

George Idelson CPHS Oral History Interview 11-5-2017

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AP: This is Abigail Porter. It's Sunday November 5th, 2017. I'm sitting in the living room of George Idelson's house at 3035 Newark Street NW, and we're conducting a full-life interview focusing on his life in Cleveland Park over many years. And I'll start with a question: tell me how you first came to Cleveland Park.

GI: Well it really goes back to how I first came to Washington. I arrived here in 1950... a job brought me. I was hired to be an advertising copywriter at the Hecht Company. In those days they called it the Hecht Company. Not Hecht's, because department stores were kind of important institutions in Washington and the leaders were important city leaders. That was barely five years after the end of the war.

I had been a World War II veteran... an infantry soldier. I came back after the war to finish up my college degree, which was in marketing and advertising at NYU, in downtown Manhattan. I lived in Brooklyn, so it was kind of a commuter thing for me. While in college. I joined a veterans group called the American Veterans Committee. AVC was a liberal organization that grew out of World War II... a contrast to the American Legion and several other veterans' groups that were more self-interested. Our motto was

"citizens first, veterans second". AVC went through an initial period trying to preserve itself from being taken over by pro-communist groups... a common problem for liberal groups at the time. It was kind of the beginning of my political awakening.

AP: How old were you then?

GI: I was 18 and a half when I was drafted and I was in for two and a half years. I was 25 when I came down to Washington. Well, it turns out that AVC had set up a clubhouse. A major reason for the clubhouse was that places of public accommodation in Washington were legally segregated at the time. Whites and Blacks couldn't eat in the same restaurants. Didn't go to the same movie houses, or sat in separate sections. Well AVC wanted to create an unsegregated environment for people to mix and meet. When it opened in 1948, it was considered to be unique in DC.

GI: The clubhouse played an important part in my life. In 1951 I went to a meeting after work to hear Chester Bowles give a talk. Bowles, formerly of Benton and Bowles, an advertising agency, was then ambassador to India. Well, sitting next to me, by chance, was a very attractive woman. After the meeting, I drove her home. We started to date and not too long after I proposed to her. Well, she wasn't buying, and subsequently she left for a job in California and I lost track of her. Some seven years later I went to Nantucket on vacation. I had just arrived and headed out to the beach. This was about five in the afternoon when everybody got

up from their blankets and decided who they're going to have dinner with. And next to me on a blanket was this pretty girl, no longer living in California, now living in New York. So we picked up the old romance, and three years later we got married.

AP: This is your wife Evelyn?

GI: That's my wife Evelyn. Yes.

AP: Tell me where was the Veterans...

GI: The clubhouse was on New Hampshire Avenue. Coincidentally, we're trying to find the exact address for a film that's being made by a cousin who is a documentary filmmaker. We thought it would be interesting to show that building.

AP: Could it possibly be the building that's now the Women's Democratic Club?

GI: In that same area. (It was 1751 New Hampshire Avenue NW)

AP: You mentioned it was very segregated city... can you tell me more about that what it was like living here then?

GI: Well, you know, Washington is below the Mason-Dixon Line. It was a southern city, so it was kind of in the DNA. People sort of took it for granted. There are still remnants of it, but things

have changed. Now, restaurants, schools, movie houses and other businesses are unsegregated. Neighborhoods less so.

AP: Were there areas that were open to both races?

GI: Legal segregation in DC existed until it was abolished by the Supreme Court in the early fifties. But it takes time to change things. Even now, parts of the city are largely black and other parts largely white. Rock Creek Park is a dividing line. The Anacostia River may be even more of a dividing line. But there were changes going on then. There was one neighborhood in upper 16th Street called Shepherd Park, where some liberal and farsighted activists joined a group called Neighbors, Incorporated which set out to prevent the white flight encouraged by real estate "blockbusters" when a black family moved into the neighborhood. "Neighbors" did it through vigorous outreach and setting out the welcome mat for both races. These were wonderful houses, but the fear of white flight had depressed values. And that became a great inducement to attract families prepared to embrace change. It's a welcoming mixed neighborhood.

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AP: When did you buy your house?

GI: We bought our house in 1967. The owner had worked for a Congressman who had been defeated. But why here, why did we move here? We were at that time living in the Foxhall-Reservoir area, very close to the river and very much in the flight path of

National Airport. My wife is particularly sensitive to noise and it became a matter of some concern to do something about it. Well, we did try to do something about it, to help organize an activist group called the Committee Against National. And we had some successes. But you don't readily change the flight path of the airplanes, not with Congressmen flying home on weekends. We finally decided that we had to move.

AP: Had you seen a house that you liked?

GI: No, but I would have liked to have built one. My idea was to find a house with an empty lot, move in temporarily, get away from the airplanes, and build a modern, no-maintenance house. Cleveland Park was particularly appealing because it really wasn't on the flight path, and close to our jobs downtown. And we loved the feeling of living in a village in the city. We never did find such a lot. Houses were very hard to come by in Cleveland Park at the time. You didn't see signs out front that said "For Sale." If you moved into Cleveland Park, it was usually because somebody told you about it. And indeed we were wandering around in the neighborhood and struck up a conversation with somebody across the street who was out tending his garden. We told him we were looking and he said, "Well that house across the street is going to go up for sale. But they haven't given it to the agent yet. And you know if you buy it now you might get it a little bit cheaper." So we did. We walked up the stairs. To me it seemed very Victorian looking, and certainly not the modern no-maintenance house I had

in mind. Big, probably bigger than I imagined we would want. But we bought it.

AP: Do you remember what you paid for it?

GI: Yeah, sixty-six thousand, and later thought maybe we'd offered too high a price. I don't feel that way today (laughs) but... and we've come to love it. I don't really think of it as Victorian any more. Queen Anne is probably a better description. Many people see it as one of the prettiest houses in Cleveland Park. That's helped by my wife's ideas about how it should be painted and cared for, and her garden that she tends so arduously. It does have a lot of steps, but we decided that if we age in place in Cleveland Park those steps would either make or break us. I'm not sure which it'll turn out to be but we're certainly aging in place at the moment.

AP: And can you think back and describe what your neighborhood was like when you moved here? Has it changed much?

GI: Well, I've always thought of Cleveland Park as sort of an intellectual neighborhood, certainly a liberal neighborhood. And in those days people took care of their own gardens and they cut their own grass – things like that. Now they hire people to do that. Evelyn is still the gardener, but we are older now and we need help. So that's that's a big difference. People who move in today are moving into a much more expensive neighborhood. You know

a lot of us old timers say we couldn't afford to move into this neighborhood now.

GI: But Cleveland Park hasn't changed all that much. Many of the things that made it attractive and appealing still make it attractive and appealing. And part of that is because in 1986 we became an historic district, which was a way to protect its historicity and to give us a voice in the kind of development that could take place here. Even so, we've had our share of development controversies. It helps to have lawyers.

AP: Do you want to talk a bit about that time period and how you gained historic designation?

GI: One aspect of the process is especially interesting. Cleveland Park's commercial district on Connecticut Avenue included a little "Park and Shop" with parking out front and retail stores behind it. It was next to a new Metro station making it a target for a high rise development which many people felt was not right for the community. In the research that was done to seek historical designation for Cleveland Park it was discovered that the "Park and Shop" had historical significance as first of its kind on the East Coast. So it was included in the designation.

AP: Do you remember who did the research?

GI: I think it was Kathy Wood. (Wood recalled the date the "Park and Shop" was built, but Judy Hubbard Saul uncovered the

historical data used for the application.)

AP: And what did...maybe you can describe what Connecticut Avenue was like at that time or even when you moved in in 1960?

GI: 1967. Not terribly different from what it is today.

AP: Okay.

GI: I mean that kind of speaks to how consistent this neighborhood has remained over the years.

AP: Do you remember what the businesses were?

GI: Well we had a different supermarket-- a small Safeway-- and when it left neighbors went on a search and convinced Brookville to come. It wasn't a real estate agent that did that; it was the neighborhood. We had lots of restaurants. They didn't change as often as they do now.

AP: There was the Roma when I first moved here.

GI: Yes, an Italian restaurant. Very popular. Food wasn't great, but it was very much a part of the neighborhood.

Sadly, Mr. Abbo, the man who owned the Roma was killed crossing Connecticut Avenue. He is actually one of three people I knew who

have been killed crossing Connecticut Avenue. That's always been an issue because we have this river of cars rushing in and out of Maryland every day, with reversible lanes during rush hours. Getting rid of the lane change and finding more parking is a subject that comes up a lot. Today we have a mid-block crossing, an idea I and others proposed when I headed the Cleveland Park Citizens Association.

AP: The lane change--was that in effect when you moved here?

GI: Yeah, I think it was.

AP: The gentleman who owned Roma, was that after he'd retired from the restaurant business, or while he still...

GI: I think he was still running the business. It was his idea to create the service lane on Connecticut Avenue. Stores like it because it allows folks to drop off or pick up items. And provides some much needed parking. But it is controversial. Some residents, mostly younger, would like to widen the sidewalk for outdoor dining. But when push comes to shove, the community votes to keep it.

AP: You seem focused on Connecticut Avenue. Do you remember what the Wisconsin Avenue corridor was like?

GI: If you live on this side of 34th Street, which is Reno Road,

you do tend to be focused on Connecticut Avenue. If you live on the other side you tend to focus on Wisconsin Avenue. From a planning standpoint, both the Connecticut Avenue and Wisconsin Avenue commercial districts have commercial overlays. That's a sub-zoning element that gives the community some control over what kind of retailing you can have there. One rule is that you could have no more than 25 percent of the frontage devoted to restaurants and bars. They didn't want to become another...

AP: Adams Morgan?

GI: Adams Morgan.

AP: Can you explain perhaps so future historians know what that means?

GI: Adams Morgan is a community on the other side of the Zoo that is very densely populated and has a lot of restaurants and bars. Real estate companies and landlords tend to favor restaurants. They seem to think that they bring in more income, whether or not that's true. But, if you have nothing but restaurants, you limit the possibilities for having the kind of mixed retail that local residents want to be able to walk to. That would mean no gift stores, no pet stores, cleaners, maybe a little five and dime store... you name it. All of those things that over the years Cleveland Park has had.

AP: Drugstores?

GI: And certainly drugstores.

GI: And it's really part of the culture of Cleveland Park that we have walkability to those things. Wisconsin Avenue, which has now been more modified in recent years, doesn't have quite that mix. Even though there are many large buildings with residents who might want those services. The two commercial districts are quite different, and they may compete with each other a bit.

AP: You talked about how the Metro came around the same time as the effort to get the historical designation...

GI: Yeah Metro came in the 1981. And I must say that ever since, I've almost never ridden a bus. At one time I had an office downtown. And I could take the Metro and in ten minutes I was in my office.

AP: Do you remember the first subway Metro ride you took? Do you remember where you took it?

GI: Well it didn't go all the way out to the suburbs. But it certainly served my purpose, which was to go downtown. Now, of course, it does serve the suburbs, and that has created the problem of how to how to fund the system because the suburbs don't always want to pay their share.

AP: Yeah. So when you were working downtown so you took the subway....

GI: Yes. But when I retired, I wrote a newsletter out of my home. Having the Metro so close was a blessing. I could go downtown and interview somebody in 10 minutes. I think a lot of people who live in Cleveland Park run businesses out of their homes. And now with computers that's probably even more so.

AP: Yes. It would be interesting to know how many conduct some sort of business from their homes.

GI: Well, we have a lot of writers and other professionals for whom that kind of thing would be normal anyway.

AP: Right.

AP: Last time we met, you mentioned quite a number of civic groups and issues you were involved in. McLean Gardens was one. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

GI: McLean Gardens was a low rise, rental housing development adjoining Cleveland Park built during World War II. A developer wanted to tear it down and build high rise buildings. Many in the community wanted to preserve its moderate cost apartments. They organized a group called "Citizens for City Living", and

successfully opposed the development.

AP: What about the Cleveland Park Citizens Association?

GI: Well, it has been active over the years, especially on neighborhood issues. The association had played an active role, some 65 years ago, in getting the library where it is on Connecticut and Macomb. In the 1940's, CPCA campaigned for a library on the empty lot, and raised \$30,000 – half the price -- for the land purchase. Later, they raised funds for meeting rooms. When the Zoo was having financial problems we helped form the "Friends of the Zoo" to raise funds.

AP: CPCA, Cleveland Park Citizens Association, was part of that effort?

GI: Yes. It's an interesting thing about citizens associations. In 1973, the Home Rule Act was passed, giving us the vote for president. It also established elected Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, the ANCs, and gave them "great weight." Which meant that if they took a position on a development or some other issue, they were entitled to a response, in writing from the government agency or commission involved. With this added power, the ANCs took some of the steam out of the neighborhood associations.

AP: So did that mean that the non-ANC groups focused on other issues that the ANC did not consider part of their scope?

GI: Well, citizens associations can focus on anything they want to. Some get very much involved in local zoning issues and some don't. For example the Palisades Citizens Association has a parade every year. They've been doing it for fifty years. It's a big deal... the Mayor comes...

AP: So our local Citizens Association has been more focused on zoning issues over its history?

GI: When I became president of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association in 2002 we were already caught up in a zoning fight over the Giant supermarket on Wisconsin Avenue. The store needed to be upgraded, and Giant wanted to build a building that would have looked like something you'd see in a suburban mall, which meant that the store would face the parking lot and the back of the store would be a blank brick wall.

AP: Like the one up on Westbard Avenue?

GI: Yeah. Typically that's the way they are. But the problem was, the back of the store, almost a whole block of blank wall, would face Wisconsin Avenue. And they could have built it as a matter of right. We hated it. It took a threat of landmarking the store that persuaded Giant to seek a better model. Giant even entered into a three-way agreement with the Office of Planning and the Association, but they never could come up with a satisfactory

design that satisfied the parties. So Giant quit trying and they let the store deteriorate over the years. To break the stalemate, the ANC and the Citizens Association went to great pains to get the new owner of Giant...

AP: New ownership? Did that happen during this process?

GI: Yes, yes, it did. A Dutch company, Royal Ahold, took it over. But they were just sitting on the property. So Nancy MacWood, who was chair of the ANC at the time, came up with this idea to hire an architect to do a drawing of what a neighborhood-friendly store could look like. CPCA helped pay for the drawing. Well, that got Ahold's attention, but it led to a major zoning fight.

In addition to a new store, Ahold decided to go for a 5-story mixed use development which we felt was excessive. There were some in the community, younger people particularly, who felt that we were opposed to the store, which was not an accurate portrayal of our position. And so at one point they decided to take over the Citizens Association. It got so contentious that our annual meeting was moved from June to September, which allowed both sides to develop competing slates.

AP: For the board and the president and vice president...?

GI: That's right. At that point, I had served for seven years and was no longer eligible to serve. The battle went on all summer and was actually carried out largely on the internet. The listserv

became the vehicle, with a lot of accusations against CPCA that were not pleasant. But it aroused the neighbors, and on election day almost 500 people came out to vote. And we won, big.

It was a bitter fight, but I think we have a much better Association because of it. And we have a big new Giant and a five story building next to it, and it isn't the end of the world.

AP: Do you feel that that's sort of representative of the community that Cleveland Park is, that sometimes people get very engaged?

GI: Well, times change. We always were interested in having younger people who were moving into Cleveland Park join the Association. Except that they weren't much interested in attending meetings. How do you achieve consensus with people who don't want to come to meetings? I don't know that we fully resolved that issue, although we're much better communicators today thanks to computers.

AP: How do you get people to come to meetings?

GI: Controversy helps. Also interesting topics. When I was President of the Citizens Association, I was successful at planning meetings on important issues with good speakers. So we often had overflow crowds.

AP: Where were the meetings taking place?

GI: Mostly at the library.

AP: Do you remember any of the speakers or events that were very big draws?

GI: We had a meeting on "aging in place" when it was still a young idea. It was the forerunner of the current aging-in-place Village that we now have. We had meetings on Connecticut Avenue's commercial district. I wanted to counter the myth that a few empty stores meant the shopping center was dying. We had store owners, landlords, city agency people. People were way out in the hall for that meeting. When they're interested they come.

AP: Would you say that's always been true of Cleveland Park, that when they're interested they come?

GI: Well, after a while you begin to know what's going to work. There was a big to-do about proposed expansion of the Macklin, an apartment house at the bottom of Newark Street. It would have generated a traffic and parking problem. I added the issue to one of our meetings and people who never heard of the Association showed up. So when people care they come.

AP: Do you think that's unique to Cleveland Park, or hard to say?

GI: It's people.

GI: Zoning, for example, is a very personal issue.

AP: Yes.

GI: People claim they don't care about zoning issues. Too complicated. But you tell somebody that an apartment house is going up next door to them and all of a sudden they're interested.

AP: Yeah, I'm thinking right now in the neighborhood is a planned development of a shelter for women up by the Second District Police Station.

GI: Yes of course. Good example.

AP: How did you get into advocacy?

GI: It actually started at a CPCA meeting. Pete MacDonald got up and said there would be a protest on Capitol Hill against the design of the proposed World War II Memorial. This was around the year 2000. I am a World War II veteran – fought in the Battle of the Bulge – and thought that the design and location were wrong. When I got there, the media picked up on my remarks and I had my fifteen minutes of fame on national and local media. The woman who organized the protest was Judy Scott Feldman, an art historian with a special interest in the National Mall. Judy started up an advocacy group called the National Coalition to Save Our Mall (now

the National Mall Coalition) and invited me to join. I have been an active board member ever since.

AP: What wasn't right about it?

GI: Well it was in the wrong place and the wrong design. It was to be on the on pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial and looked like it belonged in Arlington Cemetery. Compared to the Vietnam Memorial it totally lacked emotional impact. Incidentally, my work on the Memorial drew the attention of Isabel Furlong, retiring president of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association. I was asked to run for the office and the rest is history.

AP: So that's when you took over as President?

GI: Yeah, and that's when the Giant development issue was bubbling up. There was also another interesting development issue that was brewing at that time. A 13-acre property on Macomb Street west of Connecticut Avenue was owned by an Israeli developer who wanted to erect a hillside "village" of 100 to 200 homes. Macomb Street is barely passable now, and the thought of a huge new development really roused the community. The property, a woodland estate with trails and streams, had been owned by families going back to Alexander Graham Bell. The property was kind of a neighborhood treasure and a group called the "Friends of Tregaron" had been fighting to stop development there for years. Eventually their efforts succeeded, Tregaron was landmarked and the developer could

no longer build on it. As part of a final deal, he donated some of the land for what is now a 13-acre Conservancy. I wasn't particularly involved in this fight, but as President of the Citizens Association I was added to the Conservancy board. I am still on the board and now actively involved.

AP: What time period was that? 80s, 90s?

GI: I was president between 2002 and 2009. The Conservancy was formed in 2006. To restore the property, it has to raise money, and they are doing a great job. People need to be reminded that this beautiful property, with trails and gardens open to the public, could have been a hundred or more houses.

AP: Were you involved at all in the Rosedale issue?

GI: The Association supported the efforts to protect Rosedale, but I was not personally involved. But that's another example of how neighbors fight to preserve a beautiful, historic property from overdevelopment. So, if you wondered what this would be like a hundred years from now, you might say, "Well, maybe not all that different."

AP: So can you articulate--I think you have, but maybe more precisely--what it is you love about the neighborhood? Even going back to what brought you here?

GI: I just love the people. I love the quiet countrified look. It's just different. I love the fact that it's so close to downtown. That you can indeed walk to stores, the library and the post office. We live on a steep hill here on the top of Newark Street and it's not so easy for me to do it, but my cardiologist says I should walk. So I use errands on Connecticut Avenue as an occasion to do that.

And we now have a farmers market on Saturdays, which is another reason to go down. We love our little shopping center, but it's important that we patronize it if we want it to thrive.

AP: Thinking about beyond Cleveland Park, one of the questions we talked about was, in the time you've lived in DC, do you feel like there are any historic events that you've witnessed living here that you'd like to...

GI: Well certainly one of the big historic events was the riots of '68. I mean the riots and the fires on 14th Street. My son, whose room was on the top floor of our house, was able to see across the park and see the fires. Cleveland Park is one of the highest points in the city.

AP: How old was he then?

GI: How old? About seven or so.

AP: Do you remember what your thoughts were about the events at

the time?

GI: Well you know those were troubled times. The reason we had the riots was a reaction to the to the assassination of Martin Luther King. So while I said that we had this cultural separation in this city, I guess it was deeper than many of us realized. Thinking back on it, I guess it probably helped make us more sensitive to racial issues, housing issues, who we elected. So those events were not without consequences.

AP: Did the coming of home rule change how you felt about being a resident here?

GI: Well I'm disappointed that we didn't really get home rule and I remain so. It's a bitter pill. Taxation without representation is what we really have. Many people who live in Washington did not grow up here and go back to where they came from to vote. I suppose someday it will change, but it's been a tough battle. What do I love about Washington? I'm a political junkie and this is the place to be if you're a political junkie. Although it's not much fun these days.

AP: Do you have hope that may change or do you think we're going to be in a long period of...?

GI: Well, you know I'm going to be 93 in February. I've seen a lot of changes and have learned to be a little more patient in my old

age. We've been a lucky country. We've had oceans to protect us. We've had time on our side. We're losing that. The oceans don't matter anymore and time doesn't matter anymore because climate change is upon us. So if you think about Washington 100 years from now, part of it may be under water. The elevation here is very low and we have rivers that do tend to flood. And indeed one of the ideas of the National Mall Coalition that I'm so proud to be a member of is a proposal for an underground reservoir on the Mall to collect flood water and also serve as a parking place for buses and cars and for amenities we badly need. Maybe even a visitors' center. It's a pretty exciting idea but a tough sell...

AP: Tough sell--What are the arguments against it?

GI: Well some people don't want any more cars downtown. But if you come from out of town or from the suburbs with a family, it's a good thing. The parking won't be open for commuters. Certainly getting buses off the roads around the Mall would be a wonderful thing to do.

AP: Think about that garage up here by the Cathedral.

GI: Yes.

AP: Which--on Wisconsin there used to be the buses parked there idling. And the Zoo now has just managed to get new parking approved, I understand. So, it's an interesting point. The Mall

has...

GI: The National Mall Coalition has a great website that tells you how the Underground works. We also have ideas for expanding the Mall. In 2003 the Congress declared that the Mall was essentially a completed work of art. Well the Mall is really living history. We call it the "stage for our democracy". But you can't stop history in its tracks. And the idea that you could no longer have memorials, no place for them, doesn't make sense. There's contiguous land that's federally owned that could be expanded to. And there are a lot of things you could do to make the Mall an even better place to visit. It's like a museum without a curator.

AP: The Eisenhower Memorial is now getting...

GI: Yes, that's the latest example, and that's going to mean that they're going to have to close off Maryland Avenue. Some years ago, the Coalition invited a number of architects to come up with ways the Mall could be improved or expanded. We presented at the Corcoran Museum.

AP: Expanded? Is that east-west? North-south?

GI: All of the above. Across the river, for example. I play golf at East Potomac. Between the golf course and the river is a road and a lane of trees. Would be a great place for new memorials, particularly now, since transportation across the river has improved.

The National Park Service, which manages the Mall, has its own ideas. So it's been something of a battle.

AP: And so the Park Service has jurisdiction. Is there anybody else who has jurisdiction?

GI: Lots of stakeholders, but they don't coordinate. Congress has the ultimate authority, but no advocate. Congress is so different today. You don't have congressmen like Moynihan who really cared about things like that. They stay around two or three days a week and then go home and don't get to know each other or the city. I think we suffer for that.

AP: So even our local area Maryland and Virginia congressmen...?

GI: Well, like the others, they spend maybe two thirds of their time raising money for the next election. It's not a happy time and not a very inviting profession, it seems to me. Why would you want to run? As Groucho Marx Brothers said, "I wouldn't want to be a part of any club that would have me for a member".

AP: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about? Cleveland Park? Washington? Living in the times now or in the past?

GI: We talked about the various citizens associations. I am on the board of the Federation of Citizens Associations. We have about 20 member associations. There is also the Federation of Civic

Associations. So what's the difference? The basic difference is one is on this side of the river and the other is on the other side. The Civic Federation was founded years ago largely because of the segregation that existed in the city. There's talk about merging the two organizations.

AP: And do they have similar issues that they're grappling with?

GI: We do, and if we can find ways to work together on them, I think we could have a lot more clout politically.

AP: You think you could pool expertise or knowledge, if your group had a lot of zoning experience and lawyers, for example?

GI: There's plenty of talent on both sides of the river. Right now we are working together on amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. It's good issue because the Comprehensive Plan is ultimately the responsibility of the City Council, so voters get a chance to weigh in.

AP: And do you recollect, are there particular changes in the plan that concern you that are being proposed?

GI: Yeah there are. The Office of Planning, which is under the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development, tends to favor development. Mayors by and large, no matter what they promise when they're running, tend to see development as a source of income for the

city. Which gives developers a lot of power. Density is the magic word right now, and many of the proposed amendments would increase density, usually in the name of affordable housing. We need more affordable housing, but disagree on how to achieve it. The previous administration tried to raise the height limits of the Height Act. It would have totally changed the character of Washington. I'm a trustee on the Committee of 100, which is an organization that cares about sensible planning in the city. They played a major role in fighting the Height Act modification. There are many ways to skin a cat. It sort of comes down to who gets appointed.

AP: So who gets appointed will affect the direction of the Zoning Commission?

GI: For sure.

AP: So, commerce, building height, neighborhood development...

GI: Yeah.

AP: Rather than an elected official.

GI: That's right. The Home [Rule] Act created the Zoning Commission and it's independent, but they tend to defer to the Office of Planning. Except for the appeals court, they're a law unto themselves,

AP: So the only way that would be changed would be the Home [Rule] Act would have to be amended.

GI: That's right.

AP: By Congress.

GI: That's right. Or a constitutional amendment. There are people who are trying to do that. You know there are there are cities that have zoning commissions that are truly independent.

AP: They're not appointed.

GI: That's right. Some are elected.

AP: You love your neighborhood, clearly. Do you have any other favorite places in Washington?

GI: Well, I'm very fond of the National Mall.

AP: Do you go down there?

GI: Not as often as I should. I'm also on the board of the Tregaron Conservancy, and love to walk there. Most of all I enjoy getting down to the golf course.

AP: I think one of the other historic events that was on my list

here was Watergate--'70s. We talked about the riots.

GI: That was an interesting time. It just so happens that Watergate was an advertising client of mine just about the time all that stuff was happening. But you know, you have your professional life to pursue and you have these other issues.

AP: Well we've been talking for about an hour and a half. I was thinking maybe we should wrap it up.

GI: OK.

AP: If there's more you'd like to say now, but I don't want to...

GI: No, I don't have anything more to add at the moment but I might think of things.

AP: I'd happy to come back.

GI: OK. I mean if you think of things I'd be happy to do it again if you like.

AP: Yeah.

GI: Seems to work out pretty well.

AP: I'll turn this off now so we can close.