

Oral History of Neal Potter Transcript

**Montgomery County Councilmember 1970–1990 & 1994-1998
Montgomery County Executive 1990-1994**

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Oral History of Neal Potter 1915 - 1970

Introduction (taping done on 12/12/97)

My name is Anne Brown, and I am conducting an Oral History interview of Neal Potter for the Montgomery County Archives. This is the first of two tapings and will cover Councilmember Neal Potter's early years from 1915 through 1970, when Mr. Potter was first elected to the Montgomery County Council.

Mr. Potter, who is known as the elder statesman of the Montgomery County Council, is currently serving his sixth term as Councilmember. He has led the Council three times as president. Mr. Potter was County Executive from 1990 to 1994. He has received numerous honors while in public office, including the Governor's Citation, the Metropolitan Council of Government's Metropolitan Public Service Award, the Sentinel newspaper's Citizen of the Year Award, the National Association of Counties' Distinguished Service Award, the Audubon Naturalist Society's Legislator of the Year Award, and the Montgomery County Civic Federation's Citation for Distinguished Public Service.

Mr. Potter is a man of vision and high integrity and possesses a quick, independent mind. He is considered a liberal on many social and economic issues but follows a slow-growth philosophy for the residents and environment of Montgomery County. He is often described as a workaholic and a stickler for detail. These characteristics coupled with an insistence on knowing all the facts before making a decision are no doubt the reasons for his political longevity.

Neal Potter was born in 1915 in Arlington, Virginia. His father was a federal employee and commuted to Washington, D.C. where he worked for the Department of Agriculture. When Mr. Potter was five, his father left his

government position and bought a 35-acre farm for \$10,000 in Cabin John, Maryland. Cabin John is a tiny township south of Great Falls in Montgomery County, Maryland.

Questions

Mr. Potter, the Cabin John area, where you grew up on your family's farm, is quite hilly and rugged and seems like a tough location to farm. The dropping of the Potomac River from the rockiness at the edge of the Piedmont Plateau to the Coastal Plain is very evident in that area. What kind of farming did your family do?

We adapted to the landscape you might say. Dad at one time tried to straighten the stream, Rock Run, to keep it from flooding the fields too much. As always, the flood plain was the best land and if it was immersed heavily from a summer storm, the crop might be ruined. You can imagine what it would mean doing that work using a horse and a scoop. It was quite a job, but it helped production. We were truck and dairy farmers. Cows lived off the hilly pasture and about 30 acres of the farm was cultivated. In one big patch he had a fruit orchard of apples and peaches and the terror was that a late frost would kill the blossoms. Bugs were also a concern. It takes a lot of spraying to raise fruit.

Your father, besides being very intellectual, was quite industrious. I understand he made various improvements to the farm, such as installing the first plumbing to the farm house.

The farm house when we arrived had no central heating, central plumbing or electricity. That was quite a job, and Dad did most of it himself. The first thing he did was to get a telephone and put in the poles along the bank of the canal down to the nearest connection in Cabin John. He put in the poles and the telephone company put in the lines. It was a party line and if you wanted to ring you had to ring the right number for people you wanted to reach on your own line and ask the operator to ring others. Our ring was two, two -- two long rings and two short rings. He got a big outdoor bell that could be heard around the farm because we were not in the house much of the time. That was the first improvement.

The next one was the plumbing. He found a spring up the hillside on the other side of MacArthur Boulevard, it was then Conduit Road, which was as high as the roof of the house so he could have enough pressure to have a second-story bathroom. He put the pipe in and built a little dam around the spring to get the intake and built it all the way across the farm to the house. He put in all the plumbing, including the second-story plumbing, which with the big, heavy cast iron pipes was quite a job.

The next thing that he did was to get the electric power in. That was quite a trick because he tried to get the Potomac Electric Power Company to build a line from a half-mile away at the edge of Cabin John, but they wouldn't do that until along came the Rural Electrification Administration in 1933 when the Roosevelt Administration pushed for more electrification. Pepco then saw the "handwriting on the wall" and built the line to the edge of our farm. Dad put up the poles on the farm from which he built lights to illuminate the chickenyard and barnyard for the cows. That was quite a job to get electricity to the farm and then to several buildings on the farm.

I understand your father had a 10-pound Army field radio that he "souped up" so that it could pick up Los Angeles. What kind of modifications did he make to improve the reception?

There was a radio buff that lived about a mile from us, and he sold the radio to my father. The problem was then to get an aerial as those radios wouldn't receive indoors. Dad strung the aerial between two large trees on the farm and ran the wire from there to the house and to the set. It was a one tube radio, and you had to have two batteries, one low-voltage, to light the filament in the tube, which was a very small tube, and the other a B-battery of 22 volts to provide the potential to move the current within the set. It was a very good set that the Army had built and that's how we came to get Los Angeles on New Year's Eve. We could tell it was Los Angeles because they were celebrating at 3 o'clock in the morning.

Did you listen to radio talk shows or news programs together as a routine part of family life?

No, because you had to listen to radios in those days with earphones, one at a time. We would listen to it for entertainment, more often though for news.

There was a great snowstorm when you were a boy called the Knickerbocker Storm, which caused the roof of the Knickerbocker Theater in Washington to cave in. How did that huge storm affect the farm?

I think it was 1922, and Dad sent me to shovel out our driveway, which was fairly long. It was coming down so fast that I almost had to shovel my way back once I got to Conduit Road. Conduit Road was so heavily covered with snow that no car could make it, and Dad couldn't take his Model T down there with any hope of arriving at customer's houses so he hitched up the horse to the buggy. Fortunately, we had a buggy with very narrow wheels, about an inch wide, that could cut through the snow to some extent. But when the snow is two-feet deep, the snow clings to the spokes and caused the horse to break the singletree, and Dad had to create a makeshift hitch to keep it going and get around the route. The next day he built a sledge and set out with the horse again. Before he completed the route, men had mobilized to shovel out the roads. They didn't have snowplows, it had to be shoveled.

In reading the history of Montgomery County, there is always reference to the trolley era. Trolleys ran from Washington to the suburbs in Montgomery County. It must have been quite a thrill riding the open trolleys with no side restraints or safety belts, especially when it traveled through the hilly sections of Glen Echo and Cabin John.

We didn't often ride those open cars. Usually, the cars to the end of the line (we lived a mile and a half beyond the end of the line) had enclosed cars with a conductor and motor man for the one car. We would usually ride to the City. It got more thrilling, you might say, as things went along because the old tracks had become quite wobbly. They would knock along above the bluffs overlooking the Potomac down to Georgetown where they would stop the car and change from the trolley they used in the country to the plow that went down the third rail in the City.

The Cabin John Bridge, which was completed in 1863, was for nearly half a century a world famous engineering marvel -- the longest single-span masonry bridge in the world. The bridge was built to carry the Washington aqueduct over the Cabin John ravine, bringing water from Great Falls to Washington. I understand it used to be a popular picnic spot.

The Cabin John Hotel, which was built there to take advantage of the streetcar and people's desire to get out of the hot city, was quite a resort area. It had a marvelous organ. Glen Echo was built by the street and railway company about a mile and a half from the end of the line. They did a lot of business there, and it became a wonderful area for kids. We used to love to go there and would nag our parents to get us down there and put us on the merry-go-round. We found the rollercoaster a little frightening as it would go way up and then pitch down into the stream valley. We very much enjoyed the boat ride that went through the tunnel and, most of all, the bumper cars. The building is still standing, but it is very decayed and undergoing rebuilding.

Did you frequent Great Falls Park?

We occasionally went up there. It was about 5 miles upstream. There was a bridge you had to go across that an entrepreneur had built on cables across the stream to the island where you could go to see the main falls. I remember that it cost 5 cents to cross the bridge. It was a good enterprise as not only was it pretty economical to get there, although a nickel then is worth about 50 cents today, but being on cables if a flood hit it, it would tear off some of the boards, but the cables would still be there so the bridge could be rebuilt. It was fun.

But even more fun was Widewater, a mile and a half below Great Falls, which was a great place to swim and picnic so we often went to that area.

Since your parents were both Phi Beta Kappa graduates, was the importance of education stressed when you were growing up?

Not heavily, but I remember Mother getting after me for a year or so to try to get me to start reading. She finally found a book called *The Little Red Hen*, which had so much repetition of language that once I learned three or four words, I found it very easy to read. From that point, I became quite a reader. Dad was good in mathematics and liked to go through my homework and show me how to do it when I had problems, and even sometimes when I didn't. I remember when I got into trigonometry in high school, he did not know the identities, which I didn't know either, of this equaled that and so forth that had to be translated into steps to find the solution. Well, he did it by algebra. I don't know how he even found the right answer, but he did.

You have a very extensive knowledge of plants and flowers, especially wild flowers? Is your father responsible for that knowledge?

No, he was an expert on agriculture. My Mother was a botanist, and she loved wildflowers, which she would find along the river and canal and on the farm. She was quite a good artist and drew them. She had practiced that in college. So she was the source of that fascination.

The principal of your school, Guy Jewell, would sometimes stop by for a piece of your mother's gingerbread. Were there other influential people that stopped by to discuss major issues of the day?

No, it was no center for that, although Dad would sometimes discuss and argue with people who had some background to argue things. Very often people would come there either to visit the canal or the lockkeepers. I remember one family came down from Cumberland, which was quite a car trip in those days, to visit the canal people. Most came either to fish in the canal or river or simply to hike along the towpath and canal. So those were the large proportion who came other than relatives.

Your father ran for the U.S. Senate as a write-in candidate opposing the New Deal. Did his involvement in politics spark an early interest in civic and government affairs?

Yes, but it wasn't that candidacy. He did that to try to get some of his ideas on the air because in those days radio or TV coverage was required for candidates so he got some free time. My interest was sparked in County politics largely, and by the overriding power of the Brooke Lee machine. Dad was a very strong opponent of Lee's, and I learned some of the problems as the Brooke Lee machine tended to dominate and push things through that we did not favor because of the money or what it did to the community.

You were a teenager when the Great Depression hit. How did life change for your family?

Dad took immediate steps when the bank panic hit and put \$500 worth of gold in a safe deposit box, which is equivalent to \$5,000 today. A lot of people did that so Roosevelt terminated the payment in gold and called it all back. I guess that

preparation for trouble helped financially, and Dad inherited a little money, which also helped. The farm just didn't pay well in those days because everything was so financially depressed.

Your mother was an organizer of the Farm Women's Cooperative Market, which began operation in 1932. The Women's Farm Market is still in operation today in Bethesda on a very valuable piece of property on Wisconsin Avenue. I understand there was some opposition to women establishing the market and taking out a bank loan to get it started. There were some members of the community that didn't think it was appropriate for women to go into debt.

As I heard it, the big objection was having this big market under a tent on Old Georgetown Road a block of so from Edgemoor, which is a rather expensive development that had just been built. They went to Brooke Lee with their objection and said, "Get it out of here," which he did. He saw to the construction of the present building there on Wisconsin Avenue and got them to move over there. That split the farm women as some didn't like getting pushed around by the "County boss" so they organized their own group and opened a place near where Hecht's is now in Friendship Heights. It wasn't too successful, partly, because it was too small, so eventually it folded and moved up to the present Farm Market building.

The Women's Farm Market helped many farm families survive the Depression. Agricultural prices had dropped and farmers in the County were among the hardest hit by the Depression. For many, the extra income is what helped keep farmers going during the tough 30s.

It was an immediate attraction for a number of farmers. Of course, fresh fruits and vegetables weren't always in season so eggs and baked goods were things that became quite prevalent in the market. Some of the women were excellent bakers and were far ahead of what you could get in a regular grocery and that made people come. We sold from the farm fresh Golden Bantam corn, which wasn't very beautiful, but it was delicious. We would get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to pick it and get it over there a little after the opening of the market. People would already be lined up because they knew it was the best and had just been picked. (It wasn't picked the day before and allowed to get stale.) So that was another attraction that really brought people in.

Was your mother also involved in other educational and civic activities?

Not much, she was not politically minded. She helped me along as I got colds and tonsillitis rather persistently beginning in the second and third grades, so Mother got the teachers to agree to give me the books and let me stay home, away from all those bugs. She helped see that I did some homework, and when I went back into school in the seventh grade, I seemed to be generally up with the students. There was one little trick on grammar that I hadn't learned that cost me a grade once, but that was the only problem I can remember.

When you were in 9th grade, you won a prestigious essay contest. What was the subject of that essay, and how did the winning of that prize affect you?

I don't know about the winning but working up to be able to do that essay gave me cause for a good deal of thinking. It was on the Kellogg-Briand Pact, in which a hundred and some nations abjured war forever, at least as a policy. The essay contest was in 1929 -- the Briand Pact was in 1928. I think the sponsors of it thought this was great for people to realize how much had been done for peace. But I studied up on this, and I remember going down to the Library of Congress for the first time in my life. The guard asked me how old I was. It was my fifteenth birthday, and I was very disgusted when he said you had to be sixteen, so I couldn't go in. I did get a book or two on this somewhat technical subject and came to recognize that the Kellogg-Briand Pact was, as we say these days, "just a piece of paper," and anybody that wanted to violate it could. Of course, Hitler was already mobilizing and came to power about two years later, and things went downhill from there.

All during college there were peace strikes. We had the isolationists that wanted to stay away from it all and let Europe fight it out. A group on the other side, led by left-wing communists, was foreseeing that Hitler would attack the Soviet Union, so they fought very hard for intervention. I was sort of in-between. I couldn't be a pacifist or an isolationist as I knew too much about Hitler to possibly accept that. On the other hand, I wasn't eager to get in it so I was pushing for the League of Nations, an alliance. When Clarence Streit came along and wrote *Union Now*, which was published in 1939, I was very much for it. This was the kind of union we needed -- to have nations stand together, to be integrated to fight the threats of the dictatorships. That came very late, and the war started in 1939.

You and your brother had a six-mile bike ride to Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School from the farm. It seems you were quite industrious as a teenager. You were the editor of the B-CC High School Year Book, plus you were the Student Council President for two years. You were also involved with the B-CC High School newsletter, "The Tattler," which boasts that it is currently the longest, continuously published student newspaper in Montgomery County. Tell me about those days.

The Tattler was only four pages, was linotypeset, and printed on the Eastern Shore, so it had to be ferried across the Chesapeake Bay to the printer and ferried back, which took several days. It was a slow publication and didn't carry much "hot" news. It did pull the B-CC group together though, and students recognized what they could do, what was important, and how to communicate it. It really laid a foundation for the yearbook, which started in 1932.

My involvement with the Student Council was very interesting. First, you had to get elected, then the Council elected the president and other officers. I was astonished at being nominated and elected twice. It was a problem, you might say, getting some effective self-assertion against the mandates of the principal, but he was a fairly tolerant man, Thomas W. Pyle. (There's a school named for him here.)

I guess the one thing that started it was an English teacher, Mrs. Sullivan, who came after me one day when I was in the 10th Grade and said, "We need cheerleaders, why don't you apply?" As a farm boy, that was one of the last things on my mind. Well, at her urging I tried out with 10 or so competitors. When we were put through the motions, I picked up one of the megaphones. Well, it turned out the others were even more bashful than I was, so I became the chief cheerleader. We had an excellent basketball team with Bill Guckeyson as captain. The playing field at B-CC is named for him. That was an exciting squad -- they came within one game of being state champions! He sprained his ankle in the first quarter, and we just didn't make it. He was a terrific athlete. The auditorium faced the gymnasium then, and there were folding doors so it could be opened up and everyone could sit in seats comfortably indoors and watch. Well, that meant the cheerleaders were often on the stage, so that's how I got to be known.

You met your wife, Marion, at B-CC when you were in the 10th grade?

Yes, we happened to take the same history class. In junior high school, in the eighth grade actually, Guy Jewell gave us a history course because he was disappointed in our test results from the seventh grade. He put together a terrific course. We kept big notebooks with all the dates and maps, and he had a whole little library in the back of the room from which you could pick out books. He recommended some on the Civil War, some from the Southern point of view, and some from the abolitionists' point of view. That was educational in matters of controversy as well as history. So I really knew my American history when I was in tenth grade as we had to take it over again because junior high subjects aren't given credit toward graduation. Well, I found it a bit boring but the teacher would ask questions and I would always know the answer. So Marion thought I was the smartest boy, even though I had just really been trained in advance.

I understand you had a large group of friends, of which Marion was one, who palled around together. What did you do for recreation?

I became the mainstay of the crowd, I think, because I lived on the farm, which was at the gateway to the river where everyone loved to swim. I'd be chopping away at weeds and they'd drive up and say, "Let's go swimming." I'd scoff at the idea, but it was usually so hot, I'd join them. It was a couple hundred yards to the river, so we'd hike over to where there was a little beach and a backwater of the river. It was very pleasant. So we stuck together -- we often had picnics by the river, most often on the rocks at the Widewater area. We would take what is now called the Billy Goat Trail to get there -- it was quite a scramble. It's a beautiful place at the bottom of the Potomac Gorge. We'd build a camp fire in the evening and often have a problem finding the path back -- it went through the woods and a rocky area. I often wore sandals that I had made at Boy Scout Camp called Indian sandals with no sole, just a piece of soft leather, so I could feel the path and lead them back in the pitch dark. We almost never carried a flashlight.

You began your college career on a scholarship to Johns Hopkins, a very prestigious, arduous university. You carried well over 20-credits. Why did you take such a heavy workload?

I guess it was because I was interested in so many things and had not picked out a career. Dad had somewhat steered me in the direction of economics, but it turned out that economics was not Johns Hopkins' strong point in those days. I was going to school with a lot of pre-meds, so I thought I'd take their biology course and see

what they had to go through and see how much it interested me. They had a very good engineering school, so I took physics to see whether I could match up to the engineering students. And, I wanted to get everything there was to be had in the first year of physics. I was also very interested in languages and took the advanced French course when I was a freshman. In my sophomore year, I had signed up for 22 credits for all these things I wanted to take -- history, there was a terrific two-year history course that has stood me in good stead to this day -- the history of occidental civilization, not just American history. My French professor saw me one day and he said "Potter, you ought to be taking my Spanish course. I have a second year course with only five students. I'm sure you can pick it up -- I know where you can get a secondhand grammar." The first day he spoke nothing but Spanish and practically scared me out of the place. But I studied diligently and eventually got a fair grounding in Spanish as well. But that added 5 credits, it was a daily course, so that took me up to 27 credits.

When I went to Minnesota, they decided that no one could take 27 credits and survive. As a new student, they only wanted you to take 15, which I thought was absurd. They disallowed a number of credits I had earned at Hopkins, and I thought how good did Minnesota think it was? I was interested in psychology and had taken one course at Hopkins so I took two that first year at Minnesota, which would have taken the number of credits up to 21. So I didn't sign up for them as the Dean wouldn't allow it. I was also interested in music (I had taken a little bit of piano when I was younger) and added two more credits. I took the exams without ever getting or reading the textbooks and passed them all, but I couldn't have the credits. The Dean called me in and reprimanded me for taking all these extra courses; my grades were not all that bad in any of them, but the credits were disallowed.

With the idle time, I got quite involved in politics, which I had done somewhat at Hopkins. Minnesota was in the midst of the Democratic Farmer-Labor revolution then. Minnesota had a DFL Governor who died soon after I arrived, but the party was still very strong and a lot of the students I went with were very interested in it.

You have a deep devotion to the cause of world peace. Was there a specific event that triggered this? Weren't you involved in a peace strike when you were a freshman at Johns Hopkins?

That's true. I'd won a scholarship and thought it was ridiculous to skip an hour. I valued all the courses and that's why I was taking so many credits. But as I walked

from one class to another I passed Levering Hall, where the strike was mobilized with the speakers on the steps. As I went by, my history teacher, whom I had a great deal of admiration for, was speaking in support of the strikers. Well, one of the engineering ruffians had gotten the fire hose from inside the building and turned on the faucet and squirted it through an open window and drenched the history prof. I told myself if that was the opposition, I was with the professor, so I joined the strike right then and there and didn't go to my next class.

The following year I was heavily involved with some of the leaders of it. I wrote a nasty editorial in the Newsletter about the people who stood back and jeered. Well, that article almost got me dunked in the cooling pond for the power plant they had at Johns Hopkins -- it was back-up for Baltimore Gas and Electric. I was grabbed between classes and four students started to haul me across campus -- one man for each limb. We were halfway across when they were stopped dead by the other editor, who had come running across the campus and knocked them down, even though he was a little guy. That led to a very heated, strenuous argument that went on for two hours in the middle of the campus.

Did you also go to Annapolis for political reasons when you were at Johns Hopkins?

Yes, the year the "red hunt" was on the Legislature passed 300 bills the last night of a 60-day session, and Governor Nice, a Republican, decided to put them all to a hearing. He held the hearing, since they hadn't, and heard these bills one by one. So when this came up, Johns Hopkins sent a delegation, a well-esteemed professor of philosophy and a student leader, who was myself. We rode down to Annapolis and gave our testimony before the Governor. And he vetoed the bill. You see, Johns Hopkins was not about to tolerate that kind of suppression of free speech. There was a socialist professor in one of my economics courses and an avowed communist teaching philosophy. He didn't try to teach any Marxism or anything like that, just what was wrong with capitalism. He was very interesting, but out of 20 students, he never made a convert.

You performed graduate work in economics at the University of Chicago. Wasn't there some type of nuclear testing being done there?

Yes, I learned figure skating under the north stand of the football field. Chicago had abandoned football at that point because of the "Big 10;" they were always at the bottom so they gave it up. But in the west stand they set up the first nuclear

pile in the world that became reactive, and basically, atomic scientists made a great leap there. I didn't know anything about it as it was very secret work.

You did undergraduate and graduate work at the University of Minnesota, where both your parents had attended college, and like your parents, were a Phi Beta Kappa graduate. Why did you decide to major in economics and political science?

Well, the Depression had quite an impact on everybody in those days and their thinking. While I intended to be an engineer, the jobs for engineers were negligible so I decided to study what was going on, why did we have this depression, which meant studying economics. Political science was, what shall I say, a part of my interest in politics and doing something about what I had learned -- out of the academic and into the practical.

After you married, you began your career in 1941 as the head of the Income Analysis Unit of the Office of Price Administration. What type of work did you do?

I didn't become head of Income Analysis Unit for two or three years. I worked my way up in the economic work I was doing there. As head of Income Analysis, and throughout, I was mainly studying the inflationary gap, the difference between consumer and industrial demand and the available goods. Taxes could suppress the demand sufficiently, but that was a little too strenuous for Congress, so they set up price controls. Of course, a lot of prices leaked up as the War went on, particularly the scarce things like steel, aluminum, and various alloys so they needed very early to put on some restraints there. Then, as you tried to control the whole economy from going into an inflationary spiral, the amount of the inflationary gap, how much disposable income people had versus available goods, became an important study. The Office of Price Administration, where I worked, had a section studying demand and a section studying supply. In studying the demand side, I was particularly involved with studying taxes and how much they were restraining the disposable income. So, I became somewhat of an expert in forecasting the yield from income taxes and the income that was made. In those days, I basically knew the Income Tax Acts from 1913, which is what I studied for my master's thesis, to 1939. Now, it's very difficult to figure out the Tax Relief Act of 1997 as it's so absurdly complicated, I don't think anyone knows it.

After teaching economics at Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie-Mellon), you became an Assistant Professor of Economics at Washington State College for four years. Did you enjoy teaching and lecturing?

Yes, most of all teaching the students who were really up to it, not just spending time there. At Carnegie Tech the engineers were among the brightest in the field, and they were told that they were expected to be leaders in industry and economics was something they would need. They went at it hard. They knew their math so you didn't have to teach them elementary algebra, and it went very fast. They only had one semester, but they were taught a lot. That was very interesting and fun.

At Washington State, we didn't have just engineers by any means. We had a lot of war veterans at that time, and those guys were very interested in getting a good education in a hurry, because they were, of course, older. It was a great pleasure to teach them. Some of the kids just out of high school just weren't oriented for complicated subjects, and I had to tutor some of them to get them through it.

Tell me about the early days of the World Federalists Association. Who were some of the people that were involved?

The World Federalists Association then was formed as United World Federalists in February of 1947 in the midst of a terrible snowstorm, so I almost didn't make it. As I mentioned, I joined Clarence Streit's organization in 1939. I joined a split-off organization that was looking not just for democratic countries union but all countries to keep the arms race and war under control. The World Federalists organization started in 1942. Americans United for World Organization initially had been formed as an organization to secure ratification of the U.N. Charter. When the atomic bomb came along, it was clear the U.N. Charter wasn't up to the job, so it became the Americans United for World Government. These two, the Student Federalists, and a couple of state organizations, all got together at Asheville, North Carolina, in February 1947 and formed United World Federalists.

I was a delegate coming from Pittsburgh. At the time I was teaching at Carnegie Tech. We drove down as far as we could through this terrible snowstorm, then got a train, and then a taxi, because the train didn't go to Asheville. Americans United for World Government in Pittsburgh was a leading chapter, and to this day is an outstanding chapter because certain people have dedicated themselves to it and

civic and university leaders are a part of it. That's where we had our last convention, last fall, with the national organization.

I was intensely interested, but I found Pittsburgh intolerable because the post-war prosperity had made the air pollution incredibly bad -- the kind of thing we hear about now in east Germany or Russia. It was terrible, very unhealthy and dirty, so we decided to leave Pittsburgh. I checked around to see who needed a prof and found that one of the men I had worked with in the Office of Price Administration was looking for a professor. I called him up in Pullman, Washington, and said if you get us housing, which we had a hard time getting in Pittsburgh, I'll come. So we did. We loaded up everything and took off. I promptly formed a World Federalists Chapter with the support of the president of the university, Wilson Compton. We got other leaders around the state and became quite a strong organization.

You took a position from 1951 to 1954 as Field Director for the World Federalists organization in the Pacific Northwest. I understand you did a lot of driving in those days--about 3,000 miles a month. Tell me about your work.

The atomic bomb was the first scare. The Korean War was the next because people thought my god, we're getting into World War III -- Russia's backing one side of the Korean War, and we're backing the other -- how will this develop? So the World Federalists in Washington and Oregon put together enough money to hire a field director and put me on the road. I got a new car, well, a second-hand one that was more capable of handling those long distances. I was pretty constantly on the road, as you say 3,000 miles a month, covering not only Washington and Oregon, both of which are big states, but Idaho. And Idaho is a larger state than you'd think. The first congressional district of Idaho, which I got involved with getting rid of a bad congressman, was 1,000 miles from one end to the other. A thousand miles for a congressional district! (You know, in this county we have a congressional district totally within the county, and in fact, we have some left over, which adjoins with Prince George's and is another congressional district.) So that meant long-distance travel. I occasionally went down to Salt Lake, it was only a couple hundred miles further from eastern Idaho, to help spur the chapter there, which also exists to this day and is fairly strong. They signed up some of the leading politicians despite the negative influence of the Mormons.

Over the years, you have remained very active in the World Federalists Association. You were President of the Washington State Chapter from 1948 to 1950, you were president of the Metropolitan Washington area chapter from 1956 to 1957, you were national vice president in 1967, and you are a long-time member of the National Executive Committee. Has the mission of the World Federalists Association changed over the years?

Yes, somewhat. You know, people were so startled and afraid from the atomic bomb that you could get lots of support. In 1948, principally under our sponsorship but with a lot of help, we got (I think it was) 160 Congressmen to back a resolution calling for the transformation of the United Nations into a world government, and there were 20 Senators. So that was a high point in terms of Congressional support.

Joe McCarthy's regime, which came along with the Korean War, scared a lot of people from belonging to anything. The World Federalists had never been infiltrated by the communists, in fact, the communists in the Soviet Union regarded World Federalism as their enemy. They didn't want anyone to join because it would expose their weakness for one thing. So they called it a capitalist plot. The FBI went after various people, some people thought Joe McCarthy ought to go after us, but neither one ever investigated the World Federalists. Nevertheless, some people thought "I better get out of this before I lose my job," so our membership went down a good deal then. Even in the midst of that, we were able to defeat the isolationists right wing and unseat an extremist congressman from Idaho and elected the first congresswoman from Idaho. We got Gracie Pstot through with the aid of 30,000 leaflets we sent out. She won by about 600 votes.

We kept at it, but in the 1960s, we were having trouble all along, partly with finances, and we decided to change it to an educational organization, which occurred in the early '70s. Tax exemption helped the finances, and clearly, the job then was education. People had forgotten what the atomic bomb meant. What you could do with the United Nations as is and simple amendments could help a great deal -- like having a court with some mandatory powers, having a limited peace-keeping force, and those things are struggling into existence, of course, these days. If we ever get the guts to go after the criminals in Bosnia, for example, and do something with them, I think it would be a real step in progress. So, we have focused our political action toward the international criminal court, which tries individuals, not nations -- which is a bit of an absurdity. But international law

being what it is, that's the way you handle things, and of course, the nation which is found guilty, simply withdraws from the court and forgets the whole thing. The United States did that with respect to a decision about mining harbors in Nicaragua and so that and paying the U.N. dues is the other thing we concentrate on these days. You know, how much blood and money will it cost us to protect ourselves if we don't have the United Nations is something we try to get across to people. We also have a political arm that works with Congressmen.

How has the breakdown of communism affected the World Federalists Association?

Well, you might say one of our enemies is gone. Gorbachev and others have been very friendly to the World Federalists' idea, in fact, they preached it more than any of our presidents. Kennedy was very good on that in the days of Khrushchev when it didn't seem impossible to get together with the Soviets. The United States has become so somnolent about the matter despite what we hear about Bosnia or even some of the terrible things in Africa that we don't worry about it. We fight over taxes and other things that are of far secondary importance.

I understand you signed up Senator Frank Church to the cause of world peace.

Yes, he was quite politically minded, in fact, he married the Governor's daughter. He was an excellent speechmaker and was an active lawyer in Boise when I visited there. I got a date with him, and he signed up in about 10 minutes. He had thought it through completely. His father-in-law had a fit because he thought that would kill him in Idaho. It didn't. His principal competitor for the nomination was an avowed World Federalist, Glen Taylor, who was the cowboy with the guitar and song. He won one term, but after people found out about him and his relative lightweight in the Senate, a Republican won. Church then had to get the nomination if the Democrats were to have a chance. And he gave them what help he could and came through with the narrowest of margins in the primary because of Senator Glen Taylor's competition. So Idaho was not as much in the dark ages as some people thought. And then he was able to win the General Election and stayed for several terms and became Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He did what he could to advance things like the United Nations and defending the United States by, what shall I say, less bloody ways.

Wasn't Senator Alan Cranston also involved in the World Federalists Association?

Yes, he entered the activity very early, sometime during the War. In 1946 when the United Nations was being formed he took a draft revision of the United Nations Charter which had been created by Grenville Clark, a prominent lawyer, and Louis Sohn, who was a professor of law. They put together quite a textbook on World Peace Through World Law. The first draft of that was taken by Alan Cranston to London, I think it was, where the United Nations was being formed.

Were you also involved in the United Nations?

Very much so. I belong to the United Nations Association, which has enthusiastic support. It has a wonderful chapter here in Washington. That is part of the educational job.

There is a very sad chapter in your life when your younger daughter contracted leukemia. Do you think the area in Washington state where you were living had anything to do with her illness?

I think likely it did. We didn't conceive of it at the time at all, but the doctor where Freda May was taken first commented that he had seen quite a number of leukemia cases lately. This was in Walla Walla, Washington. We wondered why, but thought it was just better analysis coming forth or something. A little over a decade ago, the information was finally released that the Army had ordered massive discharges of radioactive iodine from Hanford, which was a hundred miles upwind from us. Some people say that was a disaster comparable to Chernobyl in the Ukraine. So that may well have been the cause.

In 1955 you moved your family back to Washington so your daughter could receive treatment at the National Institutes of Health.

Yes, we were very lucky to get her in. We brought her back to see the family. The doctor worked on this because he was doing a lot of experimentation on cancer and leukemia, so they took her. The patients are guinea pigs, but their guinea pigs are treated better than most hospitals treat any of their patients. It was a very good stay, but it only lasted about six months.

You have another daughter, JoAnn Kemp. Does she live in this area?

Yes, she does -- in Granby Woods, which is near enough so we visit each other fairly often, and often on the telephone.

After moving back to Washington, you began your long career with Resources for the Future. You co-authored "Trends in U.S. Natural Resource Commodities from 1870 to 1957" and "World Prospects for Natural Resource." You wrote "Natural Resource Potentials of the Antarctic," which was published in 1969. Did you actually travel to the Antarctic?

Yes, that was a very interesting 15 years I spent at Resources for the Future. I had to examine all the production, consumption, export, import, price levels and so forth of all the resource commodities. It was really quite a book, sort of an encyclopedic volume. It took 5 years, together with 3 staff members, to pull all that miscellaneous information from all over into one piece.

Then on the Antarctic job -- I had just finished that book when the National Science Foundation, which was managing various efforts in the Antarctic, asked Resources for the Future for somebody to examine what the resource potentials of the Antarctic might be. So Joe Fisher, who was then head of Resources for the Future, picked me. I had finished a work and had a gap so I could do it.

I spent over a year studying the Antarctic -- there's a lot to read on it. The best book on the geography and resources of the Antarctic turned out to be Russian. A beautiful, big atlas -- all in Russian. The Israelis had created a little book to translate everything, map by map, and text by text into English so I was able to use that. The Russians were really ahead of us there for a while. The visit down there was fascinating. I took a ship instead of just flying from Washington to the Antarctic, which had become available by that time; that was 1966. Jets could fly direct from Washington to McMurdo Field. But I took a ship because I wanted to see what the practicable problems of importing anything from the Antarctic would be if we found anything. That was about a month-long trip. I flew down to Santiago and then to Punta Arenas to save a couple of weeks. That was a fascinating boat trip -- through all kinds of ice and storms -- there was a tail end of a typhoon that caused 40-foot swells -- great, big mountainous waves! The ship was tipping and pitching. That was quite a trip.

You worked for 15 years as a Research Associate with Resources for the Future. What major changes have you seen in the availability and demand for natural resources?

In petroleum, we went from being a major exporter to an importer just after I finished writing that book in 1957. Of course, now we import about half of our petroleum so we are very dependent on other places. Petroleum has declined in price, which in a sense is contradictory, as the overall shortage of petroleum is almost upon us. Perhaps that's why we have global warming -- from too much burning. The one thing in which the indicators are the same is in lumber -- the prices went up relative to other prices, labor productivity went down despite the machinery, use got to be somewhat less relative to population and other things, so that was a clear indication that timber was running short. That went almost all the way through from 1870 until 1957.

Now let's focus on Montgomery County:

In reading the history of Montgomery County some names are very prominent and come up over and over. Col. E. Brooke Lee began his reign as the State Comptroller in 1920 and amassed power for over two decades, always putting Silver Spring first in many people's minds. What do you think of the era of Col. E. Brooke Lee?

He did many things right, like taking advantage of the proximity to the Capital City and the railroad service to Silver Spring. Even now we are still taking advantage of those things -- Metro is there now. Growth doesn't cost as much because certain public facilities are already there. So I think he did some good things. He had an interest in the land there, his family did, I guess he was taking advantage of that. The main problem I had with him was the way he would push people around. He would use undue influences -- it wasn't a fully democratic, open process. That's what I was fighting against -- his bossism and, what shall I say, his restraint of consensus and public discussions.

Col. Lee's power began to wane as Stella Werner gained strength with the Charter Movement. Did you know Stella Werner? What about Margaret Schweinhaut?

Yes, Stella Werner came out of the League of Women Voters, one of the forces in the Charter Movement in the 1940s after World War II. They eventually got an amendment to the Charter, I think it was 1948, and brought in a rather good Council, which was not with “the machine” at all. The machine began to reassert itself in the '50s, and I became very interested in 1958. I went to a meeting of the Suburban Democratic Club and heard Peggy Schweinhaut give a speech. It was only about a minute long, but it was a good speech. She laid it out against bossism, so I joined up with her crowd and worked on that election.

After World War II, housing development accelerated and Montgomery County became a suburban bedroom with a growing dependence on federal employment. The population doubled from 1946 to 1950 and doubled again in the '60s. The Washington suburbs were the second fastest growing area in the nation in the 1960s. The American dream of prosperity became a reality as never before in the nation's history with a significant number of families rising to the middle class. What did you think about this phenomenal growth?

We were away a lot of that time -- teaching in Pittsburgh at Carnegie Tech, then out in Washington state, and came back in 1954. After that seven-year period, we were sort of startled to see how much traffic and development had increased. By 1961, I guess it was, I joined the Citizens Planning Association, which was fighting to get some rationality in growth and to control the traffic and so on. In 1962 the *Wedges and Corridors Master Plan* came out, and I spoke up for that at once. I was the first public speaker in its favor because it made so much sense dealing with the problems that were growing apace.

The 1940s saw the suburbanization of retail centers. Prior to that, residents made major purchases, such as furniture and clothing, in Washington. The first shopping centers that were built in Silver Spring and Friendship Heights began taking business away from D.C. Later, in the 1950s, malls, first Wheaton Plaza then Montgomery Mall, began to take business away from those suburban retail centers, with detrimental effects that are still evident today in Silver Spring. What do you think of the transition from retail centers to shopping malls? Do you think shopping malls have had a positive effect on Montgomery County?

Yes and no. They draw a lot of congestion and cover enormous parking lots. The taxes are mainly sales taxes and go to the state -- we don't get anything out of that. They are a convenience in some ways. I remember the days when we would shop

downtown and Mother would take her two boys and walk a mile and a half to the streetcar line where it started, take it all the way downtown to Woodward & Lothrop's and Hecht's to shop; then there was the long trudge back home. If it were furniture or anything big, we would either get it delivered or pick it up in our little truck. We didn't do much buying though because income was limited. Mother and Dad had some wedding presents, such as the dining room table and a few things like that.

The malls certainly have their advantages, but they have their disadvantages too. I must say Wheaton Plaza harmed the Silver Spring development to some extent, and Hecht's eventually moved out there. But it is coming back, and I think people are looking at greater advantages there. Silver Spring never really developed as a shopping center, but Friendship Heights has basically on-street-front stores -- there is no mall there now, but there is a lot of shopping area on both the District of Columbia side and the Montgomery County side. Just in going through the Master Plan for the last year or two we have learned a lot about it -- what the problems are and what the possibilities are. The Hecht Company is very anxious to expand. So malls, I think, are down-trimming now, and the street-front shopping, which is characteristic of Friendship Heights, seems to be coming back again. I think that's what we're planning for Silver Spring now -- the entrepreneurs taking hold of it recognize that the mall proposal did not work in Silver Spring. It didn't fly, so they are going at it the other way, and I think they will come through with it.

The development of the atomic bomb initially pushed the Federal Government to decentralize government agencies in Washington and later the trend continued because of economic reasons and available land. The David Taylor Model Basin (also called the Naval Ship Research and Development Center) located at Carderock. The National Institutes of Health and the Naval Hospital located in Bethesda. The Atomic Energy Commission and the National Institute of Standards and Technology relocated to Montgomery County. How do you think these government agencies helped to shape the future of Montgomery County?

The fear of the atomic bomb did not account for the location of the David Taylor Model Basin because that was built before it was known. It was built at the beginning of World War II right next to our farm. We looked with apprehension at the thing, and it did give us some problems. Each of these agencies was started before the war and simply expanded. The National Institute of Standards and

Technology, the old Bureau of Standards, was in the District of Columbia and as they expanded their work in new fields, they felt the need to expand with all new buildings and acquired a great big campus and moved out there.

The Atomic Energy Commission, now the Department of Energy, in Germantown was in response to the atomic threat, but not much else was. It became so evident after the hydrogen bomb that everything would be destroyed, all our centers. One hydrogen bomb would destroy the whole city of Washington, and what meaning would one suburban department have in those circumstances? I think that is part of what we went away from. Partly, I guess it was forgetting about the atomic bomb. By the time the hydrogen bomb came along there was some terror, but we had gotten so used to it, the response was not great in terms of trying to be prepared. We did have the era of civilian defense, underground shelters, and so forth; many people built them on their own lots, but it became more and more evident that that was hopeless too, so we abandoned them. It was simply that Montgomery County was home for a lot of the professionals that they were using, like the Bureau of Standards, plus good access, which was strengthened with the Metro system -- there was the rail line before that and pretty good highways. All these things gave an advantage to the Federal Government, which they took up.

As defense spending increased in the 1950s, it brought more government related firms to the County such as Vitro, Fairchild Industries, and Bechtel Corporation. Do you think these industries had a positive influence on the direction the County was expanding?

Yes, I think they helped make a high-tech industry. These are the search outfits to a great extent. Vitro started during the war, but then found larger quarters in Aspen Hill. I don't know just when Bechtel started. To a great extent I think it is a natural center for science and technology and that is something we've tried to cultivate. There are good jobs and good contributions to our whole standard of living here.

Master Plans reflect the planning of areas to manage sustainable growth, while preserving a region's resources and unique characteristics. Montgomery County is known for its land-use planning programs, especially agricultural preservation, growth management, and affordable housing provisions. What do you think about the Master Planning process in Montgomery County?

Well, I got intensely interested in it. I guess, initially, it was because the Beltway was put through our farm, right straight through it in a very sudden way. It had always been planned to the east, but that big "S" turn that you see as it approaches the river is what diverted it right across our farm. It was a terrible shock to my folks -- they both died within six months after being evicted. So when I found out about the Citizens Planning Association, I joined-up right away. That's how I found out that the *General Plan* was being released in 1962, and I went over and heard the presentation and testified in favor of it.

What you stated before, about what Master Plans are for, is what good Master Plans are for -- we have had a lot of bad ones. The *General Plan* itself, *Wedges and Corridors*, was badly modified by the County Council elected in 1962. The development interest elected seven members, three Democrats and four Republicans. They were all for excess development, and basically, ignored the Master Plans and the *General Plan*, so it got off to a bad start. We really didn't begin to retrieve the *Plan* until the late '60s and '70s. It couldn't all be retrieved at that point because so much had gone on. But the Master Plan process is basic, and since we converted Master Plans into Sectional Map amendments by which we zone the whole area according to the Master Plan, it has become the critical first step in deciding what to do.

Friendship Heights, which was our first big test, was down-zoned about 75 percent, so the allowable development was one quarter of what it had been. We were so over-zoned that the roads couldn't possibly carry that load. So we had the justification, but when we down-zoned these properties, the landowners all went to court, eventually the Supreme Court, before it was determined that a legislative body could down-zone, reduce density, as well as up-zone, give it more density. And since the Councils of the '50s and '60s had in effect "given away the store," reclaiming it was quite a process.

For this past year, we have been working very hard on Friendship Heights again to take advantage of the Metro, trying to concentrate enough development there so lots of people will take the Metro instead of driving. I think we need to set up a Transportation Management District, which offers further discouragement of driving cars into that congested area. So, we have done a lot to develop public transportation beyond what the Metro provides. (That is the basis for the great facilities we already have in Silver Spring, which will support development very easily if we find ways of restraining car access.)

GEICO has been in Friendship Heights for 30 or 40 years and has one of the best modal splits, as we call them -- it's right by a Metro station and has the best use of transit, carpools, and vanpools of any place in the County. I hope it can be duplicated by the expansion of growth with new office buildings and apartments. So that's what we're shooting for in the Master Plan. We expect sometime next month or so to rezone it all according to that Plan, which will be the basis for growth in a controlled, and hopefully, advantageous way to curb sprawl and place people near the Metro.

Many newcomers to the area choose Montgomery County because of its schools and extensive park areas. There was a lot of foresight to preserve park lands and open space back in the 1950s and '60s. Didn't the Citizens Planning Association, of which you were President for several years, ask the General Assembly to increase the park tax so more park land could be acquired while it was still available?

I can't remember whether we introduced a bill or not, but we have always supported an increase in taxes for park acquisition, and I think our Delegation has generally been at the forefront of the changes that were needed. We have one of the most expansive park systems in the country.

Between 1954 and 1964 the value of farmland increased 330 percent in Montgomery County. You began working in the '60s to try to balance the County's increasing housing demands with the need to preserve valuable farmland. What were you trying to accomplish?

Montgomery County, because it has attracted so much industry and so many people, has naturally bid up the price of land and that tends to exclude some people from having housing in the County at all and having to commute from Frederick, Howard, or Prince George's Counties, or even from Virginia. So that is something we try to combat. Preserving farming is an important part, first, in curbing suburban sprawl. By keeping land in farming, you don't have more houses that add more cars and pollution and all the other problems. The other thing is that farming is of real value because of the fresh fruits and vegetables you can get there. Plus, it's very useful as an element that helps combat air pollution. It's a way of life and a beautiful side of Montgomery County. We're lucky to have so many parks,

including a national one -- the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, but the farms are a great deal of the beauty and environment that make up Montgomery County.

Do you still see agriculture as a viable business in Montgomery County today?

Yes, and I think one of the good things we have done for the farmers is the easements against development, which pay them for that exchange. Transferable Development Rights, where developers can buy more density instead of having it given away, is a great way to increase the permissible density allowed on a property. We let developers buy it by paying the farmer for development rights, which then become an easement against the farmer's development; so that separates one from the other with a fair exchange. The additional money the farmer gets and the lower value that he has helps keep the farm going.

You were also very involved with the fiscal affairs of Montgomery County in the '60s and were a principal organizer of the Citizens Committee for Fair Taxation. Were you concerned about the County's expanding debt financing?

No, I wasn't into that at that time. I think debt financing is fair enough for the major improvements we are making, which will be of benefit to our future generations. The Citizens Committee for Fair Taxation was a mobilization of thinking citizens against farmland assessment. Not for the farmers -- we tried to remove some of the deception from that name and take it away from the speculators. I've been fighting that ever since. If the land is worth \$100,000, \$200,000 or \$400,000 per acre, to assess it at only \$400 per acre is practically tax exemption. I have been able to get some reforms through the Legislature, but they're very reluctant. They want to keep the public thinking that they are helping the farmers when they're actually giving away our tax base. The farmers deserve it, I would say, as their value is only farm value. If they have sold their easements to the County, then they are not going to develop and only have farm value to assess.

You became involved with the National Association of Counties in the 1970s. What sparked you to first become involved with NACo?

All members of governing bodies in the counties across the country, all 3,000 of them, can become a member if the county pays the dues. Montgomery County was

a leader in that, partly because Al McArthur, who was one of the first staff members and organizers of NACo, lives in the County. It was a natural interest to get on some of the Steering Committees that helped formulate policy. So, I went for Environment and worked with them for more than a decade. Now I'm on the Finance Committee.

You frequently testified before Congress and the Environmental Protection Agency regarding environmental protection. What issues concerned you the most?

In general, it was the protection of our water courses through adequate sewage treatment and flood control, combined with saving water supply with dams so that we could ride out a drought. I've been considerably involved in eliminating sprawl, eliminating traffic, getting better controls on pollution, which has come in considerable measure from local automobile pollution. But cleaning up exhaust gases hasn't done anything, unfortunately, for global warming.

The County Council from 1962 to 1966 was very development-minded and rezoned thousands of acres for higher density use. How did you feel about that?

In common with most of the citizens who were organized and paying attention, we thought it was pretty dreadful. That Council was defeated in the elections of '66 -- most of its members. So, they sat up until at least 2:00 a.m. in the morning passing zoning cases, which they had not dared to pass before the election. That led to a change in the State law with respect to planning that said you may not consider zoning cases after October 31 -- that's the end of it in an election year until the new Council takes office. The 1966 election made a considerable change in the Council so it began some reforms. This was a miracle -- the Linowes and Blocher firm, which had, what shall I say, shepherded the greatest number of cases through, had a 2200-acre case already through that scalawag Council, which they withdrew. The Brown brothers, who owned the land, apparently agreed with Linowes and Blocher to withdraw it. That saved the whole Upper Rock Creek Valley in the direction of Gaithersburg and Laytonsville. So that was very good, and we began to recover.

What was it that spurred you on to become more than a civic activist and run for political office?

Well, I had a feeling, as others did I guess, that anybody who was fighting special interests and was a World Federalist to boot wouldn't have much chance in politics,

but some people suggested it. I filed at the suggestion of the 1966 Democratic Party's Endorsement Convention for the State Legislature. I was running in a Republican District that had not elected a Democrat for many years, but at least I came out ahead among the defeated Democratic candidates. So, in 1970 they endorsed me for the Council. That year we won all the seats because people had been so enraged by the 1962-66 Council, they were prepared for a reform Council. Idamae Garrott really put together the slate, which was nominated and then elected. So the Democrats went from being a minority to a 100 percent majority in 1970.

This is the end of our first taping. Tape two will begin with the election of Neal Potter to the Montgomery County Council in 1970 at which time the form of government changed from a County Manager-Council structure to a County Executive-Council form of government.

Part I
Oral History of Neal Potter
1915 - 1970

Introduction (taping done on 12/12/97)

My name is Anne Brown, and today is February 13, 1998. This is the second taping of the Oral History of Montgomery County Councilmember Neal Potter and will cover a ten-year period beginning with his first election to public office as a Councilmember in 1970 until 1980.

The change in the County Charter from a Council-Manager to an Executive-Council form of government divided the governmental power and provided for a County Executive to oversee the governmental departments and a Council to exercise legislative powers. The legislative branch was comprised of a seven-member Council empowered to make all zoning and land-use decisions, enact all County legislation, review and appropriate monies for departmental and agency budgets, review and approve the six-year Capital Improvements, Public Services and Fiscal Policy Programs, and set the property and other tax rates.

Under the newly formed Executive-Council government, which became effective in 1970, the growing demands of citizens for a responsive government dealing with a larger population and more complex services could be better addressed. The rapidly expanding population, which had increased by 50 percent during the 1960s to 520,000 in 1970, demanded more schools, more transportation improvements, and more recreational facilities.

James Gleason, a Republican, became the first County Executive when Neal Potter was elected as a Democratic Councilmember in 1970. The other

Councilmembers, Idamae Garrott, Elizabeth Scull, William Willcox, Dickran Hovsepian, Sidney Kramer, and William Sher, were also Democrats.

Questions:

The functions of the legislative branch are complex, difficult, and politically sensitive. Why don't you comment on some of the issues that were of concern to you at the beginning of your first term?

Well, I guess the main concerns were about land use controls, planning, and the fairness and adequacy of the tax system. Those have been my long-term interests and is, basically, how I became involved in County politics.

Your background in economics and research seems like a perfect match for the work required of a Councilmember in drafting and reviewing proposed legislation and digesting thousands of pages of agency and departmental budgets. Your learning curve must have been minimal.

No, handling so much so fast was fairly tough. I think in our first term we often ran an 80-hour week -- double-time, with no extra pay. The pay then was \$10,000 a year, of course, at lower average price levels.

A 1971 newspaper article stated that because of your efforts, County Executive Gleason's request for \$2 million for flood damage repairs to four bridges bordering Howard County was thwarted. How did you conclude that \$2 million for repairs was excessive?

Since it was Federal money we, I think as well as the Executive, were inclined to pass it over too lightly as a matter of money, but the flood sounded so drastic I thought I would go and look at the wreckage. Upon examining the four bridges, I found they were not destroyed, despite the affidavits of the engineers, and so I came back to the Council and said these bridges can be very readily fixed -- they do not need replacing. Dick Hovsepian, who was an engineer on the Council, couldn't believe it, so I took him out there to see it, and he agreed with me. So, we turned back the Federal money and finally took a small fragment of it to replace some steel on the old Howard Chapel Road Bridge, but that was all we took. The rest of them were fixed with our own money and County workers.

The Council's first year under home rule was quite productive: the Council made major progress in drug abuse programs, crime control, reform in zoning, planning and land development policies, reform in tax structures, consumer protection, environmental protection, transportation, and efficiency and economy in government. That sounds like quite a year!

Well, obviously our progress with the drug problem did not get as far as we would have liked. Gleason, basically, ran on a platform of how he would fix that problem, but he couldn't and neither could we. It's been very tough -- the folly of kids and others and remains to this day. We have got to find better methods of attacking it.

As far as economy, I think we did well, but we added new services, and we also changed the tax system substantially. I think it was during that period that we developed a tax on energy, and we developed the fees on garbage collection and disposal. One advantage of both of these taxes was that the Federal agencies, which were large in this County, would pay them. We weren't taxing the agencies, we were billing them for services on trash and letting Pepco and the other energy companies pass on the tax we levied on them to the government and to other tax-exempt institutions. So, this helped lighten the burdens on property taxpayers. The piggyback income tax was just incipient at that time and didn't yield much so this was a big relief to property taxes.

As far as transportation and other things are concerned, we didn't accomplish a great deal, but we took a hard look at our land-use planning, and we down-zoned some of the areas in which studies indicated the roads could not accommodate the development for which it had been zoned. I think we went down about 75 percent in the permitted density in Friendship Heights and Bethesda. The Friendship Heights land owners sued and thought it was inconceivable that land could be down-zoned. They wanted increased density to be given away to them and did not want you to ever reverse the process. Well, we had good reasons and the case went all the way to the Supreme Court and set a national precedent that down-zoning was permissible if it was related to the public interest and the availability of facilities.

When you took office you said, "The critical problem of County Government is how to prevent expenditures from exceeding revenues." The year before you

took office, the outgoing Council increased the budget by 18 percent and had increased it by 24 percent the year before that. The budget that was passed in 1971 increased by only 12.8 percent in comparison and was the smallest increase since 1965. How did you accomplish that?

Well, it sounds like a miracle. I don't recall such enormous increases having been made. Those percentages were something we hit in the 1970s because of tremendous inflation. Have you researched that -- are those figures verifiable? A 24 percent increase and 18 was it in the 1960s?

Yes, I got that information out of a newspaper. This was before you took office.

Yes, I understand. We had some increases, I think particularly for transit, Metro was just getting started in those years. We need to research that. I'm sure we didn't increase taxpayers' bills that much. Maybe we had grants.

Oh, this was the County's budget.

So that's a combination of many sources then, objects of expenditure. So, I think I need to research that and see how such large figures can be reported.

Over the years, you have worked extremely hard to reform what you considered to be a regressive property tax and bring about fairer and more equal assessments relative to market values. How have you tried to achieve this?

I started out by trying to stop a loophole, which has been one of my favorite occupations in public finance for 50 years. The target was primarily farmland assessment. That sounds great -- you're helping the poor farmer who can't afford to pay these suburban taxes. But it turns out, if anyone stopped to reason, which legislators generally don't, at least not in Annapolis or Washington, that the main benefit goes to developers and speculators. They have the high-value land as farmers had sold it to them long since. The farmers who remain in the Upcountry don't have much speculative value, so giving them farmland assessment is only what they have coming to them anyway, without this special law. So, you pass something requiring farmland assessment, and you're just throwing away money to increase the profits and activity in speculation, which I think is harmful to the public interest. So that was my first target. I campaigned on that beginning in

about 1960 when I first got involved with an organized citizen group against the practice the Legislature was proposing to forward by Constitutional amendments, since the Court of Appeals and the State had declared it unconstitutional to grant this special favor. It was sold by a propaganda campaign about the poor farmer, which turned out to be just the reverse of the truth. The farmers and everybody else has to pay more because it was being given away to the speculators.

I worked on other things too, like relieving property taxes that remain a regressive element that comes about when people's incomes decline from an illness in the family, or a death or something like that, and property taxes go right on as though nothing happened. Income taxes, of course, go down. So, we need to gauge the hardships of the property tax against the income of the preceding year since we don't have assessment reports simultaneously with the income. That is something I encouraged the Legislature to pass, which they did in, I think, 1974 by giving very substantial relief to people whose incomes were temporarily low. If it was going to be permanently low, they probably couldn't hold on to the property.

You began working on legislation in the 1960s to "recapture" taxes on large, undeveloped tracts of land when it was sold. The proposal recognized that property was made more valuable by the overall growth of the County and by the public services and facilities the County Government was providing to serve these properties. Did the recapture tax pass?

Yes, I succeeded in getting it through. First, the Legislature authorizing it and then getting the Council to levy the tax. The recapture is, basically, of the difference in taxes between full value or the standard percentage of value and the farmland value. Is the property maybe worth a \$100,000 an acre and assessed at \$300 an acre? The difference is practically total exemption. So on the sale price when it transferred, we levied a tax of an extra 5 percent over the usual 1 percent transfer tax; the total tax was 6 percent on the sale value of the property and this recaptured, in essence, about 3 years of special favors in the farmland assessment. The great value of the property, of course, is its possibility of being converted to commercial or residential lots and that, of course, is fostered by the public services that you mentioned. So, we're paying out more for these properties but collecting less. It's ridiculous, and I did get some action on it. We used to get two or three million a year on the recapture tax.

As a result of your effort, the Task Force on Real Property Assessment Practices was created in 1977. The Task Force found that the ratio of assessment to market value varied significantly between different types of property such as residential and commercial. Is that why you pushed to establish the Office of the Public Advocate?

I was aware of this long before this special commission. I found out that the Court of Tax Appeals of the County was granting assessment reductions on almost every application for expensive commercial properties. The way to reduce taxes was to get a good lawyer and take it to this Board, and they would give away the money. This did not make sense -- on residential stuff if it didn't apply, it got turned down. So this seemed to me clearly inequitable, and I proposed that we establish this Office of the Public Advocate to check these things and appeal them. I also found in a number of cases the State property assessors were setting too low a figure so the office was authorized to appeal the Assessor's initial figure as well as to appear before the Board of Tax Appeals to see that they didn't give away the money too readily. I also fought against the reappointment of some of the people who had been voting these giveaways. I succeeded on that.

By the way, Frank Ecker, who first headed the Office of the Public Advocate, is my father-in-law.

He did a good job.

He's a good man.

In reviewing newspaper clippings, I was surprised to find that a quarter of a century ago traffic congestion was just as big an issue as it is today. Citizens testified in the early '70s about the "ulcer-causing" frustration due to massive traffic congestion. If it was "ulcer-causing" 25 years ago, what is it now?

More ulcers maybe. Maybe, we have better means to treat it -- I don't know. We have tried decongestion -- we built billions and billions of dollars worth of roads and the use of them increases all the time.

The right answer is, of course, the *Wedges and Corridors Plan*. I appeared before the Planning Commission in 1962 when they brought in the consultant's report suggesting this *Wedges and Corridors Plan*, and when they finished presenting it,

they asked for public comments. Well, I stood up immediately and said this is the way to go because you're maximizing services people could get by putting them where the transit line can go or the major highways, like 270 is now. And, you are conserving the green space. One nice thing about that consultant's report was he proposed no zoning, just agricultural zoning for the wedges -- not sprawl development, not two-acre lots or that kind of thing, which is ridiculous. That just intensifies the problem. You get little use of the land and maximum requirements for transportation, for automobiles. So, that is the big reason we continue to have frustration. We're not as bad as some other counties in this respect, but we're pretty bad.

Most people still use their single-occupant vehicle as their primary commuting option. What do you think it will take to change people's commuting habits?

Quite a bit, I think. Part of the problem is we heavily subsidize automobiles. Parking is the worst -- \$1200 to \$1500 a year in town centers. Of course, in rural areas the land space isn't worth that much. Most of the autos in this County are in the urban areas and parking is very expensive, but much is given away free. The Federal Government does so too, despite an action by President Carter to terminate that practice. Reagan reverted to it and so it intensified the problem continuously. In the County garages the cost in current dollars is over \$10 a day to pay for that garage and building and maintenance. Our charge is \$3.50 a day or \$60 a month, which is about \$3 per working day. That heavy subsidy is part of what creates the problem. I think that what we really need is much higher parking charges and stopping some of the other subsidies.

I was working during World War II and then we had to get serious about it because the U-boats were knocking out tankers along the East Coast, and we had to get along without the gas. So, I tried carpooling a little bit -- that was very difficult. Then I took the bus and streetcar down to my job nine miles away. I found it took so much time, with the transfers and all, that a bicycle was really better. Fortunately, I had bought a bike before they shut down manufacturing during the War. So I was able to do it -- 18 miles a day, 6 days a week. I put on about 25,000 miles during the War and so did a number of others. You either carpoled, or took the buses, or walked, or biked. And that created an immense reduction in gasoline consumption, which was necessary -- we got busy and did it!

The Metro system broke ground in Washington, DC in 1970. Did the Council agree on the importance of bringing the Metro subway to the suburbs even with its very high price tag?

Well, I doubt if we paid the whole price -- this was largely Federal money. The Federal Government has been strong in supporting mass transit as obviously the country needs it, and perhaps especially, the Capital City. So Federal subsidies were put out, and the District, in order to save itself, took advantage of an Act which had just been passed by Congress in the '60s, I think, to transfer all the money that had been dedicated to putting freeways and tunnels right through the city, which would have been pretty devastating. All that was transferred into Metro building -- so that did a lot to help us all through the crisis. Now, the current estimated total cost has been about \$9 billion -- then I think it was between \$1 and \$2 billion. Most of the difference is inflation, and price levels now are about five times what that were in the '60s and '70s. So that is, I think, a good investment, especially when we get serious about the problems of global warming and petroleum shortages.

In 1973 you were elected Chairman of COG's Transportation Planning Board, which is composed of representatives of local jurisdictions, to coordinate planning for state and local highways and public transportation projects. As Chairman, you were charged with recommending improved bus service, major highway corridors, and the planning of the Outer Beltway and the Rockville Freeway. At one point, the County Council approved the Outer Beltway alignment between Rockville and Gaithersburg. The Council's action came one day after Judge Miller dissolved an injunction that prohibited the Council from adopting the Gaithersburg Master Plan, which included the controversial alignment. What happened to plans for the Outer Beltway, which for so many years were on again then off again?

Unfortunately, the Transportation Planning Board doesn't have the authority to do those things. It tries to make plans and hopes that jurisdictions will follow through -- the states, counties and cities. But on the Outer Beltway itself, it was on the *Wedges and Corridors Master Plan* adopted in 1964, I think. Then Fairfax, Virginia, had planned the rest of it on the other side of the river, and it stayed there for a number of years. In the mid-70s, I guess it was, Fairfax (from citizen demands) took it out west of the river, and we joyfully took out our half too -- as far back as 270. We could foresee some need to the east towards I-95 -- it hadn't

then been built. So that's what happened to it basically. We also changed the alignment from between Rockville and Bethesda to between Rockville and Gaithersburg because it seemed too close to the Inner-Beltway, which had already been built. So it increased the spacing and left it there. Then Gaithersburg got busy because they didn't want it near them. They zoned it for apartment buildings right smack in the right-of-way. We had a tough time fighting that off. Finally, the State Highway Administration had to buy that land for the initial Inter-County Connector portion that's already been built. I forget what it cost, I think it was something like \$10 million, to get that land back from the bad zoning that Gaithersburg had put on.

When you were Council President in 1979, you made public comments in response to an energy conservation plan proposed to local governments by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments that covered car-pooling, increased use of mass transit, building temperature control, and flexible working hours, but made no mention of increasing the gasoline tax. You thought it was also very important to increase the gasoline tax by regional agreement and urged that a gasoline tax be used to cover Metro subsidies, thus avoiding an increase in property taxes as well as providing an incentive to conserve energy. Don't you still believe the gasoline tax should be increased for similar reasons?

I sure do, and why I proposed an inter-jurisdictional action was that if one jurisdiction increases the tax and the others don't, so much of the tax can be avoided by people buying in the jurisdiction with lower taxes. I remember in the late '80s, the District of Columbia raised its gas tax 6 cents, and it got in a lot of trouble because then people started buying in Maryland or Virginia. When the new Mayor got elected in 1990, the same year I was, the first thing I proposed to her was that when Maryland goes up on the gas tax, you should increase yours in coordination. She never went after that, which I thought was foolish; but anyway, there's an illustration of how difficult it is to get adequate gasoline taxes in separate jurisdictions in any kind of close proximity to each other. Maybe Montana and Texas could do it, but Maryland and Virginia have troubles -- and D.C., of course.

So, that is something the Federal Government or a local compact ought to take care of. The Federal Government's been very negligent on this and absurdly carries increasing the gasoline taxes. I suppose it's because of the AAA lobby and the trucking lobby -- they don't want to pay for what they get. Locally, we're paying about 75 percent of our local roads, not the State roads, out of property taxes. I

think this is absurd. We worship the family and cuss the auto, but we subsidize the auto and tax the family home. So, we get it all upside down due to lobbies.

I remember the energy crisis during the '70s that was triggered by the Arab oil embargo when drivers could only buy gas on a certain day depending whether their license plate number ended with an odd or even number. The lines were blocks long, and the wait could take hours. There was a 400 percent increase in the price of crude oil, which resulted in an extension of daylight-savings time, thermostats were turned down in public buildings, and new homes were more heavily insulated. Why do you think that energy consumption is no longer a big concern today for many people?

Well, two things aggravated us in the 1970s. One was the shortage, as you mentioned, and waiting a long time in line. That was when I got my little one-cylinder motorcycle, a Honda, that would go a long way on a gallon of gasoline. I would siphon it out of the old Buick that my mother-in-law had and that would last me for months! So people had to get serious about it then -- the shortage was very great and the prices were very high. Now, it's plentifully available, and the price is lower relative to the cost of living index, the Consumer Price Index, than it was before the Arab oil boycott, so our motivations have been turned around.

Global warming is something we ought to be looking at, but we hate to do anything about a problem until it hits us. It reminds me of a cartoon I saw six or eight years ago. It was President Bush sending a message to Congress about global warming. He had put a message in a bottle and was throwing it out into the water that was rising around the White House -- you know, the ice caps melt and the oceans rise. By that time, they will get serious about global warming!

A major issue during your first year in office was the sewer moratorium. Do you agree that the sewer moratorium had a great impact on land-use patterns in Montgomery County?

Yes, it stopped development in the Route 29 Corridor, because the Anacostia sewer was occasionally overflowing down at the Peace Cross in Bladensburg. At the same time, the Sanitary Commission had issued authorizations for sewer in many places. The State Health Director stepped in, Dr. Solomon I think his name was, and said you cannot use these authorizations -- hookups must be stopped in the Anacostia. That stopped development activity there for many years and was a

combination of two things. One was the sewer was overflowing. The other was that we didn't have the capacity to service all those authorizations. It was eventually remedied by two things. One was fixing the overflow problem by pumping the sewage into a District sewer that was not in full utilization. So the lack of capacity there was solved, but it took them about five years to find out what they could do -- rather inefficient of them. The other thing was that Charlie Gilchrist initiated a policy saying that whether you have an authorization or not, you cannot get a hookup if the capacity is not there; but as long as the capacity is there, you can take it. So, if you come in for a building permit and you're ready to go, you've got it. Every month we will publish how much capacity is left -- you can keep your eye on that gauge and get your permit in time to get your building started so you won't be shut out. But if you don't, it's gone. So, all of those who were ready to go came in and got their permits and proceeded to build. And those authorizations for builders that were not ready to go, were just disregarded. And that basically solved the problem -- between those two measures.

In spite of the sewer moratorium, the population grew faster during the early 1970s than during the 1960s. "Beyond the Mid-Million Mark," a 1974 report on change in the County, concluded that the sewer moratorium had actually precipitated a building boom because the large number of valid sewer authorizations caused expeditious building before additional restrictions were imposed.

I guess that had some effect. Before Dr. Solomon's orders, people could go right on. That's why some people got so many authorizations beyond what they could immediately use. The other places maybe were hurrying because of concern that the moratorium might hit their area. I don't think it had a great effect, but it probably had some.

In November of 1973 you prepared a press release in which you stated, "The sewage problem has been most difficult, perhaps the most resistant to solve because the County has had to work through the Sanitary Commission, a bicounty state agency whose form and direction are controlled by the Legislature. Lack of local control or quick responsiveness has added to innumerable diversions and delays." At one point there was a move to abolish the WSSC. The Council submitted a bill to the State to study, reorganize, and possibly abolish the WSSC so that Montgomery and Prince George's Counties would each control its own sanitary planning. Did you support that bill?

Yes, I did. I served on the Commission that looked at how to do that. It turns out to be very difficult to take the thing apart, but in those days the Sanitary Commission basically controlled development. The preceding County Council said, "Oh, we zoned the County so the zoning was all there if you could get the sewers." We had no Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance or other such controls, so sewers were it. The Sanitary Commission wielded an awful lot of power not adequately controlled by the Counties. Since then, we've taken a pretty firm view and are careful to appoint commissioners who would stand up for our policies. The State has enacted a requirement of a *10-Year Water and Sewer Plan* and if we don't put an area into an authorized area for water and sewer, the Sanitary Commission won't extend it. So, builders keep coming in for authorizations to the Council to see if they can get sewer. This bad situation of the '60s and '70s has largely been rectified.

Prince George's County Executive, Wayne Curry recently called "WSSC, the law unto itself" and said, "What's happened over the years is that an institution has developed that sees itself as its own sovereign. Part of the problem is no government runs it and staff gets to rule." It sounds like a lot hasn't changed in 25 years.

Well, I think it has, as I just indicated. I think he's a late arrival with concern as the problems have largely been dealt with. There are real problems in getting the two counties to work together -- he may be aggravated by that as we have been. In the past Prince George's was the refractory one; now he thinks we are, but I think we've gotten it largely under control. I think it would be better if we could separate this into two pieces, but we do each control our own policies to a high degree.

Another issue of major concern to you is the environment and the environmental benefits that result from rational land-use planning. The Council created an Ordinance on Clearing and Grading of Land to curb erosion and preserve streams through a program of storm drains and retention ponds in developed areas. What conditions necessitated this program?

Development does two troublesome things to the streams. One is the grading itself, which puts a lot of silt in the streams and that kills an awful lot of the animal life, and sometimes plant life, in the streams. The other thing it does is because of the

impervious surface of roofs, driveways and streets, parking lots, and so on, it greatly increases the peak flows in the streams, which is terrible as it washes out life from the streams and undermines trees, which then fall down. We've tried to deal with this in two ways. One is by controlling the grading and the runoff from grading -- that's why you see these plastic fences around the grading job so the stuff won't flow out in the stream except in extreme floods. And, we've tried to put up storm water ponds and dams. Because we don't like to interfere with the streams, it's been mostly ponds. It's been quite a program. Our big problem now is to see that all these ponds get maintained, don't get filled up with silt, have the dam structure disrupted, or have the drain stopped up. Maintenance has begun on those, but we have a lot that are not adequately maintained.

You expressed frustration with the federal Environmental Protection Agency and said, "the EPA spends too much of its time interfering with local decision-making instead of doing the research and advisory work which could really expedite river basin cleanup." What caused that frustration and has EPA's role improved in your eye since the '70s?

I think it has. The first frustration was about the Environmental Protection Act that passed in the early '70s, requiring discharge permits for all stormdrains of any sort by July when it was August before the application permits even came out. They didn't get around to doing anything for a year or two or three after it was required. It was partly due to the foolishness of Congress, of course. They responded to the environmentalists with ridiculous laws. But the other thing was a lot of detailed instructions or requirements. I think what they needed to do was set performance standards and do research to find out how you can obtain them, and that's an awfully complex, scientific problem -- how do you deal with these things? I think we've come a long way in protecting the environment. The Potomac River has almost become swimmable again. Rock Creek, if you look at it, doesn't seem to have lost all its fish and insect life, but we have to go a good deal further before we can say we've halfway gotten there.

During your first term in office, planning and zoning were greatly improved by an accelerated planning program and a policy of zoning in accordance with master plans and a sense of timing in relation to the schedule of public improvements. Can you elaborate on this?

The first thing we did was to get after these over-zonings. We down-zoned, and found out later in this case with Silver Spring, we didn't down-zone it enough. Even despite the Metro, it's hard to accommodate all of the development capacity that was left after we zoned it down. We also undertook to down-zone the rural areas because they were mostly zoned for half-acre or two-acre lots. That's not rural, that's just sprawl development! So we instituted, I guess not until the late '70s, a plan for one residence per 25 acres, not per 2 acres, and to compensate the farmers for some of their speculative value. We set up the system of Transferable Development Rights. For each 5 acres that a farmer has, he can sell a development right to a developer who is in an area that can only get up-zoning by buying development rights. So that exchange process was somewhat revolutionary, and I think it's been something of a national model. Economists had talked about it for years, but the actual implementation was more complicated. I don't think it's perfected yet, but we've come a long way.

In 1973, after two years of work, the Council unanimously overrode the County Executive's veto of the Moderate Income Housing Bill, which required developers to build 15 percent of their housing at moderate prices. What did you think about the 15 percent figure -- did you think it should be higher or lower?

The Moderate Price Dwelling Unit Law required 15 percent, in return for which the developer would get increased density that more than compensated. Basically, the lots were supplied because of the increased density for all those moderate priced dwelling units. So, in effect, he was exempted from having to pay for the land that provided those houses and that made it easier to provide them with a moderate price. My comment at the time, as I recall, was that this will integrate communities because you will have low- and high-income houses in the same developments, but it won't increase the supply of moderate priced dwelling units to the level that we already have in the County. I think 30 percent or more of the existing houses, according to realtors' lists, were in that category already, and if you only add 15 percent, you're not improving the ratios particularly, but you are integrating the communities, which is a good idea. Too much segregation is not only sociologically bad but it's economically troublesome in terms of transportation problems and so on.

A 1973 Sentinel article stated that the reputation of the Council discouraged zoning applications as only 19 requests to rezone had been filed in the first half of

1973 compared to a high of 125 for a six-month period eight years earlier. Do you think that statement was true?

They noticed that, huh? Yes, we undertook to do the zoning in a planned and orderly way by having the new Master Plans implemented by what we called a Sectional Map Amendment where all the land was either reconfirmed with its old zoning or given a new zoning according to the Master Plan. Eight years earlier would have been right at the end of the so-called Diggs Council -- a bipartisan group of Councilmembers all of whom were outrageously devoted to granting favors to developers and landowners. They had almost given away the County and badly undermined the *General Wedges and Corridors Plan*. So we undertook to reverse that, of course, but the zoning was still there, either the old zoning or new ones according to the Master Plans. They didn't have to apply for it -- they got it automatically if it was in the Sectional Map Amendment.

There was a 120-day moratorium on condominium conversion in 1979 to slow down the frenzy of buildings being converted. The Council looked at tax deferrals, financial assistance, and direct purchase to slow down the pace of condominium conversion in the County during the '70s. Why do you think the market was so hot in the '70s and now most real estate agents consider condos "tough sells."

That was a real craze all right. Apartment owners were having a field day in conversions because -- I guess there were two things. One was a lag, in controls on rents that did not exist on the selling price of the condominium. I guess another part was a change in State law about ownership -- you didn't have to own the land beneath it. You could buy a part interest so that made it possible to do these things, and they made quite a bit of money off it. We undertook not only the moratorium, but a requirement that part of the sale price had to be put into a fund, which we used to buy or subsidize moderate priced housing. So, we tried to balance the books a little bit there and use some of the profits for social purposes. Why is it a hard sell now? Well, I think various problems have been recognized since then. A condominium means you have to get along with all your neighbors even though you don't have a landlord. I guess that's pretty complex, and as they come across the maintenance and improvement problems, I guess it turns out not to be such a wonderful thing -- so people are a little reluctant to buy them.

Wasn't it your idea to introduce legislation requiring developers and real estate agents to show prospective buyers relevant master plans so that homeowners would be knowledgeable on what was planned in an area before they purchased a home?

Yeah, I remember what really set that off was that a development out by the Derwood area where an alignment for the Outer Beltway had been reserved in the middle of a development. The development was built on both sides, which really should not have been permitted. Then, when plans were being made for the Outer Beltway, some said, "Gee, I thought that was a park." And I said, "How about checking the Master Plan?" So I got enacted an ordinance requiring that the seller of any house show the buyer the Master Plan for the area... "Oh, that's the Outer Beltway, that's not a park." Of course, they'll still come in and say they didn't know. The real estate agents got the Council to amend it by having you sign off on the backside of the deed that you were offered a Master Plan but didn't undertake to look at it. Well, that's a terrible loophole and people still claim, sometimes accurately, that they didn't know what was planned there. So I think it's helped some and tries to keep people on notice that you better look at the future as well as the present when you buy.

During your first term, the Council began reviewing six-year, long-range programs for capital improvements in public services and fiscal policy as required under the new Charter. The purpose was to look at governmental functions and their totality as they related to specific objectives or services. This six-year public services program was the first of its kind in the nation to be used by a county government. What did you think of the new budgetary review program?

Planning for the future is certainly basic and getting away from just doing it year by year, as though you hadn't thought about things, is certainly basic and that part of the new Charter made good sense. It's pretty tough to forecast things precisely, even approximately, six years ahead of time. The next year and the year after that, I find, is really about all that's done very well. So we've adopted a practice of when we set our six-year goal on bond issuance, for instance, for the Capital Program, you've got a six-year program -- but the known projects tapered way off in the fourth, fifth, and sixth years. And so we set aside a reserve for unprogrammed projects and six years hence about half of it is in unprogrammed projects. We figure we'll go along more or less evenly, but these other projects will have to fit within that reserve of so-far-undesigned projects. Same way with

the Operating Budget -- you can usually foretell what services we will provide fairly closely. You can't always forecast what unfunded mandates the Federal and State Governments will give us or what things the Federal Government will provide by "devolution," as they call it, dumping on us, but those things aren't that sudden. But your operating budget comes out fairly close to forecast minus inflation. Inflation can, of course, upset things. We do not have inflation very seriously lately. So we're not far from target.

Runaway inflation was a problem in the '70s. Rents increased by 26 percent between 1960 and 1970 on residential housing and the Consumers Price Index was rising, some years it was double-digit. Do you fear a return of double-digit inflation in the near future?

Well, it didn't hit double digit I don't think until the mid-70s, but the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries shut down our oil supplies and this tremendous escalation in crude oil prices and prices at the pump set off a big inflation. Everything depends pretty heavily on energy, you know. On roads, the cost of the roads is from cement, trucks, cranes, bulldozers, and so forth, and all depend heavily on energy. So that set off terrific inflation, and we hit double-digits in the '70s. Before that it was to a great extent, I think, the government deficit. The Vietnam War plus trying to deal with the poverty problem according to Lyndon Johnson created a lot of deficit. In a deficit you're issuing more money than you're collecting -- paying it out -- that sets off an inflation and that is something we've got to tend to more rigorously than we have even yet. With the currently balanced budget, at least by some definition in the Federal sphere, that keeps the economy under control and you have very moderate inflation. And if they don't do it, the Federal Reserve Board can give some controls by raising interest rates so people don't find it so easy to borrow and spend.

That combination has kept us fairly stable for all of the '90s. Either one of those could break down -- I mean, a balanced budget sets off various spending desires. They don't economize on the wastes in the Federal Government, whether defense or oil or favors -- agricultural price supports and all that stuff I regard as thoroughly wasteful. But they did other things which may be worthy, like aid for education, that fail to balance the budget, that could set it off again. Now the Federal Reserve Board -- if the wrong appointments are made there, it might not step in and take those much-deplored steps to control inflation through raising interest rates. That is a delicate balance, and most countries around the world don't

achieve it. And that's true even in this country. I don't expect to hit double-digit unless something happens in the Middle East or something that cuts off the main oil supply again. Meanwhile, we have a counter-force in the heavy decline in the value of Asian currencies. That means we get a lot of stuff even cheaper where we were getting it cheap already. And that holds our prices down, but the reverse effect will occur if they get their currencies under control or if OPEC blows up again. So these foreign events are, I think, more likely to set it off than Congressional extravagance.

In 1975 some homeowners saw their property tax increase 25 percent. Didn't the lowering of assessments by the Governor in 1973 from 60 percent to 50 percent of market value have a big impact on the large property tax increase?

You're talking about the tax rate increase, not the tax bills; because the bills are combined assessment and rate. Yes, I think the increases in rates were simply the outcome of the reduced assessments. This is a habit Annapolis has of providing favors by dumping on local governments. They say, "We're helping you with your tax bills. We lowered your assessments, and we cannot help it if they raised your rates." You know, unless we raise the rates how are we going to support the schools? So that forced us to raise the tax rate.

You have seen different Ficker amendments on the ballots since the 1970s attempting to require a referendum to increase the property tax rate or to issue certain bonds. Does his tenacity worry you?

Many people are giving Ficker credit for looking at the taxes. Actually, of these 15 Charter Amendments, he has done things like prohibiting the trenching of sewage sludge, requiring telephone rates in Damascus be the same as those in Chevy Chase, which is obviously illegal under State law, and I think three or four of these things have been declared illegal by the State Courts, unenforceable. I think the majority of them have been defeated by the voters, who are not quite as stupid as Mr. Ficker would like to assume. Even his tax reduction bills, which sound like a free lunch -- and since there is no such animal, that raises issues. What we need to do, and I think finally the Legislature may act in this session, is to pass a Constitutional Amendment for the State to eliminate the requirement that the maximum vote that a County Charter may require for an Amendment is 5 percent of the voters or 10,000 signatures, whichever is less. Now 10,000 in Montgomery County is far less than 5 percent. In a small county, 5 percent is quite

small. So it makes no sense to have this requirement in the case of Montgomery County, which is the largest county in the State. So, we are much handicapped by this and Ficker, for his own amusement rather than sympathy for the taxpayers, is taking advantage of it just for notoriety. I mean, there's another indication -- he ran for one office or another in the County as a Democrat, a Republican and an Independent. He will do anything to get publicity. He was once elected and the poor people of Potomac quickly found out they had made a mistake, so he only served one term. But he's right at it, and you know his other notoriety is to scream and holler at basket ball matches where the closed courts amplify his voice. I think it's absurd that the Legislature has postponed so long some action on this. We've been asking for years to kindly give us relief from this nonsense because it wastes a lot of time with the voters and a lot of money getting organized to defeat it because people have to be warned about the "free lunch" problem.

During your first term, unemployment was high, there were cutbacks in Federal research and development contracts, and business activity was slow. In 1972 the CE anticipated a \$1.5 million surplus, which was later lost because of a changed economic forecast and the Governor's veto of a bill the CE had counted on to fund part of the budget. The \$1.5 million surplus was reduced to \$.3 million. Weren't you concerned that the County's surplus was not adequate and worked to expand the margin of surplus?

Yes, I've always been something of a conservative, financially and fiscally. I do think we ought to have an adequate reserve because you can't forecast the future to that close a degree. And boy, I had forgotten that the surplus required was ever as low as a million and a half, these days it's \$55 million. Of course, prices are much higher and the County's bigger, but that is a concern I've had all the way through -- let's set aside adequate reserves -- don't follow the cheap and easy political way of spending everything you've got.

In 1976 you conducted a very clear, concise analysis of government programs so the public could better understand the fiscal problems the County was facing. The analysis showed the degree to which increased expenditures for schools, police, health, and recreation had caused an increased financial burden. Figures were further broken down into elements of inflation, population growth, and real increase in services relative to the size of the population. The results showed that increased costs were for identifiable programs for which a conscious decision was made in response to public demand for increased police and fire

protection, increased public transportation, special education for the handicapped, and more parks. One thing this document emphasized was that the increases were not due to excess administrators. For several years now, I have heard citizens complain about the school system being top heavy. Do you still think that there is not an excess of administrators today in the schools? And what about other agencies?

I'll answer your last question first. I remember that the schools have cut their administrators quite a bit. They used to have five districts in the school system and each of those had their sub-administrators, as it were. And they've cut out most of that. They do have an awful lot of departmentalization, which we questioned and offered to consolidate some of these. The big excesses are gone now, and I wouldn't say that's any major cause of the high expenditures. Partly, it is that the cost of living is higher in Montgomery County than other places. It's a reflection of our economic success when you come right down to it, and so we have to pay teachers somewhat more unless they are to commute from Frederick County or something. So, that is one reason why our costs are high rather than the excess administrators. Mr. Duncan has undertaken to eliminate a lot of the mid-level managers. I'm not sure whether we're fully maintaining the services that way but administration has been cut fairly sharply, though there is a limit of how far you can go, and we may have exceeded the cuts beyond that level of efficiency.

The analysis of the budget so people can identify the service with the tax is a problem for a county this big. This provides, in effect, loopholes for people who want to waste money, but it also provides a lot of blame from the taxpayers for problems that don't exist -- like too many administrators, while there may not be any such thing, but you have to give them so much analysis. I have taken the attitude of trying to make this clear to people, and to get taxes levied for a specific purpose. Public finance textbooks say don't do that, but it's the only way to get people to recognize what the needs are and where the money goes. So that's a measure to get people to identify these things. As I recall, those good layouts you mention were heavily the work of Art Spengler, who used to be our Staff Director, and was very good with financial analyses.

What happened to the proposal to charge tuition to children of foreign nationals and other non-tax-paying residents of Montgomery County that was expected to bring in \$1 million in FY80? Did you support that?

I think I did. It makes sense in terms of fair taxation. I think the difficulties of administration and the reluctance of the school people to enforce it has kept it from getting very far. I believe they use it to some extent, but not fully at all.

In 1976 PG County gave its police a 16 percent salary increase, and DC gave its police and firefighters an 18 percent increase. The Montgomery County Teachers Union wanted a 10.1 percent cost of living increase, based on the change in the Consumer Price Index, but the Council ended up cutting the increase down to \$750 per person. Does it bother you that Montgomery County often looks stingy compared to surrounding jurisdictions?

Not really -- look at where PG and DC are now. I think we've tried to maintain sound finances and fairness. We may be a little tight at times, but on the whole I don't think we have been because our salaries are generally more than competitive. Our benefits are really great -- our retirement and health benefits and so on. So I think they are well compensated.

You are known for your insistence in fully reviewing and analyzing issues and were well respected by your fellow Councilmembers who elected you Council President in 1973 and 1979. What were some of the goals that you tried to accomplish while you were in that leadership position and is it true that you used to fine Councilmembers for every minute they were late for a Council meeting?

Yes, when prices were lower I said, "You have to pay 10 cents a minute for every minute you were late, because you're keeping waiting all these people whose salaries are far more than 10 cents a minute, so this is minimal." We put the money into a coffee fund so that no County money would be used for our coffee.

Getting things properly examined and analyzed has always been one of my ambitions to make the government efficient and make the people understand it. I know so many places where the government is not equitable or efficient. The biggest of these is the tax system. People don't understand the tax system, so legislators get away with murder on taxes -- starting with the Federal Government. The State has imposed inequities on us, like farmland assessment. This is ridiculous and outrageous. They act as though they're the only ones that hear the taxpayers and offer them relief. I say, "We're closer to the taxpayers, we hear from them more than you do. You Assembly Members only hear from the lobbyists."

powers in the hands of the Council. Most governments across this country leave planning power with the Executive Branch. I guess sometimes this works okay, but I suspect in most cases it doesn't. It illustrates the tendency to excess influence with lobbyists and special interests.

In 1979 it was proposed to move the Planning Board from Silver Spring to Rockville once the new County Office Building was completed. Do you think the Planning Board should be located in Rockville, the County Seat?

It would be a good deal handier. Of course, in these days of faxes and computers and so forth, it isn't as important as it would have been then. Actually, it was kept in Silver Spring as a means of propping up Silver Spring, which even then was having some trouble commercially. As you know, we're now working very hard in getting revival down there. So, the Planning Board's location has been something of a nuisance, but it may have been worth it.

During the '70s Montgomery County attracted more and more research and development to the I-270 area. Did you support the zoning of this area for exclusive R&D?

I don't think we need to segregate things that much. Industrial development and employment development were basically the general plan -- put your big heavy development, industrial research, and residential along 270 and along mass transit. The regional concept was that the Metro would go all the way to Germantown and that was cut back, which I'm not sure was a wise measure, but that zoning is good. It needs to be not only on 270, however, but related to mass transit and our Master Plan in the Gaithersburg area. Metro already goes to Shady Grove, near Gaithersburg. Germantown rights-of-way have been reserved for future extension of light rail or busways.

Back in the '70s, Germantown was being planned as the first real "corridor city" for the County, and the first stage was to coordinate public facilities and private development. Your fellow Councilmember Nancy Dacek said it has not happened that way. What happened?

I think we have not been sufficient guardians and planners to make it happen. Part of the problem probably was the removal of the heavy rail line beyond Shady Grove on the basis of money. The other part was, I think, the City was planned

In 1980 the County adopted the Master Plan for the Preservation of Agriculture and Open Space due to concerns about the loss of farmland and open space to development. Many people are not aware that 25 percent of the land area in Montgomery County is currently protected in the Agriculture Reserve and that Montgomery County has more protected farmland than any other county in the nation. I'm sure you're very proud of that fact, being an old farm boy.

Well, we've done more than others, but that isn't very much. It's an exaggeration to say 25 percent is really protected, because the actual easements are on half of that. Others are in zoning, but zoning can get changed too easily, and it can be developed in objectionable ways I think. Too much of it, for my money, is going into golf courses and that doesn't strike me as preserving farm land as it is in sharp contrast to the original 1962 *General Plan of Wedges and Corridors*. The consultant recommended that we keep all these farm areas zoned for farming. He didn't show any color for development -- it was white -- you know, don't add development out here at all. The influence of the Diggs Council in the early '60s got some softening of the attitudes there, and they divided it for two-acre zoning overall. My goodness, that's just unserviceable development, very expensive, very auto-oriented, and that was a disaster. Now, we've down-zoned it, but that was only part of it, in 1973 maybe. We down-zoned it some more in the late '70s to these 25-acre zones it's called. But that isn't fully conserved. We need to do more for the farmers. We need to do more to restrict development outside the transit-serviceable areas. If you want to do something in the rural areas, Fritz Gutheim years ago had a *Sugarloaf Study*, so called I guess because they often met in the Sugarloaf Mansion with his students and aides. It was a rural villages concept, you know, Barnesville, Boyds, and so forth. It's okay to develop them as little towns, but don't zone the farmland in between for anything but farming. If you want to live in the country, okay, but live in the town or village unless you want to be a farmer. So, that is a great concept of the Up-county, but we haven't achieved it yet. Fritz Gutheim was an excellent planner and student. I wish we were doing more to follow his suggestions.

This is the end of the taping covering 1970 to 1980.