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Scott Paine oral history interview by Robert Kerstein, August 17, 2005

Scott Paine (Interviewee)

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RK: This is an interview with Professor Scott Paine, at the University of Tampa, on August 17, 2005. Thank you for being with me.

SP: My pleasure.

RK: You served on the Tampa City Council during what period of time?


RK: And during therefore, two mayors?

SP: Right. The last administration for Freedman, and the first term for Greco.

RK: Can you tell us something about your first race for the City Council?

SP: My first race was almost an accident. I had not really been thinking about running for Tampa City Council. I had thought of running for office, but it just wasn’t on the agenda at a particular point in time. And one of my students—I was an adjunct faculty member at USF—and one of my students came in to tell me that Ronnie Mason had just decided to, or just announced that he was running city wide, and the District 7 seat—the North Tampa seat, was open. So the student and I got talking, he was very active in local causes. We got talking about the putative candidates and the rumored candidates, and neither one of us were real excited about either candidate, or any of the candidates that were being talked about. And so, there was this pause in the conversation and I said, well, what would you think if I ran for office? He got all excited, he thought it was a really great idea. So we talked a little bit about what it would mean, and then I went home and talked to my wife, and talked to the kids, and we all just decided this was a good opportunity to take a stab and run. And, perhaps somewhat arrogantly I figured if anybody could put together a campaign to run for City Council in the timeframe that we were dealing with, that I’d probably be able to do it.
So, I talked to some folks, I’d been working with the Democratic Party here and, a little bit statewide for three or four years. So found a few donors to put together the qualifying fee, talked to some people about whether this is a good idea or not, and made the decision to run. Got my stuff in probably the middle of the week of qualifying.

The interesting variation in that race, an interesting question in that race was Melissa Periotoni was also—declared candidate actually by the time I or, I think was a declared candidate by the time I declared, and certainly was a rumored candidate. And she had just run the previous fall against Malcolm Beard, Senator Malcolm Beard, former Hillsborough County Sherriff, a real entrenched politician one would have thought, and she came within four percentage points of beating him.

So she was making this run; the concern was that she was making this run to keep her name in the press and get the free publicity, and she’d turn right around and run against Malcolm Beard [at the] next available opportunity, or for some other seat. That she really wanted a state office, not, not a local office. And she and I actually talked about it, because I had been a supporter of hers in that Malcolm Beard race. And it finally came down to—I asked her if she would commit to serving the whole four years. And she said, no, that she wouldn’t say that. She found words to avoid that. And I told her, then I’m going to run. Because I think we need a council member for four years. So we both got in the race, three other candidates got in the race, Tom Lewis, who was a neighbor of Ronnie Mason’s in Seminole Heights and they just hated each other’s guts. Larry Siegel, who was a former Tampa Police Corporal, former Head of Policeman’s Athletic League, and Mark Lowry who was, who seemed to be the heir apparent—he was an older businessman, kind of looked like the guy that Ronnie Mason was trying to pass the mantle to. They showed up a lot of places together, and I think he was considered the front runner, at least in certain circles from the beginning.

And I just ran a very quiet, grassroots campaign. I had probably a dozen, eighteen volunteers, family, family friends, a few political friends. We knocked on doors with very, very targeted—understood how to do that, understood what kind of voters showed up at municipal elections in March. And so we knocked on doors, followed up with thank you letters for chatting with us. We had a pretty sophisticated operation, all home run. Computer based letters, and generated you know, computer generated letters all done at home. And, and it was all below the radar. I didn’t do any conventional advertising at all. I didn’t have the budget for it, and I didn’t think it was going to matter. I was, I remember reading whoever it was political pundit locally predicting the races and saying I’d probably come in fourth in the field of five. Seemed like a nice guy, but just you know, wasn’t going to make it. And my goal was to come in second. Get about 25% of the vote, come in second, because I was sure if I was in that percentage range, I was sure no one was going to go away with 50% plus. And then we’d be in a runoff. And I was confident—I knew who my voters were, and I was pretty sure whoever I’d come up against would not know who their voters were. And sure enough when, when it was over I was in the low to mid 20%, I was in second place in the primary. And all of a sudden I got attention, who is this guy? And how did he do that? And I didn’t say too much about what I had done.
My opponent was Melissa. And she had polled in the upper, mid to upper 30’s. And she
didn’t well know what to do. There were two [inaudible] but there were two democrats,
two relatively liberal candidates, the two most liberal candidates of the five running in the
race. And I was to the right of Melissa. Well, so was Mark Lowry of course, so was Tom
Lewis, and so was Larry Siegel. So all of the hardcore civic voters could have voted for
them, didn’t have to think long about which way they were going to go in the runoff,
because Melissa was just—had positioned herself to be quite far off to the left. And then
Melissa tried to make me look like a Neanderthal. She had a nasty fundraising letter that
was actually, her fundraising letter against Malcolm Beard, and just changed the names!
And one of my volunteers was on her mailing list. So we got the letter, we took it to the
press, the Tribune did a—called them up out of the blue and then said, what is, what are
you trying to say in this? And all this kind of stuff, and is this really fair? Caught them
flatfooted and they sounded bad in the interview. Generated publicity, and all of a sudden
I started getting support from some fairly liberal organizations who were upset—
offended by what Melissa was trying to do. And I won handily, sixty—sixty one or sixty
three percent of the vote.

RK: What neighborhoods did you represent?

SP: Part of Seminole Heights, north of Hillsborough Avenue, Sulfur Springs, the—all of
the [inaudible] areas called the First Forest Hills area, kind of area between that and
Seminole Heights, and then on East, all the area around Busch Gardens and University
Square Civic Association area, kind of a range of things. And Tampa Palms, and
Hunter’s Green, the only existing developments in New Tampa in 1991. No one had ever
campaigned for city office in Tampa Palms or Hunter’s Green before I came along. They
hadn’t been there [laughs]. So I was the first person they’d ever seen and said, hi, I want
to represent you in the City of Tampa. And that began a long kind of courtship with the
folks out there.

RK: Did the issues seem to vary from neighborhood to neighborhood concerning what
issues were most important to the voters?

SP: Yes. Sulfur Springs for example of course, very distressed area. Had been for quite
some time. Their issues were very different than folks in Seminole Heights, who were
really into the historic preservation, revitalization. Everybody’s worrying about crime. If
you’re on the Nebraska Avenue corridor, you’re worried about crime at that time. But,
but the balance, the priorities was different. Folks in University Square felt like they had
a stable neighborhood and they wanted to hold onto it; and so they wanted to protect what
they had. Folks in Sulfur Springs felt like they had a neighborhood going down the tubes
and they wanted to fight—and were fighting very hard to save it.

Some neighborhoods close to the Temple Terrace border were kind of frustrated with the
fact that City of Tampa seems to never notice that they were there—isn’t that Temple
Terrace? I actually had a meeting with a number of folks in the land development,
redevelopment, couple other offices shortly after I was elected to talk about the
neighborhoods around Busch Gardens that all felt like no one paid attention to them. And Fernando Noriega was in that meeting, and he, after I talked about what was going on in those neighborhoods for a while, he said, *excuse me, Councilman, forgive me, but are those neighborhoods in the City of Tampa?* And that is my education about the problems with the administration’s understanding of where the City of Tampa was.

**RK:** What was the position that Mr. Noriega held?

**SP:** Housing? Was at that time—Director of Housing I think. Because one of the things we were looking at was, was infill housing in that area.

**RK:** What did, what seemed to be the impression of the voters, or at least what were the impressions that the voters had of the Freedman administration? She had assumed office in 1986, so she had been in a while. I’m sure there’s no consensus, but what type of reactions did you get?

**SP:** In, in North Tampa I think most of the folks who, and perceive her, as the folks who do vote in those elections, are fairly [inaudible]. So if you were talking to someone who’s a pretty regular voter, most of the folks up there liked her. And they liked her because she seemed focused on neighborhoods. And now, they might have concerns about how much a response they’re getting in their neighborhood, but they liked her focus on what was happening in the community. They liked her approach. Those who did not like her in that, in that same region, tended to dislike her about specific issues. They were angry because of something she’d done or, there was a prejudice operating. I did run into that too.

**RK:** Because?

**SP:** They didn’t like her because she was Jewish, or didn’t like her because she was a woman.

**RK:** And they actually stated those prejudices?

**SP:** Yeah. There were, there were times when, because I’m going door to door, and having conversations, I’m not doing cold drops, I’m chatting with people. And both my wife and I had experiences with people who said things about Mayor Freedman because of her religion or her gender. That stunned us. And, and our, our habit was to say, *well I don’t think you’re going to like me either because...* And just kind of push it back out there a little bit.

**RK:** So now you begin serving on City Council. Tampa has a reputation of being a relatively strong mayor system. You think that’s a fair characterization? And did you feel that City Council played an adequate role in issues?

**SP:** It’s a fair characterization, and no I didn’t think City Council played an adequate role! [Laughs] I was but very naïve when I got elected in 1991. Didn’t understand the community, didn’t understand the South of Tampa crowd at all. Didn’t understand the
black community very well. And so there’s some of these dynamics I didn’t get that were not about the institutional structure of the city, but these other sorts of networks that I had to learn about by reading Dr. Kerstein’s book among other things, truly. We sure read that a lot—I wish it was written in time to educate me [that] far back! [Laughs]

But one of the things that happened was very early on I was frustrated that Council had no agenda. And I, we had a formal agenda, which was set by the administration. We weren’t doing anything. We had no goals, we had no plans, we were reacting to what the administration presented us, or what the public presented us, and we’d occasionally get something on the agenda because of an outcry. But we weren’t going anywhere, we were all reacting. I was so frustrated that I actually tried to position to become, to unseat Joe Greco. Joe Greco was Chair of Council. And I was just so frustrated with this, there’s got to be leadership here that is proactive. It was foolish, it was arrogant, it was very naïve, and it cost me. But it was a learning experience.

Fortunately for me, it was very clear that the mayor and the mayor’s administration were running the show for most things. And fortunately for me I agreed with most everything she was doing, and was an articulate advocate on specific issues, and Sandy I think, liked that. So after you know, we got acquainted a little bit she knew a little bit about me from my Democratic Party work. And we got acquainted a little bit—she would, she would meet with me where she would not meet with some other members of Council. Or at least that’s what they alleged. We would have constructive conversations about where she was trying to go, I felt as though she listened to some of the things that I had to say when they were at least somewhat intelligent and, and I didn’t have a problem with the fact that she was a strong mayor, and she was running the city. So it definitely was a very strong mayor system, as it was then with Greco.

And you know, I don’t know if this is your follow up question, but there’s, there’s obviously this ebb and flow of that, and for the Freedman administration, the place at which it became clear that the mayor was no longer in charge was the Convention Center hotel deal. That, it was trotting right along nicely, thank you very much, and then suddenly some how all of a sudden Council members start raising objections to this deal that’s been out there and we all knew about it, and no one had said anything negative. And by that time, a little more sophisticated, I understood that Greco had a deal in his back pocket—he figured he was going to be the next mayor, and he wanted to bring that deal in, and he was talking with folks on Council, and others were talking to folks on Council and they felt like they could do something to Sandy—they could stop her, and it wasn’t going to cost them any more, because she wasn’t going to be around that much longer.

RK: And that was during the later part of the administration?

SP: Yeah, I was trying to remember whether it was—the last two years, the last year and a half—it’s in that range that this thing finally went south.
RK: What do you think was the motivation of the future Mayor Greco to want to do the deal himself?

SP: Well I, part of it was, I think he thought he could do a better deal. It went, and it was a very creative—the financing strategy for the deal was creative, unconventional. I am still convinced that it was [a] good deal. And I think the ultimate success of the Marriot Waterside proves that it was good deal because Marriot would have been the flag, and the ownership group they—the management group was tough [inaudible] group. And the, we would have been underwriting some of the risks. But I think given the success of Marriot Waterside, we would have actually seen a return on our investment. But it was not to be.

RK: Other than that, was the City Council generally supportive of the mayor’s initiatives?

SP: I think probably the right thing to say is that the Council tended to go along. Individual Council members on individual issues, for whatever such specific reasons, personal, political, what have you, would give the mayor a hard time about some things. But Council as a body tended to go along whether they were necessarily enthusiastic was hard to tell sometimes.

RK: What do you consider to be the most significant issues on your agenda during the Freedman years?

SP: There, there were several. Obviously the first thing that happened, my trial by fire, was the whole debate about the Human Rights ordinance and sexual orientation. And that, that debate and its consequences to some extent, defined my political career of public office. Because it was the first place where we became lightning rods, all of us, particularly Rudy, Rudy Fernandez and I. Because we were the Catholics, and this was—it was a religious issue. And we were the Catholics who were voting in favor of an ordinance to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. So we were getting a lot of pressure from very conservative clergy in many places. I got frankly, I got very little. Rudy got a lot. My parish was not conservative. It was tough. But that, so that was a very defining moment for us, was how you deal with that kind of public pressure and how you, how you explain yourself. Taught me some really good things about what I wanted to try to do as a Councilman, how I wanted to conduct my affairs. And then obviously it persisted, there were all the ongoing efforts to repeal it and the campaign against me in ’95 as the only incumbent to be challenged was largely based about, on this ordinance. And it carried—we carried both its benefits and its costs throughout my political career.

The Florida Aquarium deal, which was a bad deal, came forward early in my first term, Sandy’s second term. And we have paid the price for that bad deal. And I was not myself—that’s one of those decisions I made, in my view, I made the wrong decision. I think having the Aquarium was a very good idea. I think the deal that was contrived to make it look like the public wasn’t on the hook was a, was a façade. And anyone who had understood the [inaudible] well enough and understood the financing of aquariums well enough would have known it wasn’t going to work. I suspected it wasn’t going to work.
But I wasn’t courageous enough to stand up to the mayor and say, *you’re wrong.* And so I started to raise a few questions toward the end of the deal but nothing strong enough to go against it. And it passed and then of course, it’s been a, it was a—we ended up doing what we probably should have done all along, but it cost us a whole lot more because of the way it was financed. So that was a, that was an important one from the standpoint of downtown.

We had the—and, and what was downtown redevelopment and this whole tension between the mayor who was a neighborhood mayor, and the downtown folks, the South Tampa folks.

We had the Whydah slave ship/pirate ship debacle, which was an interesting defining moment here because it was one of the first times when I think the reporters, the news media began to understand that there weren’t the same sorts of deal makers that used to be around in the ‘60s and ‘70s. And they were shocked and appalled that you couldn’t bring a dozen people into a room and get something done. And I remember starting to have occasional conversations about this, interview conversations, where I’d say, *this is, this is a sign of a city growing up. This is a sign of a city that’s diverse growing up and recognizing that it has diverse power bases and there isn’t one person who speaks for the African American community; one person who speaks for the Latin community. That’s a good thing, not a bad thing.* But that was a, that was a wake up call to the city.

RK: Can you tell us why that became controversial?

SP: Well it, the, the Whydah was a pirate ship museum, that was the plan—it was privately funded, these were treasure seekers who’d raised the ship and all the gold doubloons and pieces of eight—it was a real interesting project. But it had been a slave ship. And so it became a racial issue, as some people within the community, in the African American community, and some advocates for the African American community—not of that community, were saying that you, you could not possibly have this sort of celebration of the wonder of a sunken treasure ship, pirate ship, that was actually or had actually been a slave ship. And if you were going to do something with a slave ship, there were things you should be doing differently. And, and to their credit, the project developers, the owners of the artifacts actually had some things apparently in mind, and came forward and talked about how they wanted to deal with the whole history of the ship in the museum as part of what they were going to do. But in some ways, from a PR perspective, it was probably too little too late.

It was still an era—I don’t know that we are still in such an era, but it was still a era in which once something became labeled a racial issue, people began to just fall into their conventional positions and it became very difficult to negotiate. And I don’t know that it was a great project, but it, it died, it died because of its labeling, and importantly and certainly in the sense it just was not a viable project once it had been labeled as an insult to the African American community.
RK: Do you think in part that it became controversial because of the conflict regarding the Mystic Krewe of Gasparilla shortly before?

SP: Yeah, I think that probably was, had heightened the sensitivities at that time. I’m certain that’s part of it. But at least in my own experience on council—during those four years when I was serving with Perry Harvey…

RK: And who was he?

SP: Perry Harvey was the representative of East Tampa, African American, you’d have to correct me if I’m wrong, but I think the first African American to be elected to the Tampa City Council in the quote “modern era,” unquote. He was also the Head of Longshoremen’s Union. Very politically powerful, in both ways; very influential. Of course during part of the time I was on Council, he was removed from office under federal indictment for racketeering charges—which he beat. He was, he was acquitted on all counts. But it was very difficult time for him.

I came onto Council thinking that someone like Perry Harvey and I would, would not always see eye to eye, wouldn’t always agree of course, but that more often than not—and especially on issues having to do with diversity, that we would wind up on the same side. We did right away on the Human Rights Ordinance. I was always very impressed that Perry, very early on said, this is a discrimination issue, I know that some of the folks in my community don’t see it that way, but I do and I’m sticking to this. And was, he never walked, never moved. But it was still a racially and racially charged enough conversation during those years that twice, Perry accused me of being a racist in a public meeting. And the first time, that stayed on, that stayed on the table. The second time, much later in that term, he actually withdrew it. He, he apologized for it. But that, that was a function of having really had to work hard to—and, and he learned. It was a learning curve about how I did my business. Because I didn’t always line up with Perry, and that, early on, I said, well, you’re either for or against me.

RK: What other racial issues arose during your time?

SP: There were some plan amendments, redevelopment issues on—there was one actually close to the University of Tampa, just west of here and, and mostly south of the interstate. Of planned urban change and planned category in an area where there were some old churches still operating—pretty small congregations, not very many people living there, but definitely minority community and minority churches. And someone was coming, I don’t know what it was they wanted to do, and that became a major issue.

RK: What about minority hiring?

SP: Oh yeah. [Laughs] Yeah. We had this on again, off again struggle over minority hiring and minority contracting, and, and the city’s policy with regard to women and minority businesses. And I think it was combination of things, there were of course people in the business community very definitely who were really offended by this and
wanted it to go away. There was a court case that caused us to suspend the application of the WMBE program because we hadn’t demonstrated the need, and fortunately the very suspension of the program demonstrated the need, because our contract with minority and women owned firms went just down to practically nothing once we were not requiring and incentivizing it. Says, gee, I guess we have a problem don’t we?! But that was an on again, off again. And then there were, there were problems with management in that office as well. The effectiveness of managing that office and that tainted the conversation, and made it very difficult.

RK: When Mr. Holder was chosen as the Police Chief, an African American, was there a conscious effort on your opinion to recruit or to hire, to appoint an African American to Police Chief at that point?

SP: I don’t know what Sandy was thinking exactly. I’ve always assumed that the selection of Chief Holder, which I applauded, reflected a couple of things. Because I always had a lot of respect for Sandy’s ability to see the big picture. The police department, as you know had, had been through some very difficult reforms during the Freedman years. Many of them focused on breaking the control of the department by a white leadership clique. And Sandy did a tremendous amount to truly desegregate that department, and to advance the cause, support the advancement of the cause of really talented people who were minority folks, women and minorities in the police department. She was not always popular in the police for that, nor was she popular for having done things like, taking away the take home cars.

And I believe that Sandy wanted to be sure. I always assumed—she wanted to be sure that, that that was one of her legacies. That this wasn’t a flash in the pan, this wasn’t a temporary thing. And she understood that these kinds of fundamental transformations in an organizational culture take a lot of time. And she was running out of time. By appointing Bennie Holder, a very, a very—in a lot of ways, low key, solid officer, good administrator from every record that I have seen; got along with people in a variety of different segments of the community; came off well; competent African American male. She, she knew that her likely successor was going to be Dick Greco. I think she understood that Greco’s passion for the reform of the police department was, was not what hers was, and that’s putting it mildly.

By putting Holder in the Chief’s position, she put Greco in an extremely difficult position. He couldn’t put his own man there without offending an important constituency. Why are you removing this African American who is solid, competent, you know, low key, doesn’t offend—I hate to say it that way, but he was not, not flamboyant or dramatic and he just, did really good work. How would you possibly justify that politically? Unless you’re going to replace him with another African American and that was not what I think Dick Greco would have wanted to do. So he kind of, Bennie Holder being there kind of forced Dick Greco to keep a Freedman appointee as Chief of Police. And that gave, I don’t know how many more years for that continuing institutionalization of that reform. I thought it was one of the most brilliant things. From a personnel perspective at least, that Sandy ever did. Because as soon as it happened, I was happy because I knew Holder and
liked him and thought he was great, and I just said, *and Greco, assume he’s going to win, is stuck. And that’s good.* [Laughs]

RK: What other issues were important during the time you served on the Freedman council?

SP: It was a very tough time financially, as you may recall. We had really tight finances. There was a lot of effort to get control of the budget; there was a lot of struggle to find ways to free, to free up some resources for the initiatives that Sandy was trying to pursue. And of course one of the biggest ones was housing, the whole idea of affordable housing and trying to make that real in a community where our housing stock was deteriorating at a rapid rate and we had really serious problems. And I think very creatively, she and her administration did some very, very good things. Some which really did become national models for how you work with non-profits to achieve the kind of housing efforts that were impossible by cities by themselves, at least cities like Tampa. And that was, that was a huge success in my opinion. And it was certainly something that I think most people on Council accepted and found at some level, valuable. And some really strongly supported it; it was just, it was a neat public-private partnership that reduced almost unarguably good results. It had its limitations and its challenges and its problems, but nothing like what would happen later. It was, it— but it was making a positive impact, and it was one of I think, one of her major legacies.

And when that direction, the whole issue of neighborhood revitalization, and neighborhood organization during the time that she was mayor—the number of neighborhood associations that were born or revitalized because she would send people to talk to them! She’d listen to them, she took their council. You know, Steve LaBour as the neighborhood liaison, I don’t remember exactly what his title was, but the person who was working with the neighborhood so closely, and he was good at it. [He] helped them know that they could have an influence. That was huge, and that, that I think also was a lasting legacy. Because even though the relative influence of the neighborhood associations has ebbed and flowed, they never went a way. It’s a genie out of the bottle. And I don’t think you can stuff that genie back in the bottle and that’s a good thing.

RK: And did neighborhood organizations’ form represent different types of neighborhoods in terms of economic level and race?

SP: Yeah, but of course Sulphur Springs Action League had been here forever, and is still working hard. Old Seminole Heights Preservation Association had been around; they did a name change in the course of the eight years I was in office and also recognized that the Old Seminole Heights Preservation Association didn’t speak to the totality of their needs. But all over the community there were, in East Tampa, in West Tampa, in South Tampa, and better neighborhoods, and neighborhoods that were more distressed, it didn’t matter. There was an effort to mobilize people. Now obviously they took different forms depending on the community they represented. They had different priorities, they had different structures. And they differed also in engagement with the larger neighborhood network; they had a homeowners association, they would expand…..
SP: She—the Freedman administration worked very hard to reach out to all of those neighborhoods, so whether they were involved in THAN or not—and THAN tended to be more white, more middle class and upper middle class. But that didn’t matter. Her administration went out to the neighborhood itself and worked with those associations. It was, it was just—I think that had a huge impact on citizen engagement and local politics and local policy.

RK: The City Council did have authority over zoning, is that correct?

SP: Yes.

RK: Now did you operate relatively autonomously from the administration regarding zoning?

SP: Yes. The, and I think as time went on, increasingly autonomously. And I don’t think that’s a function of the ebb and flow of the mayor’s power. It was in parts with the ebb and flow of the law. Because there were some important court cases in Florida about things like ex parte communication, and could you talk to someone about a zoning before you would, and so on. Some of which led the staff to adjust its position.

When I first came on it was not uncommon for the [inaudible] and staff to say, we recommend approval, about anything that they found unobjectionable. And over the course of I think the first four years I was in office, we got them to stop saying recommend, and get them to say, they have no objection. The reason being that a recommendation is stronger, and if they Council wanted to go against it, then in a court of law, the petitioner could say, their own staff recommended this, and they voted against it! And of course the staff has all the detail documentation, their report is professional, council is having a public policy discussion off the top of their heads—the likelihood that they’re, what they say on record is going to be as strong and solid as what’s in that staff report is not very high. And so we got the [inaudible] staff to recognize we had to have discretion; they had to put us in a position where we had discretion, so they moved to the language of “no objection”. There was no obvious reason why we could not approve this. And then the public hearing would unfold—we could hear reasons, we could frame those reasons and then our defense in court was, well, here were the things we heard at the public hearing. But the staff of course had not heard, or that the staff couldn’t consider because of their responsibility. But we could consider, and did appropriately. And that helped us with some court cases subsequently.

So we actually I think increased our autonomy vis a vis the administration because of those changes. We just felt less cornered and those were good changes. At the same time
there were some court cases that limited Council’s autonomy around the state—any Council. Because as, as you know in Florida our notion was a property right is much more expensive than what the founders intended it to be in the constitution! [Laughs] So we lost some cases. And learned some more lessons about that.

RK: Sometimes people make distinctions between pro-growth councils and more growth-management councils. Where do you think Tampa stood during the Freedman administration?

SP: That’s sort of an interesting catch-22 for me personally. The way I think about it is because the reality of Florida is that Florida is growing. I don’t know what the numbers are, but several hundred people enter Florida every day, seven days a week statistically, 365 days a year—and have for the last 20 years. It hasn’t changed. So that’s a reality. The question then becomes, what do you do about it? Occasionally people like to fantasize about putting up a wall, but that’s not going to work. So where do you want the growth? You want to them to have infrastructures; you want it where you have the city level services. You want it where you have the capacity. We already have disturbed land, that’s, it’s—if it’s going to be broke, you want it in the urban centers. So to some extent, I think the traditional growth management, pro-growth rhetoric doesn’t make sense for cities like Tampa. It’s not the most constructive way to think about it.

There are probably those who are, are interested in, in what maybe you’d say quality growth versus any growth? But I think, and I think the Council during Freedman years was in general in favor of some notion of quality growth. The reality also is that our zoning decisions very often were driven by the people in the room. That, that Council often did not struggle lightly over zoning decisions if staff had no objection and there was no one in the room objecting. They’d say, OK, move on. And then [we] struggled when people objected. So was that pro-growth or anti-growth, or good growth? That’s being responsive to the people in the room. And to some extent being responsive to neighborhoods, because those were often the people in the room: organized groups within neighborhoods. So again, that’s a good thing, we were hearing those other perspectives.

But I think on balance, Council typically tried to find a way to allow people to do what seemed to be reasonable things in the area of growth in the city. And Council supported with some trepidation the New Tampa annexations that had happened quite a bit before. They were at least willing to acknowledge that they were there, and subsequent annexations, most of which happened in the Greco administration, but, but that tone, that acceptance that acquiring some additional land for the City of Tampa, I think was there as a, something considered to be appropriate. Certainly not [an] anti-growth Council, probably more of a reactive Council.

RK: And what about the administration, the mayor and her closest advisors, is there any way you—could you characterize them in any particular way regarding growth? Because some business people felt that she was not adequately pro-growth.
SP: I think she was quality growth. I think that Mayor Freedman had a notion that there was, there were certain kinds of growth that were bad, and at the same time, she was supportive of the annexation I think ultimately of New Tampa, a lot of New Tampa. And that’s not necessarily what some people would have called growth management, or great sensitivity to environment or what have you—and I think that’s a debatable point, but I think that Freedman understood that. One of the things that has killed cities is the growth that the, the creation of essentially a necklace around the, around the heart of a city, but the city gets no benefit from, but pays tremendous cost to. So having some of these bedroom communities absorbed into the city is better than not absorbing them and having them grow anyway. Which, they were. I mean, New Tampa was going to be something like what it is now, whether it was county land or city land, I think it’s very prudent to bring that up.

RK: Did you have any joint meetings between City Council and County Commission during the time that you served?

SP: I’m nodding, and I’m thinking to myself was it during those four years, and, and I think the answer is yes. I think we had one or two. I don’t think anything major came out of those, but I will say that during those four years, I felt that relations with the County Commission most of the time were pretty good. Of course those four years, you had a, you had a County Commission that was largely being dominated by people who’d come in on reform platform after the scandals of the 1980s. They were, they were a growth management—but they’re I guess you might describe them as progressive thinking, bigger picture—and I think more willing to be collaborative than certainly some of the County Commissioners we’ve seen in the last few years here in Hillsborough County. And certainly then some County Commissions I’ve seen in other counties as well.

RK: Did you serve on any task force, forces or maybe that isn’t the right word. But I’m thinking that you served on a group to try to ensure the Hillsborough River was not—the Cleanup the Hillsborough River?

SP: There, there was the planning commission once staffed a Hillsborough River Board. And it was mostly advisory. And it was mostly about environmental preservation of the river. I served on that for a while, a couple or three years during that time. And the biggest things we battled over were speed zones, and no wake zones on the river and that was always a source of contention between the city and the board; and the environmentalists vs. the boaters. And it continues to be a somewhat controversial issue from time to time.

RK: Did you ever serve on Hartline or any…?

SP: Never served on Hartline, I served briefly on the Public Transportation Commission, fortunately prior to the scandals that affected the Public Transportation Commission. And I served, my entire time, I served on the MPO. So from 1991 to ’99 I was on the MPO as, one of, I guess as City Council’s representative. I can’t remember what the number
distribution was. And then ultimately I chaired that. But that was in the second, my second four years.

RK: When did...
What is the MPO?

SP: Metropolitan Planning Organization, which is the federally mandated transportation planning board for metropolitan areas.

RK: And were you able to see some cooperation between city, county and so on?

SP: The MPO is one of the places where, for most of my tenure, I think we had some of the best cooperation. We had good cooperation on the Council of Governments. I served there for a while, on the things we could—but the Council of the Governments was advisory. And one of the things that really motivates cooperation is money. And Council of Governments didn’t have it, the MPO did. The MPO, Metropolitan Planning Organizations have authority over federal dollars, at least a certain amount of them. And this is the same era, 1991—the legislature was signed in December of ’91 when all of a sudden, MPO was, by federal law, became quite powerful. So within a year of my, less than a year of getting on the MPO, we’re suddenly finding out that we’re kind of big boys now. And we get to decide some things. And even the Department of Transportation has to listen to us, which is quite stunning. And everybody got that—that, that there were federal dollars on the table, there was a potential to leverage state dollars on the table; there was a lot of effort to deal with transportation problems that were fairly collaborative between the cities, the county, Hartline, and ultimately, after a bit of a learning curve, the Department of Transportation as well. There were often some good partnerships there too.

RK: So you think you saw some improvements to transportation?

SP: Yes. Absolutely.

RK: Including public transportation?

SP: I always struggled with what Hartline was doing and felt we didn’t have the authority to straighten it out. And Hartline, in my, in my opinion, Hartline operates in an absolutely untenable position, increasingly so, because at least in the culture of Tampa, Hillsborough County, transit service is an urban thing. And most of our population increasingly is outside of the urban center, but Hartline is funded by county dollars—you know, it’s a countywide assessment, and it’s a countywide appointed board. So they were always caught between the need to satisfy constituencies where service provision made no sense, and the need to have an efficient, effective, productive transit system, which meant we didn’t serve some constituencies where service made no sense, and they just—I don’t think they ever managed to strike that balance successfully. And I’m not sure you could.
I think the politics of, the politics of Hartline situation are such that it really is untenable until the culture changes radically, I’m not sure it’s going to. And I blame Martinez for that, because we had a city transportation system in the 1980s and before, and he got rid of it. Why? To bust the union as I understand it. I wasn’t here then, that’s my understanding of how that was all playing out. They were, they were too powerful. [Inaudible] too powerful, too many employees, too much clout, and he got rid of them. Created, Hartline, got them off his plate. And [the] city’s transportation system has paid the price for that ever since.

RK: Can I ask you to make some comparisons between the first, Greco administration and the Freedman administration? Are there any ways in which they were similar from your perspective?

SP: One of the ways in which they were similar was that Greco maintained a, a vocal commitment to neighborhood. He acquired—and maybe he had—I wasn’t sure when he was mayor before this, and he may have always had some sensitivity about it. He liked to do the big deals, but he liked to be able to make people happy. So, so he continued that. I would say not as effectively. I didn’t think programmatically it was effective. But neighborhood groups still could get his ear on specific concerns and get a response. And that partially more a function of his more personal leadership style. But that’s the way it worked as opposed to an institutional commitment.

Of course Greco kept most of the senior staff, if you think about the director level folks. And even the Superchiefs they got moved around but they stayed, so they still—their imprint on what was happening in the city continued after Freedman. And of course many of those people weren’t Freedman’s people either, they’d been there for a very long time and so to some extent they may have reverted to practice they’d had before the Freedman administration there was. They became a little bit more, more in charge in unison than they had been in the second, in my first term on Council which was Freedman.

But I’d say more on, on balance they were very different administrations. There were some, there were some things that had been set in motion that couldn’t be reversed like paying attention to neighborhoods, some other reforms that were really good, that were moving forward. The emphasis on, for example, low income housing continued but Greco wasn’t paying any attention to it. He wanted results, but Greco first is a hands-off administrator; Sandy—Sandy seems to know a lot of the detail, a lot of what was going on in the city and tended to—I had the sense [that she] tended to get into the details of what was going on. Greco was never like that.

And so some of these folks I think particularly the problems that arose in housing were a function of folks who were very results oriented who were rewarded for being results oriented in the Greco administration without regard to how they got the results. Whereas in the Freedman administration, ultimately that would not have worked, they would have been called on the carpet and they would have been fired, at least I believe that’s what would have happened. So, some things kept going, and some things kind of disintegrated
because Greco wasn’t managing them, he was encouraging them. But it was much more—it was much more personal style of leadership of course, that’s just Greco’s style.

RK: What about development regulations?

SP: Everything was—they had the sense coming in that we were going to see a loosening of every restriction that could be loosened with regard to development. And, and some of that was good. There were some things that, you know, we’d gotten a little too, on the controlling side of, and didn’t have enough flexibility mostly. But when there was flexibility then there was going to be abuse. So there really was the sense that often, when it came to our—everything, zoning code, the notion of “quality growth”, inspections and the building, environment, all of this just got a lot more lax.

And again, some of it was good. I’m—the counter pressure was there from the beginning. And that helped to ensure that some really egregious things didn’t happen at the policy level, but if—then it was a question of application. And I think sometimes, if there wasn’t obvious public spotlight oversight, I think some things really deteriorated in terms of the quality of oversight in the area of development.

RK: When some people think about Tampa, because maybe they’ve visited for a short period of time, they often have gone to Ybor City, it’s part of our heritage and it continues to evolve…

SP: Yes [laughs].

RK: Did the Greco administration have a different perspective on Ybor City from the Freedman administration regarding their vision for policies to get there and so on?

SP: I think the Greco administration was more willing to invest public resources to make Ybor City something that, that at least to some extent, I think everybody wanted it to be. All of us, for some time, with the Freedman administration, Greco administration, City Council, had talked about wanting to revitalize this entertainment district. There was more of an emphasis on preserving something that was there in the Freedman administration in terms of historic structures and the feel of the place, and much more of an emphasis on, hey we’ve got something marketable in the Greco administration, we need to market it well.

So we had essentially more—of course the CRA’s generating a lot more money; the taxing and refinancing is generating more money, there’s money to work with there, which helped. But I think that Greco being the man of the deal, loving to do these deals, and, in fairness being good at attracting people and getting them excited about projects—I think he was looking for the big fix, and Centro Ybor was supposed to be it, [and] of course it hasn’t proven to be that at all. And that was a big culture shift—that Greco—the Greco administration was much more willing to put money there—and there was much more money to put there than I think the Freedman administration had to work with, certainly in those—in the time that I was there. So I’d say if you’re looking for the bigger
projects, something flashy that would anchor the whole thing, [that] was something that I think Greco was very committed to, and I don’t really think it was part of what Freedman envisioned. She, I think she envisioned it more as a project by project, smaller level redevelopment that would make it work.

RK: Can I ask about historic preservation? Does there seem to be a difference between the two mayors?

SP: Yes. I actually was never quite sure what Sandy thought about historic preservation. As an administration, they put some real effort into it, and some good work was done. But nature of the beast, historic preservation often means pinning policies to preserve our heritage against perceived property rights, and that’s what happened with the Lykes brothers’ property of course in downtown Tampa. And that was, that was a horrible, scandalous process. And I think there’s plenty of blame to go around on all sides of it. Positions got entrenched and negotiation became impossible. But, but what was different was, there was this we’re going to fight to preserve something that’s important here in the Freedman administration.

One of the first things Greco did was to cut a deal with the Lykes folks to get the lawsuits to go away, now it was good that the lawsuits went away, but I’m not sure—I’m not sure on the legal side of things that that deal was that good for the city. It may have been politically, the bottom line on that deal was they tore down two properties that we considered historic significant buildings. One in particular sort of did it—not behind our back, you couldn’t because it was right out[sid]e our window, but it was—[inaudible]. And all of a sudden the building’s gone—it was horrible, it was a horrible process. And the deal that then they were suing us because we were trying to stop them, and a lot of back and forth—and what Greco did was cut a deal with them, they dropped the lawsuits, got—he go them to dedicate the land for a park, but it wasn’t in perpetuity. As I understood the deal, as it was explained to me, at any time, the Lykes ownership could reassert its rights and develop that park, Lykes Gaslight park—or at least a significant portion. And it was choice between signing off on that deal or having multimillion dollar lawsuit that was going to run for years. So I appreciate the fact that Greco, Greco cut the deal. I wished we could have had something better.

On balance now, because that was 1995 that deal we struck, I think shortly after Greco was in. The park has now been there for ten years, it has become a part of the City of Tampa so much so that the county did its parallel park—all concrete or scraps, but OK—different visions of what an urban lifestyle is supposed to be like. And I think politically that Lykes Corporation could not develop that space now. And I like to think that Greco was smart enough to realize that. That he actually thought about that, and that I hadn’t. So—but that was—it was an interesting contract. [He] said, we’re going to do a deal with these folks to get them happy, versus, we’re going to fight to the death, because this is so much a part of our heritage. And it was there. And that really was a contrast—I would say that of Ybor City to some extent. But the good news is that historic preservation to some extent belongs to independent boards and the Council, and not just the mayor’s
office. So we had some setbacks. But I think we still were able to make some progress in some areas of historic preservation, even with that shift in emphasis.

RK: When people write about cities, sometimes they try to make general statements about who has the power, who has the influence, as you well know. And some emphasize that the business elite tends to dominate. Others suggest, no, it’s pluralistic—neighborhood groups have some influence, and mayors and other elected officials have influence that can counter, sometimes, big business if they choose and so on. Can you make any generalizations about Tampa based upon your years in the City Council?

SP: I think it’s increasingly pluralistic. And I do think that’s a good thing. Even, even though you have a Dick Greco who’s a deal maker and tightly tied in, things got stopped. Projects got modified significantly; initiatives got transformed because of the engagement of various community groups, other voices on a number of fronts. I certainly felt, as a Council member, once I kind of learned the ropes and understood the community better and my role better, which took two years probably at least, I felt that I had tremendous ability not to dictate, but to move—to modify, to encourage, to correct, to foster—with both Freedman’s administration and Greco’s administration. Maybe I’m a really talented guy, but, but I’m a nobody. I moved to Tampa in 1988. I didn’t go to Chamberlain High School or Hillsborough High School or Plant High School. I don’t golf at the Palma Ceia Country Club, I don’t make significant contribution—you know, I’m not that kind of player. And I wasn’t the only person who didn’t fit that mold who was having that kind of impact. And I think not just in the overtly political arena, but the larger economic and social arena you can see these people in Tampa. You can see them over the last ten, twelve years who, who aren’t tied into that group and who aren’t necessarily the Darwin’s of those groups that are traditional power bases, and have built power bases and [have] accomplished some things. So I think Tampa’s increasingly pluralistic, I’d say, and I think it’s a really good thing.

RK: Have we lost anything by moving in that direction in 1965, almost everyone appointed ten people, eight people with movers and shakers that generally dominate to a large extent. Have we lost anything at all by not having that?

SP: The hardest thing about a truly decentralized power structure is mobilization in the common cause. Getting ten people in the room is a whole lot easier than getting ten groups, real groups—or a hundred groups. And that is, in the immediate conversation over where’s the leadership in Tampa all that stuff, over the number of years, that’s the big thing everyone points to is, “it’s harder to get the deal done.” And it is. But it’s such a classic example of—and I don’t remember who the politician was who said it—the problem present situation is politics. Well what’s the solution, sir? More politics.

You know the bottom line is when you have a decentralized power system, what people have to do is work harder. They have to bring more people to the table, they have to reach out to constituencies, they have to look for new constituencies, new potential powerbases to tap to build new and creative coalitions to get things done. And that takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of time. And for some people it takes unlearning bad habits. If you’re
used to thinking that you can call ten people and be done—and this doesn’t feel very comfortable when it doesn’t work. But it means that we have to work harder, but I also think it means the potential for having real quality leadership, the ability to make decisions that have that broad support, because people really bought in is really there, it just takes time.

And just to comment—I think the whole conversation about the art museum, and the future of downtown is a classic illustration of that. I don’t think Pam—I think Pam may have gotten a little bit out front on the use of the courthouse maybe, but this is a classic example of someone who I think understands a very pluralistic, decentralized power system, and the notion that that’s—you need to work that. And I think some folks in the art museum did not understand that, and are now getting it.

RK: Some people have suggested that Mayor Freedman supported, or advocated the so-called greening of Tampa. Do you agree with that?

SP: Absolutely. My sense was that one of, one of the most important and enduring legacies of Freedman administration is going to be the fact that during her administration they focused on streetscape. They focused on ensuring that we were doing preservation of our green space to a great extent, and that we were enhancing that, were making investments in what would benefit the future generation more than the immediate generation in terms of the treeing of areas that were barren and so on. And it just—if you look at downtown today and you compare it with downtown in 1985, it’s a much more pleasant environment to walk in.

And part of that, part of it’s that trees got a chance to mature, but a lot of that, at least from what I understood and from what the administration did while I was on Council with Freedman’s administration, was this steady commitment to just replanting. We’re going to design a grate so we can plant trees in the sidewalk in downtown. And I think what’s interesting is that was all [inaudible] I don’t know that she fully understood, or that the people around her fully understood the urban heat island effects and some of the other things that we now understand are huge environmental detriments of urban areas. And you know, here we are in Florida where we really have that problem. And the trees have just made it much more comfortable. The potential for downtown Tampa in particular, but also some of the other corridors to be pedestrian walkways is there as these trees grow. That’s huge. I think it was, a major change in Tampa that helped the community a lot.

RK: I asked you about Ybor City before as something people think about sometimes when they think about Tampa. They often as well think about Gasparilla, the Mystic Krewe of Gasparilla and the Gasparilla parade and festival. Do you have any memories of Gasparilla?

SP: I have to acknowledge at this point that I have not been to Gasparilla in quite sometime, and I’m rather uncomfortable with the event, though I, when it was a little more sedate than it is now, I had, I have taken some of my children to it on occasion. But
I don’t think they need to get their anatomy lessons on city streets. What was interesting to me as someone who’s a relative newcomer to Tampa is, I served for four years on Council, when the City Hall was not taken by pirates. Freedman refused to do that whole thing with the Mystic Krewe and the pirates taking the city and turning over the key and all that. She refused to do it. And so it wasn’t until January of 1996, Greco’s now in office, and it’s Gasparilla time again, and I’m in my office at City Hall, my staff assistant—and our offices looked out on the City Hall Plaza right there where events occurred, and all of a sudden we heard gunshots. We actually hit the floor because there were all of these gunshots going off from City Hall Plaza. And all over the office people were ducking under desks and reacting to this explosive sound of gunfire! And then I peered out the window and saw folks in costumes, _oh, they’re taking City Hall._

But it was such an interesting contrast. And it did say something very strongly about I think where Sandy was coming from. And it’s an interesting question I think for both, you know for anyone looking at the administration because it’s kind of an expression of both what her success was, and what her challenge was. Because there’s an awful lot about Gasparilla not to like, and especially during the time when Sandy would not do it, it was, it was white—it was very elitist, it was very sexist. Well, it’s still two out of three. Arguably it’s three out of three, but that’s another story. And she just did not want to have anything to do with it. At least my perception was it just was something she could not tolerate. And she needs to be respected for that. But by going so far as she did—to just have nothing to do with it, she probably alienated some folks…

[End Tape 1, Side B]

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[Tape 2, Side A]

SP: …in going as far as Sandy did in her opposition to Gasparilla, I think she probably offended some people who had just never have understood what the big deal was. And that, that may have been a mistake. Because it may have cost her some support from segments of the community, elite, powerful segments of the community who were probably never going to love everything that she was doing, but might not have been so viscerally unhappy with her, as, as some of them clearly were. Some of politics is very emotional. And I think there were some folks who just never got over the fact that she wasn’t going to let them take City Hall.

RK: If I could just ask one final question sir—what would you say is the dominant legacy of the Freedman administration?

SP: I tend to think of, I remember the slogan, with all the hubris nonetheless, “Tampa, America’s Next Great City.” And I think in a way, that if you don’t take that quite literally, that’s not a bad expression of Freedman’s legacy. Because my sense is that what Sandy and her administration accomplished—maybe Council helped her in, during that time period—was helping to move Tampa out of, of a Southern—a quasi Southern city—
it was never, it’s an odd city from the south with all the migration—but more of a Southern city with some old habits and old ways of thinking that were not going to position the city well for the future. Were certainly not going to position it well for this century. And a lot of them having to do with how you think about people, and how you deal with people. So whether it was Sandy’s essentially zero tolerance policy for sexual harassment in the office; whether it was the desegregation of the police department, the real transformation of that organization; whether it was her strong symbolic statement with Gasparilla; whether it was her support for human rights and, and change and the Human Rights ordinance; whether it was going to minority business enterprises; whether it was the neighborhood work, very important. There was a notion that, we’re going to be a city that’s going to be responsive to its people, not to its select people. And that message—she was very consistent about that message, it was really clear. And, and it shows in all these different places. But the bottom line is I think it really transformed, or helped to transform the city into one that now in 2005 can be a really significant player in a global economy, in an increasingly important role in national politics. That, that’s a huge legacy to have left for it.

RK: Thank you very much Professor Paine.

SP: You’re very welcome.