debatable matter as to whether or not they’re appropriate, whether or not they are fair, rational; and I understand both sides of the, of the, of the issue. And everybody’s got their own opinion.

But we, we had some; they were put into place, they were obviously opposed by most of the folks in the development community. But ours tended to be lower than anybody else’s. We were a lot lower than Hillsborough County, and while Pasco County, which was experiencing some of the same rapid growth that we were going through in Hillsborough County, unincorporated Hillsborough was going through—did not have them initially in the, in the mayor’s administration. Some of the development communities complained to me, well, we’re going to go to Pasco County and build in Pasco. Well, Pasco got behind the curve on, on trying to manage its growth, put in impact fees that were twice what ours were and then you know, we had a few boys crawling back to Hillsborough and the City of Tampa to do some work where we were.

RK: What, can you again tell me please the position you took after your initial position with the administration?

BH: I was the Director of Finance which is a, it’s a charter position; the Chief Financial Officer for the city government. The organization includes general accounting; accounting for all funds; receipt of all funds received by the city government; a budgeting of all money; there’s a requirement for a, an annual budget that’s required to be crafted by the mayor [and] submitted to Council for their review comment, [and] ultimately has to be passed.

Within, before any funds can be spent in the, in the fiscal year to which it is applicable, I’m sure you recall some of the problems that existed at the federal government level, because they have a similar requirement when a budget didn’t get passed. And part of the federal government ended up having to take a holiday because it wasn’t legal to pay bills. Well, fortunately we never got into that, but we had, we were responsible for crafting a budget.

We had another organization that was responsible for the collection on all of the accounting for our utility accounts, which are rather odd; this is called an “enterprise fund.” An enterprise fund is no, is no different than anything else in the city government except that all of the money that comes in and goes out has to be tied to that service. We had an enterprise fund for water, for sewer, for sanitation, and for parking. And the reason that’s done is because this is a fee-for-service business. You buy water from the City of Tampa, you pay a water bill. All of the money that you pay has to be used on water related services; we can’t use it for something else. All of the money that you pay for sewer has to be used for sewer related services. And consequently you have to have separate accounting systems for each of those. We had it for those, those four, and that was a separate part of the organization.

[End Tape 1, Side A]
RK: ...Director of Finance.

BH: Yeah. And what was more, the most significant—there were two, two responsibilities that were not by charter that were really the most, the most important aspects of, of the Finance Director’s position. That is the person that the mayor goes to for advice with regard to the allocation of city money. So if there is a, there’s a question about what—and, and it’s, at the time that I was there the budget was almost half a billion dollars, it was almost 500 million dollars a year.

Before the mayor would spend something or something came up, really during the course of the fiscal year, the first person she’s going to talk to is the Finance Director. Is this something that we should spend money, move money; how can we do this? Is this something—how, how can we make something happen here? And she, and that financial advisor function became one of the most responsible aspects of that job, and that’s rather longstanding. That was the same under the, under Mayor Poe, and under Mayor Martinez. They both looked to their Finance Director for—to serve in that role.

And the second is that it was irrespective of the financial implications, the Finance Director traditionally—[it] was that way under Mayor Poe, that way under, under Mayor Martinez, and that way under, under Mayor Freedman—was, if not the top advisor to the mayor on matters financial or otherwise, was the number two person. And that’s—those were really the two most important elements. But, but keeping tabs of the money, and we were very—he] city’s got a very good history in terms of its financial accountability and responsibility. During the two, I had two audits—outside audits when I was there—both of those were unqualified. Our budget, and both of the budget’s middle periods that we had, we received the governmental and finance officer’s association award for what a wonderful document our budget was. So that’s kind of the gold standard when it comes to financial accountability and the presentation of financial data.

RK: During the 1970s especially and into the ‘80s there was a lot of talk about the fiscal problems of America’s cities, and they usually were focusing about some of the Northeast and Midwestern cities that were losing people, losing businesses and so on. When looking at the City of Tampa, when you headed the finance department, would you say that—I know that we weren’t in crisis certainly—was it a tough time for the budget in terms of having a difficult time raising the needed resources to provide services to the population?

BH: Yeah. It was, we had to be very cautious, very prudent. There’s a balancing act between the demands of government and the rational raising of resources by government. Well, you know, folks go, gee, you got a problem? No problem, just raise taxes. Well, it ain’t quite that simple. And it’s not that smart. Raising taxes is obviously going to be unpopular with a whole lot of folks, most folks. It, it adversely—your tax situation, the tax implications have, have a significant—significant that decision making of types of
organizations that you would like to attract to provide jobs in the community, they’re certainly looking at what it’s going to cost to do business in this area, what our, what’s our tax going to be. So it’s significant to that. But at the same time, you’ve got to provide fire protection and police protection; you’ve got to provide roads and sidewalks and streetlights and all of the other services of government.

We had, we had some debt that we were still carrying from a new performing arts center and a decision had to be made with regard to whether or not we were going to build a convention center, and that decision was made that we would build that convention center. It was proven to be very successful, so….

Then part of the catalyst to the redevelopment of, of downtown, that decision was made by Mayor Freedman. So we looked at what we could do, what we, what we couldn’t do, and how we would pay for it. [The] mayor was very, very good about not wanting to leave the next person in office bankrupt and, and good about paying, paying the freight while she was in office. Making sure that she didn’t place the city in a position that was, that was going to be difficult not only in her time, but in, in the, in the next, in the future for people who came after her.

It’s interesting that what, what occurs after a mayor leaves office is more indicative of what they did than what occurs while they’re in office. Because so much of what they do, if, if they’re forward sighted, if they’re looking at the future, it won’t come to full fruition until after they’re gone. The reverse is also true. What they don’t do, and some of the things they do which are un-good, the, the negative repercussions won’t show up until they leave office.

RK: You mentioned the Convention Center and how it’s been relatively successful in recent years. Initially there was a problem because there was no hotel…

BH: Yes.

RK: …built along with the Convention Center.

BH: Right.

RK: And I went to a City Council meeting where you spoke on behalf of the administration trying to encourage City Council to approve a plan for a hotel…

BH: Right.

RK: …that they did not go along with.

BH: Right.

RK: Can you tell us that story?
BH: Wow, that one’s painful! That one hurts, Bob. That was the only time—and I worked for the city, I worked for the administrations, five different mayors; [a] total of something over twenty-six years that I worked for the city. That is the only matter that I ever advocated in front of City Council that was denied. The only one. And one of the most significant, I mean of, of the matters that I personally took to City Council.

We were attempting to get approval by the city administration to issue bonds that would allow a Convention Center hotel to be built. The city would be backing them. The, obviously the hotel would be backing it. It would privately operated and managed under the auspices of a not-for-profit organization. The City of Tampa couldn’t own it directly, that’s prohibited under our charter for us to own a, an investment of that type. But we could establish a not-for-profit organization; the not-for-profit would be required to hire a professional management organization. We had placed, put all of that in place. And then on that deal we lost that one by a four to three vote.

And it was, it was one of those times when I, the mistake that I made, and I, I was the person that was responsible for that failing to go through—that was my fault. And, and I deviated from a cardinal principle of public administration that had served me well and it’s the only time, why, why I chose that one time I could—I’ll tell you why—to deviate from it. Which is, that cardinal principle is, forget about the substance, concentrate on the flaw. Now, what do I mean by that really? [What] I mean is that, that it’s an exaggeration of the product is less important than the marketing. But the fact of the matter is, the product is less important than the marketing. You’ve got a great product; I don’t care if it’s a car, a widget, a mousetrap. If you don’t market it well, you’re going to go bankrupt. On the other hand, if you have a rather mediocre product but you market it, you’ve got the best sales organization in the history of the free world, [there is a] pretty good chance that you’re going to make some money, you’re going to be successful with it.

That was a 127 million dollar deal. And I was the Director of Finance. And I was incredibly wrapped up in ensuring that it would be a good deal. That it would be a sound financial decision to move forward. And I left mistakably, I left the marketing, the getting that sold through City Council to some other folks in the community. Not, not even city staff; and it was people, it was people that we thought were, could be effective in dealing with our City Council, instead of being personally, taking charge of that and making sure that. When I walked into that meeting I counted six votes. I got three, so that’s how far off I was.

And, and the only part that kind of makes you feel good is that it was an incredibly prudent, would have been an incredibly prudent financial decision, a part of the city. A hotel was ultimately built, it was 700 rooms instead of the 900 rooms plus that we had envisioned, and now the 700 room hotel is not big enough. They should have built it bigger. It’s operated by the same flag that we were going to put on it. We, Marriott was the flag that we were going to put on it, and it, it’s the most profitable hotel in the history of the Marriot organization, and has been from virtually the day that it opened its doors.
And all of that money would have been neared to the benefit of the tax payers of the city government, if Mayor Freedman’s hotel proposal had been approved.

RK: You have a theory why a few Council people voted against it?

BH: I know exactly why some of them did. We were out politicked, we were outsold. We were out politicked on that one.

RK: You don’t want to elaborate?

BH: Well, no, you know, some of it would—some of it might be statute of limitations for some of these poor bastards might not have run out by now, so….

RK: Well let me just say that some people have speculated that the incoming administration—I don’t think Mayor Greco was elected yet…

BH: Yeah, yeah.

RK: …but at least he was going to take office, I don’t remember the timing. The new administration did not support that.

BH: That was, that was one of the votes I believe. You know, what I tell you, I know exactly well that’s a little bit. That’s a little more—I can’t sit here and swear that I know exactly—but yeah, I, after I lost that damn vote, then I start working the streets real hard to find out exactly what happened with every single, single one of these no-votes.

One of them was just a guy that wasn’t—made a mistake. He just—he looked at it, evaluated it from the perspective of being a Republican, which I am by the way—he’s a CPA, which I am not, and an financial advisor. So he fancied himself pretty good at finance and thought it was a bad deal financially. Gee, I must have screwed up on that in not selling him on how what a good deal it was. But anyway, he voted on it, he—we weren’t out politicked on him, we were, he just didn’t believe in it. Didn’t think it was the right, smart, good, financial decision.

One of them was, I believe was clearly influenced by, by Mayor Greco; and if Mayor Greco had looked at it as hard as—if he would have been fully, and that—see, that’s another screw up. I should have been briefing him. I should have been briefing this guy who’s clearly the front runner, telling him what it was so that we could have gotten his support. That was—and keep in mind any one of these folks, all I needed was one more vote. But there was one person I went, one of them, one of them somebody got to them on a, on a—in fact two of them. Somebody got to them. They offered them something. You vote against this, and you’re going to get something else. If not for them directly, but indirectly.

RK: And you didn’t see that type of wheeling-and-dealing too often during your administration? This is kind of an exception to the norm?
BH: That’s the, that’s the only time that I’m aware of. That’s the only time. That was, big money and…anyhow….

RK: I wanted to ask you about a program the mayor initiated that has received a lot of attention, generally positive attention in Tampa, and I think to some extent, nationwide. And that was the Mayor’s Challenge Fund.

BH: Yeah.

RK: And I think you were involved with that prior to your being Director of Finance.

BH: Right.

RK: Can you tell us a little bit about that program?

BH: Yeah! The mayor decided that she wanted to make housing a priority of her administration. One of the things that she did was to, she wanted to survey, what is the condition? Let’s take stock of our housing in Tampa. What’s the condition of it? Well we didn’t have a lot of money to hire a consultant to go out and survey the 128,000 residential units that existed in the City of Tampa. But, gee, sitting over at the Hyatt having a couple of martinis one night. I’m talking to the head of planning, and I go, so what if we got the fire department? These are bright guys, these are smart people, they’re out in the community. They do this thing that’s called “area familiarization”, where they will take their vehicles out to make sure that their vehicle can get down a street or something—a limb needs to be trimmed, or a street sign needs to be relocated. They can turn that in; but checking addresses to make sure that they know their areas. What if we, instead of hiring a consultant and a big team to do it, we get, we hire a consultant to train these guys how to do it? Then we have the fire department go out and survey the exteriors of our, of our housing stock. Which we did. And they did a magnificent job of it. And it was good for them, it—and it was, we saved, saved a couple hundred thousand bucks.

Well, came in, and I should have prefaced my entire diatribe on this tape, let’s say this is, we’re talking ten years ago, maybe longer. That was longer, that was at the very beginning of her administration, geez over 15 years ago. But if I remember correctly, our substandard rate was somewhere around 40%. It might have been 42%, might have been 38%, but it was right around 40% of the residential units in Tampa had something, not necessarily falling down bad; I’m not talking about sewage running in the front yard, but some significant signs of decay, deterioration was like 40%.

So the mayor looks at what money we have, mostly federal money, not very much, about a few million bucks; three, four, five million bucks—more closer to three. [She] goes, how can we leverage that? How can we take that money and do more with it than what we could? The city had been doing 30, 35 units of housing rehabilitation and that was the extent of what the city could afford to do with the money that it had available. She goes,
let’s get the banks involved. Well, city had never gotten the banks involved in anything like—we didn’t know how to get the banks involved.

Well before I know anything, she’s got three or four bankers up in her office. And she calls me up and wants to get me and the head of the housing organization at the time, Fernando Noriega, a fellow that worked for me. I called Fernando and go, you know the mayor’s got a bunch of folks up in her office, she wants to come and talk to us about this, about this loan thing. [And] get the banks involved in housing, what are we going to do? We never sat down. And then about fifteen—no I don’t think it was fifteen minutes—I go, well what are we going to ask them for? And I’m going, I want lower interest rates. I want them to lower the interest rate and make some money available for rehabilitation, new construction. Because at the time, rates were quite high. [Inaudible] rates were 12, 13%, I mean that doesn’t—and we’re starting to come down, but we’re still in double digits. I go, I want them, I want—what’s reasonable? How about two hundred—two percent? Two percent what they, below what they would do normally. OK…???. I didn’t know that their margin might not even be two percent.

And then Fernando’s going, well, on rehab loans it’s not going to be that high, let’s ask them for one and a half percent lower on rehab. That’s fine. And I want, what else do we need Fernando? He goes, well, we need them to relax their underwriting a little bit. They need to lighten up, let some loans that they wouldn’t normally let. I go, OK. Well, then, then let’s go for extended terms. If they’re typically making a, a fifteen year loan, and ten year loan on a housing rehab, let’s ask them to go—if they’re at 10, then let’s ask them to go to 15; if they’re currently at 15, let’s ask them to go to 20. So we went, OK, we’re going to get extended terms on the loans, we’re going to get a lower rate; we’re going to get some relaxed underwriting; and oh, let’s get them to eat the closing costs. No closing costs on this stuff. Yeah, OK other than hard costs. I mean, OK, well, hard costs. You’ve got to have an appraisal, we’ll do that—OK, you’ve got to pay for the appraisal; you’ve got to have title insurance, well let’s look, got to look at that.

And then Fernando, said, now what are we going to give in return? What can we do for them? I go, well, I don’t know, what do you think? Fernando was the one who suggested, let’s guarantee the toughest part of the loan, the time when it is most likely to go into delinquency or default is in the first five years. Let’s guarantee the loan during the first five years. The City of Tampa—use that three million dollars that we’ve got, and use that to guarantee the loans. Five year guarantee. So, lower rates, extended terms, more relaxed underwriting, no closing costs, and you get a five year guarantee on it.

We never sat down, we walked up to the mayor’s office, and that’s what we told these bankers. We were, we were going after, we figured three—because that’s, that’s trying to get another three or four million dollars. We got six million bucks that day. By the time we announced that program, we had thirteen and a half million. And the bankers loved it. We—in addition, I’m sorry, you know it’s been a while—but in addition to the five year guarantee, we also offered to do the initial processing of the loan by our people. Now we weren’t—and we had, I think it
was twelve banks, everybody coughing up a million, and Bank of America to big the big cheese came up with 1.5. They were NCNB at the time. We weren’t smart enough to think about using a lead bank. I mean, I didn’t even know what the hell a lead bank was, where all of these, all this money could be funneled into one bank from all these other participating banks, and then we would deal with a single set of paperwork, a single process, a single procedure, single set of underwriting criteria, that we’d get them all to agree on. We weren’t, didn’t know, we didn’t know what the hell we were doing. So we, ended up, our staff ended up learning the procedures of all, I want to say it was twelve—might have been more than that. Because we had some of the real small banks that would put in a couple of hundred, 250,000 bucks for that. We ended up with our guys learning the procedures of all of these banks to originate loans. Within two or three years, because we had greater stability on our staff than some of the banks did, some of our folks were teaching their new employees how to underwrite, how to, how to process loans.

From its inception we had virtually no delinquencies or defaults. Part of what we did in the course of, because we were processing the loans, we had a great opportunity to do quite a lot of housing counseling. Of dealing with people and explaining to them that you know, maybe you ain’t going to have enough money to pay your medical bill, you might not be able to pay your water bill or you light bill; your lights might get turned off; your water might get turned off. If it happens, call us up, we’ve got some other things where we might can help you there. But let me tell you what you—you might not be able to pay the rent-to-own television payment that’s due, which you ought not have to begin with. You might not be able to make your car payment. But let me tell you what you’re going to make. You’re going to make your freakin’ house payment. That’s what you’re going to make. And if it’s something else, you know—you go to the doctor, you might not be able to pay the doctor. You go to the doctor, but you make your house payment.

Because we could show them—you cannot, with, with the deals that we were getting, these, these folks could not rent a property for what they were paying to buy it, to own a place. It was initially targeted solely towards rehabilitation. Because getting back to our survey that showed this significant rate of deterioration of our existing housing stock; we’re trying to fix what we already have. There is value, there is wealth out there in the form of existing housing, but it’s substandard. In some cases, seriously so. So let’s fix it and let’s use the money to fix stuff. Well, then we—it started branching—it just took off and went gangbusters from there. Not without a whole lot—we had lots of problems. Learning the processes were, was a significant learning curve for our folks. We had, we had some problems with our friends at the federal government that were going, wait, you can’t use this money for people unless they’re at or below 80% of the median income, in some cases 60% to guarantee the loans. Well we had people, we would go as high as 150% of the median income, which in, in some cases for a family of three, it could be 45,000 dollars. But these folks could not qualify in a, in a—if they’ve got a couple of kids, and they’re making 40 grand a year, they’re not going to qualify for a loan except through some program like this.
But we could get, part of it also was stabilizing our neighborhoods, where we would get a family of, that’s making 40, 45,000 bucks. And instead of them moving up to North Tampa to Lutz or someplace out in the, out in the sticks, we can put them into a, an abandoned, derelict home, rehabilitate that home, and start to stabilize that area. So it was a—it, it went gangbusters. We went from thirty-four units, thirty-eight units that were done in the year immediately prior to Mayor Freedman being there to, of all sorts—we, we started branching off from there. By the end of the mayor’s administration we were doing fourteen, fifteen hundred units of, of residential housing.

Now, we got into things like adult congregate living facility for low-income people. Some assisted living; multi-family rehab; new construction demolition and reconstruction, where the house really isn’t worth, can’t be fixed. And in the process of doing that, we, we got into all sorts of other stuff that was just, we, because we were working in older sections of town, where there had in the past been some significant animus between the preservation community and the rehabilitation people. The rehab people would come in and they’d go, oh, we’ve got an old wood frame house here, let’s put, let’s put fake stone stucco on it, because they won’t ever have to maintain that or paint it. And then let’s put aluminum soffet and fascia on the thing and that will be good. And well, they ended up looking pretty much out of character with the community. I mean it just didn’t look good. There was a whole new sensitivity that developed between, between the city folks and the Tampa Preservation Incorporated people. We learned from each other; we started doing rehabilitation that was historically correct.

RK: Was that mainly in Tampa Heights or a different neighborhood?

BH: It was all over. Tampa Heights and Ybor City, Seminole Heights, West Tampa; any place that there was a significant stock of, of historic homes. But then it got to the point that if it were a home that, that had character—our folks started developing an appreciation for the, for the aesthetics. Understandably, a number of our employees had dealt in some of the very worst conditions. They were, they were concerned about making sure that when the, when, when the family walks in that the floor doesn’t cave in. That, that the water isn’t leaking in the toilet constantly. That you can’t put a—I mean some of, they used to say that if the, if the termites quit holding hands, the walls would fall down. And some of the homes were in serious, serious disrepair. But they were most concerned—they would have, some one would have put of a Quonset hut if that would give somebody as a standard, decent place to live. Well, and that’s important.

But we started figuring out that we can integrate some attention to aesthetics, that without sacrificing that commitment to providing a decent place to live. And, and we ended up working with these folks, and that became the springboard that, getting Tampa Preservation Incorporated and a number of other not-for-profit organizations, doing work in the community, which gave us kind of another double-whammy on the savings. Because now instead of dealing exclusively with for profit organizations, we would be dealing with not-for-profit organizations. That got some tax breaks, did not have to generate a return to their stockholders, and consequently could create a less expensive product. Now we’ve got less expensive construction costs, coupled with less expensive
financing, and, and the ability for people who could not otherwise qualify for a loan to get into, into—to get a loan, for a house that’s going to cost less, and you start layering that sort of stuff on top of one another, and you end up with making some truly affordable housing, affordable to people that never would have, would have been able to see that before.

And it had impact beyond the work that we did. We would do work on, very often, the homes were, that we were targeting, would be the worst house on that block face. You know, that’s the one that we can, we can—but then you see the guy next door and the person over here, and they see this house, the worst one’s going, you know we’re starting to make them look bad. And all of a sudden you see this guy starting to clean up, getting the junk car out of the front yard, painting their place, putting a new roof on it—that we’re doing nothing on. And that wasn’t, that wasn’t something that was sometimes, that was the norm. That wasn’t the, oh gee, every now and then we see this happen. No, damn near all the time we would see that happen.

That was, of everything that I ever did in the city, that was the most fun, the most personally rewarding. And the stuff that generated the greatest, the folks would write letters that would tear your heart out. That, that we would get, the mayor would get, that would just talk about, I never in my life thought that we could have anything so magnificent as this. And it would be something that you and I would find quite simple. But for somebody who never in their life thought that they would be able to own a home, we started another program where we were getting folks out of public housing into homeownership. Which is—at the time, it’s, it’s—some other folks have done that of late and have been successful. It’s, there are some challenges associated with that. But not going from subsidized rental housing to unsubsidized rental housing in some apartment complex; but going directly from subsidized public housing to a homeownership opportunity, that’s a big fell swoop and we made it work in some places.

RK: You stayed with the city during the next administration of Mayor Dick Greco. Did that program continue?

BH: I did not stay initially. I left for about six months and then I was asked to come back as the Interim Director of the Tampa Museum of Art under Mayor Greco. And I did that; I agreed to accept that on a short-term basis mostly so that I could tell my friends when they were drinking, when they’d go, what are you doing now, Harrell? I’m going, well, I’m a damn art museum director, you miserable creep.

There was a question among some of the board members whose supportive directors had some say in, in addition to the mayor. And there was a question among some of which, whether or not Bob Harrell had ever set foot in the Tampa Museum of Art. And then one of the other board members who I know quite well said, yeah, I’m sure he was there for a cocktail party at some point. And they were—she was absolutely right. But anyhow, I did that but…
Yeah, the program did stay, and Mayor, Mayor Greco did a, a—took housing to some additional directions. And that’s a whole other story.

But that was—and you’re not asking, asking about this except, but I’m going to tell you about two other things that were neat as hell that, that this mayor…

[End Tape 1, Side B]

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[Tape 2, Side B]

RK: This is the second tape in an interview with Mr. Bob Harrell on January 10, 2006. You were supposed to—you were about to tell us about a…

BH: Couple of programs that, that were started under, under Mayor Freedman. One of them was a program called “Paint Your Heart Out, Tampa.” One of my—the head of Code Enforcement, he worked for me, [had] gone to a convention and saw a tape and talked to the person who had started this program called, “Paint Your Heart Out Pittsburgh”—I think it was where it was—“Paint Your Heart Out Pittsburgh.” And he came back all enthusiastic about this, it was a program that was designed to, to paint the homes of low income, elderly people; it was all done in a single day, and they’d paint—I don’t know—I think probably then Pittsburgh Paint was supporting it, and they had gotten some money from the, from the city and, and it was a great thing. And he wanted me to see this tape, and well I go, OK, that sounds—doesn’t make my, doesn’t, doesn’t get me all fired up. And he keeps bugging me to look at this VHS tape. And I kept cutting it off, and I finall y watched this damn tape, and I just became a believer. This just, thing, just looked neat as hell. Well, and I take the thing to Bob Buckhorn, [the] Mayor’s assistant. And I start bugging him to look at it, and he goes, nah, I, that’s sounds that—that doesn’t sound like anything great, blah, blah, blah, blah. I keep bugging him until he looks at it, then he becomes a believer. And then the two of us take it to Mayor Freedman, and she becomes a believer, and she goes, alright.

And then Buckhorn says, we need to get somebody on the outside to run point on it. We’ll be supportive, but let’s, let’s try to avoid putting city money and a lot of city—we’ll be a sponsor but let’s…we were still tight for cash. And seeing, trying to find, figure out—long story short, he comes over with Doug Labelle, who was the president at the time of the Builders Association of Greater Tampa. We go to Doug, get—Doug signs right on; I didn’t know him from dog-nothing. The guy was just the perfect, perfect person for it. He agreed to take on the chairmanship of the thing, so long as he could have a co-chair that—of his choosing. And as long as he could fire volunteers. I’d never had a guy that I had approached that said, I want to be able to fire volunteers. I go, sure OK, you’re going to be the chair. He goes well, I’ve had some people that didn’t want—if I’ve got a volunteer that I can’t work with I’m going to get rid of them. Doug was a business person, damn good. He gets a guy named Tom Willis, and they co-chaired this thing, and it became—my gosh, every person that we took it to signed on immediately. And it wasn’t like you—[we] just, you talked to them. We went to a paint manufacturer, you
know a local paint manufacturer and said you know, could we get you to talk to... He goes, yeah in fact, how many houses do you think you’ll be doing? [We reply,] we could be doing 30. He goes, I’ll give you the paint. Holy moly—I said, he gave us paint for 30 freaking houses! And he goes, I got this person I want to talk to, she’s a—she’s a design professional that does exterior paint selection, and what we’ll do, we’ll go out and talk to these folks so that—we didn’t want to white wash the town—so we’ll give them a selection of colors, and we’ll sit down with each one of them and come up with some—so that somebody doesn’t do a, let’s not do purple and orange, let’s do some color combinations that look nice. They went to every house.

We, we ended up—we’re up to 30, now we have to come up with teams of volunteers to paint them, and select a date. We go to Tampa Homeowners, an Association of Neighborhoods. Remember all those little organizations, little neighborhood organizations…

RK: Yeah.

BH: …this mayor got going? And got, and empowered because they were listening to—the city was listening to them? Well they formed their own association now, the big umbrella group. We go to them, that we want the volunteers from you guys. The head of THAN, a woman named Margaret Vizzi, she signs on right off, yeah, absolutely, count on it. So now we’ve got—we’re going to work on 30 houses, we’ve got the paint, we’ve got a bunch of volunteers, we’ve got—well, it got—we had….As we started this, the word started to get out on this.

The president of the local Chase Bank, unfortunately I can’t remember [his name], he calls up Doug and he volunteers to be the fundraiser! I never—and Doug was saying the same thing—nobody volunteers to be a fundraiser for anything! This guy calls up, I’d like to be—because you’re going to need some money for incidentals and some other stuff. I go well, we’re going to need to—let’s set a target for 50,000 bucks. The first year, we then, the volunteers start coming out of the woodwork.

We ended up adding another ten houses—we went from 30 to 40, then from 40 to 50, from 50 to 60, and we go, geez, now we’re, our logistics are starting to get tough, to try and do 60 houses. One of the banks came in, they wanted a house. I can’t remember the bank, it was, but I said, I’m sorry, 60 houses is the limit, that’s it. They go, we’ll donate 10,000 dollars if you’ll let us paint a house. They’ll donate ten grand if you’ll—which tells you something about how this community is responding to this. And I go, shit! What do we do now? Well I got a team of employees in my department that had, that were going to paint a house. And I call up, it was Nick D’Andrea and John Barrios, were the captain and co-captain. Nick was the head of the construction, construction service center. Nick? I got good news for you buddy, you know that Saturday in May that we’re going to, going to paint a house? Your boys are home free, you can head out, you know, don’t have to go. And I explained the situation to him, and he and John look at me like I have just popped their balloon and licked the red stripe off of their candy cane! I’m going, no guys, you don’t understand, see you’re not going to have to get up at six
o'clock on a Saturday and work until five pm. You can go to the beach! It could be a nice
day, I’m sure. They left. Didn’t say much. Came back the next day, and said, we’ve found
a house that, there’s this old lady that needs... we’ll provide the paint. We just want to be
a part of this. You don’t have to do nothing. We just want to be a part of it. I go—
[expletive], I wanted to cry. I go yeah, I think we can work that in. We’ll pay for our
own—because everybody got t-shirts you know, [they said] we’ll pay for our own t-shirt.
We did 61 houses that year. And the next year I think we did 90; the year after that we
did 100, and it’s still going up.

RK: And was there another program you wanted to mention?

BH: Yeah, that one—in, in Code Enforcement one of the things that we, that we’ve found
that the neighborhoods were very, very interested in was in cleaning up—the
neighborhood organizations were interested in cleaning up their neighborhoods. We had,
we had our band of Code Enforcement [inaudible]. Something that I had done years
before in a, in a county neighborhood where I lived, was that our civic association would
send a very un-intimidating letter, when we, as a civic association would see that
somebody’s got a car, a junk car, or their grass is overgrown, or their house needs to be
painted and go, you know, Dear Mr. Shmuckmier, and we’ve noted that this situation
exists at your place, and you know this is our neighborhood, and, and we love it, and I
know you care about it also, and, and we’d really appreciate it if you’d address this
because we think that it might be a code violation. Now, you know, we’re not turning you
in or anything, we’re just, we’re your neighbors, and we’d appreciate it if you would take
a look at it and see if you agree with us that you know, maybe something could be done
and... thank you very much, and we really appreciate this and yada-hoo-do-bing bang.

When we sent those out in that little—I lived in a little neighborhood that was out in the
county before I had this job. We got something like 70% compliance on the first time that
we sent it out. We’d drive back by. Well, I went to Sulphur Springs, and they were
complaining about Code Enforcement, and I said well, here’s something that we could do
in conjunction with you. We can, at the time it was—we could pull ownership
information, so we could give them a list by address, computer run, this was again, before
the internet and all this being accessible to just about anybody. Give you a list of all of
the places in your neighborhood, and then help you with a little post card, and print those
up for you with your little logo on it. And it’s coming in a very non-threatening fashion.
This isn’t big brother, this isn’t—different people respond to things differently. Some
folks, if they get a letter from the city, they’re going to, oh-my-gosh, the City of Tampa
has—the government—I better get this taken care of right away. A lot of folks, other
folks, will take something from the city and go, oh, they’re sons of bitches. They’ll take
that notice, roll it, smoke it, and say to hell with them. But that same person who doesn’t
have a whole lot of regard for the government, when it’s coming from their neighbor,
then it’s kind of, this is different.

And then they, then start going, well, OK, my neighbors are the folks who are sending
this. This isn’t coming from the government, it’s coming from my neighbors. Sulphur
Springs, on their first, first canvass of the neighborhood, got something like 70%
compliance, 80%—it was just out—and a feeling of—getting back to that word that I hate—of, we’ve been able to make something positive happen in our community. And for many of these organizations, their greatest success was a function not of what they accomplished, but what bad thing they kept from happening. A neighborhood would—oh, somebody’s applying for a license to sell, to open a bar at the fringe of their neighborhood. And they go, we don’t want that bar there. They show up en masse and they are successful in stopping that bad thing from happening. That’s keeping their area from getting worse. But it was damn rare that neighborhood organizations could, had something they could grab a hold of that would make their place better. That their power was coming from doing something as opposed to their power coming from keeping something bad from occurring. It was making something good occur. And, and they just loved it.

That thing took off across the city. And virtually every neighborhood that, that had any sort of Code Enforcement issues, that, that—and it became a galvanizing, a uniting affect when they saw the results that they were generating from it. It was just phenomenal.

In fact, “Paint Your Heart Out”, and that, what that program became known as the “Peer-To-Peer” program was one of three programs that were submitted to the gosh, what’s the organization that gives out the…

RK: National League of Cities, was that it?

BH: No it’s, I’m not—is it the National League of Cities that does the “All American City Award”? When Tampa got the “All American City Award”? In gosh, it must have been the fourth or fifth year of Mayor Freedman’s administration, the first time the city had ever received that. And Florida, no, it’s the national, it was the one that Teddy Roosevelt founded. It’s the, but it’s the most prestigious award that a city can receive is to be designated as an “All American City”, and we got that for the first time under Mayor Freedman, and those were two of the three programs that were submitted to get us into that running. So those were a couple things that were fun to be a part of, that were, were just….

The other thing that this mayor did, [I’m] real proud of is the, is the sports—the Ice Palace. I was heavily involved in that, I was the city’s chief negotiator on the city’s participation. It gets back to her being for fiscal conservatism in that. The, it was a great deal, it was more private money than had ever been put into one of these facilities anywhere in the country. So we’ve got—and it was, it was, I want to say it was almost half of the money was coming from private sources. Then the state was coughing up a big chunk. The, the county was coughing up—we were the last ones in, we put the least amount of money in, we put less money than any city in the nation had put in to get a multi-purpose sports facility. We got it in downtown Tampa, which was catalytic to changing the nature—that we’re seeing now, that we’re seeing now. I mean it’s a long time after, but when we see the residential boom that we’re seeing down and the absence of things like the Aquarium, the Convention Center, the Ice Palace—we knew we wouldn’t. Would we see things happening in the Channel district that we’re seeing now
in the absence of those things that started, I mean it’s, it’s a continuum. You can’t, you can’t give any one mayor credit for it, but by God, Sandy Freedman deserves a big chunk of the credit for what’s happening in downtown Tampa now, that she started in her administration, made happen in her administration, that, that really came to reality.

In addition to us having damn little money in that, for what we got, we also got, we got a lean on the franchise and restriction on how much they could borrow against the franchise to keep them from leaving. That if they leave, we could foreclose on their franchise to pay for any, any money that they owed us. Because we had a long term arrangement with them. We said, we’ll put this money in, but you got to stay here, you can’t go away. Well, we found that some of these folks had blown through some of those agreements, in other places, and they didn’t have any hook to go after to keep them, to make them stay or to, well, we had a hook. It was the only one that the National Hockey League had ever approved as a lean against the franchise. It’s the only one in the history of the league. And that league is the oldest professional league in professional sports. It goes back to the 1800s, NHL does. All this stuff that we learned.

How is it—the National Municipal League, it’s something like that, it’s something like that. I just can’t recall, Bob as to what the, what the name of that, the National Civic League, I believe is the name of it. Sandy would know. National Civic League. Pretty sure.

RK: I should know but I forget.

BH: Yeah. I do too. But that was cool, the Ice Palace.

RK: Was the Sports Authority involved with those negotiations as well?

BH: Not, not really. The Sports Authority is kind of the management arm. And at the time that we did that deal, if I remember correctly, they took possession of it. They owned it, but it was basically a pass through because part of what the Lightning organization; the Lightning is—if you’re listening to this 200 hundred years from now, you might not know what the Lightning—the Lightning was the hockey team….

RK: [Laughs]

BH: …that was involved in this transaction. And part of their, one of their requirements for, for their significant financial participation was that they would manage the facility. Now that’s not—in St. Louis, when, when they were trying to get the Los Angeles team to move from LA to St. Louis, good-gosh it was something like 350 million dollars that they paid to get that franchise there. Jacksonville was in the hundreds of millions to get, to get a professional football team. To me it seemed like insanity. We got ours in for, you know, ten, twelve.

RK: Was that an example of good cooperation, good relationships between the city and the county regarding the hockey?
BH: Oh yeah, yeah. And there, there were a lot of people that were, that were instrumental in getting that. Ed Turanchik was that the County at the time and he was, he thought that that was something that was important to downtown. And to Ed’s credit, a lot of folks that are on the County Commission don’t—I mean, they look at the county map and they automatically exclude the municipalities that, well, excuse me, we are in the county, we do pay county taxes. And, and Ed wasn’t that way. Ed is a good, good man. So he was, he was very important in getting the county’s participation. And he and I spoke with, with some frequency. And the state was obviously important—every piece of that was important.

Any one—get back to this whole business of people’s power coming from things that they can keep from happening. It’s a whole lot easier to stop something than it is to make something happen. And unfortunately some people gravitate to government because they want to stop something from happening. It’s just—and they, and they, their feeling of power is, or their need for power is somehow satisfied when they can stop things, but….

RK: I just have a couple of…

BH: Sure, sure.

RK: …more questions if I could. One, how would you characterize the mayor’s leadership style?

BH: That’s a good question. How would I characterize her leadership style? [Pauses]

I don’t know that I can come up with something that’s very articulate. Let me speak to it, and, and, and—because I can’t, I can’t come up with a category that….

The mayor was very decisive. She would seek input from lots of folks, and was receptive even if it was not solicited. That if I knew something was going on, I, I felt very comfortable going to her and giving her my opinion and my recommendation. I saw, saw that as part of my obligation, that’s my job. Now, that’s not to say she always took my advice or that she agreed with me, or that she, or that she wouldn’t do something 180 degrees different from it. And when that occurred, then it becomes my job—nobody elected Bob Harrell to be anything, they elected Sandy Freedman to be the mayor. So it’s my job to make, to implement the decision that she makes. And, to the best of my ability, to make it successful and prove myself wrong. I go, no Mayor, that’s a very bad idea, we shouldn’t do that. [Mayor’s reply], oh this is what we’re going to do Bob. I’d go, OK Mayor, then that’s what we’re going to do. And then it’s my job to make that successful.

Well, but she was very open to listening. She was very intolerant of, of people failing to execute with, with the zeal that she wanted and expected. And rightfully so in my opinion. She expects it be—when a decision is made, she’s going to expect you to execute it and execute it zealously. That becomes your job. And she didn’t—and if she ever caught a whiff of somebody that was trying to torpedo something that she wanted to
do, then that person was as good as gone, and should be. That to me is a 100% appropriate.

Incredibly fair, incredibly sensitive. Almost to a fault. And I won’t give you any examples there, but she was just, she was a very nice, caring person. I, I don’t know—none of the men that I ever worked for were like that. And it’s, and it’s something that I like a lot. It’s a, that, that she cared a great deal about people. Not an ounce of pretension. None. And, and in her, in her decision making, never once—and I was closer to her in, in just about all of the major decisions that, that were made at, in the city, especially in the last couple of years. I never once knew her to do anything that she didn’t believe to be in the best interest of the citizens of Tampa. It wasn’t, I never once, never said well, this would not be politically smart, so we’re not going to do that. Or, well, these folks have always been, have always treated us poorly, and so we shouldn’t do that, that, to help them. Or, these people have been real good to us, so we need to take care of them and make sure that they’re taken care of. None of that. Just none of it. None of it.

A lot of guts, very courageous—I’m sure you’re, I wasn’t directly involved in it, but her whole exchange with the Krewe of Gasparilla and, and saying that, no I don’t’ think it’s really appropriate for me to surrender the city to you guys under the conditions of your organization. So she didn’t! [laughs]. I thought she should trot out the SWAT team when she did that myself. You know, when these guys come in an go...[makes gun sounds]. [laughs] But anyhow....

She was, she was accessible to the staff; respectful of the staff. And I think had, you have to understand this is tempered with the fact that I loved the woman, I loved the woman. And, and closer to her personally than certainly to any of the, any other mayor—but closer to her personally than most other people in my damn life. So I’m probably not the best person to ask for an unbiased opinion about this damn magnificent lady, so....

RK: And I just have one final question sir. You worked for several administrations, when you look back at the different administrations, how would you characterize the Freedman administration in terms of this short period of Tampa’s history?

BH: [pauses]

RK: In terms of it’s legacy?

BH: That—the most profound change element that I saw, in the office of the mayor that resulted, that came about from her administration was that focus on the common citizen. That didn’t exist previously. That this, this, cultivating the, the citizens, and that by way of the neighborhood organizations, the neighborhood associations, she put into play. A lot of cities hate this comprehensive plan that we are required to submit to the state. And it has to be approved by the state, and it’s, it’s approved in it’s entirety or not, and if it’s not entirely approved, then it’s got to be resubmitted. And it’s a little rather bureaucratic, and time consuming process. She added to that plan, an optional neighborhood element. Nobody had ever done that in the state’s history! Which obligates the city to do certain
things with regards to neighborhoods, neighborhood organizations, how they’re treated, what—I mean, it, it, it makes that a requirement as we move forward in everything else that we do. If it’s in that comprehensive plan, that becomes—that, in terms of gradations, of levels of things—that supersedes the zoning code, as a for instance. That supersedes our land development regulations, our—because—that is at the top of our, of our list of things that we have to abide by. And she saw it as being that important. She had the first neighborhood convention that, that she invites all the neighborhoods to come down, has guest speakers that talk about organizing, things that can be done; how you can be more effective; the head of the Convention Center. And I guess it was the last year of her administration, she declared it by, by a mayoral edict, “the year of the neighborhood.” Hell, it was the only year of any god damn thing that she did during her entire administration! And declared it the “year of the neighborhood.”

But as a legacy, that, that—I need to come up with another word that, for—empowerment—but creating that sense of a people being able to significantly influence their community and their local government that has transcended two administrations. And as I said, it was strengthened under Mayor Greco. I don’t think—hell, they didn’t have a choice. And Dick Greco and Pam Iorio are bright people, and they could look at it and see, this is, this is a, this is a freight train that I can’t stop even if I want to. So let’s make it look like it, you know, [laughs], like it’s something that I really like even if I freaking hate it! And so, that—and Mayor Iorio has taken it and added—I think they’ve added two or three people to that Office of Neighborhood Relations. I don’t know how many organizations are out there—it’s got to be in the, it’s got to be north of 100 that we’ve got out there now, that the city constantly interacts with. And it’s—and it changed, not only did it change how the people, how our folks in, and some of common people, people that never felt like they had much to say about it before, but it changed how the bureaucrats, the especially the middle-management folks looked at their, what they were doing. The transportation people, when they’re talking about, we’re going to, to, to do something, but let’s go talk to the neighborhood about it before we, before we get involved in it.

There was a time, for instance when, when the city would look at, you know, where are the population centers; and where are the schools located; and what’s our current street network; and what’s our current sidewalk network; and we need sidewalks, we don’t have sidewalks between this point and that point, and we’re going to put the sidewalk here because there’s a school here, and there’s a something else there, and we’re doing to go in there and do that. Well, sometimes, for a whole lot of very good reasons, you don’t need a sidewalk some places. Some people don’t want the damn sidewalk there. It happened one, it happened in Palma Ceia, because we were, they were looking at Plant High School, and considering sidewalks that didn’t exist, going to Plant High School. And there’re survey crews out there; and well, the neighborhood organization finds out about this. A whole boat load of them get up in arms because, hell, there’s a neighborhood organization out there that we’ve dealt with, that we damn near created—and now they’re saying, we don’t want the sidewalks there! And, and it was interesting, George Pennington, who, who was still Chief of Staff at the time, he called me in, and said, you know you, and I know that this isn’t your area but you’re going to, you’re going
to be responsible for getting out there and getting the word out that we’re putting in side walks for kids to walk to school. And I did a survey, and no, there hadn’t been a kid walked to Plant High School since 1938, you know? They’ve been driving their BMW’s and their Mercedes, but no, you don’t need that. And it was a very quiet local street network that exists out there. They had no damn reason for it! And at the same time we got, you know, some place in East Tampa, we’ve got people that are begging for sidewalks, and I go, maybe we ought to listen to some of these folks! And it, and it changed that mentality on the part of, of what the citizens looked to for their—from their government, and what, and how the employees who worked for the government responded to the citizenry. And, and in a very, very, very positive way. Very positively.

RK: Thank you very much, I very much appreciate this…

BH: My pleasure.

RK: …you taking all this time.