

TRANSCRIPT—FLORINE DENNIS

Interviewee: Florine Dennis
Interviewer: Dwana Waugh
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START OF CD

DW: OK, it is Saturday, June 17th, 2006. I'm interviewing Florine Dennis for the Long Civil Rights Movement Project Initiative for the Southern Oral History Program, looking at the Belmont Community. Good morning, again.

FD: Good morning.

DW: First, if you could just tell me a little bit about your childhood and your background, leading up to you moving into the Belmont community.

FD: OK, I won't go back to the childhood then. [Laughter] Well, basically, I went to most of the public schools here in Charlotte, left, went to A&T for a year and a half in Greensboro. Then got married in '70, lived in Savannah and Charleston, came back to Charlotte in 1985, October. I have three sons. We moved back, lived with my mom, started working at Presbyterian Hospital, worked there for 15 years. In the meantime, I was looking to get a house. But this is a Habitat Home that I live in, so I had a chance to get a Habitat home at that time. The location was Belmont community.

Basically, I knew nothing about the Belmont community, knew nothing about the north side of Charlotte, because I lived out on the northwest side of Charlotte on the other

side of [Interstate] 85. So, it was eye-opening. So this is why I'm in Belmont. I moved here in November of 1993. Our first son was in college, so he was away. So my two younger sons move here with me. Arturo and Jermaine. During that time, between the time of '93, from the time that I moved over here, until the time of probably about 1999—. 1998, I was busy trying to raise my sons and getting them ready to go on to higher education, working to pay the bills and all that, yada yada yada. So I didn't have much time for involvement in the neighborhood.

By the time my youngest son graduated high school in 2005, just before that I started getting involved. About that time, they were talking about looking at revitalization for the Belmont community versus urban renewal, which we're still fighting, making sure that it is revitalization, not that. Then I started getting involved with the community. I came on the board for the Belmont Neighborhood Strategy Force. That's the name of the community organization. I became involved in that in 2002 or 2003. But sometime after 2000, then I started becoming more involved, looking at making sure that—. What the plan said—. The city came and talked to us about the revitalization plan, and talking about what they wanted to do over here. And asking our opinions, the stakeholders, those that are homeowners who live in the Belmont community, what they would like to see happen in the community. We did a planning session on that, and we're still looking at the outcome of that. Been a lot of changes during the time, some good, some bad. Hopefully, more for the good. We're still working on that.

DW: You said you went to Charlotte schools most of your life. What was it like, assuming you went to school in the sixties? And Charlotte was kind of known for its

desegregation struggles, with the Swine case. What was school like here? Did you have a connection with a lot of the Civil Rights struggles that were going on nationwide?

FD: Not nationwide. I guess between here and South Carolina, you experience growing up in the country. In the summertime, we always got sent to the country with my grandmother. She lives in South Carolina. You knew—. OK, riding the bus, that thing about the—. I didn't even know what the difference was, and there still is no difference—. White bathroom, colored bathroom, white water fountain, colored water fountain—they both taste the same. [Laughter] Probably the only thing you experienced more with the colored bathrooms was the fact that they probably just didn't clean them up as much as they did the white restrooms. You know, you'd probably pick up stuff. You'd clean up around yourself if you wanted it to be straightened up more.

But I guess the parks—didn't do much with the parks because we really didn't frequent the parks that much, because in the summer time we were not here. My grandmother had almost a hundred acres of land, so heck, you had a whole big park out there. [Laughter] A whole big park to play in, with a whole lot of work to do. And I guess you would also experience there in South Carolina the fact that my grandmother worked the farm, and then plus the fact her husband was dead. So we were trying to keep the farm going. So we went down there, and we would do work and tobacco and stuff we'd get. And if we wanted to help bring money in, earn money, then they had these trucks where you could go out, work on a tobacco farm, and you earned so much money. Most of the times you went out to work. The tobacco farms were for the white farmers more so.

With the black farmers, basically, if someone in my grandmother's neighborhood, her community—. Basically, sort of just did I guess what you call barter, which you don't hear

much of now. You did some work, and they did some work for you. You exchanged the work that you did for maybe food or something along the way, medicine. Some kind of bartering system that they did that was more prevalent instead of exchanging money, which was important and brought the neighborhood, the community, closer together, because they learned to depend on one another. So therefore, living in the community like that, in the country, a lot of the discrimination were not as prevalent as if you were in the city.

Here in Charlotte, there was segregation of the schools. You experienced all the cruelty in Cherry community, so we were sort of like in the middle of, right next door to, Myers Park. You saw the difference between the homes, but as a young child, you know, you didn't think much about that. Their homes were larger, but you were comfortable where you were; you were happy. Walking to school—. I walked—. Morgan Elementary School was right there in the neighborhood, but when it came to going to the high school, you walked. Then the buses for the white kids, you know, rode past you as you were walking to school. [Laughter] But then again, when I went to junior high, I went to York Grove, which was all the way out on the other side of town. Instead of going to a school that was closer, you got bused out there.

So. When we were growing up in the schools, we may not have had as much. But the teachers didn't let you know that, because they spent their own money providing the things that you needed. Education was stressed, really big, because knowledge—. If you wanted to move on, having that knowledge is something no one can take away. And I was to learn from my grandmother and my parents that, never think of yourself as being inferior. Always think that you are always just as good or even better than the next person. But never think of yourself as being less.

And you also grew up with the fact that Christ—. I remember that my grandmother always had right over her in the living room a picture of Christ. He was black. So you looked at, not as just God and Christ being as white as what you displayed in the Bibles and every place else, but you had that in the home, that he's black, too. So he's the color of whatever—. You're made in his image, so whatever image you're made in, that's the way you look at it.

DW: Did you have friends also have pictures that you remember of a black Jesus? Or at churches that you attended, was there a black Jesus, or was it typically a white Jesus?

FD: No, it was a white Jesus. It was just in my grandmother's home; that was what she had. [Laughter]

DW: Interesting. I'm curious about Charlotte. You were mentioning where you lived in Charlotte and that you came back Charlotte in 1985.

FD: Uh-hmm.

DW: When you did come back, what kind of job opportunities were available for black people or people in general in this area?

FD: That's a good question. I don't know. [Laughter] In Charleston, it was really very limited for a lot of blacks there. Most of them did the hotel work, or working in the hospital. They had the Long Shoremen there in Charleston, which was more prevalent. But coming back in Charlotte, I decided to be in the medical field and the unit secretary. At that time, I didn't want to be a nurse and I decided—. So I did unit secretary. And I really had no problems getting the job when I came back to Charlotte. () God was good, and God is good. [Laughter]

So basically, I guess growing—. With the kids, because I have three boys—. It's different for boys than girls. With boys, you get thrown. There are more things that go on with them, especially as they become teenagers or whatever not, with the police and whatever not. You may have that harassment as they're walking along, especially just walking in the neighborhood. I had my oldest son, who played football, so his thing was staying in shape and jogging. I remember him telling me one incident of where he was running—this is on West Boulevard—and the police followed him. I guess they saw that he was just running, but he followed him for a certain length of time to see what he was going to do. But you know, you mind your own business and keep on going, and he just kept on going. So. [Laughter]

And then my other sons have had problems. One, he said he had problems with his friend. His friend's parents let him drive their Mercedes, so they had that problem of being stopped. I guess you call that racial profiling on the part of the police, where teenagers driving a nice car and have friends in it, so they stopped him. And how much is the rest, he didn't tell me that till later on. I didn't know that at the time it was happening. [Laughter] They didn't talk about those things.

But I think the jobs had become better. A lot of people say that—I forgot the term—where, what do you call it?

DW: I don't know. [Laughter]

FD: Oh, this is crazy. I guess because a lot of—I can't believe I forgot what I wanted to say. What do you call the term, because they're talking more about it, and they're saying that a lot of with the blacks—. Oh, what is the term? Where a lot of, you know, like

in the jobs, where you've got a lot of blacks who came in because of—. You were hired because you were black.

DW: Oh, affirmative action?

FD: Thank you. [Laughter] But I think that affirmative action had a lot to do with—to help a lot of blacks get jobs in places where they otherwise would not have been able to have gotten a job. The thing is getting the job there—when you get the job—is that, to prove. Because even with affirmative action, once you got the job, you had to be twice as better, twice as good as the next person was, or the opposite race was. Because they all say you got this job because you were black, so you had to prove yourself. And that I found, yep. [Laughter]

So I've been doing that in each and every job I get. I feel like I need to prove myself, that—. Because you get these jobs, and like you say, people say you don't need affirmative action now, which I believe it still is needed to a certain point, because a lot of people are—. A lot of young blacks who have gotten jobs have gotten there on the backs of the affirmative action, of the people who went before them.

DW: So you were saying that there were jobs for the medical field. Do you feel that that was the type of, the only jobs that were open to black people in the '80s, and that now things have changed due to affirmative action so that there are a lot of jobs? Like a black person can be a CEO of a company, or can run a bank, or can do other types of more white-collar jobs?

FD: Well, I think a black person or any person can do anything that they want to be. All you have to do is apply yourself.. Now wait a minute. [Laughter] No, all you have to do is to want to do it and apply yourself to it. The knowledge is there. Plus the fact that like the

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'60s and '70s—. That's where things started turning around slowly, but people were still in top jobs during that time. Probably like in the '60s and '70s, there was, like, teachers, nurses, and doctors. They were in all fields, political, all of those.

I guess I was thinking, the last time I was at A&T—. That was in 1969. That was, post some of the sit-ins, and basically, that was when they had the riot there at A&T. And they put changes in civil rights and some of the things that were going on. That's where the young guy got killed on campus, which was one of the reasons they threw that riot. Basically, a lot of people choose to stay on, but they sent a lot of people home. Basically, they sent everybody home, but a lot of people stayed and fought.

DW: You mean students, sent a lot of students home?

FD: But there was still a lot of students there. That was one of the reasons that the National Guard came on campus.

Well, right now, I think that a person can do anything that they want to do. Just remember that the education doesn't mean that you have to go to college, to a four-year college. You have so many different schools. If you don't want to go to a four-year college, you have technical schools, you have the community schools, but some form of higher education once you get out of high school. Don't drop out. Stay in there, because knowledge cannot be taken away from you. [Laughter]

DW: Good advice. I wanted to just move now to talk about moving into Belmont. And you were mentioning before that you didn't know that much about this area. What was your impression when you first moved here and just learned more?

FD: Well, I heard a lot of bad things about Belmont. [Laughter] The crime, and all that stuff, but I said, "OK, well, I'm going to go ahead." It was a choice that I had at the time. Other places, I didn't want to move there, so I decided to move here in Belmont.

DW: Was the other place in north Charlotte as well?

FD: It was over there off Oaklawn Avenue. What do you call it, near what do they call it? Oh, God, I forgot the name of the community now. But I chose this area, and the boys, they liked this area over here, too. But the only stipulation was, they wanted to go the same school they were going to before we came here, so I just—. I know it was one of the reasons I was not as involved between—. Wake up in the morning, we'd leave the house about 6:30 in the morning, maybe get home about 8:00 or 9:00 at night. [Laughter]. Didn't leave much time for community involvement.

DW: I know where I grew up, if you lived outside of a zone, you had to pay an extra tuition to go to the same school. Is that the same thing in Charlotte, or it was fine to kind of decide where you wanted to go to school?

FD: No, it was fine. My middle child, he played football. They were all involved with sports and scouts and church activities. So up until the youngest one was in high school—. I think he was like in tenth grade, yeah, he was going into eleventh grade. Then they say he can't play football. Because he lived outside of the area, he had to sit it out. If he was still interested after a year of sitting out of sports, then his senior year he could play sports. And we just had to go through the school system downtown and talk to them about it and sign an affidavit, all that stuff like that. So in the meantime, he just did the band part, gave him more time to study. [Laughter] He did other activities, but it didn't cost anymore—. There was no extra things like that.

DW: OK. I should have been living here. [Laughter]

FD: No, when I moved up here from South Carolina, until I brought the boys up here during the school year, I had to temporarily let my mother have custody of them because my husband and I separated and divorced, and let her have custody—was it custody or guardianship?—of them until I moved up here. So that's why I had to do that. Otherwise, I would have to pay [Laughter]

DW: I understand. [Laughter] Well, you said—. And this is a Habitat home—

FD: It is.

DW: Well, how did you get involved with Habitat and the whole process of home ownership?

FD: I think it was something to do with advertising. If you—. During that time, now you don't have to have—. You can get a Habitat home without children. But if you had a child, if you had children and you were interested in becoming a homeowner, you could go and apply. During that time, they were going by different zip codes in the city, and at that time I lived in that zip code, so I said, "This is worthwhile to go see." So I went and put an application in. It took about a year before I found out that I could get into the area. Then they did credit counseling with me after they accepted. Had to do sweat equity, about 500 hours before you can get into, before you can pick your lot. [Laughter] And before you even consider start building, you were accepted in the program, and then you did the sweat equity time. They cut the sweat equity time from 500 to about 250 now.

DW: That's—

FD: Whoo—

DW: That's a lot! [Laughter]

FD: But that's OK. It was good. I learned a lot. I'm pretty happy here. There were two times when I first moved here—. Then it wasn't quite as bad. Let's see, somewhere between ten and eight years ago, it sort of got bad over here. Drugs became a problem. People would drive through. First I didn't know what was going on. I got educated real well over here. [Laughter]. I learned a lot. [Laughter] My boys, they sort of saw—. They knew what was going on, but they didn't tell me. I'm seeing myself. I'm taking them and going to go catch their bus, taking them to school in the morning, guys running, coming up to your car. And I'm saying, "Why at 6:30 in the morning are people coming up to my car?" [Laughter] They didn't say anything to me. I guess they knew what was going on, but then I finally figured out what was going on. [Laughter]

Things got—. I think they really became more proactive when—. And my mom—. And they approached people and everybody driving up the street, and if you stopped to the store, if you stopped to the stop sign, they would come up to your car. I really didn't know, but one time my mom came over here, and she blew her horn for me. They go to her car and now I say, "OK, that's it." That's when I became really active. I said, "OK, enough is enough." And that's when I started talking to the police.

My son was living here between the time of—. My oldest son, it was just before he went into the army; he was here for about six months. No, it wasn't that long. He was here for about a few months, and he saw what was going on, and we started getting more active with—because people have no respect for you. If you didn't say anything, they come up to you, hide drugs on your property, just step on your property with no respect of a person's property. They didn't care anything, and so I said, "This is enough." So I started talking [laughter] and telling them, "Don't come on my property."

And I guess when my oldest son was here, he saw what was going on. He was looking, and he said, ""Mom, why are you harassing these guys? And I said that—because I don't want them on my property, and what they're doing, it's not right. And I guess my calling the police, too, and going to the neighborhood meetings, talking to the community officers to find out what could be done, and they said dial 911. The greasy—. The more you dial, the more it—. Even if it takes a long time, because at first it used to take—. It seemed like it would take an hour you'd sit and wait, two hours, three hours. It took a long time at first, but talking to the police officers, telling them what was going on—.

And my son came here, and he was sitting here, and he used to run cause he was keeping in shape and stuff like that. And he got tired of it, so he called the police. The police came, and they couldn't find anything. So when he started going out and talking to them, and telling them, then he started getting threats. [Laughter] But I guess you have to look at him and see him. He's built; he benched 450. [Laughter] So they didn't bother him. That must have been after he was in the army. He came out of the army and came back here. I'm trying to remember; I'm getting this mixed up. But he got threats, snakes thrown in our driveway. They were dead [Laughter], but that's OK, I guess signifying it's a snitch. Got shot at. [Laughter].

But that's why I say it's much better. You still have it, and they say OK. They probably call me the mean lady, or the lady who called the police. But I say fine; as long as it works, it's OK. Telling them move it, get away, move out from them coming, stopping in front of the house and people coming up and giving them drugs. I say if you're not visiting anyone here, move it. My getting out, telling them to move, not being afraid, willing to stand up and take the neighborhood back, it's a thing that you have to do.

Trying to get other people involved and help you is a different story. People don't get involved until something happens to them. Like the girl down the street. She got her house shot into, and then she started getting involved. And then later on, the girl over here got hurt. So different things like that. But we're still working on it, working on trying to improve the neighborhood. The neighborhood is beginning to change, the makeup of the neighborhood, because income—.

Belmont being very close to downtown, the arena moving there, and downtown becoming more active, changing the makeup of the apartments, the townhouses people bought—. And then the prices going up, and then no doubt the prices have doubled, tripled since I moved here. People buying house probably about fifty, sixty thousand dollars, and turning around and selling it for a hundred, hundred and fifty, and moving on up.

The Hope Six is coming in. So that's why we're saying, looking at, as it being revitalized, instead of urbanized, because if they do that, then basically people who stay here will not be able to afford to live here any longer. They'll be taxed out, which has happened in a lot of places. In South Carolina, Daufuskie Island, in Hilton Head, in places like that. And just trying to make people more aware before it's too late, of what they have and not be too complacent, and to take—sort of to be proactive.

DW: What do you mean by being aware of what they have?

FD: Well, a lot of homeowners here who let their kids and grandkids sort of do what they want to do out of their homes, and because the police crack down, they could lose their homes that way. People who have homes here, unaware of the fact that their homes are really sort of like a little gold mine in here [Laughter], that you may have bought your home

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for maybe about forty, fifty thousand dollars, but the price of that has gone up, and not let—. I guess be aware of what you have.

OK, you have this house. It's a home. It doesn't mean that it's everything, but be aware, I guess, to take pride in it, take pride in your neighborhood, not just sit back and just let anything happen, because—. Sometimes I still hear, "Hey, man, this is not Charleston. I'm in north Charlotte." You know, they consider this a party place, plenty of loud music, noise, a lot of drug activity, high crime activity going on. They try to encourage that, I guess, because around here, a lot of times, I might sit and just watch it. And when I used to work at the hospital, I didn't realize some of the things that was going on in front of my eyes. That's why I say I got a lot of education.

People coming over here I used to see, I'd say, "OK, what's going on?" Drugs. You sit long enough, you can figure out what's going on. Cars pulling up, white—. It looked like housewives with their vans and whatever not, high school kids, college kids, even bringing drugs over, supplying the drug dealers, you know. I guess that made me mad, because here these guys are intelligent. They're smart young guys, but you know, they're just throwing their lives away for what they think is a lot of money. It's a few dollars and for jail time, probably loss of their lives. And also in the process of selling drugs, they're destroying other lives, because you have, you look at people coming—. These people, not just young kids, not just college kids, grandmommas coming along.

I watched one lady, an older lady, pulling her money out of her sock, taking her shoes off. It is cold out there. She takes her shoes off; her money's in her sock. She takes the money out of her sock, gives it to the guy, and then I'm standing there laughing at her. You know, I said, "That's sad." You watch young mothers who have kids buy drugs. What

happened to these kids? They have this money at the beginning of the month, food stamps and all this stuff at the beginning of the month. What happened to these kids around the middle of the month and toward the end of the month? They have nothing. There is no money. They don't—.

And then we have some young girls walking now; somehow you can tell a prostitute, and they sell. Because for drugs and stuff like that, the drug dealers use the young elementary and high school kids who are doing—. They're not selling; they're watching out for them, watching out for when the police come. You see all this thing happening. So these are things that I have seen happen here. I don't know if that's what you want to know.

[Laughter] So that's why I say, you know, to take back your neighborhood, because this street used to be hot. I guess I really got infuriated when there was one drug dealer who said, "Nothing happens on this street without me, my say-so." And I said, "OK." That was a challenge. [Laughter]

DW: I can't imagine being shot at and just not being afraid.

FD: Oh you can't be afraid. As they say, what Joyce Meyers say, do it afraid. [Laughter] You can be afraid and still do it. [Laughter] And I do have—. Because I have all three sons—. One is in Tennessee, and one is in Illinois. My oldest one became a policeman, as a matter of fact, in Tennessee this year. Yeah, I have interest in—. They said, "Mom, it's never going to change." And I said, "I'm out to prove that it will." So it's a challenge to me. [Laughter] It's to prove that OK, you can bring your family back here without the fear of all—.

It's going to be drugs, it's not just happening down poor communities. It's happening all communities. It's just behind—. The higher income, it happens behind closed doors

here. It happens in the street. The alcohol and drugs, and also with AIDS and all the other stuff that goes with it, it's happening out in front of your eyes. It's where other places have it behind—. Money pays and money closes things, shuts that up. But here, you know, they don't care. So it's out there.

DW: Yeah. Well, it seems from what you were talking about with the police is that it's kind of a love-hate relationship that you have with the police, that they can antagonize people, but they also can be helpful.

FD: Yeah, they can. And that's why one of the community policemen signed up, did what they called citizen patrol. He suggested that I go to that, and I took him up on that. And I learned a lot there. They talked about community police. Most of a lot of the things a cadet will go through, except for those like—. What's that six-week program, where they're two days a week, two nights a week, from 6:00 until 9:00? You looked at every aspect of the police, what they do with community police and for that CSI, looking at the labs, shooting range, the ride-along with the police, the contact—they have their contact—looking at how they have the rush of adrenaline when you're looking at, when you're in different situations. They come and, you know, different departments talking to you. So that helped a lot there.

And also, you already realize that, but everyone is a human being. Everyone is infallible, so you never put anybody on a pedestal. It doesn't matter; the pope, you don't put him on a pedestal, because he's a human being. [Laughter] So you have to pray. [Laughter] Prayer—. You have to keep God in your life there, and keep that in. And basically, that's what sometimes we have—. People have got together, even on the phone or whatever, and praying for the community, [Laughter], praying for the city, praying for the community. All not out there sitting behind—. Because you have to walk and pray, and that's about it.

You look at these young guys, and basically, I would like more for them, because they're somebody's child. So, I have three sons, and I look at that. And I see, in looking at them, that they're intelligent, doing some dumb things. So—

DW: Do you feel that the police, when there are drug busts that are made—? Do the people who are selling drugs or supplying drugs ever get penalized for it? Or is it more often than not that they kind of get a slap on the hand and are able to continue?

FD: Sometimes I think it depends on how much they have and whether it becomes a federal case.. But yeah, I guess that makes the police frustrated, because talking to some of them, you know, it's a lot of guys. They --. Sometimes they feel like criminals have no rights, and the person who's not doing anything out there—. And they find that a lot of the police get frustrated. Because, you know, they arrest them, they go before the justice system, they're in jail for a few days, then they're back out again, doing the same thing. So if you don't want any in your neighborhood, you just have to keep being persistent. [Laughter] And they keep being persistent, so somewhere along the line, somebody's—. It has to change some way or another, and hopefully before that person gets killed or something like that, which has happened, you know. So. [Laughter]

DW: Well, I was curious about the Community Development Corporation, the CDC, how with your involvement on the Belmont Strategy Task Force—

FD: I'm on the CDC, too.

DW: Oh, OK. [Laughter] Is the Belmont—is that part of the CDC, or the CDC is part of the Belmont Task Force?

FD: Well, it's supposed to be part of it, but it's two separate energies. Basically, CDC's basis is to build houses. To look at the land, if there are any, and to develop, and also

looking at that it's for poor, low to lower income housing. Affordable homes is what it's supposed to be. Affordable can mean a lot, so basically, low income affordable homes. But right now the homes are selling. I think the lowest are like a hundred and ten or a hundred and twelve thousand dollars. It's what the cheapest is. So it's also to help reach out to the community, so that should be through the strategy force there in the reaching out to—.

Mr. Jones, he's the executive director, and he's been—. It's going on his second year, because before Michelle Allen was the executive director, and now she's with housing authorities. But he did a lot of talking to people in the community and reaching out, and then they have—. The doors are open from eight to five, so there are—. Anyone who's interested in wanting to buy a home here in the Belmont community just needs to go in there and talk to them. They have—what's her name?—Ms. Green, who's the assistant program director. She talks to them and tries to find if they need credit counseling. She helps them with that, to find out if they can afford a home.

You know, there's a lot of foreclosures going on. People get into the home and then not able to stay in the home. So basically, it's to be able to get into the house and to be able to stay there, not just for a short time, but for the length of time until they're ready to sell.

DW: Now do you think that the CDC—and did you become involved in 2000?

FD: CDC? CDC was sort of dysfunction, and I think—. I'm trying to remember; I think it's like in 2003, somewhere there, or 2001, somewhere between there—. The city decided to try to get a lot of the CDCs going back up. So it took about—. Because I didn't know what the heck CDC meant, CDC to me, being in the medical field, Center for Disease Control. [Laughter] I said, "What are they talking about? What kind of diseases?" So I had to be educated to that.

It took about six months, the city coming in and doing workshops for those who were interested, who going there had to come up with missions and coming up with what the mission was, the vision statement was before, and come up with our own. Well, something, or either just to see if that still applied, to revamp the mission statement. Also to look at the amendments and see if all those still—. We'd look at those and see if they need to be amended.

And then they had a vote for people in the community, those who wanted to be part of the CDC. CDC is composed of four community—basically it's supposed to be thirteen members. Four community, four private, four public sector, and the thirteenth is supposed to be on it from somewhere—. But basically, community, public, and private sectors. So, and don't have to be, the community either has to be resident or a business owner here in this community. The public sectors—people from the housing authorities, department of social services—someone to bring something to the table. And the private sector, still bringing something to the table, income.

DW: And do you feel that the city is helping Belmont to become revitalized, or how do you see the city's role in revitalizing Belmont?

FD: Ah [Laughter] OK, the city is helping, because they've helped with the CDC doing loans and stuff like that. They do training, but you never leave everything up to the politicians and to the city. You have to also be watchful. They're supposed to be—. Because they're stewardships of the people's money, but you're stewardship of your community. So it's a two-way street there. And so each has to be vigilant with each other. They keep us on our toes, and we have to keep them on their toes, too. [Laughter]

DW: And for your neighborhood, do you find that there are a lot of people who own their own homes that live around you, or in your surrounding community? Or are there a lot of renters?

FD: There are more renters.

DW: More renters.

FD: Yeah, it's probably about like thirty-eight percent home ownership, and the rest are renters. And right now we're getting a lot of boarded up homes, because prices are going up, especially with the Hope Six getting ready to come through. A lot of absentee landowners who are deciding for whatever reason—. If you go on Van Edward Street, you will see a row of houses that's boarded up. And I guess they are just probably waiting to sell and sell at a good price. Because by the time the Hope Six is getting ready to start, right behind me they will be building apartments on Sixteen and Seigle, and also on Fifteen and Seigle. That's where it'll start. They're tearing down Piedmont Court. It's in the process of being torn down now.

DW: Do Piedmont Court residents interact much with Belmont residents that you remember?

FD: Well, it's supposed to be, because Piedmont Court is part of Belmont. But no, I don't think so. I think they're sort of like own little thing.

DW: Why do you think that that was?

FD: I don't know. The Housing Authority --, they had their meetings with the Housing Authority. Also down there, you have Seigle Avenue Presbyterian Church. So they had a lot of connection there with the church being there, and daycare. And then they did the

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Jacob Ladder or Hope something; I forget the name of the little—. They built this place there on the corner of Tenth and Seigle, and a lot of the people from Piedmont Court used that daycare center there and other activities for the kids. So it's sort of like they're contained there. I guess they felt like they had most of their stuff there.

We went to a couple of their meetings and some of the activities. I guess we just had to let them know, because I don't know what happened with the president and the kind of interaction that was going on between the Piedmont Court and the rest of the community. So a couple of times we went down to the activities, and a lot of times they didn't come to our meeting and we didn't go to their meeting. But I think Diane, she went to some of their meetings, and that's to find out some of the things and let them know that we are here.

DW: We're talking about the Hope Six Initiative, and I was just curious what you think about Hope Six. Do you see it as a very positive thing for the community, or negative?

FD: I think it can be positive. I'm just waiting to see what's going to happen. [Laughter] Hopefully, it will be positive--. We asked them how it's supposed to be built on. So looking at Oaklawn Avenue, basically it's supposed to be built on, sort of like Oaklawn Avenue, what they call the Parks at Oaklawn. They had some apartments over there. They revamped those. Well, basically they tore them down and did them all over again. I don't know if that was a part of Hope Six, and also looking at some of the things they did with Dalton Village. It used to be Dalton Village. It's changed to Arbor something. I've forgotten the name of it. But there was a lot of violence and stuff going on over there, and that's been changed for the better.

So basically, that's what I'm hoping that this is going to be, change for the better. Because at Piedmont Court, not everybody, but there was a lot of drugs and crimes going on.

And you know, people would run from this area to down there, and back and forth, so police was just sort of hold off trying to get them because they were moving so much. So basically, I'm hoping that it's going to be positive.

DW: OK.

FD: And I know these areas will hopefully be for low income to moderate income. I think having mixed income helps. I'm all for—. I don't believe a person—. You have the jobs now, but if you're on welfare, I believe there comes a time when you need to get off welfare. You don't need to be on welfare you whole life, because to me, it's—. I remember after my husband and I separated, I had that moment there where the boys, and the between jobs, and just getting—. And I needed to get some food for the boys. [Laughter] And I said, "OK, if I can just get food stamps." And it was a good thing because I didn't. But it's so much of your whole life is open, and they wanted to give me ten dollars of food stamps. And I said, "OK." So they wanted to know everything about me for ten dollars of food stamps. [Laughter]. I say, "Forget this." [Laughter] It's better to work that minimum wage, which I did, which was real—.

Because I used to work for a phone company, then coming down from working at the phone company to going and working at the hospital, it was like, oh, that was a real shocker. [Laughter] I was making half what I made working for the phone company. [Laughter] It was kind of rough, but if you're working, you're earning your own income instead of having everything. Everything free is not good. Some things free are good. Everything is not, because you sort of lose control of your life. It's like somebody saying, "You have to do this; you have to do this."

And true, that may be Big Brother looking over your shoulder now, but you feel like you've got a little bit of control instead of no control. And then I think with your kids, if they see you out there working and you're earning a living, that instills in them, OK, we're not just sitting back and waiting for things to be given to us. You need to get out there and work. Yeah. So. [Laughter]

DW: When you were saying that you think mixed income communities are a positive—

FD: Yeah, I do. I wouldn't say try to keep up with the Jones, but you take pride in where you are. That doesn't mean with a low income you're not going to take pride in where you are. But you feel like, OK, that you're not just into one set pattern that your kids are looking at, and you're saying that we don't have to just take this. We can move up further. That's where it helped them to maybe—education, they go further and higher in their education. That you don't always have to be down at the bottom, and you're talking to other people to see how they got there. Or you're not even just talking, just watching. And look at the positive part of it.

OK, let's see how I can put this. Mixed income. Now when I say mixed income, I don't mean like slam, to the bottom of the barrel all the way to the millionaire. [Laughter] There's that low to moderate income there, and I think when you have that low to moderate income, people who have—. It's bad to say that—. If you're spending more taxes, you have more money there; you're demanding more. You can demand more, as where sometimes the city looking and say, "Oh, they're at the bottom; they're low. They're not putting much into this." So therefore, if they can drag, they'll drag their feet. But you got that mixed income, then you got sort of a play with the government. [Laughter]

So what I'm saying, OK, you want more, I'm putting more in. I want more, and that can help the rest of the people. So that helps the lower income, too. [Laughter] Yeah, that's sort of the way you look at it, because sometimes you get so low and you say "Why are we bothering with them?" [Laughter] That's sort of like what Bob Johnson did with Michael Jordan. You notice how much? [Laughter] OK, that's what, that's what-- [Laughter] Yeah, they both got money, but just in different ways that—you know, different clout.

DW: Yeah. [Laughter]

FD: Yeah, so you're looking at the Bobcat team; they're looking at it in a different light, right?

DW: Um-hmm.

FD: OK [Laughter], that's what I'm talking about.

DW: Well, I wanted to ask you about the difference between urban renewal, urban revitalization. You seem to be making a distinction between the two.

FD: Oh, revitalization and urban renewal. Urban renewal is what happened to First Ward and Second Ward. It was totally obliterated. I went to Second Ward High School. Would you like to know where, what happened to Second Ward--? What happened, going down Independence Boulevard, where they tore the school down, they put up a car dealership. They were supposed to have been doing all this stuff, and they ended up with a car dealership there. Where the elementary school, the aquatic center's there now, and it's near Myers Park Elementary School. The only thing that's left of Second Ward is where the Charlotte Metro School is. It's for the handicapped. The gym is left there. So the rest of the school is gone.

Now, all the houses and everything are gone, except for some homes that are left where Little Rock Church is on McDowell Street. There were some homes that been there all the while. Those people really fought for those. But a lot of homes, a lot of those places are gone. You can look over at downtown where the culinary school is and all those places. There were homes there. It's called urban renewal. Those were all torn down. There's a total makeup—. The neighborhood is no longer there. The place is there, but the makeup—. The neighborhood is not there. None of the houses or anything. Churches were gone. Churches were torn down. All the homes were torn down. Totally different makeup.

This is the thing; it's not to come in and tear all these homes down and just do a whole new thing. That's what I'm—. You're revitalizing what you already have, not clearing it out, not taking everything out. It's like you're doing with an old house. You don't go in—. If you take it down, bulldoze it down, then you have taken the history away. But you go in there and remodel that house, you still have the history there with some new stuff in. But you got both of them together. And that's sort of what I mean. [Laughter]

DW: And you mentioned before about the fear of—some people feeling that they're going to be taxed out of their homes. So once property values start increasing—.

FD: yes, it's started increasing. That's why they're looking at trying to get some kind of tax deferral. You've got a lot of older people who've been here, who are through paying for their homes. They've been here thirty years or more. They have a fixed income, and taxes go up. They're not able to afford those taxes because they're on fixed income. So we look at some way of trying to keep, without these people turning their homes over to their kids. That they can still have their homes and not fear of losing them for tax.

DW: Do you think that the Hope Six will keep that in consideration, or city builders and developers will take that under consideration to preserve, to keep people being taxed out of their homes?

FD: The Hope Six doesn't have anything to do with that. Politicians, city council, well, they say the city council doesn't have it. City council, they keep raising the taxes, yeah. [Laughter] They did the tax deferral, there's some at the state. So, have somebody looking at that, trying to work on that. But the taxes are going to go up. All you have to do is go back and look at—. I lived in Savannah. Look at Hilton Head. Look at Daufuskie Island. Look at what happened there in those areas. Oh, what time is it? [Laughter]

DW: I think it's—yeah. Yeah, OK. [Laughter] But to wrap this up, is there anything that you would want to add to the interview. Something that I didn't ask you that you think is important?

FD: Oh, that I think is important. Hmm. I think that Belmont will survive. There will be changes. And I'm hoping that there will be more homeowners instead of renters, and that the absentee landowners who have been absent and who have just let their homes—. And what they've done, they haven't helped the neighborhood at all, because a lot of the homes are run down. They rent their homes to renters and without fixing them up, and they're fixing them up now because of prices. They figure they're going to get more.

So basically, I'm hoping that people living here will take pride in their homes, take pride in their neighborhood, have their children to learn respect of each other and also respect of a person's property. I think that's important, and to be a good neighbor. And willing to help them—not only helping the youth, but also helping the elderly, too. And somewhere along the line there that the elderly can help the youth, and not just the fear that the elderly

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are afraid to get out and they're afraid of the youth. That they can sort of come together and there's a point, a melting point there where they can help one another. That it become a village. [Laughter] OK, and— [Stands up].

DW: So since you need to go, and I appreciate you doing this interview with me.

FD: Yeah, I didn't realize—. God, I can talk, can't I?

END OF TRANSCRIPT

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