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Susan Swift oral history interview by Robert Kerstein, February 8, 2006

Susan G. Swift (Interviewee)

Robert J. Kerstein (Interviewer)

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RK: OK, this should be recording. This is an interview by phone with Susan Swift. And it’s February 8, 2006. And Susan, what was your position with the Freedman administration?

SS: Manager of Development Coordination. And then I was the Deputy Director of what is now known as Business and Community Services I think.

RK: They keep on reorganizing.

SS: Right it was housing and, Housing and Development.

RK: OK. And the main focus is going to be the Freedman administration, but if you don’t mind, can I just ask a little bit about your background, where you were born and where you grew up?

SS: I was born in New York, and grew up in Miami, Florida since I was five years old.

RK: And then you got a master’s in urban planning is that correct?

SS: Right. I have an undergraduate degree in geography and a master’s in urban planning from Florida State. And the undergrad is from the University of Florida.

RK: And how did you end up in Tampa?

SS: I didn’t want to go back to Miami [laughs].

RK: That’s lucky for Tampa.

SS: Thank you. I had a sister in St. Petersburg at the time and a couple of friends from graduate school who had gotten jobs in St. Pete. So I went to St. Petersburg first, and that was my first job out of school. And then I just stayed in the area.
RK: And when did you start working for the city of Tampa?

SS: In April 1, 1984.

RK: So that was during the administration—the latter part of the administration, of Bob Martinez.

SS: Right.

RK: And what was your position then, initially?

SS: That was, I was the manager of Land Development Coordination Division.

RK: And what does that focus upon?

SS: Really zoning, zoning; some short range planning; but really it was, it wasn’t long range planning but some special projects. And short range, what I would call short range planning, and zoning.

RK: And was that a civil service position?

SS: It depends what you mean by that. Was it protected?

RK: Yeah.

SS: Actually, I’m trying to remember. I think that might have been one of the few—I guess that one was protected.

RK: Actually I’m not even sure what I meant. So then Mayor…

SS: Well they did have what was considered like a protected…

RK: OK

SS: …class under civil service. But then as a Director you were, you were technically at the whim of the mayor.

RK: I see, OK. So then we get a new mayor when Mayor Martinez steps down to run for Governor.

SS: Right.

RK: And had you known Sandy Freedman before?

SS: Only from her being on town council—City Council.
RK: And did you initially stay in exactly the same position after she became mayor?

SS: I did, yes. I was in that position for nine years.

RK: Oh, for that long?

SS: Yeah.

RK: OK. Can you, when the mayor came in, when Mayor Freedman came in, were there any—what would you say was a primary policy focus regarding what you were responsible for? Did she have a specific orientation regarding zoning and development?

SS: She had a couple things that I can think of off the top of my head. She, she definitely had goals, a vision of some things that she wanted to accomplish. I think one of the first things that she did was she set up a Blue Ribbon Committee to look at planning and zoning for downtown. And that was definitely one of her objectives.

Her, one of her other things that she wanted to do was improve the permitting process. And, and some of the other—I’m just, really these are off the top of my head but—and of course she had a new focus, something that really had been not looked at when she hired a neighborhood coordinator and she was certainly viewing the city in a different light. And actually looking to the neighborhoods and respecting the neighborhoods, which in the past, people had treated completely the opposite.

RK: Did you work with the Blue Ribbon Committee?

SS: I did.

RK: Can you just talk a little bit about it, I know it was sometime back, but as far as the major concerns?

SS: She, she appointed or you know asked some pretty heavy hitters to serve on a Blue Ribbon Committee specifically to look at downtown. And they, but it was a pretty broad, you know, group, well represented. But I, I don’t know how many people were on it, but maybe 12 or 15, I can’t really recall. And one, before they really, and she, kind of laid out, charted out what she wanted them to accomplish and I’m not sure that I recall everything. But if I’m not mistaken, they, the Downtown Development Authority which existed at the time had hired—and I, I could be confusing my chronology here, but I think they had hired a consultant. They have a, they had a staff of a few people. And they had hired a consultant to look at a, a plan downtown or to do a plan. And I think it was not being well received if I remember correctly. And so she wanted to, she recognized that they needed a plan or new zoning for downtown. But you know wanted to get something done rather than just abandon what was, what was on that table. So the first thing she did was she had me and the planning director and—the planning director was Roger Wehling. But then the—the third person I think was the downtown development
authority staff person at the time, but I think he left soon after that. And his name is, was like Jeff…

RK: Thaxter?

SS: Yeah.

RK: OK

SS: And I’m not, again I could be confusing my chronology, but he either was still the development authority or, or had been right before this, and maybe he was in another role. But anyway she sent the three of us out to look at other communities with successful downtowns. And we went on a whirlwind tour of I think, I want to say it was like seven cities in six days or, seven cities in seven days, and all across the country. And the purpose of that was to try to find good examples and narrow down a list that would be worth taking this Blue Ribbon Committee on and setting up meetings so they, they could talk to the people who were really involved in making that happen. And so we were kind of like the advance team. We set up, we decided which cities were worth seeing and then we set up meetings, you know—we, we met with whole bunch of people and found people who could you know, tell them about the financing and the zoning and the planning. And some people had special programs on maintenance where they did extra taxing districts so they could have better maintenance and trash pick up and that kind of stuff. And so we went on this tour which was a great experience. And then we came back and we, you know put, basically put a shorter tour together. And this Blue Ribbon Committee and the mayor, I didn’t go on the big tour, but I think Roger and Jeff did. And they you know, took them to several cities—I think they, we narrowed it down to three, three cities across the country to see how they did things right.

RK: Do you recall any of them?

SS: I, I can’t remember which ones they went to, the three that they went to. But the ones that we went to were San Diego, Denver, Portland; we drove up to Vancouver, I don’t know if that counted as one of them or not. Seattle—yeah, Portland, Seattle, Vancouver—we went to for the day—Denver—and then I always get St. Louis and Kansas City mixed up, the one with the big arch….

RK: That’s St. Louis.

SS: St. Louis.

RK: I was there for six years, that’s how I know.

SS: Really?

RK: Yep.
SS: And there was another one—there were another one or two, I don’t…

RK: OK.

SS: …terrible that I can’t recall what they were, but…

RK: Then the full committee went back to three of those?

SS: I think, yeah, I think they ended up going to three.

RK: OK.

SS: But and then from that, you know we came back and we started meeting on some of the, trying to work out some of the zoning issues. And we ended up in a relatively short time—I mean there was a lot of controversy and a lot of arguments—but they came up with you know, with a plan and zoning districts. And you know, one of the, one of the objectives was preserving the waterfront or you know, and, and doing some design. And I’m trying to remember what the other objectives were but there were, they, they incorporated public art, and you know a lot of, some other design amenities when we actually did the zoning code. And I’m not sure if that—then that might have been the—that might have been the, the result also, or the initiation of the public art ordinance. Which you know, really was a big thing. And at, in its, in its day, I think it was, you know there weren’t a lot of those around the country. So I think that was also what came out of [it] too, where buildings of a certain threshold had to provide public art. And, that’s still in place today and a lot of people use that as an ordinance to look to.

RK: And did your final plan have to go to City Council?

SS: Yes.

RK: And what type of response did it get, do you recall?

SS: I think by the time it—I, I don’t really recall—but I think most of the, most of the controversy had, was worked out and we got consensus from that Blue Ribbon Committee that by the time it got to Council I don’t recall that it was problematic by that time. But I can’t really remember.

RK: Can you characterize any of the disagreement? Was it, for example, pro-development as opposed to pro-regulation? Do you recall any of the splits?

SS: I think a lot of it was what, what should go on—well there, there was a discussion of height, and should the heights be limited. And should things like, should buildings be designed so they were stepped back in, you know a lower height, like, they call that a wedding cake kind of style in terms of height. Whether—one of the bigger controversies was, should each property set aside open space, a percentage of open space on the block. And then a lot of it had to do with what should go on the waterfront and how it was
designed. And I think, again I might be getting my chronologies mixed up, but I think a lot of, I think that might have been prompted by the NCNB building and how that had not been designed to respect the waterfront.

RK: And that was during the previous administration, wasn’t it?

SS: Right. That was, that was when the rose garden was removed and replaced with the NCNB Bank building and a parking garage. And my opinion was that, that wasn’t a bad thing in concept but the way they designed it wasn’t really good. And it really kind of ruined a segment of the waterfront and, and prevented it from being connected by any kind of future Riverwalk.

The other part of the plan was it also came up with the concept of how they would somehow do a Riverwalk—it wasn’t designed at that point of what it would look like, but at least giving public access to all of the waterfront parcels along the river if the city ever wanted to do some kind of Riverwalk. Or if we wanted them to contribute, and that was some of the arguments, who should build the Riverwalk. If you built a high-rise office building it, I believe it ended up that you needed to build your piece of the Riverwalk, even if nobody was on either side of you. And there were a lot of discussions about public access, you know, liability—if the public walked across my property, am I liable and those kinds of things.

RK: Did you have representatives from the development community on the committee?

SS: Oh yeah. It was, it was actually mostly developers. It was balanced but it was very well represented. There were bankers, there were lawyers, there were a lot of developers. There were some merchants or merchants association people. Because one of the other things that we were trying to do is also get more retail space. So that you weren’t walking, you know, so it was more pedestrian friendly and you weren’t walking by a blank wall. So we wanted it to be designed for retail space even if it couldn’t be occupied that way yet. If the market wasn’t there to occupy it, we at least wanted—you could, you could occupy it, I think with an office, but it had to look like it could someday be retail space.

RK: Did the issue of eminent domain come up in any context? And I ask that partly because that’s been a controversial issue the past year of two nationwide.

SS: I can’t remember if it came up as part of that Blue Ribbon Committee. But clearly the City of Tampa used eminent domain—I mean, not a lot, but they, they certainly used eminent domain for economic development purposes. But I don’t think it related back to that Blue Ribbon Committee in any way.

RK: OK. How long did you stay employed with the city?

SS: Eleven years.
RK: So you left in….

SS: I left in April, actually, March 30, 1995.

RK: OK and you did get a plan in place. And did it stay in place in pretty much the same form throughout that period that you were there?

SS: Yes, it actually did. It was, I think the result was we came up with two, two zoning districts, CBD-1, and CBD-2. And one was higher height than the other, and you know, they, they had certain design features and certain kinds of review, architectural review. But it, yes it, it pretty much remained, and as far as I know, it remains in place now pretty close to what was adopted back then. I really haven’t kept up with it the past few years, but.

RK: Were there any claims ever, while you at least were still with the city that these regulations perhaps impeded development because developers do not want to have to spend money to comply with them and time and so on?

SS: No. I think what, what helped was when Martinez was there they actually undertook one of the, one of the first or the first, what they called area-wide DRI, development of regional impact. And it was called the downtown Tampa DRI. And because they did that DRI as a public sponsor, it got a lot of developers out of doing—having to eventually do their own DRI. And I think they recognized that that was a big advantage for Tampa downtown developers that a lot of other communities didn’t have. And I don’t think that the architectural reviews or the other design things were onerous.

RK: OK

SS: So I, I don’t think there was a lot of—after the initial, you know, wrangling, once it got adopted, really I don’t think there was a lot of criticism or change after that. It seemed everybody seemed to live, live with it.

RK: OK great. You mentioned a second goal was to improve the permitting process.

SS: Right.

RK: Can you explain a little bit about that?

SS: I think throughout her campaign and you know maybe when she was on Council the mayor had heard about a lot of problems with, you know permits and site plans and you know, that it wasn’t a user friendly process. And, and actually right in the early ‘80s, right around when I got with, when I got to the city, they had just, under the previous administration, had just done or just started, kind of an overhaul of the permit process. Where the developers had complained of long lines—I mean literally they would wait for hours for a permit, or I mean, just to apply for a permit—hours and hours, and—there, the
bottom line was there weren’t enough staff and resources. And so at that time the developers said we, we’ll pay more if you just get, you know, get us more people, you know, we’re willing to pay for it. So when I got there in the early ‘80s they were just implementing kind of the first wave of these improvements, and, and those improvements really related to bodies. You know, they just needed more staff to review the plans and to accept them. And then things settled down and people were happy and you know, we got, we got some automation. We automated the permit system, and which took many years. But it got done and that certainly improved tracking of it and, and finding, you know, finding historical data and improving the tracking of the projects.

Then I guess, I’m not, I can’t recall what specifically what she was hearing but there were certainly some rumblings. So when she came on board we actually, I, I guess inherently you think you know what they’re complaining about. Oh, we’re too restrictive, you know, we take too long, blah, blah, blah. Well, ironically when we did a survey, we found out that they were not really wanting us to be more lenient in their reviews. They really weren’t complaining about the time frame, they were complaining about convenience. And the irony was the number one complaint was that they had to come downtown to get their permit—find a parking space, pay, you know either a lot of money in the garage and walk a couple of blocks, or pay a meter and keep running out and feeding it, you know, dimes at that point, and getting parking tickets.

And so, after that the mayor—she had [us] start to look for buildings that had, you know that weren’t right in the core of downtown. And a bunch of buildings were looked at, and the bottom line was we, we found a building right across at the river on North Boulevard. And the, the city bought it, or leased it long term, I can’t remember which, from WEDU, and renovated it, completely gutted it, renovated it, bought new furniture for everybody, new computers, new phone system, everything. And I want to say that was in ‘93, so, that it actually opened. And that was a huge, you know, I think success for her. And again I always use that as an example that you think you know what customers want, but until you really ask them, you, you know, you don’t necessarily—you need to communicate, and they’ll tell you what they want, and they told us and it turned out it wasn’t what we thought at all.

RK: Good you asked!

SS: Yeah, exactly.

RK: And is that still pretty much in place, do, do you know?

SS: Yes, yes it is. And, and what, what we did was we took it a step further and when she came to Bob Harrell who was my boss at the time when he served as, as head of the Department of Housing and Development, and he kind of said, you’re in charge of this. And I went back to him and the mayor with a proposal, and I said, I’ll be in charge of this, but here’s what I think you really need to do. You need to take it a step further and putting all, all the people in one building isn’t going to make them function better. It will give the applicants free parking, but it won’t make the system work better. You need, they
need to all answer to one person so there is one person in charge. Because there were people who, if you looked at everybody who touched a permit or a site plan, there were nine different departments involved. So if you know, if an applicant came in and said, *I want to save this tree, but I’m going to have to lose a parking space*, then you had two directors who, why should they give up, you know their own code? And there wasn’t one person accountable, and the people weren’t on one team, they were on nine teams.

So I proposed a reorganization into one department for everybody who was going to now be in that building. And she agreed to it. And so then we implemented that proposal, the, the reorganization along with the physical relocation. And everybody—there were approximately 90 people that were going to be moving to that building. And everybody except the eight or nine fire marshals were put under our department and reorganized. And I think that, more than even the physical location was what made it a success. Because everybody had to play together and be on the same team.

And it also allowed us to eliminate a lot of duplication with each little area, each little specialty. Engineers, you know, the people who approved driveway permits, people who approved trees, people who reviewed storm water—they each would have had a separate department to, back downtown, to have to answer to. And there were, you know, in some cases, some inherently conflicting goals between, for example the engineers who paved the streets, and, and the same engineers approving applications from developers. It was like they had two jobs that didn’t necessarily relate. And so what we tried to do is, is pull out those areas of those departments that dealt with this other service of development applications and treat them as a service, as their own service. And you know I think that was a big part of the success too. And it, in some ways it was like pulling teeth with the staff because some of them literally went home physically ill when they found out they were going to be moving and reorganized. But eventually they you know, I think they all came around and I think it’s, it’s a really good example of you know, how, how government—or any organization can improve, if it’s willing to, you know, look, look at, look at itself and how it operates.

RK: And did Mr. Bob Harrell head that department?

SS: He headed the department and I headed the, that, that—let’s see is that one—I think maybe in the middle of that Fernando Noriega might have—I can’t remember when he took over. Bob certainly started it. I’m not sure if he was still in his position when it opened….

[End Tape 1, Side A]

RK: This is the second side of the interview with Susan Swift and this is being recorded from University of South Florida because Ms. Swift now works in Virginia as an urban planner.

Can I ask a question please about a general issue of regulation of building and development? Some apparently during the years that Sandy Freedman was mayor felt that
the regulations were more onerous than they would have liked to have seen, I guess we should, could put it that way. And I recall when the next mayor took office, Mayor Dick Greco, he initiated a review of the existing regulations and some changes were made—I don’t know the details to the changes. But can you tell me first whether I’m correct at all that some of the building community, the development community felt that the regulations were stricter than they, than they wanted them to be at least; and also were the regulations tightened up during the Freedman administration concerning storm water and the other aspect of development?

SS: I, of course I have a personal bias, because I helped write some of them. But I don’t think that they were, that they were onerous. And what’s funny about it is that the Council approves the ordinances, all the land related ordinances. So if they were onerous, it was because the Council adopted them. And I think a lot of people for example had thought the tree ordinances, tree preservation ordinances were too onerous. But that wasn’t approved by the mayor, it was approved by the Council. So I think, I think that was a lot of, a lot of politics, a lot of misplaced blame because she was a direct person.

And you know, Mr. Greco, in my opinion, told people what they wanted to hear. And although I wasn’t there when he came in and changed or, or studied a lot of the codes, where it was my understanding that really a lot of the codes were left the same. But I think the difference is that under the Freedman administration everybody was treated consistently and the, and the codes were consistently applied. If somebody called her office and complained and they were a big wig or a friend, they were very good about saying, I appreciate it, but you really need to talk to so and so, I don’t get involved in that. And so I think on the day to day application, there, there was a lot of consistency. And we made people consistently happy and we made people consistently unhappy—but I think we treated them consistently. But I think the difference was the codes weren’t that much different.

I think there were some things that were changed when he first came in. But I think what happened was most of the changes that were suggested were, ended up not being changed because the neighborhood folks came in and said, no we don’t want you to reduce that buffer, you know or, or increase that height. So I think, I think when he came in he didn’t realize that there was another constituency besides the developers. And so when they tried to change the codes I don’t think that as many of them passed. And I think the regulations were still pretty much the same.

But I think in the day to day administration they were not applied consistently. And again I’m just saying, I’m just reporting what my former staff said because I was no longer there. But it was my understanding that they, that the staff was constantly nervous about were they—if John Q developer called and complained that we were being too tough, then a call was made to the staff, you’re being too tough, find a way to fix it. And if a call from John Q citizen came, that you’re not being tough enough, I want my house protected, then a call when down and said, you’re not being tough enough. And that they, the staff never knew whether—they were never empowered, they were, or they were no longer empowered to make their own judgment calls on, you know, when, when
somebody called upstairs, instead of telling them that we’re going to be consistent, they were, they were clearly told to take one direction or another. Now I’m not saying they’re, that they were told to do something illegal, but you know, there are, there are hundreds of interpretations that people make in terms of site plans and permits. Everyday you have to make certain calls. And I think when it came to those calls they were not, the regulations weren’t necessarily applied consistently if somebody had made a call. And that was, I think the frustration that the staff had that they weren’t, that they weren’t really allowed to be consistent. If somebody made you know, made noise, then, then they, they got something. They got special treatment.

RK: I see. So it was implementation that was different for the most part.

SS: Right, right.

RK: OK great. A third focus of the mayor you mentioned in the beginning of the interview had to do with neighborhoods and a neighborhood coordinator being hired. Can you talk a little bit about that?

SS: Yeah that was something that I think she really changed the way that, that the staff—I mean certainly the way the neighborhoods viewed themselves because they were suddenly empowered. And but, but even viewing it from the inside the way the staff thought—it changed the way of thinking that you know, this isn’t us against them, and there are citizens, there are people with faces out there. And it really worked both ways because of some of the efforts that she made, I think the citizens also saw that the staff were people with, with faces—they weren’t just faceless bureaucrats that made these decisions and you know, were lazy or, or thoughtless or whatever, that we were real people and we lived in the community and we cared.

And I think she, there were several programs involved in it, but I do think it changed the culture of the city. And made, made people think out of the box and involved stakeholders. I mean I think planners already do, already think that way. But there are a lot of other departments, utilities, engineers, you know, a variety of different departments that did things based on a book and didn’t necessarily ask stakeholders first or didn’t think through options. And I think the culture change made them think out of the box, think of different options, and also recognize that there were citizens and residents and neighborhoods out there.

And, and sometimes they had good ideas too—and maybe we should ask them, so it was complete culture change I think from the way things were handled previously when you know, in particular somebody like Margaret Vizzi, who was a homeowner, a citizen, would call up when I first started working there and complain about the office being built and how, they weren’t doing this and they weren’t doing that and the plans said this—and a lot of people just kind of ignored her as some you know, pain in the neck citizen. And it turned out in a lot of cases that she was right—that they hadn’t built it right or you know, they were supposed to do this and they hadn’t. And the culture changed to you know, be more respectful of those kinds of comments and, and then literally went so far as to
outreach to those, to those groups and those citizens and have them have a say in their community.

I mean one of the most amazing programs I think they did was in code enforcement which wasn’t really in my division at the time. But there was one neighborhood in Sulphur Springs and they had a lot of problems enforcing conversions of houses into duplexes. And it was just a nightmare for our code enforcement division to really enforce. And they ended up working with a neighborhood group where they became, not vigilantes, but they, if they saw something they would send it to us and we had specific details of what we needed done to, to get. And what kind of information they had to provide to us. So it wasn’t, you know, just any drive by that they thought somebody was converting something just because there were a couple of cars in the driveway. They, they actually had specific information that they worked with them on. And they ended up you know really ultimately making some awareness and fixing the problem. And you know it was kind of like the ultimate public/private partnership.

And also in enforcement they did something like they, they tried the docket for code enforcement cases were so long. And it took so long to get them through because of state law that they used the neighborhood group as kind of the first, the first line of defense or offense. And what they would do was, thinking they could get from peer pressure, better results, the neighborhood group sent out a little postcard and said, hi, you know we noticed, we, we your neighbors noticed that you have too many tires piled up in the back of your house. We would love for you to move it. And you know it was like, honey getting more than a hammer and they went ahead and, I don’t know what the percentage was, but it was an incredibly high percentage rate when their neighborhoods asked them to clean it up versus when the city had asked them to clean it up.

So there were a lot of you know, neighborhood initiatives that, that again, I think she changed the culture of the whole city.

RK: Is it true that one component of the neighborhood initiative was to write a new element to the comprehensive plan that focused on neighborhoods?

SS: Yes.

RK: Can you talk a little about that?

SS: Yeah. That, that was in a way I think it was kind of more of a statement than—whether it was really enforceable. But I, again I think it was a culture change to show the importance of neighborhoods and that the, the city and a comprehensive plan really is more than, in Florida there were functional elements. And in a lot of cases I think rather than doing like a master plan or a neighborhood plan for each area, because there were like fifty or sixty neighborhoods, they tried to say from a policy perspective, this is what’s important in our city, and this is how we want neighborhoods to be you know, respected, and, and involved. And so it was really a, really short policy document, but
laid out what the philosophy was, and the Council actually adopted it. Now again, I haven’t paid attention so I’m not sure how that’s survived.

RK: Can I, I’d like to ask a couple of other questions that are more general regarding the mayor, Mayor Freedman. One can you characterize what you think was kind of her leadership style?

SS: Well she was certainly a leader, and she had, she had things she wanted to accomplish. And she you know, she wanted to improve the city on a variety of levels. And she was, I mean she functioned more like a city manager more so than other—I mean mayor Martinez did, did too, he was I thought, a good manager as well. But so she wasn’t like too hands on, but, but she was more hands on than I think most mayors would be. She had some ideas of her own of how to, you know, if she had, she had a vision for OK I want to change X. Sometimes she had some ideas on her own, and sometimes she, she didn’t. But she was very open to new ideas. People could come to her on something she hadn’t even thought of and say, hey we think we can fix this, or we want to do this better, what do you think? She was, you know, very open to it and very good about asking the right questions. OK, who would this affect? What are the downsides? What are the positives? What would it take to do it? But definitely, definitely action oriented and, and was a leader in terms of, she had, she had a vision of, of what she wanted. What she wanted changed or what she wanted the city to be like. And you know she empowered everybody to kind of come up with ideas and then let us run with it. And, and frankly after working in other communities—you kind of think everyplace is like that until you work elsewhere. And, and I just wrote Bob Harrell an email recently saying how spoiled we were that you know we were able to do so many different, you know really neat and different things and actually accomplish so many things. And we did so many state of the art things in some ways. But you didn’t realize that while you were doing it that the rest of the world wasn’t at your same level. And now that I’ve worked in other places and realize that, first of all you need a leader like that who’s willing to make change. And you know you need somebody to, to help facilitate that through. And she was really, really very good at that.

SS: Did she have a top staff person or a couple of top staff people that tried to follow through on implementation and make sure the changes actually reached the people?

SS: I think, I think she had a really good senior management team, you know with the exception of you know maybe one or two people everybody really was a team player. She did have a Chief of Staff but she didn’t rely solely on him. She really dealt with the department head. You know she was, she was pretty open. And, and unfortunately I don’t think the perception, the public perception of her was that way but she was you know I could go up there and say I would like to talk to her, even, even before I became an assistant director, if I, at the manager level. And you know, admittedly because I, not many managers probably had that access, but because I did zoning things and they were more visible—but I could go up there and tell her assistant, you know, I need an appointment on X, and you know she would, you know find a time. It might not have been for a week, but you know, it, it wasn’t that I didn’t have access to her. And I think
that she was very accessible. You know and always, again made you feel like if you had a
new idea that it wasn’t crazy. You know, may not go with it, but, but it, she, she didn’t
make you feel you know, stupid for asking.

RK: And I have one final question. I know you have another meeting in about three
minutes…

SS: No, you’re OK for now.

RK: Oh, OK. I, well in that case I have two questions. [Susan laughs] Was there, was
there any major—was there a significant change in the zoning code during the time that
you were with the Freedman admininistration?

SS: There was a—I’m trying to think of major—when I got there, that was before her—
there was one major one when I got there. There were, I wouldn’t call it major. I think
what we did was, at, at some point, and I frankly can’t remember if it was at the end of
Martinez or during her administration as a result of the comprehensive plan. Which I, I’m
trying to think, was the late ‘80s. I think in the late ‘80s they, we adopted a
comprehensive plan and then you had a year basically to rezone the, rezone properties to
conform to the plan. And at, that took over a year and we did it by quadrant. So that kind
of was when this big new zoning code came into affect.

RK: I see.

SS: After that, and I’m, I frankly don’t think it was under her administr—

RK: OK

SS: …but it might have overlapped.

RK: OK.

SS: Now, we, we did an annual review of the zoning code and if we, and we literally kept
a running list of you know, problems over the years that we thought needed to be
changed, or and Council would tell us. And you know, some people could go to the
Council and say, hey I want this on the list for the next revision. And the good news about
that was they didn’t, they weren’t always changing it like some places do. And, but they
did, you know they did take a good look at it every year. And we made, you know, the
necessary changes.

RK: Was this sometimes in response to or related to what you were speaking about, about
before to neighborhood groups?

SS: Yeah, sometimes it was related to neighborhood groups. Sometimes it was, you know
developers came, or somebody came in and they would, had some new use that you
know, as a result of technology, like even cell towers, you know.
RK: Yes.

SS: At some point, while I was there they invented cell towers and we had to deal with them and add them to the zoning code. Or, you know, some other kind of new use that resulted from a new technology or something. Sometimes it was that, sometimes it was as mundane as a new kind of fencing that you know, wasn’t recognized or something like that.

RK: Now this is my final question. And you were very familiar with, I think, the Freedman administration, not just in terms of the job you did but more generally. And if one tries to place the administration kind of historically—you have Martinez before and Greco after, but you had, you know a longer period obviously. And you ask what the legacy of the Freedman administration might be—in, you know, any sphere whatsoever, does anything come to mind in particular that you think people thirty years from now might be looking at or speaking about?

SS: Well I do think that the downtown was the, was a huge one. And even though maybe not, not as much downtown development occurred during that time, the fact that she got these zoning districts and better design of them, you know, with this Blue Ribbon Committee. That she came in and saw that as one of her first priorities. And those, that effort set the tone and the look of downtown I think for, you know, decades to come.

And I think the obviously the other thing was both her housing programs. The city had housing staff but they really didn’t do very much until she came on board and people came with her, to her with ideas of you know, we could do this and we could do that. And, and she let them run with it. And you know ended up getting national attention for that. And also the neighborhood programs. You know at one point they packaged the neighborhood programs and there were forty different neighborhood related programs that had been initiated. I think all virtually her, during her administration.

And the other is, you know I do think that the, it, what it’s called a construction services center, but you know, the, the permitting center and, and the way it’s organized. I think that again, people really look to that I think of how to, how to do it right. And you know, although anybody who goes to, through a regulatory process is never happy, they you know, they really are, have always been one step ahead I think of everybody else. And you know, have, have really done a good job at that.

There’s one other thing too that I forgot—other than the downtown—and I forgot what it was.

RK: Well you’ve done a good job of remembering a lot though over the last hour, and I greatly appreciate your time. I know how busy you are in your new job. Maybe you should tell people where you are.
SS: I’m in Leesburg, Virginia, which is a rapidly growing suburb of Washington, DC. And last year was, it was, it’s the county seat of what last year the census said was the fastest growing county in the country. And we used to think, in Florida we thought 2% a year, or 4% a year of growth was a big deal. Here they have 10%....

RK: Oh boy.

SS: …a year growth. So, in ten years, between the 1990 and the 2000 census they doubled in size here, so.

RK: So you have a busy job.

SS: Yeah.

RK: I really very much appreciate—I very much appreciate your taking the time to talk. Thank you very, very much.

SS: Thank you and let me know if you have any….

[End Tape]