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Mike Salmon oral history interview by Robert Kerstein, June 11, 2006

Mike Salmon (Interviewee)

Robert J. Kerstein (Interviewer)

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RK: This is an interview with Mr. Mike Salmon, on January 11, 2006. Thanks a lot for speaking with me sir.

MS: You’re welcome.

RK: Can you tell me something about your personal history? Where were you born?

MS: I was born in Sedalia Missouri, 1941. And I went to high school there. Sedalia’s a small town at 20,000 population. I went to University of Missouri at Rolla for my undergraduate degree, and then worked about six and half years before I went back for two masters at University of Pittsburgh. I then worked in Joplin Missouri as Public Works Director for six years and was recruited during Mayor Poe’s term to come to Tampa and began in 1977.

RK: And what was your position with the Poe administration?

MS: I was Director of the Department of Public Works….

RK: And what were the primary responsibilities?

MS: In that case, streets and storm water and design and construction of general public facilities—the essential city engineer function; exclusive of water and sewer. Water and sewer each had their own engineering departments but the Public Works Department built the buildings and streets and storm sewers for the city.

RK: And would what were the—you mentioned to me earlier before we started the recording that one of your major projects was energy plant?

MS: The Refuse to Energy plant came to me in 1983, under Mayor Martinez’s administration when Dale Twatchman left the city and I moved into his position. He was Administrator of Water Resources and Public Works. When I got that position, the city
had gone through negotiations and concluded those negotiations were ready, to reconstruct and start up again. … The Refuse to Energy facility, had been closed down for air emission violations. So that project started in Mayor Martinez’s administration and continued on through that period of time. I don’t believe it was complete—well it wasn’t commissioned until 1985, I’m not sure what the overlap—the mayoral overlap was in that time frame. [Shortly]…after that we became aware in 1992 that the new Clean Air Act was going to require another retrofit, so what we’d done earlier to increase capacity and improve its air pollution performance wasn’t adequate for the 92 Act. And we spent quite a bit of time getting ready to redo that again; had to re-bid it. So during that time, I will have administered the expenditure of something on the order of 200 to 250 million dollars on the facility, rebuilding it twice to meet the environmental requirements.

RK: Did you get federal money to help you?

MS: No. No, there was no federal money available. Early on it was thought that the project could be done in concert with the county, but that failed to materialize, and we built ours and the county built theirs. So there was no other contribution other than the obligation of revenue bonds from solid waste collection.

RK: Do you recall why you weren’t able to coordinate with the county?

MS: As I recall, in Mayor Martinez’s administration the question arose at the time about who was going to be in charge of a project in the city because the determination had been made to expand the existing facility on the McKay Bay site. And the county was asserting that they were going to be in charge of the project, and Mayor Martinez did not think that was a good choice. And so Mr. Twatchman at that point started off taking on the project for us as a city project. And it was ready to be constructed, the construction had not begun at the time he left, and I picked up the project and carried it on.

RK: Do you know what motivated the project to begin with, why the city thought it was a good idea?

MS: The city and the county both needed to solve some problems that were associated with operating the landfill, which was notorious out, off of I-4. And [they] were looking for solutions to solid waste disposal, acknowledging that there was no elimination of landfill. They were always going to have to have a landfill, even if it was for residue from the Refuse to Energy facilities.

But at any rate, the state was running into problems all over the state locating landfills, and mandated a study of Refuse to Energy or, some other terminology they used to look at the concept of recycling and all kinds of other solid waste alternatives to landfills before a final decision was made on how the solid waste was going to be handled statewide in the metropolitan areas. There were a large number of areas that were mandated to study this question, and out of that study came the city and county’s determination to move forward with Refuse to Energy. And the city then went on its own and did its own thing. And that’s the history up to where we are now. The county is, I
believe expanding theirs at this time and retrofitting for whatever emission requirements they had and we have met our—the City of Tampa has met its requirements.

RK: And do you work with Tampa Electric?

MS: Tampa Electric is the purchaser of our power.

RK: And did that work smoothly?

MS: I think it worked alright. Tampa Electric is a good citizen. We had some conflicts about what they should have to pay for the energy, and there were some federal laws that impinged on those decisions that were beneficial to the city. And some state laws associated with the way the Public Service Commission identified facilities that Tampa Electric was planning; that combination made it advantageous for us for a period of time to…sell the power to them. So the city was getting six million dollars a year for both its energy and the avoided cost of the capital that TECO [Tampa Electric Company] did not have to spend to either build or maintain the identified units which were at that time a coal fired unit. Now that they’ve chosen to build oil fired turbine generation—it’s a lower capital cost; our consequent payment for that would be lesser if we had a new contract. And the contract is coming up for negotiation in the near future. So the city’s going to have to negotiate that issue.

RK: What was your position during the Freedman administrations?

MS: I was Administrator of Water Resources and Public Works during that time which meant that I had water, sewer, solid waste and public works, plus a small environmental function.

RK: And were you there throughout her time in office?

MS: Yes, yes.

RK: Were you one of the Super Chiefs?

MS: Yes.

RK: And what were the major endeavors during that period of time that you were involved with?

MS: Over that period of time there were things that overlapped. The city built the Performing Arts Center during—beginning in, in the Martinez administration, and completed it for the most part in that time frame. There were some clean up issues, conflicts with contracts and that sort of thing that overlapped into the Freedman administration. And then when Mayor Freedman came into office, she was in a position where we had designed and bid the Convention Center construction. Which was I believe, about 70 million dollars. And she ultimately received those bids and sent that
forward for construction, not without some trepidation I think. But nevertheless we were able to meet the budget requirements on that, and so she moved forward with building the Convention Center.

RK: Does the city technically own the Convention Center?

MS: Yes, owns and operates the Convention Center.

RK: And how did it work out in terms of revenues and expenditures?

MS: Well, I happen to know that there was never any thought that the debt service was going to be carried by revenue. So that’s one of the things the city does with the Performing Arts Center, and with the Convention Center and with some of the other public investments that it makes where there’s no direct tie with the community revenues that might come in, be they taxes or just income to business such as stadiums and that sort of thing. In the case of both the Performing Arts Center and the Convention Center the debt service was supposed to be a city responsibility. And in the Convention Center’s case, they’re now operating in the black from an operating cost standpoint. In other words they’re not, it’s not a cost to the city’s budget for operating cost, but the debt service is continuing to be a burden. And will be for, you know the 20 years or whatever it is that it has to go. It’s actually been in operation for about 15 years now, so I suspect it has another 10 or 15, where the debt service will be important.

And I notice they’ve already been thinking about expanding it, you know trying to figure out how to, how to make it larger so it attracts another step—or another size of convention to the community—or more overlapping which is another possibility. And as a consequence, there probably would be another debt service activity at some point. But there’s always an argument about who pays. There’s an argument about who benefits—you know, does the county benefit? Does the hotel/motel industry benefit? Does the city benefit? Who benefits and how to take revenues from those various areas and, and allocate them to construct a facility like that.

RK: So do you recall how much the city is allocated for each year roughly on the debt service?

MS: You know, I knew early on what has happened is some of that was done when interest rates were high and most of those facilities had been refinanced three or four times. And each time they either took some capital out or they reduced the debt service cost. In many cases, some combination of that, which means that they’re not paying what I recall. I, I recall the Convention Center was in the range of 10 million dollars, I think it’s ranged from nine to twelve million dollars per year—maybe below that now. The Performing Arts Center—the city’s contribution to that facility was, in, in the contract itself turned out to be about a total of 40 [to] 41 million dollars. So whatever the interest rate would generate on that—something in the range of four million or less. Two and a half to four million, depending on the rates.
RK: So a very small percentage of the budget of the city?

MS: Well, that’s a large percentage of the utility tax budget of the city because that’s what ends up—that’s what ends up funding those kinds of capital; for the most part it’s, it’s U-tax. So that has some significant impact on, on the debt service capacity of the city, without additional revenues, I’ll put it that way. But there’s no subsidy—well, there is a subsidy for the Performing Arts Center that the city pays each year as one of the contributions [to] the, all the governments around here, and they apply for arts grants and that sort of thing from the state. So there’s a combination of things that go into the budget for the Performing Arts Center. The Convention Center is wholly supported by the city with occasional small inputs from the Convention and Visitors Bureau.

RK: So even if the Convention Center operates in the black as it is now, that is no relevance to retirement of the debt.

MS: The capital, right.

RK: Now what about the Aquarium, were you involved with that as well? Was that similar?

MS: The city wasn’t actually involved in the Aquarium except where we stood back and guaranteed certain things, and when it failed to meet those obligations the city had to take it over, and took over the consequent debt responsibilities. So it wasn’t built as a city facility except that in backstopping the debt service that was guaranteed by this private operator, the city had an interest in making certain that the facility was, was built in the way that everyone represented and done in a proper way. So we had a representative who followed that project during its construction period to make sure the iron and the concrete was there and that sort of thing. After somebody says, this is what we want to build and it will do this…that is, they do the proforma in terms of people going into look at fish, and revenue is in the door, then somebody says, this is the thing that will do that. And we made sure they built the facility that was supposed to do that. Well it failed and the city had to take it over, and has had to make payments on that facility for a long period of time.

RK: Sir, was that during the Greco administration that the city took it over?

MS: Yes. The Greco administration had to, I believe, had to pick that up.

RK: Downtown has, or had, two different tax increment financing districts I believe, is that true?

MS: I don’t know that, I’m not familiar with that to the level of detail I think you’re going to ask the question.

RK: OK but that sold it—
MS: Yes, there are…

RK: But that had no relevance to these capital projects, I guess.

MS: Not at that, not in….

RK: In terms of finances?

MS: Not in that instance. The redevelopment mechanism was contemplated to be used for the Convention Center property acquisition, but I don’t think that actually happened. The blight designation was for the downtown area, was an important designation to allow certain kinds of things to happen, but I don’t believe that it had any direct benefit to the Convention Center construction. Nor to the, well, to any of those three facilities that we’ve been talking about.

RK: During the Freedman administration as well, the Port Authority I believe was active in developing the Channelside area, in terms of the cruise ship facilities and so on. Did you coordinate with the Port Authority? Did you have to work with the Port Authority?

MS: No, the Port Authority pretty much owned or controlled their own property and their own destiny. And that was the time frame when the Port Authority [began] real estate development activity or developed their confidence to become real estate developers…, which goes on today. A lot of what is going on may be not even related to the Port, [but] is a product of the Port’s beginning the initiative of becoming a landholder for development purposes.

RK: One of your responsibilities was storm water, is that true?

MS: That’s true.

RK: Can I—I can’t ask an intelligent question about storm water, but I—I’m curious about were there any, expansions to the facilities necessary during the Freedman administration? What were regulations tightened or loosened?

MS: Storm water, in my opinion has been [the] stepchild of the city for many years, many years. I’m not sure whether that’s changed even in [the present]…administration because it’s always fallen short from a standpoint of having…management information for both capital planning and maintenance and operation, and long-term capital improvement.

I still don’t think that information exists adequately but they’re—this administration, Mayor Iorio’s administration is doing some significant expenditures in the area which is a beginning. I’m of the opinion that the size of the problem in storm water in this kind of environment, with the rainfall intensity as we have in this semi-tropical environment during the rainy season is always going to be a challenge unless somebody deals with it very deliberately—in the environmental area as well as in the facility design and
operation area. And there is not an adequate maintenance activity ongoing right now to take care of the problem.

I mean each year, when it rains, the inlets, some place in Tampa, will start backing up because they haven’t been cleaned regularly. There will be flooding; you know, street flooding and some yard flooding and that sort of thing as a result of a lack of capacity in the system. Now some of that will happen because of the nature of the intensity of storms, because you can’t design [for] the ultimate storm—let’s put it that way. But the level of service, a management term, the level of service that the city gets out of the storm water system is just wholly inadequate, and has not been looked at in any kind of thorough comprehensive manner. It’s, very subject to term limits.

The vision that occurs even in an eight year term for facilities when, with mayors it’s important to accomplish something tangible in the term of office, storm water suffers a lot. It’s easy to ignore. There’s a dry season. The water goes down even in the rainy season. It just is a way of life.

RK: And it would be very expensive to fix, is that their problem?

MS: It would be very expensive to fix. I don’t personally think that’s an excuse for not doing it or not having a longer term view. If we have comprehensive planning in the community for land use and all that sort of thing, we ought to have comprehensive planning for the facilities to support that too. But that doesn’t happen here, so.

RK: Do you know when most of our present facilities were constructed?

MS: Well, you can generalize about that and what it amounts to is it varies depending on where you are in the city. Some of the facilities like the south interbay were built in the early 1900s as a part of the redevelopment—or development of the south interbay. And they were done pretty much on a non-technical standard agricultural run-off basis. So the pipes are too small; there aren’t enough inlets; the ditches have been encroached on by property development and that sort of thing. So South Tampa is kind of a wasteland from the standpoint—and this is a generality, there are places that drain fine—but there are an awful lot of places in the South Tampa area that, that flood regularly and don’t have adequate outfall and it’s a problem of not upgrading and maintaining. It’s a combination of things—the facilities.

RK: Are other parts of Tampa in better shape?

MS: The best part of Tampa is the area of East Tampa which was referred to as the 29th Street Outfall Project which was a product of urban renewal and Model Cities programs. Very large amounts of money, probably 35 million dollars were spent to take that particular area of town, create a standard drainage system. Now those design standards are not current now, because that was again, started 30 years ago. But put in a standard design storm system, and then put in curbs and gutters and improved streets; or a much better ditch system, a ditch system that had positive outfall and that sort of thing. There
were times where people routinely, every summer walked to their car from the house you know, with their shoes off. And this drainage system took a lot of that away. Not all of it, but a lot of it. And that’s where the drainage system is probably in the best condition. One of the outcomes of that was a lot of retention ponds put in that neighborhood. And the neighborhood does not like the retention ponds, and so there’s a program being developed right now to try to make a park like environment around them and make them an amenity rather than the eye sore, that people think they are. But in fact it’s, it’s a place that has really, very good drainage comparatively.

RK: And that was in the 1960s primarily with federal money?

MS: That was—began in the ’60s when the money started coming in and was probably completed sometime around 1980.

RK: And what about New Tampa, sir?

MS: New Tampa has systems that were entirely developer designed and built. Many of them are taken care of and maintained by—much of the system is taken care of and maintained by the neighborhood associations or the community development districts, that are special taxing [districts], one or the other. And the city’s responsibility up there is to maintain the road cross pipes and inlets pretty much that were designed to current standards. New Tampa has about a 15 [to] 20 year past…those facilities were built to meet the requirement.

There were a couple of adjustments that were made. There was an allowance of a one-foot-freeboard, that was allowed at least in the Tampa Palms, the early development areas that was allowed. And the requirement initially required two-foot freeboard. Well the one-foot-freeboard is, is fine, if you have positive outfall and no problem getting rid of the water. But a lot of the property up there is, swampy. And as a consequence, you’ve got water lying just below the roads, and the yards are wet a significant part of the wet season. The two-foot freeboard would have, would have prevented that, would have had the water low enough that the damage to the streets that is being seen up there in some cases, would not have been occurring. And the wet yards, you know, the spongy yards would not have been occurring. So it’s a, it’s a trade off but in fact they don’t have significant flooding up there, except where something gets blocked, you know, paper, trash, vegetation gets into any inlet or a pipe gets blocked or something like that.

RK: Can you tell me what freeboard is?

MS: Well freeboard would be where you create a pond and the difference in elevation between…the adjacent ground level [and the pond water] is allowed to be one-foot…rather than the two-foot of the prior standard. Well the one-foot, given the capillary action in the soils is going to have a [moisture at the surface] a significant amount of the time. Actually the pond needs to be down to not have a wet condition in the yards.
RK: Going back to South Tampa for a moment regarding the storm water issue. I believe that some neighborhood groups, or a neighborhood group during the Freedman administration, kind of urged steps to be taken, is that correct? They saw the flooding as a major problem and called for changes? Did you deal with that at all?

MS: The only outcry that I recall, there was a period of time when I was Administrator of Water Resources and Public Works, and storm water was housed in the Sanitary Sewer Department. I think there was pretty much a concerted effort not to do anything with storm water; try to minimize what was done and minimize its impact on the city’s fiscal situation. And there was a group of people at that point who rose up and became very concerned about the condition of the receiving waters, the canals and lakes that are on the Westside of the interbay peninsula between Kennedy [Boulevard] and Gandy [Boulevard]. There’s a, six or eight specific locations that I can think of, and then some more canals that are involved in the situation where they have had sediment build up and tidal action now precludes the boat navigation in some of those situations. And some of them have had significant siltation and have environmental problems. Well those people started coming to the city and asking for some improved service, but it wasn’t flood related…

RK: I see.

MS: …it was purely aesthetics or environmental or navigation or something like that. And…the argument was that they didn’t have beneficial use of their navigable waters adjacent to their homes, for which they paid higher taxes. And that debate—I never entered into, but there’s a whole bunch of ways to look at that. It’s something the city, I think, needs to look at. My personal view is that those property owners need to pay for it, or help pay for it in some way.

And during, all the way up to the end of my term, they, we never worked out the appropriate division of responsibility, financial responsibility for that activity. So they’re still debating it, it was in the paper last week.

RK: And how long—when did you leave the city, sir?

MS: I’ve been gone a year now.

RK: Only a year, so 2005?

MS: Yes. Well, I left in October of 2004.

RK: Now was another one of your responsibilities the waste water treatment plants?

MS: Indirectly. The waste water treatment plan is under the sewer department, the sewer department is under me. There was an ongoing program of expansion and improvements going on. I initiated some portions of things that went on there. But most of that was initiated by the department head and supported.
RK: Who was the department head there?

MS: Well there were various department heads in that location. Jack Morris was—actually, I guess Elton Smith was a department head for a period of time, then Jack Morris was the department head, then Ralph Metcalf who is still the department head…

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

RK: So we were speaking about the people who headed the—had responsibility for the waste water treatment plants.

MS: Yeah, the sanitary sewer department—or waste water department, whatever they call it now. Jack Morris moved…to the Public Works Department from the sanitary sewer department, and Mr. Metcalf moved up at that point to the Director and has been the Director, all that, all that time up to now, 2006. And that was an ongoing program. That had been underway since Mayor Greco’s first term when the issues of the water quality in the bay generated interest in…building [the advanced]…waste water treatment plant, AWT, which is a higher standard than tertiary…Federal grants were available and so the sewer department…moved forward with acquiring grants [for] a very comprehensive program to spend enormous amounts of money.

RK: Did we have to, did Tampa have to do the AWT or was it a choice?

MS: I think in order to meet regulatory requirements and reasonable environmental goals, they had to go to AWT because there’s a, a combination of all the [required] traditional removals associated with sewers, plus the nutrient issue that dominated this warm water bay. The nutrients were causing a significant amount of the algae blooms and other kinds of things that were causing water quality problems in the bay. …They had to meet that requirement. So that was the reason AWT was the level that was required. It’s not a specific technology, but it’s a technology of identified removals that have to be made in order to make the water compatible [with] or an improvement. And the theory is…that the effluent is probably better water than exists in the bay in many cases. Particularly in the upper Hillsborough Bay, you know, which is still kind of an industrial area—it’s changing, but that’s, that’s what it’s history was. Ship, ship manufacturing, ship building, ship painting, ship maintenance. Spilled cargo—phosphate for example was a big issue recently, so there’s a combination of things that needed to be done to clean up the bay, and the AWT plant was the first step in that.

RK: And was this expanded during the Freedman administration? The plant, did it have to be expanded?

MS: It was expanded based on anticipated increases in, in flow. I, I can’t tell you whose
administration that all began in. But I think it did coincide with Mayor Freedman’s eight years, or eight and a half years in office—something in that order. Because there was a fear that we were going to go over capacity and find ourselves with growth limited. That was what happened, and that was the reason an additional, I think 36 MGD of capacity was identified as needed and constructed. That growth has not occurred quite the way it was anticipated but it will occur, it will occur. I mean it’s not now, and it gives us another use for the term freeboard, in terms of capacity to work against so the, the plant won’t be limiting in what the city can do.

RK: And how was it financed, the expansion?

MS: Utility bonds. Water, sewer and solid waste are pretty much funded with utility bonds and then we always tried to get grants. Early on the EPA’s grant program was very beneficial to the sewage treatment plan. But there are grants that can be gotten both from state and regional governments for water. And some of those for storm water as well. Solid waste pretty much does not get any, any significant grant program.

RK: And utility bonds, bonds backed by the utility tax?

MS: Yes. They’re not bound by the value of the tax collected. It’s truly a, it’s truly a utility tax.

RK: And with this…

MS: Revenue bonds and utility, and city utilities taxes.

RK: And was the Convention Center the same?

MS: [The] Convention Center was a utility tax, but it was not done on water sewer utilities, it’s the utility tax, which is a tax collected from various private utilities that they pay to occupy our streets. Tampa Electric, telephone…

RK: OK, OK. And they charge us, right?

MS: Shows up on your [bill].

RK: Yes.

MS: Shows up on your bill, and they very carefully show it on the bill as a tax that they have to pay so that’s the reason their rate is as high as it is.

RK: I know it’s difficult because you were with the city so long sir, but is there any way you can focus on the Freedman administration in terms of—try to identify that administrations priorities regarding what you were in charge of? Or any changes in any of the programs you were in charge of? I know that’s difficult, but does anything come to mind?
MS: No, not really except each mayor is different. The, the situation I recall when she first came into office that dominated my activities and occupied my time in particular was the Convention Center construction. She was not a big supporter of the Convention Center particularly where it was. The site didn’t have a lot of conflict, but there was some conflict about occupying that waterfront site with the Convention Center. And when she came into office it was very clear that the amount of money that was budgeted for that project was all that was going to be available for it, and...she was going to use a high bid, for example as an excuse to not support the project [if] it was too expensive. Somewhat similar to what was going on here with the, with the art museum to some extent, although there wasn’t any private money involved. So the conflict with the operating group didn’t occur. But with the Convention Center we spent an enormous amount of time and effort making sure that the budget was, was accurately met. We brought it in under the budgeted amount at the time of the bid, and then managed it with very small change orders. So that it’s, the change order amount on it was well under ten percent— somewhere between five and ten percent. Which is something that happens, changes occur, even mayors want different things done when they see they have a choice in regard to how something’s done; they sometimes want to make a change. And no change is free, usually even a reduction in a quantity from a contract is more expensive because that wasn’t the way the contractor bid it.

So at any rate we brought that in under, under budget and as a consequence were able to move forward with that project, which had been lingering out there since probably the Poe administration. There was, there were chamber committees that had recommended, on several occasions the construction of a convention center and Mayor Martinez finally you know, stepped up and authorized the design and moved forward with it. But there was a long period of time there where we were identifying the size of the, the convention center, and the scope, and what it was to do, and what it was to be, and those sorts of things. And then where it was to be, how much it was going to cost, and all these kinds of things. We traveled around the country actually looking at different convention center venues to see how they worked, how they were laid out; and they have a particular characteristic design if you, if you look at them. Back of house, the house of the operation, and then the face of the facility. And they’re completely different, they transition. All the services come in the back and that sort of thing, and all the people come in the front, and then you have this mix of meeting rooms and, and exhibition space that’s supposed to be well balanced out. Well you end up having to then lay that out on a site and make it happen. So we spent a lot of time on that in the Martinez administration. But Mayor Freedman is the one who, who decided to go forward and initiated that, that construction.

And it was, that was a very good project for the city. It went very well. That, that history goes back to Mr. Howard Curran. I don’t know if you’ve heard that name before, but Howard Curran was a retired navy captain, a graduate of the Citadel, who came to work for the City of Tampa after retiring, and was responsible for both the AWT sewer plant, early on, way before I got involved with the sewer department as Administrator. He was building that facility and getting the grants for it, and that sort of thing. And when he
finished that first phase I got him to come back and help me with the Convention Center and so he was the construction administrator behind both of those facilities in the City of Tampa. And he has his own history, I mean he’s, he’s legendary as a staff member for the City of Tampa. Mayor Freedman knows him. And he was just extremely well respected.

RK: How do you spell his last name, sir?

MS: C-U-R-R-A-N, I think. It’s either E-N or A-N. But it’s Howard Curran, Captain Curran. He’s just a, a legend. He raised a lot of young people in the organization to be good engineers, good project administrators, just, was an exceptional individual.

Any rate, he built the Convention Center for me. He was in the construction office there along with some other people—Don Cermeno who’s still with the City, as we speak, was his aide in that construction. And that was a good project. The design was [by] HOK, which was…a high flyer in the design business; they’re big in convention centers, they’re also big in sports facilities. Now they have a specific division that’s in charge of stadiums and that sort of thing nationwide. So they’re a big design firm and it was a nice project.

I was always proud of that building and the way it came out—it laid on the site good, its appearance is good to this day. It doesn’t look dated. Maybe it will someday, most of them do, but right now it’s current…and is doing a good job for what I believe the initial goal was: to bring people into town. So there’s a new hotel going down there across from it right now and the Marriott’s down there, adjacent. And the Riverside is re—rejuvenating all the time; that’s a great hotel site and it’s been up and down, and right now I think it’s a great contribution to the city. Then you’ve got some other hotels that are in the downtown area, or in Ybor City, and I think maybe one’s going into Channelside that will contribute and benefit. You know, it’s a mutual thing for hotels to mutually benefit with a convention center….

RK: Were you involved with the effort with the Freedman administration to get a convention center hotel that was, I believe to be operated by a not-for-profit organization, but was very much a city project?...

MS: Well…

RK: …That the City Council voted down?

MS: Even before that when we were negotiating initially to build the Convention Center, in Mayor Martinez’s administration, there was a proposal from the Mack Corporation that came to the city that included a hotel, and office building and the Convention Center. And this was an effort to do the public/private partnership sort of thing. …We had negotiated the deal on the Convention Center and the Mack Corporation who built One Mack Center and the County Center. And then I think, sold both of them, but at that point built both those buildings downtown. A New York developer had come in here and we were having good conversations with them. We negotiated a deal on the Convention
Center including construction details and all kinds of stuff—that was what I was involved in to get that accomplished. And that fell through. And that was planned to be on that particular site. That was how that site came to the city because we had authorized, or purchased or agreed to buy from them, somehow or other, the Cadillac dealership…that was acquired for the site. With that, we had already defined the site with probably about $50 million dollars worth of investment in land, something like that. Land was very expensive for that project, because of dreams people had about what downtown land was worth. It’s only recently got anywhere close to that in terms of reality, but nevertheless, those were the numbers we were dealing with.

At any rate, the Mack Corporation [deal] fell through. We already had the land and were already heavily invested into the project, so the city picked up the project, went through with the design and got to the point—where Mayor Freedman came into office, where the bids came in. Now there was already that sunk cost for the $50 million dollars in the site—you weren’t going to throw that away, but you’d already bought a site for a convention center and had a design for a convention center on that site. Any rate, that’s when we brought it in, on budget and built the facility. So during a lot of her administration that, that project—well, during four years probably of her administration, that site was under construction and in the development of operating strategies and marketing strategies and those sorts of things.

RK: And trying to get a hotel?

MS: And trying to get a hotel. And actually, that, there was another hotel proposed where the present, I think it’s Embassy Suites is going in, the new one that’s going in across the street from the Convention Center. That site—the city had negotiated [a] deal on that site for the development of that hotel, and agreed on it all and then City Council voted not to support it. And Mayor Freedman has her own theories about all of that, and I have none, because I have no facts in regard to what happened…. But City Council, in any case, changed their mind on that project, which had been going forward fairly quickly. And they changed their mind just before Mayor Greco came into office. And when Mayor Greco came into office, the Marriot Waterside became a reality, which is a beautiful hotel.

RK: Were you involved with the group, I think you were, that went to different neighborhood associations with the Mayor?

MS: Yes.

RK: Is there any way you can generalize about the concerns of residents that you tend[ed] to hear? Certain questions or issues?

MS: Well I can generalize about them. You go to the wealthy neighborhoods or the reasonably wealthy neighborhoods, and they were concerned about traffic and garbage cans and stuff like that. You got to the poor neighborhoods, they were worried about crime and didn’t have much else, that they wanted to complain about. And I think that
opened the door. Those public meetings opened the door for what I think are the neighborhood associations and Tampa Homeowners Association of Neighborhoods, THAN, which is now active in the whole neighborhood office, which Mayor Iorio has in place now.

I’m not sure whether that’s all good or bad, that’s—there’s all kind of interplay between those groups and...the way the administration of the city and the public facilities are done. ...[The decision is not] necessarily improved by it, but I think the perception of the public that they have better access is improved. And certainly it’s an opportunity to talk to the public. I always felt like you needed to tell them the truth, rather than what they wanted to hear, because I...believe [in] an informed electorate. And there’s a certain reality to what the city can do for the citizen, and what the city can do as a result of its revenues and this sort of thing, so, and what the overall push for the city can be for any particular activity.

I don’t like to have a different standard for a particular service in different parts of the city just because a neighborhood pushes or a particular leader in that neighborhood, which it can fall to, pushes for a particular service in an area, as opposed to delivering pretty much equal service citywide. That transcends the issues of wealth and culture and race and all those things if you simply try to deliver equal city service to all the citizens. The arguments about taxes paid here, versus taxes paid there, all those things never really impressed me. You know, it was a general government philosophy from my standpoint, so I saw those conflicts all the time. I thought the neighborhood meetings were useful and I felt like I had a good rapport with those groups of people....

Interestingly enough, I’ve always done that. My first job as a public works official, I was City Engineer of a little town called Moberly, Missouri. And Moberly Missouri is [a] 13,000 population town, you know, it’s not much bigger than—well it’s the same size as Davis Island and Harbour Island, put it that way. So you take a little town like that and when you needed a public facility or you had a public works problem, you’d go find somebody, talk to them about it very specifically. We had the—opportunity of selling some bonds for both sewer and water expansion and construction of a new water treatment plant. And I would go to people’s homes in the evening routinely, and they’d have groups together and we’d talk about it. And the bond issue was sold, you know. Some of it was general obligation bonds which required a 2/3 majority to pass in a bond issue, and then the revenue bonds needed the 50% under Missouri law. And it all passed; we’d go out and tell them what needed to be done, what was wrong, this sort of thing.

And I can swear I would go to these meetings with little ladies around the city and meet with them and talk to them about these things, and you know, you meet with civic organizations and other kinds of things, and I found that very empowering to be able to help the community accomplish what they needed to accomplish by explaining public facilities to them, and what needed to be done and what it was going to cost, and what the benefits were. Well, that same thing transcends into this larger city with these neighborhood organizations and I enjoyed that.
RK: Did you—the city, programs under your responsibility ever change that you recall, the priorities, due to citizen organizations calling for changes?

MS: [Pauses]. You know, I think the most useful information we’ve got in regard to some of that had to do with traffic and transportation. Traffic flow, too much traffic; bypass traffic where the large roadways, the major arterials were too clogged to carry the traffic and neighborhoods were getting bleed off traffic; speeds; traffic regulation; stop signs; four way stops, those kinds of things. The speed hump thing, you know the speed bump, the speed hump; then there’s something, a “speed table” which is what the new term is now. All those things are outgrowths of—and traffic calming, the idea of traffic calming I think is an outgrowth of interaction with neighborhoods here. That’s an upcoming technology in traffic engineering, the idea of traffic calming…. It flies in the face of building roads that are [designed] with a certain capacity and maintaining that capacity because almost all traffic calming strategies force traffic out of neighborhoods back onto already overloaded roadways. Without dealing with the capital costs of the loss of capacity that the roadway has, but it deals with the issue of the quality of life in the neighborhood as it’s affected by the traffic.

So you know, it’s a two-edged sword to go out there. You can get votes by taking traffic out of the neighborhoods. You don’t get necessarily penalized for having the roads clogged because everybody says, the roads are clogged. You know that, the idea is you’re going to spend a bazillion dollars on some kind of mass transit for example to replace [capacity] that you’ve consumed—it’s a, it’s a problem of people and the way people live and cars and all that sort of thing. …Those are the realities, the political tradeoffs that I saw. And I saw that in the neighborhood discussions, a lot of that.

RK: Can I ask two more questions, sir?

MS: Sure.

RK: You worked I think relatively closely with Mayor Freedman, is that true?

MS: Yes.

RK: How would you characterize her leadership style?

MS: She was interesting. Every time I went to work for a Mayor, except for Mayor Poe, who hired me, there was always a time of transition and building trust and trying to understand what their goal and emphasis is. And without fail, every mayor came in with some opinions about what the city did right, and what the city could do, and what the city did wrong, and what needed to be changed. And there’s a period of time where they’re interacting with the organization, where I think they’re really getting reality defined to them. Because if you don’t work in the city and you come in as a nonprofessional, and you don’t understand how it, how it works and this sort of thing, a lot of the things you want to do may well be illegal. They may be fiscally impossible or the tradeoffs that you
contemplate…, you may find to be unacceptable once you see what resources you have to work with and what are the consequences of shifting those resources are.

So when Mayor Freedman came into office I swear it took me two years to become comfortable with what I thought she wanted, what her vision of the community was. I worked for woman mayors before. I had a woman mayor in a city manager form. And that was, that was different than working for a man, even in city manager form. And I didn’t work directly for her, but she was the political head of the organization.

At any rate, Mayor Freedman comes in, she’s the first strong mayor, which is a rare form of government, in a woman’s role, and there were, there was a time of trying to figure out what her emphasis was, how was she different from a Martinez who, who’s a very detailed manager, [and who] knew what was going on. What did she want to know [and] these sorts of things? And in about a two year period of time, some of which was uncomfortable, I think she and I reached an understanding about what her goals were, and what she wanted to see done and where she wanted to go with the city, what her emphasis was and that sort of thing. But it does take that kind of time. There are, there’s a meeting of values and an understanding of values; there’s a potential for conflict.

You know, I was a trained public works administrator with not just degrees in engineering, but a degree which approximated a public administration degree also. And you’re dealing with the delivery of public services and those sorts of things. She’d seen it from the City Council point of view and that was very advantageous, very frankly. So in a reasonable period of time, during what I guess was eight or nine years of her term, I came to where I could articulate what she was interested in, what I thought was important to her for the community. You don’t judge those things in terms of right or wrong. What happens is you just have to make an accommodation and figure out where they would like to go with the community and how you can help them get there is more the issue. And in my case I had to be able to kind of articulate that.

An interesting sign that I could do that was, I thought I could—and I did it several times—introduce her in a public forum where she was a speaker. [I would] pretty much tell people what she was interested in and how she did things, and how, what her visions were and that sort of thing [as] I introduced her [as a speaker].…. And I think that, when you can articulate what you think the, the values and the initiatives and the goals are, and some of the accomplishments, then you’re in a position to be comfortable with those things. And be able to not have to be managed…, but rather that overall, you’re going to be moving in the same direction all the time and come back for redirection or monitoring, those sorts of things. She had staff meetings, very large….

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[ ]

[Tape 2, Side A]

RK: …about the type of things you were involved with.
MS: Yes, yes. Very deeply involved in details and that sort of thing. And she was a
people person. She’s a people person in the community; she’s a people person in the
municipal organization. You had 4000 people at the city, and I think she knew 3999 of
them.

RK: [Laughs] I think sir the last thing I wanted to ask you would be to ask you if you
could kind of recollect. You said you became comfortable introducing her, articulating
her vision and accomplishments. Can you kind of reproduce kind of your introduction for
us here?

MS: Well I’m not sure I can, but I will make an effort to comment on the kinds of things
that I think…I thought was important. I think she thought that the quality of life in the
community was a product of the neighborhoods and the services the city provided to
those neighborhoods. And she wanted the city to be responsive to the citizens and those
neighborhoods. She was very much wrapped into the arts and, and still is I know. And I
think acquired some art work for the city that was extremely high quality. Since art [is]
subjective, or the love and quality of art is subjective, I’ve seen other mayors not
necessarily agree with what some of the art she acquired, or the emphasis on the arts at
all. It’s, it’s an interesting thing to see the arts ebb and flow with various mayoral
administrations.

Mayor Poe built the art museum that existed for the city. I think Mayor Martinez was not
particularly enamored of the arts, but was very excited about the Performing Arts Center
and also the, the Convention Center as it worked out. And Mayor Freedman came in and
she was very interested in, in community arts and that sort of thing. So she, she had an
aesthetic sense that was I think, very beneficial. She was good with people and was good
[at] getting people to move with her toward her goals, those sorts of things. And she
would listen about public facilities. I don’t think she ever got real excited about water,
sewer and public works, but she understood that those underpinnings of the community
were some of the most important. And the quality of service and the quality of the
facilities and the reliability was extremely important.

So you know, that—I, using those kinds of terminologies and phrasing and that sort of
thing, I could, I could introduce her and, with a little humor and a great deal of sincerity.
And feel comfortable with knowing where she was going and what she was interested in,
what she thought the community ought to be.

RK: Thank you very much for spending time with me, I appreciate it.

MS: It’s quite alright. I hope it works out, I hope your project works out.

RK: Thank you very much.