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An Interview with Chris Guinchigliani

An Oral History Conducted by Suzanne Becker

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Recorded interviews, transcripts, bound copies and a website comprising the *Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood Oral History Project* have been made possible through a grant from the City of Las Vegas Centennial Committee. Special Collections in Lied Library, home of the Oral History Research Center, provided a wide variety of administrative services, support and archival expertise. We are so grateful.

This project was the brainchild of Deborah Boehm, Ph.D. and Patrick Jackson who taught at UNLV and resided in the John S. Park Neighborhood. As they walked their community, they realized it was a special place that intersected themes of gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion, sexuality and gentrification. Patrick and Deborah learned that John S. Park had been listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and that original homeowners, local politicians, members of the gay community, Latino immigrants, artists and gallery owners and an enclave of UNLV staff all lived in the neighborhood. Therefore, they decided that the history of this special place had to be preserved, joined with the Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries and wrote a grant that was funded by the Centennial Committee.

The transcripts received minimal editing that included the elimination of fragments, false starts and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the narrative. These interviews have been catalogued and can be found as non-circulating documents in Special Collections at UNLV's Lied Library.

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Interview with Chris Guinchigliani

July 20, 2007

Conducted by Suzanne Becker

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Preface

Three decades prior to this interview, Chris Guinchigliani moved to Las Vegas and began teaching at the Clark County School District. Seeing Las Vegas as a place of personal opportunity, she involved herself first in the teachers union; eventually serving as president of the Nevada State Education Association from 1987 through 1991. She shares some of her political experiences being elected to the Nevada State Assembly for 16 years and then became a Clark County Commissioner.

Chris and her husband Gary Gray (above left) are longtime residents of the John S. Park Neighborhood and Chris was among those who originated the idea to getting a historical designation for the community. She highlights the process and obstacles within the community as people developed an understanding about what preservation really meant.

She touches upon a broad range of topics that living in the neighborhood: Manhattanization, increased traffic, crime, lack of amenities such as a grocery store, the Arts District and First Friday events. Chris also talks about the residents coming to an understanding about the benefits of preserving the John S. Park Neighborhood.

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood



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Chris Guinchigliani 5/30/09
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Interview with Chris Guinchigliani

July 20, 2007 in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Suzanne Becker

This is the John S. Park Oral History Project, interview with County Commissioner Chris Guinchigliani.

So you had a large Jewish population over in that section as well. They were kind of clustered near to their church or synagogue that they went to. So John S. Park was really more LDS [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also known as Mormons] or considered more LDS. But, in that transition, many of the folks either passed away or their kids moved out and didn't come back into the neighborhood, so it's a very small group.

But when I first ran for [Nevada State] Assembly, I ran against Mr. [Jack] Schofield or he ran up against me, and a lot of issues came up because I didn't take my husband's last name.

Oh, really.

Oh, yeah. Women should really be at home, raising their children.

So it was still pretty old-time.

It was very old-time, yeah, unfortunately. And they're very divisive because a lot of the women that were LDS, wound up supporting me, but they weren't going to do it publicly. And plus I was pro-choice, so that put, you know, that kind of interesting twist on it. So I had the Catholics and the LDS and I'm pro-choice, but it was an issue because we were doing the women that were actually doing the ballot at that time. But, even within those two churches, if you really talked with people, it's not government's business, and so that message tended to translate if someone asked about it.

Unfortunately he's passed away and now his wife has just died. But the former United States Senator Berkeley Bunker lived on Sixth Street. In fact, Mike Pollock and Barb [Pollock], they brought their house. That's their original house, the Bunkers' house. So they're only the second owners on that. You'll have a lot of that. We're only the third owners.

Well, yeah, I mean I've spoken with Marie Horseley who's lived in that house. I mean they built that house, you know.

Yeah, exactly. My neighbor who just passed away, Mr. Fox, built our home. And I met him going door-to-door and he's like, oh, I built that house. I had a second story. Here's the plans. And it was so cool.

Oh, that's great. Yeah, I think that's what's so unique about it is actually you can still get the history of the house, and know the history of how it was built, what was done to it, who was in it. I do think that that's pretty unique.

You should talk to Kerin Rogers if you haven't yet.

You know, I've tried to get a hold of her. I've had a little difficult [time].

Have you? I haven't spoken to her in a couple of days. Her back, she has really [a lot of trouble], and so there's days when she is just down.

Sure. That's understandable.

Yeah. But I'll talk [to her]. We check in on her. She kind of does little work jobs for my husband. She does his proofreading and things like that. And see, Kerin is an interior decorator. But Kerin goes back. She knows, oh, my God, history that you don't even [know].

Yeah, I would love to talk to her. I would love to talk to her.

And her dear friend Madelene Capelle who's an opera singer, who does *Undone Divas*— I don't know if you saw the play over at Winchester, but she's taking it to New York. I mean we do plays in the living room. I mean it's just, it's really [laughing].

That's great.

Yeah, so you got all that that goes on. So, Kerin definitely, I'll make sure that she gets in contact with you.

Yeah, and I'll leave her a message. I've been in and out of town, too.

So yes, you know the history of the houses, and in many cases a lot of these new folks that have moved in are only the second or third owner of [the house].

Yeah. Which is amazing. Which is really amazing. And it almost runs counter to this whole image of Las Vegas and the whole transitory population and, so again I think that's just another unique thing.

Yeah, you have this perception and people going, oh, my God. When I came out to teach, they have schools in Las Vegas? And I'm like, yeah, and in twenty-some-odd years we're the third-largest school district in the United States. People go, huh? We have the largest number of churches and synagogues per capita than anyplace. I mean you got this weird underbelly but it's not a bad underbelly, you know what I mean? [Laughing]

Well, it's not and, you know, it's just that general perception and people think, oh, do you live in a tall, shiny tower?

Exactly. Yeah. Aren't you in the Turnberrys [Turnberry Place]? [Laughing]

Right. So, yeah, and that's really interesting and something I'm curious about is the general social-political-religious mix of that area because it is so diverse and you do

have your little sections, and so you know it's interesting to see how it played out and how it's playing out now, you know, the shifts that have happened.

The school had had a celebration of all the kids that had attended John S. Park [Elementary School] about fifteen years ago.

Like historically? Oh, wow.

Yeah. You should try to see if you could [speak with them] because they did a booklet. Senator [Richard] Bryan was not in John S. Park but he was just down the street. [Mike] O'Callaghan as you know lived down the street. Eileen Brookman and her kids, she was an assemblywoman for twenty years and represented that area. Steve Evans who is [Claude] Blackie Evans's son, he bought (now I'm going to go blank. From the university. Ah, one of the first female legislators.) Flora Dungan's home over on Sixteenth Street. So he found, and donated to the Women's [History] Center, like boxes of stuff.

So I mean, you had this wonderfully integrated area, because you had Jewish, you had African-Americans. There's never been a large African-American component but there's been a handful that have lived in that. I mean we were probably one of the first that was more where they assimilated to because, I'm telling you, when I first moved here, parts of North Las Vegas and Westside were worse than what I saw in Chicago, in forms of discrimination. So our neighborhood in some ways was kind of the first step up because the houses were affordable, at least within the Huntridge area, and so if you were African-American or Hispanic that was kind of the first step. So, in its own little weird way, it was kind of an integrated area to some extent.

Yeah, and I think it's still sort of serving as just a place where people can go, a mixed community.

Yeah, if you're going to buy a house. Unfortunately all the prices have gone up, but if you're going to spend two-fifty or three hundred, why not do one where it's got a neighborhood, it's got some features, it's got architectural [features]. At one time, I was trying to get the architects in the area to take a look at, we had something like thirty-eight of the original architectural designs of homes in Las Vegas, throughout that whole Huntridge area. So that would be another thing. Was it Lucchesi Galati that was working on it? Because the old weeping brick, you know, you had all those different architectural features that were there. And actually, a gal I met, because I'm dealing with the National Golf Course in my district where they're trying to build that, Mary Margaret has done the Atomic Age Preservation Program, and they have listings of the houses in our area, in the architectural styles. I have the book. If you don't mind, you might want to stop that for a second while I look.

Well, actually now that we're talking about preservation, I have so many questions for you so I'm sorry for skipping around a little bit but, what's your take on the historic preservation aspects of the John S. Park Neighborhood?

I actually was on the original John S. Park committee that formed the historic neighborhood. It was very contentious, believe it or not. Not that people didn't believe that their homes were worthwhile and they didn't have a problem with the sense of community. It was no one wanted to have to go into architectural reviews and still wanted to maintain [their independence]. There is a saying, you're still independent in that area, you know, and so people were fearful of that. So it split the neighborhood for a while.

But it was a worthwhile fight. Let me back up. See, the city, there was no designation, other than we had the commission, the Historic Preservation Commission. It was really more city-based. The county doesn't have that, OK? So what happened is, the city's planning department said we really ought to be looking at some of these, so it was initiated by planning staff, not even by politicians. And so, we were the first group that had organized as a neighborhood. That was just when we were starting. We don't want gated communities, because I think that's an oxymoron [laughing], but we wanted a community, and how do we start? Well, happened to find out that we would've qualified, or at least from Franklin [Avenue] to Charleston [Boulevard] and from Ninth Street, Tenth Street to Las Vegas Boulevard, qualified as the first section, based on the rules that the city had set up. So, we started having neighborhood meetings, we formed a board, we spent two years probably working on the John S. Park Plan, as well as the historical designation. And, it brought a lot of people together, whether you agreed or disagreed. It was very healthy. I mean we generally had meetings with fifty to sixty people that would show up.

Which is really amazing, you know, so it sounds like that's been one of the major debates or issues that has been within that community.

And how do you balance the individuality? And we didn't want to go in and tell people you can't ever remodel and change that, so we made very clear that while we wanted the historic designation, we wanted to preserve things but not prevent people from doing some modifications as they needed to. And I think that balanced out, and most of the folks that were opposed at that time seemed to have seen that it didn't change anything, it just helped us in some fights on development issues.

It seems like it would be beneficial.

Oh, yeah, property taxes are enhanced, but it gave us one more tool to use when development that was not compatible with the neighborhood comes into play. Historic designation helps. And that's part of what we were saying is we're a unique area of town. We're right off the Strip. I don't know if you were here when we did the Stratosphere battle with the roller coaster and the twenty-six-story hotel that they wanted to put in on Las Vegas Boulevard.

Was that the Titanic?

The Titanic prior to that. So, that designation, I believe, gave us an additional tool. It's not the only thing, but because we were able to organize the neighborhood, it helped as well, because that had not happened. So, what happened is, you had John S. Park Neighborhood, you have Beverly Manor neighborhood now, you have, gosh, and I'm going to go blank for the Ninth Street [neighborhood]. Anyway, you've got four or five different neighborhoods between Charleston and St. Louis [Avenue] that did not exist. And we do block parties, you know, so it built a camaraderie but it gave us an opportunity to also be able to muster the troops when we needed to go before the city council and/or wherever else we needed to go.

Sure, and that makes sense, you know. So I guess I just want to back up a little bit and, if you could talk a bit about how you became involved. What led you to where you are today as a county commissioner? Because you went from teaching and then you were at UNLV getting your master's.

Yeah, I started teaching at Jim Bridger Middle School twenty-eight years ago, in North Las Vegas. And within three years I was president of the local teachers' union. This is a

town of opportunity, and I think maybe that is probably the better message that comes into play is, opportunity was there, you either step up and do it, lead, follow, or get the hell out of the way, in other words [laughing]. I was complaining about stuff that was going on, so somebody said, why don't you run? So I did. I got elected to the board prior to that. I was running their political program prior to that. I had never even been registered to vote [laughter], you know. Vegas was good to me. And I hope in the long run I've been good back, giving something back, because it's been a very good community and a ton of opportunities. So I've been blessed in that way.

So, yeah, I was local president, I was state president, and in my last term as state president, my assemblywoman, Eileen Brookman, her son wound up being very ill and had to have open-heart surgery, and he was the first one in the state of Nevada. And she'd already filed for office. And she called me up. My husband actually had run Eileen's campaigns in '68 when he first moved to town, so I mean there's that history, too, that comes into play. But Eileen called me and she said, I want you to run for my seat. I want to withdraw, and I want you to put your name in. And I said, gosh, I'm a union president, you know, I'm pro-choice. Eileen was as well, but I mean it was just, what's going to happen here? Well. So I did. And then Jack Schofield filed against me as a Democrat. We had a very heated, contested primary, but I won. And I won, I believe, because I did grassroots. Jack wanted to rely on his old LDS contacts and the good-old-boy structure. He'd been in the legislature, was not well-respected, so he had some history and baggage that were there. But I came from the framework of an advocate, I think, because I was the president of the union, so I just turned my advocacy to a broader base, in the long run, in my opinion. And I love door-to-door. It's an extremely humbling time, because we all

want to be liked still, so you could still have the door slammed in your face and it hurts but you can't dwell on that and you move to the next one. And then you have some wonderful, delightful lady invite you in for tea.

I miss my assembly years because you only run every two years, which actually keeps you more involved. But I had sixteen years, and I felt that I was a very hands-on legislator. No criticism of my peers. We all work second jobs, our full-time jobs and then that one, which is part-time. But I did get involved with my neighborhoods. I helped organize them. I went to City Council to argue. I went to County Commission when it was a commission issue. I believe that I was a public servant, and if that's the case and someone's got a problem, then you interact, and I think I was much more active in local government than most of my peers, as assembly and senators. It just was my choice. And I think because of the uniqueness of the area, you know. I was still small and compact in jurisdiction compared to some of the other districts which were, you know, thousands and thousands more people, in the long run.

But when I made the decision to leave the Assembly and run for County Commission, I gained just whole other sections that are older Las Vegas in a different way, you know. And what most people want is just to have a phone call returned or know there's someone they can talk to. And one of my goals is to organize neighborhoods, so we're trying to put [back] neighborhood pride, especially we're targeting areas that have been trashed. We're going out at seven a.m. tomorrow morning to clean up. I go out there myself, not just expecting staff or someone else to do it. And then it's like, OK, we painted, we cleaned, we raked your yards, we took all the stuff you've been trashing and throwing out. If I come back and see it, I'll bring Code Enforcement. So part of what I'm

trying to do is, we'll make nice, but part of this is your responsibility after that, and let's figure out how we can work together. And then what we're trying to do is set up pride groups, and have neighborhood meetings. We have grants the county can give, so say one of your neighbors is elderly and can't fix up their yard.

They can get a grant to do something like that. That's great.

Right. Yeah. So, trying to promote that. So I'm a strong believer. We have to stop closing our doors and thinking short-sighted. We have to step out and take the risks and maybe have your neighbor get angry with you, but maybe have him say thank you, too. So I have to lead by example, as far as that's concerned, so we're trying to do that as well. So, it's just a larger group to have to work with, but many of them have the same needs as we found in John S. Park. I mean, granted, my assembly district used to actually go over to McNeil [Estates] and Scotch Eighties, too.

That's a pretty large area.

It expanded when we did the redistricting after '91, but I still have a compact [district]. I could walk my district many times compared to those that are spread out, you know.

Right. Well, and I think that, again, you've got the uniqueness of a neighborhood which has blocks and roads and sidewalks.

Exactly. I know. That was always an appeal. I can get a volunteer sometimes to go door-to-door. I go, I have sidewalks and trees. [Laughter] And they're mature trees, you know.

It's different than being, you know, on a more sprawly kind of area. Yeah. Do you think that the area, the community has changed, or I guess in what ways, if any, has it changed politically?

Politically, again I would say, it's always been a Democratic area, at least as far as legislature and commission. But take party away, I consider it a more progressive area in that most of the folks that I deal with are concerned about quality-of-life issues, they are concerned about the environmental issues, they are concerned about proper sustainable planning, and so I think that lends itself to have that voice available, because we're organized. I think those types of individuals exist all throughout this valley. It's just that they haven't had the opportunity to have a community that helps bring them together. And so I think that we're a diamond in the desert, to some extent.

Yeah, yeah, I agree. And so we talked about the debate over preservation. What do you think some of the other major issues are, that have been significant to the neighborhood?

Crime. We still have crime, because we're right off the Strip, and that makes us more vulnerable. I don't agree with the city's order-out rule. All that did was just force the prostitutes into our neighborhood so they stand on Sixth and Park Paseo instead of on Las Vegas Boulevard now, which then you find we've had more break-ins, you have a lot of transients, because we're in the downtown corridor and there's transitional housing for both ex-felons and just men, that people don't realize but I know because I go door-to-door, down on Tenth [Street] and North Tenth Street, on the other half, so they tend to wander through the neighborhood, looking either to get to the Strip or looking for odd jobs to pick up, and because we had been an elderly area, there is a vulnerability. We used to have a much higher crime rate. I mean we were burgled five times. And that's even with bulldogs. They always knew either when we were out with them, they kicked in our metal doors. I mean there's little things that we learn, you know, we used to have

the crank windows and after the second time, the police said to us, hey, maybe take the handles off. Ah, duh, you know, so you know you learn, one time after another. But we still are vulnerable in that crime area, and especially with the smaller group of elderly but there are still quite a few elderly there. You have to watch that.

And then the young kids that have come in. I mean John S. Park Elementary School has quite a large population. The kids come all the way from Stratosphere behind, you know, Naked City, or Meadows Village, all the way over. So they've had overcrowding issues. But that was rebuilt and they tried to stay within a historical theme. They kept some of the pieces that were there that were unique to John S. Park.

Crime. I think growth overall. If you talk to the neighbors, when you probe a growth, it's the threat of high-rise taking over, or traffic, if you really probe with people. And, while we live in a corridor, I do ride my bike even to here. It's dangerous though because there's no bike paths anyplace. This county is not set up to be promoting things to get us alternatives out of our vehicles, so that's something I want to work on with Councilman [Gary] Reese as well to kind of link some stuff up. But, I would say, when people used to get in their car and be able to get to Boulevard Mall in five minutes, now it takes twenty, it's those impacts that are seen in the surrounding area. That and grocery stores close by. I mean, the little amenities that normally a neighborhood has, we've never had, because of our proximity to the Strip. And people kind of tended to [know], oh yeah, there's folks over there, but didn't really engage, you know what I mean?

There's not an infrastructure. And Councilman Reese, we work very closely together and he's quite aware of that. You know, I tease Lawrence Weekly because our neighborhoods are kind of [close together] and we're like, you want a grocery store?

When I first ran for office on First Street and Casino Center [Boulevard] that's what my people wanted, was a grocery store. [Laughter] And maybe like a J.C. Penney's. We don't want a Macy's, you know [laughing], they were so cute. We actually did a petition and submitted it to the city, that we need a grocery store, and we really should have something that's closer than just Smith's or Albertson's. But you need the critical mass that can sustain it. And I think once Soho [Lofts] and some of the bigger projects come on line, you may then begin to have [grocery stores]. And we don't need the big box anymore. To me, bringing in the smaller [grocery stores] like they do in Boston and Pennsylvania, they've got wonderful downtown grocery stores which are enough to be able to manage the size but you get the variety that's there. Because right now, poor people that live in motels and that's their home, there's nothing, or they have to go to a convenience store that charges twice as much. So they're already on a fixed income that's affecting them, and then we double-whammy them in that way. So, those infrastructure things are missing still.

And so that brings up an interesting point, and I'm just curious what you think about the Manhattanization, as we like to call it, of the downtown area. How do you see that impacting things?

I think north of Charleston is the right place for it. Again, I grew up in an apartment and I grew up in a big city. I believe in mixed use. I think you can do mixed-use development that just can be wonderful. Step-up apartments, then you move to condo, townhouse, you know. But I think our neighborhood is the piece that once you get out of the apartment, the condo, the high-rise, you want a house. And I think we reflect the ultimate American dream. But that puts a pressure on us, to some extent, as a neighborhood as well because

we have Las Vegas Boulevard. The owners there assume, well, everybody else is putting a high-rise in. We want to. And we're like, wait a minute. How compatible is that to this residential [area]? Now we were able to fight it back, but that won't always be the case. I mean I had to just approve a high-rise, Fontainebleau, next to Turnberry Towers. You got tower-to-tower issues there. For us, the footprint is so small on Las Vegas Boulevard, they're directly up against us, which then creates a shadow. But I tried in the legislature to get shadow studies required and planning, and I didn't get that. I tried to get height restrictions, not to stop it, but to have certain reviews that came in over five-story or thirty-five feet or whatever. I couldn't get that either. I mean it's unfortunate because people saw that as anti-growth. No, but planned growth, we need to do a better job of planning what we're doing, and we have to do things that do not destroy what little bit of history or community exists already. And that, to me, sometimes those structures belong on the other side, not directly abutting the neighborhood. And, you know, we're not going to win all of those, unfortunately. But luckily some of the projects that have been approved, I don't think are going to get off the ground.

Yeah, I mean somebody was saying the other day that change is almost inevitable, so it's how we can work within the parameters to make it work.

Oh, sure. I mean, you know, you look at the REI thing. I personally don't believe a stadium is necessary. I don't think we have the population or the traffic. We have not fixed the Spaghetti Bowl. What in the heck are we thinking, to have that huge a development off of Charleston to Wyoming [Avenue]. I mean, hey, folks, where's the plan for traffic flow, for traffic-oriented development? Let's make sure we have bike paths and bus paths, and let's look at some alternative ways for mass transit. And that

ought to be what we're focusing on, as well. And in fact I'm doing a letter to Councilman Reese because he and I were talking about this anyway. I said, Gary, if anything actually gets off the ground, and I question whether it will, mass transit has to be a component, bike paths, pedestrian-friendly malls. We have to stop forcing people into cars. And that area needs to be developed. That's a perfect area for low-mid-high-rise residential, single-family. You can do a wonderful mix.

Right, and it would seem to me that to build the population down here, you want to keep families down here.

Yeah, we've been here through the thick-and-thin, you know, and that's why we didn't support some of that stuff on directly abutting the neighborhood, and I think it still was the right thing to do.

Yeah, it'll be interesting to see the changes.

But we also have to look environmentally. As we add high-rise, we are increasing the heat. I personally believe we have a global warming issue, so what are we doing as far as, as you add more concrete, folks, we got a problem. We don't have enough green as it is. So I'm planning on looking at having green rooftops, because that will assist, not only with the amenities for the people there but also with just keeping the heat maintained and some things along those lines.

How does that play into water usage?

Well, actually, you can probably even do an artificial-turf green roof, with then some trees which help with the oxygen part of it, and do more, you know, drought-tolerant landscaping. So there are some ways to play with that because of our water problem.

But I agree that we need something to take that heat from the concrete.

Just to keep that radiation. I mean, oh, my Lord.

Yeah. I mean you can definitely feel it when you walk by buildings. It's projecting. And so I guess that leads me to think about the Arts District as well and the development of First Friday. I mean you've probably watched that develop. What's your take on the relationship between the continued growth and development of the John S. Park community and the growth of the [Arts District]?

I think it complements what we're doing. I think, even though they are somewhat threatened because of where that new development may go in, I think there's ample opportunity for [the] Arts District, no matter where, in that downtown corridor. So there's plenty of opportunity there. I think that and First Friday, what it did, is it focused people outside the community, on the jewel that we have in downtown. And, most people now, I mean if you look at it, if you figure we've got allegedly still five thousand people a month moving here, they're coming from urban areas, most of them, and in fact, the single largest migration from one county to another, happened from Orange County [California] to Clark County. So they had expectations of arts and music and performance and this and that, and so I think that will help us when we need to mobilize from time to time, but also help people focus on, we need a core. To have a downtown, you need core components that are there. I'm the one who got the performing arts building going, because legislatively I wrote the bill and I taxed the car rental industry to help pay for the performing arts center. You need those types of cultural amenities, and we're still young enough that we didn't have a lot. And I think, now, you have a lot of people that believe that it won't compete negatively with gaming. Gaming is on board. You know what I

mean? You have to massage some of that, at first, but now I think people have bought into it.

And it would seem to me that with the incredible growth that we're having, I mean there are people moving here from other urban locations that are expecting a specific lifestyle or, you know, looking for the type of neighborhoods that they used to live in, or the same types of amenities.

Where you can walk to your restaurant [and] walk home.

Right. Shops, restaurants, coffee houses, grocery stores, that kind of thing.

Exactly. If it's properly planned, the whole downtown corridor could be a delightful, wonderful urban village in and of itself. But, too many people are in this for the money and they're buying property to flip it, and I don't have a great trust level for a lot of the projects that are planned because it was really just to flip the property. And I would love to see like the students at UNLV in the architectural school, and they have done this one time but I don't know how far out they [took it], take a look at the corridor, coming in from John S. Park even, and the old Huntridge area, what could you do to make that whole [project a success]? I mean we piecemeal everything, unfortunately. Soho Lofts is ugly and it comes too far out. But that was staff, and staff should never have allowed the zero setbacks, to encourage people [to build]. They're going to build anyway. Now most cities are going back to bigger setbacks rather than zero setbacks on their streets, because if you want to add mass transit, you've now just screwed yourself. There's no easement. There's no space. So those are things that we still have to deal with.

So we need some forethought in our planning. Yeah. So, all of this aside, I mean people are still really drawn to the Huntridge area, the John S. Park area. For you, what has living in that area meant? What has it meant to you to be down there?

I have dear friends, that I never would have met, I believe, if it hadn't been for the neighborhood. It's a community. How else can I put it? It's fun. It's different, in that not every house looks the same. We watch out for each other. We know whose dog might have gotten out, you know, I always look for Chuck and Dominic's because Ben gets out [laughing], like, Chuck, Ben's out, you know. Or knowing which senior, if his curtains aren't opened by 5:30 in the morning you better go check on him. So it forces you, in a good way, to be a member of your community rather than just closing your door and closing yourself off behind a wall. And I think that's healthy. I think that's good for people, because then you see stuff through other people's eyes.

And what do you hope, or where would you like to see over the next decade or fifteen years, where would you like to see the neighborhood going, or not going for that matter?

I would love to preserve it as best as we can. I would like to see that corridor that was bought up on Las Vegas Boulevard where the old Oasis and all that were torn down, I know that people want high-rise there but I really think that could be a step-down, mixed-use, like a pedestrian pathway. If you can marry both sides of Las Vegas Boulevard, you could do some really integrated little shops, mall, cafés, little restaurants that could sustain [the population]. But the restaurants can't make it until we have enough people there to keep them going. That's part of that pressure that comes into play. And then, I can see bike paths. I just think the urban model is out there, that we could do, but we need

developers that want to be compatible with us, not just make a buck. And that's where I think the neighborhood has to start reaching out. We have to reach out with Councilman Reese on any projects that are coming in, let's get with some folks, maybe talk to the owners, Pete [Peter] Eliades and those that own on the Strip, and say, let's come up with a plan to help you make what you want to make, but complements [our neighborhood], you know what I mean? And I think we need to now be a little bit more assertive on that part of it.

So the neighborhood really needs to stay active and aware and involved and push for some of these changes.

Absolutely. Absolutely, because I mean there's high-rises approved all down [in that area]. I mean St. Louis doesn't even realize how many have been approved over there, just off the Strip. Again, you're abutting houses by Paradise [Road] and all of that, yeah. And so then where do you go with traffic? What do you do with schools? Because they're already overcrowded. How do you make sure? There was one man that came to see me and Councilman Reese, that wants to literally bulldoze 538 acres, from Turnberry to Fremont [Street]. From Maryland Parkway. Oh, yeah, he's from Dubai or someplace. He's got a whole plan laid out, all this mixed-use. I'm looking at it and he says, well, this is a blighted area. I said, I take difference with that. I said, I live in this area, and we are not blighted. Go to any city in the United States and show me where you don't have a few yards not [maintained]. This is not a blighted area. And he was trying to convince [us] that he can go get all this financing and I'm like, I don't support that. I said, why would you want to destroy this neighborhood? You can do things that complement. You could do roundabouts, where you can have, you know, more pedestrians. It's safer,

anyway, driving, we should be doing roundabouts all over the place, but you can do roundabouts with pedestrian, with all these things, on the other side. You don't have to destroy what little bit of housing we have left that's actually still affordable, and unique, just to make a buck.

You know, I think that's really interesting, and I'm wondering, you know, if you think some of that comes from just the overall larger image that Las Vegas projects, because, you know, like we were talking about earlier, I mean you tell somebody there's a university in Las Vegas and they're like, really? Are there slot machines? You know.

You can valet-park at the hospital. [Laughter]

Right, and so people just really have this odd perception of what it is and so I think they tend to not look for things or even expect that there would be these neighborhoods. But I feel like it happens locally as well.

It does. We get taken for granted and that's why I think the Arts District and First Friday and all those things have helped us. Like when we were fighting Stratosphere, it was phenomenal how many neighborhoods from other areas of town joined in. It was like, hey, if it can happen [to you, it can happen to us]. I said, because we have pockets of delightfully historic or at least classic neighborhoods throughout this entire valley, that need to be protected.

And I think that's good and I'm wondering if it's just going to grow, even though the population is growing, perhaps the demographics are changing, and people are coming in that sort of have these [expectations].

I think different expectation, and I think luckily, although the housing downturn will help ease some of that pressure, and may bring in those that are more responsible, developers that really want to look at, how do we work together, not how do I tear this down to build this one up.

Yeah, because it seems like that's what Las Vegas has been built on is down with the old, up with the new and, you know, it's always quick.

Yeah. Unbelievable. We do turn around quickly.

Right, and it's turning quick cash, too, and so it seems like that ethos needs to change.

Right. But it has to go through activism, and you cannot be complacent in this town because it happens quicker than I can blink my eye, like where did that come from, where did that go?

I mean you've been here now almost thirty years basically. Do you see or think that there has always been a strong sense of community within Las Vegas or have you seen that go through changes?

I think there's always been a strong sense of community here. There really has. Because it was so small and because it was good-old-boy network. But that good-old-boy network had some positives, as well as negatives, but some of the positives are, they got things done, but they also had a community that worked through those things. And so, I've always figured that Vegas is jazzy, and I like that part of it, with a good, well-centered part as well, and so I think we're so unique in that way. Yeah, I mean if you go to Reno, they have a totally different perspective of themselves and the world ... and yet in Vegas we're like, hey, there's something good about being able to say, we can do that, we can

accomplish that. It's just that we have to make sure that we don't lose the balance that needs to be maintained, and that is you don't have to destroy everything in order to build something new. You can complement each other. You can actually be a support system for each other, to some extent.

Right. Well, we've been talking a while, so I really appreciate you taking the time. Is there anything that we didn't cover that you think might be [or] is important or interesting to understanding the history of the community and the John S. Park Neighborhood?

No, because you talked about the LDS, and I would definitely try to reach out to some of those folks, to kind of get just background on that part of it. The new folks, and you got Margaret [McGhie]. I mean, Senator Bryan would be good to talk to, because Richard actually grew up down the street, I believe, towards the Miracrest area. A friend of mine grew up actually on Sixth Street but he lives out in the Lakes now.

Yeah, I mean if there's people that you think, too, that we should talk to, that would be great. Anybody that you can recommend.

I'm trying to think. Smith's Food King, they were LDS, and their house is on Sixth Street, but they just moved out and young couple that's friends of the Harneys, her husband a theatre [personality], does one of the shows on the Strip. I'll get Kim's phone numbers for you. They bought the original Smiths' house, so that's kind of neat. I don't know who else might be around. I'll put a little list together for you.

And I mean just even talking about this, it just seems it's so interesting that that neighborhood is so instrumental in the growth of Las Vegas.

Right. And I think what was good is you had the blend of those that grew up there, and then brand-news, and they weren't threatened by each other, and I think that helped immensely.

Which is good. Well, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

Thank you. It's been kind of fun. [Laughing]