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Land Use Oral History Project
Patel Center for Global Solutions
University of South Florida

Interview with: Ms. Margaret Vizzi
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WM: I always put a label on the disc by saying, “This is Bill Mansfield from the University of South Florida’s Land-Use Oral History Project talking to Ms. Margaret Vizzi in her home in Tampa Florida on October the—

MV: Ninth.

WM: The ninth. October 9, 2006. Ms. Vizzi, we always get people to start off by having them state their name and telling us when they were born and where they were born. So let her go.

MV: Okay. I am Margaret Vizzi. I was born July 30, 1931 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

WM: Okay. What is your current occupation?

MV: Homemaker.

WM: Okay, that’s good.

MV: It has been for a long time.

WM: When did you come to Tampa?

MV: 1960. September 1960.

WM: What brought you [to Tampa]?

MV: My husband was born here and he had finished all of his training and we came back here to live.

WM: Training in what?

MV: Medicine.

WM: So he was a doctor?

MV: A MD. He was in internal medicine.

WM: Okay. Well tell, me what got you involved in [the Tampa Neighborhood Association?] I read in the newspaper where you'd been active in the Tampa Neighborhood Association. Tell me about that.

MV: Well, my original activities started, I guess the first time we sat here at our dining room table. Someone came to my door with a petition, because of the development that was being proposed, just three blocks west of us. So, we signed the petition and not much—you know—other activity did I get into, at that time, because I had several young children.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: But the thing that really got me involved was traffic being caused by the development that occurred.

So, with the petition that the neighbors had passed around I went down to the mayor's office, it was Bill Poe at the time and talked to him about the concerns. That was just the beginnings then of realizing that the development that was going to occur around us, because Kennedy Boulevard is so close. It was going to be important to pay attention to the development around us [and] not only in the neighborhood.

So, I got involved with others who lived in the neighborhood and we began—At that point it was sort of the beginnings of the early, early comprehensive planning that was occurring. This was in, I would imagine, the early '70's.

WM: Is that when the person came around with the petition?

MV: No, no, no, no. That was in 1963. Several years went by before the transportation problem became, you know when the development was complete and the traffic problem was generated. The cars, instead of using Kennedy, were using the neighborhood streets.

WM: Okay.

MV: So that's how [it started]. We just felt something needed to be done.

WM: Traffic congestion in your neighborhood [got you involved]?

MV: Well it wasn't the congestion. It was the numbers of cars that were coming through here because it was easier than using Kennedy. They came through here instead.

WM: So, tell me about the process of organizing your neighbors to affect a change.

MV: Originally those of us who lived in this area that was more effected, because you have to know [the neighborhood of] Beach Park and this area. There [are] only two streets that go through: Cleveland and Azeele. Then you hit the water. So everybody that wants to go that way has [to] filter down these streets.

WM: Everybody who wants to go to the water?

MV: [Yes,] to the water.

WM: Which is west of here?

MV: Just on the other side of the water there is another residential development, to the west and then between us is where [this] commercial office building started going up. That was the traffic that was being generated to come through [our neighborhood].

Then, of course, the other thing on my particular street, on Sherrill, which is now [a] cul-de-sac. Town and Country was developed, which is the neighborhood northwest of us. Many of those who lived there worked at MacDill Air Force Base. They would come through this little street in front of my house, go up Azeele to Westshore and then out to the Base.

The city registered six thousand cars a day on this little two-block street.

WM: Wow!

MV: It took a death at the corner of Cleveland and Sherrill to—Are you familiar with our former Mayor, Dick Greco?

WM: No.

MV: Well he was our former mayor, the first time. Then he came back and served again. It was during his first [term] as mayor that he came back and [made a] cul-de-sac [of] the street, after the death occurred.

WM: There was a traffic accident?

MV: Yes, because of the heavy, heavy traffic that was going through here.

But anyway, as all of this occurred more of the neighbors began to know one another and we began to get very involved in watching what was happening around us.

At that time, I would think it was maybe the mid-1970s, that the studying began for the comprehensive plan. I wasn't sure what that was all about, but I did find out that in the original plan this area, all the way to Azeele Street, was designated for the commercial to

come back to it. When we found that out, we started our efforts to make sure that that changed with the new comprehensive plan that was coming in and the new land-use designation.

WM: Okay. I just want to make sure I understand you. You looked at the comprehensive plan and discovered that commercial—

MV: Could have been allowed to come into this area, all the way to Azeele.

WM: And you wanted to keep this residential?

MV: We wanted to keep this totally residential. To keep nothing further than what fronts Kennedy Boulevard as the commercial. Then everything south [of Kennedy] residential.

WM: Okay. This might seem like a one of those obvious questions, but why would you want to keep it residential? I mean keep the business—commercial [development] from expanding into this area?

MV: Well, because it's a totally different—you know—you can't merge single family detached [housing] with commercial. For example, I know that those who want to live in the condos [downtown] are okay with the commercial mingling with the condo. But it's always been my feeling, and for most people, who live in single-family detached [housing] neighborhoods, you don't want that within the neighborhood.

You want it surrounding you, so that you can use the commercial. But you don't want the traffic that's generated and more trash, more trucks and all of those good things that have to serve the commercial [area]. So it isn't only the commercial but even high, higher densities. We wanted it to remain single-family detached residential [housing]. We got busy and attended meetings and learned what it was all about.

WM: You said you found out that this was originally planned for the commercial to return; how did you find that out?

MV: When we started looking into this, "What is this land-use?" and, "What is this zoning all about?" [We] started talking to the people down at the Planning Commission, which in those days [the] Planning Commission was really just beginning.

I guess you're familiar with the Hillsborough County city/county planning as compared to each city in the county having its own [planning commission]?

WM: Um-huh.

MV: So we started talking to those who are in the planning commission and found out that [our neighborhood] wasn't zoned for that. This was zoned for residential, but the land-use that it could have been given other zoning to allow for the spread of commercial [development]. Of course we were all single-family detached and didn't understand why

they let all of this develop as single family and then have that land-use designation [for commercial].

So, then—I guess—I'm trying to think of the years and I can't. I would imagine it was the late 1970s when all of this activity began. And then it was in the 1980s when the new comprehensive plan was being put together. The mayor at that time was Sandy Freedman. We talked to the land use and zoning people at land development in the city and told them of our concern about any land use designation that would allow that spread of the commercial or higher density into the neighborhood.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: They studied it and understood it, because we were surrounded by it. If you'll take a little ride, you'd understand that just two blocks that way—two blocks that way, it's high density.

WM: What? Two blocks west and two blocks north?

MV: Yes and two blocks north is high density. So anyway, they totally understood and gave us the land use designation, suburban density, residential. Which means it's an R-6 now. It's called an R-6 which means six dwelling units per acre.

WM: Okay.

MV: So basically that's how my involvement began. And being concerned about traffic and then getting into land use and zoning, cause they run together. It's like, which one comes first? Build the roads let the development [happen]? Or let the development happen and then build the roads.

WM: Usually they build the development and then the roads.

MV: Right, and then worry about the roads and then there is no place to put them, which is the problem that this city and county has.

I don't know if you're familiar with the development that's going to happen south of Gandy [Boulevard]? All of that land-use it was originally heavy industrial. [They're] Westinghouse plants back there and a lot of these chemical plants, et cetera. Now it's all being re-zoned for high density residential and some commercial to serve that.

But I don't know where the cars are going to go and the city doesn't know where the cars are going to go. So that's—[throws up her hands in frustration]. Mr. Weaver, I know is very familiar with all of that. [See Ron Weaver's interview with Bill Mansfield. 9-26-06] Part of it because he's been involved with some of that, I know with the redevelopment hearings down there. We're saying Westshore Boulevard cannot be widened.

If you do, all of this residential that lines it, very expensive homes, there's no place. South Tampa is really limited in what you can do with roads.

WM: You said [that] in the early 1980s the new comprehensive plan came together and you said, "We talked to the planning commission."

MV: Right.

WM: Who is "we"?

MV: Oh, some of the neighbors, in my neighborhood. At this point I was, you know it was strictly, I had nothing to do with all the rest of the city.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: But in the meantime, I started attending City Council meetings. I realized that things were going on in other neighborhoods, that they had no idea was happening. So I became very concerned.

Then, of course the neighborhoods that are just east and north—'cause there are no neighborhoods going directly north until you get to Hillsborough. There was so much going on over there.

Loretta Ingraham who was a black activist in her neighborhood, we would see one another and talk about the fact that we really had to get together and pay attention, you know, together. We ought to form an umbrella group.

Well that was the beginnings of the talk, but nothing happened until Sandy Freedman's second term. There was-um- Parke Wright, Parke Wright III, who was a very influential man in the development of downtown called. He lived in Sunset Park, which is just south of us. He said, "You know we really need to get these neighborhoods to start working together, to watch out for what's going on in the neighborhoods."

With that he called a luncheon and I called about fifteen people from different neighborhoods by then, that I had met up with. So we formed the Tampa Homeowners, an Association of Neighborhoods. Which was how the umbrella group came to be. It was because of the fact that I realized that people just did not know what was going on and what was about to happen to them. So because of that we are now, this is our eighteenth year as the umbrella group.

It's been a good involvement.

WM: Good. I'd like to ask you for you to tell me more about that. But first, you said that Ms. Ingraham was this black woman, what neighborhood did she [represent]?

MV: Lincoln Gardens-Carver City, which is just north of the interstate. Truly—I would say—[thinking] ‘cause it doesn’t go all the way to Westshore, but I’ll give you the boundaries. It’s Westshore to Del Mabry.

In fact most of that neighborhood was developed when they went through with the interstate through Ybor City. Many of those who lived there were displaced and they built in that area. They were seeing all of this development around them too, which is mainly now the Westshore development. Which is, I guess you know the largest business development in the state of Florida.

WM: I’m afraid I still haven’t learned that.

MV: Well it is. I mean it’s bigger than downtown. It’s the largest in the state [even bigger] than Miami. It’s such a large district. It is limited [for height] because of the airport, but other than that, there’s just lots of office space.

So anyway, they were being affected by that. They were being affected by what was happening on Dale Mabry and all around them. She and I would see one another at City Council and we would talk. We knew that we were close together. Loretta died about ten years ago and the community center in her neighborhood is now the Loretta Ingraham Community Center. Loretta and I got to be really good friends.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: She was a good lady. I was really—I was on vacation when she died and I was just so surprised when I came back to hear that.

WM: Let’s see, you’ve been active in the Beach Park Homeowners. When did that start?

MV: The Beach Park Home Owners, we reorganized about twenty years ago. It had sort of —there was an organization many years ago. The original Beach Park was started in the 1920s. It was the—actually that’s how this Azeele Street [issue] came about. Because Beach Park was really Azeele, south and east. That’s why when they were putting the land use and this land wasn’t developed yet, even though it had the zoning for only single families, that’s how that designation, in my great thinking came about. There was nobody here to say any other thing.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: So then, as I say, twenty years ago Beach Park Homeowners re-established and I was on that original board and still sit on that board. In fact Ron Weaver lives in Beach Park, but on the other side of Westshore. He’s in this neighborhood as well.

WM: Tell me about the reorganization process for the Beach Park Homeowners Association. How did it come together?

MV: Well—I'm glad you asked. There was a proposal for a townhouse development, right up here at the apex of Royal Palm, Azeele and Westshore Boulevard. There was this piece of land right here. (taps the table to indicate close proximity) Someone wanted to put townhouses [on it]. And everybody said, "No!"

So it was during that process that a larger area came together and then the Beach Park Homeowners was re-established. Ever since then we've been very active in watching this "corner."

WM: Okay. When you said, "when they came together," that's kind of a vague term. If you could, tell me as much as you can about the organization process, recruiting people—

MV: Well, flyers. We have a totally different way of doing things now. We used to walk fliers [around the neighborhood]. I mean, petitions we'd walk door-to-door. Fliers, we'd put out fliers [the same way]. That's basically how we'd let the people know. Then of course there was a meeting called. There were about twelve of us who were really sort of "the group" that got it going.

WM: The leading forces?

MV: Exactly. So we then, passed out the fliers [and] had a meeting. A small group was put together to put the by-laws and the articles of incorporation and all of that together. Then we were officially formed.

WM: Okay. Well, tell me what you remember about the leading people. Who were they? What kind of folks were they?

MV: They were realtors, they were businessmen, they were attorneys. Now it is very difficult for attorneys to really get active in their neighborhoods, especially if—I'm not exactly sure how to put this. They helped a lot, but they had to help us quietly.

WM: Unofficially?

MV: Yes, sort of unofficially.

WM: Would that have brought up issues of attorney-client [privilege]?

MV: Yes. Well it could. And attorney—the kind of work that they did.

WM: Conflict of interest issues?

MV: Conflict of interests, exactly.

But I mean—as far as they were [There were] homemakers, housewives, you know—all kinds of people who got involved. Mainly they really wanted to see that this—um—area remained [zoned for] single family detached residential.

We are one of the few neighborhoods that is [solidly] residential. Many of the others are solid residential but they will have sort of a strip of commercial. But within our boundaries we're totally single family detached.

WM: Okay, so the people in the organization were committed to maintaining the status quo?

MV: Exactly.

WM: I don't want to put words in your mouth.

MV: No! That is exactly right.

WM: I just want to make sure I understand.

MV: Yes. Because by then the issue of the land use, and all, in our zoning had already been taken care of. Those of us who had been active at that point had already seen to that.

In other words they wanted a re-zoning [in order] to do that development. So any way that continues to be our main focus—maintaining the single family detached and paying attention to what happens around us to make sure it won't adversely affect us.

For years we fussed about water pressure and other serves, storm water. Now the city has finally put together the storm water fee, to do some storm water projects.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: Put with the developments that did happen around us, many of the—most all of them—had to take care of their own storm water. In other words in couldn't flow down into us any more. And the city has since put in more water lines that development had to pay for. So that cost didn't affect us.

The main thing that we still have concerns about are traffic. And when something is going on around us, we still go down there and talk about traffic and what it would mean if that development occurred. Now we as for traffic [quality] and hopefully get them to use, like Kennedy Boulevard, where the traffic should be. We have a resolution that is reinstated that every one of our general membership meetings as Beach Park has a board that pretty much runs the organization. Twice a year we have a general membership meeting and we reinstate the resolution that says, "The board shall work to maintain the residential character," or "to maintain current land use and zoning that the city of Tampa has established," within and around us.

We don't want it to get any more dense than it already is outside and keep what we have inside.

WM: You said that you started attending the City Council meetings, was this prior to—and I'm asking this question to get some kind of chronology.

MV: I kind of think that I started attending City Council meetings—I mean on a regular basis (that's every Thursday), probably before the establishment of both Beach Park Homeowners and Tampa Homeowners. Because Tampa Homeowners was formed shortly after Beach Park [Homeowners] officially came back as a group.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: So that would have been twenty-five years ago, maybe? That's a long time.

WM: I know. I can't keep of track of time like I used to.

MV: Of course I was juggling all of this, raising nine children besides.

WM: My goodness.

MV: But I did. Because I felt very strongly about it. I mean I was living here and I was—my main reason for getting involved in that traffic issue was because of my children. All though they had a big back yard to play in, they were still out on the streets, riding their bikes. There was a time when they could even ride their bikes to school. So—um—I did that.

WM: What was your impression of the [city] council meetings?

MV: They were very interesting. I found them to be very interesting.

WM: How so?

MV: Well, because, you know there's a lot that goes on at council meetings that people just don't realize.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: And you've got to remember, back then there was no cable television that you could watch [the meetings] on. In fact it was Tampa Homeowners that sort of got all of those—them, you know, to put it on cable. And notices that were available, we now get notices of zonings that will occur in your neighborhood or the closet neighborhood to development outside of the neighborhood.

None of that was [available] at that time. People just didn't know what was going on. It was—I just started getting really interested in realizing that people needed to pay attention to what was going on. Not only for Beach Park, but the other neighborhoods at all.

WM: I think you said that you learned that what was happening in one neighborhood would affect another.

MV: Absolutely. Of course.

WM: You mentioned that Ms. Loretta Ingraham would attend these meetings too. But were there other concerned citizens?

MV: Not on as regular a basis and even [Ms. Ingraham] didn't come to all of them. But Loretta was there because she had gotten involved because of everything that was going on.

One of the main things, I think, was when the Westshore development of regional impact came about. I guess that's when I really met Loretta and that's when we realized we had similar issues. Because, very definitely, all neighborhoods are important to one another. Because if you've got a good neighborhood here and a dilapidated neighborhood here, it's just not going to work.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: So—um—it was fun. I enjoyed getting other people involved. And, of course, when Mayor Freedman realized we had formed our group then she actually hired someone to work with the neighborhoods and help us to get all of this information. That's Steve LaBour. If you want any information on the beginnings of that office you might want to talk [to] Steve LaBour because he came in and—

I would help Steve. Steve didn't really know what he was doing. I had some of the beginnings. Sometimes when Steve wasn't in the office [if somebody called about a neighborhood issue] the city would tell them to call me. (chuckles) So I sort of became Steve's helper, you might say, just out of the fact that I happened to be here.

Then as Steve working with the city and other neighborhoods, he would let me know about this other group, so that's how I got to know more and more of the neighborhoods. 'Cause the city of Tampa is pretty spread out.

WM: It is indeed.

MV: Especially once you leave south Tampa, it goes so far north and east. It would have been impossible for me to go to Sulfur Springs. That's way out on 41. Are you familiar where Sulfur Springs is?

WM: That's where the water tower is.

MV: Yes it is. Of course that neighborhood was very involved. I've met them. In fact they were one of the founding members of Tampa Homeowners as well. So it was

[through] my getting involved that I learned some of these people who were being active in their neighborhoods but didn't have any official group.

So, of course after that they formed their own associations. And we promote and push and encourage them to be organized—I mean incorporated—and to have their bylaws and to follow them. Keep good records. So that's what, sort of happened after Tampa Homeowners was formed. That neighborhood involvement spread.

And then, [chuckles] it was really funny because some people from the county, who lived in the county, in the unincorporated county didn't understand that they were not in the city of Tampa. And they wanted to; you know, get involved and get some of the things that the city was doing, because the city then put [up] these signs. I don't know if you have noticed the neighborhood signs? Well the county people wanted signs too.

Well this got the county involved in getting a neighborhood office set up in the neighborhoods around the county. But that was all an outflow of the city of Tampa doing what we did in the city.

WM: You said that Steve LaBour came on as sort of a liaison between the city government and the neighborhoods?

MV: That's right. That's what he [did].

WM: When was that?

MV: That was—this is our eighteenth year, so he came in about the second or third year, so that about sixteen years ago [1990], maybe seventeen [1989].

WM: Okay. I'll do the arithmetic and figure out when that was. Well, tell me about putting together the neighborhood association, because—

MV: Which one? The umbrella group?

WM: No, no we'll start with the Beach Park first, because you said there were people who were really concerned and had the time, the energy and the interest to devote to the organization.

MV: Right.

WM: So how did that play out? Did you have people—?

MV: You mean people who didn't want to see what we were doing?

WM: No, no, no, no. I'm just thinking about, from the way you described it you said there was about a dozen people, who were the engines, the leading forces in organizing it.

So—um—then there were the other people in the neighborhood who were sort of interested but not as active, you know, so—

MV: Right, but we had their support. And that's where it's so important. Because in most neighborhood groups, that's what you have. You have the "engines" which are those twelve to fifteen people who really get into it. Then the others want the same things, but they can't [participate] because either they are working or they really don't want to get involved, or whatever. But you have their support. We never had opposition to what that "engine" wanted to do.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: I mean everybody jumped on the bandwagon and said, "Yes." In most neighborhoods, that's the case.

Now in some I know that there has been some friction, you know, people wanting to sell out. So they could have other development rather than residential. But—um—I think today, people realize that a good residential neighborhood supports those [commercial] developments on the major streets.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: So I don't see that kind of conflict in neighborhoods anymore. Of course when it comes what zonings, for example, that's another thing. You know where the restaurants that are on the main streets want a liquor license. Needless to say you want nice restaurants, but you also have to be very careful, because once a property is "wet zoned" it stays "wet zoned," no matter who stays there, or who goes. So, that's another big involvement of neighborhoods, is watching out for wet zones.

WM: When you say wet zones you mean selling alcohol?

MV: Selling alcohol. Exactly.

WM: Okay.

MV: Of course there are different kinds, selling it packaged or just with an "R," where you have the restaurant and they are just selling beer and wine, usually. Some of the bigger ones of course go to the mixed drinks.

But that was another big thing that the neighborhoods couldn't understand how these people were all getting these licensees to sell all this liquor around them. And—um—we now get notices of all of those things, on a regular basis, out of the Land Development Office. We get a list of all the zonings that are coming up, all the "wet zonings" that are coming up, as an out-flow of this involvement many years ago. So it makes me happy to know that all the neighborhoods now have access to this [information].

WM: Tell me how the associations—I guess we can construct examples so that people can understand how the association works.

But like an issue comes in and a zoning change or a request for a zoning change—does the city council contact the neighborhood association, or is it incumbent upon the neighborhood association to [find out]?

MV: Let me show you, I just got [this].

pause in recording

MV: This comes out every two weeks.

WM: Um-huh. It's called *Tampa Cares*.

MV: Yes, *Tampa Cares*. It comes out of the zoning, the land use office. And this always [has] some pertinent information about things that are coming up. And then this tells you all of the Variance Review Board. 'Cause you know there is a board that gives variances.

WM: And that's a change in the zoning plan?

MV: That's a change but there has to be a true hardship with the land. It can't be just because I want to do it. There has to be a reason.

Then you have the zonings.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: That's these "Z's." Then you have the "wet zonings."

WM: Okay and that's for alcohol?

MV: That's for alcohol.

WM: Okay.

MV: So every two weeks we get a mailing like this. And this is how neighborhoods [get information]. The ones who are mailed these are the one who's listed down at the city as the contact person for the different neighborhood [associations]. [It comes from] the neighborhood office that I was telling you about, [with] Steve LaBour. Shannon Edge is now the contact person in that office.

WM: Shannon Edge?

MV: Shannon Edge, yes.

WM: So this—um—

MV: That [newsletter] comes from land development.

WM: So it comes to your office?

MV: Comes to your home.

WM: And then what?

MV: Well, then you go from there. For example there is one on here that is in Beach Park. Someone is requesting a rear yard setback, for example. So of course the position that we will take on this, because we don't look at them and say, "Oh yeah, we like you so we won't [oppose this request]." Across the board we go down there and say, "We want it to stay the way it is."

Now if the land is shaped differently, for example if it is a triangular lot, there [are] times when we know they will get [the variance] because of that. But just because somebody wants to make their home bigger and have more. [Unanimously] our resolution says we will maintain the zoning laws.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: The zoning laws set the setbacks. So this is a variance from the established setbacks.

WM: Okay.

MV: So, as you see hear all the neighborhoods are listed that [have a request]. So you take [the newsletter] and go from there.

WM: Okay. I just want to make sure I understand you. [The newsletter] comes out so the board of the [neighborhood association]—

MV: Beach Park, for example.

WM: Beach Park would sit and talk about this among yourselves?

MV: Well, our position is, just across the board. Many times they will call and ask, for example, the president of the Beach Park Homeowners. "Will you all agree with this?" And she just tells them, "No we will not."

That doesn't mean you can't go down there [to the city council] and ask. If they see that there is a reason to give it, fine. But across the board we say, "No." It's not consistent with the zoning code.

WM: Okay. I'll set up a hypothetical example, just help better understand how it works.

Say I want to expand my house in Beach Park, so that it exceeds the setbacks. So I would go to the city and apply for the variance.

MV: Right.

WM: They would send this out [*Tampa Cares*] and it would go to the president [of Beach Park Homeowners Association].

MV: And I also get a copy, as the zoning chair for Tampa Homeowners [Association].

WM: Okay. So you would read here that I want to expand my house and I'm asking for a variance. So you would come and tell me, "No you can't do this."

MV: We don't go [to your home]. We'll go down to the hearing.

WM: Oh.

MV: We'll go to the hearing. But sometimes [people] will call and ask if we're going to oppose it. And as I say, our president, as just as all of the presidents have in the past—sometimes they call me as the zoning chair for Beach Park, and we just [say to the variance applicant]. "We're not telling you not to go down there [to the Variance Review Board]. We're not telling you that you're not going to get it. But we will not support you in doing that."

WM: Okay. But I've called you on the phone and said I still want to expand my house and [you've told me] that you're still not going to support it. So we go to the city council—

MV: No that's the Variance Review Board.

WM: Okay. We go to the Variance Review Board and I tell them I want to expand my house and that means to change my setbacks. So then, what would you do?

MV: Well [you would] give [your] testimony, and this five criteria by which they are supposed to grant variances. And one of the main ones is a hardship with the land. Not a personal hardship. Not that you've got a larger family, or your parents are coming to live with you, or anything like that. It's supposed to be a hardship with the land. (taps table for emphasis)

Sometimes it's because there is a—grand oak, for example, in one part so that [you] could have expanded in that [direction] but because the grand oak is there and you don't want them to cut down the tree. We still couldn't support [you], but we could understand where the VRB [Variance Review Board] might say, "You could have [expanded in that direction] but you can't because of the tree. So will give you [your variance]."

The VRB has been pretty good about upholding the code and making sure there is a hardship, a true hardship with the land.

WM: So cutting down the tree would be a hardship with the land?

MV: Cutting down a grand oak in Beach Park is almost as bad—or worse—because (I don't know if you know this) but Tampa is known for its tree cover. We do help to protect our trees. We would say, basically, "Well don't expand." Period. But we can understand where the VRB has a reason to grant [you], maybe the rear yard because they don't want [you] to cut down the tree either.

So, as I say, there are times when we totally understand why the variance is given. Yet we would not go to the hearing and say we support [you] doing this.

WM: You said there were five criteria for the variances [what are they]?

MV: Oh gosh.

WM: This isn't pop quiz.

MV: No, to name them off—if I was going to a hearing I'd be able to [name them]. I'd have them written down. But it all has to do with—one of them is that you wouldn't adversely affect your neighbors. [Another] is that you have a hardship with the land. And that's the one where not to grant the hardship [Interviewer's Note: Did you mean not to grant the variance?] would be a hardship on you. Which is what I just explained. And then there's three others that I [can't recall]. Ordinarily I'd know them, but right now they're not coming to me.

WM: You'll think of them once I've left.

MV: I review them every time we have to go to the down there.

WM: Anyhow, I'm there and I want to expand my house and you all have said that you oppose this.

MV: So we go down there and then after they hear the petitioner, then they hear any opponents, or proponents. Then they deliberate among themselves and decide what will be.

WM: Okay. They have decided to overrule you and give it to me. So do you let it go or do, is there an appeal [process]?

MV: We could appeal, but in most cases that becomes very expensive. The homeowners associations can't afford. There are appeals to city council and you can—um—appeal it to city council, either if it's denied and the petitioner wants to do it or if the opponents could. But in most cases, as I say [it doesn't happen].

That board has been really good, especially in recent years, about upholding [zoning ordinances]. When they grant something you can understand why it was granted. So—um—I'm trying to remember—I think one time we filed an appeal as far as city council and it was overturned—um—by the council. In other instances—yes—there was one I remember, not too long ago, where the VRB denied it and they appealed to council and the [City] Council did give it to them. So [there's an] appeal to the city council as well—either way.

WM: So both sides have the right to appeal?

MV: Correct. And then from there, if you still don't like it you can go to court.

WM: That's where Mr. Weaver comes in?

MV: That's where he would come in. But I've never faced Mr. Weaver.

WM: (laughs) Well good. Okay. But the—um—the board of the neighborhood association, is it generally the same people? What kind of turnover is there?

MV: Well it all depends. It's difficult to get people to commit. Different groups have different ways. Some people [I mean other neighborhoods] have their board meetings and then they have a general meeting like every other month.

We found out, early on, that to get people out twice a year in general is about the best way to go. 'Cause at the same time we have our neighborhood watch meeting, which is, you know [you see the signs] around that say the police, the neighbors are watching.

The board has turnover. Sometimes you have a lot of turnover. Our group, we lost two of our members to death. Usually there are two or three new people that come in about every three or four years, because when you are elected for a two-year term, you're usually reelected.

I'm the only one that's been on this board since its inception, 'til now. And yet I've never served as its president. I always felt that I'd rather be involved in all of the issues and watching things and have someone who will be president and do all of the other things that the president of the group has to do. Of course THAN [Tampa Homeowners Association of Neighborhoods] they know I was a founding member of THAN.

The way THAN works, you send a representative from your group to THAN. Early on, as a founding member of THAN, I got involved with THAN and in fact served as its president for the first four years of the organization. Of course THAN, I think we're on our seventh [president]. In fact Steve [LaBour], after he left the city, he represented his neighborhood and became president.

So as far as turnover, in most neighborhoods, from what I gather, it's the turnover like we had. Every three of four years you'll get new people on the board and then some fall off.

And some will come back. It's just for some other reason that they can't continue at that time. But it varies and I think it varies in the different neighborhoods as to the involvement on the board.

WM: Okay. That brings logic to a good place. Talking about putting together the neighborhood associations in THAN, so tell me about that.

MV: Well this all started and we had that first luncheon that I told you about—Parke Wright III had called me in and talked to me about the fact the he thought we ought to be looking at an umbrella group of neighborhoods.

I knew about twelve people by then, from different neighborhoods, that had been involved but with no real organization of a board, just neighborhood involved people. So we got together, and as I say, he had a lunch for us. From that we had meetings [where] we put together the incorporation and even had discussions about what we would call this group that we were putting together. So that was the founding group and of that founding group, there—let's see there are—one, two, three [counts to her self] there are about four of us who are still involved with Tampa Homeowners. Though the founding members are an automatic member.

Other than that, each neighborhood is represented. We work there as a board. We have a meeting once a month and there is a representative from each neighborhood. So you have one vote per neighborhood. In fact we have a meeting this week. It's always the second Wednesday of the month.

But that's how Tampa Homeowners was formed. Then most of those went back to their own neighborhoods and did what we did in Beach Park. And formed into their individual groups. Now, I think the city has—you'll have to talk to Shannon [Edge] about the actual number, but there are about fifty neighborhood groups now that are officially formed.

WM: Wow. Well, can you recall the four original members who are still active?

MV: Well there's Sally Flynn and I. Oh gosh (as she searches her memory). Oh—I'm trying to remember. Maria O'Sullivan, she was in Beach Park as well, but I don't know if she was (voice trails off). I'm trying to think of [where we sat at] the table. Um—maybe it's only three of us and I'm thinking of Maria as the third person, but I don't know if she was actually at that forming meeting or not.

Out of curiosity, I don't know if you want me to let you know, to put it as part of the record, but I'm going to ask Sally Flynn, because she and I are there regularly, and I know there are two others that show up on occasion. And the any past president is an automatic member as well, to continue on that group.

WM: And when did THAN get started?

MV: We're now in our eighteenth year.

WM: Okay.

MV: That was in—
WM: 1988?

MV: 1988.

WM: I guess there are a wide variety neighborhoods from the affluent to the challenged?

MV: Absolutely there are. Ironically though, some of the neighborhoods show up when they are having a problem, 'cause they want our help. "How do I do this?" It concerns me that some of them don't come back after they solve their problems, because it is so important for the continuity of listening to everything that THAN has to offer at our meetings.

WM: Um-huh

MV: For example the zoning code. Tampa just had a major revision to their zoning code. Well that is so important for us to be involved in and we were. Those are the things that everything else is guided by. But many people don't understand that part of it. They only see that they need our help as THAN, when they are having a problem.

But we do have [representatives] from the very affluent to the very [economically] depressed, but trying to help themselves, absolutely.

WM: Has there been—I don't know how to put this—have there been conflicts of interest? Like something that would benefit one neighborhood might be detrimental to another neighborhood?

MV: Yes, very definitely.

WM: Tell me about that.

MV: Especially, for example there was something recently. Are you familiar with Bayshore Boulevard? The Hyde Park Neighborhood preservation group was very concerned. And we all are about Bayshore . Bayshore , as they say, is everybody's street in this city.

But—um—some of the zoning code, that was going to help everybody else, was detrimental to Bayshore , because of setbacks. [Setbacks] I think was the main concern.

We weren't even thinking about Bayshore and Hyde Park hadn't really gotten involved on the zoning committee that was reviewing all of that, until the very end. Then that conflict came about because we were supporting what the city was proposing without

even realizing the impact, the negative impact that it was going to have on Bayshore . In that instance what happened was, Bayshore was given a special classification.

For example right now, the big issue is front porches. I don't know if you're familiar with that?

WM: No that's another one that's news to me.

MV: Well, some of the older neighborhoods, Seminole Heights for example, that were all developed with front porches, they want front porches. And I have a front porch.

But one of the council members decided that everybody ought to be able to add a eight-foot front porch to the front of their homes. Well suppose I want to do that and I stick out eight feet and my neighbor's back here? You'd just have this unconventional—

They want to make it legal, in other words, to go into your front yard setback and add front porches. Well it's very interesting because on of the [examples] that he was using, because he wanted to do it, was Seminole Heights.

Well Seminole Heights, they don't want new development to go into the front yard setbacks either. They want it to line up with everybody else's front porches. So it's very interesting to work with the other neighborhoods. Because some of them only have five foot side yard setbacks, and that's the way it is.

[In] most of those instances now, they are doing what they call the neighborhood planning where they actually have an overlay, which addresses their zonings. For example there is the Hyde Park Overlay, so far there's the old Seminole Heights Overlay, there is the —oh—what's that called, just north of down town? They've done one for that area too, with all the re-development.

WM: Tampa Heights?

MV: Tampa Heights! Exactly.

So that they have separate rules from the basic city code. So that in the basic zoning what we tried to do is address what is important for everybody. And then where there are different types of development that occurred, for example, in Tampa Heights, where they want to maintain what they have. We totally understand that.

I think as time progresses there will be more and more neighborhoods that are going to want to do that. Especially in East Tampa where they have a more unique type of development in the past and they'll want to maintain it. We have no problem with that.

You asked about any conflict, I remember one time, it was one of the city council [members] who had a concern about all of these people who were parking on the lawns.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: That isn't very good [for] the aesthetics of the neighborhood, nor for the just the whole idea. Cars aren't supposed to be on the lawn. You ought to have a driveway where you can [park your car].

Well some of the neighborhoods felt they didn't want the cars parked on the street and they didn't have enough room to put a driveway to handle the cars. So both the council-person and the Tampa Homeowners sort of backed off on that. And it's an individual neighborhood type issue. I think the code still says you're not supposed to do it but in many instances it's a matter of neighborhoods who don't care, and feel its okay just ignoring it. And those that do, call it in [and complain], cause it is a code violation.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: So, that's the way those kinds of issues go.

Boats in front yards, for example, [there's] a strict code on what kind of boats and the size of the boats [that can be in your front yard]. We, in Beach Park, if somebody moves in and puts this big boat in the front I guarantee you the city will be called. We just don't want the boats in the front yards.

Other neighborhoods could care less.

WM: Well in thinking about development issues, like you were talking about, changing zoning from industrial to—and again this is another hypothetical situation, but say there was a neighborhood that wanted an area zoned for industrial/commercial and this other neighborhood association didn't. How would that be resolved?

MV: Well, going to city council hearings.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: Now in recent years, and I don't know if you've spoken to Ron Weaver, but the city council has become very adamant about developers meeting with neighborhoods, before they come to the hearings, to see how [many] problems you can iron out, that the neighborhood sees and see where the developer can say, "Okay, maybe we won't do it as dense," or, "Maybe we won't do it this particular way." And I have not seen that in most cases.

The residential parts of those neighborhoods, the two neighborhoods, would probably view it the same way. They'd probably realize that the development is going to happen so that the best thing to do is work with the developer, to make the development as good as it can be. That's basically what's happened with us.

You've got to remember when I moved here, for example, Westshore Plaza wasn't there. When that went in we didn't even know what was going on, back then. I think they opened in 1965, or '66. But—um—the development—you need to have some commercial development and it's got to be the best you can get.

Everything else that occurred then, on this side of Kennedy, was all development, so we as Beach Park had a lot of input into what went along there and that's why our streets are cul-de-sacs. They realized the traffic would come through here, to Kennedy, just to like they come through this way to get back there. So they cul-de-saced all the streets. There is one street along Kennedy that is opened, but other than that they are all closed.

So, getting back to the neighborhoods, I think that they would probably work together to see the best. Because nobody is against development, but they don't want it to adversely affect the residential neighborhoods. Because residential neighborhoods are important to the city. And we'll agree that there are different kinds for different kinds of people who—you know—If you want to live in a single family detached [housing neighborhood] Beach Park is an excellent place to be, along with many other neighborhoods. And if you want to be in the high density [neighborhood] there are areas to be in.

So, I have never seen one neighborhood fighting another neighborhood, with disagreements about development.

WM: Okay. I was just thinking of if THAN encompasses fifty-four different neighborhoods—

MV: Oh! Well we don't take—there was one issue that was very difficult for us to make neighborhoods realize that we were not going to go in there and tell you what you wanted. We were strictly there to help you accomplish what you wanted to accomplish.

No, it's only on the zoning code, for example or transportation issues that we come up with our position on different things. As far as the zoning, we don't get that. They will come to us and say, "What can I do? I've got this problem. What can I do?"

But at first some neighborhoods didn't want to join because they thought we wanted to take over the whole city. We told them, "Not at all. Each individual neighborhood is responsible for it's own. We'll help you to accomplish whatever you want to accomplish, but we're not going to take a position."

In fact, are you familiar with where they want to—um—what was that water? You know where they are putting the River Walk through Hyde Park?

WM: Waterworks Park?

MV: Waterworks! Exactly. The city came to THAN and for us to give our opinion of them giving up that land, that park designation. Of course we [are] all very familiar with

what had happened to the park on Davis Island. What, two years ago, were you here when all that was going on?

WM: No. We were just arriving.

MV: You were just arriving?

WM: So we had a lot of other things to worry about at that point.

MV: Okay. Well, everyone was very upset when the city did give a hundred-year lease on part of the park area on Davis Island.

WM: Tell me about that.

MV: Well, Tampa General [Hospital] wanted to expand. The city felt it was important for them to expand. The only way for them to expand was to go into what was designated the park area on Davis Island. [There was] major opposition from Davis Island. In that instance Tampa Homeowners had taken a position, because of the fact that it was a designated park that was being given up for development. We felt—you know—we have not enough park designation to begin with. And to give it up is not great. But anyway, ultimately, the city decided it was better for Tampa General to have their expansion, so they took some of that park and gave [them] a hundred year lease, or whatever, on the park area. Now, Davis Island still has some park left.

WM: Um-huh.

MV: So all of that was very familiar in our minds and then [the city was] coming to THAN to support a de-designation of a park area. The first we said was, “Wait a minute, we don’t even know that—Tampa Height had not even seen this. They hadn’t voted on it. So we were not about to take a position. All we said was our concern was still for the de-designation of the park.

I understand, in the meantime Tampa Heights had supported that. They’re going to take this [property] and give them some other park area. [I’m] not exactly sure, ‘cause that only happened two months ago.

WM: Yeah, I read about that in the paper.

MV: So, we’re very careful about taking positions about things that happen in other neighborhoods. That’s not what we’re all about.

WM: So in dealing with the city council you can offer suggestions and rally public support but you can’t—you don’t affect policy?

MV: Right. Well policy—yes! The zoning code, for example. The other big thing that’s coming up is the TCEA. Are you familiar with that Transportation Concurrency Exemption Area?

WM: No, I'm afraid not.

MV: Well, that was [a] major thing that was put into place mainly during the Greco administration.

WM: And what is it? TEC—

MV: T-C-E-A, Transportation Concurrency Exemption Area. The entire city of Tampa, south of Fowler [Avenue] is under that TCEA. City of Tampa north of Fowler is not. I served on a citizens committee that totally opposed it and they wanted to put it in place. What it says is that just because you don't have the road network for this development's transportation you can't stop the development. That's what's caused this problem in this city of Tampa.

WM: The traffic congestion?

MV: The traffic congestion, yes. Before that came into being you could still pretty much move around because development couldn't occur unless the roads could handle the traffic. Now they can't even consider transportation as part of the rezoning. They can talk about parking. But—So now this is coming—oh I forgot why I brought this up.

This is an issue that's coming up to [City] Council and the administration is looking at. Was this a good thing and should it continue? Should it continue in some areas where they want to see development occur?

It was mainly done to help development in east Tampa, in the Ybor City area. But where did the development occur? Not there! [It was] all in the south Tampa area.

Now we were successful in stopping it. The Citizens Committee I'm talking about. [We stopped it] from going north of Fowler, where New Tampa was just developing, so it's not effective. I mean that part of Tampa is not under a TCEA, nor is the rest of the county. It's strictly the city of Tampa, south of Fowler.

And we will take a position. We have taken a position on that.

WM: I guess you can express your opinion and shape policy that way, but the decision is made by the city council?

MV: The decision is made by Council. Absolutely.

WM: Okay. Well tell me how you were successful in stopping the TCEA north [of Fowler].

MV: Well, because I was on the Citizen's Committee and we just said, "How can you do this? All of that new area of Tampa is just starting and they don't have enough road work to begin with."

This was ten, eleven years ago. "So why would you want to do that?" And they listened to us. So they decided that [it would be] Fowler south. Of course they kept telling us that the main reason was that they could get development in Ybor City and in east Tampa. And then who got it? Everything south of Kennedy, mainly. I mean it was where all of this.

So [there was] this big discussion. In fact there was a big hearing, where I saw Ron [Weaver]. In fact last week, or the week before, where the city is trying to decide, is this going to continue to be a good thing?

Then, of course the state has really started cracking down, because we weren't the only area that did it. I mean that's why transportation around the state [is such a problem]. Traffic has gotten so congested. Truly, there is no place to put more roads in south Tampa. South Tampa, north Tampa, even north of the interstate. Those are all established neighborhoods. To go through there and just clear the houses, so you can build more roads for more development, makes no sense.

WM: That reminds me of a question I wanted to ask. When I was talking to Mr. Weaver he [told me that] when they were trying to get a change in zoning, they would bring in all sorts of experts to testify about why these changes were necessary and possible. So how do the neighborhood associations counter that?

MV: Only our speaking in council, realizing the obvious. They can bring in all kinds of experts who will tell you, "Oh no, this development isn't going to bring any more traffic than what was here [before]."

For example, I'll just use the development down there, where you have these chemical plants, or Westinghouse. Those people went in [and testified] and then they went back home. You're changing that to five thousand dwelling units, plus. That's only what's been approved. So you have people that have [at least two or three cars] per home. They go in they go to work and they come back out.

But the developer will say, and the transportation expert will say, "But you're not going to have any more [traffic issues] than that Westinghouse plant caused." Knowing what you know about living in a neighborhood, and living in your own home you know how you go in and out. You don't come in and stay in the house the rest of the day. So!

I guess, you know, council also has some shall I say, pertinent information on their own. Sometimes the experts, particularly transportation people, there is something with this— Right now the only thing they talk about when they are approving development is peak hour traffic. They don't talk about the off-peak. And it's the off-peak that all of this residential [development] encourages.

It's not that we're saying that residential development shouldn't occur, but it's the density that is concerning everyone. As far as experts? No he can't bring. Not recently we have gotten a young lady on our board who is a transportation [expert] who has given us even more information about—I always knew the difference, I didn't realize that it was in the code, that you only address peak hour traffic, that you don't address off-peak.

That's why the experts that they bring in only talk about peak hour traffic, not about the other traffic.

WM: To play the devil's advocate, I can imagine the city councilmen sitting there and the development people saying "Mr. Councilman, who are you going to believe? Dr. Smith, with a Ph.D. in traffic management from a leading educational institution, or Ms. Vizzi who seems to be an irate housewife?" Because the experts—

MV: Well believe me they do it. Yes.

WM: So how do you counter the access to resources that these groups have?

MV: Sometimes its very difficult. I think that's what's happened. I mean what's so fresh in our minds is all of that re-development south of Gandy [Boulevard]. Because that's only a portion of the land that's available down there.

Everybody sees what we have now. So for the transportation people to say it is not going to make it any worse. Well it's sure not going to make it any better either. I mean the city council has some smarts as well. You know, they can see things. As far as mass transit; which is another issue that's coming forward.

I've promoted mass transit. I know you weren't here but there was what they called the Committee of 99, in 1999. We worked and that was when the County Commission considered passing a penny sales tax for mass transit.

They put together this committee of ninety-nine people. We met over an entire year, way out at USF [the University of South Florida]. So those of us who lived in my area [had a ways to drive]. These meetings were held at the worst hours. I'd have to go through traffic to get down there, which they said that was part of it. They wanted us to know how bad the traffic was. (laughs)

But the committee came up with a recommendation. Though, at that point we were not yet totally ready for mass transit, that in five years it should be reviewed. But they had to continue because it was going to have to be.

Well everything just died. It went off the plan. Well now, with what the state is saying, unless you can put a mass transit plan into your transportation element the state is going to oppose all this additional development, without the means for transportation.

It's going to be an interesting session next year. I think that the—(sighs in frustration)
Well we'll wait and see what happens.

They're not going to stop development because we all know that landowners have certain rights that they can develop. But the city also has the burden, if you want to call it that. Of making sure [it] is development that's not going to overload the road system, that's already overloaded.

So they can bring in all the experts that they want to and say, "This isn't going to do any more. This isn't going to make it any worse."

WM: I'm just thinking, in convincing people that they made the right decision they will want to decide with the experts, even though, if you look beyond the expert testimony what the experts advocate defies all common sense.

MV: In some instances it does. And yet, until recently, I guess I knew that it always addressed peak hour traffic, but the very idea that it doesn't even consider the off peak hour traffic, which is getting almost as bad. I don't think there is a time, anymore, when you can get on the interstate and not be in traffic. Or the roads, I mean Westshore [Boulevard] and Kennedy [Boulevard] there is no off peak time that is not peak. And yet they only address peak [traffic hours].

I guess that's the thing you have to find out, are they talking about peak time? Because if you've got an "F" to begin with, no matter how much more traffic you put on it, it's still going to be an "F," 'cause it can't be any worse.

WM: And an "F" road means?

MV: It's the worst. An "A" road means that the traffic just flows. A "B" road is a little bit more congested, and it goes on to "F." "F" is a failing road.

WM: Okay.

MV: For example, Westshore [Blvd.] has been a failing road. I call it an "F-F-F" road. See you can't make a road like that any worse, supposedly. (chuckles)

WM: Well, I'm sure they could find a way.

MV: Well that's it, but it can't have a worse classification because it's already an "F." That's as bad as you can get.

WM: Do you see people becoming more involved with civic activism and planning and preservation?

MV: Definitely. Absolutely and there are always the core groups of each neighborhood. For example, are you aware that comp-plan [comprehensive plan] is coming back up?

They just did the EAR [Evaluation And Review], which is the evaluation review of the old plan. Now they are going to be coming up with the new comprehensive plan. They have to look at what your old plan said you would do. Did it work the way it you wanted it to work? Or did it cause what we have now?

That's when Greco was in and decided he wanted to do that, they had a revision. They did comp plan changes and they changed what was in there. That's when the TCEA came about. So the evaluation and review [asked], "Did everything come out good or do you think it's not so good?"

That just went up to Tallahassee for review and now the planning commission is in the process of looking at all of the elements, the land use. Is all of the land use the way you want it to be? Or should we look at maybe changing some of the land use?

That's what we'll be working on, is this comp plan. I guess you have talked to those in the planning office?

WM: I've talked to Paula Harvey [see Paula Harvey's interview with Bill Mansfield 8-25-06] but she's more county planning and Steven Gran [see Steven Gran's interview with Bill Mansfield 6-28-06] who is the agricultural liaison with the county planners.

MV: I mean down at the planning commission, you haven't talked to them?

WM: No I haven't.

MV: 'Cause Michelle Oglivie there—

WM: What's her last name?

MV: Oglivie. (spells) O-G-L-I-V-I-E, I think it is. And Terry Cullen are the ones working on the city of Tampa and the county as well and all of that planning.

I served on that. I've served on a lot of citizens committees.

Two years ago when they were putting together the EAR, the Evaluation and Review, they put together a committee to give input as to what the people felt. There were all kinds of people there. There were developers, there were the citizens, to tell them what they thought about. So we worked on [that]. We had six or eight meetings over a year, before the EAR was put together. So Michelle and Terry are the ones that are working very closely with the city of Tampa's comp plan update.

WM: I ask this question a lot, because I, like most people, come home from work in the evening and I want to have supper and read and just not have worry about anything. But it really behooves us to stay involved in what's going on around us, to have some control over development.

MV: Absolutely.

WM: But then there are people, developers, who have a vested interest in this development and that is their job. They have at their disposal experts and all sorts of resources that we don't. So how do we equalize things?

MV: Fortunately you have those [people] that will get involved, such as I have. I mean, can you imagine, I was raising those nine children and I put dinner on this table every night and would go to meetings. They were a little bit older by the time [I got involved] and it was only if my husband was at home, because I never had help to leave them with. I had to be here with them.

But a lot of this happens during the day. Re-zonings used to happen during the day. That was the other thing. The people who worked couldn't get to them. But now, at least, if you have any kind of an interest and you have a group that will let you know [about meetings].

Now, there are still those who say, "Oh yes I think that's a great thing." And then won't get involved. But thank goodness, as I say, there are different kinds of people. And there are those that will go out and speak. We can write letters now. We can send E-mails.

On any kind of contact with council on a zoning issue they must make that known at the hearing. Their attorneys ask if you've had any contact either with the developer or any of your constituents on this issue. You have to put it on the record. For a time there you were not even allowed to call them or write to them or anything else like that.

In the old days everybody talked to them, those who were for and those who were against. Then it went to no contact. Now it's come to you can contact them with letters, phone calls et cetera, but they must put it in the record that's available, right there at the desk.

Then at the hearing it's all made known.

There are other ways to affect things than just going down to the hearings and that's what we tell people if [they] can't be there. Some people will go but they don't want to speak. Well council will address that, for example, someone who can make a nice presentation. They'd rather hear a neighborhood's presentation done by two or three people, than [to hear twenty people stand up and repeat the same thing. So some people can just come and they give a minute. You're allowed three minutes to speak. They can give a minute of their time, [up to ten minutes] for one person. So if a neighborhood wants to make a thirty-minute presentation and you have three people who are really good speakers and know the issues then it all be accomplished by just bringing people who will give their minutes. So there are so many different ways [to affect policy].

That's what I mean when I'd go to those city council meetings and realized all of these rezoning [hearings] that were occurring that nobody knew anything about. Of course all of that has changed over all of these years. [There's been] a tremendous change.

WM: I'll be walking home and see a sign announcing a change and I think [that] ordinarily I don't have any control over this and it's going to happen whether I want it or not.

MV: But you do and you can. You can fight city hall.

WM: And that's what the neighborhood associations do?

MV: That's what the associations do. For a long time it was, "Why bother? You can't do it." And I'm not telling you that we've stopped development, 'cause you can see that hasn't happened. But the development has definitely gotten better, except for traffic. Putting that TCEA thing in place was a terrible thing. I had no idea that it would be as bad as it [has been].

My understanding was you had to have a road or an improvement planned on the Five-Year Plan to approve it. But that's not the way it went through. It just went through that you basically can't stop development just because you can't handle the traffic.

WM: So I guess we'll reap a bitter harvest from that.

MV: Well we have. Hopefully the city is going to realize that. If they wanted more development in east Tampa, but down here my gosh, in south Tampa and even areas in north Tampa now. I don't think it's a good idea in most of the city. I don't see why it should be at all. If the roads can't handle the traffic it is going to generate? My gosh! What do you want to do?

WM: (facetiously) Go to the suburbs.

MV: Well that's what we don't want. I was out in West Chase, on Saturday with my two daughters, visiting from Fort Lauderdale. We went [to] visit a son out there. The traffic was **unbelievable**. On a Saturday at mid-day. So the suburbs are getting bad.

WM: Well I've been talking [to] you, asking questions for the past hour and a half. Is there anything thing [more to] say? Any question you want to answer that I haven't asked? Anything you want to talk about that we haven't covered?

MV: I can't think of anything. I think I've brought up things that you didn't expect to have to listen to. But they all come together. That's why Tampa Homeowners became such an important thing for neighborhoods. Because at that meeting we will have different speakers. [At] this one this time we're going to have the clean city team. The director of that is going to be there to tell us more about that program.

But what I mean, whenever there is a major thing, like the comp plan coming up, the planners, Terry and Michelle will come to out THAN meeting and give us more

information about where we are in the process, so people can get involved when hearings come up.

WM: I said I wasn't going to ask you anymore questions, but I guess there is one more I want to ask. As involved as you have been in working with the city to control development and effect development in away that it's beneficial to most number of people, have you ever considered running for city council?

MV: No! [I] Never did. Many people have asked me [that] over the years. In fact they've even jokingly asked me if I'd run for mayor. I always felt that you need somebody on this side of the fence as well. I've preferred being [outside of political office] to help them. I fully appreciate what [the council does]. Because no matter what they do they are going to have those who agree and disagree. The attorneys can help the development side. And they need people on the community side who at least know how to at least get up there. If you're going to oppose something, you don't just say, "I don't like it." You have to give the reasons of the adverse effects, et cetera, that it would have.

I think that's where [I'm most effective]. We just won a big one down here where they wanted to put a condo down there west of us. It all had to do with the development did not coincide with what was around it. So it was denied.

Will [they put] something there? Yes, because it's an office building now. Whether they will come back and just do another office, or they'll come back with a reduced condominium that would fit more into what is already there, we don't know. We know we'll get something there. But it will be a better "something."

And that's what I've always said. You're not going to stop development but just make it as good as it can be.

WM: I just want to make sure I understand you. You decided not to run for office because you knew you could better serve the public as an advocate?

MV: As an advocate for—um—good quality of life in the city of Tampa.

WM: Okay well that sounds like a real good way to conclude. I want to thank you for taking the time to talk with me. I've enjoyed it.

MV: I've enjoyed it too.

WM: Well good. I'd hate to think it'd been a trial.

MV: I hope I've answered all of the questions you've asked, with an answer you've understood. 'Cause everything, as I say, comes together. When you start talking about one thing you see how "that" was affected by "this." And it really is. I mean transportation and land use go together. You can't address one with out the other.

WM: Okay. But I always remind folks that the information you've shared with me is going to be deposited in the University of South Florida and be available to future researchers and in order for them to have access to it I need to your permission. There is a release form that I have to ask you to sign.

MV: After you send me that printed transcript [of the interview].

WM: Well you can wait and sign it then, or sign it now. It's your choice.

MV: I'd rather see.

WM: Okay.

MV: This is sort of an aside, because I've been interviewed by some newspapers on different occasion and it didn't come out I said it. The more controversial parts came out instead of everything. So that's why I'd rather sign it later.

WM: Okay. And we do want this to represent you. Also I've been photographing everybody I interview. Do you mind if I take your picture?

MV: No, just so I can be sure my hair was combed.

WM: Okay. I'll cut this thing off, get the camera out and you can—

end of interview