

MICHAEL HOUCK

TAPE 5, Side 1

March 22, 1996

M.O'R.: This is a continuation of the interview with Mike Houck on March 22nd, 1996.

M.H.: Dedicated staff that ...

M.O'R.: Why don't you start that sentence over?

M.H.: Yeah. Metro has, in addition to very bright and creative and dedicated staff, colleagues in the local cities, like Maggie Collins in Milwaukie, Elaine Wilkerson in Beaverton, and some other folks, even though they do fight periodically, who are pretty dedicated to the tenets that are espoused through 2040. Actually through, I think most of them would have no problem personally signing onto the Coalition's objectives and supporting the Coalition. Some do in their private lives. And then of course a pretty engaged citizenry.

So you know, combining all those things, I think it is a pretty unique situation. It is unusual to have all the tools available to us - the statewide land use planning and Metro's mandate - to undertake a massive project like this. So yeah, I would agree with you. Robert probably would wince and say, "Well, we could do this, you know, other places in the country." Well, that's just not true. Not in the same way.

We hope we can be a model for how other regions need to change some things - for example, instituting regional governments. Although David Rusk, when he was here - I can't remember - I think it was perhaps the Milwaukie, Wisconsin region - I don't remember

the jurisdiction - there they've achieved something comparable to Metro simply by annexation. So they've just used a different process, and they wind up with one mega-government that - if you don't have regional authority, forget it. You know, a lot of people are opposed to big government. Well, you know, what's that mean? What's big government? It's a hackneyed term. The fact of the matter is if you don't have regional authority there is no way in hell you're going to talk about regional planning in any meaningful way, I don't think. It's as simple as that. People will be fighting one another all the time. You can just look across the country; that's what's happened.

The interesting thing is, though, I think the cooperative efforts that have occurred around the country have occurred around natural resource issues: Chesapeake Bay; cleaning up the Chesapeake is what brought together lots of jurisdictions to cooperate on things. So those natural resources that cross political boundaries sometimes can be the glue that holds together aggregations of governments.

And I'm hopeful that that happens on that Tualatin, by the way. I mean, I only attempted to answer one part of why is this good for the Tualatin, and the next step, the next evolutionary step in my mind is getting the urban folks working with the farm folks working with the forest folks to really look at the Tualatin and cooperate, not fight one another. Because right now, as far as I'm concerned, anyway, the meetings I've sat in, "No, it's their fault." You know, it's the aggies. The aggies are saying, "No, it's those goddamn urban folks," and then the forest folks are out

there not even engaged. "We have the Forest Practices Act; don't bother us; go away."

Well, I'm finding that in Washington D.C. right now sitting on the this storm water management advisory committee. There's an ag guy that shows up every meeting and stands up and every meeting he has to say, "We're not the problem, but you're the problem." And you will never get anything accomplished if people are pointing fingers at one another. Scapegoating.

M.O'R.: Well, you know, I think if you look at some of these things, like the affordable housing issue and drugs and crime and all these kinds of things and compare them to the environmental issue, you might almost get a sense that - as I said earlier that, you know, people's priorities might be such that the environmental concerns would come out on the bottom. But on the other hand, I guess the environmental concerns are issues that cut across, you know, economic boundaries and cut across even racial or political boundaries, and you can find, I guess, a lot of support in the country in general, from all different stripes of people?

M.H.: Absolutely. In fact, the Coalition to Restore Urban Waters that I'm working with is focused on inner city degraded waterways, so we're working with groups - Friends of the Chicago River, the L.A. River, the Anacostia.

In fact, there's a play that got panned in the *Oregonian* unfortunately that's in town now that we brought to town: *The Wolf at the Door*. If you haven't seen it, I really would recommend going. They've tightened it up quite a bit so it's not as long as it was - it was like three hours long; now it's two and a half. The whole focus of that play is that topic. I really would - we

ought to go take it in. It's playing tonight, Saturday and Sunday, and it's great because - and in fact it came about because David Simpson, who was in town last year with *Queen Salmon*, and I got together and started talking about, well, what's the next play you should do? And that is the topic, urban stream restoration and bringing people of color, low-income folks and more mainstream environmentalists together. And it's a musical comedy is what it is. It's pretty cool.

I agree, it does cut across all of those so-called boundaries. In fact, one of the biggest frustrations I've had is, as progressive as a lot of our elected officials are, like Vera Katz and other folks, there still, I don't think, is a true realization that a healthy environment is required for a healthy economy. It's not in addition to, it's not separate from, it's not versus, which is typically how it gets portrayed.

People move to this region - I mean, this has been said so often I can't believe that, you know, there are elected officials who still don't acknowledge this - that they move here because of the quality of life, and by quality of life, they mean the environment outside their homes. It's not just their job environment or, you know, the schools or whatever. It's Fanno Creek, the Tualatin River, the Sandy River, the Willamette River. That's what brings people here. And it's inconceivable to me to - you could even begin to tease that out of the economic base of the region. But typically people do. It's like, well, the environment's here, and the economy is here, and I guess I would say, "It's the environment and the economy, stupid."

M.O'R.: Right. Intertwined. Well, do you see the environment, care for the environment, ever becoming a major political organizing principle as it's become with the Green Party, for instance, in Germany, in this country or in this region?

M.H.: I think it is. I think it is. I think there are catch words out there that don't necessarily say the environment per se, but every elected official today is talking about the urban growth boundary. That's their first topic of discussion. Well, what does that mean? We say hold the urban growth boundary. Well, what that says is support the 2040 planning process, which includes - you know, so that - in my mind, that is an environmental statement.

I've been approached by virtually everyone running for office wanting to sit down and talk with me about water quality issues and green space protection. That didn't happen ten years ago. In fact, it's gotten to be annoying. Seriously, it's like, "Well, I have to talk to you, Mike. I've talked to 15 people, and they've all said I have to talk to Mike Houck about water quality and green spaces if, you know, I'm going to have a successful campaign."

I'm not saying that I'm important. I'm saying that that topic is important, and who they wind up calling eventually is myself and some other folks on the conservation committee. So I think it already is a key issue. Obviously the schools - you know, crime and so forth, I'm not saying that they're not up there, but in terms of issues and polling - Metro just recently did a poll, and environmental quality is in everybody's mind is right up there.

M.O'R.: When these politicians come to you and have to talk to you, do you think it's because they want to educate themselves

by sort of getting your viewpoint, or is it because they want you on board and not on the sidelines?

M.H.: Both, but I've seen a lot of pretty sincere effort on the part of some of those folks to educate themselves because they acknowledge they're not up on the issues, that they've been more involved, say, in social issues, and they've been pretty honest about that, and I've read Jim Francesconi's position papers and so forth and talked a lot with Gail Shipley and some of the other folks, and they're working pretty hard, I think, to educate themselves. I'm impressed. [laughs] We'll wait and see down the road how they vote, but you know, you've got to start somewhere.

M.O'R.: Right. Another thing is this whole idea of the urban growth boundary. Is this - I mean, this is something certainly that you do hear a lot about here.

M.H.: Mm-hmm.

M.O'R.: How does this stack up with respect to the rest of the country?

M.H.: Well, there are - I mean, there are hardly any other places that have such a thing. It's total - people stand and look at you in amazement when you talk about the UGB in other regions of the country.

That's becoming less common. The State of Washington has their Growth Management Act now, which requires urban growth boundary around communities of 100,000, I think, or greater. I can't remember the exact figure.

So yeah, that's unique, too. That's why I said earlier that we are unique in having the regional government and land use planning, why statewide land use planning is really one of the most

important tools is the urban growth boundary. So yeah, it's unusual. They can't believe it. "What? How do you do that?"

M.O'R.: Of course I guess the seeds for part of this have been sown for a long time, the land use planning at the state level?

M.H.: Tom McCall, 1970 - whatever - -3 or -1.

M.O'R.: Right. Well, I'm sort of running out of questions to ask you here about these topics, so maybe I'll just throw out in general if there's anything else that you can think of that might be important to talk about vis-a-vis the Tualatin or anything else we've touched on, really, in this interview?

M.H.: No. I guess the last thing I'll say is that - and you don't have the most recent Freshet, but I wrote a piece in the regional newsletter regarding citizens as infrastructure. I think that, you know, Unified Sewerage Agency needs to do all those good things to treat water before it gets dumped into the Tualatin and so forth, but the reality is if we're going to protect water quality, wildlife habitat and natural resources, it's going to have to be at the individual level, citizen level, and I think that more money needs to be put into supporting groups like Fans of Fanno Creek and the Tualatin River Keepers, and I'm actually very pleased to see USA has just announced a grants program where they're allowing citizen groups to apply for funding to help them do their work.

So it's no longer a question of government doing everything. Ultimately there has to be more civic involvement. And to the extent that we can, as organizations like the Coalition or individuals or individual organizations, promote more civic engagement, I think that's going to be the key to pulling this stuff off.

There needs to be the recognition that resources need to be brought to bear on that. It just won't happen spontaneously.

M.O'R.: Well, I'm glad you brought this up, because that was actually something else I wanted to ask you about was just the various friends' groups and what roles they play, Fans of Fanno and River Keepers, et cetera?

M.H.: They're key.

M.O'R.: I guess that sort of is just a recognition of the truth that the price of preserving, for instance, the quality of the Tualatin watershed is eternal vigilance, probably.

M.H.: That's right.

M.O'R.: And you need those groups out there looking at their particular little piece of it to ...

M.H.: And educating other people, right. USA can't do that alone. It's a partnership, or should be. Typically, of course, it's been an antagonistic relationship over the years, and it's grown, I think, into more of a mutualistic relationship more recently. There are still going to be battles fought, obviously, over particular issues or sites or whatever, let's say between the Fans and USA, but my guess is there's more cooperation going on today than there was five years ago, which I think is for the better.

M.O'R.: Okay. Well, thanks a lot for all of your time, and for a really good interview today.

M.H.: Thanks for the interest.

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