

**Wayne Potratz Oral History Interview**  
**Southeast Seniors Neighborhood Stories & Memories Oral History Project**  
**January 8, 2019**



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## **Abstract**

Born in St. Paul in 1942, Wayne Potratz moved with his wife Virginia Potratz to Southeast Como in 1972 after Wayne got a job teaching at the University of Minnesota Department of Art. Wayne went on to become an acclaimed professor and sculptor, and today is a Professor and Scholar of the College Emeritus.

The Potratz's originally rented at 987 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue Southeast before buying a house at 1104 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue Southeast where they live to do this day. Both Wayne and Virginia have been active in the neighborhood and have observed the significant changes the neighborhood has undergone in the close to 50 years that they've lived there.

Virginia, who is present for the first part of the interview, was a member of the Southeast Como Livability Committee which works to keep the neighborhood clean and care for its properties. The committee also addresses issues such as noise, traffic, and partying which increasingly became problems as the neighborhood transitioned from a significant number of homeowners to largely student rental with absentee landlords.

Wayne discusses improvements to the neighborhood, changes in the local businesses, and changes in political representation. He also discusses how the city's housing ordinance, social hosting ordinance, and traffic diverters have influenced the character of the neighborhood. He concludes the interview with some reflections on where he feels the neighborhood and the city as a whole are headed going forward.

# Southeast Seniors Neighborhood Stories Oral History Project

Interview with Wayne Potratz

January 8, 2019

Erica Seltzer Schultz, Interviewer

Erica Seltzer-Schultz: **ESS**

Wayne Potratz: **WP**

Virginia Potratz: **VP**

*Track 1*

*00:00*

**ESS:** Today is January 8, 2019. Erica Seltzer-Schultz is interviewing Wayne Potratz and we are in Southeast Minneapolis. This is for the Neighborhood Stories and Memories Oral History Project. And we are also joined by his wife Virginia who will be here for the first part of the interview. So, just to start out, where and when were you born?

**WP:** I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota April 8, 1942.

**ESS:** What neighborhood in St. Paul did you live in?

**WP:** I lived on Snelling and Palace, kind of just below the Highland Park neighborhood.

**ESS:** Okay. What was that neighborhood like?

**WP:** It was a middle-class neighborhood with families, and it's right around Snelling Avenue, so it was kind of noisy. It's going up the hill up to Highland Park, so trucks would be downshifting right in front of our house. So grew up with a lot of noise. But it was just a regular neighborhood with lots of families—kids in the neighborhood. And Mattocks School was two blocks away. That was my grade school.

**ESS:** So you went to grade school there. Where did you go to high school?

**WP:** St. Paul Central High School.

**ESS:** And then where did you go to college?

**WP:** Macalester College just down the street.

**ESS:** And then you went out to California for grad school.

**WP:** Yes, I went to graduate school at the University of California at Berkeley.

**ESS:** So how did you end up back in Minnesota and not staying out in California?

**WP:** Well, I got a degree in Art and Education at Macalester College and I'd done my student teaching at Mounds View High School, and my second year of graduate school I noticed that there was a job opening for teaching art at Mounds View High School. And also the Vietnam War was on and I wasn't interested in participating in that at all. And so, I applied for and got a job teaching at Mounds View High School in 1966, so I started in the fall of 1966. I graduated from Berkeley in the Spring of '66, taught sculpture there during the summer, then came back here.

**ESS:** And where did you first live when you came back?

**WP:** I lived in a store on Jefferson Avenue and Clifton right near the old Monroe High School. It was a former beauty parlor, and it had a big space in the front and a tiny little mini-apartment in the back, a little kitchen and a tiny bedroom and a toilet. So I started a studio there while I taught in high school.

**ESS:** A studio for your art?

**WP:** For my art, yeah, my sculpture.

**ESS:** And then you lived there as well?

**WP:** I lived there as well, yeah, which was when then the assistant principal asked, where was I living, and I said I was living in a storefront and he looked a little askance, and it was not the normal place for a high school teacher to be living, but it worked for me.

**ESS:** And how long were you there for?

**WP:** I'd say about a year—year and a half, and then I moved into a small house in the neighborhood that had a big garage, triple-car garage so I could build a foundry there. And I had a roommate, another art teacher—Tom Schuh. So we were there for—well, we lived there when we first got married.

**ESS:** How did you two meet each other?

**WP:** At a party at my house.

**ESS:** So you originally lived there and then, in 1973, you moved to this neighborhood, is that correct, on 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue?

**WP:** In '72.

**ESS:** Oh, '72.

**WP:** Yeah, we went—in 1971 we went to Europe for six months, travelled around camping and—all over Europe. And then in '73, we went back for the summer and we gave up the house at that point, came back and lived with— [interruption] What was that? We didn't?

**VP:** We gave up the house in '71. We gave up the house in '71, we came back and we lived in two places. We lived with the Browns, we lived with your sister, and then we moved in 1972 to 987 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue Southeast.

**WP:** It was a friend of ours was living there and he was giving up that—was the upper floor of a duplex.

**ESS:** What led you to move to this neighborhood?

**WP:** Well, we lived in the neighborhood. We saw—it was a Sunday—we saw it in the paper.

**VP:** Well, or we moved to this neighborhood because he got a job—teaching job at the University of Minnesota—

**WP:** University in '69.

**VP:** And started in 1969.

**WP:** Right.

**VP:** Right after we got married. And so, because he was teaching there, we wanted to live close to the University.

**ESS:** So what was this neighborhood like when you first moved in?

**WP:** Lots of—

**VP:** It was all families and older people.

**WP:** Diverse neighborhood of older people, younger people with families.

**VP:** A number of people who worked at the University in all kinds of positions.

**ESS:** And what about just structurally, was is pretty similar in terms of the landscape and the buildings?

**WP:** Yeah, I mean, there's been some modification to housing here which we can get into later, but I mean, most of—this house was built in 1908 and there have been a few changes. The house on the corner burned down. It was a really great mansard-roofed house too—it was a duplex or was it a two-storey—

**VP:** They used it as a duplex rather than a single family and then—

**WP:** It was a huge house.

**VP:** —Carl lived there with—upstairs, and his parents lived downstairs.

**WP:** Downstairs, right.

**VP:** So it was kind of duplexed, but it was a Victorian-mansard.

**ESS:** So, you moved to this house pretty shortly after you moved to this neighborhood, right? A year later or so, is that right?

**VP:** It was about 18 months later, I think.

**WP:** We saw the house in the advertise. We came over and looked at it. It was like a Sunday or something.

**VP:** It was a Sunday.

**WP:** Sunday, and we made a bid right away for it.

**ESS:** Had you been—do you own the other place or are you renting it?

**WP:** No, we're just renting it.

**ESS:** What attracted you to this house?

**WP:** Oh, well, it was the woodwork was all intact and—didn't my dad come along?

**VP:** Yeah, your parents were having dinner with us, and we came over here and took a look and then your dad came over and took a look too.

**WP:** Yeah, my dad was a cabinet-maker and kind of woodworker and he said, "Buy this house." So we did.

**VP:** Because it was structurally sound and the woodwork had not been painted. A number of—a few little things were and then I stripped those.

**WP:** Yeah, the plate rail you stripped.

**VP:** And the bathroom—all the inside interior woodwork of the bathroom I stripped, and also the big cabinet—the kitchen cabinet was—I stripped that.

**ESS:** Do you know much about the history of the house? You said it was built in 1908.

**WP:** We're like the third owner, but you have a great story to tell.

**VP:** When my children were little, they were at nursery school and I was bringing groceries into the house and a person drove past very, very slow and stopped in front of the house and was looking at the house, and he looked quite elderly, and he—I just asked if he was lost or needed help and he said, "No, I used to live in this house." And I said, "Oh, really?" He said, "I just wanted to drive by because my dad and my brother built the chicken coop and they also built the built-in bookcase." And I said, "Well, would you like to come in?" And he said, "Yes." And he and his family were the second owners. And he came and he got very tearful and thanked me profusely. And, by that time, we had already redone the kitchen. So that was different for him, but he looked out at and walked around the house and looked at the chicken coop and he became very emotional and said he was going to some high school reunion.

**WP:** Marshall High.

**VP:** Because he had gone to Marshall High School at that time—and thanked me. And he was probably I would imagine in his 70s at that time, maybe 80. But he thanked me profusely and was very grateful that I had let him walk through his house.

9:59

**VP:** And he was the second owner. And that would have been in the early 80s.

**WP:** So I think we're either the fourth or fifth owners. We bought it from a couple who were in graduate school at the University and they had got positions elsewhere and so—

**VP:** I think we're the fifth owners because they bought it from the family who had it before and I think they were only here for two—maybe three years, and then they were going back out East. So I think we're the fifth owners.

**ESS:** So is there a chicken coop out back?

**VP:** Yes.

**WP:** Yeah.

**ESS:** Do you have chickens or have you had chickens?

**WP:** No, we've never had chickens, but it's been used as a kid's playhouse and there's a—Ginny's little garden house for a while. And we have chairs and stuff for when we—for the—

**VP:** Little storage for lawn.

**WP:** —for summer stuff stored out there. So, when our grandchildren came, they kind of liked being in there and, as they get older, they'll enjoy it more.

**ESS:** Great. So, let's move on to talking about neighborhood involvement. So you've both been a little bit involved in the neighborhood. Do you want to speak to that first before you have to leave?

**VP:** I was on the board—and I can't even remember what years, but I was on—I guess I wasn't on the board, but I was a member of the [Southeast Como] Livability Committee. I was on that with Katie for I think a year or two I volunteered to be on that. And then we did a—during the time I did that, we were neighborhood people who went around and checked the—I don't know—inspected, I guess, for exterior problems on mowed lawns and unkempt properties.

**WP:** We did that annual cleanup too for a number of years where everyone picked up trash around the neighborhood.

**ESS:** What was the Livability Committee about?

**VP:** Just—

**WP:** It's still going [unclear].

**VP:** It's still going, and the livability was about keeping the neighborhood cleaned and upkeep to properties, so that properties weren't garbage and issues like that.

**ESS:** So what kind of issues were you—

**VP:** Well, a lot of noise issues are not so bad now—things have changed—but there was a lot of partying, people—noise at night, people using lawns as toilets, a lot of drinking—

**WP:** Big parties.

**VP:** —huge parties, lots of nighttime traffic, especially on weekends. So, there was a period of time when it was very, very difficult to live here, I would say.

**WP:** As the neighborhood gradually changed over to rental. So the—

**VP:** And primarily student rental.

**WP:** Student rental—so it's about 70 to 75 percent, as I recall, absentee landlord in the Como neighborhood right now. So most of the—like all of the people that were our neighbors, Frank across the street—he and his wife passed away. That was bought by a parent that had their kids live there and then it became rental. The house next door is rental. This house is rental. The two houses—

**VP:** Well, pretty much all the—most of the houses are rental on this end.

**WP:** Yeah—pretty much all the street—yeah.

**ESS:** Why do you think that transition happened?

**WP:** Well, it was of—

**VP:** Investment.

**WP:** —investment—people coming to buy—. There are a number of kind of main landlords that have a lot of houses here. But I think it was just opportunity, you know? Older people were selling, and then a lot of division of houses like the—I can't remember the number right over there.

**VP:** 1099.

**WP:** 1099 was just a beautiful house and now it's chopped up into two apartments, and so that's happened. That's happened with the architecture. The house next door had a lovely porch. Some entrepreneurs bought it and took out half the porch, made a—extended a bedroom there so they could put more people in. The problem that I see generally in Minneapolis and in the neighborhood is that Minneapolis just does not enforce its housing ordinances. This is zoned three here for three unrelated adults.

**VP:** And now they're actually changing housing ordinance in order to pack more people into neighborhoods—increase the density of a neighborhood.

**ESS:** So just to linger on that for a second, you're saying that Minneapolis doesn't enforce how many people can live in a dwelling.

**WP:** They don't actively enforce. If you make the complaint, they will try to investigate, but we had five or six—six—some people living next door and they were not particularly good neighbors, so we did call 311 and—or I think I did it on the website, but the response I got was, “Well, they're claiming they're related.” And they don't have any resources to investigate such a claim, but every semester the names on the mailbox would change, so that was just people lying. So that's one of the little untruths that people will tell in order to get around that particular part of the ordinance. It is three unrelated adults in any one unit. So that's violated right now. We've kind of let it go because they're really good neighbors up to this point.

But this house just sold. We had a very good relationship with the previous owner. But this house just sold and you can see the front now. He's taken out part of the porch and has got a window for the basement. So that means a bedroom is going into the basement. It's already a duplex. So, why does this—and I understand the notion of increased density, but what it really does is it destroys the housing stock for families. So no one—for example 1099—no one's going to ever buy that for a single-family home again because why would they want to convert back from a duplex—go to that expense? So that's the problem that has happened in the neighborhood as I see it.

So, less and less families on the street. On this street now there's Cathy [Collins]—well Jake's lived here a long time but he has roommates. Cathy's lived there almost as long as we have. Then there's another woman who lives the next door down. I'm forgetting her name now—she doesn't—I don't see her very much. She's lived there a long time. But the rest of it is all become rental. So a family lives on the corner. But that's the character of the neighborhood has really changed. So like I don't know the names of the people next door because we don't have a lot of contact. They don't introduce themselves. I did meet a couple of the guys that live next door. We try to keep track of names. But it gets difficult with an ever—almost semester-like kind of changing-of-the-guard, so to speak.

I think one of the things that has helped is the social hosting ordinance because I can remember an incident across the street where there was a very noisy party and the police arrived and it was a little bit like that circus trick clowns coming out of a Volkswagen. There must have been 50 to 100 people in that house. And so, it's like this mass pouring of bodies coming out of the house. During that same time period at 1099, they had a party—they had a wrestling match in the backyard. And the neighbor Richard—Richard's an architect, does solar—[unclear] one of the families that live across the street—one of the few families that live on that side—he called the police. And again, it was a monstrous number of people. And that's when you have people roaming around.

*19:54*

And because this area doesn't have alleys; it just has driveways, so it's real easy to sneak up and use in between the houses as a toilet. And I've caught several people doing that during my years

here. I was up late and I heard a disturbance on this side. But that's really subsided since the social hosting ordinance was passed.

**ESS:** When was the social hosting ordinance?

**WP:** I want to say early 2000s—I don't remember now.

**ESS:** And what was the ordinance?

**WP:** It's an ordinance that—as I understand it that if you're party is—if the police have to come to your party because of noise or disturbances, if they find underage drinkers, the host goes to jail and the landlord gets a warning and it's my understanding—I may be wrong about this—that if they get two warnings, they lose their rental license. So it's kind of a stiff situation. So that part of roaming—and I think the University [of Minnesota] has also done a little better job of kind of giving information to students and informing students and trying to be a better neighbor to the community. There's been a kind of a University-Como-Marcy alliance. It kind of started with the stadium because we knew when the new stadium was going to be built that that was going to be a big problem with noise and people parking in the neighborhood. So that's changed I think a little bit. The University has done a better job of kind of introducing students to what it means to live in a neighborhood and be a neighbor. And we would have a lot of things with garbage out on the street, and that's changed for the better, I think.

**ESS:** So is the University-Como Alliance an organization that actually started?

**WP:** I think it is, yeah. I think Katie Fournier is on it. A number of neighborhood activists are on it. We usually go to the Southeast Como Improvement Association meeting. We missed the meeting this fall because we were travelling, but we usually go to that and kind of find out about what's happening. There have been a number of meetings now about the diverters. You notice that the streets here on Talmage are closed off corner to corner. That's to keep truck traffic from kind of going between Hennepin and Como.

**ESS:** Okay.

**WP:** To keep that kind of cross-traffic contained.

**ESS:** When did those get put in?

**WP:** Oh, those were there when we moved in. And now, as a matter of fact, there's an old couple that lived down the corner down there on Talmage and 15<sup>th</sup>, and he was like kind of a gardener. They really kept their property very nice. And he would kind of manage the diverters and kind of plant and trim trees and stuff. And that's kind of gone by the wayside and ours was pretty bad. There's another community member on the one on 16<sup>th</sup> has been doing some work on there, but the neighborhood did some grants for the University Landscape Architecture Class to kind of design some new, more ecologically friendly—the rain—like a rain garden kind of diverter. So that those designs are in the works, and I think there's a grant pending now to do the first one down here on Talmage and 15<sup>th</sup>.

**ESS:** What's you thought about having those diverters in the neighborhood?

**WP:** Yeah, they're alright. It does cut down—once in a while you'll see a truck driver that doesn't kind of know what's going on come down the street and then be confronted by the fact that they have to turn, and if it's a big truck they have trouble. Sometimes they've had to back back out, but I think now with GPS and all that, it's less of a problem. But it does cause confusion for people who don't know the neighborhood because, if you say I live on 15<sup>th</sup> and they come off of Como to go on 15<sup>th</sup>, they wind up on 16<sup>th</sup>—or 14<sup>th</sup>—they wind up on 14<sup>th</sup>, so it gets confusing. So here we always have to tell people turn on 16<sup>th</sup> and then you'll wind up on 15<sup>th</sup>.

**ESS:** Yeah, makes sense. So what are some other issues that the neighborhood organization has addressed during the years?

**WP:** Trying to think—I think livability has been the main one. I know there was the issue with Van Cleve Park for a while, especially the fencing of the baseball field off. See, part of the park is owned by Minneapolis Public Schools, and it's their main baseball park, and they redid the field maybe ten years ago, and they put a big fence up and locked it, so it's not accessible to the neighborhood. Before the neighborhood kids would come and play baseball there—I mean, you know, play soccer. And it's a small park; it has its problems. The fields are really—the soccer field's really bad. My son played soccer with Southeast Soccer, and the field was pretty bad. It has to do with the fact that during the winter they flood the—for skating. So, it has multiple uses, so their baseball fields and soccer fields, so it's hard to kind of maintain that. I know there was a big meeting about the whole business with the Minneapolis Public Schools fencing off the field. People from other parks came and talked about what they did, and it was always kind of—our soccer field was pretty bad. So, when the kids played, other teams would come and—.

Though there was the—Southeast soccer used to have a Halloween Bowl, which was a—invite teams from around the city to come, and there would be a tournament—a one-day tournament that was always fun and we participated in that quite a bit. I was just reminded that I'm doing an archive of all the material I've collected during my 45 years at the University. It's going to the University archive, so I've been going through photographs and I just came across some programs from the Halloween Bowl and photographs and stuff of the teams that my son played on so, nostalgia time.

**ESS:** So when did you start going to these neighborhood organization meetings do you think?

**WP:** Well, I can't remember when—oh, I think it was when the neighborhoods—all the neighborhoods got funding, and I can't remember what that's called anymore. They got funding from the city to form neighborhood associations and deal with neighborhood issues. So Marcy-Holmes has a neighborhood association, Southeast Como Improvement Association is what ours is called. So we started going then, coming to—going the yearly meetings and getting involved with trying to influence neighborhood ordinances and things like that. But now that money was—Mr. [R. T.] Rybak was the guy that kind of put the kibosh on that money, so that money is no longer there. So it is kind of a struggle, I think, for some of the neighborhood associations to keep being funded with a coordinator in an office and keeping up a website and getting information out to neighbors.

**ESS:** Yeah, how is Southeast Como doing with that? Do they have a coordinator?

**WP:** I think we still have a coordinator. I still get emailed blasts. There's a website. Your involvement in neighborhood kind of goes in waves. So right now, I've got a lot of personal projects, so I haven't been as tuned into what's happening.

30:02

We missed the neighborhood meeting. We did go down for the diverter meeting and we also—there's a project for wrapping the traffic boxes and electrical boxes with graphics to kind of cut down on the graffiti. And we've contributed to that and kind of did some—participated in the surveys as to what kind of designs and stuff were—that's Laila Smith, lives down on the—close to the University housing—is the coordinator for that. So that's been an improvement too. And I was on the committee that chose the neighborhood sculpture that was a project for neighborhood—they were kind of like signposts or kind of neighborhood sculptures. And I was on that committee, and we chose the—it's—I don't know if you've been down there on the corner.

**ESS:** I saw it, actually.

**WP:** It plays—it actually plays music.

**ESS:** What type of music?

**WP:** It's a random—it depends on the wind. So there are pipes and, as the wind goes around, it changes. But public sculpture is a very interesting thing because some people like it and some people don't. And so they were—people around that lived around there were all worried about oh, there's going to be this noise because originally it was going to go every hour during the day. And now I think it's maybe at noon and maybe at six—I don't know. Maybe it's at night between two and three times a day. So unless you're there, it doesn't really play very often. So I was on that committee. So it kind of goes up and down, your involvement with the neighborhood.

**ESS:** So for that committee—let's talk a little bit more about that—what is the official name of the committee, do you know? You don't need to know. I was just curious.

**WP:** It was the Gateway Project for the city. So each neighborhood got a gateway. I was on actually three or four of them as a sculptor because there are all these sculptures and kind of was up—the one on northeast, and I think it was the one down on the neighborhood right by the former Lake Calhoun.

**ESS:** Oh, Bde Maka Ska?

**WP:** Yeah, that corner project there right on the corner there of, I want to say Lake Street and it would be the east—southeast corner there's a project. It's kind of a landscape with stone and

plantings and stuff. That was their project. So there would be a request for proposals, and then sculptors would send in ideas about what they thought would identify that neighborhood. And then the committee was made up of—oh, usually a couple people who had art backgrounds and some people from the neighborhood. And then they'd review proposals and kind of then vote on what project they thought would best serve the neighborhood. So that's what we did for—well, I did it—I think I was on three committees—Gateway Committees.

**ESS:** And this is city money?

**WP:** It was city money, yeah. So if you go around to the various neighborhoods, you'll see various—some of them are like signs, some of them are sculptures, some of them are kind of landscape installations. But each neighborhood got one I believe.

**ESS:** What do you think about the sculpture here and its impact on the neighborhood?

**WP:** It was kind of controversial because it was kinetic, and there were concerns about maintenance, but so far it seems to have held up. And I don't know if there's a maintenance budget or not. I'm spacing on the artist right now. I should know it. I think it was the best art idea for this neighborhood of the ones that were submitted. There were some others that were—they were okay, but they weren't—. This one I think was the most innovated. It had a kind of sense of the railroad that kind of cuts through the neighborhood and kind of the whistly, kind of the whistling of the trains, the tooting of the trains. So it has that kind of sound if you are there at 12:00 or 6:00 I think it is.

**ESS:** Is the train something that you feel is a major feature of the neighborhood?

**WP:** Well, I grew up on Snelling Avenue, so a lot of noise, so I don't hear it very often. They do—I think they have cut down on—for example, it cuts across on Talmage, and there have been a number of—actually a couple of deaths up there. And all the streets used to go across the railroad, and now they're kind of blocked off. And Talmage is the only one where there's still a crossing grade. And that's part of—there is a—Laila Smith and some of the other people that have been involved with the Livability Committee and there's a gardening kind of group, so they've really done a nice job along the side of the railroad grade. The railroad owned kind of a little triangle piece, and that's been all replanted with native plants. It used to be just a kind of a dump for old railroad ties and railroad bed material. And also, the divider there now is planting, and then there's the neighborhood garden right across from Mannings [Bar]. So the railroad is a feature of the neighborhood. It does kind of bisect the neighborhood. Where was I going with that?

Yeah, the plantings—there also is a community garden over, I want to say on 18<sup>th</sup> and couple blocks in from Como—kind of a community garden—vegetable garden. So all of those things have been an improvement. The other improvement has been entrepreneurs who have come in the neighborhood and—for example, the building on the corner was for a long time—well, when we first moved in, there was a small grocery store there—Butch. He was a butcher, and it was pretty pathetic grocery store. He was kind of on the way to retirement, and it wasn't stocked very well. We did buy a few things from him. And I think the corner used to be a drug store. And

there was a guy that owned it, and he lived in Northeast Minneapolis. Building kind of—there were a number of things that went in on the corner. There was also a little 3.2 bar called the Goal Line. And funny little 3.2 bar, and they had a little tiny kitchen, and they made little hambury burger-like things, and it had a really curious little mural of elves, and someone had painted inside.

So the whole thing kind of fell into disrepair. And then Nina Wong and Thomas [Gnanapragasm] bought the whole building, and they have the Chindian Café on the corner. They started that, and then over the years they have totally rehabbed the building. And for a while she had a little gallery next to her thing, but now Bolster which I'm not sure what they do—I think it's a software company—came in, and she renovated the whole building. And now it's really nice.

*40:01*

And then across the street was a Mobile gas station. And the corner there where Nina has her parking lot was fenced off with a chain-link fence, and all the junk cars were in there. And so, her turning that into a parking lot and making—planning says improve the neighborhood. And then Clockwork came in when gas station went out of business and totally renovated that building, and they kept the big logo of the Pegasus. And actually, Clockwork was noted as one of the better companies to work for in the state of Minnesota in terms of the way they deal with their employees, so all of that has helped at least this little corner of the neighborhood. So there's been that. There's been that improvement. The Bunge Elevator situation has finally been resolved. The elevator was abandoned, and people were climbing in there, and there were a number of deaths. Matter of fact, we have a good friend who was on this—he's on the Twin City Rescue—he's a firefighter. And he—the last person who fell to their death there, he was one of the guys that had to help the doc go in.

So that's all Project for Pride in Living has developed that part of the neighborhood and led—there's some increased diversity there. I think there are a lot of Somali families living there. So that's increased the diversity of the neighborhood. But right in this little pocket here is a lot of rental.

*End of Track 1*

*42:07*

*Track 2*

*00:00*

**ESS:** Alright, so let's talk a little bit more about development in the neighborhood. So when I was driving on Como, I noticed there is an interesting kind of—it was just 15<sup>th</sup> and Como area—there is an interesting array of shops. There was Black Coffee and Waffle which is this really kind of hip, new coffee bar. And then right next to that is hardware store, and next to the ramen place is Craig's Barber which is very much kind of old-fashioned barbershop feel, but in this kind of modern—

**WP:** Actually, Craig is a new barber there. The older guy Pete retired, and Craig is actually a former art student at the U of M [University of Minnesota].

**ESS:** Oh, really?

**WP:** Yeah, he was a student in the department, and so, he's become my barber now. I just kind of reconnected with him at an opening. So yeah, the ramen shop used to be a really nice Japanese restaurant called Obento-Ya, but that woman, she was from Hiroshima and was really nice. I kind of ate in there the very first day it opened. But she passed away from cancer, and her husband ran it for maybe about four or five years after her death, and then I think he finally gave up. And now it's become the ramen shop. And then the next the Tap or the Blue Door or whatever, that's been a number of things, tanning parlor and bunch of stuff. That's kind of a college bar and restaurant. Right now, it's too noisy in there for me—too many TV's and it's just too noisy, so I don't go there.

There's been a number of things in the neighborhood. Pat's Hardware has been there for years. I patronize Pat. I try to avoid the big—like “Home Despot”. I don't got to Home Depot. I try not to go there. I like to patronize Pat. The corner store's been a number of things. The one thing that the last guy who had the corner store did was he painted a mural on the side of the building there on 15<sup>th</sup>. A very nice mural was done, and that has cut down on all the graffiti on that wall. Also, the mural along the railroad cut going on 15<sup>th</sup>, going underneath the railroad there is really a nice addition to the neighborhood. That's good. They should really do one on the other side. And then the railroad really needs to paint its bridge, but that ain't going to happen there. I don't see it without a lot of pressure.

It's kind of like what windmills do you tilt against in the neighborhood, you know? It's just kind of what fights do you want to pick? But the commercial corner there, that's kind of settling in now, I think. There's been a number of things next to the little grocery store. Now I think it's a little kind of hip clothing shoe store.

**ESS:** What's your feeling about these places coming in that are more kind of hip?

**WP:** It's alright. I mean, more and more college students in the neighborhood because of the absentee landlord rental stuff, so that's fine. I mean, obviously if you're going to start a business, you best do your market research as to who's in the neighborhood, so that's fine. I used to eat at the Japanese restaurant all the time. We eat at Chindian a lot because it's just right down the corner. The ramen shop, it's okay. It doesn't compare to some of the other ramen that I've had in town, so haven't been back there. But the middle eastern football pizza place on the corner, I've eaten there a couple of times. I don't know how they hang on. I don't see very many people in

there. But I think there's another restaurant—it's owned by the same people, so that might be subsidizing. It's fine. The coffee shop's great—good coffee.

And actually, I think our neighborhood is split in terms of its council representation, so Kevin Reich has like a little section of Southeast Como here, and he's mainly a Northeast representative. I don't think he pays enough attention to our little corner. And I'm going to space on green party candidate—it's got most of Southeast, and I'm going to forget his name now—I'm getting too old. But he holds his neighborhood meetings in Black's Coffee place there. So yeah, they have good waffles and—.

**ESS:** I heard that at some point, the city split up Southeast wards because Southeast was too powerful. It used to be like all the all the Southeast neighborhoods had the same council member.

**WP:** Yeah.

**ESS:** And then they split it up because it was this really powerful block, and they didn't want—that's what someone said they felt that the city—.

**WP:** I don't know about that about the politics. I know that it was at the last census, I think all of a sudden it was like, "What—whoa." I'm not voting for Cam Gordon now? Cam is the other councilman who is the green party guy who is in the—you know, has that part of Southeast and kind of the university neighborhood. So I don't know about that. I didn't really hear that, but that could have been an issue. What else was I going to say? Yeah—Cam seems—Cam comes to most of the neighborhood meetings. I can't say that for Kevin Reich. I did—he does hold meetings up in Northeast. I did go meet with him one time about some issues here in the neighborhood recently, but he has his focus up there.

**ESS:** One other thing I noticed when I was driving down Como is past the barber shop and across from the gas station there was this walk-up that was pretty run down with a For Rent sign on it. It looked like one of those really old-fashioned three-storey walk-ups. I was wondering if that's a feature of the neighborhood that—are there many of those types of buildings, do you know?

**WP:** I think mainly it's single family, though I think it's going to change with the 2040 or whatever that plan is—in 2020 plan because I know just over on I want to say either 13<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> they just tore down two houses—two kind of pretty well run-down houses that had been rental for a long time. I think it's over on 13<sup>th</sup> there are three or four houses that are owned by a gay couple, and they're just beautiful. It's just like one of those things, when you walk in the neighborhood, you go, "Oh, wow—is this a delight," you know? Boxwood bushes and plantings and topiaries and sculpture and, you know, it's—Ginny has three gardens, so she's gotten a couple bloom awards from the city—the kind of thing—thank you for planting. So we try to contribute to the neighborhood by keeping your property in shape and kind of planting and so on. That is one of the problems with the absentee landlord, because they don't maintain the property the same way. And that's an issue as I get older, shoveling snow. I mean, I'm 70—I'm going to be 76—77.

9:57

I shovel my walk, and it gets really annoying to walk in the neighborhood when people don't shovel. It's just part of being a good citizen. And so, that's a complaint I have generally, and the city is just slow to respond. If you call in a sidewalk, sometimes by the time they get around to inspecting it, the sun has already melted all the situation. So you don't get a lot of fast response in on inspection calls.

**ESS:** So, we've talked a lot about changes in the neighborhood over time. Is there anything else that you want to note as you reflect on the changes? You've been here about—what is it—45 years or so? Is that it?

**WP:** Yeah—so—

**ESS:** 46 years?

**WP:** —1970—Nixon resigned—we were painting the house when Nixon resigned—painting the interior and, for a while, there was a little unpainted area that my wife left up in that corner as a reminder. We were watching TV and painting it, so it was '73 I think, so been here a long time—40-plus years. And we like—for a while we thought we got kind of—oh, we're just going to move out because we got kind of tired of the noise and stuff. But as long as we can get up and down stairs, we're going to stay. We like the neighborhood. We like—it's easy to get on the freeway. The Quarry's up there for shopping. It's convenient through old neighborhood shops. And for a long time, it was very close to my work. I would walk most of the time or ride my bike or take the bus. And you know, it is convenient. I can walk two blocks, get on the bus and make a transfer down at the stadium and be at the airport by light rail. So if we're going for a long time, we like to travel. If we travel for a long time, we don't want to park the car at the airport, we just hop on the bus and light rail. So it's a lot of convenience. Light rail is been good. If I go to St. Paul, most of the time I just drive my car up to Raymond Avenue and park and get on the light rail. I like the light rail a lot. Feels like a big city now. It used to kind of feel like just a little city, and now it feels like a bigger city, a more grown up city.

**ESS:** Minneapolis as a whole you'd say?

**WP:** Yeah, and I like the bike lanes. I know a lot of drivers are poo-pooing the bike lanes, but bike lanes are good. I mean, I like to bike and so does my wife, and so I think that's good—to share the road. In 1971, we were in Amsterdam, and one of the things that impressed me about Amsterdam, even in 1971, is that it seemed like the city first of all was for people walking. And then it was for bicyclists. And then it was for people with boats because of the canals. And last of all, it was for automobiles. And same for some other cities, like we were in Cologne in '71 and the entire middle of the city was automobile-free. It felt like it was human; it had a human scale.

So, we have the Hennepin Avenue here, which is a big thoroughfare and Como is another lesser of a thoroughfare, but we're kind of bordered by two industrial areas which is okay, but I understand that this industrial area is slated for some development. And already we have, in the

industrial area, a couple of brewpubs and other things kind of moving in. And my studio is just about four blocks from here on the corner of Stinson and Broadway, and the building is full of silk-screeners and artists. So, that's changing a little bit.

**ESS:** Do you ever participate—I guess it's more Northeast, but do you ever participate in Art-a-Whirl?

**WP:** Yeah, I'm a NEMAA [Northeast Minneapolis Arts Association] member because my studio is actually in Northeast Minneapolis, so I'm a member. Yeah, I'm in Art-a-Whirl. It's not so good for that building because it's out of the kind of the main area, so we don't get as much traffic. Last year was terrible. I was there for three days and I had twelve people in my studio, so I have to really consider whether I'm going to do that again this year, but I might be open for one day.

**ESS:** Yeah—that makes sense. So let's just talk a little bit about what you see for the future of the neighborhood. You talked about the 2040 plan. What's your feelings about that plan?

**WP:** I can understand the notion of density, but what I'm really worried about is just what's already happening in a neighborhood where like over on Como, too, a house was torn down and now there's a big three-storey apartment-like structure there. I don't think Minneapolis does a very good job in architectural review, so I'm worried about the kind of architecture that's going to go up. Some of the buildings like down on Central and 4<sup>th</sup> and University, the old Superior Plating site—that building's okay, but the one that they're building just one block this way, boy, it's pretty boring architecture.

And for example, right behind me, a guy bought this house and he immediately added—by himself—added a third story. And it's just a—I mean, we planted a tree back there to shield our view. It's really doesn't look good. It's not in keeping with the architectural plan of the neighborhood. So I'm worried about that. I don't think Minneapolis does—I don't think they care. You know? They don't care.

I'll give you another example. The neighborhood—it's my understanding that we try to mitigate runoff. Guy bought the house next door. What did he do? He tarred over blacktop the whole back yard here. So all these increased tenants that are going to live here can park their cars back there. So is that a good situation? I don't think it's a good situation, you know? I'd rather see grass or I'd rather see plantings or something like that. I don't know what the effect will be on my yard, but she has a side garden here—back garden, side garden, and a front garden.

So I think that's going to be an issue as to what does the architecture going to look like? See a lot of kind of cookie-cutter kind of architectural things. The one on the corner here at 15<sup>th</sup> is okay. It looks good. That was a foreign car repair shop. So that's gone on the corner there on 15<sup>th</sup> and Como. So that's my only worry is that—it's the stuff like that. I mean, what's this guy going to do now? He has an open front there to the porch and doesn't look good to me. And one of the things that the university figured out—and this was one of the university presidents. I served under so many, and I'll think of his name later, but he came to campus, and he really realized that aesthetics have a lot to do with how you feel in an environment. And so, he really fostered—

Yudof. President Yudof fostered a whole campaign of beautifying campus and planting and cleaning up the buildings and making it feel better.

20:04

And it did—it cut down on the graffiti and the mess that was left around. And I think that’s—same in a neighborhood. So the architecture, the amenities, the way it looks is important.

We’ve had the problem with the park board too, with their monoculturing of blocks for trees. And that’s bit them twice now. It was all elm trees, and the elm disease came through. Then they put in all ash trees on our block. Talmage got the maple trees, okay. So we got the elm trees—now all the elm trees—. Actually, I illegally planted that linden out front there, because we had two elms right here. And they cut down one. The other one just went a few years ago. We requested a Princeton elm, and we also had a big elm tree in the back that was probably about a hundred-some years old. That finally got Dutch elm. We treated it for years—finally got Dutch Elm—cut it down. Now we planted a Princeton elm. They’re disease-resistant.

So now they figured it out. They have got some oak. They’ve got some mountain ash. They’ve got a diversity. So that’s all important, but the whole street looks very different because there are no trees here. They are all young trees. I mean the Linden is now the biggest tree on the block. (Laughter). It was a stick when I planted it.

**ESS:** Anything else you want to say about changes or the future of the neighborhood?

**WP:** Well, I tend to be an optimist, so I hope that—you know, for a while we vowed, “Well, when we have to move out, we’re only going to sell to a family.” But you get to the point where you go, “Uh—I don’t know if that’s going to be really realistic,” you know? We’ll see what happens. I hate for this to be broken up to be another roomie house. My wife just refers to it—it’s become a neighborhood of roomie houses. That’s her main complaint.

So I’d like to see—for a while there was a Southeast Association that tried to buy houses and make sure that they went to neighbors. And the guy that ran that kind of passed away. And it’s like one of those things where it takes someone who’s got a real passion about that to kind of keep it going. So that kind of fizzled out. And there are some very historic houses in the neighborhood over on 13<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. There’s a church over there which Chris Poor from Arms and Armor bought and fixed up. And now he’s trying to sell that because he can’t keep it up anymore. He had his Oakeshott Institute there. That’s kind of a historic church, actually. I think there’s—it might be by a famous architect. I don’t know for sure. He thinks it is the same architect that did the capitol.

But that’s what I’m worried about. I’m an optimist. I hope that families can move in, because it’s a great place to live, especially for if you work at the university, or if you work in this neighborhood. It’s a nice neighborhood, but I’m worried about increased rental and the way that landlords care for their building. You can go down the street, and I can identify the houses that

are owner-occupied just by the way they look. So I hope to be optimistic, but there's a pessimistic-optimistic side to this whole thing.

**ESS:** Anything else you want to share before we wrap up?

**WP:** No—I think you got most of my speech (laughter) —my memory's so-so.

**ESS:** Thank you.

**WP:** You're welcome.

[End of Interview]

Total Interview Time: 1:06:52