



AN ORAL HISTORY OF
**THE TRUCKEE MEADOWS
REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY**

Prepared for

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January 2019

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Featuring interviews with

Elisa Cafferata
Greg Evangelatos
John Hester
Leann McElroy
Geno Martini

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INTRODUCTION

Nevada's legislature created the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency (TMRPA) in 1989 to foster coordination among the three local governments: the cities of Reno and Sparks and Washoe County. TMRPA is comprised of the Regional Planning Governing Board (RPGB), the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and the TMRPA's Executive Director and staff members.

The Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency is committed to supporting comprehensive and innovative approaches for economic development and community planning for the cities of Reno and Sparks, as well as Washoe County. In addition to facilitating land-use, infrastructure provision and resource management conversations among public and private decision makers, TMRPA also serves as a collaborative information and data warehouse, coordinating regional data collection and delivering advanced geospatial analytics for regional solutions.

The Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency (TMRPA) oral history project was initiated by the TMRPA in 2018 as part of its 2019 Regional Plan update:

The Truckee Meadows Regional Plan provides the framework for growth in our region for the next 20 years. It directs where growth will occur, identifies development constrained areas that are not suitable for future development, sets priorities for infrastructure development and addresses natural resource management. The Regional Plan is also designed to coordinate provision of services and capital improvements, as well as foster collaboration among the local governments and affected entities in the region. The Regional Plan Update gives us a chance to envision and shape the future of the Truckee Meadows, which is expected to grow by approximately 107,000 new residents over the next 20 years. (TMRPA, 2017)

As part of this Regional Plan update, the TMRPA staff wished to document the origins and development of the TMRPA, and invited participants in this initial oral history project on the basis of their ability to relay their firsthand experiences and knowledge related to those topics. After the oral histories were recorded and transcribed, each participant was given the opportunity to review and approve his or her transcript before its inclusion in this volume and deposit in the Special Collections archive of the University of Nevada, Reno Libraries. The full audio recordings are available there upon request.

The transcripts in this collection have been lightly edited for readability, while not altering the meaning or intention of what was said. While accurately reflecting the oral history recordings on which they are based, it should be kept in mind that these transcripts are records of the remembered past, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. Accordingly, they should be approached with the same prudence exercised when consulting any other kind of primary source of historical information, from newspaper accounts to diaries. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of

the individuals interviewed, and not the opinions of the TMRPA, the interviewer, or the archival repository in which they are found.

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Alicia Barber, PhD
January 2019

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CHRONICLER BIOGRAPHIES

Elisa Cafferata

A fourth-generation Nevadan, Elisa Cafferata joined the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency in 1993 as an intern. Moving quickly into a permanent staff position, she managed the TMRPA's Quality of Life Indicator project in conjunction with the agency's Quality of Life Task Force and the organization Truckee Meadows Tomorrow. She left the agency in 2000. She currently runs her own consulting firm, Cafferata & Co dedicated to inventing the future with government relations.

Greg Evangelatos

Greg Evangelatos joined the planning staff for the Washoe Council of Governments in 1977 after having worked for the City of Manhattan Beach, California, his hometown. In 1978, he became a Zoning Officer for the City of Sparks, advancing to Senior Planner, Principal Planner, and finally the city's Director of Planning and Community Development, a position he held from 1987 to 1995. He went on to an extensive career in the private sector, focusing mainly on planned communities. He was also the City Manager of the City of Fernley from 2010 to 2012. He is currently doing consulting work.

John Hester

Born in Texas, John Hester worked for the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments in the Cincinnati area before being hired by Washoe County's Department of Regional Planning in 1981. He was Assistant Director and Director of the county's Department of Comprehensive Planning, which was formed in 1983, and later became its Community Development Director. He then moved to the City of Reno, where he served as the Community Development Director, Redevelopment Administrator, and Assistant City Manager. He retired from the City in 2011. He is now Chief Operating Officer for the Bi-State Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, which has part of Washoe County in its jurisdiction.

Leann McElroy

Leann McElroy, a native of Indiana, joined Washoe County's Department of Regional Planning in 1979 after five years as a planner for the City of Naples, Florida. In 1980, she joined the City of Reno as a Principal Planner. In 1985, she became the city's Planning Director, and in 1992, moved to the City Manager's office to coordinate

Intergovernmental Relations. She became the Chief of Staff for the City of Reno in 1996 and retired in 2007.

Geno Martini

Geno Martini is a lifelong resident of Sparks, Nevada, and had a successful career in banking when he was appointed to the Sparks City Council in 1999 to fill the seat formerly occupied by Tony Armstrong, who had just won his mayoral election. Martini became Mayor Pro Tem in 2004 and was sworn in as Mayor of the City of Sparks in 2005 upon Armstrong's death. Elected to full terms in 2006, 2010, and 2014, he held that position until 2018, making him the longest-serving mayor in the city's history. He joined the Governing Board of the TMRPA in 1999 and served for many years as its Chair.

ELISA CAFFERATA

A fourth-generation Nevadan, Elisa Cafferata joined the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency in 1993 as an intern. Moving quickly into a permanent staff position, she managed the TMRPA's Quality of Life Indicator project in conjunction with the agency's Quality of Life Task Force and the organization Truckee Meadows Tomorrow. She left the agency in 2000. She currently runs her own consulting firm, Cafferata & Co dedicated to inventing the future with government relations.

ALICIA BARBER: This is Alicia Barber. Today is October 9, 2018. I'm with Elisa Cafferata in Reno, Nevada. Elisa, does the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency have your permission to record this oral history interview and make it available to the public?

ELISA CAFFERATA: Yes, you do.

AB: Thank you so much. I'm just going to start with a little biographical information—not very much, just to set the stage a little bit—by asking when and where you were born.

EC: I was born in Portland, Oregon in 1962.

AB: And how did you make your way to Nevada?

EC: Actually I'm fourth generation Nevadan. My dad was up in Portland in medical school when I was born, but my parents never intended to stay there. They just were there temporarily. He did his internship and residency in San Francisco and then we moved back to Reno, and I've pretty much been here most of the time since then.

AB: And tell me where you attended school.

EC: College-level school?

AB: Yes.

EC: I went to Mills College in Oakland California. I spent a year in law school in Washington, D.C., which I hated (the law school part), so I came back to Reno and got my MBA.

AB: And did your MBA have any specific area of emphasis? I know they sometimes do.

EC: My emphasis was organization development and design, so it's a pretty general course of study but I did do some research projects in that area.

AB: Did you have any specific intention for what you would be doing once you got out of school?

EC: I had no idea what I was going to be doing. Once I had sort of jettisoned the law school plan, then I just thought I really wanted to get a graduate degree and then I'd see from there.

AB: Tell me how you made your way to the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency. I believe that was in 1993.

EC: Yes, right around then. I had been doing non-profit political work and non-profit management, and the problem with those jobs is that especially in politics, you have to get a new job every year or every election, so it's pretty transient. I did one of those "What Color Is Your Parachute?" questionnaires, or something like that, and decided what I really liked was strategy and strategic planning. There was an internship at the Regional Planning Agency, which I applied for, thinking that I wanted to go into land use planning. Luckily it had nothing to do with land use planning, because I wouldn't have liked that. It ended up being focused on special projects, and the Quality of Life Indicator project was what they were working on at the time, so I got to work on that.

AB: I'd like to try to understand a little bit about what the organization was like when you arrived. I saw some references in late 1992 to a Quality of Life Task Force. But then Truckee Meadows Tomorrow was already an entity, too.

EC: Right.

AB: So can you tell me what you encountered when you got there with respect to Quality of Life and who was looking at those issues, and also what those two entities were?

EC: Sure. My understanding is that before I got there, they had written the first Regional Plan, and there was a huge controversy in the community about growth versus no growth. Were they going to put strict growth limits for the region into the plan, or how were they going to approach it? And the compromise was, "We're going to monitor our quality of life and if it's not tracking the way we want it to track then we'll do something about it." It was never very clear what exactly they were going to do, but that was the compromise.

The Regional Planning Agency had created the Quality of Life Task Force to look at how to measure quality of life and how to track it over time. And at the same time in the community, the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada, EDAWN, had been doing a lot of research and had found—and this is still true today—that the number one reason businesses choose to come here is because of our quality of life. They had the same idea at the same time—that if that's the number one thing people come for, we'd better figure out what that is and how we can protect it and make sure we're improving it.

So the two groups sort of got going around the same time. And the idea behind Truckee Meadows Tomorrow was that it was going to be an association of associations—the education association, nursing association, chamber of commerce, faith groups, working together for EDAWN and Truckee Meadows Tomorrow to protect quality of life.

They became aware of one another fairly early and started having joint meetings, and they had hired a facilitator from cooperative extension or the University, and went through, I don't know, a six-month-long process of trying to determine what an ideal outcome would look like and how they would know when they got there. By the time I arrived, they were really frustrated, because they had been having this process conversation for six months without doing any work about it. They were pretty ready for something new to happen, to be sure.

AB: So you were an intern and who were you working for and with most closely at that point? This task force?

EC: I was an intern and the idea was that I was going to work for Kris Schenk, who was the Executive Director of the agency, but he was in a serious car accident the weekend before I started. I arrived on Monday and he wasn't there, and he didn't come back to the office for a couple of months, really. It was a horrible incident, but it was an incredible opportunity for me to sort of shape the program. I have no idea what it would have looked like if he had been there to direct it the way he envisioned it.

I talked to several of the local government folks. I remember having a conversation with Leann McElroy and she said, "This is an opportunity for you to just create the program with these two groups."

So I did start meeting with the groups. And like I said, by that point they were mostly meeting jointly anyway but really looking for a direction to get going with the program.

AB: Was that task force on the TMRPA side comprised of community members? Do you remember what kind of people, if not the specific people, it included?

EC: It was community members and it was representative of the things that land use planning agencies would deal with. Jim Spoo was the Chair of the Task Force, and he was the former mayor of Sparks and still a member of the District Health Department. Lynn Atcheson was the President of Truckee Meadows Tomorrow. We had reps from local governments, the water authority, air quality, environmental interests. It was a representative sample. And then it started getting a little tough to sort out who was on which one of those organizations. The distinction was that Truckee Meadows Tomorrow was more an association of associations, so it was representing members. And the task force would have been more government agency types.

AB: Do you think that they developed that task force on the TMRPA side pretty early after the passage of the legislation that created that agency? Did they know they needed to focus on quality of life specifically from the very beginning?

EC: I don't think it was right after the legislation, because once the legislation passed, they had to create the initial Regional Plan. I think that task force was born out of the controversy in the community about what that Regional Plan was going to look like.

AB: Was that a controversy that you were aware of at the time?

EC: No, I wasn't paying any attention to that. Before working at Truckee Meadows Regional Planning I was working for the opera, so I was really focused on other things.

AB: So the two groups had been talking about quality of life but had they gone so far as to start identifying quality of life indicators, or was your task to try to figure out how to measure those factors?

EC: They had been having lots of conversation about what the process would look like and what their shared values were, and how would they know they were a success. They had identified an example of another community—which was Jacksonville, Florida—that had created its own set of quality of life indicators. That was a project that was started by the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce. It was the same kind of idea as the economic development approach—that this is how we get companies to come and that we should be good stewards of our communities.

In Jacksonville, they had identified categories of what would fall under quality of life, like the environment and education and business, and they had worked together to come up with fifty or a hundred indicators that would, on a community level, measure quality of life. I can't remember if they had actually done a report; they might have issued a preliminary report on how they were doing on all of these things. So there was a kind of model to look at to get going. The two Reno groups had that, but they just didn't know how they were going to recreate it in Reno when I started.

AB: So when you did start in 1993, did you start to formulate those indicators right away? It seems like a chicken-or-egg thing: do you go out to the community to find out what the indicators are, or do you formulate some sense of what they are and then ask the community about them? How did you begin, and was anyone helping you do that at the time?

EC: Let's see, there was a lot of conversation, like I said, about process. They really did want to reach out to the community. But we all agreed you had to have a sample. You had to have something for people to react to rather than just asking, "If you were going to measure what was important to you about living here, what would it be?" It's really hard to come up with that off the top of your head. And they wanted to have a pretty in-depth conversation about what the best measurements would be. They had a lot of expertise at the table. They had a lot of folks who wanted to be involved.

So the process we designed generated maximum participation from the community. We had nine committees because we had nine areas for quality of life, although they shifted over time. There was art, education, environment, economy, government, public safety, transportation, land use, and health. So those were the nine committees. Each of those nine committees met a couple of times. And we were working under the Regional Planning Agency, so these were all public meetings. Each of the committees met half a dozen times and kind of talked through questions like, "How would you measure the arts?" "How would you measure education?" "What are the most meaningful measurements you can have?" In education and health care, there are hundreds of things that are measured, but the conversation asked, "Does this really capture the essence of what's important to the community for quality of life?" And each of the nine committees narrowed it down to ten to fifteen measurements in their area in terms of measuring quality of life. So that was phase one. We had a hundred and fifty possible indicators.

Then we went out to the community to get their feedback, and as I think back on it, it was pretty amazing, the work that we did. You couldn't recreate it today because there aren't those kind of community groups anymore. We went to the Chamber and Rotary and Kiwanis and all kinds of service organizations. We went to business stuff. Anybody that would have us, we went. The voting was a forced ranking of the indicators where we had them pick two areas. They'd look at the indicators in education and transportation, for example, and vote in terms of their thoughts on what was most important to their quality of life.

I think we did over a hundred presentations in the community, which like I say, you couldn't do today. There aren't even a hundred groups you could present to anymore. But there were in those days, and I think we were presenting to an average of twenty people each time. Two thousand people participated at that point in voting on which indicators were most important to them, which narrowed it down to about 66 indicators, or somewhere in there. And then we did a survey in the newspaper that mirrored it and let people vote that way. So if we somehow missed you in the presentations you still had the opportunity to vote, because we worked with the newspaper to find out how important these things were to people in each of these categories. From that we ended up with a final list which we felt we could pretty solidly say were the things that were most important to the community in terms of their quality of life.

AB: That's a lot of data.

EC: It's a lot of data.

AB: When you got all of it, how did you compile that and who did that?

EC: We were lucky, we had Katherine Cole with Marketech. She's a marketing research person, or was, in Reno at the time, and she helped compile a lot of the information that we got. We were literally making copies of lists of indicators, and instead of just giving people a survey, we gave them play money and they voted with play money to tell us how they would rank each of the different indicators. She took all that data, literally thousands of responses, and pulled it together for us to determine what the final list of indicators were. I can't remember, but I think we ended up with 33 ultimately. It was pretty challenging to get down to that few.

AB: I have an article here from July 1993 that's showing one of these games. It showed the play money and members of the task force throwing play money on cards with their favorite indicators, which seemed like an engaging way to get people directly involved in those questions.

EC: Right.

AB: So you had all the data.

EC: So we had all the data and then we presented our recommended list of indicators, which we would track over time, to the Regional Planning Agency and the local governments that made up the Regional Planning Agency. And they adopted them. They became an official part of the Regional Plan with the idea that we'd report on them, which we did do. So that was what happened with those indicators.

Truckee Meadows Tomorrow still exists and over the last twenty years or so, they've gone back every five or ten years and conducted another community process to ask if these are still the things we should be tracking. But they haven't recreated that super in-depth community outreach because it would be very difficult to do. Or you'd have to design it a different way. So that's what happened with the indicators themselves in that process.

AB: And so that was to be incorporated into the Regional Plan because that was the main point?

EC: Yes.

AB: But then EDawn and Truckee Meadows Tomorrow were interested in other things, too, right?

EC: Yes.

AB: They wanted to identify quality of life to go into their study or their planning.

EC: Right.

AB: Did the results from your initial round of assessing and analyzing quality of life also apply to what EDawn was looking at, or was it information that then went out to other parts of the community?

EC: After we identified the indicators, the next thing I worked on was creating a quality of life report. These were fairly encyclopedic reports on how we were doing on each of these indicators and why it was important, why we cared, and all that. They ended up being these very thick reports, which were then, as we realized, not super actionable. They were more of a resource.

For EDawn, it was useful for their staff in terms of bringing all these indicators, all these measurements, together in one place. Whenever I talk about this I remind people that you have to remember that in the nineties you couldn't get on the internet. We had one email address at the Regional Planning Agency and the boss had it. Very few people had email; you couldn't just get online and research things. So to bring all this data into one place was very helpful for EDawn, but nobody was sitting around reading an inch-thick report on how we did on all 33 of these measurements.

It was good as a resource, but for Truckee Meadows Tomorrow—and they very much took the lead on this—they wanted to make it actionable. We wanted to not just measure quality of life, we wanted to encourage people and organizations to do something with this information to make the community a better place. And so that really was the focus for Truckee Meadows Tomorrow.

Ultimately, I think the task force was absorbed into Truckee Meadows Tomorrow because their original charge had been fulfilled. They had identified the indicators and handed it off. So the pivot then was, "What do you do with it?" It's not enough just to provide information. It's really nice to think that local elected officials, if they have great information, will make great decisions. And someone pointed out that we need to think about the reverse of that: if they don't have good information they can't make decisions based on good data. What they do with it is sort of out of your hands. But with Truckee Meadows Tomorrow, their focus became how to empower people in the community to do something about the indicators.

AB: When I looked at the website for Truckee Meadows Tomorrow they indicate that in 1994 they issued a prototype of the indicators report, which became the benchmark for future indicator reporting efforts. Is that related to what you were doing or is that something different?

EC: It's related to what I was doing. Lynn Atcheson had the vision for all of these efforts. She understood that what we had to do for Regional Planning purposes was not going to be a community-friendly document, so she spearheaded the effort, and what was called Washoe Med at the time (now Renown) funded the creation of a user-friendly compilation of highlights of the report. It looked kind of like a corporate annual report with quite a bit of narrative about the areas—for instance, here are the five measurements in arts and culture but let us tell you about arts and culture in the Truckee Meadows. So they were highlights, stories to put a face and the background on the indicators. And then, like an annual report would have, it did have the numbers in the back. So it was more like a corporate annual report, but much more user-friendly. They did that for five or six years and then ultimately that moved online, so it still exists.

AB: Tell me the chronology of what happened. You were an intern and then at what point were you a permanent employee, and what was that job? And then how did that develop over those first couple of years?

EC: I'll have to go back and look. I have about five business cards from Regional Planning. As an intern I was paid, but very little. And then I think I became the Assistant Analyst, or Assistant Administrator, and then an Administrator, and then ultimately at Regional Planning I ended up as a Management Analyst, doing government relations and lobbying and that sort of thing. That's the level that that position is. I had several promotions, but I don't know that I could tell you the years. I would have to go back and really research all of this because I was doing a lot of work for Truckee Meadows Tomorrow, as well, and that work was parallel to what Regional Planning was doing but not directed by Regional Planning. I was also the Executive Director for Truckee Meadows Tomorrow and I ultimately was working for both organizations. For a few years, I was paid from Regional Planning, and Truckee Meadows Tomorrow covered part of my salary so that I could work for them. So it was kind of post-modern, where you have a lot of bosses and a lot of gigs.

AB: Now by that point had they separated from EDawn and were their own independent non-profit, Truckee Meadows Tomorrow?

EC: That was fairly early on I believe.

AB: On their website they say that was in 1993 but it's sounding like maybe it wasn't that early.

EC: I think they were a non-profit early on. But several years into it, they got a \$750,000 grant from Washoe Med, and that is when I officially was working for them, and they were directing part of my time, as opposed to Regional Planning. Originally the work was all overlapping and TMT was advisory. But a few years into the process, when we were focused on getting people to take action, there were definitely things that we were doing that weren't related to the Regional Planning mission, so it was helpful to have money to cover that separately. There was a focus on getting people to take ownership of indicators and

to try and do work to move the needle, as we always said, to make it a better community. So that was work that was led by Truckee Meadows Tomorrow versus Regional Planning.

AB: Did Truckee Meadows Tomorrow have a staff other than you or just a Board?

EC: I was the paid person.

AB: And the staff of TMRPA was pretty small at that point? It still is.

EC: Yes, it still is.

AB: Did the structure of that organization evolve over the time that you were there? You were there through, I think, 2000. Did that change with the TMRPA or did it stay pretty consistent?

EC: We ended up with a new Director. Well, I worked with three Directors. We started with Kris Schenk, and then Dave Ziegler who had been the Executive Director at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency came and was the Director. And he really focused on delineating between the Regional Planning work and the Truckee Meadows Tomorrow work and we had to put contracts in place so it was very clear who was paying for what and where I was using my time. And then Emily Braswell was the third Director. There's always been pushback on the Regional Planning Agency here because local governments would rather do their own thing without having to coordinate as much as they have to. So 2000 was at a particular point when there was a lot of pushback on the amount that was being spent on the indicators work. Regional Planning is funded by the local governments, and they were getting a lot of pushback, and it was just a good time for me to go do something else. But I was there for a long time. At least for me that was a long time.

AB: It sounds that you had such success going out into the community in the early to mid-nineties. People were eager to talk about these issues.

EC: Yes.

AB: I just think what a combination of different things was happening at that time. Downtown was experiencing some difficulty, with lots of closed hotel casinos, vacant properties like the Mapes and the Riverside, and a lot of smaller hotel casinos. And that at the same time we were starting to get some of those early large subdivisions like Damonte Ranch and Double Diamond Ranch. How would you characterize that time and what was happening contextually in Washoe County, and how do you think that impacted the kinds of discussions you were having? Do you remember any of those specific issues looming especially large to people?

EC: You know, there is something about being the "Biggest Little City in the World," where this community had this constant tension between growth and no growth. The Regional Planning effort came out of some of that fight, which was especially vivid in the seventies when we had so much growth that the water treatment facility couldn't do any more sewer hook ups, which is the real limiting factor on growth. You could have a house but no indoor plumbing—well, okay, maybe not. So it wasn't quite as

contentious as the seventies, but in the nineties we had experienced some big growth and my sense is that whenever there is a real influx of people, the people who have been here for any amount of time start getting nervous about things like water and traffic. You get this reaction. So there was still quite a bit of that.

And the nice thing about this project was that at least in theory we were going to say, “We’re going to make sure the community stays a nice place to live, which is why you’re here, even as new people come.” And not everybody bought it. How effective you thought it was going to be depended on how long you’d been here. As I think back on it, there were no mechanisms in place to change land use planning if we weren’t maintaining the quality of life indicators. But as it turns out, when you’re measuring thirty things, some of them are getting better and some of them are getting worse, and there’s no direct correlation.

People would often say, “Well, if we just stop letting people move here, everything will get better.”

And I would say, “Well, there’s not a direct correlation.”

For example, when you look at the data, our air quality has improved dramatically. So if you just saw that there are more people and the air quality has improved, you could come to the mistaken conclusion that once we get to a million people, we’ll have the most pristine air on the planet, which of course is not true. There were other things happening. But it made the point that there are things you can do in your community in the case of air quality. For instance, Congress passed a Clean Air Act. If you lived here before that, we used to have these horrible inversions and the smog would settle in and stay in the valley floor forever. So there were two things: one was the Clean Air Act, and then we also made it illegal to build houses with fireplaces. You had to have catalytic converters on your wood burning stove, and so these are the things that really improved our air quality.

So like I said, it wasn’t quite as contentious as the seventies, but there still was that current. One of the things that happened in the eighties and nineties was that the planning agencies and the local governments approved almost any development that was presented. In one of the reports that we did, we found that we had approved enough housing to accommodate what we were projecting the population growth to be for the next forty years, which is giving yourself a lot of slack. But the problem with that is then you have all these developments that are approved, and if you are a developer and you want to create a new housing development, all the stuff that’s close by has already been planned for. So that’s why we started seeing these huge developments much further out from the main part of town. The other thing that was starting to happen in the nineties was conversations about sustainability and purposely planning our communities. We were starting to look at the costs and impacts of sprawl. That was a lot of the conversation, and the underlying question was how do we get our arms around creating sustainable communities without throwing the brakes on the economic engine? That was always the tension among the stakeholders.

AB: How did you feel about the results of your analysis, your identification of the quality of life indicators, and how people felt about them? How did you feel about the way that was integrated into the Regional Plans, and did it seem, in identifiable ways, to translate into policy changes for different areas? Can you recall any of those?

EC: By law, the Regional Planning Agency is required to update the Regional Plan every five years. For the first update after we did the quality of life indicators, we went through, and in several policy areas, we

changed the policy to encourage planning in a way that would address things that had been identified. For example, in land use planning, when it came to neighborhoods, it talked about things like work housing balance, which actually is a fairly tough concept to get your hands around and really plan for. Other things, like walkable neighborhoods or connections to trails or access to open space, are a little easier to incorporate and measure. Those were things that came out of the indicators that were incorporated in the Plan update that happened—I'm not even sure what year that was.

And then the very next Regional Plan update was a pretty significant departure from previous Regional Plans. The original Regional Plan basically took all the Master Plans of the local governments and focused on where Reno and Sparks and Washoe County meet, and how we make those transitions make sense. The next Regional Plan did not make a whole lot of significant changes to that, those boundary planning issues. But the next Regional Plan after that was a significant change and focused on how to direct development into existing communities, create more density within the McCarran loop, and try to discourage sprawl. I don't think that would have happened if we hadn't had the conversations that we had.

Then that Plan ended up in court and Judge Hardesty basically ended up writing the Regional Plan, which was an interesting application of judicial authority. But it still kept many features of trying to be more sustainable and at least do something about sprawl. Then we had the economic recession and people were desperate for any kind of growth, so now I think we're back in the place of having to have the conversation about how to balance sprawl and cost and accommodate growth and all those things.

AB: Do you want to talk about that lawsuit at all? That looms kind of large in the history of the Planning Agency.

EC: By then I was not working for Regional Planning anymore, but I think it was a reflection of this tension between the local governments which fund and then have to abide by—I wouldn't say the "authority" of the Regional Plan. Basically the way the law is set up is that the local governments are still responsible for their own Master Plans, and then there's a process that's separate, where a Regional Plan is created that deals with these cross-jurisdictional issues like how as a region we are going to deal with transportation and water and open space. And then all the Master Plans have to conform to that Regional Plan. There's always been tension there, and it just ended up that the local governments felt that the Regional Plan had gone too far in redirecting what land use should look like—although they went through an extensive community process to get there, so the community input led to what was recommended. But it represented a pretty big departure for the local governments.

AB: Did things change significantly after that? I know this is after your tenure working there.

EC: Things definitely changed in the way land use planning was happening and how local governments worked to make sure they were in compliance. This probably wasn't too close to the recession, but I think growth really slowed down also in that period. That made it much less of an issue, because you didn't have people coming in with plans that they wanted to get approved, and so there weren't as many projects going through the process. I think there was some breathing room. And it's probably worth revisiting at this point.

AB: You had mentioned the mandate to revise the Regional Plan every five years. How did that pace seem to you? Did that seem appropriate, was it feasible, did it seem like the right duration of time in between plans? How did it affect what you did?

EC: I thought the pace of a five-year update was fine. What was the most challenging—and I really don't know how you would ever address this—is that the Regional Plan is supposed to be the overarching plan that deals with cross-jurisdictional issues like transportation and water. At some point in those five years, the Regional Transportation Commission is creating a master plan for transportation, and the local governments all do their master plans, and the water planning authority does its planning. There wasn't a great sequencing of all those plans. You might just be incorporating what was already there. It's hard to have that regional level view and approach and then actually influence the other planning documents in a way that makes sense. If you think about what's logical, you would say, "On a regional level this is what we will do with transportation and water and open space." And then the local governments would adopt that or incorporate their piece of it. But it doesn't exactly work like that, unfortunately.

AB: Now was there a time when you were working exclusively for Truckee Meadows Tomorrow and no longer working for the TMRPA, or was it always integrated during your time there?

EC: When I first started, I was just working for the Regional Planning Agency but doing a lot with Truckee Meadows Tomorrow because they were kind of the Board of Directors of the process. So I initially started working for them. There wasn't a point after that where I just was working for the Planning Agency, which was okay. Like I said, I thought I was interested in being a planner, but really I was interested in all the special projects like managing the community input for the Regional Plan update, or working on the Complete Count Census Committee efforts, where we were trying to get people to turn in their census forms. Those were the kinds of projects I ended up working on, which I really enjoyed.

AB: Why did this agency become involved in the census?

EC: I'm pretty sure it's in the Constitution—which I haven't memorized, so I don't know—but in the United States you have to take a census of everyone who lives here every ten years. And from the sixties through the nineties, participation in the census had been declining dramatically. People weren't as civic minded, or they started having concerns, or they just couldn't be bothered. Nevada had a pretty dismal rate. So for the 2000 census, the Census Bureau hired people to work in communities to set up Complete Count Committees, to work with the community to encourage people to fill in their census forms and return them. Dave Byerman headed up the effort in Nevada, and he worked with local governments to create Complete Count Committees. We reached out into the community and involved a lot of different community organizations to encourage people to participate.

I'm not sure how Regional Planning ended up with it, but I think we were just the logical group, and because I worked on special projects and I had done so much community outreach, I was the point person for our community. So we worked on the Complete Count Committee, we had special events, we did an ad campaign, and we did a lot of public service. Particularly of interest was reaching out to communities of color to make sure that they participated. The state invested, I want to say \$800,000 in this effort, and the reason it's so important is then for the next ten years, when federal money is distributed, it is based on the number of people that you have, based on what the census said. So it's

really important to get a good count. And I think Nevada was tied for the most improved state for return of the census forms. We did a really good job. I was very proud of that. But I think that was partly a direct result of all the work we had done on the indicators, reaching out to the community, so we already had a lot of connections in those communities and really worked to get the word out. We had a model that worked here.

AB: So there was a lot of diversity in your outreach for the quality of life indicators?

EC: Yes.

AB: You made some real inroads.

EC: We did. When you're going to Kiwanis and service clubs and Rotary, you're really getting a lot of the same people over and over again. So we had Lonnie Feemster with the NAACP, we had some faith groups, we had outreach to seniors. We did a couple of sessions where we specifically invited communities of color, including the tribe and NNBCAS, which was the Northern Nevada Black Culture Awareness Society. We had Nevada Hispanic Services at the time. We specifically invited those folks and asked, "What haven't we looked at? What questions aren't we asking?" We were very intentional about getting that input. And the LGBT—I think they were just the "LGB" community at the time—we reached out to them. I think we involved the disability community. When I say the outreach was extensive, it was really extensive. We made sure we got out as far as we could.

AB: When you aggregated that data, did it all go in the same pool, or did some of the demographics of who was responding become part of the analysis—where people lived, what their background was? I saw in the survey that there were questions about how you identified yourself. Was it important to understand who was responding to certain questions, and how those respondents might differ from each other based on some of those characteristics?

EC: We were taking in all the information by hand, so we were not doing a lot of cross tabs and that kind of analysis. I think mostly for those demographic questions, we were trying to make sure that we got a wide diversity of ages, races, communities....

AB: Income level?

EC: Income level, yes. It became very clear to me while participating in this process that there are some people who belong to these service organizations, for example, and they are happy to do the survey more than once because of course you're asking them for their opinion, and of course why wouldn't you listen to it because they're the people who are running the planning commissions, and they're running the organizations doing the work in the community, so very much engaged and committed to the process. When we reached out in communities of color, it felt very different. You'd spend a lot of time having this conversation about how, "Nobody ever asks us our opinion, nobody wants to know what we think, nobody ever engages us."

And I'd be saying, "I'm here, I do want to hear your opinion, I am engaging you."

You have to get through that, the fact that it's not automatically assumed that their opinion is going to be included, and that it counts. You had to convince them that we really did want the full diversity of opinions. I remember one of the surveys we did asked, "Are you registered to vote?" And when we presented the results of the surveys and the process and what we thought the indicators would be, one of the elected officials asked, "Well, what do we care what people think if they are not registered to vote?"

And I said, "Well, I'm pretty sure they still pay taxes, and whether or not they share their opinion through their votes, certainly their thoughts should be included in the survey."

It was very interesting seeing whose opinions counted to some people, and whose didn't. Starting with the quality of life program and certainly through the census program, it's harder to get out into those communities that aren't the ones who are always at the table. And it's a little harder to get them to participate because they are not entirely convinced people are going to listen to them. Based on what's happening with the census now, you can understand the fear.

AB: Now when you said when you were first putting together the plan for the quality of life indicators, you were looking up one model in Jacksonville, Florida. Once you got more experience with this, and you'd done it a couple of times, did you get a sense of how what you were doing compared nationally? Did you present your information, your processes, your strategies, or your methods on a national level, or did you learn anything about how your approach related to what other communities were doing?

EC: Yes, we were really the second major community to do this. Jacksonville was a Chamber of Commerce project, and when they picked their indicators it was like the very first phase of our process. A bunch of Chamber of Commerce members on a committee picked the indicators, and they created the report. Then we came along and did this huge project. There were a lot of communities in this era, hundreds ultimately, that did projects similar to this. A lot of communities were asking, "How do we get our arms around growth, or what our community is, being more intentional?"

I can't remember quite how we started getting involved with other communities. Probably a year or so into the process, we got connected to a national think tank based in San Francisco that was serving community indicator projects. We presented at one of their conferences, and that was when I realized how much further our process went than most processes did. On the national level, Jacksonville is pointed to because it was the first, and ours has often been highlighted because it was one of the most extensive and also one of the most sustainable projects. There's a global consortium of community indicator projects now, and we've presented at their conference many times.

There are things that we did which were different, like our huge community engagement process. And like I said, Truckee Meadows Tomorrow really focused on how to make these items actionable. Over the years it's become a lot easier to get data, but how do you get people to do something with it? We started with what we called an "Adopt an Indicator" program where we encouraged individuals to take on the specific indicator that they were going to personally commit to, whether it was picking up litter, or riding their bike more, or taking an art class, whatever it was. The challenge with that is that you can't really measure if people are making a change—although we always said that individual decisions drive a lot of what your community is like. So that was one piece.

Later, we developed what we called "Quality of Life Compacts," where several organizations would get together and attempt to move the needle on a specific indicator. I think the County took on recycling and open space and said, "As an organization, we are going to make a commitment to move the

needle.” That was another project that folks around the country were very interested in—learning how we did that and how we set them up, and then replicating our program. So from the first or second year we have been a national model. We’ve been featured in several publications. I keep getting these notices that our paper was quoted by somebody else talking about indicators. I can give you a list of the publications somewhere. I have it.

AB: Absolutely. Tell me about these “Accentuate the Positive” celebrations. What was that all about?

EC: That was another one that people really liked. The tag line for Truckee Meadows Tomorrow was, “You make a difference and we measure it.” We always tried to bring the data and the information to life and to show why it was relevant. We always wanted to make it actionable and to help people to see that these are not abstract things; these are decisions people make, or decisions that communities or organizations make. The idea behind “Accentuate the Positive” was that when you start researching these things, you see a lot of negative stories, and we don’t spend enough time accentuating the positives of the people and the organizations that are really making a difference in our lives and in our communities.

So we started doing these events—this is very much a Lynn Atcheson vision—and our goal for the first one was to have 500 people come. Then once we had sold 500 people tickets, she said, “I think we could sell a couple hundred more,” which we did. We had 800 people, I think, at the first event, and we gave out silver stars because we are the Silver State. And I think we had at least one not for every indicator, but certainly an individual and a business and a government agency in each of the areas. In the arts, it would have been an artist and an arts organization and the city’s art program, something like that. We gave awards and recognition to, I don’t know, probably about 50 people at each one of these events.

AB: Do you remember where you did that?

EC: I think the first one was at what I call the MGM-Reno Hilton-Bally’s-Grand Sierra Resort. I couldn’t even tell you which one it was at the time!

AB: So in a big venue.

EC: Yes, in their grand ballroom. They were in the middle of the day, and instead of a trade show, organizations could have a booth to feature what they were doing about quality of life. But it had to be interactive. They couldn’t just be handing out information about what they were doing to make the community better; they had to have some kind of interactive feature so people could really participate, which was all part of the theme: you can make a difference to our quality of life.

AB: Now you left in 2000, I think?

EC: Yes.

AB: But you have since then served on the Board of Truckee Meadows Tomorrow, haven’t you?

EC: Yes.

AB: Did that happen right away, or was there a period of time in between?

EC: There was quite a bit of time in between. I did some projects with them over the years when they updated the indicators, and worked on specific projects. And then Truckee Meadows Tomorrow asked me to be on the Board. It was kind of funny because the gal who initially approached me didn't know that I had been the staff person for Truckee Meadows Tomorrow. They just reached out to me for some reason and I said, "You know, I helped start this whole process."

So I got involved again, and what has changed so much from when we started in the nineties, is that this data was not available—the indicators report was a real research project, and it took me months to put together the data. Now that is not the case at all. The data is readily available; you can go research any one of these indicators and come up with tons of information. My interest was in how to turn the corner from being focused on aggregating the data—which was of huge value then and is of no value now—to grappling with this question of how to make it actionable, how to help people make decisions.

I think in the world we're in now, we have way too much data. It's become less actionable because you're just swimming in it, and it's really hard to get your arms around it. I used to do presentations every time we updated the report, to give an overview of what we had found in the new report. It was a lot of new information, but when you're tracking 33 indicators and you say, "Air quality is up and traffic is down," or whatever all the numbers are, people then say, "But what does it mean?" It's a huge data dump. And the advantage of having one person do all the research and really sort through it is that then you have this overarching view of all of the data and what all of it means.

What I used to say about the indicators is, "What this means to me is, if we really want to improve our performance on something, federal laws make a significant difference. The Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, these made significant differences in communities that you couldn't have made just because you all banded together and wanted better air quality. It just doesn't work that way. For those big, cross-jurisdictional issues, you need a higher-level approach that says, 'We're going to raise all the boats.'"

But the other place that we made a big difference in our community is when the whole community came together and made a concerted effort to address a problem. In the nineties, the Hispanic high school dropout rate was seventeen or twenty percent. It was huge. The community came together and made a concerted effort—not just the school district, but the Chamber of Commerce and Hispanic Services and a bunch of different entities—and made a significant dent in the Hispanic dropout rate. So we could do it, we just had to all come together and really focus on it.

You see efforts like that in the community now. We are very rich with community organizations that really want to take these things on, but I would say the lesson learned at this point is you have to be really focused on one thing. For instance, it's the Hispanic dropout rate, not all students' performances at all levels of all aspects of the education system. There's not a way for the whole community to engage in that. It's not focused enough. So that's the level where we are now, asking how you get past drowning in information to make it actionable. I do think Truckee Meadows Tomorrow could step into that role, but they're not quite there yet. I think they're still having that conversation. As I look back on it, a lot of what we did was what you would call early infographics, taking a lot of information and turning it into something visual that people could interact with. I think that's where we are, asking how to take all this information, which is a lot more than we used to have, and put it in a visual format, or in some format that's workable and usable.

AB: And all organizations seem to be trying to deal with that, too, right?

EC: Yes.

AB: How did the funding mechanism develop for Truckee Meadows Tomorrow? You said initially there was a massive grant from Washoe Med, now Renown. Did that continue to be the way that Truckee Meadows Tomorrow was funded?

EC: Yes. They gave us a \$750,000 grant. Washoe Med (now Renown) designated \$250,000 to fund operations for five years, and the other \$500,000 was distributed as grants to non-profit organizations working to improve quality of life. We granted out \$100,000 a year and the applicants had to pick a specific indicator they were working on and demonstrate how they had made a significant difference. It was a model project, which I think was great, because it was on the very cutting edge of when non-profits and grantors turned away from what you would call "input models," like how many people went through our program, and instead started looking at impact, like how many people who went through our program stayed sober or got jobs or graduated from high school, or accomplished the goal we wanted them to accomplish. It doesn't matter how many people got treatment if they didn't get the result you were going for. It was a great model and we had some really great success stories and some great programs.

From there, because Washoe Med didn't sustain that funding and the health care industry changed dramatically, United Way incorporated indicators into their grant making process. We talked to the Community Foundation [of Western Nevada] a lot and they weren't really making grants at the time, but they've incorporated it to a certain extent, so we did see funders start to incorporate this idea of looking at impact instead of looking at input numbers.

To come back to your original question though, the \$250,000 that we had to fund operations we invested, and so that initial funding was able to fund operations for ten or fifteen years. It lasted for a long time because they had invested it, so that was good.

AB: And they retained a very small staff.

EC: Yes.

AB: So have you been off the Board for a while now?

EC: Yes. Because I do government relations every other year, I'm completely out of pocket at the legislature, so it's really not fair to be on an organization when I can only be there half the time.

AB: Are there any other developments or activities of note that you think you'd like to discuss from your time there?

EC: We experimented with a lot of different things, in terms of trying to get folks to take ownership and action of the indicators. Washoe Med did a whole series of billboards and public service campaigns around different things like teen smoking, teen pregnancy, different issues. There were a whole bunch of billboards in town trying to impact the health-related indicators. Washoe at the time set a great model for

other corporate organizations to do this sort of community responsibility work, so that was another project we did.

I think my favorite thing was something that we did in advance of one of the Regional Plan updates. We did what we called “Youth View.” This was another community engagement project, but this time it was all youth—any age of youth, but mostly we did this in the school system and also in college—and we asked young people to tell us what they thought the future was going to look like, and what they wanted to see. We asked them to do any kind of submission. They could write a story, or draw pictures, and a whole class did a bunch of dioramas, which was interesting. I had those in my office for a long time. We got everything from, “There will be Ferris wheels” to “a lot of skate parks.” But really what was interesting about it—and I’ve looked for the files and I don’t think I have them—was that the kids, more than the adults who were doing a similar process for the Regional Plan update, really got the role of technology. Some of it was about flying cars, but some of it was definitely thinking about robots and electronics and how the world was going to change with respect to technology. In some ways, they had a much better view of what the future was going to look like. We wrote up a youth vision with the best parts of what they said. Mostly it tracked the community’s idea of the vision you saw if you looked at the indicators, regarding arts and education and whether people would feel safe and how you could get around. But their vision definitely incorporated a lot more about technology. They were more futuristic, it was interesting.

AB: Does it make sense to you still, assuming it did, to look at quality of life in a regional way here? Do you think that approach is appropriate as opposed to looking at it by different jurisdictions?

EC: Yes, I think there’s a lot of overlap in what people will say makes a nice community, but when you started looking at how other communities were doing their process, there are definitely things that are different here—the attention to the environment, to trails, to outdoor activities, the fact that we have four seasons, the fact that the natural environment is so beautiful. That is definitely clear in our indicators as compared to other communities. The whole goal of Regional Planning was to get the local governments to do a better job of sort of working together to protect the things that were important, or to make sure government operated efficiently, which definitely everybody would like to see happen. I still think it’s a good approach. I do think that you’re going to see different issues in each community based on their needs and their values, but it’s a way to create a joint vision, as it were, and measure if you’re making any progress towards the vision. Compared to the kinds of community engagement we did at that time, you’d have to really change your approach to get the same kind of involvement, but in some ways with social media and some of those methods, there should be ways to do it. It would look very different than it looked in those days, but it’s doable.

AB: And do you think there is enough commonality in Reno, Sparks, the Truckee Meadows, the area that’s being encompassed here, for that to be done on that level together?

EC: I really do think so. It helps when you frame the question as, “What’s important to you in terms of your quality of life at a community level?” Especially when we’re growing, that framework helps people think about the things they all want to see, and turns them away from the thought that it’s all these new people who are wrecking everything. That kind of thinking is usually from somebody who’s only been

here three or five years, and I always think, “My family’s been here for four generations, and we didn’t close the door on any of you, so I think there’s room for a few more folks.”

But it helps people instead of focusing on one another and what other people are doing to them, to focus on what we are jointly interested in seeing for the community and how we can get there. It’s a great way to frame the conversation. I do think that we have a lot of shared values. There is a reason that people come here, and it generally is the quality of life. The data helps you see that there is a group of people who can experience all the best of what the region has to offer in the Truckee Meadows, and there is definitely a significant population that doesn’t have access to any of it. The goal would be to make that more accessible to a much larger part of the population.

AB: And identifying those issues and areas is the first step.

EC: Right.

AB: I want to thank you so much for talking with me today.

EC: Thanks for having me.

GREG EVANGELATOS

Greg Evangelatos joined the planning staff for the Washoe Council of Governments in 1977 after having worked for the City of Manhattan Beach, California, his hometown. In 1978, he became a Zoning Officer for the City of Sparks, advancing to Senior Planner, Principal Planner, and finally the city's Director of Planning and Community Development, a position he held from 1987 to 1995. He went on to an extensive career in the private sector, focusing mainly on planned communities. He was also the City Manager of the City of Fernley from 2010 to 2012. He is currently doing consulting work.

ALICIA BARBER: This is Alicia Barber. Today is October 17, 2018. I'm with Greg Evangelatos in Reno, Nevada. Greg, does the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency have your permission to record this oral history interview and make it available to the public?

GREG EVANGELATOS: Yes, absolutely.

AB: Thanks very much. For this project, we're focusing on the creation of the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency and what predated it. But we're also interested in the events and experiences that brought you to Washoe County. So can you tell me first where and when you were born?

GE: I was born in Manhattan Beach, California in 1949. My father was a Greek immigrant. He married my mother, who is also of Greek ancestry, and I had two sisters. One has passed away. I grew up in southern California and had a very interesting childhood because I was basically in the commercial flower business with my folks for the first eight or nine years, and worked in the fields, which was kind of unique for where I grew up.

Then I went to UCLA. I got a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and History, and then I took a year off and did some construction work and traveled a little bit. I went to the University of Oklahoma, Norman. I had a Ford Fellowship and did two years there. I got my Masters in Regional City Planning and returned to my hometown of Manhattan Beach. Under the Ford administration, there was a program called the CETA, which is the Comprehensive Educational Training Act, and they hired me essentially to be staff with federal funding for the City of Manhattan Beach. The downside of that was that there were no benefits associated and you could be laid off whenever the money ran out.

I started looking around for other opportunities and I saw this position in Reno with the Washoe Council of Governments. It was a Water Quality Planning position. I'd been through here in the early seventies when I was hitchhiking and traveling, and just thought, well, hell, I'll come up here and visit and get a free trip and see if I'm interested, or they're interested in me. Ironically, coincidentally, I met three elected officials, or appointed officials, from Sparks on the interview panel. So they hired me.

The Director then was Frank Freeman, and then they brought in Richard Heikka. He had experience in doing the Lake Tahoe Plan in '71, so they were becoming fairly ambitious about the Regional Planning construct, if you will. In the meantime, there would have been an existing Regional Planning Commission and that was getting eroded primarily by Sparks, whose Planning Director, Alex Fittinghoff, felt that the approach was a bit parochial and really wasn't sensitive to the needs of Sparks. He was brought in in 1976, and he created the first professional planning staff complement.

I worked for the Council of Governments for a year and a half and it was politically volatile, with seventeen elected officials. And I wanted to be in a municipal governance setting. Where I worked in my hometown, in Manhattan Beach, I liked city planning, and I liked smaller cities, and so Sparks kind of fit the bill. There was a position open, which was a Senior Planner position, and I put in an application for that. And Mr. Fittinghoff said, "Well, Greg, I don't think you're going to get this one, but we'll keep you in mind. There may be something that opens up."

A Zoning Enforcement Officer position opened up, and by that time I was wanting to part ways with the Council of Governments, so I took the position and did code enforcement along with planning and federal grants management for a year and a half. Then I started going up the ladder at the city. I went from Zoning Officer to Senior Planner, and did that for a couple of years. Then I became Principal Planner, and finally I was the Director of Planning and Community Development, appointed in 1987 and I served until 1995. The years 1989 and 1991 were the legislative sessions during which the Regional Plan came into fruition.

AB: Let me go back for a minute here and talk a little bit more about the Washoe Council of Governments because it's not an entity that exists today.

GE: Right.

AB: I'd like to know the constitution of that, which you alluded to, but could you explain a little bit about that and what their role was, both in general and as it pertained to planning, specifically?

GE: The Council of Governments, I believe, was created to be a glorified funnel for federal funds to the region, and specifically to the sanitary sewer plant. That's a huge amount. And federal funds from the EPA to expand the sewer plant logically related to how the community, and how the region, is growing. That facility was jointly run by the City of Reno and the City of Sparks as a unique governance, in that Reno picks up most of the cost, or two-thirds of the cost, and Sparks does one third of the cost, but they also manage the facility. One of my co-workers, John Gonzales, and subsequent administrators in Sparks run it and then there's a Governing Board, so it's kind of a unique entity from that perspective.

The federal funding at that time was ninety percent federal and ten percent local. I think they required that there be comprehensive regional planning—and I think also for RTC funds, before RTC was created. So it was largely a funnel. Within that construct, there were areas of expertise and specialty. One was water quality—it's the non-point source pollution. In other words, it's not the pollution from the sewer plant, but it's the cumulative pollution from construction dust, from agricultural animal waste going into the water system, and that area of expertise addressed how we keep that clean.

There was a technical panel, and I was sort of the staff advisor to that panel, who basically were users and/or citizens from Verdi to Pyramid Lake. So I got a kind of a comprehensive physical perspective on the region, as someone coming new into the community. And I also in the summer of

1977 floated the irrigation ditches in a two-man raft, documenting diversion points. It was in the middle of a drought, but the Steamboat Ditch is fifty-six miles long, the Orr Ditch is twenty-eight miles long. The Last Chance Ditch is another one. And those were functioning ditches. My supervisor, Leonard Crow, put me at this and it was kind of a “What did you do on your summer vacation?” type of job, which was a lot of fun.

And then there was housing. Alice Parsons was a co-worker of mine. We had areas of expertise, and then we evolved into air and water quality because at that time we had wood burning stoves. This is a bowl, and we had inversions in the winter time. A lot of this was co-authored by the Health Department, in terms of Jack Sheehan and another gentleman, Brian, who worked on that. It was the non-attainment plan that the feds mandated relative to air and water, to air quality. So we had water quality, air quality, housing, and this diversity of topics which has to be handled at a regional level. Now, there were also seventeen elected officials. All the elected officials were on there. That was a little bit unyielding and that’s probably why I preferred going to Sparks.

AB: And so staff like you worked for the county?

GE: Well, it was an interesting dynamic. We were in PERS, we were administered by the county, but the monies came from mostly the Feds. So we were sort of independent, but in the middle of the political dynamics, if you will. But yes, the county administered and paid our paychecks and made sure that we were in the retirement system, but the administrative structure was an Executive Director and all these elected officials. I’m even thinking that most of my salary came from federal funds and not local funds.

AB: And then at that time there was a Regional Planning Commission but not individual planning commissions?

GE: Right.

AB: And that Regional Planning Commission was made up of individuals who were appointed by the elected officials?

GE: That’s correct. I think the Regional Planning Commission was created in 1947 and was actually a progressive institution in terms of the history of planning in the United States, because to have a Regional Planning Commission in the late forties was pretty good. Later, I think what happened with the growth dynamics of the era is that when the MGM came in, it created a chain reaction for six or seven or eight other hotel casinos and brought people like myself to the region. That created a little bit of an imbalance between the people who were comfortable and liked the established order, and the people who were brought here in this cauldron of growth and change and development. The planners actually didn’t have a chapter of the American Planning Association here until we created it. So we were people in our late twenties and early thirties who had come from other places who were educated in planning, and a lot of the people who were on the Regional Planning Commission staff were more civil servant-type people. They were more into the processing of subdivision maps with a little more of a reaction-oriented approach rather than a progressive attitude that we’re going to go out and look at how things dynamically work over the next fifteen, twenty, thirty years and figure out our game plan.

AB: And was that staff for the Regional Planning Commission employed by the county?

GE: I believe so, yes.

AB: But it was not a Washoe County Planning Commission, so it had representatives from Reno, Sparks, and Washoe County?

GE: Yes, it was four, four and four.

AB: Oh, it was equal.

GE: I think so, I think it was equal.

AB: Okay. So you were saying you went to work for Sparks and my understanding is that Sparks was just starting its own planning division at that time.

GE: Yes.

AB: They hadn't even had a planning division or a planning commission of their own. None of the entities did.

GE: No.

AB: So where did things stand when you came to Sparks?

GE: Well, I was hired in May of 1978. At that time, we were in the process of creating our own planning commission. We had a technical group, and I was the third professional planner hired. Alex Fittinghoff was the first professional planner; he was hired in 1976. Joseph Culgan was the Senior Planner that was brought in in early '78. I was brought in in May of '78. Mr. Fittinghoff's main objectives were twofold. The first was to create a real comprehensive plan for the City of Sparks that went out and looked at how the growth of the community would occur over the next twenty years. It was kind of a traditional approach. There were three alternatives: one heavily skewed the residential, two heavily skewed to industrial/employment/commercial, and then three—the baby bear soft one—was the mixed balance of both, and that was the one we chose. Mr. Colgan was directed to produce that plan, and it occurred in about a two-year period.

So that was in-house to us, and then we created a planning commission. Then we basically seceded from the Regional Planning Commission, which created all sorts of political conflict. Some complained that Sparks was abandoning these tried and true traditional institutions and there was some back and forth. And Sparks' reaction was, "Well, we're just tired of not having superior land use decision making in our community." A lot of the mobile home parks, a lot of the industrial users, were perceived to be substandard. In other words, land use had proceeded in Sparks without the hands-on municipal control and direction to shape how development occurred. I think the belief among the upper management and the electeds was that Sparks needed to take its destiny into its own hands. So that was really what started things. And then I was brought in to do code enforcement to get out in the community and

basically say, “We have established benchmarks of property maintenance and we’re not going to tolerate people turning their yards into junkyards and wrecked cars everywhere,” and so forth. And that was an interesting public education process for me because there is a certain element of conflict in code enforcement.

AB: I thought it was striking that Sparks was the entity that pulled out of the Regional Planning Commission. Sparks was so much smaller than Reno at that point. It made me wonder whether it was just a sense that there was sort of a favoritism happening because of size. There was a big size discrepancy between Reno and Sparks at that point.

GE: Yes.

AB: But it became clear that Sparks actually had a position about what Regional Planning should be, and this Regional Planning Commission wasn’t fulfilling what that should be. I even saw there was a position paper that was written in 1980. It said Jay Milligan was the Sparks City Manager but, so I don’t know who actually wrote it but...

GE: I would say that Alex Fittinghoff composed it and it was edited.

AB: Okay. Bill Raggio at that point said that a withdrawal from the Regional Planning Commission by Sparks would be a step backwards. So I can imagine there was a lot of political heat for doing that.

GE: Yes.

AB: I did wonder how much you might have been involved in the position paper. I’m looking at a newspaper article that stated that Sparks was arguing that regional planning issues needed to be made distinct from the local planning issues. Regional Planning issues included things like the alignment of US 395 through the Truckee Meadows, a housing plan, a water use plan, an urban limits boundary, an area-wide recreation plan, and a county-wide position on major federal or state projects such as the MX missile system. And there were thoughts that Regional Planning wasn’t addressing the things that they should have been. Is that your recollection?

GE: Yes. And I think sometimes Nevada has challenges with California in terms of the philosophy. John MacIntyre—who was the City Manager before Jay Milligan—was the County Manager. MacIntyre, Milligan, Alex Fittinghoff—these were northern California people, or central California people. And the electeds—I think it was started with Mayor Jim Lillard, who went to the County Commission—had a progressive bent. We were sort of a microcosm in the sense that it was a small municipal organization and it had purpose. So we were always in these informal and very strategic discussions about Sparks’ future, both internally and within the regional context. Now the other thing is that the growth dynamic created a sewer moratorium in the City of Reno, and we had surplus capacity, some of which we leased to Reno, and some of it we kept for our own purposes. So we did have some leverage relative to this growth dynamic. That was probably adding fuel to the fire. So I think Mr. Fittinghoff was correct, and I think he probably composed most of that position paper. The internal sign code or landscaping ordinance or

architectural guidelines within a context should be municipally driven, and should be under the control of a local planning commission.

AB: Special use permits, things like that?

GE: Yes. And then the regional issues, the bigger issues like air quality, water quality, the regional housing dynamic, many issues of which are still with us, need to be at that regional level. So then what happened was there was this period where we formed our own planning commission, but we did still have some interaction. I think we, over time, severed the ties. It took four or five years from the initial stages to where we were completely separate, more compressed. But again, I'm a line staff person at the time, I'm the foot soldier. I'm the guy that's out in the community doing code enforcement or managing federal grants. I'm not operating at that higher level when that occurred in the late eighties, where I got more involved in that.

AB: It's interesting to think about those transitions that you're talking about, where there was a desire in Sparks to try to think about the larger livability issues and trying to regulate to some extent what people were doing with their property where it had been a very rural community for a very long time and was very distinct from Reno geographically, too. There was actual separation between the two communities. That must have been an interesting experience, trying to implement those things on the ground when they hadn't been happening too much of an extent before. It seems that pretty rapidly after Sparks got a planning staff and its planning commission, Reno did, too. But then there was still this Regional Planning Commission. So what is your recollection about what happened at that point as far as interest in developing something new with Regional Planning? There were many years in there before the legislation was proposed formally. Do you remember what kind of conversations were happening? Bill Raggio was expressing some interest in planning from a very early date and he continued to. Where did the interest in trying to create something new come from?

GE: Well, Senator Raggio because of his history as Washoe County DA and minority, (sometimes majority) leader in the Senate, had tremendous stature in the state and was respected north and south. When he spoke, people listened. And he also protected the region in terms of this north-south situation, getting a fair share, and so forth. He and Joe Dini were very protective of our region, and both in my mind were great men politically and personally.

I think there was a period—I don't want to say it was dormant—but in the eighties, the two cities were pursuing their own goals separately. I think a lot of these issues were simmering, and maybe it boiled over in the late eighties. We've seen this in the discussion of fire consolidation. I mean, how long has this been going around—for thirty, forty years? And I'm still not sure what the resolution is in terms of the county service area and the City of Reno service area. A lot of these issues get bogged down in the personalities. You almost have to have people of goodwill, because these are independent elected officials, independent in Sparks, independent in the county, independent in the City of Reno. I think that the glue that the previous Regional Planning had, had dissipated. It didn't exist. So the back and forth and the bickering was probably the catalyst for Senator Raggio to say, "Wait a minute." He handcuffed us together. In other words, they basically said, "You're going to cooperate, you're going to work, and you're going to work together intensely during this session and you're going to resolve these issues or

else.” I didn’t want to know what the “or else” was because, you know, the cities are creatures of the state. They have the power to restructure our form of governance if they so choose.

But I think a lot of these issues continue to pile up. I think the Regional Transportation Commission was created probably in the late seventies, and that created some glue because there were two electeds from Reno, and two from Washoe County, and one from Sparks, and the idea was “Let’s kind of work together on the transportation.” They’re the MPO, the Metropolitan Planning Organization, and Jerry Hall created that entity that others have inherited. So I think there was Regional Planning going on at the transportation network level, there was Regional Planning in terms of the sanitary sewer facility relative to the infrastructure and sizing appropriately, and Reno and Sparks worked together on that. But again, on the housing issue, the homeless issue, there were similar discussions to what we have now. The homeless have a detrimental economic impact on the downtown core, but they have needs. How do we socially in a conscientious manner handle the homeless, but yet not let it impact the long-term viability of the downtown? “Well,” some say, “let’s shift them out, let’s move them out,” and Sparks asks, “Why do you want us to inherit your problem?” A lot of times the individual government perspective is parochial to the interest of that government. And I think that really drove the Regional Plan process to say, “You guys have got to work together; this region is too small, and the public does not want to hear you people bickering.”

AB: So many of those issues were identified and explored and addressed in the Blue Ribbon Task Force report that was published in 1974. I believe that had been sponsored by the Washoe Council of Governments and the Regional Planning Commission, realizing that there were these very large regional issues that they were going to have to tackle together.

GE: Right.

AB: It seems that that kind of self-scrutiny was happening from the early 1970s through the end of that decade. From your experience in planning that you brought with you, and your education, was that something that was happening in other places at the same time, or was this area just hitting a certain population point where metropolitan areas or cities would have to start addressing growth?

GE: The current analogy that comes to my mind is the legalization of marijuana in our state, where half the state is now Californians. Native Californians brought our culture, if you will. And a lot of the native Nevadans are concerned about that. But I think the growth rate and the change forced us to reexamine. The construction and the building community by its nature is conservative; it wants to see the clear path forward so they can build housing or commercial and make money. I think the decline of gaming in a national context, and concerns about the deterioration of some of the properties in downtown Reno, prompted responses from people like William Eadington, who are very sharp people, saying, “Look, we need to diversify, we need to rethink the economic base.”

So that’s on one side, and then you’ve got the people who want to build warehouses; they want to continue to build, they don’t want to see sewer moratoriums, they do not want to see disruptions, they do not want to see political infighting where there is no predictability on the various planning bodies. There is a lot at stake when there is either an unclear path forward or even political chaos. Really, when any community grows, it is a metamorphosis. It’s going from caterpillar to butterfly. We just don’t know

exactly how painful it is and what the steps are and how long it's going take. So we are always wrestling with these issues.

I love Nevada. I'm a very sentimental, very traditional person. My son was born in Sparks, my grandsons were born here. He's a doctor in Visalia but I'm very sentimental about the opportunity that the people of Sparks gave me to become a mensch, to become a man of the world. I've loved the community and I love the people here, and so to me that's always the context of the discussion, within the family. With a lot of things that we sometimes see as big issues, it's just a matter of reconciling the irreconcilable differences and figuring out the solution. Let's stop arguing and fighting and let's find the solution. I think our region is like any other one where you have that birthing process. Sometimes it's just not clear what the path is forward.

AB: What kind of involvement did you have at the City of Sparks in the creation of the legislation that formed the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency?

GE: I contributed the professional term "Sphere of Influence," which is in state law. That's the area in which a municipality will grow into in an orderly fashion. That was a main issue. From Sparks' perspective, we were apprehensive about Sparks losing its identity, and that concern continues today. Any discussion of consolidation, as you well know, in terms of the Sparks fire function, or whatever, is a very touchy subject. They are a city of 100,000 people. When we were doing this, the city had probably 45,000 or 48,000 people, whatever the number is. I had just been appointed Director about a year-and-a-half before that, and my plate was full just with what I was trying to accomplish, because in the same period of time we were updating our master plan and we were also looking at the Spanish Springs area in terms of a growth corridor.

With the Regional Plan, we had to be active participants, especially with Washoe County, in terms of how we could have an orderly growth and expansion into county areas. This is where the issue of non-contiguous annexation came up. Everything within the sphere—even though it's in the county until it's annexed—would be under Sparks' developmental control. That was a very unique tool that was created by the legislation. Initially, we were paranoid about Sparks losing the ability to govern its own destiny. In other words, initially—at least in my mind—I thought, as much as I like and respect Senator Raggio, if we're going to end up with a Washoe County planning function that handles all three entities, I might be out of a job. But I think as we evolved over time in the process, we got over that and we realized that the true mission is to establish a regional operating context to look at the broad perspectives there were in the 1980 position paper of the City of Sparks.

Sparks was always supportive of Regional Planning as truly defined. Our concern was direct developmental control from outside the community being imposed upon us. That was one thing. Another thing—as you recall, we were talking about the mixed plan or the balanced plan that we did in 1980—as a professional planner, I always believed that Sparks should be a full-service community. In other words, at some point, the Sparks Marina was a pit. It was a hole in the ground. But we actually had plans for the recreational conversion of that from 1984. We had a long-term game plan in terms of how the community was going to evolve. And we had a vision that was internal to our community and we just did not believe that Washoe County or Reno could serve the citizens of Sparks in the same way that I could, if you will, because I was employed by the city. At that time, I'd been working for the city for ten, eleven years. I know how it ticks, I know what its heart is about.

So I think that we brought that to the Regional Planning discussion, in terms of saying, “Let’s discuss the regional issues. What types of development belongs in an urban context, a suburban context, and a rural context?” We didn’t go to the level that Oregon did in their 1974 legislation that established growth rings—one of the issues now with Portland is that there are boundaries, and it’s not some lighthearted little deal to annex those boundaries. They are very, very serious about it. What it has done is densified Portland, and yet they’re pushing and they’re wanting to expand their boundaries. I use Oregon as an example just because they’ve been at this for forty years. So we use some of those ideas in terms of ensuring that the cities will have an urban-type setting, then the edges will be more suburban. The county will play a little bit of a different role than the cities. But it was still a work in progress. It was hammered out and we brought in a consultant, Robert Freilich, who had worked on the Ramapo case, which is a famous land use case.

AB: Where is that from?

GE: Ramapo, New York. It basically controlled the allocation of sewer resources to the growth of the community. Petaluma did a similar thing. We tried to bring in people who were national experts to assist us, because with the legislative clock, as you are well aware, the gun is fired in January and then by May or June you’ve got to be done.

AB: Did Sparks bring Freilich in?

GE: Well, I recommended that he come in.

AB: To serve the larger project?

GE: Yes. And then there was the issue of funding. I’m not even sure exactly where the funding came from, because it was a fairly hefty fee. But we believed that it was in the best interest of this region, and we learned a lot from each other. Leann McElroy was representing the City of Reno and John Hester was representing Washoe County. The three of us spent a lot of time together down in Carson City and back up here, and I’m guessing that about thirty-five percent of each session was devoted to it. I was physically exhausted, actually.

AB: I would imagine. And were you three physically writing some of this plan or was that the legislators’ role?

GE: No, we did it. We wrote most of it and I think Freilich, too. I’m not even sure how many others we brought in on it. But we did end up writing it. And again, the Nevada legislature has evolved, obviously, but it was government on the cheap, so a lot of times they used the local officials as well: “We ask for your expertise, because we don’t want to bring in consultants. We don’t want to have our own staff here at the state to advise us on planning, so Greg, you’re acknowledged.” They would use us that way in terms of composing language. And we were crafting the language on the fly.

AB: Tell me about the concerns that were raised about the relationship of the local master plans, the individual municipalities and the county’s master plans, to the Regional Plan that was being developed.

There seemed to be a lot of concern or at least questions about which had to conform to which. Did the local plans have to conform in advance to what this Regional Plan said? Was it going to dictate those plans? Of course, the individual entities wanted to have control over their individual master plans. Can you talk a little bit about those concerns, and if you feel like they were resolved, how that ended up working?

GE: Well, to the best of my recollection now, I think we took the local plans as a given. In other words, Sparks has an adopted master plan that says “Here’s the general allocation, the transportation network,” and so forth. Reno has a plan. The county has these sub-area plans or whatever for Spanish Springs and the unincorporated areas, Washoe Valley. There wasn’t enough time to say, “We’re going to revisit all these plans.” I mean, it wasn’t humanly possible. So I think for the sake of moving forward we basically just took our existing plans in terms of a master plan concept as a given. We were negotiating more about how, in the next twenty years, the region was going to address these longer-term concerns.

We had to create the institutional framework of representation on the commission—four, three, and three or whatever—and then there’s the Regional Planning Commission and the Governing Board. We inherited a little bit of the previous squabbling in terms of trying to figure out the representation part. Our position was “We want to avoid you giving us land use direction” more than looking at the Regional Plan and the policies to figure out how to amend our plan after this is in place to be consistent with the Regional Plan and then hereafter, making sure that we’re working together and that the issues that Senator Raggio was concerned about get addressed.

AB: So it did implement a different type of structure.

GE: Yes.

AB: And your Regional Planning Commission before, as you say, was comprised of individuals who were appointed by the local elected officials?

GE: Yes.

AB: They didn’t need to be Planning Commissioners for those jurisdictions because they didn’t have planning commissions for a long time.

GE: Right.

AB: This new legislation created a Regional Planning Commission composed of members of each jurisdiction’s planning commissioners.

GE: Correct.

AB: Because they all had a planning commission by that point who were appointed, not elected, and so it seems that was one change. They still didn’t have to necessarily be planning professionals. They probably weren’t usually, right?

GE: No.

AB: But they were citizens. But then also you had a Governing Board for Regional Planning and that consisted of the local elected officials from the different jurisdictions.

GE: Yes.

AB: Today I think that's ten members plus one member from the school board who I think isn't voting. So that's the part that didn't exist before, right?

GE: Yes.

AB: Can you talk a little bit about what the existence of that Governing Board changed? What difference did that make, or why was the Board such a necessary addition to the structure?

GE: You have to think about these issues of consolidation, or the issues of governmental efficiency. I'll give you an example. After I left government, a young man and I were working in a real estate office and he was doing some research, and he said, "Greg, guess how many land use categories there are in Reno, Sparks and Washoe County in terms of classifications of land use for residential?"

I said, "I don't know."

"Seventy."

I think when the public hears something like that, they think, "You've got seventy land use categories?" And, of course, the county's got the categories of 2.5 acres and then ten acres and forty acres and then we've got multi-family this and MF that. I think these sorts of common-sense counter-intuitive issues keep bringing us back to the desire to streamline this thing. Do we have to have three sets of rules for everything? Can't we just get more of a clearinghouse mindset that we're here to serve the public in a way that's efficient? That's a constant that drove a lot of the conversation: Do we have to have three sets of rules for everything and three sorts of processes? I think what Regional Planning did at least for that near term was to bring us back together. And it really did. The Spanish Springs Plan was a joint plan developed between ourselves and Washoe County. And I also got the six major land owners—it was like 7,000 acres, 11 square miles out there. I was planning a new community. Basically I planned a new town with the county. And it was approved unanimously by the Planning Commission of the City of Sparks, the Planning Commission of Washoe County, the Washoe County Commission, and the City Council meeting jointly. The Regional Plan allowed for the Spanish Springs Plan to occur and it gave us a growth corridor that is still being implemented. It's sixty percent developed. This is almost thirty years ago.

In land use, you can only plan efficiently if you have large tracts of land that you can create a comprehensive plan for. But under state law at the time, the county had control, and so there was this incremental approach: we'll take three acres, five acres, we might take one farm but we aren't going to look at the thirty-year buildout. Is it Vista Boulevard or Sparks Boulevard or the Pyramid Highway? It certainly wasn't perfect, because we had unintended consequences of the properties that were outside the Sphere of Influence that were developed in the county. Some of the Pyramid Highway problems and the congestion also went beyond what we controlled in Sparks. But we had 7,000 acres, and of that, we preserved 2,200 acres of open space, and we set up a regional trail system, and a park system, and we

created an impact fee system that was internally driven and later evolved into the state system. We did it informally through agreements. The point is that we worked with the county, and the county surrendered the land use review capability within the context of the Spanish Springs Plan. And I think it worked well for the citizens of Sparks and for Washoe County. That was certainly a concrete benefit of Regional Planning, because we were required to compromise. Reno and Sparks are two cities and we're next to each other, so we have common interests in terms of redevelopment of downtowns and all that stuff. But the unincorporated areas are where the cities grew into, and to figure out a mechanism for the logical orderly growth and expansion is a commendable goal.

AB: Did the pace that was established to develop revised Regional Plans seem appropriate? I think every five years you needed to produce a new Regional Plan.

GE: I think so. It's a real challenge. From my perspective as a municipal planner, the forecast should be for a twenty-year period. Water should always be fifty years because it's just a different kind of resource and you have to make major physical infrastructure improvements. That's the one area where I think fifty years, absolutely, is the mandate. A comprehensive plan for municipalities is twenty years, but practically speaking you need to do a ten-year update. What happens is there are too many changes. The market changes, the composition of the community changes, techniques change, the economics of the region change. Tesla comes, and now we have to consider what we do for entry-level housing and how we respond to this, and that should be done in the context of a comprehensive plan.

And so in Sparks, we had the 1980 plan, and then by 1989, 1990 I've got requests for amendments that I'm not doing willy-nilly. I'm putting them in a basket, and we did an overhaul of our master plan, as well, with thirty amendments. We had a major overhaul. I had Glen Godfrey do that. But again, that was within the context of the Regional Plan, where Sparks is identified as having a major downtown. There are parts of the Regional Plan that overlay into your local comprehensive plan.

It was either coincidental or serendipitous that as I was overhauling the comprehensive plan of the city, we were also in the middle of doing the Regional Plan, as well as the Spanish Springs Plan. We had those three similar but different processes going on. But in my mind it was all the same thing, because what you're looking for is Sparks is operating context in the region. How can we improve our land use decision making process internally, and in terms of how we interface with not only the county and the city, but the feds and the state and RTC, and everyone else?

Eventually we got control of the water. There's always this evolution of governance that's not in the books. I mean, the fact that the power company owned the water became a political issue to where TMWA was created, and it's a private utility directing growth? That cost the region \$350 million because we had to buy the infrastructure back from them. But still, that's one of those things where there's a maturation process. The evolution of a region occurs when cooler heads prevail, rather than the bickering, when we ask, "What is it that we should be doing that we're not doing? How do we make better decisions?"

AB: We talked about how Sparks was the most vocal in its criticism of how Regional Planning was working around 1980. From your perspective, did the creation of the TMRPA resolve those issues that Sparks was having? If they were saying Regional Planning wasn't working, do you think that that got resolved by this plan?

GE: Well, I think that if we had become obstinate, then we would have been hypocrites. You can't criticize and then say, "Okay, I'm taking my ball and going home," or "I can't trust that the outcome of this process is going to help us." Largely, that was not a politically viable option, anyway. Senator Raggio made it very clear that "You're either going to work together or I'm going to give you a solution." So that forced us to think about our place in the region.

I've been here forty-three years, and I think one of the challenges is the identity of Sparks. I'm in front of the Sparks City Council on something else, and Greyhound wanted to saddle up at the RTC facility, and this poor guy was on a speaker phone, because he couldn't make it to the meeting. And he used the word "Reno" three times. The identity thing is something that Sparks is very proud of, but we also had to advise the elected officials that we have to participate, we have to be a part of this, because if we don't, we'll be left out in terms of what we believe is both in the interest of the region and the interest of Sparks. A lot of times we would align with the county, and other times we'd align with Reno. And again, it was more to say, "Okay, the Sparks perspective on this issue is this." And hopefully all three agree, but sometimes we may have had a disagreement with Reno but basically said, if we and the county believe this, and the votes are there, then we're going to go this way.

So there is that political dynamic. We didn't replace the political process by having a Regional Plan. What we did is we set a context in which we could operate and respect the fact that Washoe County has issues in Washoe Valley that they need to address, and it may not physically directly impact us, but we have to respect that. I was talking to a friend of mine, we were coming back from Fallon, we were doing some work out there. The Southeast Connector was the Tahoe-Pyramid Link and I went to a Regional Planning Commission meeting in 1982 to testify that we preserve that corridor because it was going bye bye.

AB: Preserve that corridor in what way?

GE: To allow for that roadway to occur, because we knew that there were twenty-seven lanes of traffic going north-south in 1980, that the buildout in this region would require that. They had what they called an "A line" along the western edge of the Sierras that got politically decapitated, but we still have the freeway, and we had Virginia Street, and then we needed the Southeast Connector. Planners by their nature know that there are regional consequences to our actions. There is a cumulative impact of having 100,000 residents in Sparks and 40,000 jobs. We're a magnet in the industrial district, but we're a little weak on the commercial, and so we need to do this to build up that, but we're not operating in a vacuum. I think it is often hard for the elected people to just say, "Okay, we're going to let go of that, we're not going to be parochial when somebody brings up the issue of homeless; we're going to try to look at it in the regional context of what is the solution for the region and how do we contribute resources to solving that at the regional level."

AB: Do you think that there was always a bit of an educational moment that happened when elected officials became members of Regional Planning, when they joined that Board and started having these conversations? Did you see that?

GE: Well, for the eight years that I was the Director, Chris Exline, who was a Professor of Geography [at the University of Nevada], was on the Commission, and he was a stellar supporter, both of me professionally—he was a wonderful man—but he got it. There are descending levels of engagement and

understanding, but certainly the people that serve on these commissions, be it the Regional Planning Commission or the RTC or the Airport Board or whatever, the Convention Authority, are forced to acknowledge the regional context. In other words, Storey County is now becoming an economic engine that affects the region, and it's outside the political control of these people.

I've actually argued on a separate level that we need to reconstitute Regional Planning to incorporate Lyon County, Storey County, Washoe County, and Carson, and geographically broaden the horizon because the transportation issues on the I-80 corridor going out to Tesla or whatever other employers are out there, the cumulative social impacts that we have relative to schools and housing and the demands on the social services, Storey County is not picking up. They're picking up the revenue from whatever subsidies came through the state minus the \$1.7 billion in terms of what comes to the communities to build the schools. Again, we have to constantly redefine the region. And sometimes it's the forest for the trees—we need to elevate and start looking at what the region is. According to our friends from EDAWN, that's the center of the circle now. Fernley as the bedroom community or potential industrial employer has a larger role to play than heretofore, and rather than the two cities and the county looking at it just at this level, we should be expanding that perspective.

AB: Were any conversations of that nature about expanding the definition of the region happening while you were working at Sparks? That was through the mid-nineties, right?

GE: Yes, yes. It wasn't as critical as it is now. We were beginning to think Spanish Springs might need a reliever road coming out instead of the Pyramid Highway. It would be farther east and come back toward Interstate 80. There are dilemmas and challenges when you physically grow in terms of accommodating those cumulative impacts. But again, that's over twenty years ago, so things have evolved and changed, obviously.

AB: Definitely. One thing we're interested in is whether the county acted differently than the cities in terms of their relationship to Regional Planning. It's a different situation, obviously, but do you have any thoughts about that? I know it's kind of a big question.

GE: Well, it's an interesting question. I personally as a professional practitioner have concern about Neighborhood Advisory Boards. The issue at the county is that you have Sun Valley, and you have Washoe Valley, and you have Incline Village and you have Verdi. So the county has these little villages—let's call them villages—and there is a very rural mentality, if you notice some of these annexation wars. There's a cultural difference in Red Rock, where you're out there, and you've got ten acres and two horses, and pretty soon here comes the urban creep and there is a lifestyle conflict. Some of the County Commissioners are elected from the urban base, but I think culturally they tend to be more sensitive to these outlying areas. And so that's another issue that the cities often have, of saying, "Okay, that's very nice, but eighty percent of Washoe County is here." And yet when we're talking, all we hear about are these issues and these concerns about this other twenty percent, and "Don't we pay a tax to you guys?"

So there's always a little bit of this cultural conflict. The county has its issues but what level of engagement do they have with the urban perspective? They handle a lot of the social services in terms of the Senior Citizen Center and the Health Department, the judicial system. There's a regionalized construct for that, but they have a ton of independently elected officials. And so again there's a little bit of a

cultural difference between the cities and the county, especially when the cities are penetrating and going out into these areas.

I think that's where there's a lot of conflict and you could have a situation like—I'll just pick Reno and the county, where we'uns don't like you'uns because you'uns is coming out and changing the lifestyle of we'uns here in Verdi. And again, is it resolved? I don't know. Is there a context to resolve it? I think so. But again, it's easier said than done. I mean with respect to growth, you're either going to have horizontal growth or vertical growth. Humans by their natures like to re-energize, or it's the profit motive, or capitalism, or whatever it is. We can't just say, "Well, this is it. We're done. It's a finished perfect canvas." My hometown is encircled, with the ocean and three cities on the three other sides. It's all going vertical, it's McMansions. Humans always find another way to reinvest and recreate.

So I think the region is a work in progress. When I came here, there was probably maybe 140,000 or 150,000 people here—maybe closer to 200,000, for the sake of discussion. Now there's half a million. And that's the other thing I've learned, is infrastructure. When Sparks went from 30,000 to 90,000, for the sake of discussion, it tripled in size, but the infrastructure cost to serve that isn't triple. It's a much, much larger number because the infrastructure to serve 30,000 people is totally busted when you go to ninety. You have to rebuild everything. The federal laws change. And so this whole notion of people paying again and again and again for services that they thought they bought, this is a hard sell.

If you really think about our line of work, properly done it's not easy, because you can't just gloss over these issues with people. I had some land use battles in Sparks over apartments, and I mean these were bloodbaths. To the single-family homeowner, anybody living in an apartment is a scum sucker and "Please go away!" And it's like, "Wait a minute, I lived in an apartment when I was in college. People can't afford a house." And with these conflicts, a lot of them are economic, a lot of them are cultural, and you've got to say in the fair share or the economics of the region, look at what warehousing or gaming pays people, and you have to conclude that fifty-five to sixty percent of your housing should be either multi-family or town homes. Everybody can't be living on one acre with a house and a big lawn that they can't afford to water. It's just not real. The issue is that people have these core beliefs. And that's where the finesse part of planning has to come in and say, "We're going to referee this to where it's balanced." It's often not popular decisions.

AB: In your recollection, were the funding mechanisms for Regional Planning ever a source of contention?

GE: I don't think so. I mean, I think it's a relatively minor amount of money. I know that the position of the Executive Director and support staff have a specific earmarked line in the tax bills. I guess that's where they get it. No, I don't think that was the issue. I think there was concern about whether we were creating a fourth bureaucracy. As a public servant and a taxpayer, we do want to be efficient with the allocation of resources. I don't know if they've even got a million-dollar-a-year budget. The question becomes whether that is a cost-effective utilization of the public monies. I say it is, just because it's a way to focus people's attention on regional issues. Now, again, I have a belief that we need to expand it geographically. That's my belief. But then again, I'm just a private citizen with a little consultancy. I think in time that will happen. The players will probably have to change, or at some point they'll probably say, "I think we need to do this." Whether it has to be proposed from the top down or through another version of what Raggio did, I don't know, but I think sooner or later it's going to have to happen.

AB: Can I go back for a minute, because we didn't talk specifically about the creation of the first Regional Plan and I just wonder if you have recollections about how that process went?

GE: Well, I do. It was interesting because this was 1989 and I was physically exhausted. We had the budgetary process and I was in a meeting with the other department heads and the city manager and I was kind of like this. [demonstrates]

AB: Head down on the table.

GE: And I was getting a nap, or whatever. The city added seven positions city-wide and they gave me two, because they felt sorry for me. I had really inherited a second job because Senator Raggio didn't say how you're going to do it, he just said, "You're going to do it."

AB: You're going to do what?

GE: "You are either going to write this plan or you're going to coordinate the writing of it and you better get it done between now and the end of the session or else somebody will do it for you." So we were full force engaged in the composition and language and we worked together. And it was interesting, it was like having a second job. But you have to also go and report back because the City of Sparks, the city manager and the elected people would say, "You know, Greg, we love you, but are you giving away the store? Are you being cooperative to the point where you're going to surrender autonomy that we think is critical?"

We were actually going through a transition at the time. I think Jim Spoo had been the mayor and I think he resigned to take a job at the state, so we had some political changes that were occurring, and I was also trying to navigate through that, in terms of the new mayor and so forth. But for the most part, I think that we did as good a job as we could have given the resources, given the timeframes, given the differing perspectives, primarily county/city perspectives on how we were going to accommodate the perspective of the other. And I think that's the key issue, to have an open mind about how this is going to work. There's an element of uncertainty, because you're creating it, you're drafting it, and you're talking about language, and you ask, "Well, how about if we say it this way?" or "How about if we go back and do it another way?" or "How about if we spend a day and come back and revisit it?" and that kind of stuff. There was a lot of that going on that was very interesting.

AB: And later there was much more of an effort to have public outreach with respect to the quality of life indicators.

GE: Yes.

AB: But my understanding is that wasn't necessarily a part of the first Regional Plan, or maybe it was to some extent. I'm thinking about the speed with which that had to be created.

GE: Well, there were two sessions. There was the 1989 session and there was a 1991 session. Some of '91 was dedicated to the infrastructure instruments by which this was going to happen, and some of it was what you're talking about. And that has its own life because you could have two hundred indicators. I

mean, it's the challenge of bringing science to the art of planning. We think if we can analyze it and we approach it mathematically and arithmetically and we just show people that there was a survey and this is what people want and so that's what we're going to do. That's always a challenge in terms of planning, because a lot of it is nuanced and it also depends on the community. The community of Sparks historically has been what I describe as blood and kinship—very middle class, very working class, very family-oriented. It's just different than Reno. Reno has a lot of upper-end stuff and it has a lot of multi-family housing. The majority of the housing in Reno, fifty-five percent, is multi-family, because it was an economic response to gaming and so forth.

Each community has its own identity, and I think the art of this thing is to say, "Okay, how do we incorporate all these good notions and the actual behavior of people?" You could have a hundred indicators or fifty indicators. Lynn Atcheson and Jim Spoo are some of my...I just love these people. And again it goes back to the respect that I've had for people who are working, even if they are not elected people, just people that are just trying to do something that is in the public interest. It's community spirit. I mean, that's where our strength lies. In a certain way, the responsibility doesn't lie just on the elected and the appointed, it lies in the people of the community saying, "This is important to us, and we're willing to contribute to the solution and that's where we have strength." Because if the government just starts saying, "Well, I think we ought to do this," it's like, "Okay, how are you going to get it done?" Whereas if we say that we need to have water conservation measures in place because it's a scarce resource, so we're either going to do it through xeriscape, or we're going to do it through the pricing system, or we're going to do it through public education, or fining people for wasting water, whatever, there is a goal, and the goal is to conserve the resource, but there are all these other steps to get to that, and it's modifying human behavior.

AB: You left the City of Sparks in what year?

GE: 1995.

AB: But you stayed here locally?

GE: Yes.

AB: Did you feel compelled to remain involved in any way in Regional Planning or in these discussions, or in local planning? What did you leave to do?

GE: Well, for the first eight years I was actually with two civil engineers, and we had a consulting business. A lot of my work was still in Sparks, just because I have the knowledge base, and at that point I had respect from the electeds because we had parted on good terms. So if you think about it, I was there for seventeen years, and for fully ten or twelve years after I left the city [government], a lot of my work was in Sparks, related to developments that occurred subsequent to that. So that's almost thirty years.

Then my wife and I bought a house in southwest Reno. We have one child and he went to Reno High—he's now a doctor, a psychiatrist in Visalia, and I have identical twin grandsons that are three years old. But that part of it has been kind of the best part, that you realize the evolution of the community. I took my son out and we were at Wingfield Springs, golfing at Red Hawk, when he was about fourteen, and I said, "Greg, no matter what you do in life as an occupation, make sure that what you

do matters,” and I pointed out to the wetlands that are out there. “In my line of work, we were able to preserve these wetlands instead of letting them be plowed under or allowing the natural context of Spanish Springs to be wiped out because of development. What you’re seeing here is a product of a lot of people working together, but I take pride in the fact that I did that. So whatever you choose in your life, think about that.”

AB: Are there any other things you’d like to talk about with respect to Regional Planning and the TMRPA?

GE: Well, from my perspective, I’m more of a hands-on type of planner, where I like to see things get built or things get done—the senior center gets constructed, or housing gets rehabilitated. I think a lot of Regional Planning becomes very amorphous and very data-driven, very technical, very acronym-loaded, and it moves away from something that’s usable by the public in their day-to-day living. My interests lie in more concrete-type planning. It doesn’t mean that I don’t respect Regional Planning, it just means that on my best day I prefer to do the other stuff where I actually physically do something—build a park, get a bicycle path done, or something. I’m oriented that way. I respect it and obviously I played a role both initially with the Council of Governments and the water quality side, as well as air quality. I did the master plan for Sparks, and did the Spanish Springs Plan, but I’d probably get more satisfaction out of having rehabilitated some older woman’s house, because you can actually see the direct linkage between quality of life and a constructive action by the government.

Sometimes I wonder if we’re creating debating societies, and we’re just in our own conflict zones instead of remembering, “Oh, by the way, those people out there are expecting us to make constructive decisions.” Just as a perspective thing, you spend a lot of time in City Council meetings, and Sparks at that point had, let’s say, 50,000 people, so I’m sitting in the Council meeting one night and I’m thinking about the major players in the community, the decision makers, how many people actually are engaged in the business of governing and running things. In Sparks, it was maybe 300 or 400. In Reno it’s 1500 to 2,000. So what are the other people doing? They’re home, they’re working two jobs, their kid is in little league, they’re trying to pay their bills, and they’re just hoping that we make the right choices.

AB: And hoping that officials who are elected share that deep sense of accountability to their constituents. I want to thank you so much for talking with me today.

GE: You’re welcome.

JOHN HESTER

Born in Texas, John Hester worked for the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments in the Cincinnati area before being hired by Washoe County's Department of Regional Planning in 1981. He was Assistant Director and Director of the county's Department of Comprehensive Planning, which was formed in 1983, and later became its Community Development Director. He then moved to the City of Reno, where he served as the Community Development Director, Redevelopment Administrator, and Assistant City Manager. He retired from the City in 2011. He is now Chief Operating Officer for the Bi-State Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, which has part of Washoe County in its jurisdiction.

ALICIA BARBER: This is Alicia Barber. Today is October 19, 2018. I'm with John Hester in Reno, Nevada. John, does the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency have your permission to record this oral history interview and make it available to the public?

JOHN HESTER: Yes.

AB: Thank you. For this project we're focusing on the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency, its history, and its precursors, but we are also interested in the series of events and experiences that brought you to Washoe County in the first place. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

JH: Sure. I was born in Beaumont, Texas in 1953.

AB: And where did you go to school?

JH: I got my undergraduate degree in architecture at the University of Texas at Arlington in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. And then I got my Masters of City and Regional Planning at the same place.

AB: Did you do those one right after the other, sequentially?

JH: Well, I did, but I was working at the same time. When I was finishing my architecture degree, I worked in urban design for the City of Fort Worth, which made me decide I wanted to move out of architecture to a larger scale. So I went to grad school there, and while I was there, I worked for the North Central Texas Council of Governments, which was the Regional Planning Agency for multiple counties. I think it was about four million people back then; it's much bigger now. They did all the transportation, water quality, air quality, and regional land use planning. So I got interested in regional planning way back then.

AB: What was it that drew you to regional planning? What about it interested you?

JH: I've always been very interested in how the urban fabric works, all the systems, and how they all work together. Also, in architecture school, I realized how subjective some of the things were. For my senior project, I had three professors arguing at my jury about whether this design was good or bad. And I also knew that while a lot of architects want to be the next I.M Pei or Philip Johnson, or something like that, very few get to be. So I thought I would enjoy and probably make a bigger difference helping to make the environment and the world a better place as a planner than I would as an architect.

AB: And was your hope to stay in that region when you got out of school?

JH: No, no. As a matter of fact, before I graduated, I had a couple of offers to stay there, and a couple of my professors said, "Hey, this great job we just saw is opening in Cincinnati. It looks like your job, you ought to apply for it." So I did. It was the Ohio Kentucky Indiana (OKI) Regional Council of Governments. If you know Cincinnati, it's really a metropolitan area that's in three states. It's Ohio, northern Kentucky—in fact, the Cincinnati airport is in northern Kentucky—and a little bit of Indiana, too, so that's why it was named OKI. They flew me up there, and halfway through the interview the guy said, "You got the job," because they wanted me to work on econometric modeling. I ended up building an econometric macro model of the Cincinnati economy, and worked with a lot of interesting people, including the corporate people from Federated Department Stores and Kroger and the University of Kentucky and Ohio State and Indiana University. In fact, Indiana and Ohio State people both offered me the opportunity to come there and get my PhD using the model I had done, but that wasn't really what I wanted to do.

Then my job morphed into being in charge of the Regional Plan update, and we were writing elements. Back then, it was about energy. Believe it or not, back in the eighties, people were talking about how we could get off of oil. Unfortunately, we lost track of that work, and now it's been resurrected. But anyway, we were working on energy and economic development, because Cincinnati was going through a transition out of the industrial and into other things. Some large companies there like Procter and Gamble and Cincinnati Milacron and all those guys, just like in Pittsburgh, were leading the community out of the economy that *had* been into the economy that *was*. But there were still people who were waiting for the mills to open again, and all that. Just like everywhere, there are people who go down the road looking in the rear-view mirror.

Anyway, I was doing that, and the American Planning Association had their national conference in Cincinnati, so I was giving a paper on the econometric model and how you could do one in your planning agency, and I saw this job in the Reno-Tahoe area. I particularly focused on the Tahoe part because I had lived in southern California, even though I was born in Texas. I was born in Texas because my grandfather was an OB-GYN, so my mom would go back there for us to be delivered, but I lived in southern California until I was twelve. And I always had the west in my blood a little bit—the mountains, and the ocean, and the sky. So I saw this Tahoe job, and I have an uncle who was over in the Sacramento area who's an anesthesiologist, so I called him and said, "What do you know about the Reno-Tahoe area?" He gave me some good input and told me some other people to talk to. I went in and talked to the guy who was recruiting, a guy named Bob Young, or Robert N. Young. He had been brought out here by

the old Regional Planning Commission of Reno, Sparks, and Washoe County. He was formerly the Executive Director of the Baltimore Regional Planning Council.

So he hired me, and I took the job site unseen in October of 1980. I flew out here in December to find a place to live, and I remember landing at the airport, and this is when there was still housing right up next to the airport. I think it was called Home Gardens. I looked out the window, and there was a mattress laying on the airport side of the fence that somebody had thrown over it, and I thought, “Oh my gosh, what did I do taking this job site unseen?” [laughs] I had already resigned in Cincinnati. But I rented a car and drove up to Tahoe, and it got better. And that’s how I got out here, and what I did before I got here.

AB: And that position was with Regional Planning?

JH: Yes, Bob had been hired by the Regional Planning Commission of Reno, Sparks, and Washoe County, the RPC. Under state law, the RPC was supposed to do the long-range planning for Reno, Sparks, and Washoe County, and it also reviewed development projects. Then if they needed to be approved at a higher level, they would go to the Sparks City Council or Reno City Council or Washoe County Board of Commissioners. Sparks had pulled out of the project part, and had created their own planning commission, and had their own staff. Alex Fittinghoff was the Director. They did that when John McIntyre, who was the County Manager for I think twenty-four years, was the City Manager of Sparks. He had been recruited from Santa Rosa to be the Sparks City Manager, and he was there for about a year-and-a-half before some of the Sparks Council Members who got on the County Commission lured him over to the county.

The criticism of the Regional Planning Commission that Sparks was making was that they were focusing too much on projects and not enough on the regional growth issues. Part of the reason for that was that in 1978—I wasn’t here yet, obviously—they had six or seven casinos going up at the same time and a .2 percent unemployment rate, and people living on the river. They weren’t prepared for growth, nor did they handle it well. They had a sewer moratorium and all these kinds of things. So that’s why Sparks had pulled out. There also was this group called the Washoe Council of Governments (WCOG) that was set up like a Council of Governments to receive funding for water quality from the federal government. The feds required you to set up these COG-like structures. Sometimes they’re called an Association of Governments.

AB: And that was comprised of elected officials from the three jurisdictions?

JH: Exactly. And the RPC was appointed. There was a guy named Chuck Breese who was running the WCOG. I think his father was a professor up at the university, but I don’t know much more about that. What Bob understood was that his direction was to bring back all the regional functions under one group and create a regional agency that was truly doing regional planning. The county was funding all of this because there was a funding agreement in the seventies where some of the property tax that Reno and Sparks collected, they gave over to the county, and the county paid for what was then called “civil defense.” Now it’s called “emergency management.” It paid for planning, and there was something else I can’t remember in that agreement that the property tax shift to the county was supposed to pay for. So the county was funding it and the county wanted the RPC to still do the project review. A guy named Mike Harper was in charge of that.

AB: What was his position?

JH: We called it “current planning.” He was in charge of current planning. He was kind of trained by Leann McElroy. Reno had decided they were going to do their own local work and they hired a guy named Bob Hunter, who had been Director in San Antonio, and Bob hired Leann from the Regional Planning Commission, so she went to work for the City of Reno.

AB: That was around the same time when you came, in 1980-81?

JH: Yes. I think Leann had just left when I got here in '81. So Mike took over current planning. Reno was starting to take over all of their own work in terms of project review, and starting to do some long-range planning. Sparks had done the same thing before that, and the county said, “We think it would be good to do the regional coordination, but we also want you to do the county planning, RPC.”

Then there was the WCOG. The idea was to pull the WCOG and RPC efforts, doing regional and unincorporated county project review, together in one organization. So they used an interlocal agreement to create a thing called the Regional Administrative Planning Agency, or RAPA. The group that Bob answered to, and that were his day-to-day-managers, was a committee of the three managers: the City Manager for Sparks, City Manager for Reno, and the County Manager. And then there was the RPC and there was the WCOG, and depending on what was being processed, you would see which body it would go to.

The RPC members, the commissioners, at one point decided they didn't like this, for a number of reasons. I think the spokesperson for it, but I might be wrong, was a guy named Ron Bath. I think he left the community to work in the Pentagon in charge of strategic planning. I think he's back now. Anyway, there was a big meeting where the Regional Planning Commission invited the elected officials and made a pitch to re-create the RPC the way it was, and bring it all back. They argued that we didn't need separate local planning commissions. The Chairman of the County Board at that time was Jim Lillard. Jim had been at Sparks when John McIntyre was there, and Jim said to the Regional Planning Commissioners, “You all can do whatever you want, but we're not going to fund it. In fact, we're going to create our own department, just like the two city governments have. We will still support regional planning, we'll still pay for that to happen, but you're not going to have your own independent staff again,” because that's what they had before. “And you're not going to hire and fire a director who has all the planning staff that then gives final projects to the local governments.”

AB: So what was their reason for objecting?

JH: I think number one is that the two cities never intended to go back. And number two, the county had more unincorporated population, and probably still does, than the City of Sparks. And they said, “We need our own planning function.” Also, some of them had visited Clark County, and as you know, half of the population of Clark County is in the unincorporated area—the Strip, the airport, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, all of that. They had some people advocating that Washoe County should become like Clark County, and become an urban county. So they were thinking we were moving toward that.

AB: There were subdivisions on the horizon in the county at that point, weren't there?

JH: There was a lot of development already in the unincorporated county, plus Incline Village. And the county, in subsequent years, were kind of surprised, but the WCOG agreed to change the service area for the Truckee Meadows Water Reclamation Facility to exclude the South Meadows. Then the county built a sewer plant there. The county's targeted growth area was the South Meadows, so they helped get a library out there, a regional park, wastewater, water systems, all that stuff. And that is, in fact, one of the biggest growth areas over the past twenty, thirty years.

AB: Definitely.

JH: Later in my story I'll tell you how that all got annexed, but anyway, that's how things were in the eighties until probably '87, '89, one of those legislative sessions. The county had an Assistant Manager named Bob Jasper, and Bob had been talking with some of the legislators—particularly, I think, some of the old regional planning commissioners and some of the other folks who liked the old model, maybe some people in the development community, I don't know exactly, people like Bill Raggio—who said, "Maybe we need to go back to something like that." I wasn't that closely involved in any of this, so I didn't really know, but Bob came back to us at Washoe County, and John McIntyre said, "Well, why don't you help Bob put together some legislation? What's a good model?"

We started looking around for good models, and one of the structures we liked was what Florida did, where the cities would develop their plans, and then they would fit into a county-level plan. The concept was that you'd have this county-level plan that the city plans were consistent with, and it would all work together. Bob put together some proposals like that, and I think it was in the '89 session when he showed them to the LCB [Legislative Counsel Bureau] staff and Bill Raggio. And the immediate response from the cities was, "We don't want to be subservient to the county," understandably. "If you're going to set something up like this," and I don't know that they really wanted something like that set up, I don't really know, "we want to be equal partners."

The people who were really involved at the legislative level on the Senate side were Bill Raggio and Sue Wagner. Bob Sader was very involved on the Assembly side. They put together at the staff level a team that included Greg Evangelatos and Leann McElroy. Greg had been working for WCOG—that's how he got here, and he worked on water quality, and then he went to work for Sparks. I think by that time, Alex Fittinghoff had left to start his own consulting firm, which is now CFA. Bob Churn was the Public Works Director so that's the C. Fittinghoff was the Planning Director, so that's the F, and Associates. So it was Churn Fittinghoff Associates, which is now CFA.

I believe Greg was the Director then, and the team that worked on this at the staff level, was Leann, Greg and I. We pulled in some of the concepts from around the country that we thought were the best, some of the ideas like Spheres of Influence, concurrency, conformance review against the Regional Plan. A lot of things that are in the legislation were things that Greg and Leann and I agreed on. And so that became the legislation.

AB: Was that a pretty harmonious process with the three of you?

JH: No. Well, Greg and Leann and I have always been professional friends.

AB: Sure. But you're representing a jurisdiction, right?

JH: And our jurisdictions were not all happy with this, frankly. When you work for a local government, you're kind of a soldier. You're not making the call; the elected officials are, in consultation with the manager, their CEO. You do the best job you can to represent their interests. If it had been up to Greg and Leann and I, who knows what we would have come up with? But we were representing the interests of our jurisdictions. The early versions, as I recall, had the county in charge. There was a delegation meeting, and the Washoe legislators were not happy with the county at all, because obviously the cities had talked to them and said, "What are you doing here?"

AB: What would have been, from the county perspective, the advantage of having it set up that way?

JH: Well, I would say Sparks wanted to be independent, that was my perception. Reno had these fits and starts dealing with growth. You can see that now; there's a lot of growth happening, and I don't think the city is necessarily ahead of the curve on infrastructure right now. Jim Lillard was the County Board Chair. Jim died in the early nineties. But he had been on the Board for a while, and there was this sense at the County Commission level that we need to take a broader view and make sure that we have adequate wastewater, water supply, all that we need to get into the business of serving the whole metropolitan area. At the same time, there was a tension in the county, like "We also want to represent the unincorporated residents who don't want to be in the cities, or at least the City of Reno." So there was this thought that the county could step up like Clark County did. The Las Vegas Strip wouldn't have been there if Clark County hadn't said, "Hey, we'll build a wastewater treatment plant and we'll put some land there and we'll build an airport and all that stuff." So there was the thinking that you needed somebody who had that perspective, that we need to plan ahead and provide this infrastructure and do these things.

Whether the cities saw it that way, or agreed that they weren't doing the job, I don't know. When I say the cities, they actually were very distinct. Reno had mayors like Barbara Bennett and Pete Sferrazza who were a lot more questioning of growth, which wasn't exactly the case in Sparks or the county. There was all that division, going back to 1978, when there was so much going on. Anyway, that was the perspective I think some had. And when I say the county, it's really not the County Commission or the City Councils, it's the people that they listen to, who make the donations. It's what their elected representatives were hearing from those who influence them.

So that's where the idea for the legislation came from. There was also another line of thinking—how true it was I don't really know—that we don't need three providers of service, we don't need three of this and three of this and three of that. And maybe that's part of the reason that this regional planning had Spheres of Influence and service areas in the legislation, so you could figure out how to separate those, so that two jurisdictions aren't vying to serve the same area, because that's not a good use of resources.

AB: So you're saying the legislation actually mapped out those areas?

JH: It told us to as part of the Regional Plan. That's where Spheres of Influence came from, and the Truckee Meadows Service Area, and all that. The Truckee Meadows Service Area wasn't explicitly defined, but the legislation would say things like, "Identify who's going to be the jurisdiction that this is ultimately going to end up in and design to their standards."

AB: Explain what that is, the Truckee Meadows Service Area.

JH: The Truckee Meadows Service Area came out of the Regional Plan, but the legislation said to clarify what geographic areas are going to be the responsibility of what jurisdiction. So if it's in the unincorporated county now, but it's going to be in the city in the Sphere of Influence, then the city should say, "These are the standards we want met," because it's going to be the city that's the infrastructure provider.

AB: Just anticipating?

JH: Yes. And that's pretty typical in a lot of places. So at that point it was time to start developing the first Regional Plan.

AB: There had been some references to a model in Florida that was looked at, as an example. Were you looking at that and do you remember where that was?

JH: Yes, it's under their state law that the cities' plans have to add up and be consistent with the county-level plan.

AB: That was what was in the Florida law?

JH: Yes, Florida had a thing called a Growth Management Act.

AB: Oh, so you were looking at state legislation?

JH: Yes, this legislation was all about what the state can require. The state then put into the legislation that it applies to counties from this size to this size, which is really special legislation in some people's minds. My friend who used to be the Clark County Director, Rick Holmes, said, "It's not that it's special legislation, John, it's just that it applies to tall skinny counties in the northwest part of the state." [laughs] So it was designed for Washoe County, but it had to be written so it was applicable state-wide. If anybody else grew into that population—I think it was 150,000 to 500,000, or whatever—it would be moved, and it has since been moved.

AB: There's other legislation that does similar things, applying to places with a specific size of population.

JH: Yes, and so if you hadn't changed it by now, the County Commission would have seven members, for instance.

AB: When you worked in Regional Planning in other parts of the country, were they mandated by state legislation or governed by state statute like Nevada?

JH: Well, yes, there was state legislation. Also, there were strings tied to federal funding where you had to have these regional agencies put together. That's where WCOG came from. But there are other

models. Kentucky, for example, has “area development districts” that are basically the regional planning areas.

Where this Regional Planning legislation came from, the old RPC, was back in the forties or fifties, when the idea was that you had one planning commission for a city and county. I think Winnemucca and their county still does, because it’s more effective to have one staff than two in smaller areas that don’t have a lot of resources. I think that just grew as Reno and Sparks grew, but at a point, it got to be outdated. Most of the other regional agencies, other than a few, don’t really have permitting authority or look at subdivisions and all that kind of stuff. They’re trying to make regional systems work—transportation systems, like RTC does, or the water supply system, like TMWA does. Most of the regional agencies work on that.

So you’ll see them in places like Minneapolis St. Paul, where the regional council does the stadiums, they do the airports, they do the wastewater, their big regional systems. In Dallas Fort Worth, the North Central Texas Council of Governments did the transportation plan and then they would spin off to implement parts of it, or other organizations were created to implement parts of it. DART, Dallas Area Rapid Transit, was created out of the need for a light rail system in Dallas. Fort Worth had a different system. In Cincinnati we had what was called TANK, which was the Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky, that did all of northern Kentucky and brought it across the Ohio River to downtown Cincinnati to a regional transit center. Then on the Ohio side, they had SORTA, which was Southern Ohio Regional Transit Authority. And we made sure those guys worked together.

So that’s what regional agencies typically do, but there are some that are way more powerful. Portland has parts of three counties that have a directly elected regional government. They also run the OMNI and the zoo and some other things. They could run the transit if they wanted to; they have the authority to do that, but they don’t. The TRPA up at the lake has permit authority and that’s unusual in that you have a transportation and land use group. It’s not typical.

AB: Thank you for that. I want to try to place things in context. You were starting to talk about the creation of the first Regional Plan, but first, did the creation of the TMRPA have a pretty easy road, getting through the legislature? Was it controversial?

JH: There was a lot of back and forth. I would say it wasn’t non-controversial. Frankly, if it wasn’t for Bill Raggio, because he was the Senate Majority Leader, I don’t know that it would have passed. And I don’t know that what we ended up with was exactly what everybody thought we would have when we went into it. But it is what it is. I think the rest of the state just watched, thinking, “Well, this is only going to apply in Washoe County, so you guys figure out what you want,” and Bill Raggio, because he was the Senate Majority Leader, said, “We figured it out, this is what we want,” and it passed. I wouldn’t say it was non-controversial, though.

AB: When you say that it might not have been necessarily what people had had in mind, or what they had expected, is there anything specific that comes to mind?

JH: Well, for the longest time, I don’t think Reno liked it, because in the first few iterations of the Regional Plan, Sparks and Washoe County were kind of aligned in limiting Reno’s area to grow. Reno, like I said, had these fits and starts of development. Now the county had close to 100,000 unincorporated residents who said, “I don’t want to be annexed, I like it the way it is.” Mainly that was about not

wanting to be annexed to Reno. So I think a lot of people would have been happy if it never had been created. The county didn't end up having the county coordination role that they thought they would. And I don't know that the cities feel like it adds a lot of value—I don't know, even to this day. Probably the most important thing that's in the Regional Plan, in my opinion, looking at it now, and having been gone from it for eight years, is probably the Spheres of Influence, so that people know which jurisdiction they're going to ultimately end up in. But that's still very controversial because of what happened—I'm jumping ahead now—in the late nineties. The plan has to be updated every five years, so the first one was '89, and the next one was '94 or '95. Getting ready for the Plan that was to be done around 2000, I had been hired by Charles McNeely to come over to the City of Reno, so I was at the city and everybody agreed to doing what we call a “fiscal equity study.” Have you heard of this part yet?

AB: To fund the planning agency?

JH: No, it was to say who's paying what taxes and who's getting what services. When I was at the county, we had a County Commissioner named Grant Simms, who had been a City Council Member in Reno, and he was convinced that depending on where you lived, you either got a good deal or you were subsidizing somebody else. So we had looked at that a little bit at the county, and we were also looking at the fact that the county had about 100,000 unincorporated residents and not a lot of specific revenue sources that come from just them for their services. Over the long-term, it was a strategic look at where the county was going. We knew that we probably needed to figure out how we were going to pay for local-type services, not out of county-wide revenues. So Grant had us look at that. We had some sort of report—I can't remember the title of it—that we took to the Board, but you wouldn't know by the title that that's what we were looking at. It was something like “Service and Revenue Options for the Future,” or something like that.

AB: Was that deliberate?

JH: Well, we didn't want the 100,000 unincorporated residents to get all up in arms about it, but we were trying to objectively say, “We've got a hundred thousand residents and we don't have a lot of revenue sources for the services that we're provided, and maybe there is a fiscal equity issue.” We didn't call it that. Grant left the commission, and I went over to the city, and other people changed and all that. But in 1999, Jeff Griffin was Mayor, and Pierre Hascheff was on the council, and also Dave Aiazzi. I can't remember who else was on there but we were talking actively with them—and with the City Planning Commission—about this fiscal equity issue. So we pushed for the study. Sparks agreed to it, and the county, to my surprise, agreed to it. It was done by EPS, a group called Economic Planning Systems—I could probably still find a copy of it—and what it said was that the unincorporated residents were receiving \$20 million dollars in services that were being paid for—I'm simplifying this—out of city taxpayers' money going to the county general fund.

Everybody argued with it. Some people like Dave Aiazzi banged on the table, and said, “County, write us a check!” That wasn't going to go anywhere. The county is not going to say, “Okay, you're right. Here's twenty million dollars a year.” That's just not going to happen. So our strategy was, if they're not going to shift the fiscal structure, let's shift which jurisdiction people are in. That was our logical alternative. So we advocated, going into the update of the Plan, that the Spheres of Influence should be shifted so that the fiscal inequity issue got resolved over time, because more and more of the

development went into the cities. As a city taxpayer you pay a higher property tax rate. So you pay the county, and the county gets the same money from property tax from everybody—city or county—but then you get additional property tax in the city. And that goes toward roads, parks, all those things that the county provides to unincorporated residents out of county-wide revenues. That's where the subsidy came from.

AB: So walk me through that just a little bit. The Sphere of Influence is not the same as annexation or city limits.

JH: The Sphere of Influence is where you're going to annex. And the Spheres of Influence up until that Regional Plan had been very limited for Reno. In the 2000 Plan, that was when the alignment between the county and Sparks started to break, because of the fiscal issue. So we said, "Okay, if you're not going to change the fiscal structure, then what we need to do is change which jurisdictions have the future development." We didn't really think we would be able to annex all of the unincorporated hundred thousand people. That was politically a no-go, a non-starter. So the concept was, "Okay, all of the growth areas are going to go into the cities, so that this problem doesn't get worse." And the county sued the Regional Planning Agency over that Plan and then, of course, all the local governments joined.

That was the Regional Plan lawsuit that Judge Jim Hardesty got. I don't know if he's the Chief Justice now, but he has been. He was the Washoe District Court Judge that got the case. And to his credit, I remember a stack of stuff feet high that we all gave to him, and he appeared to have read it all.

AB: All of these reports?

JH: Oh, yes, the Regional Plan, all of the staff reports, and everything. People would bring up issues like, "Well, this didn't happen," and he'd say, "Okay, I want to see the documentation and whether it was the city or county." We'd bring it back and he'd say, "Well, you're right, and you're wrong." I think through the process he was open minded about it. And what ended up coming out of that was indeed the way the fiscal equity issue was being addressed made sense. We actually created a formula that said, "We want this density overall in the region, so if you've got enough land for that density, you don't need any more annexation area or any more service area. If you don't, you get some."

So that created huge areas for the cities, particularly Reno, to annex into. I remember working with Perry Di Loreto, who I'd worked with when I was in the county, because he had nine thousand acres in the Southeast Meadows, and he said, "I'm going to fight you on annexation because I want to be in the county. I've taken my plans through them and all this stuff even though you're now at the city." He said, "But I want your agreement that whichever way it goes we'll work together." I said, "Oh, of course." So we ended up prevailing on the Sphere of Influence issue and annexing Damonte Ranch, and we worked together. But all of that, the sewer plant that was out there, all of the South Meadows parks, all of that moved into the city sphere, basically taking away the county's move toward becoming an urban county.

AB: Did the result of the lawsuit require all of you to get together and rewrite those policies, or did they actually rewrite that and determine what those formulas would be in the course of the court case?

JH: I remember the number four—four units per acre or four people per acre density. I can't remember what it is, but basically what it said was, if you multiply your projected population or divide it by this

number, that's how many acres you need existing in your projected growth area. The county had way more than they needed, and the City of Reno, in particular, had way less, so that shifted it.

Based on that, we did amend some policies. and Hardesty also asked us to do facility planning. We want to make sure there's facility plans, water and wastewater facilities and flood management plans—for all of these areas, you've got to do that. There was a settlement agreement that included a lot of things. I remember one of the things in there was that you had to have a certain length pole and stand on a certain ridge up in Somerset, and the people from Mogul shouldn't be able to see the development. Jim Galloway pushed for that stuff. So we went about doing what the court told us to do, and we made amendments to the Plan, amendments to the Spheres of Influence. It ended up that the City of Reno still needed some more land to satisfy that formula, and the county said, "Well, we don't see any of these surrounding neighborhoods we're willing to recommend you annex," so the city jumped up over some of the county and put in some Sphere of Influence in a place called Spring Mountain.

AB: Where is that?

JH: It's up by Winnemucca Ranch, up by Pyramid Lake. I'd have to get a map and show you. It would have been a non-contiguous part of the city, which would have been the second time that happened to the city. Stead Airforce Base when it was annexed in 1967 was not connected to the city.

AB: Oh, that was the first one?

JH: And the city grew into that, but that was through a special act of the legislature. We did a plan called the "Spring Mountain Plan," and it required a jobs/housing balance, trip reduction, all of these things that frankly I don't think were possible for the developer to do. And since then, they've been selling off the land for open space or other purposes. So I don't think that will ever happen. But if you go back to that old formula, there is still a lot of area that should go into the city that they don't have. I don't know if that formula is in the new, latest versions of the Regional Plan or not. I haven't been tracking it.

AB: Why don't you take me back to the writing of that first Regional Plan?

JH: Well, for the first one, there was no Regional Planning staff. We had been doing it at the county, so we said, "We'll staff the effort." We as county staff did a lot of the GIS maps and a lot of the analysis. The secretary for the Regional Planning Agency, Carmen Kennedy, had worked in the county. The first Director was a guy named Kris Schenk, who came from California. I can't remember if it was Santa Cruz or where he came from. And they hired a guy named Robert Freilich from Freilich, Leitner, and Associates. Freilich at that time was one of the better-known attorneys in planning. He had argued in front of the Supreme Court on a case called "Ramapo, New York" where they had phased their infrastructure expansion and phased their growth. They called it "tiered growth." So surprise, surprise, we ended up with a "tiered growth" concept in the Truckee Meadows Regional Plan. Anywhere he and his consulting firm went, you would often see that concept.

AB: And who hired him, specifically?

JH: The Regional Planning Agency did. The county was doing a lot of the information support, but he led the process, so we ended up with a tiered growth concept, but we had five alternatives. I think one was compact, and one was based on the status quo, and one was where's the best infrastructure investment, and some of the same things you see in the analysis Kim Robinson and the TMRPA are doing now—like, how do you best utilize the existing infrastructure and what's the fiscally most sound growth pattern, that kind of thing. We did all that, ended up with a tiered growth concept, and that was the first Regional Plan. I think it was adopted in '90 or '91. And then with the five-year update after that, I don't recall that there were any big changes. With the five-year update after that, which was 2000, 2001, that's when we ended up in the lawsuit. And then I think the next one, I can't remember the date, 2006, give or take, was really not that eventful. And I haven't been tracking it since then. I think 2011 was going on when I retired.

AB: Now what do you recall about quality of life indicators being part of that conversation, because my impression is that that was not part of the first Regional Plan?

JH: That came along later on. I don't remember exactly when, but Elisa Cafferata—at that time I think her last name was Erquiaga—was working for the Regional Planning Agency, and there was talk about how do we quantify what we're trying to do and monitor it. So that's where Truckee Meadows Tomorrow, TMT, came in. There was also a group that was the next version of the Blue Ribbon Task Force called The Forum for a Common Agenda that was going on. Frank Partlow was part of that, and Kathie Bartlett, and others, and they were trying to do what the Blue Ribbon Task Force did, take an outside view of what's going on. Elisa would go to those meetings, I would go to them. The different jurisdictions had people there. I think TMT came out of all of that.

AB: That Blue Ribbon Task Force was put together under the auspices of the Washoe Council of Governments and the Regional Planning Commission at the time. Their study was published in 1974, as I understand.

JH: I wasn't here then, but I remember that when I did get here in 1981, people sometimes referred to it.

AB: It had looked at all these different factors, air and water, infrastructure, growth—growth being the most controversial.

JH: It was interesting to me that when I got here, there was a Regional Plan that the old RPC had adopted, and what had to be in the Regional Plan was dictated in state law, and one of them was the conservation element. It was supposed to identify the capacity of the area for growth. And the capacity of the area for growth based on water was 250,000. Well, obviously, we're at 450,000 now. You could see that there was one point of view that prevailed in that plan, and there was probably the other point of view that has led to all the growth we've had—everything that said, "That's an artificial constraint, we're not going to use that." And they didn't, and we've been all right.

AB: When I was doing some research on what pre-dated the TMRPA, I read that when you were working as the Director of Long-Range Planning for the Regional Administrative Planning Agency, you said that

you thought air pollution was going to be the number one problem here in the long run. Do you remember that being something that you were getting concerned about at that time? That was 1984.

JH: I don't remember that, but I certainly could have said that. That's not what I think now. I think now the biggest constraint we have is going to be treating effluent and maintaining the water quality standard. I think there's going to have to be some sort of introduction of other water or resources, or different ways to deal with effluent, because in the North Valleys, what's going on with Swan Lake and the city putting effluent into a lake that's at flood level, is not a good idea. And then down here at the Truckee Meadows Water Reclamation Facility, I know there's an agreement to send some water to the Tahoe Reno Industrial Center, but that also takes water out of the river, and so it needs to be replaced, or outlying areas need to have replacement water that can leave water in the river, all because of trying to make these effluent standards. So I think that's the next big constraint. Fortunately—and this is something that we talk about up at the lake because we've met air quality standards up there—fortunately the fleet mix got extremely cleaner. And the fleet mix now as it moves to electric will be even cleaner.

AB: Fleet mix? Tell me about that.

JH: What's in the fleet of cars and trucks that people drive. We have much, much cleaner cars now in terms of the emissions, and as we move to electric, which I think is inevitable, there'll be zero emissions. The biggest issue with that will probably be the grinding up of particulates on the streets as tires interact with asphalt, which will go back into the effluent issue because it will be non-point source pollution that also gets into the river. So the storm water management function has to happen. But there is always a constraint out there, and typically people figure out how to deal with them. Or if they don't, then stuff stops.

AB: It seems that the Washoe Council of Governments was mostly put together to secure federal funding.

JH: Yes, that's my understanding.

AB: So what took its place as far as how federal funding comes in now? Do you remember when the Washoe Council of Governments went away?

JH: When RAPA was formed. RAPA basically included it.

AB: So RAPA had replaced the Washoe Council of Governments.

JH: And the RTC was created, which got the federal funding for transportation. The Health District gets the money for air quality.

AB: So it's just broken up now into different areas.

JH: Yes.

AB: Okay. Because it did sound like a kind of unwieldy body. Or I guess it just had a lot of members.

JH: Well, there were more than a hundred local governments in the Cincinnati organization I worked for, and there were more than two hundred in the Dallas-Fort Worth organization. So what they do is they create an executive council that's a manageable size, and that's who works with the staff. They have a once-a-year meeting of two hundred representatives, and here's the slate of executive committee members, and then that's who works with the Executive Director. Kind of like at the legislative level nationally, it's like the whole Senate and whole House don't meet all the time; they have all these committees.

AB: So they divide it up.

JH: Yes. The WCOG was a little too big but not big enough to have committees because you had seven and six and five representatives from each jurisdiction, or whatever the numbers were. Seven Councilmembers from Reno, five or six from Sparks and five County Commissioners.

AB: Tell me the chronology of your professional career from when the TMRPA was created and when you went to the city. Talk a little about your journey.

JH: When I came from Cincinnati in 1981, my position was called Information Systems Manager, or something like that. I was in charge of models and data and that kind of thing. We created a base mapping system. That's how we got into GIS in 1983. Automated mapping was a new technology that was emerging. And then I think because of the tax shift to Clark County, Washoe County was cutting back, so Bob Young was asked to reduce the size of the staff. So there were three divisions. There was my information group, Mike Harper's current planning group, and a guy named Dick Danforth was in charge of long-range planning. Dick was let go, and I took over long-range planning. And when Washoe County created its own planning department in '84, we were named the Department of Comprehensive Planning, the same name Clark County had. Bob was Director and he reported to the County Manager. I was Assistant Director in charge of long-range planning, and Mike was Assistant Director in charge of current planning.

When Bob retired in 1990, the County Manager and the commissioners liked both of us, so they kept the Department of Comprehensive Planning, which I was Director of, and they created a department called Development Review that just reviewed permits. The Comprehensive Planning Department I was in charge of had subsequently taken on strategic planning for the county, the capital improvements program for the county, and a lot of stuff, so we had grown bigger than what we were when the department was originally created. We worked a lot with finance, we worked with all the Neighborhood Advisory Boards. I was Director of Comprehensive Planning until '95, and the County Commission at that time asked John McIntyre to prepare a reorganization plan.

So we created a Community Development Department, which is more typical in local governments, and Community Development usually has planning, engineering, building, all that stuff. I don't know that our proposal had all of that, but I was deemed Community Development Director. I was designated to become an Assistant County Manager. Bob Jasper had left, Katy Simon had come in—I think she was Katy Singlaub then—and taken over finance and become one of the assistant managers. And then I was Acting Water Resources Director for a year right after the legislation changed to create

the Regional Water Management Plan requirement, and county was staff for that. I can't say that I really did much on that. There was a really good group of people. Everybody got together. We had a guy named Steve Walker who is still around who was my water planner. He lives in Douglas County now and is a lobbyist, but he really was good at getting everybody together. So they came up with a Regional Water Management Plan. I had the honor of presenting it to the legislature because that just went with the position. I was that for a year, and then John McIntyre had announced I think in '96 or '97 that he was going to retire and the Board decided not to wait around. Katy was anxious to become County Manager, so in '98, that happened.

And at the same time, the Assistant City Manager in Reno was a guy named Dan Shaw. He had had a professor at Indiana University that I had had at the University of Texas at Arlington, so we had met, and had socialized a little bit. Dan called me one day at eleven in the morning, and he was talking to me about what was going on between the two jurisdictions. I was telling him some of my disappointment with things that were going on at the county, and he said, "Would you like to come over here?" and I said, "Yes, but I don't want to go through a recruitment process where it's public, because I'll lose my job," and he called me back at two o'clock and said, "You've got a job. I just talked to Charles McNeely, and you've got a job." And so in three hours, I made the shift to the city, gave my notice and then in 1998, we ginned up the city's new position on Regional Planning. I think I told you how the Regional Plan shifted the balance of the Sphere of Influence and fiscal equity. So I was Community Development Manager, and that subsequently became Community Development Director. Charles did have an Assistant Manager position that ultimately went away, and so I was Community Development Director until around 2008 or 2009.

Then during the recession, when Mark Lewis left as Redevelopment Administrator, I took that on as well. I took on business licenses, took on the legislative program, and became Assistant City Manager under Donna Dreska after Charles left. And for two weeks, I was Acting City Manager, when Donna left. But I knew I was going to retire. We had cut out the old Assistant CD Director job, cut out the Redevelopment Administrator job, and Bob Cashell asked me to prepare a proposal to be City Manager for I think it was six or eight months until I retired, and then they were going to bring in Andrew Clinger. So I prepared a proposal and said "I will be manager for six or eight months and I won't backfill any of those positions," because I wouldn't want to be the new City Manager coming in and see that this other guy had just filled the CD Director, and just filled the Redevelopment Administrator position. Plus, we had reduced the staff a lot.

AB: Because of the recession?

JH: Yes. When I took over Redevelopment, I had to lay off about ten people, and I had to lay off sixty people or reduce them by attrition in CD and so we were much leaner. I told the Council I would do it, but only for a set amount of money, and they said, "That's too much," and I said, "Okay, that's fine." So I finished out my time at Reno and retired in June of 2011, and decided I was not ready to just hang around as a retiree. I don't play golf. So I got a job up at the lake and have been enjoying that.

AB: Tell me what that job is.

JH: I am the Chief Operating Officer for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. What that means is I have all the operating departments—I have long-range and transportation planning, I have current

planning, they do all the permitting. I have a group called Environmental Improvement which is kind of like an environmental public works department; they do the capital program, but we call it “Environmental Improvement Program” for all of the partners. There are fifty-some-odd partners that do projects up there, from the federal down to the local level. And we coordinate all that through the EIP. They also run the storm water program that helps the local governments retrofit, and they run the aquatic invasive species program. We try to keep fish and weeds and stuff out of the lake that aren’t naturally occurring. And we have a forest ecosystem program that works with the Forest Service. We’re trying to look on the large landscape level at forests as whole ecosystems, because you may have heard that 127 million—I think that’s the number—trees have died in California over the last few years from the drought and beetle infestation and climate change. So we’re trying to look at forests, and we are one of the parties involved in that. We’re trying to look at it and say, “What is the forest of the future going to look like and what are we going to need to do to be resilient with climate change, and what do we need to do to be fire resistant?” It’s very interesting work. So that division does that.

Then I’ve got a research and analysis division and that’s about ten people and they do what their name says, research and analysis. They run our GIS, run our permit system. They’ve got a really great program that we were the first ones to start that has a user group of about eight or ten users, it was called LT Info, Lake Tahoe Info. You could go online and check it out. I think it’s LTInfo.org. All of that is a lot of tracking, a lot of initiatives we’re working on to update our plan. One of the great honors in my career has been winning two national planning awards. Most people don’t ever win any, and I won two—not just me, but in 1990 at the county our capital improvements program process, including use of GIS, won a National Planning Award. And then in 2015, we won a National Planning Award at TRPA for our Sustainability Action Plan because we figured out the whole set of what you could do as local governments, as residents, as tourists, to help us reduce greenhouse gas emissions to deal with climate change.

AB: That’s great.

JH: That plan was largely developed by a collaboration of a bunch of people and consultants, but since we got to put our name on it, I got to go to Seattle and get an award for it. To me, the pleasure of it all is creating a good staff that can deliver, and an environment for them to be able to deliver good plans. That’s really what I did. I don’t really do the work myself. So anyway, that’s it. That’s how I got to where I am today.

AB: Well, and Lake Tahoe was one of your main reasons for wanting to come to this area in the first place, right?

JH: Yes, it’s kind of interesting, because when I was at Fort Worth way back when, there was a magazine called *Planning* magazine and I remember reading about this thing called the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency that had just been created by this bi-state compact, which was unusual. They had all this authority and this mission that it was supposed to fulfill, and they had done this stuff called symbol mapping, SYMAP. It was back when computers used the green striped paper and it would print different symbols depending on different things. There was a picture of this SYMAP stuff that would look just archaic to anybody if they looked at it now. Back then, it was cutting-edge technology being used by the new Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to save the Tahoe Basin. I looked at that and just stored it away, and thought,

“That’s a kind of a cool thing. They’ve organized a planning agency around an ecosystem instead of jurisdictional boundaries.” And I thought that would be fun to work for, since they’ve got this environmental charge. I never aspired to work for them, but it just happened, so it’s kind of cool. I went full circle from reading that article to being in charge of most of the stuff there.

AB: That’s great.

JH: Yes, it is fun. I’ve been fortunate, been blessed in my career.

AB: You’ve been very comprehensive. We really want to try to cover what some of the issues were before the TMRPA was created, what was resolved, what wasn’t resolved, what was problematic and needed to be corrected or adjusted, which anything would have to be as time went on. And it seems like the Spheres of Influence was obviously a major development. I don’t know if there was anything else that came up while you were working for the City of Reno from a different perspective, with respect to working with the agency and with Regional Planning. Anything that gave you a different perspective or things that came up that hadn’t come up when you were working somewhere else?

JH: I would say there is one really important concept. I don’t know how much it’s still embedded in the Regional Plan, but if you look at this region and how it’s changed over time, the east-west corridor was Highway 40, the Lincoln Highway, and the north-south corridor was Virginia Street, US 395. And what’s happened now is that Interstate 80 came through and 580 or 395/580 came through, and so you have these two older auto-oriented corridors, and everybody said, “Well, what do we do with those?” For that to pencil out for redevelopment, you have to make them more dense, and to make them more dense you really need to make them more transit-oriented instead of auto-oriented. So the concept of transit-oriented development and TOD corridors got built into the Regional Plan along with the lawsuit and everything going on, which was kind of a negative, if you want to look at it that way. The positive was this vision of TOD corridors. The Bus Rapid Transit that RTC put in on Virginia Street and is just now putting in on 4th Street and Prater Way is to me that kind of concept in its infancy. And I know it needs to be tweaked because some of the development standards for buildings don’t work, and maybe the densities aren’t what they should be, but I hope that concept stays or at least is paid attention to as we move forward. In 2009 and 2010 I know Lee Gibson and I were really pushing hard to see if we could get a streetcar.

AB: That’s the Director of RTC Washoe?

JH: Yes, and Lee’s a planner, so he drinks the same kind of Kool Aid I do, I guess. [laughs] Anyway, I think the BRT, the Bus Rapid Transit, is a step in the right direction, but I hope the community has enough vision to take it a step beyond that to some sort of light rail, whether it’s a streetcar or something a little more like a MAX in Portland or a BART. We’re not that big of a community, but just something that can allow those corridors to get reused and redeveloped, so they don’t become blighted parts of the community, they become the vibrant parts. Where we live here, we love to walk down to Midtown, and we’d love it if there was even more of the kind of things that are happening there. I know a lot of people want to live there, and there is some redevelopment going on, but I just think that’s a neat concept that was in the Regional Plan. I don’t know if it still is.

AB: Can you walk me through that idea about density, trying to increase the density of those older corridors, and what that actually means? What is there now that you'd like to see more of, and what's the relationship to it being an old transportation corridor? What makes those important sites?

JH: Well, we have the same thing up at the lake in South Lake Tahoe. We have a lot of old motels and properties with huge parking lots. So if you're going to Reno, you're going to drive up Virginia Street and you've still got some of the old shopping centers, and stuff like that. And what transit-oriented development does, is it makes it more dense because it's not where the cars are going anymore. You can build parking lots, but it's not a good use of the land. I'd rather park people than park cars, you know what I'm saying? Or park jobs instead of parking cars.

So to give you an example, some of the RTC staff and some of the City of Reno staff went up to Portland, and from a land use side, it was easy to see what they had done to create the streetcar, how that worked and was funded and everything. But from the land use side, how do you get from what you have here now to what they have, where they'll have four- or six-story mixed-use buildings? What you do is they would buy a lot that had either nothing or dilapidated development on it, and they would turn it into a parking lot. And then you have a transit stop and you have a parking lot, so you can get there either by transit or car. And then, as there's more demand for it, you say, "Well, we'll give this parking lot to a developer who will build a mixed-use building with parking built into it." So you begin to create a higher density that supports the transit and also doesn't turn everything into parking lots. You can actually use that land like a bank to help. And if you've ever been to places like Portland on their transit-oriented corridors, they are very vibrant. They have a lot of people, a lot of jobs, and they revitalized the core of the community. So that's a concept that is in the Regional Plan and I think it's in the new city plan that I hope carries forward.

AB: And what it is that you think that a light rail or a streetcar like a light rail can do to accomplish that more than Bus Rapid Transit can?

JH: You know, people used to ask Lee and I that question all the time, and I don't know exactly what it is that makes a difference. But there is a perception in land owners who make investments, and a perception in the transit rider that "I will get on light rail, but I won't get on a bus." Or "If there is light rail here, I know there's a commitment to this transit infrastructure that there isn't with a bus." Now, BRT has a commitment to these nice stations that by the way could work with a streetcar or light rail, but if you put a rail there, I know that's where you're going to run your transit vehicle. I don't know why or how it fits into proformas of developers but that's what they do. There have been studies all over the country that confirm that they do that. I don't know why the ridership changes when it's light rail versus a bus, but, you know, I do it, too. I go to other cities—we were just in Boston this summer, and I would get on the T, the subway, but not so much the bus. And I don't know why.

AB: Do you see that potentially as a solution that would just work within Reno or even broader in the region?

JH: Well, right now I think it could work from Sparks to Reno on the old Lincoln Highway corridor. I think they are calling the BRT on that route the "Lincoln Line," and you probably helped design some of

that or came up with that idea. I think it could work on Virginia Street. Could it be extended? Sure. They started small with the Portland streetcar and now they've got some longer extensions. It could even go to TRIC [the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center], I don't know. TRIC is kind of low density. I mean, there's a lot of stuff there, but it's low density, so you'd have to have a way to get to a congregating point. I just like the idea of reusing those older transit corridors because they're the core of our community.

AB: When you think about Regional Planning today, with TRIC, with Storey County involved in this metropolitan area, do you see those more recent developments influencing how Regional Planning works or should work? Any thoughts about that?

JH: It should be multi-county. I think it's been that way for years. It should have included Carson City, and it should now include Storey County and Douglass County, because it's all one. Probably you can look at different things like commuting patterns—what's the economic region, what does the airport serve? Look at all of those and you could get a better idea of what the region really is. In a way, I feel a little empathy for Kim Robinson and the TMRPA right now, because a lot of their energy is just keeping the jurisdictions from fighting with each other. And there are big issues like housing, and they're not just in Washoe County and Reno and Sparks. It would be nice to have everybody in the region get together and say, "What do we want to tackle regionally, and can we all work together, and what's our vision?" and try to achieve that vision.

That's the fun part of planning, to me—creating a vision and then trying to go after it and involving everyone in the process, which goes back to my architecture roots. Architects aren't about not building things or keeping peace between parties, they're about a vision and something happening, something getting built. At least this planner feels that way. It's about what's our vision, how are we going to morph from here to there in the future? It's not always more. I look at some of the things around here that have happened since I got here and, you know, people now appreciate the river. The river used to be behind the buildings, and everybody would turn their back to the river. We've got a wonderful Museum of Art that's world class. The university is a top 200 national university now and I always said I would rather live in a university town than a tourist town—not that they are mutually exclusive, but the economic impact from a university is way better and higher quality than from another convention or casino or something. I think that the value of the university has been unrecognized for a while, and is now getting recognized. We've got a tremendous airport for the size community we have. For any other place that has half a million people or less, the air service is nowhere near what we have. And gosh, the things around us like Tahoe and all that, it's a great place to live, as you know.

AB: Well, I want to thank you so much for talking with me today.

JH: My pleasure.

LEANN MCELROY

Leann McElroy, a native of Indiana, joined Washoe County's Department of Regional Planning in 1979 after five years as a planner for the City of Naples, Florida. In 1980, she joined the City of Reno as a Principal Planner. In 1985, she became the city's Planning Director, and in 1992, moved to the City Manager's office to coordinate Intergovernmental Relations. She became the Chief of Staff for the City of Reno in 1996 and retired in 2007.

ALICIA BARBER: This is Alicia Barber. Today is December 7, 2018. I'm with Leann McElroy in Reno, Nevada. Leann, does the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency have your permission to record this oral history interview and make it available to the public?

LEANN MCELROY: Yes.

AB: Thank you. For this project we're focusing on the creation of the TMRPA, what preceded it, and what effect it had, but we are also interested in the series of events and experiences that brought you to Washoe County. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

LM: I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1952.

AB: And where did you go to school?

LM: I went to Ball State University, which is in Muncie, Indiana, and got a Bachelor's degree in Urban and Regional Studies, which was an interdisciplinary program that was designed to train people to get a job in planning and then ultimately public management.

AB: What drew you to that field? What got you interested in it?

LM: You know, when I first went to college, I had no idea what I wanted to do—I mean, none. I was completely at a loss, and Ball State had a series of core courses where you basically had to pick some sociology classes and geography classes, or you could do the math and science routine. There were a whole variety of things you could pick from to take, but you were required to take them. So I did my picking, and after I'd been there the first couple of years, I thought, "Okay, now what have I liked?" I went through the courses that I had liked, and I sat down with the catalog, and I thought, "Hmm, everything I like seems to fall in this Urban and Regional Studies area." It was run by an institute, and I made an appointment with the director of the institute, and went to see him, and chatted with him. It was a

fairly small program, although Ball State was a good-sized university; there were 17,000 students there when I was there. So I chatted with him, and when I left, I decided “Okay, well, that’s what I want to do.” I switched into that program, which fit perfectly with the things that I’d been taking that I liked, and finished up. And there were hardly any women in the program, at all; there were two of us.

AB: Did the program give you any career assistance in trying to find a job afterwards?

LM: Ball State had a pretty good placement center, generally. So I’d say, “Yes and no.” They told me where to apply, and what I might need to show them, what kinds of projects I’d done while I was at school. In between my junior and senior year, I did an internship at the Methodist Hospital Urban Design Studio in Indianapolis. That was a joint program between the Architecture Department and the Urban and Regional Studies Institute. Six of us were chosen for that, and I commuted from Muncie back to Indianapolis the sixty miles every day that summer. We did it together, so it was actually great fun. It was a big carpool. I really enjoyed it. The guys that I worked with said that I was a frustrated architect, from their perspective. But I never really wanted to go into architecture; I really did like what I was in.

From there, it was pretty natural to go to the placement center, and talk about what kinds of projects I had done. Besides that, there was another big project I had worked on, and I did a bunch of independent studies with a professor. Six months before I graduated, I started applying for jobs. I had some friends who lived in Naples, in southwest Florida, and went down to visit. The City of Naples didn’t have a position open, but I wanted to go talk to the director anyway, so I went in to chat with him, show him what I had done, and get any feedback from him that I might be able to get. This was a man by the name of Jerry Annis. Before I left, Jerry said, “Well, where are you staying?” and I said, “I’m staying with some friends.” And he said, “Why don’t you give me their number, and if we have anything open up, I’ll give you a call?” That afternoon, he went to the city manager, and got a position approved, and the next morning at nine o’clock, I got a call offering me a job. So I moved to Naples, and I stayed there almost five years, and liked it very much. I was very fortunate.

AB: That’s terrific.

LM: It was just happenstance. I went to see him knowing they didn’t have any positions open, at all. And he decided to hire me.

AB: How big a city was that at the time?

LM: It was about 22,000, so it was a small town. Naples is one of those Florida cities that expanded quite a lot in the wintertime, with lots of snowbirds. But it only had about 22,000 permanent residents. Planning was a small department; there were only four of us. The building and engineering end of things were separate from us. It was fun; I enjoyed it.

AB: Was there a lot of on-the-ground learning? Did you feel that you were already fully equipped to hit the ground running? How did that go?

LM: The one area that I thought the program had been deficient in was the legal basis for planning. Fortunately, the department had a whole series of books about case law, so I took them home at night, and

read them. I felt pretty good after that. The first thing I did was a bikeways plan. And other than just in class, I had never done any real public speaking—nothing comes to mind, at least. I had participated in different things, but certainly had never gotten up in a government meeting in my life. And even though I was an entry-level planner, you presented your own work. So I got up in front of the Planning Board, and got up in front of City Council, and made presentations to the public, and the whole nine yards, right out of college. When it's a small department like that, you do a lot of things that you don't get an opportunity to do when you move into a larger department right off the bat.

In Naples, we had an area that was sub-standard housing. It had been built in the thirties, and it was on the railroad tracks, and it just wasn't suitable. It had a private sewer line that was inadequate to handle the flow. It had all kinds of problems. So I got a grant for us to build Section 8 housing, and we built Section 8 housing. We moved the people out of there two blocks, into nice, new apartments, and were able to tear that down. It really needed to be torn down; it was in very bad shape. And the sad part about it was that it was in an area where the train did kind of a circle—I forget what you call those. It was behind the train station, so it was hidden from public view. A lot of people in Naples didn't even know that it existed. But obviously, the people who lived there knew that it existed, and it needed to be done. So we did a Section 8 housing project, and then we did a Section 8 existing project, and did vouchers for people. We did a lot of housing-related things that we wouldn't have done in a different department. And I did all kinds of current planning and some long-range stuff. It was fun. It was a good place to start.

AB: What year did you start there?

LM: I started there in '74.

AB: And what prompted you to leave?

LM: Well, I loved the warm weather, but I got married in the course of that, and my husband and I came to Reno on a vacation in January of '79. He really liked it, and he really wanted to move west. And I thought, "Well, I've been there almost five years, and it's probably time for me professionally to look for something different." He said, "Well, why don't you just go talk to the people at Regional Planning and see what they have open?" Well, they did have an opening, and before I left, they showed me my office.

AB: [laughs] This is sounding like a pattern for you.

LM: [laughs] It has worked very well for me over the years.

AB: Who was that who you went in to speak to, and where were they located?

LM: They were at 241 Ridge Street, in a standard kind of office building. In fact, the McDonald Carano law firm was in that building; I think they owned the building. We were on the first floor. I talked to a guy by the name of Dan Whitmore. I started with them in March of '79. At that point, there was a man by the name of Dick Allen, who was the Director of Regional Planning, and he had two assistants: one was Dan Whitmore, who was in charge of current planning, basically, and the other was Don Bayer. Don was in charge of long-range planning. I know that Danny and Dick are both gone, and I believe that Don is also deceased at this point. I don't think they're around at all anymore.

AB: Was this position in long-range planning?

LM: No, the position was in current planning, which was pretty wild at the time, actually, because the Regional Planning Commission was 4-4-4. It had four representatives from Sparks, four from Reno, and four from the county. They were meeting four times a month, and they were starting at seven and going until one or two in the morning.

AB: Four times a month?

LM: Four times a month. And they did it on a Tuesday and Wednesday, back to back. So it was Tuesday-Wednesday, Tuesday-Wednesday, two weeks apart. I mean, it was just unbelievable how much was going on. And it was all current planning that was happening at that point. They had done a long-range plan before I got here, and that hadn't been successful. I'm not sure exactly why it hadn't been successful, but I don't think any of the three entities had adopted it. But the Regional Planning Commission had adopted it. So every time we did any kind of a current planning case, we had to tell them what the old plan said, and then tell them what their adopted plan said, as well, and then of course it went on to whatever jurisdiction it was in, for final approval.

AB: So all the local planning things that are done locally now, was all being done at that Regional Planning level? Is that what current planning was? Things like zoning and special use permits?

LM: Exactly. In fact, Reno and the county still had Boards of Adjustment, so all of the variances and the minor special use permits went to the Board of Adjustment in whatever jurisdiction. Sparks had already gotten rid of theirs. I don't think they ever adopted the MPR [Major Project Review] language.

AB: So Sparks had already shifted locally?

LM: Well, let me back up a bit. The Regional Planning Commission had written this plan, and nobody adopted it except them. They had the authority to adopt it, the way the law was written at the state level. So as a result of that plan, language was adopted for what we called MPRs, which were very large special use permits for a development over 1500 units, I believe. Were they that big? I don't really remember all of the criteria, but if you were a subdivision of a particular size, a special use permit of a particular size, then you had to go through what was called an MPR. And it basically was an environmental review. That's really what it was all about. Reno and Washoe County adopted that legislation in their zoning ordinance, but I don't think Sparks ever did, because when I got here, we would do MPRs for both Reno and the county and take those through the Regional Planning Commission and then onto the City Council or the County Commission. But Sparks was handling all their own special use permits and all their own variances, and the special use permits and the variances went directly to the Sparks City Council at that point. Only Sparks zone changes and amendments to the master plan went to the Regional Planning Commission at that point in time.

AB: Was this 1979, 1980 at this point?

LM: Yes.

AB: Okay, because that's about the time that everyone started splitting, and Sparks was the first jurisdiction to leave Regional Planning. So had that already happened, or was this kind of a transitional moment?

LM: They had not completely left; I would say it was in transition at that point. Alex Fittinghoff was their Director, and Alex very much thought that Sparks needed to do its own plan and its own planning. And that was a first in this area. Actually, the first zoning ordinance in Reno was adopted in 1946, and it was based on the L.A. zoning ordinance, which was kind of interesting, because for the most part, from what I was told, they took the L.A. zoning ordinance, tweaked it a little bit, and adopted the thing.

AB: But it's such a different sized place, especially in the 1940s, right? Maybe it doesn't matter with zoning.

LM: Well, L.A. was much smaller in the 1940s. Reno had casinos, even then, although it certainly was a small place, and they needed housing for people who worked in the casinos. So they wanted some higher density housing than what you have in a lot of places. And Reno really did have that; when I first moved here in 1979, more than 50 percent of the housing in Reno was multi-family. It was geared more for working people at that point; it was different. And then they did a second one—I think the next update was in '57. Historically, those were the two that I heard about. And they only talked about Reno in that respect. I don't know when Sparks wrote their zoning ordinance, but I'm sure that it had to go through Regional Planning because that was the only planning commission at that point in time. They may have done one for Sparks at the same time that they did one for Reno, but I don't know.

AB: When you arrived, there had been so much growth, so quickly, in the 1970s, overtaxing resources, even.

LM: Yes. I mean, when I got here in March of '79, they were still talking about people camping out on the river, and people were very concerned about growth at that point in time. I think that the plan that they did at Regional Planning probably responded to that. But when I got there in '79, we still had a really pro-growth City Council. Bruno Menicucci was the mayor. So that would probably explain why they didn't adopt that plan. But they did adopt the MPR legislation to get us to look more thoroughly at larger projects.

AB: Now, when you arrived, was there already discussion about Reno forming its own Planning Commission and planning department? That probably hadn't yet happened, I don't think. It was right after that.

LM: Not so much. Sparks already had its own core department, and they were already doing special use permits and variances. We were still doing all of that stuff for Reno and the county at Regional Planning, and there was this discussion about what we were going to do. Sparks had made it pretty clear that they wanted to pull out. Well, it wasn't so much that they wanted to pull out; they wanted to set up their own local planning commission. At that point, they hadn't said they were going to pull out of the region

completely. So nobody was really sure quite where that was going. But in the course of that first year, it was clear that Regional Planning was not going to continue to do the local planning for the two cities, at least. The county wanted the Regional Planning Commission to continue to do their reviews for them, and they hadn't indicated any particular interest in pulling out. But once Sparks did, Reno decided that this was the way to go. I moved over to the City of Reno in October of 1980.

AB: When you went over to the City, was it because they were forming their own planning division at that point?

LM: Yes, exactly. That's why I went over to the City.

AB: Were you recruited?

LM: I was.

AB: By the mayor, or city manager?

LM: They had hired a Planning Director, a guy by the name of Bob Hunter, who came from Hillsborough County, Florida. He had been with the Regional Planning Commission at Hillsborough County. So Bob recruited me to move over and basically set up the department for him. My title was Principal Planner, but I was the only Principal Planner. It was the Director, and then it was me, and then everybody else reported to me, basically. He wanted me to move over and work out the transition for how we were going to take over development review. Of course, he was new, and he didn't know very much about the community at all, so he really needed somebody who understood how the codes worked, and how the community worked.

I moved over in October, and the reason I moved over was because a few months earlier, once Reno had hired Bob Hunter, it had become clear to me that Reno was pulling out as well, and I really didn't want to be doing projects in the county. I didn't want to be reviewing projects in the unincorporated area. That just didn't suit my particular interests; I really liked the urban part of things. So when they offered me the job, I thought, "I should just take this." And it was a little bit difficult because by that point in time, Dick Allen had retired, Dan Whitmore had retired. I don't know whether Don Bayer was still there or not. But Bob Young had come on board, so at that point, I was working for Bob Young, and Bob didn't want me to go. He was trying to talk me into staying at Regional Planning, which he just couldn't do, because it was clear that it wasn't going to be Regional Planning much longer. It was going to end up being just County planning, and I just didn't want to do that. So there were some hard feelings there, I think, on Bob's part, that I left. He was not pleased at all.

AB: Were there larger objections to the different jurisdictions gaining control over their own local planning, or did it seem to be a general assumption on everyone's part that the way that it was set up wasn't really workable, because there was too much work for Regional Planning to do? Was it contentious, aside from the personnel issues, where of course they didn't want to lose you? Was it a controversial and contentious time?

LM: It was. It was. I think a lot of people in the community, particularly in the development community, were very concerned about what this was going to mean. This was a big change. What would this mean in terms of how they would handle projects, and what's Reno going to do that's different from the county? They really didn't want three separate sets of rules. That was the big concern. But actually, for the longest time, Reno and the county both had essentially the same zoning ordinance. Sparks was different from the word go. Once they did their master plan and redid their zoning ordinance, they were different from everybody else.

AB: And central to Sparks' reasoning and justification for pulling out, it seemed, was that there was a philosophy there that Regional Planning should really be handling broader issues like air quality and water and sewage, and things like that?

LM: Those things for the most part had been done by the Washoe Council of Governments [WCOG], and they had come under Regional Planning. They still had a Director, but that Director was like the third assistant to the Regional Planning Director when I came. The offices were lined up with Chuck Breese in the corner and Don Bayer, Dan Whitmore, and then Dick Allen. But those things had been done. I'm not sure exactly why everyone had gotten unhappy with the WCOG staff, but they had, for some reason, and that's why they put them under Regional Planning, thinking that, "Well, now all the regional stuff will be in one place." But they really didn't give it time to work. And I don't know whether it ever would have or not. We were clearly overwhelmed with the growth that was happening in Reno, in particular, and the county, to a lesser extent, at that point. It was mostly happening in Reno.

AB: The Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency wasn't created until the end of the eighties. So what were the eighties like in terms of Regional Planning? You were now working in Reno. Were you still doing the same types of things that you had been doing in Regional Planning—current planning projects? What was the relationship to Regional Planning and the work that you were doing, specifically?

LM: I moved over in October, and we took over the Reno planning function in March, as I recall. It seems to me that's when we started processing. So that would have been March of 1981. And that's kind of when the transition started. I don't think we actually had a local planning commission meeting until June. But Reno still had four members on the Regional Planning Commission. We did not pull those people off. Sparks still had four members on the Regional Planning Commission. So did the county. So they were continuing to meet, but for the most part, once we got our local planning commission up and running, and Sparks had theirs up and running, by that point in time, Regional Planning was only doing County projects. But they were still doing water quality kinds of things, and the federal money was coming through there. Leonard Crowe was still there, and Leonard was involved in that.

AB: What was his position?

LM: I believe he was the water quality planner. Leonard is still around occasionally. I think he mostly lives in Mexico, but I think he comes back to visit every now and then, because I have friends who tell me that they've seen him. Leonard would have a better perspective on how WCOG had worked and what happened with respect to that.

At any rate, we had a time schedule worked out in terms of the transition, and once we took over, we hired a staff to do not just current planning but long-range planning. We hired a young woman by the name of Bev Kaiser, who was the head of our long-range planning division. She started on a draft plan and did various alternatives and a bunch of public outreach. So in that regard, what Reno did mirrored what Sparks had done, in terms of writing their own plan and getting a plan adopted. We got the plan adopted and then we revised the zoning ordinance, and our zoning ordinance was a bit different from the county's at that point.

AB: It must have been interesting to be forming that department and the city's whole planning approach. Sounds like that would have been kind of an exciting thing to work on.

LM: Oh, it was. We had two division heads. Duane Gasaway headed Current Planning, so they did all that review, and then Bev handled the long-range planning. The city had had a Community Development department that handled Community Development Block Grants, and that got combined into Planning, so it became Planning and Community Development. And that was run by a woman by the name of Pam Barrett, so we had all the CDBG stuff in the department as well. So we had three divisions at that point.

AB: Now, at some point, Community Development became an overarching umbrella that included Planning, right?

LM: That happened in 1992, while I was the Planning Director. The city was in pretty bad shape in 1991, laying off people. The recession was very difficult, so we needed to do as much as we could to try to save money. We did a reorganization plan and combined Planning with Building and Engineering. That's what happened there.

AB: So back to the early eighties. You were a Senior Planner at that point?

LM: When I moved over in 1980, my title was Principal Planner. I did that for three years, and then I left, and went to work for a local engineering firm as their planning director, for a year-and-a-half. And then at the end of that year-and-a-half, Bob Hunter was leaving the City, and the City Manager called me and asked me to apply for the job. So I applied for the job. And I was happy to come back to the City. Doing private stuff wasn't as much fun as far as I was concerned, and I really did enjoy what I could do in planning.

AB: Now after having, as you mentioned, a very pro-growth City Council and Mayor in the seventies, there was kind of a shift happening in the eighties, wasn't there?

LM: Yes.

AB: Can you talk about that a little bit?

LM: In 1980, Barbara Bennett was elected Mayor, and Pete Sferrazza was elected to the City Council. I would say that Barbara Bennett gave the Council an anti-growth face. From a practical standpoint, there were a lot of conditions attached to projects, but projects still got approved. It was pretty rare for

something to actually be denied. But the rhetoric was very much putting developers through their paces, and to some extent, I suppose, making the community feel that “the city is not just approving things willy-nilly. There are conditions, and projects have to meet all of these conditions, and we’re going to make sure that what they’re doing is really good for the community.” And I think it did have that effect.

And then of course after Barbara Bennett, Pete Sferrazza became the Mayor. And he kind of continued with the same approach. The City got kind of a bad rap, if you will, because the City Council meetings took forever. They started at 8 o’clock in the morning and went until midnight, twice a month. We got killed in the newspaper because of that. Now, they asked a lot of questions. If you believe in open government, Reno really had open government. There were no backroom discussions amongst councilmembers in those days. Everything was discussed at the table, openly, for everyone to hear. And a lot of people thought it was really painful. [laughs] So as a result of that, we had kind of a bad reputation in the newspaper. But it was truly open government.

AB: How much communication outside of those meetings was there with the elected representatives—City Council and the Mayor—and your department in Planning? What was that communication like? Was there a lot of it?

LM: No. It occurred in the meetings. We got our direction in the meetings. The city’s charter says that councilmembers are not to supervise the staff, they are not to give direction to the staff, they are to give direction to the City Manager, who then gives direction to the staff. And it was run like that. We didn’t have calls from councilmembers to do this or do that, or any of that kind of stuff.

AB: Who was the City Manager at that time?

LM: In 1979, it was Henry Etchemendy, but Henry was only there until 1980, and then he retired. And then Chris Cherches came. I came back as the Planning Director in April of ’85, so Chris must have been the City Manager until late 1985, I think. And then I think Hal Schilling was the City Manager until around 1990. He made it five years—just barely, though. And then it was Clay Holstine. He’s still working. He was Hal’s assistant.

AB: I found a profile of you in the paper from 1985, when you became the Director of the Planning Department, because they wanted to know what you saw as the challenges and what issues you were facing. I’m curious if these still resonate as issues that you remember facing when you began that position in 1985. One was that there was a major battle over proposed new rules for development, it seemed. The city was undertaking some massive changes in ordinances, the development code, that were supposed to control growth and manage development. There was an expectation that there would be tougher restrictions placed on hotel casino construction. You had mentioned that a little bit before, the role of casinos in Reno. But I guess there had been a moratorium placed on any new construction, temporarily. Do you remember that being the case, and a source of controversy?

LM: It was actually a huge source of controversy at the time. We had very lax rules on hotel casinos, and given what had happened years earlier, the city had decided that they just didn’t want hotel casinos opening all over the place, and they wanted new rules. We hired a consultant who came in and interviewed a lot of people, and wrote some draft regulations for hotel casinos, specifically. We took

those to the Planning Commission, and the Planning Commission reviewed them. We presented them to the City Council, and they reviewed them, and it was clear that this just wasn't palatable. What he had proposed wasn't going to work.

AB: For the casinos?

LM: Well, it wasn't going to work for the community. So we terminated his contract, and we appointed what was called the Development Code Review Committee. It had citizens, it had at least one councilmember on it, a couple of planning commissioners, and a bunch of consultants in the community, and I chaired it. And the first thing we did was to redraft the hotel casino regulations. That went through public hearings, and the regulations got adopted, and then the task was to redo the rest of the development code. I must have spent two years with that committee, because what was clear after what we had been through with the casino regs was that we were not going to be able to just hand the Planning Commission and the City Council a new development code and say "Here, adopt this." And the development community wasn't prepared to deal with one thick document that said, "All the rules have changed; here they are." Nobody wanted to do that.

So as a result of that, we started through the code, and we did it in sections. Doing it that way created a challenge for the department, because we had one set of rules that were on the books, and another set of rules that were going through the Planning Commission and the Council, and a third set that were under review by the Development Code Review Committee. So we had to make sure that for any project that one of the local consultants would be working on, everyone knew what the rules were now, and also what the rules were likely to be, so that they could incorporate them into their planning as they were preparing projects. It was a tremendous challenge. The committee met every week for a couple of years, doing that, and we ended up with a new development code. It was painful for the staff—talk about staff meetings, I mean, trying to make sure that the staff was up to speed on exactly where we were in the process, so that they could tell people as they came in the door, that was challenging. But we got it done.

AB: Getting into issues that Regional Planning had to face, questions of annexation were really prominent in the 1980s, it seemed. Some of the largest ranches in the Truckee Meadows were being converted into developments at that point—Caughlin Ranch, Double Diamond Ranch, Damonte Ranch. What were some of the issues that were brought up by those developments with respect to annexation? Was that a controversial issue when it came to the county and the city? That was a major transition that was happening in this area at that time.

LM: It really was. With the Caughlin Ranch, I would say they handled it differently. They knew that they wanted part of that to be in the city to start with. So when they did their development plan, they drew a line, basically, and said, "Okay, this is more dense. We're going to annex this into the city. This is less dense; we're going to keep this in the unincorporated area." So they brought their plans before both the city and the county, and there wasn't a lot of controversy over that at all. Double Diamond was a different issue. What we think of now as South Meadows was originally Double Diamond, and they went to the county first. The city was not pleased. It got approved in the county first. And then there were all kinds of issues over that, because the city felt very strongly that if it were going to be developed pretty much the way that the rest of the community was developing, it would not be the type of low density one-acre, two-

and-a-half acre, five-acre lots like the western part of Caughlin Ranch. This really looked like city. So the City Council felt very strongly that it should become city.

AB: Was there still unincorporated land between Reno city limits and where that development would start? Would it have leapfrogged to annex that right away?

LM: I'm trying to remember. The city had annexed south, so I know that it was contiguous when it annexed; it certainly wasn't fully contiguous. The city had nothing on the south of it, nothing on the east of it, and nothing on the west, either, because that was all unincorporated area. But the city had already been developing toward that area, and so I'm sure that there was something that was contiguous, at least.

AB: So it was perfectly reasonable to assume that it might be City? When you said that they went to the county first and it became county, what then happens? What's the conversation that happens when that occurs?

LM: Well, in the case of Double Diamond—and you'll get beyond where I was, because keep in mind I came out of Planning in 1992 and moved into the City Manager's office at that point. I did some regional planning once I was in the manager's office for a short period, but I became the Chief of Staff in October of 1996, and so I was completely out of there by that point in time. I wasn't doing any more planning at all, and probably hadn't been for nearly six months. So you have to understand that my memory is not going to be the best one on this particular subject. But they went first to the county, and then it ended up changing owners—I don't remember exactly when Double Diamond changed owners. And the new owner wanted to bring it into the city. It was a lot easier in terms of service provision, they thought. And there was a big debate. We had the fiscal equity study somewhere along in there, and there was a big debate over, "Okay, if you're going to stay in the county, how are you going to pay for these services? Are you going to become an unincorporated town?" We really didn't want the county to be establishing unincorporated towns all over the place, the way they had done in Clark County. From the county's perspective, Clark County was an example, and they thought they had been successful with that, so they were looking at that as a possible way to fund services. And the fiscal equity study, of course, basically said, "We all pay the same amount of taxes to the county, so unless you have some sort of a different revenue stream from these developments, then we're going to be subsidizing the services you provide." On that, Reno and Sparks agreed. So that kind of put pressure on the county to do something differently. But it changed owners, and then it ended up in the city, and I don't really recall all of that stuff that went through.

AB: When or how do you recall conversations beginning about creating a new Regional Planning Agency?

LM: Well, by that time, everybody had pulled out. The Regional Planning Commission had disbanded, and the county had appointed its own local planning commission. We had probably gone a couple of years like that, at least, and there were a number of people in the community who just didn't think that we were looking at things regionally. And they were right. We really were not looking at things from a regional perspective, quite as much.

AB: What do you mean by that? What would be looking from a regional perspective?

LM: Well, we were fighting over waste water. [laughs] And we were fighting over water, to some extent—not us as much in that, but Sierra Pacific, of course, had Westpac. That was the water company then. And the county was getting into the water business, so Westpac wasn't very happy about that. In about 1992, the county had proposed the Honey Lake Project. They were going to bring water in from Honey Lake, up near Susanville, and build a huge pipeline. That was a pretty costly project, and a lot of people were not happy with that proposal. So there were a lot of water issues, and of course there were wastewater issues to go with it. There was a lot of impolite discussion going on. It was just controversial. People wanted that resolved, and, I think rightly so, in that regard. They did not want this to continue the way it was going. From their perspective, I think it looked like, "Okay, we broke up the Regional Planning Commission, and now we have no forum except WCOG to discuss this," and we had trouble getting quorums for the WCOG meetings because it was all the elected officials. So the community felt like there was really no forum for discussion on this, and there should be, as opposed to just the county and the city arguing back and forth in the newspaper, which is what was happening.

At any rate, Senator Raggio decided to take things in hand, and he had a bill drafted. And the bill was really designed to say, "You've got to get together and work this out." He introduced it, but I don't think he had any intention for it to end up being the final bill. It was basically a one-page bill. It could have been two; it could have been front-to-back. [laughs] But basically all this draft bill said was that with respect to planning and land use, everything the cities did had to be approved by the county—which he knew would be unacceptable. I mean, he knew that. This was a smart man. There was no question about that. But it was designed to say, "Okay, I'm going to propose something that I know you won't like, to bring you to the table, so you have to work something out."

And it worked. I mean, it *worked*. My recollection is that he gave us thirty days to respond to the Washoe delegation. And trying to draft what I think was fairly complicated legislation in thirty days, to get the submission, the bill draft, approved by the local elected officials, and then to present it the delegation at the end of that thirty days, was really quite a task. He really did expect us to create miracles, if you will. And the managers delegated it to the planning directors, so at that point it was Greg Evangelatos in Sparks and John Hester at the county, and me in Reno. And I remember looking at the calendar and thinking, "Oh, wow. We've got thirty days, and we're going to need a couple of WCOG meetings, and those have to be posted and meet the open meeting law. And we need something to work from. I mean, if John and Greg and I just sit down and try and begin drafting legislation without anything to work from, it's going to be impossible. We'll never meet this deadline."

I'd come from Florida, so I was familiar with the regional planning legislation in Florida. Down there, they had what they called Developments of Regional Impact, DRIs, rather than "of regional significance." They had a regional setup that was multi-county, and there were levels of approval and there were levels of appeal, all within that Florida planning legislation. So I decided that probably the best thing would be for me to just sit down on the weekend and write a draft bill, and I would use the Florida legislation as a model and try to adapt it to what I thought would work here. And then when I sat down with John and Greg, we could tweak it to take everybody's concerns into consideration.

And so that's what I did. I sat down and wrote this outline of a bill draft and then sat down with them and we tweaked it here and there, and we added different parts. The sphere of influence stuff is a term that they had used in the LAFCO [Local Agency Formation Commission] legislation—the annexation law in California. And of course, Greg was familiar with that. So we incorporated spheres of

influence into what we were talking about. Rather than DRIs we had “Developments of Regional Significance.” And rather than a multi-county setup, we did our own kind of set-up in county. And we went from there. I know that probably two or three weeks in, we had a meeting of the Washoe Council of Governments and went through what we were talking about, and they had some ideas and some things they wanted us to go back and look at. So we instantly set up another meeting that was within the 30-day time frame, sat down, did some more tweaking, and then came back and presented it, and they approved it, and then we went to the delegation, and presented it there. And then it went into committee and got presented in committee, and it eventually was enacted.

AB: Now, you had mentioned that originally, Senator Raggio had a proposal that seemed to put the county in charge, or that the local jurisdictions had to be approved by the county. What happened to that during the course of crafting this legislation?

LM: Oh, that went away. That went away. I mean, everybody knew that that would not be palatable.

AB: Including the county?

LM: Oh, yeah. The county knew that wasn't going to go anywhere. And what we wanted, I think what all of us wanted, was something that still had the local imprint, if you will. Sparks very much wanted to be Sparks. They didn't want to be Reno; they wanted to be Sparks. And Reno had its own identity. Reno wanted to remain the big dog, to be blunt. And it's interesting, I looked at some population figures the other day, because the perception is, of course, that Sparks is a much larger proportion of the region than what it used to be. And it really isn't. In the 1980 census, the population of Sparks was 40,000 and Reno was 100,000. Reno was two-and-a-half times larger than Sparks. And the 2017 estimates that I looked at online show Reno still being two-and-a-half times the size of Sparks; Sparks is now 100,000 and Reno is about 250,000. So proportionately, between the two cities, that really hasn't changed. But Reno didn't want to be subsumed into a regional identity any more than Sparks did. I mean, we wanted, each of us, to maintain our own identities. Our interest in drafting the legislation was to make sure that that local component was still there, but to provide a process where regional issues got discussed, and where there were conflicts, that those could be mitigated, including appropriate appeals where those were necessary. So that was the goal.

AB: And was this idea of spheres of influence a new idea, or was that just a new term for something that was already part of the process, trying to determine, from my understanding, where cities were going to expand, or what jurisdiction in the future might be in control of a certain area?

LM: There wasn't any extraterritorial jurisdiction in Nevada before the regional planning legislation. So when you did your master plan, which is what it was called in Nevada—it was called a “master plan” in the legislation as opposed to a “comprehensive plan,” which is what it's called in a lot of states—there wasn't any ability to plan for, if you will, any legal mandate at least, or any legal authority to plan to annex into a particular area, and plan for services in that area, although everybody thought that we should be doing that. In California, a lot of people were familiar with spheres of influence because that's what they used for annexation purposes for cities in California. So it seemed natural since we wanted to incorporate that into the regional planning legislation that we would just use that term. It made sense to

use that. Sparks very much wanted to expand into Spanish Springs at that point, and Reno wanted to go south.

AB: Now once that got passed, then there was the writing of the Regional Plan. Were you intensely involved in that, as well?

LM: In the first one, yes.

AB: So we're now talking about the writing of the first Regional Plan that followed the establishment of the TMRPA. What can you tell me about how that went? Was that as similarly rushed and stressful as writing the legislation was?

LM: No. At least with the first Regional Plan, we had some opportunity to go through a real process. The process that we had to do to develop the legislation was so condensed, it was much faster than what you would ever do if you were actually thinking ahead and planning to do that, and knew it was coming. But we didn't know that it was coming, and Senator Raggio told us that we had to do it, and we did. But with the Plan, that wasn't as stressful, from a timing standpoint. It was politically difficult, I think, because Sparks really wanted Spanish Springs. They really wanted Spanish Springs, and they wanted development authority in Spanish Springs. And they knew that they were going to be annexing in a phased manner, but they wanted Sparks' development regulations to be in effect up there. They knew they had to work with the county. So they were really, at that point, in that first Regional Plan, trying very hard to be cooperative, because as a City their interests were not so different from Reno's at all, but they wanted this area, and they knew that if they didn't get along with the county, that not only would it be stressful during the Regional Planning process, but it would continue to be stressful afterwards. There would be hard feelings, and that would carry over. I think they just didn't want that; they wanted to create a good working relationship so that that would proceed in an orderly manner. At least that was the way I looked at it.

Reno people were occasionally frustrated with the Sparks people at that point, because it was like, "Come on, we have the same interests here!" But they were very much going to keep peace in the valley. And that's to their credit, I think. I don't think they were wrong in doing that, at all. But it was frustrating sometimes when it would seem so clear cut to the Reno representatives, and the Sparks people would be, "Well, now, hold on, hold on. Let's talk about this a little more." But we got through it.

AB: Were you generally satisfied with how it turned out?

LM: You know, I don't recall being unhappy with how it turned out. But I don't really even remember. I remember more the process we went through, and what Sparks was doing, and what the county's interests were, and of course what ours were, as well, rather than what the final plan even looked like.

AB: How did it work on an actual level of coordination? Would you as the head of Planning in Reno meet just with the heads of planning from Sparks and the county? Did this just happen in meetings where you would get together and talk through issues?

LM: There was a Technical Advisory Committee, and we had regular meetings on this Technical Advisory Committee. It was bigger than just the three planning directors. Kris Schenk was hired as the first Regional Planning Manager. It seems to me that we had meetings just with Kris, with the four of us. But there was this much larger TAC that brought in the BLM Director, the people at Westpac, the water company at the time... a whole lot of regional players were in that Technical Advisory Committee as we worked through that first draft.

AB: The one comment that I saw that you had made testifying before the legislature about the formation of the Planning Agency regarded some specification that they needed to hire an assistant. There was a requirement that the new Director of the agency hire an assistant, and you said, "You know, I think we should just wait and see if it's needed." It didn't seem to you like it should have been something that was in the legislation. I don't know if you remember that at all.

LM: I do, actually, because they were getting into the nitty-gritty, and it was like, "Come on, you're going to have a Director, and you're saying we have to fund it," and since Reno wanted four members on the governing board instead of just three, they said, "Okay, you want four members, so how are you going to pay for this?" So Reno said, "You know, we'll pay 40 percent. The county can pay 30, and Sparks can pay 30, and we'll pay 40 percent because we want that tenth member on the governing board. So they bought that, but then they kept trying to specify how the money was actually going to be spent, and that just seemed unnecessary. I thought, "Come on, give this guy a chance. We'll hire a Director, we'll see what the needs are, and go from there. But there really wasn't any desire on the part of any of the local agencies to ever allow the regional planning agency to become as big as what the old Regional Planning agency had been. That just wasn't in the cards. Nobody wanted that; everybody wanted to do their own local thing, and to make sure that Regional really did concentrate on Regional.

AB: And it has remained small.

LM: Yes.

AB: There seemed to be a lot of concern, or at least questions with the Regional Plan about what had to conform to what. Did the local plans have to conform in advance to what the Regional Plan said, or was it going to dictate those plans? Do you remember that being an issue, about the relationship between the jurisdiction's master plans and the Regional Plan? Which came first?

LM: Well, as soon as the legislation was passed and we hired Kris Schenk, then we started doing a Regional Plan. And as soon as that was adopted, then the idea was that we would make any amendments, if any were necessary, to our local plans, and then we would bring all of those before the Regional Planning Commission and the Governing Board for conformance review. So, basically, that's what happened. I don't recall a lot of changes being necessary to Reno's plan, at least, before we came in for conformance review. There may have been some.

AB: So once the new system was in place, how did the TMRPA compare to your expectations for what Regional Planning would be, or could be?

LM: I think they were really successful in terms of providing a mechanism to ensure communication. And to some extent, that really was at a staff level, because we had a Technical Advisory Committee during the plan preparation, but after that, there were monthly meetings between the Regional Planning Director and the local directors, and there was a monthly meeting with the Regional Planning Director and the three managers, as well. Those continued for as long as I was involved in the process, at least. And we always had an agenda for the meetings. So it really did provide discussion that probably wouldn't have happened otherwise. And it gave us a Regional Plan that got adopted, that didn't have to be adopted by each of the units of local government. Being adopted by the Planning Commission and the Governing Board was sufficient for the region. And that made it more palatable to have a Regional Plan, because with the old Regional Planning Agency, the Regional Plan had to be brought before each of the local governments, and if there was a part of it that one unit of local government wasn't quite so thrilled with, then that made it more difficult. I'm sure that's one of the reasons it just didn't get adopted at the time. So I think this created a process that was more likely to result in the adoption of a Regional Plan than what we had before, looking at the earlier model. And then it did provide for ongoing communication, which was important.

AB: Do you feel like the county might have thought that it gave too much power to the cities, or more than they wanted, or did it seem like all the entities were reasonably satisfied with that arrangement?

LM: I think the county was going through a transition. They really wanted to become Clark County for a while. And the Honey Lake project ultimately did not go forward. That was stopped in its tracks, if you will. And part of that was the timing was all wrong on that.

AB: Politically?

LM: Yes. It wasn't that it was a bad thing for the county to look into something like that, but they really did it on their own, and they did it without consulting with the other units of government. And there were problems associated with the project, because it would have introduced water that didn't meet the water quality standards that were necessary for us to put the water back in the river, mostly TDS.

AB: What is TDS?

LM: Total Dissolved Solids. It was too high in salts. At any rate, it had problems, and the county kind of did a full steam ahead approach at that point, and then had to back up, and then we ended up with a Technical Advisory Committee, and the Technical Advisory Committee recommended that the county not go forward with it. So they were in some ways trying to move ahead on their own, and that really didn't work very well for the region, either. I think that ultimately what we ended up with was a much better path.

AB: In the early 1990s, you changed positions. Can you talk a little bit about what happened with your career with the City of Reno, how that changed, and why, through the 1990s?

LM: Well, I think I mentioned earlier that 1991 was a very difficult year from a budgetary standpoint, and that we needed to look at ways to save money in the city. The city [government] had a lot of layoffs, and

we did a reorganization plan, and combined Planning, Building, and Engineering into one department. At that point, I moved into the City Manager's office to do Intergovernmental Relations. Obviously, we had felt that we didn't quite know what was going on in some ways in terms of how the county was moving forward, in particular—much less so with Sparks. And part of that was maybe that Sparks and Reno had similar interests in a number of ways, so we kind of understood what they were doing. But we didn't quite always know where the county was headed, and we wanted to know where the county was headed. So my job then was to do intergovernmental relations and keep track of where the county was headed, and provide input where that was appropriate in County Commission meetings, and things like that.

AB: Did you in that position also work as some sort of liaison with state government, or was it really concerned more with local and County relations?

LM: In the beginning, it was really about local kinds of things. Then, ultimately, I ended up supervising our lobbyist at the state level. They would call me down, and I'd testify on various things. I never was registered as an actual lobbyist in the state, but I did supervise the people who did that.

AB: What was it like for you to leave a position that was oriented around Planning and do something completely different?

LM: Well, there were still a lot of planning issues, and planning-related issues, if you will. For the next three or four years, I still had at least a feel for what was going on at the region, and was involved in that in terms of doing intergovernmental relations. But it was broader, and from my perspective, it was a good opportunity, because I had thought for a number of years that I wanted to move into the manager's office and perhaps even become a City Manager, although I decided at the end of my career that I was perfectly happy finishing as the Chief of Staff and not becoming the City Manager. I was ready to retire and do different things with my life.

AB: And when did that happen? When did you retire?

LM: I retired in 2007. I moved into the City Manager's office in 1992. I became the Chief of Staff in October of 1996. And then I retired in August of 2007. It worked out very well for me. I felt really good about my career at the city. We had accomplished a number of things that I was happy about, and I wanted to do some different things, so I was pleased to move into retirement.

AB: When you look back, having had a long career with the city and in this region, is there anything in particular that you would say is surprising to you about how the region has grown and developed?

LM: I suppose, as a region, the one thing that is certainly quite different is how far we go north to south. I wouldn't necessarily have anticipated that we would have gone as far as we have. As far as the economy is concerned, the fewer number of hotel casinos, I thought, was completely to be expected, and I think many people saw that writing on the wall pretty early.

AB: Even from the eighties, I think.

LM: Yes. There was certainly an effort to diversify the economy, almost from the moment I arrived here. And interestingly, when you look back, the three hotel-casinos that opened on the Fourth of July in 1978 were the MGM, the Sahara, and the Mapes Money Tree. The only one of those that's still operating is the Grand Sierra Resort. It was the MGM, it was Bally's, it was the Hilton—it's just been through a whole series of different owners who have done slightly different things with it. But the other two in the downtown area have been redone into different things, some of them more successfully than others. But I think everybody looked at that situation at the time, and those of us who were around can remember people talking about people camping on the river in 1978, because there were not enough houses for the employees of the new casinos to live in. I think that probably we were overbuilt in casinos very early, and so the move away from that into other areas, has been really good for the community.

AB: Well, I want to thank you very much for talking with me today.

LM: You're very welcome.

GENO MARTINI

Geno Martini is a lifelong resident of Sparks, Nevada, and had a successful career in banking when he was appointed to the Sparks City Council in 1999 to fill the seat formerly occupied by Tony Armstrong, who had just won his mayoral election. Martini became Mayor Pro Tem in 2004 and was sworn in as Mayor of the City of Sparks in 2005 upon Armstrong's death. Elected to full terms in 2006, 2010, and 2014, he held that position until 2018, making him the longest-serving mayor in the city's history. He joined the Governing Board of the TMRPA in 1999 and served for many years as its Chair.

ALICIA BARBER: This is Alicia Barber. Today is December 12, 2018. I'm with Geno Martini in Sparks, Nevada. Mayor Martini, does the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency have your permission to record this oral history interview and make it available to the public?

GENO MARTINI: Absolutely, no problem.

AB: Thank you. For this project we're focusing on Regional Planning and planning in general, but we are also interested in the series of events and experiences that led you to your formal participation in issues related to growth and planning in our region. So I'm wondering if we could start by asking when and where you were born?

GM: I was born right here in Sparks, Nevada, in 1946. Actually, I was born in Reno, because Reno had the only two hospitals. So I was born in Reno, lived there for about three to four days, I think, came home to Sparks, and I haven't left since. We're very close to where I was born, really. We're about a half a mile from where the property of the ranch I lived on begins, just to the south of here.

AB: Could you explain where that location was?

GM: Approximately the S on the top of the hills in Sparks, that was the eastern boundary of our property. The western boundary was at approximately Sparks Boulevard. The southern boundary was Interstate 80, and the northern boundary was Prater Way. We had a section of land right there, and we did all kinds of things: we raised cattle, we had potatoes, we raised onions, we raised our own hay, we had chickens, and gardens and all that kind of stuff. We were pretty self-sufficient. The stores were not nearly what they are now when we lived there, so we shopped in town once in a while at small stores, but most of the stuff that we ate came from our ranch.

AB: How long had your family lived there?

GM: Since the early thirties. My grandfather came to the United States in the late twenties, early thirties, and bought the property that I just described to you, and we were there since then. It was three families that lived on the ranch: my grandfather and my grandmother lived there, had a house; and my uncle and his wife and two kids lived right next door; and next door to them was our house—my dad, my mom, and my brother, and myself. So we all lived together on the ranch. You know, everybody worked on the ranch. I worked when I was younger, my brother worked when he was younger, when we were going to school. My two cousins, Danny and Loretta, we all worked on the ranch. We had to. We had chores we had to do every day, and we got up and did them.

AB: Where did your grandfather immigrate from?

GM: He came from Italy, a place called Ponte Buggianese. It's in central Italy. He and my grandmother both came from there; they were married in Italy and came here. My grandfather came over in the early twenties through Ellis Island, and he was here about thirteen years before he could afford to bring his wife and my mom over to the United States. So my mom came here around 1935 when she was thirteen years old. She came into New York. Ellis Island by then was closed, and she came by train to Sparks, Nevada.

AB: Where did you go to school as a kid?

GM: I went to all Sparks schools—Robert Mitchell is still here, on Prater Way. I went to Sparks Junior High, which has since been torn down, and then I went to Sparks High School. Then I went up to the University of Nevada. I started there in 1964 and graduated in 1972.

AB: How did you get to school as a kid?

GM: We had bus service around here. And once in a while, it was kind of a treat for me to ride my bicycle to school. When I got into junior high school, I used to do that once in a while, just to have something different to do. But we rode the bus every day, to and from school.

AB: Did you spend much time in Reno, growing up?

GM: Not a lot. There was really no reason for us to go over there. We'd go to the movies once in a while. But until I got into high school, I didn't spend much time in Reno at all. Again, there were not that many different things to do there. I mean, everything that we did was here, sports and that kind of stuff. I was very heavily involved in sports. Once in a while, we'd take the Nevada Transit bus to Reno to go to the movies or something. But we had the Sparks Theater here, and they had all the movies that we needed to see. We didn't spend much time at all in Reno.

AB: Do you recall the construction of Interstate 80 very much?

GM: You know, I don't remember that exactly, I do not. I'm struggling to think what year that it started. It was in the sixties, I believe.

AB: They finally completed it through Reno and Sparks in 1974, I think. But it was a very long process.

GM: It started with the Winter Olympics, I believe, in 1960, when it was in Squaw Valley. That was when they got started, and then it evolved from there. I do remember when it came through the Nugget, and went over the top of the existing Nugget building. The second tower wasn't there yet. That was an interesting growth period for the City of Sparks, and it really put the City of Sparks on the map when Interstate 80 was put through. I remember Highway 40 very distinctly from when I was a young man, because it went right through the middle of Sparks and right through the middle of Reno. And then Interstate 80 coming through by the Nugget is what I remember the most.

AB: It was quite an engineering feat.

GM: Absolutely. And now it's just a choke point for that whole Interstate 80 corridor there. It chokes down to two lanes, and there's really not a lot they can do unless they want to spend an awful lot of money to make that wider, maybe to four lanes through there. It's going to be very difficult and very expensive.

AB: How do you think that the construction of I-80 changed people's experience of coming through Reno and Sparks, as opposed to traveling Highway 40?

GM: Well, as you say, they came through Reno and Sparks. A lot of them just passed right by, but I think it was a good stopping-off point if you were coming from the west or the east. Once you went over the top of the mountain, unless you stopped at Truckee or somewhere, the next stop was Reno and Sparks. And when you're coming from the east going west, Fernley was nothing at the time, Wadsworth was there, but had nothing at the time, so I would say that a natural stopping-off point for gas or food would be Sparks, or the next stop would be Reno. If you were coming from the west going east, you might stop off at Reno for food or gas, or you might come into Sparks for the same thing. I think Sparks built up when Interstate 80 came through. That's when the Nugget really started to power up, and became a really successful property.

AB: Going back to your college years, what were you interested in studying there?

GM: Nothing. [laughs] You know, I was a typical jock. I was a Physical Education major and a Health minor. Now, that's about as generic as it gets for a dumb kid from Sparks, is it not? I played football and baseball through high school, I loved sports, so that's what I wanted to do. I was going to be a teacher, but that didn't pan out like I thought it would. But I enjoyed my college years, believe me. Like I said, it took me eight years to get through, and it was a great time in my life. I wouldn't give that stuff up for anything. I was in a fraternity, the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity. I still have great friends from those days in the fraternity. I was having too much fun, really. I didn't want to get serious and have to go get a real job. You know, I worked hard when I was a kid on the ranch, and I worked hard during the summer, because I worked for my tuition. And tuition wasn't much at that time; I think it was \$155 a semester. You could take as many credits as you wanted, 12 to 18 credits. I did the minimum, 12 credits, just to stay involved. But it was an excellent time in my life. I loved it. I loved sports and I wasn't really interested in learning a lot about anything. I finally did. I made it and got through, and it was all good after I graduated. I was on

the eight-year plan, but I didn't turn out to be an attorney or a doctor. I didn't get a PhD and all that good stuff. I just had a good time.

AB: Did you live in the SAE house?

GM: I lived there for one year. I was the house manager, which gave me the opportunity to live there free, and then I would manage the pledges that would come in and clean the house. And I managed the money and the rents. That helped out. It was a fun year that I lived there, and then I went back home after that.

AB: What year did you graduate?

GM: Finally in 1972. My parents were very pleased about that, that I finally made it through. I started in '64 and graduated in '72.

AB: What did you do after that?

GM: You know, that's when I made a career change, for me, from being in Athletics and wanting to be a teacher. I did some student teaching for a semester at Sparks Middle School. That school is still here. I was under a couple of people that I knew very well from the Sparks area, guys that were in Physical Education. But student teaching was a bad experience for me. I did not enjoy it. I was at a few different schools, and I didn't like the way the kids acted. Of course, I was a jackass too, when I was a kid. [laughs] I was a smart alec kind of kid. I just didn't enjoy it.

So a friend of mine said, "Why don't you apply at First National Bank? They have a training program there." I went to the guy that I knew, who was the head of Personnel—his name was Jim Whittaker. The only thing they required to get into the training program at First National Bank was to have a college education. If you were a college graduate, you would qualify for the training program. So I went and talked to him—this was on a Friday—and I knew him pretty well from schools and being around. He had lived in the area, like me, for a long time. So he said, "You know, Geno, we're going to run a credit check on you, and if your credit checks out, we'll hire you." Sure enough, Monday morning, I got a phone call saying, "Report to work tomorrow morning," which was Tuesday. That was the end of that deal, and I was away on my thirty-year career in banking.

I learned from the bottom up. I started as a teller, and I did every job in the bank for six or eight weeks. They had you take a test, to pass on to the next area that you would be in, like safe deposit, vault teller—I did all those things. I think it was great training. Probably nowadays you can't do that because it's so expensive to train people like that. Training is really a huge expense in Personnel, anymore. Human resources, I guess it's called now, right? I was very pleased. After I got through the program, I knew how to be a banker. I was an operations officer, and I ran a branch. I did all the daily operations at a branch, so I knew about every job in a bank—general ledger, notes, returned items, returned checks and those kinds of things, safe deposit—I had to be an expert in all of those areas, in case problems arose. I had to know what the bank's policies were. It was a very, very intensive training program, but it was terrific. The people that come in to work at the bank these days are in such a silo. They only know how to do one thing; they can't do multiple things like we did back when we got the training that we had. As I look back on it, it was a great, great experience, and it was great training for me.

AB: What was the location of that first bank that you worked in, and what other locations did you work at through that career?

GM: The location that I first worked in was the head office, which is now the Reno City Hall, the building there on First and Virginia. That was the Reno main branch. I worked at that one, and then right down the street to the north was the Second and Virginia branch; it's Harrah's now. It was a beautiful old building, beautiful old branch. I worked there for a while, I worked at the Keystone branch, I worked at the Plumb Lane branch, I worked at the Vassar Lane branch. We had one there at the time. I worked at the Sparks branch, downtown. I worked at the McCarran branch. It was First National Bank; it's now Wells Fargo. I worked out at the Peckham Lane branch, I worked at the South Virginia branch, right down South Virginia. I worked at a ton of different branches, and it was great. All of them were different in their own way, different employees and things. And it was truly a great experience; I really loved banking at that time. At the end of my career, I was very pleased to get out, because it just wasn't the same. All jobs now are not the same as they used to be, you know that as well as anybody. The job I had then during that time was awesome; I loved the banking.

AB: Well, it seems that before the advent of online banking, a bank was much more of a community space.

GM: Absolutely. There were a lot of personal relationships you had there with the people. You know, when I finally got into the Note department, and learned the credit programs and learned how to do loans—car loans and real estate loans and commercial loans and all those things—it was much more personal, face-to-face, like we're doing right here. If you wanted a loan, you didn't have to fill out something on a gosh darn computer. You came in, you sat down with a loan officer, you talked with them, you filled out the application, and you went through the process. It was very quick: either yes or no. You qualified or you didn't. And you did it face to face. So the relationships then were great. I created some great relationships that I still have today with people. One that I can recall was Bob Cashell. The first time I got to know him was when I was in banking, and did some of his banking for Boomtown and all his investments. So I got to know him very well. And those are the kinds of relationships you created back then.

Now, it's so impersonal. Now, they want to keep you out of the bank; they don't want you in the bank. If you go to the bank to cash a check or something, you get charged extra money to do that. It's the craziest thing in the world, even though I understand that the age we're in now is computer-driven. I got into banking just at the same time when they were transferring different things like general ledger over to the computer. They used to do it all by hand. I was in the time when they were running parallel. They would do it on the computer program and they would do it by hand, just to make sure that it was all jibing before they went completely to the computer. It was a great time. And like I said, it was so personal. The whole deal was personal. Now, they don't want to see you, they don't want to talk to you. That's why the last eight years of my banking career was at Great Basin Credit Union. I loved it there because, again, it was pretty personal, like it was in the old days. You'd talk to people face to face, you knew who they were, you could get a feeling back and forth. Looking at an application and running a credit check, what's that tell you about a person? You have no idea what their character is. I mean, if you're a good judge of character—and we all make mistakes when we do that, we all misjudge people—it's a lot better, to me, to look somebody in the eye and talk to them, than just to look at an application.

AB: How did you become interested in serving in local government?

GM: Well, when I was in high school, I ran for student body president, and I was elected student body president the last semester of my senior year. That was the advent of my politics. I never really thought about it anymore until a friend of mine that graduated with me, Tony Armstrong, approached me about it. We were pretty good friends through grade school and high school, and we graduated together from Sparks High School in 1964. After I graduated from college in '72, I bought a house in Sparks on Glen Meadow Drive, and Tony lived right across the street from me. We lived across the street from each other for about twenty years. He wanted to run for City Council, and he actually ran two times. The first time he lost, and the second time he won. He was elected to the City Council in 1993, 1995, sometime in that time span.

After he'd been on the Council a while and he wanted to run for Mayor, he came to me and said, "You know, you're involved in the business community"—I was very involved with the Sparks Chamber of Commerce—"and I know you know the business area, you're a banker. We need somebody on the Council that has more financial experience than some of the people we have." So he said, "If I run for Mayor and if I'm elected, I'll have a two-year term left. Would you be interested in being appointed to fill that term out?" I thought about it, and went and talked to my boss, and he said, "Yeah, you should take that." That's when I was with Great Basin Federal Credit Union. He said, "It'd be good advertising for the bank, too, for you to be on the Council." So that's what I did. He appointed me to the City Council in 1999, and I was appointed as the Mayor Pro Tem, that's like a Vice Mayor, in 2004. Then in 2005, unfortunately Tony passed away. And the way our City Charter reads is that if the Mayor leaves office or passes away in office, then the Mayor Pro Tem automatically becomes the Mayor in thirty days. So that's what happened to me. In February of 2005, I was sworn in as the Mayor, and I had about a year-and-a-half left on that term. Then I ran in 2006 and in 2010 and in 2014. I built up 13-1/2 years as the Mayor; I've been the longest-serving Mayor in the City of Sparks. And the rest is history. You know, now we have Ron Smith, who's going to do a great job. He's brand new, but he's been on the Council for twelve years, and sat next to me for twelve years. He was from Ward Three, same as me. Tony was from Ward Three. So the Mayor in Sparks has been from Ward Three for the last twenty years. And now it'll be 24, almost 25 when Ron's done with his first term.

AB: Did you expect that serving as a city councilman would be compatible with having a full-time job? Were you concerned about the time commitment?

GM: You know, I was a little bit, but it worked out fine. I had a job where I would go in early in the morning. I'd go in about 5:30 in the morning and do a lot of the work that I had to do, and then I would take Council time in the afternoon. That's when I had time to do things for the Council. Our Council meetings were at four o'clock on Mondays. So I was concerned, but it worked out pretty well. It was a big time commitment for me because I worked a lot of hours. But I enjoyed it. I would do it all over again in a heartbeat; I wish I could do it all over again, because it was a good time. I really enjoyed my time on the Council.

AB: Now, right when you joined, there were already so many issues related to growth and the planning of the area. The transformation of ranches into developments had been underway for quite some time. Do you recall when you first joined, what some of those issues were, regarding growth?

GM: When I got on the Council in 1999, Tony was on the Regional Planning Governing Board, and he wanted off, because he'd been there for quite a few years. So the Council appointed me to take his spot on the Regional Planning Governing Board. I think I came on in October or November of 1999, and I was only on the Council for five or six months before I joined the Regional Planning Governing Board. I was brand new, clueless as to what was going on. [laughs] I mean, I had no clue. It's pretty funny, as I think back on it. And then, on top of that, in 2000, we started the five-year Regional Plan update. So here I am, I was appointed as the Vice Chair, because it was Sparks' turn to be the Vice Chair, and then in 2000, the Chairman was going to be from Sparks, so I became the Chairman, I believe, at the end of November of 2000.

So I'm the Chair of the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Governing Board, no clue what the heck's going on anywhere, and I was thrown right into the middle of that Regional Plan update. And it was a nightmare cluster. I mean, it was terrible, Reno and the county fighting back and forth over who wanted this, and who wanted that, and we were trying to stick our nose in there and get done what we needed to do, and plan our areas, and Reno was planning their areas and the county was planning their areas, which areas they wanted. It was a terrible time. But as I look back on it, I loved it. I had so much fun chairing those meetings, because here's Reno and the county fighting back and forth, suing each other, and Sparks was right in the middle of it. So Sparks made all the decisions, because if we agreed with Reno, we'd vote for what they wanted, and the county would be out. But if we liked what the county wanted, we'd vote on their side. So we helped put the plan through. Sparks had control of what was going to happen in the Regional Plan, and we worked it out pretty well.

As I look back today, there was a time there when Bob Cashell was in office, [as Reno Mayor] and I was in office, and Bob Larkin was the Chairman of the Washoe County Commission, and Bob Larkin and myself and Bob Cashell were pretty good friends, and we got along well. We used to meet once a month for breakfast to talk about what was going on in the region. And I believe, as I look at it today, if those people would have taken Bob Cashell, Geno Martini, and Bob Larkin, and put them in a room with a couple of staff people, we could have worked out the whole deal without any lawsuits or anything. I can guarantee we could have done that, because we were good friends; we were willing to compromise in different areas. You know, Sparks compromised and gave up some things that maybe we wanted, and we let the county have them, or the City of Reno have them, because we needed to do something to break up this logjam of the Regional Plan Update. The five-year Regional Plan update took seven years, to get done. They finally got it done in 2001. As I look back on it, it was a fun, fun time for me. Like I said, I was a rookie thrown into the middle of all this, and I had to learn quick on the run. And I did.

AB: Were these issues that were contentious mostly involving annexation and spheres of influence?

GM: Absolutely.

AB: It looked like the big one in 2000 was about Damonte Ranch.

GM: Yes, that was huge.

AB: And as you say, that was between Reno and Washoe County.

GM: Yes, Reno and Washoe County fighting back and forth over who gets what, who goes where. And the thing is, I completely don't understand what the mentality of the county is, and why they want to do a lot of projects in the county, because the way the tax structure is set up, they get the same amount of tax if the property is developed in Reno or if it is developed in the unincorporated County. I don't understand why they would want to do that. They could let Reno and Sparks do the projects, do the roads and stuff, which we're then responsible for maintaining, and they could get the same amount of tax as they would if the project is in their jurisdiction, but then they have to do the roads, they have to provide Washoe County sheriff and all those things. So I really don't understand their mentality. To me, it would be much easier or better for the county to let us annex a couple of spots, and do our developments, and they get the same property tax for doing nothing. I don't get it.

AB: Does it seem to you that the county has had a similar perspective on that all the way through your involvement in government?

GM: It has been, the whole time. They're always fighting to not let the city annex this, they want to do a development there, whatever. We had a couple of developments where we annexed some property down the eastern canyon into the City of Sparks, because there was a project that wanted to put something together down there. After we annexed it, we looked at it from a financial perspective, and we could not afford to do that development down the canyon—we're talking about just this side of Storey County. We couldn't afford to do that because of the maintenance of the roads, and it was too far away for the police and fire that we'd have to provide, so we de-annexed it, if you want to call it that, and gave it to the county and let them do the project, because it made more financial sense for them to do it than it did for us. We gave that up. I thought we were pretty smart about doing that. We really were. We rushed to annex it, and then after we looked at it, we said, "We can't do this."

AB: What about Spanish Springs? Was development of that area a controversial issue?

GM: It absolutely was controversial. That's just like the project down at the Pyramid Highway that Reno wanted to do, way out in the county—Winnemucca Ranch. They wanted to annex some property out there and do a big project, and it fell through because, again, with fire and police services and all that stuff, it was just too expensive to do.

Anyway, Spanish Springs was controversial because it was not really connected to the City of Sparks. It was kind of a stretch to make that contiguous to Sparks, or whatever you want to call it. But they gave it a shot, and it worked out great. You've been out there; you know what it's like. It's beautiful. They have great houses out there. So we were fortunate that it worked out. When I got on the City Council, we had just started a study that looked toward the future, and analyzed what the property tax would bring in if we built houses or if we had commercial property, or industrial property. And we found out that if we kept doing just houses, we would be in the hole in about fifteen years. So we went to the developers and said, "Look, if you want to build in Sparks, you've got to do mixed developments. You've got to do houses, you've got to do stores, you've got to do commercial, you've got to do industrial,

whatever we need on that property for property tax, we need you to do that.” And the developers were awesome about that. They came to the table, they redid a lot of their projects, and we approved them, and the rest is history. And that’s what brought all the commercial property and the stores and things out there. We asked those developers to redo their projects, and they did.

AB: Was that only for developments of a certain size that were in more outlying areas?

GM: Yes, I would say we were looking at the bigger ones, because if you’re going to do a mixed development, you need a good size piece of property to put the houses in, and then also put commercial, and that kind of stuff. You need a little bit more property. So we worked on the bigger ones. And then some of the smaller ones, they just completely went with commercial instead of residential. All that stuff is market-driven. These developers know what’s going to sell. Is it going to be houses or is it going to be storefronts? They understand what the market will bear at the time they’re doing these projects. We worked very closely with those developers. And we have smart people on our staff. Let me tell you, we have smart, smart people at the City of Sparks. I love those people. They’re hardworking and they do just a great job, I just love those people. It was great to work with them.

AB: What issues came up involving capacity when it comes to the growth of the area? There are issues related to water, to sewage treatment. What kinds of conversations were happening, from the Sparks perspective?

GM: You know, the capacity hasn’t been a problem until now. The sewer capacity now is definitely a problem. They’re going to run out of capacity unless they build, or unless somebody else builds another water reclamation facility, which is what it’s called. I call it a sewer plant. In 1964, they started building the one in Sparks. I had just graduated from high school, and my friend was working out there, so he got me a job out there, too, to work, building the sewer plant. I tell people, “I built the sewer plant,” or helped build the sewer plant. But they’re going to need another facility somewhere, or they have to expand that one. And that one has plenty of room to expand for more capacity; but it’s really, really expensive. Hookup fees and all that are going to have to go up; it’s just a matter of time when they do it. In fact, the Cities of Reno and Sparks own the sewer plant jointly, and the county buys capacity from Reno and Sparks. They are just about out of capacity, and are not going to be able to develop anything in the county unless they either build another facility somewhere, or unless we expand this one. They’re going to have to step up to the plate and pay for a lot of that stuff. It’s going to be very expensive.

AB: What are the obstacles to that happening? Does it seem like there’s a difference of opinion among the jurisdictions about how to make that happen, or is it purely a financial issue?

GM: Well, to me, it’s purely a financial issue. I mean, we can make it happen. If you’ve got the money, you can make anything happen, is that not true? There’s space out there to expand it, plenty of room to expand the water reclamation facility. So that’s not an issue. But there are a lot of people who don’t want to grow anymore. There are elected officials who are using the capacity for the sewer plant as a growth issue. What they’re doing is they want to stop growth, and a way to stop it is that if you don’t put any more capacity to the sewer, then you can’t grow, can you? You’re all through. There are a couple who are using that an excuse, saying, “You can’t grow anymore until we have capacity; it’s too expensive; we

can't do it," blah blah blah, one thing and another. The problem with the way our tax structure is set up, in Nevada, is that if you don't grow, you die. We have to grow in order to keep up with what's going on. So that's a big issue, and, like I said, some of the elected officials don't want to grow, and that's their choice. I'm a pro-growth guy.

AB: During your terms as Mayor, there have been incredible transformations in downtown Sparks. Were those developer-driven or was there a lot that had to be done on the political side in order to make some of those changes? Can you talk about that a little bit?

GM: Man, we tried everything. When I talk about Sparks, I always say that I was on the City Council and served as Mayor for almost twenty years, and we couldn't get anybody to even build an outhouse down there. I mean, we tried every gosh darn thing we could think of—big box stores, mom and pop stores, this store, that store. We had a great plan—Nate Cherry was the guy that put it together for us. It was a great plan for downtown Sparks, with apartments like you see now, and commercial, and office space. And then when the economy tanked, we got nothing. We couldn't build anything down there. So, finally, a guy by the name of Jay Carter Witt, who owns Silverwing Development, did some projects in Reno, and Reno was just not friendly to him. They were not helping him get his things through, and he was a little upset with them. Ron Smith heard about that. He was the chairman of the Revelopment Agency downtown at the time, and he called Jay Witt and said, "You know, we've got some developable property in the City of Sparks here, downtown. Why don't you come down and take a look at it?"

So Jay Witt of Silverwing Development came down with his partner and they and Ron took a walking tour of all the property, to see where it was, and he said, "I would like to take a shot at this." And the rest is history. I mean, gosh, you've seen what's going on down there—beautiful apartment houses. He's putting up what's called the Deco right now, it's going to be ten stories, and it'll have parking, and a little park. It'll be beautiful, beautiful apartment houses. It's going to possibly have a penthouse at the top. That's something he's talking about. It's really great. He's going to put in some stores and things down there. The theater's reopened now. They're remodeling the older C Street garage and putting the Deco property right over the top of it. Like I said, it'll be ten stories high. It's awesome.

And now, as you look downtown, along Victorian, the old Silver Club is just about history. The Nugget's tearing that down. They want to do an amphitheater and maybe an outdoor facility to do concerts and things. That's something that might come downtown, which would be a great venue to have down there. So we'll see. It's going great. I think it's going to become a destination kind of place, where people will want to come for concerts, fun, restaurants, movies. I'm looking forward to that. The Nugget's right in the middle of it, because it's beneficial to them, too. When they get conventions and events there, their guests like to do different things than just gamble, sometimes. So there will be other stuff for them to do, when they come here. So the Nugget is very involved in this.

AB: Do you feel that Sparks has really had a city center that people could identify? I'm wondering if these new developments might impact that a little bit.

GM: You know, I think what's happening downtown now will continue to make this be the city center. In the past, we were looking at some city center kinds of things in Spanish Springs. I was very leery of changing our downtown from the existing downtown area to Spanish Springs. You know, in any city, I think the heart is their downtown, and this has always been our heart, where it's at right now. I think now

we've created something that will make that, or continue to make that our downtown. One time, we had plans for building a new City Hall down there. You know, that could happen again maybe in the future, who knows? Again, very expensive. That's something they'll have to look at. There's still talk of trying to move downtown to Spanish Springs, but I hope they don't do it. I love downtown where it's at now. I think it's in the right spot; it's where it should be. Maybe I'm just old-fashioned because I've been here for 72 gosh darn years, and downtown has always been where it's at, so I'm kind of torn between that and moving it to Spanish Springs. Spanish Springs is a great area; it's beautiful. I agree with that. But it's not downtown, to me, anyway. To me, it's not downtown. Downtown is downtown where the Nugget is, and that's it.

AB: There's so much linking of Reno and Sparks together—Reno-Sparks this, Reno-Sparks that. My impression has been that for those who are from Sparks, or live in Sparks, the distinct identity of Sparks has always been very important to them. Has that been true for you?

GM: Oh, absolutely. I mean, we're not Reno. We don't want to be Reno. We're not Vegas. We don't want to be Vegas. We want to be Sparks. And we do things for families. I think we're still family-oriented. It's a great place to bring up kids. In Sparks, we have a lot of parks. Before I was there, the Council made a policy that they wanted to see a neighborhood park a half-mile from every resident in Sparks, and we've done that. We've built parks for people and kids and families; that's just what it is. Most of the events we do are family-driven, family-oriented—Hot August Nights, even though that's a Reno and a Sparks event, it's for families and kids; the Rib Cook-Off, again, is a family deal; the Hometown Christmas Parade, that's a family deal.

Quite a few years back, Bernie Anderson, a Sparks guy, was in the Assembly, and he passed a bill that made the Sparks Christmas parade the official Christmas parade of the state. So the Sparks Hometown Christmas is the official Christmas parade of the state, and we're very proud of it. Again, it's for families. We have a new event now—it's five or six years old—called Pumpkinpalooza, for Halloween. It's a kid's deal. You go down there, and they have pumpkin races, and you have kids and families all around, and it's just wonderful. That's what Sparks is all about. That's what we want to be, and I think the present Council and Ron Smith will push to keep it that way.

AB: Do you have memories of Jack's Carnival?

GM: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Dressing up in whatever costumes we had in Jack's Carnival. I remember the last time I was in Jack's Carnival, I was in junior high school in the band. I was the biggest kid in the gosh darn band, and I wanted to play drums, but no, I had to play the sousaphone because I was the only one who could carry it in the parade. Me and another kid, a big kid, too, we were the only two that were big enough to carry the sousaphone in the parade, so we played the sousaphone. But I remember marching in the band in Jack's Carnival. And I remember marching in it as a kid when I was in Robert Mitchell, too. I had great memories. We'd march down the middle of town, and we'd go to Deer Park, and they'd have it set up with games and things for kids, and they'd cook hamburgers and stuff. It was an awesome time for kids. I remember it very well.

AB: Deer Park, specifically, it seems, was a very popular place.

GM: Absolutely. We started on Sixth Street, down in the middle of town, and at that time, where the Nugget is now was a park, with huge trees. It was a beautiful, beautiful park. From Pyramid Way all the way down to 14th Street was nothing but a huge park with huge trees, and it was beautiful. There was a bandstand right in the middle of it. So we'd march by that and down to Deer Park, and that's where all kids went and played games during Jack's Carnival. It was a good time.

AB: Going back to Regional Planning, there's so much of a need for housing now—affordable housing, especially apartments, and Sparks is filling a lot of that need. On that Regional Planning board, was this massive need for housing anticipated, or does it seem like it came on all of a sudden?

GM: It doesn't just seem like it; it did come on all of a sudden. I don't think that we realized what the impact of TRIC [the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center], the regional park out there that was put together—I don't think we realized what kind of an impact that was going to have on Reno and Sparks. I think we were caught a little bit off guard. But we're getting there. I told my staff many times over the last couple of years, as we started this growth, every time we'd approve something—it was apartments here and apartments there, houses here, houses there—and I said, “You know, boys and girls, I'm getting a little nervous here,” that we're maybe overbuilding now, maybe we have too much inventory. But obviously, I was wrong, because we still need more. We think we need more, and they're going to build more. So they're coming in. You know, we need to do something to get the prices of houses down; it's ridiculous, crazy. And apartments—ridiculous, crazy. And that's probably our fault. I think us elected officials maybe need to take a hit for that, because we didn't realize, like I said, what TRIC was going to do to us, what the impact was going to be. And Tesla, oh my gosh. Twenty-five, thirty, forty percent of the people that are renting apartments downtown are from Tesla and Panasonic and Switch and all those. They're all from out there. It might even be a higher percentage, I'm not sure.

AB: Do you have indications of how many of them are living in Reno versus Sparks?

GM: You know, I do not, and I'm sure maybe our staff does. I've just always worried about us. I'm worried about Sparks. Reno is Reno. I understand the things they do will impact us, hopefully for the good. The things we do will impact them, as well. And that's the relationship that Bob Cashell and I had, when we were both there. We talked a lot about what he was doing and what I was doing, and he would always give me heads up about what was going on over there, and I would give him heads-up on what was going on over here. I didn't want him to be surprised, and he didn't want me to be surprised, either, with what was going on. We had a great relationship, and I'll tell you, I never talked to anybody, never ever talked to anybody who didn't think that was very healthy for this region and for Reno and Sparks, especially.

AB: You mean having that close relationship?

GM: Having that close relationship with Bob Cashell. And I agree, I think it was very healthy for this whole region. And again, when Bob Larkin was the Chairman of the Washoe County Commission, we were all good friends, and we could talk together, we could yell at each other, and swear at each other a lot—we did that once in a while—we'd have some heated arguments and discussions, but after it was all said and done, I think we did the right things. We knew what the right things were to do, but then it was

up to us to convince our bodies, or elected officials, that it was the right thing to do. And I think all three of us, had pretty good relationships with our elected people, and we were fortunate to have that.

Like I said before, I seriously believe that Bob Cashell, Bob Larkin, and Geno Martini could have sat down at a table like we are doing today, and worked out that whole mess of the gosh darn Regional Plan in 2000. I know we could have done that.

AB: And you were all involved in it at that time.

GM: Absolutely. But at the time, the Regional Planning Governing Board was all different people, and this guy wanted to sue that guy, and this guy wanted to sue that guy, and it was just horrible.

AB: Do you recall if the results of that Plan, as it was revised at that time, included some things that you weren't especially happy with, as a representative of Sparks?

GM: Yeah, there were a few things. It's hard to remember offhand exactly what those were. But like I said, we made concessions. We gave this for that, and they gave this for that, and once we all sat down like adults instead of children, we worked it all out. Finally the settlement had to go to Judge Hardesty. He was a District Court Judge then, I believe. He called us all together, and I was kind of angry about it, because I was on my annual golf tournament for the SAE House, up at Plumas Pines, and I was right in the middle of the gold tournament, and he set a date—he did this on a Tuesday, and we had to be there on a Thursday—and we had to be there. I was up there at Plumas Pines, and I was thinking, “Well, I'm not going to go.” My City Attorney said, “Well, you might want to think this over again. The judge has said that you will be there, and you'd better be there, because if you don't, you might go to jail.” So I said, “Okay, I'll go.” [laughs]

I wasn't happy about it, and I let Judge Hardesty know that I wasn't happy about having to come out of my golf tournament for this gosh darn Regional Plan to do a settlement conference. But we did it, and we worked out some issues. He sent us packing and said, “Okay, here's what you've got to do. You've got to do this and this and that.” I don't remember exactly what the issues were, or what the demands were that he put on us, that we had to do. So that's when we all really got together and stopped suing each other, and got it done, when he finally stepped in and said, “Okay, boys and girls, this is what you're going to do, not what you want to do, or what I need you to do. This is what you are going to do. It's this, this, and this. Bring it back in sixty or ninety days, whatever the time frame was, or six months or whatever, but this is what you will do and this is how you will work it out.” And we did. We didn't have any choice.

AB: And that was really more of an issue between Washoe County and Reno that precipitated that lawsuit? That was the one about Damonte Ranch?

GM: In my recollection, yes.

AB: And you in Sparks were probably being lobbied by either side?

GM: Absolutely! So we had the choice of what we thought was better for us and the region. And like I said, Reno had four votes, the county had three votes, and we had three votes. So we could stick it to the

county 7-3, or we could stick it to Reno, 6-4, whichever you liked. And we did it, too. We made those decisions, because Sparks had the three votes that went one way or the other. It was something we had to do.

AB: Do you feel that was true for issues that came up after that, issues related to Mogul, and Verdi, and other areas in the North Valleys?

GM: North Valleys and all that stuff, that was not Sparks-centric. That was Reno and the county unincorporated area. It was all about those folks and who wanted to annex this or did annex this, or whatever. We tried to stay out of it, if we could. We didn't want to stick our nose in it, unless if affected us. If it affected us, then we would go to the table and say, "This is good," or "This is not good."

AB: So TRIC, out there, has had an enormous impact, as you say, on housing and capacity issues. Do you think that its existence is changing how Regional Planning needs to work, because it's not even in Washoe County?

GM: Absolutely.

AB: Does that mean things need to be rethought a little bit?

GM: I agree one hundred percent, they do need to be rethought a little bit. I think the Regional Planning Governing Board is now in the middle of doing another update, which has taken almost two-and-a-half years. There have been stumbling blocks; there always are. I don't think it should take that long. Here again, there's too much bickering and fighting and no compromising, and that kind of stuff. So that's probably what's led to this. But absolutely, they're going through that now with the Regional Plan, to try to take that into consideration. I mean, they'd better take it into consideration, because it impacts us, whether we like it or not. And it will continue to impact us. There are only going to be more jobs created out there. They're creating more and more all the time. You listen to what's happening, and talk to EDAWN [the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada] and Mike Kazmierski, and you know how he's talking. Employment's coming, and you'd better be ready for it. So we're trying to gear up for it.

AB: Do you think that you will be able to, or will be expected to, stay out of these conversations, now that you're no longer working in an official capacity? Do you have any interest in remaining involved?

GM: Let me think. No. [laughs] Well, I shouldn't say that. I'm interested, yes, in what's going to affect Sparks. I mean, I've poured my life into this place. So I don't want to let it go now, not that I'm going to have any influence or try to influence anybody, but if somebody asks, I'll give them my opinion. There's no doubt about it. I'm not afraid to talk about it. Let's put it this way: I'll keep my eye on it, and if I see something I don't like, I'll let somebody know. I have my whole life poured into this city, and I love this city. It's a great place. Everything that I've ever done is related to this city. I've lived here all my life, I've worked here all my life. Everything I've done is Sparks. I don't want to give it up now.

AB: Is there anything else that you'd like to discuss in terms of the growth of Sparks and its development?

GM: I've enjoyed seeing how it's grown. I think we've done a pretty good job of letting it grow, making it grow, whatever you want to call it. We've grown, I think, in the right areas. When all is said and done, when we annexed Spanish Springs, it was a big controversy because it was tough to make the rational nexus. There was no rational nexus that would let us develop out there. It wasn't contiguous to where we were; it wasn't connected, really, to where we were—maybe by the corner of a piece of land here that might have connected with something out there. It was a stretch to build out there, and it was a big gamble for the people that built that there—the Lowes and Harvey Whittemore, and those folks. It worked out good, though, fortunately. And that's one issue that we had. But the Council now is going to continue to work on things, and I think, let it grow where it needs to grow, and keep an eye on it, and make sure we make the right decisions. We don't always make the right decisions. We think we do; we have great staff, they give us good information, we digest that information, and then it's up to us to make a decision, one way or another, on the information we get. And our Council's pretty good about working with the staff and paying attention and reading their information and being prepared when they meet together.

So I think it's been good. People think maybe sometimes we've grown too fast. And sometimes I think maybe that's happened, too. But as I look back, I don't have any regrets about what's happened, or what I did, or the decisions I've made. I'm kind of a risk-taker, so I was willing to take some risks. You make a decision, you go with it, and then you do what you have to do to make it work. A few people complain about this, complain about that, and I tell them, "Look, get off your butt and do something, or shut up." I call those people the CAVE people. Those are Citizens Against Virtually Everything, and I tell them, "If you don't like what's going on, then get involved, put some skin in the game, and do something. But get off your ass, okay? Don't sit on your butt on the couch and then complain about what's going on. Do something."

And I think that's what I did. I was upset with some of the things that were going on, and when Tony asked me to get involved, I thought it was a good idea, and I did. I got off my rear end, and I would do it all over again. I wish I was still there, really. I just loved it. The best job I ever had was on City Council and being Mayor of this city. Awesome.

AB: I want to thank you so much for talking with me today.

GM: My pleasure; I've enjoyed it. Sometimes my memory's not as good as it should or could be, I guess, but I've had a good run. I love this place, and like I said, I'd do it all over again. I loved the job. Thank you for interviewing me; I appreciate that.