Interview with Ann Calvert
Interviewed by Linda Mack

March 20, 2009

Interviewed for the Minneapolis Riverfront Redevelopment
Oral History Project

Ann Calvert - AC
Linda Mack - LM

LM: It is March 20, 2009.

AC: The first day of spring.

LM: I'm finally here with Ann Calvert, senior project manager. Is that your current title?

AC: Principal project coordinator.

LM: For CPED [Community Planning and Economic Development] for riverfront development. You've been working on the riverfront for approximately a hundred and fifty years.

[laughter]

LM: No, it just feels like it.

AC: I started on as a temporary intern in 1973, so it is coming up on thirty-six years. I wasn't working exclusively on the riverfront then, but was working on some of the riverfront projects and have been working with a focus on the riverfront since, I guess, 1983, when I was made supervisor of the riverfront team. So it has been decades.

LM: A few. Yes. She knows all. [chuckles]

AC: Not quite.

LM: I don't know how much time you have today...

AC: I blocked the morning. [laughter]
LM: Oh, okay! All right. We'll see what we can cover here, because we can always come back to you and fill in some blanks.

AC: I hope I'll be around for a little longer. [laughter]

LM: Yes, right, right. We want to get these people.

I've been asking people, really at the beginning, what was your first personal experience with the riverfront?

AC: I grew up in northeast Minneapolis, and, over the years, we'd take the bus across the river. I was vaguely aware of the river, but like many people, when I was growing up, the river wasn't a place you went. You maybe glanced over it as you were going over a bridge. I do remember in fifth grade taking the train out of the Milwaukee Depot, because I had some cousins that lived in Faribault. I was in fifth grade, and Mom and Dad decided I was old enough to ride the train all by myself down to Faribault. I remember very vividly my first encounter with the Milwaukee Depot taking the train all by myself down to visit my cousins, which was exciting. I remember in college that we would come down to the banks of the river for a party or something. But, I didn't have a personal relationship with the river like some people do where they came down and swam and that kind of stuff.

LM: So when you came to whatever it was then, HRA...?

AC: MHRA [Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority]. I was in college at architecture school, and they had a position open as a temporary part time draftsperson. I decided to apply. I almost didn't take it because I had a job on campus, and it was going to take a bus ride to get to work. But I did, and, obviously, the temporary turned out to be a very long-term job. [laughter]

LM: Wow. And that actually did involve some work on the riverfront?

AC: It was drafting. It was back in the era before computers, and you actually took sheets of Mylar and an ink pen and drew maps. I remember one of the first ones I did was a map for the Industry Square Redevelopment Project.

LM: Oh, for heaven's sake. Do you still have it?

AC: It may be around up in the file somewhere. I don't remember. Nobody does maps that way anymore.

LM: Right, right.

AC: I remember making a map, and I remember different projects in the Industry Square area that I was involved in as a draftsperson. But then, eventually, I became permanent
and became a planner—the titles were all different back then—and, then, a project manager and, then, a project coordinator. In 1983, I was made the head of a team, a riverfront team, the supervisor of a riverfront team. So, I, for many years, worked exclusively on the riverfront. Then, as part of reorganizations, the department was expanded to include, first, industrial, and, then, all of the commercial development. So there was a window of several years where I was a manager and the riverfront was part of what we were doing. I was involved a lot more than a manager normally would be because my heart was there, but it wasn’t exclusively riverfront. Until... I’d have to look now. There was a point at which I realized, no, I’d rather just be a project coordinator working on the riverfront than managing people. [chuckles] So I, in effect, demoted myself and have worked exclusively on the riverfront since then, except, that now, I’m being pulled back.

LM: What was the riverfront like in 1983?

AC: Well, in 1983, the two restaurants were the pioneers, and, there were some Bicentennial projects in the late 1970s on Nicollet Island. Some of the work in Hennepin Bluffs Park, that was all back in the Bicentennial. Had Itasca [Complex] been done by then? Yes, Itasca was done in the early 1980s, and Saint Anthony Main.

LM: Yes, the first part of Saint Anthony Main.

AC: Yes. That was the late 1970s, so there were some starts at development and more starts on the island and the east bank, because there hadn’t been as large an industrial impact over there. Many of the redevelopment projects along the riverfront were created back in the 1973/1974 vintage. In 1983, about the time I waded in, there was a lot of intense planning going on. The first Mill District Plan was done back about that vintage. Some of the planning for the North Loop Area, the Heritage Landing Plan that the Glacier Park folks [real estate developers] did, so there was a lot of planning on this side of the river, but there hadn’t been much implementation on the downtown side yet. And it was before Riverplace and some of those projects.

LM: It was still pretty much a defunct industrial landscape on this side?

AC: For the most part, on the downtown side. In fact, to start with, Saint Anthony Main was hopping, so there were pockets of activity, and there were the two restaurants, and the First Street Station, I think, was a restaurant by then.

LM: Yes.

AC: So there were pockets of activity, but it was still pioneer territory as far as people visualizing what it could be.

LM: So what happened to change that? What were the steps along the way?
AC: Well, there were a lot of plans that were done that helped people visualize what the area could be. There was a lot of coordinated effort. Clearly, one of the biggest strategies has been to have the Park Board be able to come in and start doing improvements that both created access to the riverfront from a physical point of view, and awareness of the riverfront because now you can drive along it or get to it, and that started changing the image of the area. So, even though it wasn’t the work the Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA) was doing directly, it was work that we were very supportive of. We assisted in some ways with some land acquisition or some funding and that sort of thing. The park improvements were a big part of the redevelopment strategy. In addition to the planning, there was a lot of rezoning that was needed in order to prepare for things.

We’ll maybe get to this more with seminal moments, but the Heritage Board was an important turning point. We already knew that the history was important, but we’d been focusing mostly on just trying to preserve some of the buildings. To most people, if they look at an old mill building, it’s just an old brick building. They don’t know why it’s historic. So being able to interpret the history and not just preserve it was important towards creating that sense of place.

We were lucky back in the late 1980s and very early 1990s that what was then the MCDA had some resources. The common project had been approved, which allowed us to pool some of our tax increment revenue, but the NRP [Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program] had not yet started. There were some revenues there, and so we were able to make some investments in large chunks of land that became available during the real estate depression in the early 1990s, and some in the late 1980s. We were able to buy some pieces of land at fairly decent prices that gave us the ground work for, eventually, being able to get those redeveloped.

LM: Such as?

AC: Such as... We bought the Washburn Crosby complex. We bought the Chicago Northwestern’s big railroad yards. We bought the General Mills elevators, two and three. We bought the Depot in 1992. So there was some significant land acquisitions that were pretty speculative at the time, but have paid off well.

Then, there’s just been a heck of a lot of project-by-project work to start implementing the plan, whether it’s implementing park improvements, implementing development activities, implementing the public improvements that were needed to support. Large areas had been big railroad yards and didn’t have streets and, in some cases, either had no utilities or had utilities that were from a hundred-plus years ago. They needed a little work. There were a lot of coordinated efforts to get those sorts of things done.

LM: Should we go to the seminal moments as a way of organizing?

AC: We certainly can. I’ll probably think of many, and, obviously, there’s maybe too many on the list here.
We talked about the fact that there were some pioneers that came to the area: Reiko Weston and Peter Hall with their two restaurants. Louie Zelle with Saint Anthony Main was definitely a pioneer; and John Cuningham doing the Itasca. I think those were all people who were ahead of the curve at seeing the potential and starting to do some of the changes. All of that work, interestingly, was done privately. It wasn’t things that the government was yet involved in, at least in the initial phases, and providing a lot of support for.

I wrote this in the order I thought of them, and not necessarily in chronological order. I’ll just work through the list.

Another important turning point was the Crown [Roller] Mill fire in 1983. We, obviously, had in the Mill District Plan visualized a very different future for the milling district on the west bank of the river. But the fire obviously gave us one block that we had a real challenge to deal with. So the block where we’re meeting now was back then a burned-out shell of an historic mill. Another building that was still standing, the Standard Mill, was being used just for cold storage and was in very bad shape. It had been used, supposedly, as an animal rendering plant at one time. It stunk to you know what. The Ceresota Elevators was still an operating grain elevator. Howard Bergerud had the vision... Well, there were other people that had a vision. Al Smith was the guy who had owned the Crown Mill and had some visions for development, but hadn’t been able to put it together before the fire. Kit Richardson would be an interesting person for you to interview.

LM: I did.

AC: Oh, you’ve gotten him?

LM: Yes.

AC: He and his partners had been involved in the Standard, so there were people who were starting to see the potential but hadn’t yet put the pieces together. Then, obviously, the fire was a big step back. Howard Bergerud and Greg Hayes stepped forward and were willing to tackle the block and tackled it comprehensively, the entire block. It wasn’t just pieces of it. I often think that had the Crown Mill not been...restored is the wrong word, but, at least, what was left of it was preserved. The Ceresota was an operating grain elevator. The challenge of that was to take apart the bins in the middle and put floors in. Just from an engineering point of view, it was all a very challenging block. But having this block get turned around... It was ahead of its time and the hotel kind of suffered as a result, but it at least made sure that those three buildings in this block were pulled back from the abyss and made into something positive. So I think that was a turning point. I don’t know where Howard is these days.

LM: That was all done privately, as well?
AC: No, we were involved in that. The MCDA was involved in some of the land assembly. The party who did own the Crown Mill, as I said, did have some plans of his own and we condemned it away. Let’s see, I’d have to stop and think. There were parts of the block that Howard and his partners already owned. I think they maybe owned the Standard, and we acquired the Ceresota and the Crown, but I’m not sure I remember that. We assisted with some of the land acquisition, although we did get money back for the property, and we did some public improvements. Then there were some bonds that were sold for it. But it wasn’t for the magnitude of the project; because it was a fairly reasonable amount of assistance. As I said, it was ahead of its time, and it ran into some tough times with paying off the bonds, etc. But from a preservation point of view and from a redevelopment point of view, our goals were achieved. It’s very unfortunate that the private investors had such a tough time. But the buildings were preserved and a block of redevelopment was secured. So we did achieve those goals. That would have been in the early to mid 1980s.

Then another one is when Glacier Park, which was the development subsidiary of the Burlington Northern... Burlington Northern had been looking for years at what to do with their big land holdings in the North Loop Area, and had talked about development and hadn’t quite gotten anything off the ground. Then Glacier Park did this big plan, Heritage Landing. By then, there was a vision for having the Great River Road and park along the bank of the river through the whole downtown area, and they realized that that would help them in their development process. So they made the offer to the Park Board that if they donated the land would the Park Board commit that they would build the park and the parkway by a certain date fairly near in the future? That, obviously, was a huge incentive. The Park Board said, “Yes,” but the quandary was they didn’t have the money. So the MCDA loaned them the money to build most of those improvements.

LM: Okay.

AC: I think the Park Board had some funding, but the MCDA loaned them a significant amount of money to build that first phase of West River Parkway, which did get done and got dedicated in October 1987, the first day of the World Series.

That took one whole big swath of the riverfront and made it accessible to people, and really was one of the things that lit the fire under the North Loop Area being redeveloped. Obviously, there was a lot of public involvement in specific properties in the North Loop area, like the Landings and Renaissance on the River and River Station. There was MCDA involvement in a number of projects, but I think the thing that lit the fire under that area was Glacier Park stepping forward with that offer, and the public sector rallying to respond to the offer, and the result being that we got a big and very important part of the park improvements done in a fairly expeditious manner because the deadline was on!

LM: Do you know who at Glacier Park was responsible for that?

AC: I don’t remember any names.
LM: It’s an unusual deal but makes excellent sense.

AC: It makes excellent sense and, in ways, they were doing what the people who offered
the land for the Milwaukee Depot did, and what we had done, and what happens a lot of
times in suburban communities where developers are coming in to subdivide forty acres
and they provide for parks and things like that. So it was a good offer. I don’t remember
any names. I can see if I could dig any up. I think it being, obviously, a national
company, I’m not sure that even the decision makers were local folks that are still part of
the community. They were, maybe, even people from wherever Glacier Park was
headquartered, which I don’t remember now.

LM: The parkway went from...?

AC: Plymouth [Avenue] to Portland [Avenue]. That was, I think, one of those turning
points—there are tons of important projects on the riverfront—as far as ones that not only
were important in themselves but really turned things around a little bit.

The Stone Arch Bridge, obviously, was right up there in the top pantheon of the ones that
really changed the area, because not only was it such a wonderful resource to be
preserved, but by creating that link across the river, there was a loop rather than walking
up and down one side or going to the other side and walking up and down the river. By
creating that loop and creating the wonderful vistas that you get from the bridge of the
river and the riverfront and the skyline, it just was a huge turning point for the riverfront
and the perception of it and the accessibility of it. You now had a loop and, now, it’s
such an icon.

LM: It’s everywhere.

AC: It’s everywhere on brochures, etc.

LM: It is on the cover of the planning magazine for the Minneapolis Convention Center.

AC: Yes, exactly. It’s right up there with Spoonbridge [and Cherry], I think, as far
being one of our icons.

LM: Yes.

AC: So that was a very important project.

Back up... Before that, one of the important things that made the Stone Arch Bridge
possible was the Heritage Board being created back in 1988. We had, previously, for a
while, the Riverfront Development Coordination Board [RDCB], but it had ebbed away.
There was continued coordination through the staff level. The Heritage Board was
something that, once again, was a formally created entity that brought together the
partners around the topic of historic... It was mostly about interpretation. Back then,
because the buildings hadn’t yet been preserved, the resources hadn’t been preserved,
some of the early interpretation was, first, built around the fact that we need to preserve the resources that we have. It brought the parties together in ways that, I think, built some relationships and provided a place for coordination. Then, the Heritage Board Plan informed a lot of the work with getting the bridge rehabilitated as an important resource but, also, as an important link to the Heritage Trail. The Heritage Board vision for the Heritage Trail was kind of reinforced, and, then, the important projects were identified in that first plan of having a center that, then, became the Mill City Museum and Mill Ruins Park. I think that plan really informed a lot of the planning implementation by making sure that the history of the area was not just a background element but was in the foreground - a respected aspect. I think the work that has been done to preserve buildings and interpret the history has been very important, along with the park development and the natural resources. But, of course, the river has created that magical “sense of place” that is part of what makes the area so attractive to people. They come here, and they feel the authenticity, and they feel the significance of the place. Having not just the historical buildings preserved, but actively trying to explain to people what makes those buildings and this place important has been very significant, I think.

I think the fire that we had over at the Washburn Crosby, which was very tragic, was one of those galvanizing actions. There had been talk in the Heritage Board Plan about the need for an orientation center. I think having the fire there galvanized everyone. Nina Archabal [executive director, Minnesota Historical Society, MHS] was just saying at the Heritage Board meeting the other day, that she wasn’t sure herself that had there not been that fire that really galvanized people, what would have happened. The Historical Society said, “We’ve got to do something here!” The whole Mill City Museum was an important project for a number of reasons. It found a good use and saved what was left of the Washburn Crosby and, then, it provided that centerpiece to the interpretation, brought the Historical Society in as an important party. Had the fire not happened and been another one of those things that needed a response, I don’t know how things would have turned out. Something would have happened, but what it would have been I don’t know. Or whether it would have as significant as what we ended up with: the Mill City Museum as not only this wonderful facility, but that blend of the old and the new that is part of what makes it so memorable.

LM: She was telling me that it really started out somewhat modestly as an interpretive center. I believe it was somebody on their board who was helping with the fundraising who said, “You know, you need to think bigger. If you want me involved, go for it.” [laughter]

AC: The condition to it? [laughter] Okay. I wonder if that was David Koch?

LM: Yes, I think so.

AC: Yes. As I said, it might have happened anyway, but it wouldn’t have been the same museum even if it was in the same place, because you wouldn’t have that sense of new building and old ruins. Having the fire happen, I think, put a fire under people.
Not that I wouldn’t go back and not have the fire if I had a choice, but it was one of those turning points.

I mentioned the fact that I think the MCDA having the foresight to do some of those significant land acquisitions in the later 1980s, early 1990s, was important. We, then, had resources that we could work with and work around and guide what was happening on that property.

LM: Rather than just waiting…

AC: Waiting and hoping somebody would do something. Of course, with the Depot, we waited and Harry Wirth bought it and wasn’t able to pull it off. Then it was sold again, but the buyer wasn’t able to pull it off. So, it put us in a position of being more proactive. I think, in the long run, it will show that those were all financially very wise investments, too. But, at the time we bought them, people thought we were rather insane. [chuckles]

LM: Yes. It was not a bureaucratic move. [chuckles]

AC: No, it wasn’t.

LM: It was very entrepreneurial.

AC: And it was believing in the vision of the area and knowing that when there are opportunities to buy property… I look back at the Depot. We spent $2 million for sixteen and a half acres that was generating a million dollars a year in parking revenue.

LM: That’s kind of a no-brainer, isn’t it?

AC: It was pretty controversial.

[laughter]

AC: We, obviously, had to make some more investments to get it developed. I’m looking forward to that story when the last projects are done so we can sum it all up.

I wasn’t personally involved in it, but I think that whole Nicollet Island agreement that was done… I’ve never seen the thing. I keep thinking somebody must have a copy; I should read it.

LM: Oh...

AC: Did you find it?

LM: I went to see Phyllis Kahn. I just started calling. Jan Hively… I’m going to talk to her next week.
AC: Okay.

LM: I called Chuck Neerland, because I thought maybe he would remember where the bodies lay and that sort of thing. I went to see Phyllis Kahn. Well, she just pulled out of her files the legislation that she submitted that has the out parcel in it.

AC: Out parcel?

LM: The out parcel is the land that the Park Board owns that the houses are on.

AC: Oh, it’s all considered one out parcel from a legal point of view?

LM: Yes.

AC: Okay.

LM: So it’s delineated. I don’t know how exactly.

AC: So the pieces worked together.

LM: And I’m not sure she really remembered exactly how it happened. Her secretary was Judy Richardson, who was married to John Chaffee— or partner or whatever. She didn’t live on Nicollet Island at that point, but she represented them. I think that the folks on Nicollet Island must have come to her and said, “Okay, we need help here.” What it did was limit what the Park Board could purchase. It could purchase the land, but it couldn’t purchase the houses, I think, because of the Metropolitan Open Space money. It put a restriction. Then there was actually...this is an amendment to further restrict it because they saw that the Park Board was trying to get in there and buy more stuff. The part I haven’t figured out is how this was related to this big document that was the agreement between the Park Board and the HRA, and the city I assume, in 1983...

AC: Right.

LM: ...which is a document like that.

AC: I’ve always understood it’s a big one. As I said, I didn’t work on Nicollet Island. All those years, Nicollet Island was its own world.

LM: Yes, it was.

AC: So I just had this tangential understanding about it. I’m pretty sure that somebody here dug out the agreement back when there was the controversy over DeLaSalle.

LM: Oh, yes, that’s the same...
AC: What did the magical agreement say? I keep meaning to go see if I can get myself a copy and read it and see if I can understand it...the whole chronology of all of the controversy about what were the choices and who was involved. Eventually, it *did* get decided. The plan worked out that the Park Board would own the land and people could buy the houses.

LM: Right, if they showed a plan to fix them up.

AC: I think that we were involved with trying to get some financing.

LM: Oh, yes, right.

AC: Most lenders didn’t want to lend anything for a situation like that where the land was owned, not leased. I don’t think we’re still involved in the financing, but, at least, for some of those initial rounds of financing we were...

LM: I’ve been through the HRA...

AC: I don’t understand the pieces of that, but my feeling was that that agreement and, then, the implementation of that agreement finally resolved things so that something could move ahead. That seems like an important turning point.

LM: Oh, absolutely.

AC: It wasn’t like just a one thing; it was a very complicated mishmash of things. But, at some point, it reached the point where somebody would sign something and they, then, started acting on it.

LM: I’ve got a couple of pieces of that in the interviews. Al Wittman was talking about the meeting... I think it was a non-public meeting of public officials...

[laughter]

AC: Okay. Probably before the open meeting law.

LM: ...where this sort of was presented. John Chaffee has a copy of it and it’s, literally, about that... He said it took about a year to get it written, but he didn’t know where that was written. That’s the part I can’t figure out. Somebody said they thought it came out of the mayor’s office, and [Don] Fraser doesn’t remember anything about it. But, you know, that can happen. So that’s why I thought maybe... Jan Hively remembers quite a bit about it, so I’m talking to her next week.

AC: She might know.

LM: That’s a pretty interesting story.
AC: It is.

LM: And it's also an interesting story as far as the preservation, because the federal laws have changed. This was an urban renewal area and, then, when they did that historic study, which I've also seen copies of, the Miller Dunwiddie Study...

AC: Right.

LM: There's a newspaper clipping that reported on that. It said, "A surprising number of historic structures were found on Nicollet Island."

AC: Which now we're looking back and think...duh! [laughter]

LM: Yes, right. You might look at them and think they're just rundown houses, but...

AC: No, they were old and important.

LM: Right.

AC: One of the things I've never been clear about is the timing of... I remember when I was young riding the bus across on Hennepin, on Nicollet Island you didn't have those big open vistas you have now. You saw storefronts. I've never been clear whether those storefronts were cleared out as part of the urban renewal or whether they were...

LM: I think when they rebuilt the bridge, they made sure to get rid of them, at that point, because of the attendant social problems with the people who hung out there.

AC: Yes, one of those examples of solve the social problems by removing the buildings, which has been unfortunate. I don't think we do it as much anymore. But it's been one of those things. That was certainly a big change to Nicollet Island. Maybe you couldn't have had the new bridge with the right-of-way. Anyway, it would be very different. It's part of the Nicollet Island history that was lost.


AC: There was a lot that was saved, but that was an important part of it that was lost. It hasn't even been interpreted well with photos.

LM: No, and, you know, John Chaffee, again, can recreate that whole streetscape.

AC: Oh, he should do that.

LM: That would be a good display sometime.
AC: Yes, yes, and information that would be good to capture somehow that I don’t think we’ve done a good job interpreting so far. So anyway, the whole Nicollet Island agreement seemed like an important turning point.

Another one was the whole Depot story where it had been bought by Harry Wirth, and he couldn’t work it out. We, then, bought it in 1992, but it was still kind of a conundrum...how to deal with the pollution. By that time, everybody was much more aware of the challenges of pollution than they had been in the past, but we didn’t yet have the solutions. It was an era there, and we’ve kind of forgotten it now, where people were aware of environmental pollution and all of the nasty things you could find buried in the soil, and aware of the huge costs to clean it up. But there weren’t, yet, any of the legal structures that we have now.

First of all, I think we’re more thoughtful in what needs to be cleaned up. It’s not like you have to dig it down to China and haul it all away so it’s pristine. There are more pragmatic approaches to identifying what really is a hazard, and what can stay where it is and be capped, and if it’s removed needs to go somewhere. I think we’ve figured out how to technically deal with the pollution. Our MPCA [Minnesota Pollution Control Agency], I think, deserves a lot of credit for being on the forefront of some of the legal structures that were allowed, that said that if you weren’t the one that caused the pollution, but you came in and bought the property and you worked with them and did a cleanup - not necessarily to pristine levels, but to workable levels - then you weren’t going to be liable for all sorts of nasty things. The development community and the lending community just didn’t want anything to do with properties for a while there. That was one of the challenges with the Depot property, along with the fact that the train shed was such a unique structure.

It wasn’t too difficult to imagine alternate uses for the Depot itself, but the train shed was a challenge. I think Gary Holmes coming in with the vision for the hotels... This is a weird little turning point... A guy who was a skating consultant (I think his name was Brad Lemberg) was supposedly driving down Washington Avenue one Sunday after church with his wife and looked at the Depot and thought, could you fit a skating rink in there? Supposedly, he and his wife stopped and measured, and he determined, yes, you could put a skating rink in there. He was a consultant who designed skating rinks, and he started trying to work that idea and brought in Blue Line, I think they were called, the skating rink building company, which, then, became the kernel of an idea for the Depot. Then, Gary Holmes came in and, eventually, the skating people disappeared but CSM [Corporation] was willing to continue on with one of the two rinks, not both of them. I think his vision of being able to use that property, and his experience as a developer who knew how to get things done, was important. And the timing of it. It was coming along at a time when there were programs and legal structures to deal with polluted property. That wasn’t any longer the complete deal stopper that it had been before.

LM: I want to go back to that, because you said the MPCA took the lead on this kind of interpretation of restricted liability. Was that, then, a kind of policy measure on their
part, or was their legislation at the state level that defined that? Did you all have any influence in encouraging them to do that?

AC: I know we, not so much me personally, but some of my colleagues, were very actively involved in trying to make people aware, policy makers and the legislature, that the pollution challenge was a real challenge, and that it was keeping a whole bunch of property that could and should be redeveloped for some use that’s valuable today, from being put to some good use. So there were a lot of initiatives to try to develop funding programs. For the last several years the state has had a pollution cleanup program. The Met Council has one. Hennepin County has one. So there has been this group of actual funding programs. We’re hearing the Met Council program may be out of function for a few years, because they need the money to run the bus system. Whether the other two will retain their funding or not, I don’t know. There was a lot of effort to identify funding. There was an effort to change the tax increment law to allow pollution to be one of the things that would make property eligible for a tax increment financing district. The pollution cleanup was an eligible expense under tax increment. I don’t know if some of the things the PCA set up as far as their voluntary cleanup and investigation programs, whether they were able to do that administratively or whether that took some legislative approval or not. If I ever knew, I’ve forgotten that. But those were important not just for the riverfront but for a lot of areas.

LM: Yes. So, at this point, you’re holding the Depot property. You’ve started the pollution cleanup.

AC: We’d gotten a grant, I think, for some asbestos cleanup in the depot. We got an ISTEA grant [Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act] that restored the Clock Tower. So we’d been starting to do some investigation and trying to figure out how to do the cleanup. I’d have to look back for when we started... You know, we had that cleanup process that we used on the Depot when we pumped out the oil. The Depot property we renamed, and Parcel A is behind River West and Parcel B was, basically, the two blocks where the hotel complex is now, and C is where MacPhail [Center for Music] is. We had started on Parcel B, which was where the historic buildings are, but whether we started that before... I know by the time we sold it to CSM, we had completed that part of the cleanup on that property. Whether we had started it before CSM and Blue Line came into the picture, or were doing that while we were negotiating with them... My memory is a little fuzzy on the timing of that.

LM: Anyway, you started on parcel B, the cleanup?

AC: It was a little different situation over on A. It turned out that process didn’t clean up everything as planned. There were still pockets that, unfortunately, CSM had to clean up on their project. On many of the blocks, we’ve had kind of a two-phased pollution approach. We did that initial work and got the oil that was floating under there pumped out, but there have been additional grants for, I think, most of the blocks. Luckily for us, it’s not an environmental thing that’s a public safety hazard or that was seeping and going anywhere. It was just more a matter of... You had to dig it up because you were
building parking underneath the building or something, and you had to haul it away appropriately and dispose of it appropriately. So there has been grant funding for that and will still be some funding needed for 205 Park, and then for Parcel A, I think we’ll need some, as well.

LM: How did Gary Holmes come into it?

AC: Dick Victor might remember. I don’t remember. I think when these skating folks were working with us, we said, “This is great that you have an idea for the train shed, but we really need to figure out the whole thing. We can’t just do the train shed by itself.” I know, for a while, there was some other developer that they were working with. So whether they went out and found CSM, or whether we planted the idea of CSM... I know that CSM, at the time was looking for a location for a hotel. So whether they had contacted Dick, and Dick knew they were looking, and he told the Blue Line folks, “Why don’t you go talk to CSM,” or whether CSM heard about the skating idea... I don’t remember how that marriage got made. Dick might remember.

LM: Sharon [Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton] always said she put Gary Holmes up to it, and that she kind of brought him down there and said, “Why don’t you do this if you’re looking for a place in the city?”

AC: She maybe did. I know that she did that with Brighton [Development] for the North Star and the Loft area.

LM: Yes.

AC: I didn’t remember that, but my memory is not perfect. Dick was the lead project coordinator, so there probably is a layer of some of what was going on behind the scenes that he would know that I’m not as aware of.

You know, standing back and going, well, where are the pieces that tie together? There’s a synergy between this person who said this and that person who said that. All of a sudden, something makes sense that didn’t.

LM: I think I have about three different versions of how the Crown Roller Mill was saved. [laughter]

AC: Oh! okay.

LM: There are a lot of people out there...

AC: Yes, claiming that.

LM: Right. So that’s kind of fun.
AC: I have hanging on the back of my door a foam core key. One of the things that was happening... I don’t claim a huge amount of... There were higher profile people. Do you know John Mecum?

LM: Yes.

AC: At the time, he was an intern working for Steve Murray as an HPC [Heritage Preservation Commission] staff person.

LM: Oh, really? The architect?

AC: John is now an architect. He was an intern once upon a time. [chuckles] That’s how old I am.

LM: Wow.

AC: We were providing some of the behind the scenes staff work to prove why it would be feasible to save the building after the fire. There was the decision facing the City of whether to stabilize or not, etc. I don’t remember exactly what John and I did, but we were a little part of it, and when it was done, John, being an architect, carved me that key and gave it to me tied with that cheesy red ribbon that you get at Bachman’s for a Christmas wreath.

[laughter]

AC: I still have that on my door. I broke it once and there was no way I could not patch it together.

That’s probably the power of many of these important turning points, is that it was maybe one person with an idea, but it takes a lot of cooks to make these things happen, and a lot of truths to what were the important turning points and different perspectives. Not everybody knew what everybody else was doing.

LM: Did Gary Holmes buy the property outright from you all?

AC: Yes, we owned it, and, then, he bought it and paid us for it. By the time we sold it, we’d done that pumping thing. We sold it to him for $3.2 million with a package that included a significant amount of tax increment assistance. We sold him the land; we got some cash. We, then, provided quite a few million in assistance for historic preservation and for the parking ramp, because we wanted to make sure the parking was buried underground and not some above-ground structure. So we made some significant investments in the property.

LM: As I recall, he found that it was going to be much more than he anticipated, like about $8 million or something.
AC: It cost more. Yes, I don’t know if I ever knew how much.

LM: He just dealt with that?

AC: He dealt with it.

LM: He didn’t come back?

AC: There’s a range of developers, and there are some of them that will tell you whatever you want to hear till you’re past the point of no return, and, then, they will come back in and whine about why they need this and can’t do that. Then there are the ones like CSM, who I have a great deal of respect for. They weren’t happy about the increased costs. We heard about the fact that, you know, it was a challenge for them, but they did it. They just went ahead and did it, and did a wonderful project. We did, though, revise the terms of our potential future sharing of parking revenue to reflect their increased costs.

LM: Then, Sharon told me about the last minute labor dispute that nearly sunk it.

AC: Yes, we had many times when we... The labor dispute was a big challenge, as was the point when the skating rink people backed out. The original package was that the skating group was going to be the lead and do the financing for the skating rink, which was a multimillion dollar component to the whole thing. When they got cold feet and backed out, then there was a great deal of angst about whether the skating rink, without that partner, continued to be the best idea for that property or whether something else should be done for the train shed. If it was the skating rink, was CSM willing to take it on? That’s when it shifted. It was going to be two rinks end-to-end. It shifted to being just the one. They took a deep breath and agreed to take it on. I’d have to check back, but I think we restructured things so that the amount of our investment went up some. So we had one whole deal all negotiated that then needed to be amended fairly significantly. It seems like most projects don’t become real until they’ve almost died at least once or twice.

[laughter]

AC: You know, that’s kind of the test: if it hasn’t almost died yet, you’re probably not as close to being done as you’d like.

LM: So then the Saint Paul Skating Club, or whatever it is, came in just as a tenant?

AC: Yes, just as a tenant. They didn’t have any equity or anything. I’m sure they were part of what maybe made Gary a little more comfortable taking it on, because he did have somebody to help pay the bills. As far as having that anchor tenant, for at least a while that was helpful.

LM: Yes.
AC: It’s morphed, you know. The thought was that people would be delighted to skate in the summer, and it didn’t turn out to be that way. It was very expensive for them to keep that ice cool when the sun is coming in those windows in the summer. [laughter] Clearly, the idea has morphed to find something... I think they must be about done with their season for this year. It seems like, as a seasonal thing, it’s worked well, and as an event space, it’s worked well. Some of these original redevelopment concepts kind of evolve either due to changes or just because things need to be tweaked a little bit.

Another seminal moment... This would be going back to the early 1980s, and I wasn’t personally involved. The whole design of the West River Parkway on this side of the river... There was a lot of discussion about where should be the route of the parkway, and should it hug the river? Should it go in a block or so? The changes were done to avoid some of the gatehouse and canal archaeology. Well, the whole thing was very important, but, to me, the kernel of genius—I think it was an Al Wittman or Bob Mattson thing—was the concept for Mill Ruins Park.

LM: Yes.

AC: Not knowing what was under there, but assuming something was under there and using that as the core identity for what the “park” could be...that this wasn’t going to be a typical “park” with green space and ball fields and picnic areas. That whole concept of Mill Ruins Park as a very unique kind of park that preserved those resources and used them as its raison d’etre, getting that all worked out as far getting agreement with SHPO [State Historic Preservation Office], etcetera, as to what route would work, took years, obviously, to implement. But I think that was another one of those important turning points. That concept of Mill Ruins Park is something that I think was another seminal kind of thing.

LM: Yes. I think it really was Bob Mattson... In fact, he remembered the meeting that he had with SHPO, and Dennis Gimmestad was there. He was talking about a park down there, and everybody was sort of going, “Eeeee.” Then, he explained what it was, and they went, “Oh, that might be okay.” [laughter]

AC: And that was one of those oooh moments.

LM: I get the feeling—you may know more about this—that he carried that idea and kind of made it happen. It wasn’t something that the Park Board itself wanted to do.

AC: Oh, I imagine it took some internal coaxing.

LM: He really made it happen.

AC: And I think Al was important support for that.
LM: Yes. I haven’t talked to [former Park Board Superintendent] David Fisher. I don’t know where he is now, actually.

AC: Saint Louis, I’m told.

LM: Okay. He was a good advocate.

AC: Right, yes. But it wasn’t the obvious idea. I’m sure it took some time internally for the Park Board to get comfortable with the idea. That was, I think, important for getting something resolved so that things could move ahead, but, also, important for Mill Ruins Park as another one of the really unique features for the area. It still has more phases to be done to really have people understand the magnitude of what else is buried under there. Judd [Rietkerk] just told me the other day that he was keeping Mill Ruins Park future phases in the funding applications for regional parks. So, hopefully, eventually, the rest of the pieces will get done. That seemed like an important turning point.

Then, later, when the parkway was able to be completed... We got the stretch to Portland [Avenue] done, and, then, they worked up from the other end and got to under the [Interstate] 35W Bridge. But the last stretch that kind of connected in front of the Washburn Crosby and gave us, eventually, the Plank Road was important. The Plank Road, I think, added an interpretative feature, but more importantly, it made the final connection of the parkway and the trails part of the system. It wasn’t just a segment. It was something that connected. We had kind of a connection up river, although it was just along Marshall Street. But that down-river connection meant that you could ride your bike from one waterfall to another. It was important to have the parkway and the trails there just as a segment, because it created some access, but it didn’t really have the power as a recreational amenity that it does now when it’s part of that larger system.

LM: It is easy to forget how late that happened. It seems like it’s always been there.

AC: Yes. It took a long time. I think people often wondered why did it take so long for the Mills District to get going. First of all...

LM: There was Shiely Sand & Gravel there.

AC: ...there were a few real estate recessions in there. Also, that park amenity wasn’t completed until fairly late, and the elevators were there. We had all these historic buildings that didn’t have futures. First, we figured out the Depot and, then, the concept for the Lofts and Mill City Museum started gelling, and people could see...okay, now that’s no longer a huge question mark. But we still had those elevators hanging around for a little longer, and people were wondering, what is going to happen to them? Then, somebody died. Sad as it was from a preservation point of view to loose those elevators, they were another one of those big question marks. So having some of those things get resolved in a positive way, with the connection to the parkway and removing some of the
things that were just question marks that were making people hesitant about the area, were all important pieces.

Thinking about our buying those elevators... At the time we bought them, our main impetus was that we wanted to remove the rail lines that served them... Of course, they were located over here, some blocks from the core mill district. Much of the rail was gone from the area, but the elevators were still served through the Chicago Northwestern yard. They had such a huge capacity that when the trains came in to bring in grain and take it out that the rail spur had to go all the way down Second Street to about Fifth Avenue. The train needed to be so long to handle the capacity. You've seen the pictures of Second Street [South] when it wasn’t a street. It was just lined with rail tracks.

We had the Whitney hotel about to open up here and the Ceresota office building, and they didn’t want a rail track in front of the hotel. So we bought those elevators knowing that eventually they needed to be redeveloped with that piece of property. The kind of near term impetus was to get rid of that rail line so that when this hotel opened, it had a prayer of success, and so that we could then come in and pave Second Street. Second Street was not really a street. Portland was kind of an oiled street. Second wasn’t a paved street until the mid to late 1980s when that went in. Then, we repaved Portland at about the same time. Of course, then, we put in Fifth [Avenue South] and, then, we put in Park [Avenue South] and, then, we put in Chicago [Avenue South]. We put in Eleventh [Avenue South]. Any one of those by themselves isn’t a seminal public improvement, but they were all parts of what needed to be done. But buying those elevators so that we could pull that track and make Second into a street from a functional point of view was, again, a turning point in terms of the image of the area.

LM: You said Second Street wasn’t paved until...?

AC: Well, let me check.

LM: So when the Whitney Hotel opened, there were still railroad tracks there?

AC: No, I think by the time that opened, we did have the rails removed... Let me see if I can find it. Gosh, I thought I had Second Street down here. I’ll have to check. I thought I had the Second Street paving included in my list of things that I put down in my data.

LM: It would have been in the 1990s?

AC: No, paving of that stretch would have been about the time the hotel opened (1987 or 1988). There was another stretch of Second further downriver that was paved in about 1990 or 1991.

LM: Oh, okay, so early. You bought the elevators and you held them for a while before you ...?
AC: Yes. We bought them from General Mills, and they agreed to continue to use them, but just with trucks.

LM: Okay.

AC: They agreed to continue to be the tenant in there and use them and manage them, you know, but with just truck access.

LM: I see.

AC: So the use of the elevators became very much more passive. There wasn’t a lot of in and out. You could use trucks for delivery, but it wasn’t as significant.

LM: So that was early-ish when you bought them, but it was just that they didn’t get torn down until later.

AC: Yes. They got torn down later, right. We built Second Street, and there was a great deal of debate about Second because the funding source was state aid money, and to meet state aid, it had to be a lot wider than many of us wanted it to be. Now, the width has allowed us to have the bike lanes. But the original vision for state aid was that it needed to be two lanes each way, and we all kept saying, “But that doesn’t leave us any land. We need some room for streetscape and stuff.” So there was a great deal of pushback and forth about the configuration of Second Street. It is the width it is because of the MSA [Municipal State Aid].

LM: I did not know that.

AC: Then, the Guthrie [Theater] was coming in... A lot of people treated that as a big turning point.

LM: Yes.

AC: It was hugely important. To me, knowing a lot of these other things that had happened, it felt more like the exclamation point on a lot of what had been done much earlier, and it was kind of the confirmation that things were going in the right direction.

LM: Right.

AC: It was a very important project for affirming that, yes, this is the place to be. It wouldn’t have happened had all of that groundwork not been laid. It was an important project. It was a turning point, but not as much of a turning point as it seemed for a lot of people who weren’t familiar with all of that background work.

LM: Right.
AC: What else? That was my list of “turning point” seminal projects. I’m sure I’ve missed some things. Certainly, there are some huge projects. Riverplace was a huge project. The Federal Reserve was a huge project. There were some other projects that were significant but didn’t feel as much like turning points.

LM: Right, where things did really shift.

AC: Yes.

LM: Let’s see. We talked about the physical challenges of the pollution and, certainly, the financial challenges. What about political situations? That’s always fascinated me because, as I think it was Lou DeMars pointed out that, since it was not a neighborhood, it wasn’t part of a ward.

AC: Well, it was, but it was just a...

LM: There were many wards. So where was the political ownership? Did that make its redevelopment more challenging or less challenging?

AC: In some ways, the fact that it wasn’t a neighborhood—although, it was on the edge of some neighborhoods—and the fact that it was not, literally, abandoned, but, you know, had cold storage rather than active business uses, made it easier to do the redevelopment. Other than Nicollet Island and the controversy there, you could propose changes without displacing a bunch of existing residents. You were displacing businesses, but many of them were on their last legs - they weren’t robust, thriving businesses. Maybe Shiely Sand & Gravel was.

Most of the businesses that were being transitioned out of there knew their days were numbered, or it was just storage or something, so you could propose some changes without facing a huge amount of push-back on the impact to what was there already. That is different from the Upper River where we have... We don’t have a residential community, although, we do have some neighborhoods who very much are right next to it that are very supportive and interested in what’s going on. But we do have some businesses, you know, things like the scrap businesses that are viable and want to stay there. So it’s very much a different dynamic from that point of view. The East Bank was always, of course, much less industrial and had more connections with the Marcy-Holmes neighborhood and Saint Anthony West, so I think there has been more of sense for them that this was part of their territory. Of course, downtown didn’t have that many residents when we started at all! Or they were at Loring Park or Elliot Park, quite a ways away. The dynamics have certainly changed as the riverfront has been redeveloped and the adjacent neighborhoods, like Marcy-Holmes, have gotten better connected into what was always their neighborhood, but maybe hadn’t attracted much of their attention.

Also, now as people have moved into the area, we’ve created new neighborhoods. I think they have a little bit different identity with North Loop and Mill District. So now we have created new neighbors that are, obviously... Many of them are very passionately
interested in what happens and weigh in on the future of the area, which is a very different dynamic than what we had when we started and there weren’t that many people who cared, who were either supporters or detractors.

LM: Right.

AC: I think it did take people seeing the potential of the area and recognizing you’ve got one of the world’s great rivers. You’ve got an area right next to downtown, right next to the University [of Minnesota] that was really just not contributing anything, and it’s the birthplace of the city. There was this huge opportunity to put that back to some use that takes advantage of that great location and all the amenities the area had to offer. It took people seeing that vision and being willing to wade in and tackle it, trusting that, yes, if we do this, it won’t happen immediately, but we can turn this around. And we did! It just took a long time.

We certainly have seen an ebbing and flowing of the level of interest among those who were the leaders over time, and the ebbing and flowing of the level of involvement of different entities. For example, the Park Board was very active back in the Bob Mattson, Al Wittman, Dave Fisher era, and somewhat the Mary Merrill Anderson era. The Minnesota Historical Society was relatively new. Now, it feels, at least as far as some of the current activities, that the Historical Society is a more active partner than the Park Board on some things. Who has been involved and who have been the individual leaders has changed over time.

The riverfront, before this recent change in the economy, had gotten to the point where the public sector investments had been done and most of what was happening was happening privately. We were selling land that we had bought. So we were involved as the landowner but we were making money off of the land that we’re selling, and then the developers go finance it themselves. So I think people have started to feel like the riverfront is now done. We can move on. Now, of course, the economy has changed and the remaining development won’t go quite as easily. There are still some things left to do, some big things. We’ve got to save the Pillsbury A Mill. We’ve got to get the last missing link of parkway done. So there are still some things to do, but I think it has a different place in people’s awareness of priority than it did when it was clear that if we don’t do something, nothing is going to happen.

LM: Let me ask the question in a little bit different way, too. Where was the vision for the riverfront carried? Within the city council? In the mayor’s office? The players change.

AC: The players change and who was carrying the vision has also changed.

LM: Who were the great advocates? I have my theory, but I’ll wait. I’m curious about that.
AC: I can’t say that I’ve ever thought it through in depth. But there certainly have been some people like Sharon Sayles Belton when she was a councilmember and, then, as mayor. She was a huge riverfront supporter, even though it wasn’t her ward.

LM: Right.

AC: She was somebody who was a very consistent supporter.

[Mayor Donald] Fraser was somewhat involved, but I don’t think he was quite as much of a leader as she was.

LM: Yes, it seemed at that point maybe Lou DeMars was more active.

AC: It could be that there were more at the council level.

LM: That was the Riverplace, a different kind of image for the river.

AC: Yes, a different aspect of it.

At the Park Board… I think Dave Fisher was, and I think Mary Merrill Anderson was a good supporter. I don’t think it’s the current Park Board’s priority. I think if they have a riverfront priority, it’s more the Upper River than it is this stretch of the river.

Nina [Archabal], once the Historical Society got involved, has been a strong and consistent partner. The [National] Park Service now is one of the newer partners and is more involved. Then, the University has been more aware of its opportunities being on the river and what they can do to interact more with the river. So there are new partners that have come in that weren’t that actively involved before.

LM: That’s interesting. I gather that’s sort of David Wiggins’ return to the National Park Service.

AC: Yes, David Wiggins and Paul Labovitz as the new superintendent. They’ve been involved. Yes, the two of them are more active these days than… Well, of course, when the Park Service first got involved, they were still just trying to figure out what the territory was and get their center built over in the Science Museum. I think once they got that done, then they could think about some other things.

Now, with this new [Minneapolis] Riverfront Corporation [MRC] being started… Vision is an interesting thing for the river. We had Mississippi/Minneapolis: a Plan & Program for Riverfront Development as kind of this initial cornerstone plan and vision, but that was 1972, so that’s going on forty years ago.

So much of the planning that we’ve done since then has gotten split up into a Mills District Plan, a Heritage Landing Plan, and plans over here and Nicollet Island, or the interpretive plan. People have always said…”well, show me your plan for the
riverfront.” I’ve had to rather sheepishly say, “Actually, it’s this whole stack of plans, and they’re all in constant evolution.” I have always felt that, at least amongst the TAC [Technical Advisory Committee] that were active members, the vision was there as to how those pieces knitted together and what we wanted to achieve, but we’ve done a terrible job at articulating it. From a planning point of view, it’s spread out in all these documents. One of the things we did as part of Riverfront Organization Study is to have a little work process that put on one page “The Vision.”

It’s mostly articulating the vision that we’ve always had, but just hadn’t written down. That felt important to me, and people responded to it very well. It’s a very top-line vision that doesn’t say what’s going to happen on a particular piece of land, much less what the one- to three-year capital improvement plan is or anything.

One of the things that I’m hoping the new Riverfront Corporation will take on is being keeper of that vision... We’re just in the process of doing our strategic planning process. We’ve talked about the Riverfront Corporation being the keeper of the vision so that it is the place where all of those partners come together as board members to try to do some coordination in working together. But we also want to have an entity that, although it has politicians on the board, is separate enough that it can be the consistent keeper of the vision...the way Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation does. Don’t let people forget about that vision. Weigh in on the opportunities, and weigh in when there are threats, and try to provide assistance in coordinating and raising the profiles of things, so maybe you can get funding that you wouldn’t otherwise. The hope is that the Riverfront Corporation will, then, come in as a new partner. It’s still being organized. It hasn’t played that role yet, but that’s very much one of its goals - to be the keeper of the vision, the champion for the riverfront, etcetera.

LM: As opposed to the Saint Anthony Falls Heritage Board, which has a more specific agenda?

AC: Everybody supports the Heritage Board...I hope everybody supports the Heritage Board. It seems like it. would continue even after the Riverfront Corporation is launched. There’s a fair amount of overlap of the board membership, but there are differences between the two entities. The Heritage Board, first of all, is focused only on the central stretch of the river, and it’s working only on history.

LM: Yes.

AC: The Heritage Board isn’t involved upriver. It isn’t down river. Although, in preserving and interpreting the history, they waded into a lot of stuff, you know private development projects and park projects that have historic components. Clearly, it’s not like they’re completely shut off in some ivory tower of history, but their goal is historical interpretation, and it’s geographically limited. They’re also not an entity. They were created by the legislature, but they’re not a legal entity that can do anything.
Anything they do has to be done by the Historical Society as their fiscal agency. They can’t hire staff. They can’t enter into their own contracts. They’re not a 501(c)3 that people can donate money to. So it doesn’t have the organizational structure. It’s very important in what it does, but it is limited in what it can do because of its organizational structure. Whereas, the MRC is a non-profit, and we’re going to be applying for 501(c)3 status and, hopefully, it will be able then, to enter into contracts, hire staff—not that it is going to take over doing the implementation. It’s still going to be the Park Board building the parks, and the city doing the development and public improvements. But, the Riverfront Corporation will be able to be more of an actor. Whereas, the Heritage Board has been a place where the policy makers come together, and they pool the money so that we can do the planning and do the small planning grants. They did have that little era where they got a fairly significant chunk of money to do the bridge and help with the Mill Ruins Park and Washburn Crosby. The Heritage Board is wonderful, and it will continue, and, certainly, it will be needing to work out how it coordinates with the MRC. It doesn’t do everything the MRC would, could, and should do if it evolves the way we hope it will.

LM: I also want to be sure we talk about the TAC. I actually have a theory that the TAC carried the vision very much through a lot of different council members and different administrations. Would you talk about that?

AC: I would agree with that. The TAC... Oh, I don’t have the dates in front of me. Fred [Neet] dug this out at one point. The TAC was kind of an outgrowth of the old RDCB, which was very short lived. Nobody knows what happened to their records. Nobody knows quite why they dissolved. Anyway, the TAC apparently was kind of an outgrowth of that.

LM: Maybe for the tape we should explain...

AC: The Technical Advisory Committee, which was staff people, started out fairly small. I think it was Jerry Luesse from MHRA, John Burg from Planning, Jim Lind from Public Works, and Bob Mattson or Al Wittman from the Park Board. So it started very small. In 1985, the Council took some action kind of formally appointing and recognizing a Riverfront Technical Advisory Committee that had, I think by that time, a slightly larger membership. I forget the dates. I can dig those out. Then, when the Heritage Board was created, the reality was that it doesn’t have its own staff. Instead of having staff what the agreement is—although, it’s not a legal agreement—is that the funding partners each provide the $31,000 a year for a little pot of money, but also provide staff to act as the Heritage Board staff. So the Heritage Board took an action in 1988, too, that kind of recognized the Riverfront TAC and said, “Yes, you’re our TAC.” The membership has changed over time because where it started out very small, it’s now, I think, about forty people on the distribution list.

It’s all pretty much the governmental entities. Any governmental entity that has some involvement with the riverfront is on the list. Most of them don’t come to the meetings.
But they are on the list, and, hopefully, getting the materials and kind of staying apprised of what’s happening.

LM: So that would include Hennepin County...?

AC: It includes the county. It includes the Corps of Engineers, the National Park Service, the University, DNR [Department of Natural Resources], etc.

LM: So it’s way beyond the city now.

AC: Way beyond local...

LM: But is the working TAC still operating?

AC: We have been meeting every month for decades—except for a rare occasion. For example, if the Fourth of July was the day we were going to meet... There have been a few that have been cancelled. Otherwise, pretty much every month, we have gotten together to share information, to coordinate what we’re doing, to kind of think about things like the Heritage Board work plan. The staff has always, every year, put together the proposed budget and work plan for the little pot of money. The meetings would be maybe a couple of hours once a month. You could only talk about any topic for fifteen, twenty minutes, so there have been a ton of different work groups that have spun off to work on the Heritage Board Interpretation Plan, or work on a particular design for a park. So there have been a lot of work groups that have spun off that have been subgroups of the TAC, with a couple of extra people added because of the topic.

I think you’re right that we have been one of the keepers of the vision because, not in all cases but in some cases, the staff has a longer duration than the elected officials who come and go. We tend, as staff, to have the time to be more aware of the details of things than an elected official would. As much as they have on their plates, they can’t get involved in the details. So we have been more involved with the details and have been working consistently to try to knit the pieces together and, as it moved forward, come up with strategies. Okay, we have this piece. How are we going to find a developer? What are we doing to do to get Mill Ruins Park funded? Coming up with strategies, sharing information so that we weren’t caught by surprise by something.

One of the things that has been a challenge is that now people are perceiving the Central Riverfront as kind of done. With changes in leadership, for instance, attendance at meetings hasn’t been as good. The decision was made in February to go to meeting quarterly instead of monthly.

How that will work, I don’t know. The city now has these sector teams. There are five sector teams that, in many ways, are similar to the TAC, in that they bring people together from different areas on a monthly basis to talk about a geographical area. It’s mostly CPED people in planning or the development side. I think all the sector teams have a Public Works person that occasionally comes. But it isn’t outside the city. It’s
kind of a similar geographic focus that in ways, I think, is doing much of what the TAC had done. Now, because that exists, there has been some pushback that, “well, we don’t need the TAC then.” I am concerned that we will lose some of that knitting together of the pieces.

LM: Yes.

AC: All of the parts of the riverfront, yes, need to tie to their sector, but there’s a lot of what’s specific and unique to the river that needs to tie up and down the length of the river. There are a lot of specific regulations and requirements and funding sources and partners that are different to the riverfront and that don’t apply to, say, most of South Minneapolis or North Minneapolis or whatever. How that will work in the long run, I don’t know. At least, for this upcoming period, the TAC will be meeting once a quarter. Whether that will mean that more people will come, I don’t know. The public sector staff, we’re all doing two or three people’s jobs. So the amount of time we have to pay attention to anything as we did in the past no longer exists. Whether people will now feel it’s just once a quarter, I’m going to make more of an effort to try to be there, or whether there will be even poorer attendance because people aren’t working together – it will be interesting to see.

An important part of the TAC and an important part of the Heritage Board and, now, an important part of the Riverfront Corp... it’s a virtual world, but relationships still matter. Working with somebody long enough that you start to build trust, or in a few cases know where trust is not warranted, you can build communication. You can build some working relationships so that you can really start wading in and getting something done, and, hopefully, working together to avoid the conflicts rather than standing in different courts and lobbing bombs at each other. So those places where people come together and build those relationships... It’s a long term investment. It could be that at any particular meeting no earth shaking thing happens, but I have always felt that having places where those working relationships can be built in the long run is hugely important. There are people on the TAC that I’ve worked with for years, or that aren’t any longer on the TAC, that I still respect as professionals and I view as personal friends because we’ve been through wars together. It builds a facility as the keeper of the vision, but it also, builds an ability, when it’s working right, to work together to solve things that any of us on our own in our own agencies and departments would have a heck of time doing. Either things would not happen, or things would happen with a great deal of pain and angst and conflict. All of these partners share an interest in the river, but from very different perspectives.

LM: Yes.

AC: The things that are the good solutions, if you’re looking at it from the point of economic development and taxes, may be different than the solutions if you’re looking at it from the point of view of preservation or recreation. The experience of the TAC has been that if we work together, we can find ways to come up with solutions that meet multiple goals. Projects and initiatives that achieve eighty or ninety percent of each of
our individual goals can actually happen if we can work together and quit holding out for one hundred percent of what each of us want, because that way nothing happens.

LM: My other theory is that because this happens at the staff level rather than at the elected official level, it avoids a certain level of grandstanding that contributed to the demise of the Riverfront Development Coordination Board, for instance. You don't have to answer that. [laughter] No?

AC: I think you're right in that the staff tends to be thinking about what is the goal we're trying to achieve? What is the programmatic goal that I, as somebody in economic development...we want jobs and taxes. My housing colleague wants affordable housing. We're looking at what are the public goods we are trying to achieve, and how can we work together to achieve them. Most of us don't expect any personal credit for it.

LM: Yes.

AC: We're driven by the vision of what we want to achieve, but we don't have to worry about getting elected every year or every four years. Things can happen—you're right—at a different level that is not as impacted by what is having to come up for election and needing to have things to point to as accomplishments and controversies that need to be avoided. If we're just in our world of thinking what's good for the riverfront, we don't have to be - as the elected officials have to be - constantly weighing options. The riverfront isn't the only priority. There are all of these other needs that they need to and should be paying attention to. There's a lot of pushing and pulling about what should get the resources and what should get the attention that the staff was able to get around. If we're in the riverfront mode, we can focus on that. Again, we're hoping the Riverfront Corp will be able to be looking at things from the point of view of what does the riverfront need now and in the long term? How can we achieve that? How can we articulate its opportunities and needs clearly enough that people understand it as a priority? Within the broader group of priorities that a city has, how can we make sure that even though the riverfront is not preeminent, it is not lost in the shuffle?

LM: Is there still a Park Board representative on the TAC?

AC: There are a couple of people, but there's been this ebbing and flowing and, at this point, they come to some of the meetings. There have been years when the Park Board people were there every time and were very active on the Heritage Board, etc. Now, it's not non-existent, but it doesn't seem to be as high a priority.

LM: Yes. As I understood it, they changed their way of organizing their staff, so it's not geographically oriented, when Rachel [Ramadhyani] left.

AC: Well, no. Before Rachel left... In fact, they went more geographical because they have their districts. They have three districts now and the riverfront is within all three of them; although, one of the districts has just a little stretch. But they have some people
who are in planning who are for the whole system and, then, other people that are in their
district offices.

LM: Oh, I see.

AC: We have, at this point, the two people who come...one person who is, I think, in
planning... I'm not sure how they're organized. It does not honestly seem that it is as
much a priority for the Park Board as it was in the past. Similarly for the Planning
Department, we don't get as much participation from them. I think they kind of feel,
well, Ann [Calvert] is doing it, so we're covered.

Public Works...the person comes is brilliant when he comes, but he's busy. Where,
before, Jim Lind was deputy head of the department, I think, at the time, and he would
personally come to the TAC meetings. There have been changes in levels of priority in
the different organizations and changes at what levels of organizations were people
involved.

LM: Some of that, I suppose, is a sign of what has been accomplished.

AC: Yes, yes. I think there is the feeling that it's been done.

LM: There aren't a hundred things happening.

AC: Yes. Clearly, these days, as I said, all the public bodies, everybody, is doing at least
what before were two or three people's jobs. People are so crunched for time that it's
very hard to say, "I will spend some time on something that, in the long run, has huge
potential but it's not a fire." Instead, it's "I've got a report that's due tomorrow." So I
think unless people are really told, "You will go; this is a priority," it's harder for people
to carve out the time, because they do have so much on their plates. I certainly
understand that.

LM: You're one of those people.

AC: It is a challenge. It will just be interesting to see how it works as we move forward.
The Riverfront Corporation, that work group, has been meeting every other week, so
that's some of the same people. So it could be that some of the things that were done as
the TAC will now shift to being done by the staff people who are there. They still keep
the name TAC, but now the aegis under which they're doing it is underneath the
Riverfront Corporation and its work, which could be a little different...but might be
similar people. That's taken a lot of work to try to get the Riverfront Corp off the
ground. It could be that some of the time investment is happening, but happening through
that role.

LM: Is that a public/private body?

AC: Yes.
LM: So it will be a board of elected officials and of others?

AC: Yes, the goal is there will be twenty-four people. Fourteen of the seats are appointed by other bodies, several of which are public. There are three representatives on the board that are from the three stretches of the river that are neighborhood organization reps. So there are fourteen people who are largely governmental that are appointed by other bodies to this board, and, then, ten positions that are appointed by the board that will be some additional residents and, then, some business people. Just now, we’ve got three of those ten appointed. There’s a recruitment process going on to fill the rest of the spots. But it will be a public/private board that will both government and non, both grassroots kind of community folks and, we hope, some others. Dave Norback who is the head of RSP [President, RSP Architects] has agreed to serve.

LM: Just a couple more things. Any other kind of over-all reflections as you look back? Or you can leave that till later.

Then, I also wanted to ask about the undone business and what do you, as you look forward, feel strongly are the agenda items that you hope someone is focusing on whether it’s you or someone else?

AC: Looking back, I think you feel, well, of course, that was important to do, and I’m glad that collectively we did it. I think it’s had a huge return on just about anything you might want to measure. It’s been very important not only for the riverfront itself, but think what an amenity we now have that attracts people to come to the Convention Center, come visit Minneapolis, come live along the river or live in downtown near the river. That is the kind of amenity, you know, the Richard Florida creative class [The Rise of the Creative Class], all that kind of stuff that keeps Minneapolis vibrant. So I think it is so important that we did it.

I think many people couldn’t see that it could happen. Even those of us who could see that it could happen never anticipated condos selling for millions! But, there were years there where people were completely flummoxed about what to do, and not at all sure that something could be done. Now, looking back, people feel, well, of course, and aren’t we glad we did it? I feel hugely blessed to have been involved with it and involved long enough to really see the changes. Many people either are new enough to the area they didn’t know what it used to be like ten years ago, and even the ones who’ve been around have forgotten. Well, hasn’t the parkway always been there? Hasn’t Riverplace always been there? [laughter] Having worked on it long enough, you really can see the cumulative benefits of what has happened. That’s why I’ve been trying to keep track of all the data so that we can really tell that story. I really do want to, someday, see some of those before pictures you have, because I would love to have a whole suite of the befores and afters.

LM: Yes.
AC: Those are so visceral. People can see from them..."oh, yes, that’s a big change.”

But we’re not done. In the Central Riverfront, we still have work to do to complete development on the Depot property... We still have the Mill District City Apartments who we hope will get their financing and be able to get started. We just approved exclusive development rights for Parcel A. We’re hoping that will get going once the economy comes back.

LM: For housing?

AC: Yes, senior housing and rental housing and a little bit of commercial and, then, a parking ramp that will support this building and Mill Place in addition to the new development. The 205 Park site, which we are just are spiffing up for a parking lot for interim use, has development potential. The parcel that wraps around the Guthrie ramp has potential. There’s another phase of the Zenith [Condominiums] to be done. Steve Frenz has his proposal back here. So, clearly, there are additional private developments on this side of the river. There are still some infill things happening in North Loop. There’s a proposal working its way through now on the Merit Printing site. There are development opportunities still out there that, once the economy comes back, we hope will start...may not booming the way it was for a while, but will at least get going. There is still a great deal of opportunity over on the east side because the Pillsbury A Mill property and those historic buildings are very, very important to get done, and there is a lot of opportunity there. Then, this vision of extending Main Street so it connects to East River Parkway so we have the continuous trail and parkways on the East Bank of the river is very important.

We’re about to wade into an update to the Saint Anthony Falls Interpretive Plan. The Heritage Board just a week ago authorized us to move ahead with that. That’s going to be a very interesting process, because where the first plan was driven a lot by, as I said, needing to preserve the resources, most of the resources have now been preserved. The focus is going to be more on how do we maintain and keep alive what we’ve already done, and, then, from a programmatic point of view, what are the additional things that we could be doing? When we did the first interpretive plan, nobody had cell phones and the web. There are all sorts of things we could be doing for interpretation using new technology that, you know, nobody even anticipated back then. We need to think through what some of those opportunities are. I’m hoping that plan will inform our actions moving forward to make sure that everything we’ve worked so hard for stays not only sustainable but stays alive and fresh and interesting and meeting new needs. We also need to identify which stories we still haven’t told or the remaining resources that we need to save, or things like how to deal with the this whole controversy there has been over some of the archaeology where the Wave was proposed. There is more archaeology over there and we need to decide how important it is to save.

There is the whole question from an interpretive point of view...do you need to save every piece of archaeological something? If so, is it because there is something you can learn from it, or is there a particular interpretive story that it helps communicate, or are
there some things that, yes, you document it, but, then, you don’t need it? Some of those questions, I hope the plan will weigh into. That will hopefully inform, perhaps, another layer of activity. We’ve never really told the sawmilling story very well. The railroad story is just hinted at.

We’re also in the interpretive plan looking at this story of the last thirty or thirty-five years, which has been another era for the riverfront, like this project. We’re starting to try to get some of that documented so that today’s history can be told in the future. We’re starting to think about some of the social history and the inter-relationship between what mankind did on this stretch of the river to the environment, and why we’re now trying to respect and restore the environment more. The theme for 2010 is going to tie to the environment and the changes to the natural resources over time as a result of our vaunted history that actually had some real environmental impacts on the river and on the areas upstream. There’s a lot to be done, I think, on the interpretive front.

As I said, there are a number of projects to be done. Almost all of the parks have additional phases. You know, there are many mill ruins here that could be urban archaeological digs? There’s the Gatehouse rehab and reopening the canal that could be done. There are additional phases in Mill Ruins Park. There’s some work going on looking at this East Bank area here, because the Hennepin Bluffs could use some rehab. There’s a lot of interpretive potential over here with some of the stories of how that waterpower canal worked. Working with the A Mill and working over at the University... They’ve got that first stream lab and the ability to tell some of the environmental story. There are additional phases of Boom Island Park in their plan. There’s additional work for Nicollet Island. So there’s a ton of additional phases of park improvement that could be done.

Then, the other thing is trying to take the success here and keep moving it up river, so that we can make some of the changes up there that are envisioned for above the falls. We haven’t run out of things to do.

LM: Thank you so much.

[End of the interview]