

The text below includes minor corrections.  
A scan of the original publication follows.

Willamette Heights Chronicles  
Willamette Heights Historical Archive Committee  
Carol Weigler, Jan Madill, and Chet Orloff  
March 16, 1991

Interview with Morton Paglin  
by Chet Orloff

This is the oral history of the I-505 freeway plan of the late 1960's and early 1970's.

O: When did you first arrive in Willamette Heights?

P: We moved here in 1965. I was very impressed, because it was so close to the city center and yet you had the feeling of being in the country with forest close by. I just liked the whole ambiance of the area, particularly because it reminded me of the Berkeley hills, where we had been living for many years. We moved, up to NW Aspen in the summer of 1965, into a rented house, because it was immediately available. Then we began to seriously look for something that could be purchased. I must say, though houses were cheap here, they weren't easy to find. They would sell very quickly. You had to do detective work to get in first.

O: Were there a lot of people renting houses at that time?

P: Not a great number. There were just a few houses here and there for rent. Most had been occupied for many, many years by the same residents.

O: When you moved up here, was it considered a family neighborhood? Were the houses filled with children with varying ages?

P: Yes, there were families with children and a fair number of elderly retired people. When I spoke to real estate people at the time, they constantly tried to pull me toward a newer house in the suburbs, but I kept resisting. There was some feeling that Willamette Heights could go either way because there was a lot of industrial pollution at that time coming up here, as well as a fair amount of industrial noise. On Thurman Street, particularly, there were many deteriorated houses. There was the feeling that although the houses were cheap here, the neighborhood could decline further, and therefore it wasn't necessarily a good bet. However, the neighborhood always seemed interesting to me. It had a mixture of blue-collar people, retired people, college professors and other lower income professionals, architects, artists, journalists and so forth.

O: When you moved here in the mid-'60's, did the neighborhood have any particular characteristics that made it differ from other neighborhoods?

P: Yes, I think it did. For example, in Eastmoreland you had this feeling of a beautiful kept up and maintained neighborhood. By contrast Willamette Heights had a slightly down-at-the-heels quality with houses that had not been well maintained and were not that good to begin with. On the other hand, it had a kind of casual quality that I liked. One reason that I didn't want to stay in Eastmoreland was the feeling I had that if I didn't mow the lawn regularly, my neighbors might frown at me. I didn't want that type of commitment. Furthermore, I liked the hills, the view and the trails. I liked the informality of the neighborhood, and the fact that it was so convenient and yet dead-ended into a large park area.

O: Did that sense of the neighborhood carry through to the next decade--into the mid-70's?

P: Yes it did. You began to get more professionals moving in and more of the blue-collar working class households leaving. It wasn't a mass movement but you began to get a few lawyers and doctors moving in. You noticed people paying a little more attention to exterior of the house and fixing it up.

O: Were you friends with any neighbors who had been here a long time before you moved here?

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O: Did you get to know some older, long-time neighbors with whom you could talk about early Willamette Heights days?

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O: Who were some of the leaders in the neighborhood who were involved in organizing some of the issues?

P: Well, I think Dennis McLaughlin, who is an architect who lived across the street, became involved in many issues. From the Goldschmidt period on you were aware of increasing involvement in local politics. I would say the Edelmans were certainly involved, and you noticed more and more people, such as the Grimms and Betty Daggett, would have coffees for certain candidates.

O: Let's move on to issues of the freeway. When did the neighborhood first become aware that the Oregon Department of Transportation was planning a freeway extension in this part of the city?

P: I became aware of it in 1969. I remember chatting with my neighbor at the time, Jim Stroup, who was an architecture student, and I remember we read some articles in the paper. It seemed that the I-505 corridor design was settled. They had started acquiring houses in the corridor. It was now a fait accompli that we were going to have a freeway that was going to take out almost all the houses from between Thurman and Vaughn.

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P: My neighbor said that it would really have a great impact on the neighborhood. I responded, "Well, why hasn't anybody done anything about this? It's taking out a large chunk of the neighborhood. Freeway noise isn't necessarily desirable, and this is a very pleasant neighborhood. Why are they doing this?" He said, "Well, that was the design that was accepted, and no one seemed to object. However, originally it was supposed to be a modest throughway and suddenly it changed. The Highway Department changed it to a, full-fledged freeway design." I said, "Why can't we do something to stop it?" We looked at some alternatives very briefly. New environmental laws had come on the books, at that time and we began to look at those as a possible way by which this might be stopped. I remember calling Edelman, who was an architect who lived up on Aspen. When I first called him, he was laughing and said, "Hey, Paglin, I heard that you were going to stop the freeway." It was a big joke, because it seemed so preposterous.

O: After you learned that there was a possibility of a freeway here, what did you do to familiarize yourself with the issues?

P: Obviously, I started to do some research about the specifics on the design of the freeway, exactly where it was going, where it was originating from. As an urban economist, it wasn't too difficult for me to start digging up the necessary materials from the Highway Department and other areas. I began to look at all the structures including some business structures--the number of jobs lost, the number of houses lost, the assessed values of all the buildings that would be taken off they tax rolls, the number of people, who would be affected. Then I began to look at the justification for the freeway in terms of the traffic, the cars, trucks, and so forth; To my surprise I found that they were designing a facility that was really optimal in terms of carrying traffic through the area and that seemed to conflict with the requirements of the area for a system for dispersing the trucks and traffic into the industrial area. I saw no reason for a freeway that had very limited access and was optimal really for just carrying high speed vehicles going to the coast out St. Helens Road. We didn't need that kind of structure. In terms of traffic patterns it seemed to me that what we wanted was something quite different from the corridor that the highway department had designed for the area.

One day I said to my neighbor, Jim Stroup, "Why don't we organize a neighborhood association?" I had found out the that the NW District Association had been in favor of the new freeway. Jokingly, I told Jim that I'd be the president and make him the vice president. Then we contacted Dennis McLaughlin, Al Edelman and a few others, asking them to join the Willamette Heights Neighborhood Association. I went to the Oregonian and talked with someone at the city desk, telling them about the association and its purpose.

O: Did they publish an article?

P: They published it, I think in the early 1970's. Over time we got more substance to the organization. We signed up people who would be members, collected some dues, and had a more formal structure set up. Then I appeared on local TV to alert people to what was going on. We began with the small amount of money we had collected and started putting out leaflets and distributing them in the neighborhood. Then Jim Stroup, Dennis McLaughlin and I took a petition around demanding that a hold be put on freeway construction until neighborhood hearings happen. Under the environmental acts that had recently been passed, there was supposed to be an adequate number of hearings regarding impacts of the design on the neighborhoods. I had found that the original design that the Highway Department had put forth which was not a full-fledged freeway, had gotten some feedback from neighborhood meetings. However, they then went ahead and changed the design into this full-fledged freeway design without having new hearings. I, therefore, felt that there was some leverage we had here in stopping them. I got a petition with a lot of signatures that we could send to the Highway Department.

O: How responsive was the neighborhood as far as signing the petition?

P: This included the flats, although I got started in Willamette Heights. Actually, many of the impact statements were on the area below the bridge on Thurman Street.

Up here at least 85% of the people we contacted were in favor of the petition. The small number of people who were opposed thought that it would be good to get rid of all the "trashy" houses that were deteriorating below the bridge on Thurman Street; it's not going to renew itself anyway. But I thought there were some very nice structures below the bridge on 28th Place. If you considered the impact of the freeway--the fumes and the noise--it certainly would have had a negative effect on those structures. Certainly, in the long run it would have been detrimental to the livability of the neighborhood.

O: Were there other neighbors who joined in on working on this in a more active way than simply writing a check or signing a petition?

P: Some people like the Witts [Marvin and Anita] were interested and contributed, but I would say that in terms of the real leg work in getting the neighborhood organized, I did a lot of the work. I also threw my wife and kids into the leaflet distribution work. In fact, only a handful of people got this organized. We got photographs of the neighborhood where the freeway would go through and where the impacts were so at our early meetings we were able to explain to the neighborhood exactly what was going on. A lot of people just had a fuzzy notion that there was going to be a freeway down there but they didn't realize the extent of the impact. We had smaller meetings in people's houses. Then we held a large one at Chapman in 1971 and we invited people from the City Council.

O: Once you had that meeting at Chapman, did it have a riveting affect on the neighborhood?

P: It did have an affect. People really got interested and aroused.

O: Was that a key moment in the history of the freeway?

P: I Yes, I think it was a very important point, showing the strong sentiment and the number of people involved. We began to collect more funds--for example, NW Industrial Laundry was located on lower Thurman and they were a large contributor--I think they gave a couple hundred dollars. That was a lot of money then. Other people gave two-five-ten dollar contributions. We needed money for such things as consulting a geologic engineer about the impact of all that blasting and digging, as this is relatively unstable ground up here. We also began to pull in the legal experts. Nick Chaivoe attended one of the meetings and suggested a lawsuit against the Highway Department. He was then asked to volunteer his time to help with this. He agreed to, though his time available was minimal.

O: What was the position of the NW District Association?

P: I remember early on in about 1970, after I organized Willamette Heights Association, I went to both the board of Friendly House and the NWDA. I made a formal presentation of my objections to the freeway. They said they had already taken a stand and were opposed to our position. They thought they might get something from the Highway Department, perhaps some new housing, though there was nothing in writing. This was very important because a City Council meeting was coming up shortly. The City Council technically had to approve plans. I had tried to rally some groups to present the evidence against approving this freeway. However, the NWDA had a much larger cohort of people--experts and influential citizens--coming out in favor of it and they carried the day.

Also, at that time there was much less tendency to resist freeway construction than there is now. I could see the benefit of the freeway. I realize people have to get to where they are working, otherwise a city doesn't function well. You have to move goods and people efficiently and quickly. However, I felt this was not a design that would do that, and, furthermore, it would have negative impact. As a matter of fact, with the help of some consultants, I had developed two or three alternative routes that would channel a large part of the traffic directly into the industrial area where it was headed. While the council was interested--Goldschmidt at that time was on the council and showed some interest--there wasn't enough force behind our proposal to really stop a multibillion project. For example, the construction unions were all for it. Some law firms involved with these construction firms were also all

for it. At that point our only recourse to stop it was to get an injunction in federal court that they had not met all requirements, particularly the new environmental legislation.

O: How did you, yourself, as an opponent of the project, gather the data necessary to know that you had enough here to go up against this multibillion dollar project?

P: Jim Stroup and I went to the Federal Register and to some environmental organizations and got copies of the law. Every law has to be translated into specifics and the specifics are printed in the Federal Register, which all private and public agencies have to follow if they come under the jurisdiction of this federal law. We got the relevant legal material and then went back and got the history of the hearings that the Highway Department had held. We compared this with the new environmental laws. Since they had markedly changed the design without having any hearings, we felt we had some very specific objections to the construction plans.

Now we consulted with attorneys, who didn't know that much about some of these new laws. Nick Chaivoe first started on it, and then we got some other people, including Steve McCarthy. At that time Steve was working for a labor lawyer and said he couldn't work on it during company time, but could do some work privately. He started to work on it, but a few days later he said that he needed to withdraw. I surmised that the reason was because his employer represented a number of unions that were strongly in favor of the freeway project. When we first tried to get the injunction in federal court--Gus Solomon was the judge and Nick Chaivoe was the lawyer--we presented some material and the judge said that our case was very poorly presented. He told Nick that since he claimed to be working in the public interest, he was ordering Nick to drop all of his cases for the next three or four weeks or as long as necessary and devote himself full time to preparing this case in a proper manner. He said, "If you want to do good for the public, then you do it right. I'll rearrange your schedule for you to get some of your other cases postponed. I want you to devote yourself full time to this and get all the help you need to come back and present proper case." We left with our tails dragging behind us, so to speak. I remember asking Nick Chaivoe, "Do you really have to devote yourself full time to this eight hours a day?" He says, "You bet. When a federal judge tells you to do something, you do it, or you're in contempt of court." In a sense that hostile reception was very valuable in the long run because it forced Nick to devote himself full time to this case. It galvanized all of us to really get working and gather the necessary evidence to present a proper case in federal court. So we did.

I should also mention that Steve McCarthy returned shortly thereafter, having left the firm he had been with, and did some good work on the legal team. He and Nick also brought in a few other attorneys who contributed time. Meanwhile, there were many other aspects of this case and I went about gathering the so-called economic evidence on adverse impacts of the plan. We organized a team--legal/economic/environmental--and put together quite an effective case. When it came up again, Judge Solomon decided not to take it and transferred it to Judge Belloni.\* We prepared a very systematic case, which went on for a couple of days. The Highway Department flew a delegation out from Washington. They were probably 10 or 12 strong, and they had their own experts.

When it was all over, the decision favored us! Judge Belloni\* found that indeed the Highway Department had not taken into consideration all these impacts and that the design that they had finally agreed on wasn't the design that they had presented at earlier hearings. However, we, didn't win the case outright. What the judge did was order the Highway Department to go back, start from scratch, consider alternative designs and hold hearings in the neighborhood. Finally, as a result of this decision, we had to go in front of the City Council again and ask the City Council to reverse itself, which it did. By then the NWDA had already changed its position and joined us. In fact they were even party to that suit.

O: The composition of the City Council at that time was the same as it had been before the suit. Who sat on the City Council?

P: It was Ivancie, Goldschmidt, McCready, Anderson and Shrunk.

O: So what came out of those subsequent hearings is what we now have?

P: Right. They didn't have to take out all those houses on the Thurman corridor. They didn't have to build a massive structure that would impact Willamette Heights because it would go right over the bridge and then down in front of what is now Montgomery Park. All that was eliminated in the new design.

I think the long-term impact on this neighborhood would have been adverse, and the renaissance of the area that we've experienced certainly wouldn't have taken place. Notice what's happened to those old structures on lower Thurman. It's become an extension of the 23rd Avenue shopping area. The houses have improved, and it's become one of the most desirable neighborhoods in the city. From the general point of view, the increase in assessed values allows the city to collect far more in property taxes than they would have, had the freeway gone through.

O: Let's conclude with what has just been happening in the neighborhood with another project, the proposed truck stop down on St. Helens road, which a number of neighbors were involved in resisting. What similarities and contrasts do you see in this most recent effort to your own efforts?

P: It's similar and had I had the time I would have been involved. My wife spent some time on that project. I would say it was on a much smaller scale. After all, this battle with the Highway Department and changing the City Council took a number of years. It took the dedication of many, many peoples. I frankly felt kind of worn out from the whole thing. I said that this was the end of my Willamette Heights neighborhood activism. As a matter of fact, for quite a while after the legal suit with the Highway Department and all the publicity, I would constantly be called by neighbors who had problems from barking dogs to streets that aren't repaired. I finally decided I needed to devote myself to my academic research and therefore dissolved the Willamette Heights Neighborhood Association.

I should also say that the neighborhood associations had become more structured, because the city, realizing the potency of the neighborhood associations, thought maybe they should organize them to get some control. They organized the Office of Neighborhood Associations, and only official neighborhood associations recognized by that office have any official status. Had that law been in effect, I probably would have found it much more difficult to organize an independent neighborhood association. I noticed that when there was talk of budget cuts recently, the Office of Neighborhood Associations decided not to sacrifice any of their personnel and instead to sacrifice some of the services they provide. I thought that was kind of interesting commentary on where the priorities are. I'm not condemning them, as they do good things, too. I'm just saying there are certain dangers when structures become bureaucratized and absorbed into the formal city hall political mechanisms.

O: What was the sense of the neighborhood after the suit was concluded? Was there a stronger sense of neighborhood identity and solidarity?

P: I think there was. The success brought people together and showed them that a couple of people who had a good idea and some willingness to spend some time could do something. That's what I also point out to my classes. It's not many societies that are that open and responsive. When you look back on it here, it wasn't the money interest, it wasn't the union, it wasn't the construction firm, it wasn't the organized political structure that got its way. Instead, several people with a few hundred dollars, some ideas, and dedication were able to turn this thing around. It shows that people who are willing to work to do something that has some rational basis and justification can get support and get things done, even if it looks impossible at first.

O: Do you think you could attribute part of the success to the effort of the neighborhood itself?

P: Yes, I think the people who lived here had a sense of the importance of preserving the neighborhood. There was an awareness that here we have this little enclave in the hills and we have the feeling this is a good neighborhood and want to preserve it. I think there was a feeling of identity. When they came together and saw each other at meetings at houses, this brought the neighborhood closer together. I think it certainly forged a sense of neighborhood awareness that hadn't existed to that degree before. Many people who had benefited from the decision are still aware of it. For example, Marvin Witt thanked me not so long ago saying, "If it weren't for you, my office in this little pleasant area wouldn't exist." When I walk through the 28th Place area, I get a feeling of satisfaction

because I know that here is something tangible I've done. I know that had I not organized the neighborhood, this would have been obliterated. This gives me a very pleasant feeling, because most of my work has been in the academic intellectual area. You have some impact with ideas, but here's something tangible I have done. I look back on it with the feeling that the effort was worthwhile.

O: Do you have any parting shots that you think we should have covered?

P: I would like to mention that one should be aware that neighborhoods do change and that we have to accept certain changes and not always resist change. I know there are some people who are admittedly, worried about the gentrification that has taken place in the neighborhood. As an urban economist, I'm aware that neighborhoods don't stand still. When it was going downhill, the moans and groans were about how difficult it was to get mortgages, up here. There was concern that it might deteriorate further. Now it's true you're getting a lot of private investment. Property values are going up and some people can no longer afford to live here. However, some of them move to Hawthorne and improve the SE Hawthorne neighborhood. That's the way cities change and develop. So while I don't like to see the neighborhood become homogeneous in the sense of having all doctors and lawyers, still one has to recognize that neighborhoods usually either go up or down. In the case of Willamette Heights, it's going up and overall it's, beneficial. It's more beneficial having it improving and renewing than deteriorating and going downhill.

O: Thank you very much for this insightful interview. This has added significantly to the lore of the neighborhood and it is certainly an important element of the neighborhood's recent history that hasn't been documented until now.

P: I enjoyed it because it refreshed my memory of the past twenty years. Thank you.

\*Judge Goodwin presided over the trial, not Judge Belloni. It is not clear if Judge Belloni was ever involved.



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a very pleasant neighborhood. Why are they doing this?" He said, "Well, that was the design that was accepted, and no one seemed to object. However, originally it was supposed to be a modest throughway and suddenly it changed. The Highway Department changed it to a full-fledged freeway design." I said, "Why can't we do something to stop it?" We looked at some alternatives very briefly. New environmental laws had come on the books at that time, and we began to look at those as a possible way by which this might be stopped. I remember calling Edelman, who was an architect who lived up on Aspen. When I first called him, he was laughing and said, "Hey, Paglin, I heard that you were going to stop the freeway." It was a big joke, because it seemed so preposterous.

O: After you learned that there was a possibility of a freeway here, what did you do to familiarize yourself with the issues?

P: Obviously, I started to do some research about the specifics on the design of the freeway, exactly where it was going, where it was originating from. As an urban economist, it wasn't too difficult for me to start digging up the necessary materials from the Highway Department and other areas. I began to look at all the structures including some business structures--the number of jobs lost, the number of houses lost, the assessed values of all the buildings that would be taken off the tax rolls, the number of people who would be affected. Then I began to look at the justification for the freeway in terms of the traffic, the cars, trucks, and so forth. To my surprise I found that they were designing a facility that was really optimal in terms of carrying traffic through the area and that seemed to conflict with the requirements of the area for a system for dispersing the trucks and traffic into the industrial area. I saw no reason for a freeway that had very limited access and was optimal really for just carrying high speed vehicles going to the coast out St. Helens Road. We didn't need that kind of structure. In terms of traffic patterns it seemed to me that what we wanted was something quite different from the corridor that the highway department had designed for the area.

One day I said to my neighbor, Jim Strube, "Why don't we organize a neighborhood association?" I had found out that the NW District Association had been in favor of the new freeway. Jokingly, I told Jim that I'd be the president and make him the vice president. Then we contacted Dennis McLoughlin, Al Edelman and a few others, asking them to join the Willamette Heights Neighborhood Association. I went to the "Oregonian" and talked with someone at the city desk, telling them about the association and its purpose.

O: Did they publish an article?

P: They published it, I think in the early 1970's. Over time we got more substance to the organization. We signed up people who would be members, collected some dues, and had a more formal structure set up. Then I appeared on local TV to alert people to what was going on. We began with the small amount of money we had collected and started putting out leaflets and distributing them in the neighborhood. Then Jim Strube, Dennis McLoughlin and I took a petition around demanding that a hold be put on freeway construction until neighborhood hearings happen. Under the environmental acts that had recently been passed, there was supposed to be an adequate number of hearings regarding impacts of the design on the neighborhoods. I had found that the original design that the Highway Department had put forth, which was not a full-fledged freeway, had gotten some feedback from neighborhood meetings. However, they then went ahead and changed the design into this full-fledged freeway design without having new hearings. I, therefore, felt that there was some leverage we had here in stopping them. I got a petition with a lot of signatures that we could send to the Highway Department.

O: How responsive was the neighborhood as far as signing the petition?

P: This included the flats, although I got started in Willamette Heights. Actually, many of the impact statements were on the area below the bridge on Thurman Street. Up here at least 85% of the people we contacted were in favor of the petition. The small number of people who were opposed thought that it would be good to get rid of all the "trashy" houses that were deteriorating below the bridge on Thurman Street; it's not going to renew itself anyway. But I thought there were some very nice structures below the bridge on 28th Place. If you considered the impact of the freeway--the



fumes and the noise--it certainly would have had a negative effect on those structures. Certainly, in the long run it would have been detrimental to the liveability of the neighborhood.

O: Were there other neighbors who joined in on working on this in a more active way than simply writing a check or signing a petition?

P: Some people like the Witts [Marvin and Anita] were interested and contributed, but I would say that in terms of the real leg work in getting the neighborhood organized, I did a lot of the work. I also threw my wife and kids into the leaflet distribution work. In fact only a handful of people got this organized. We got photographs of the neighborhood where the freeway would go through and where the impacts were so at our early meetings we were able to explain to the neighborhood exactly what was going on. A lot of people just had a fuzzy notion that there was going to be a freeway down there but they didn't realize the extent of the impact. We had smaller meetings in people's houses. Then we held a large one at Chapman in 1971 and we invited people from the City Council.

O: Once you had that meeting at Chapman, did it have a riveting affect on the neighborhood?

P: It did have an affect. People really got interested and aroused.

O: Was that a key moment in the history of the freeway?

P: Yes, I think it was a very important point, showing the strong sentiment and the number of people involved. We began to collect more funds--for example, NW Industrial Laundry was located on lower Thurman and they were a large contributor--I think they gave a couple hundred dollars. That was a lot of money then. Other people gave two-five-ten dollar contributions. We needed money for such things as consulting a geologic engineer about the impact of all that blasting and digging, as this is relatively unstable ground up here. We also began to pull in the legal experts. Nick Chaivoie attended one of the meetings and suggested a lawsuit against the Highway Department. He was then asked to volunteer his time to help with this. He agreed to, though his time available was minimal.

O: What was the position of the NW District Association?

P: I remember early on in about 1970, after I organized Willamette Heights Association, I went to both the board of Friendly House and the NWDA. I made a formal presentation of my objections to the freeway. They said they had already taken a stand and were opposed to our position. They thought they might get something from the Highway Department, perhaps some new housing, though there was nothing in writing. This was very important because a City Council meeting was coming up shortly. The City Council technically had to approve plans. I had tried to rally some groups to present the evidence against approving this freeway. However, the NWDA had a much larger cohort of people--experts and influential citizens--coming out in favor of it and they carried the day. Also, at that time there was much less tendency to resist freeway construction than there is now. I could see the benefit of the freeway. I realize people have to get to where they are working, otherwise a city doesn't function well. You have to move goods and people efficiently and quickly. However, I felt this was not a design that would do that, and, furthermore, it would have negative impact. As a matter of fact with the help of some consultants, I had developed two or three alternative routes that would channel a large part of the traffic directly into the industrial area where it was headed. While the council was interested--Goldschmidt at that time was on the council and showed some interest--there wasn't enough force behind our proposal to really stop a multibillion project. For example, the construction unions were all for it. Some law firms involved with these construction firms were also all for it. At that point our only recourse to stop it was to get an injunction in federal court that they had not met all requirements, particularly the new environmental legislation.

O: How did you, yourself, as an opponent of the project, gather the data necessary to know that you had enough here to go up against this multibillion dollar project?



P: Jim Strube and I went to the Federal Register and to some environmental organizations and got copies of the law. Every law has to be translated into specifics and the specifics are printed in the Federal Register, which all private and public agencies have to follow if they come under the jurisdiction of this federal law. We got the relevant legal material and then went back and got the history of the hearings that the Highway Department had held. We compared this with the new environmental laws. Since they had markedly changed the design without having any hearings, we felt we had some very specific objections to the construction plans. Now we consulted with attorneys, who didn't know that much about some of these new laws. Nick Chaivoe first started on it, and then we got some other people, including Steve McCarthy. At that time Steve was working for a labor lawyer and said he couldn't work on it during company time, but could do some work privately. He started to work on it, but a few days later he said that he needed to withdraw. I surmised that the reason was because his employer represented a number of unions that were strongly in favor of the freeway project. When we first tried to get the injunction in federal court--Gus Solomon was the judge and Nick Chaivoe was the lawyer--we presented some material and the judge said that our case was very poorly presented. He told Nick that since he claimed to be working in the public interest, he was ordering Nick to drop all of his cases for the next three or four weeks or as long as necessary and devote himself full time to preparing this case in a proper manner. He said, "If you want to do good for the public, then you do it right. I'll rearrange your schedule for you to get some of your other cases postponed. I want you to devote yourself full time to this and get all the help you need to come back and present proper case." We left with our tails dragging behind us, so to speak. I remember asking Nick Chaivoe, "Do you really have to devote yourself full time to this eight hours a day?" He says, "You bet. When a federal judge tells you to do something, you do it, or you're in contempt of court." In a sense that hostile reception was very valuable in the long run because it forced Nick to devote himself full time to this case. It galvanized all of us to really get working and gather the necessary evidence to present a proper case in federal court. So we did. I should also mention that Steve McCarthy returned shortly thereafter, having left the firm he had been with, and did some good work on the legal team. He and Nick also brought in a few other attorneys who contributed time. Meanwhile, there were many other aspects of this case and I went about gathering the so-called economic evidence on adverse impacts of the plan. We organized a team--legal/economic/environmental--and put together quite an effective case. When it came up again, Judge Solomon decided not to take it and transferred it to Judge Belloni. We prepared a very systematic case, which went on for a couple of days. The Highway Department flew a delegation out from Washington. They were probably 10 or 12 strong, and they had their own experts. When it was all over, the decision favored us! Judge Belloni found that indeed the Highway Department had not taken into consideration all these impacts and that the design that they had finally agreed on wasn't the design that they had presented at earlier hearings. However, we didn't win the case out right. What the judge did was order the Highway Department to go back, start from scratch, consider alternative designs and hold hearings in the neighborhood. Finally, as a result of this decision, we had to go in front of the City Council again and ask the City Council to reverse itself, which it did. By then the NWDA had already changed its position and joined us. In fact they were even party to that suit.

O: The composition of the City Council at that time was the same as it had been before the suit. Who sat on the City Council?

P: It was Ivancie, Goldschmidt, McCready, Anderson and Shrunk.

O: So what came out of those subsequent hearings is what we now have?

P: Right. They didn't have to take out all those houses on the Thurman corridor. They didn't have to build a massive structure that would impact Willamette Heights because it would go right over the bridge and then down in front of what is now Montgomery Park. All that was eliminated in the new design.

I think the long-term impact on this neighborhood would have been adverse, and the renaissance of the area that we've experienced certainly wouldn't have taken place. Notice what's happened to those old structures on lower Thurman. It's become an extension of the 23rd Avenue shopping area. The houses have improved, and it's become one of the most desirable neighborhoods in the city. From the general point



of view, the increase in assessed values allows the city to collect far more in property taxes than they would have, had the freeway gone through.

O: Let's conclude with what has just been happening in the neighborhood with another project, the proposed truck stop down on St. Helens road, which a number of neighbors were involved in resisting. What similarities and contrasts do you see in this most recent effort to your own efforts?

P: It's similar and had I had the time I would have been involved. My wife spent some time on that project. I would say it was on a much smaller scale. After all, this battle with the Highway Department and changing the City Council took a number of years. It took the dedication of many, many peoples. I frankly felt kind of worn out from the whole thing. I said that this was the end of my Willamette Heights neighborhood activism. As a matter of fact, for quite a while after the legal suit with the Highway Department and all the publicity, I would constantly be called by neighbors who had problems from barking dogs to streets that aren't repaired. I finally decided I needed to devote myself to my academic research and therefore dissolved the Willamette Heights Neighborhood Association. I should also say that the neighborhood associations had become more structured, because the city, realizing the potency of the neighborhood associations, thought maybe they should organize them to get some control. They organized the Office of Neighborhood Associations and only official neighborhood associations recognized by that office have any official status. Had that law been in effect, I probably would have found it much more difficult to organize an independent neighborhood association. I noticed that when there was talk of budget cuts recently, the Office of Neighborhood Associations decided not to sacrifice any of their personnel and instead to sacrifice some of the services they provide. I thought that was a kind of interesting commentary on where the priorities are. I'm not condemning them, as they do good things, too. I'm just saying there are certain dangers when structures become bureaucratized and absorbed into the formal city hall political mechanisms.

O: What was the sense of the neighborhood after the suit was concluded? Was there a stronger sense of neighborhood identity and solidarity?

P: I think there was. The success brought people together and showed them that a couple of people who had a good idea and some willingness to spend some time could do something. That's what I also point out to my classes. It's not many societies that are that open and responsive. When you look back on it here, it wasn't the money interest, it wasn't the union, it wasn't the construction firm, it wasn't the organized pal structure that got its way. Instead, several people with a few hundred dollars, some ideas, and dedication were able to turn this thing around. It shows that people who are willing to work to do something that has some rational basis and justification can get support and get things done, even if it looks impossible at first.

O: Do you think you could attribute part of the success to the effort of the neighborhood itself?

P: Yes, I think the people who lived here had a sense of the importance of preserving the neighborhood. There was an awareness that here we have this little enclave in the hills and we have the feeling this is a good neighborhood and want to preserve it. I think there was a feeling of identity. When they came together and saw each other at meetings at houses, this brought the neighborhood closer together. I think it certainly forged a sense of neighborhood awareness that hadn't existed to that degree before. Many people who had benefited from the decision are still aware of it. For example, Marvin Witt thanked me not so long ago saying, "If it weren't for you, my office in this little pleasant area wouldn't exist." When I walk through the 28th Place area, I get a feeling of satisfaction because I know that here is something tangible I've done. I know that had I not organized the neighborhood, this would have been obliterated. This gives me a very pleasant feeling, because most of my work has been in the academic intellectual area. You have some impact with ideas, but here's something tangible I have done. I look back on it with the feeling that the effort was worthwhile.

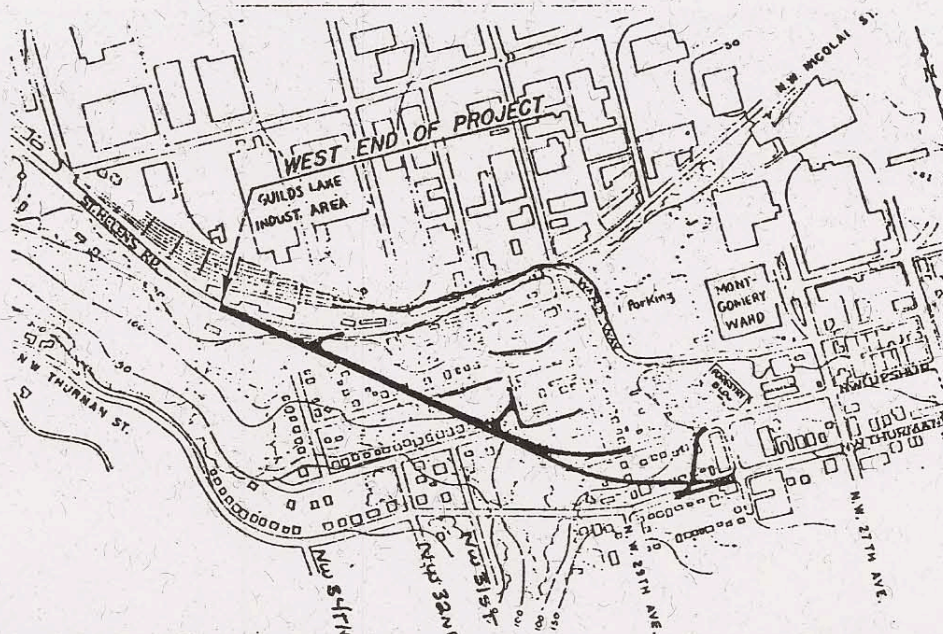
O: Do you have any parting shots that you think we should have covered?



P: I would like to mention that one should be aware that neighborhoods do change and that we have to accept certain changes and not always resist change. I know there are some people who are admittedly worried about the gentrification that has taken place in the neighborhood. As an urban economist, I'm aware that neighborhoods don't stand still. When it was going downhill, the moans and groans were about how difficult it was get mortgages up here. There was concern that it might deteriorate further. Now it's true you're getting a lot of private investment. Property values are going up and some people can no longer afford to live here. However, some of them move to Hawthorne and improve the SE Hawthorne neighborhood. That's the way cities change and develop. So while I don't like to see the neighborhood become homogeneous in the sense of having all doctors and lawyers, still one has to recognize that neighborhoods usually either go up or down. In the case of Willamette Heights, it's going up and overall it's beneficial. It's more beneficial having it improving and renewing than deteriorating and going downhill.

O: Thank you very much for this insightful interview. This has added significantly to the lore of the neighborhood and it is certainly an important element of the neighborhood's recent history that hasn't been documented until now.

P: I enjoyed it because it refreshed my memory of the past twenty years. Thank you.



A GROUP of Willamette Heights residents has opposed the proposed replacement and alternate route leading into St. Helens Rd. The darkened areas are the proposed route.

Another section which is not shown in this map extends from NW 22nd Ave. to NW 25th Ave. on Upshur St. Some 30 homes may be involved.

Oregonian map of proposed freeway, c.1971