



***Decision Makers of Armadale
Oral History Project***

**Former City of Armadale Councillor
1997—2005**

Trudi Hodges



Government of Western Australia
Department of Culture and the Arts



Trudi Hodges

Interviewer: Anne Yardley

Transcribed by: Anne Yardley

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Decision Makers of Armadale Oral History Project

CITY OF ARMADALE SHIRE PRESIDENTS, MAYORS AND COUNCILLORS 1977 – 2014**INTERVIEWED FOR THIS PROJECT**

Decision Makers of Armadale interviewee

Trudi Hodges

MUNN	Jeff	1975	1979
		1981	1990
		1995	29.5+
CUMMING	Alexander (Alex)	1970	1977
FOKKEMA	Spike	1979	1986
		1993	1999 13 years
HOLTON	Terry	1981	1997
		1997	1999 17.5
STUBBS	Roger Charles	1984	2003 18.7
ZELONES	Henry	1989	1997
		1999	20.5+
REYNOLDS	Linton	1989	2011 22.5
STEWART	James (Jim)	1989	2009 22.5
REARDON	Susan (Sue)	1990	1993
KNEZEVICH	John	1991	2009
HART	Patricia (Pat)	1992	1996
		2003	11.5+
CLOWES-HOLLINS	Vivienne (Viv)	1993	2005
COMINELLI	Alison	1997	2007
HODGES	Trudi	1997	2005
HOPPER	Deborah (Deb)	1997	2005
TIZARD	Robert (Bob)	2003	2011

MAYORS

STUBBS	Roger	1992	1996
		1997	2001
FOKKEMA	Spike	1996	1997
REYNOLDS	Linton	2001	2011
ZELONES	Henry	2011	current

DEPUTY MAYORS

REARDON	Susan	1991	1992
HOLTON	Terry	1992	1993
HART	Pat	1993	1996
MUNN	Jeff	1997	2011

The Kelmscott Road Board was formed in 12 December 1895
 The Armadale-Kelmscott Shire Council was formed on 1 July 1961
 The Armadale Town Council was formed 1 January 1979
 The Armadale City Council was formed 16 November 1985

Councillor Trudi Hodges 1997- 1999, 1999 – 2005

This is the log of an interview for the City of Armadale with former Councillor, Trudi Hodges. Councillor Hodges served on Council from 1997 to '99 and again from 1999 to 2005.

The interview takes place on Tuesday 26 November 2013 in Trudi's office at Dale Cottages, Armadale. The interviewer is Anne Yardley.

Time	Subject	Keywords / Notes
00.00	Family – early life Ireland	Dublin Mother widowed Missed school because of asthma Elder brother
02.23	Early working life	English teacher ambitions Worked jewellery shops and in building industry Eventual career in aged care Arrived Australia aged 25
04.25	Decision to leave Ireland	Poor employment prospects Ireland Boyfriend made redundant Bad Christmas 1984 Ireland Followed boyfriend to Perth Brother already in Armadale
05.37	Move to Australia and Armadale, July 1985	Fabulous – all green, pretty Armadale easy to walk round, beautiful homes Sense of village centre in Armadale – not artificially built round supermarket
07.05	Interest in local government	Developed from work in aged care Issues of aging Board members involved with Council Involved on periphery Disappointed so few women Good career move
09.20	Election process	Didn't win first time Enjoyed election process First elected 1993 Represented Armadale Ward Councillor for 2 years Spike Fokkema, Freeman of the City Stood in his vacancy and won to represent Forrest Ward

11.04	Forrest Ward	Mixed area – struggling families / semi-rural Hobby farm Armadale Forrestdale Councillor [Allison] Cominelli Shared responsibilities of Forrest Focus on urban section
12.05	Daily work of council	Full council meetings Four predominant standing committees monthly – Planning committee City Strategy committee Community Services committee Technical Services committee Role to feedback to community Also focus groups
14.43	Balance family and work	With support of Mum and husband Children adapted Strict household routine
15.43	Managing different demands from different sections of council	Good communication skills Seeing all sides of story Residents approach council usually with problems Understood staff working with boards Councillors – interesting group of people
17.44	Council meetings	Polite and structured Issues usually worked through at committee level Harmonious, professional, sense of responsibility Business of council stayed in council chamber
19.25	Periods in office Main issue during first term	Two years, then four across three elections Section of Armadale Ward wanted name change Mount Richon Mount Nasura Declared interest because of perceived of financial benefit Councillor Frank Green Public meeting held Considered name change snobbish 1999 or 2000
24.57	Other issues	Tonkin Highway extension Forrestdale Business Park Armadale Re-Development Authority Grand Cinemas

26.27	No particular issue beyond reflecting diversity in community	Too few women Aged care sector needed local government
27.45	Major issue during second term	Brookdale Waste Treatment Plant Proposed changes to operating license Councillor Cominelli Cleanaway Services
30.07	Concerns about type of waste being treated at Brookdale	Hazardous waste entering site Local Government Minister [Paul Omodei] WA Health Act Peter Merrick, Councillor Toxic waste Many residents nervous about accepting such waste Supportive of action to prevent
35.00	Difficulty in getting accurate information	Clever use of language to convey materials were commonly used with no ill effect Department of Environmental Protection Chairman of the Board, Environmental Protection Authority People felt ignored Paul Andrews (dec) Member Southern River involved Fire in another plant in Bellevue Public meeting held [7 April 2001]
40.00	Dissatisfaction with Environmental Protection Authority	Residents cross Public rally resulted in raised awareness, media attention Approach to Minister for Emergency Services
42.25	On site protest by local residents Trudi decides to take step back	Tent Embassy Issue should be driven now by residents 'leading from the rear' Community took over fight
44.49	Plant reduced its work till it finally closed Success of community efforts	Drive to make Armadale a better place to live 'triumph of community resistance' Councillors role in tent embassy
46.46	Role of local government	Accessibility Community base Limited role of – especially planning

		Responsibility of councillors
48.20	Changes to administration she would like to see Councillor training	training before taking up role of councillor big responsibility - accountability, litigation, transparency, governance large budgets to make decisions on governance interested amateur insufficient
50.10	Specific training	Governance training Media training No parliamentary privilege Councillors part of community – visible Effective use of phone
52.03	Regrets about time in Council	Handling of name change issue [Mount Richon] No particular regrets
52.56	Major achievements	Changing profile of Council to include more women Acceptance of women Increased understanding of needs of older people
55.17	Decision not to stand for Council	Need for councils to constantly move and change. Need for new people
56.06	Role of staff in local government	<i>Unsung heroes</i> Public can be very demanding Work hard in difficult job
57.14	Future development of Armadale	Lots of potential Still difficulties – often perception not reality Sense of community Village centre feel
	End of interview	58.06 minutes

Councillor Trudi Hodges 1997- 1999, 1999 – 2005

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Can we start with your full name, date and place of birth?

Well the real name is Gertrude, Gertrude Mary Hodges but the Gertrude I try and ignore and I usually tell people I'm going to kill them as soon as I've told them 'my name is Gertrude'. But anyway, thankfully, that's been abbreviated to Trudi, which is good. And I was born in Dublin on 23 March 1959.

Your growing up, could you tell me a little about your family

My father died when I was 11 months old, I had another brother who was five so my Mum basically was widowed as a very, very young woman - she was only in her thirties. So she brought both of us up on her own and under difficult circumstances because I was ill. At the time I was considered to be a chronic asthmatic – I don't know what they call it nowadays – so I predominately spent most of my early years in bed, very little early school. I didn't get to pre-school, my first year or two I had very few weeks in school because I was sick a lot of the time. So I wasn't exactly the easiest time, particularly for my Mum – my Mum had a very hard time in the early years, but we made it through.

Siblings, do you have siblings?

My brother, he's five years older and he's the one that started – he took the first trip to Australia. He was the one that started the flood.

I'm guessing your education was a bit disruptive at first.

In the very early years it was, yes. I went to primary school but I'd missed out on a lot so I struggled a bit in the beginning and then found my feet when I was 10 or 11 and discovered books which was good because my Mum was an avid reader and from there on I kept going non-stop so I made it through primary school and high school, did Leaving [Year 11 studies] which you did in Dublin, did reasonably well – didn't break any records but did reasonably

well and always intended to further study but circumstances – work and things – took over and, yeah, that was the early years.

What were your ambitions, your work ambitions?

Oh dead simple, I simply wanted to teach English in high school – it never changed, still doesn't. (laughing) I'd still love to stand up in front of a classroom of students and, you know, expand on about the glories of poetry, but life didn't go in that direction for me.

What did you do instead?

What I did instead was I became a leader in the aged care industry in a local government area, that's what I did. That's been my career.

You were doing this in Dublin before you came to Australia ---

No, no, I was 25 when I came to Australia so I had done the usual – left high school and got jobs. I worked in jeweller's shops, erm, I worked for a building industry supplier and I moved with that group of people - that company wasn't doing very well and I moved with the middle managers who decided to go out on their own so they mortgaged their houses – four men mortgaged their houses – 10,000 pounds each - 40,000 pounds – and took the jump and decided to start their own company and they took me with them. We started that company with a desk, phone and my handbag. I had a cheque book and all that goes with the beginnings of a business in my bag. They did very well, they were very successful. And I worked with them till I decided to come to Australia.

What sorts of lessons did you learn from those people?

The lessons I learnt from those people were predominately that (pause) - - - instinct and desperation will make you achieve lots of things (laughing) because they were working on both they knew they had a good business model. They were skilled at what they did, they were all good PR [public relations] people and they knew where to access expertise and they were desperate to make a go of it. As I said, mortgaged their homes and that's a big motivation for people. And at the time it was the mid-80s in Ireland and things were very, very bad so they had a lot to lose if they did not make a go of it. It was a lot of extra hours, a lot of extra work.

Why did you decide to leave Ireland?

Exactly the same reason as someone in my age group did in the 80s – there were very poor prospects for employment. I had a reasonable job – that job was good for what it was at the time, but my boyfriend at the time had nothing. He had been made redundant and we faced – intending to stay together but – but we faced a likely struggle to get employment. My brother had come to Australia and we had been tootling along and trying to save up for a home which was a waste of time and actually that last Christmas – the Christmas of 1984 was awful – a bad Christmas, the weather was terrible, the car broke down and he came to see me after Christmas and said: ‘I’ve been to the Embassy and I’ve got a visa and hopefully you’ll come too.’ It was as simple as that.

[05.23] So he came first. He came in the March and came to my brother in Armadale and I waited for a few months ‘cos [because] I thought he might get homesick – I wasn’t really convinced that he would stay because he was very home oriented and by about July he had obviously found his feet so I followed at the end of July that year – 1985.

What were your early experiences in Armadale, when you came to live in Armadale.

Came to live in Armadale, yep, and my early experience of Armadale was I thought it was awfully green. I had images of Australia being barren desert – because I’d read those sort of books when I was a teenager - left all my cold clothes behind me and came in summer clothes to the middle of winter and thought it was fabulous because it was so green and the hills - I could get in the car and be at the beach in half an hour – I sat on the beach in a bikini in July much to amusement to everybody around me but it was 20 odd degrees, I thought it was fabulous. And yeah, it was a pretty place, easy to walk around, the suburbs were flat so you could go for a walk and I saw what I considered to be beautiful homes because they were all different. A lot of the home estates in Ireland are a hundred houses all the same and I had lived in the middle of the city so to me it was all very spacious and very laid out and very green and very pretty – lots of flowers, a pretty place. What was attractive, and still is, was that it had a sense of a village or a town centre. It wasn’t an artificial suburb built around a supermarket. I liked that.

How did you become interested in local government? How did that come about?

Probably from participation in my job because, as an aged care provider you’re steeped in the community. You’re dealing with residents and families and you’re dealing with the day

to day nuts and bolts of access - people getting to and from the facility, parking, pathways – all the ordinary day to day nuts and bolts of living and working and managing your way around a community. And the chappie who was president of the organisation at the time was involved in [the local] Council and had been - and one of the ladies on the Board [representatives of the organisation's stakeholders] at the time was involved in Council. There was another gentleman on the Board who was involved so there was quite a Council participation there across the Board over a number of years. Much of which I would think in this day and age you'd likely have to declare interests but in those times that wasn't high in everybody's agenda.

So Council was a conversation that happened a lot – there was a lot of talk about what happened at Council - I didn't really know much about it but I ended up being involved on the fringes because I'd have to write to Council and ask questions and queries - and then there was a vacancy. I had been studying because I had gone back to uni [university] after my second baby was born and I had just finished my degree and the chappie in question who was the president said there's a vacancy in Council, would I be interested. And I thought well I don't know anything about Council but what do you do – I mean I was that ignorant – I understand the nuts and bolts of government but not the day to day participation. He kindly brought me in agendas and documents and I had a read and learnt about things I knew nothing about. That was interesting so I said I'd give it a shot because having looked into it there were very few women involved in Council which I didn't think was a good reflection of the community. And because I could, I thought well I'll give this a go. I didn't for a minute shy away from the fact that it may be a career enhancing move – you know the more you're involved, the more authority you have to participate and speak out so I gave it a shot.

And I didn't win, I was hammered because another local person had put his hand up and was very well known so I was unlucky it was never going to happen first hit. But I really enjoyed the process and at that stage there was still an election day so it was the whole business and hype around election and I really enjoyed that. It was really interesting, so the second time I got up.

What was your degree in, going back a little bit, was it anything to do with politics, or local government?

No, no.

What year were you successful?

[10.00] '97 [1997] I think, yes, '97 – stood in '96 and won in '97.

And I believe this was Forrest Ward.

No it wasn't. Originally it was the Armadale Ward but has since changed. So originally it was the Ward I was living in but I only got two years because there was a change in the process of council at that time. And then there was a full spill so everybody had to go again and then I got beaten. I did five elections in six years or something bizarre – then I got beaten and I was off, and that was fine, and then there was a chap, Spike Fokkema, he might be on your list, he's a Freeman of the City. He was standing down from Council because he had purchased a vineyard in Margaret River and he - - - conversations went back and forth and the suggestion was that I stand for that vacancy because it was an interim vacancy. And I was successful in that and that's how I got involved in the Forrest Ward.

That particular Ward, Forrest Ward, what kind of an area or community is that?

It was very mixed and that's what was interesting I suppose about it - it had a strong urban area of which there were locations where people were struggling and it had a semi-rural [area] - what was a whole hinterland of the old hobby farm in Armadale - that was the Forrestdale section of it which went down to some big semi-rural properties, big five acre properties etc. At the time there were two councillors- the other lassie was Councillor [Alison] Cominelli - she lived in Forrestdale so she – we sort of divvied it up between us so that she paid particular attention to the Forrestdale semi-rural portion where she lived and I focused on the urban section that was closer to the Armadale boundary. But we shared responsibilities so we would decide who went to what meeting so that's how we shared it up between us.

For those of us who aren't familiar with the work of Council, can you talk me through the sort of work you might do in an average week. What might you be called on to do?

Well, there's the standing committees that you're responsible to participate [in], so our Council works on a full Council meeting and then there were four predominant standing committees. My interest from day one was to participate in the planning committee and I was involved in the city strategy committee and that was the committee that oversaw governance and policy. Then there was [the] community services committee which was, as

it says, talked about facilities and community services; then there was a technical services committee which I had no interest in, it was dead boring all to do with bloody diggers and drains. It has to happen but I've never understood why seven people had to sit around a table and discuss why you needed that particular low-loader. If you needed the thing, you bought it. End of story. So I never involved myself with tech services.

So they rolled out over [a] monthly period and then in between of course from a community perspective there would be a focus group here or a community group there and you would attend those meetings as best you could. Your role was to basically get feed-back from your community from all these various groups so you could enhance your own knowledge and re-enforce their opinions or requests back to Council. So you might be called on to intervene if somebody was upset because Council said they couldn't have three dogs or you might get called on because somebody had a problem with signage or - - - so it went sort of from the sublime to the ridiculous across any given day. But on the day the two dog or the fence or those issues are huge for the particular resident in question so it doesn't mean that you in any way trivialise their concerns. Each individual, whatever is their problem on that day, is a big deal for them. And sometimes they just need to tell somebody that they could vent to – and people would vent quite freely. So an answering machine is an essential element of being a councillor, I believe.

You could almost participate to the degree that you chose, so you could do something every day, or you could do something every night or you could contain it, so [for] good councillors working together as a team you would divvy it up so everybody had a reasonable life and some space.

You had a young family as well. How did you balance family and work on Council?

No different to anybody else. It only works with the support you've got so I had my Mum who was excellent, she was very loving and keen and involved with the children. So she was a great support, for instance they would go to her after school and things like that.

[15.00] My husband obviously was there in the evening and he was very good. He understood the interest and he was happy to take up the slack. Children just roll with the punches don't they? I did run the house a bit like an army barracks. There was a rule and there was a roster and a routine you had to keep to otherwise things would fall apart. There were pretty set standing orders for the day in the house you know, but it worked (chuckles).

Within Council and your life as a councillor, the sort of personalities you encountered: how did you manage those different demands, you've got the Mayor and Council, the general public, the staff?

Well, if I suppose I have a skill, it's to be able to communicate and talk to people. I never had a problem listening and talking and seeing different sides to stories. I understood the community's perspective because people usually only interface with the council when they've a problem. The vast majority of the time it exists it's there - - they have a moan every year when they have to pay their rates. But other than that there's no particular interest in Council as you would know if you look at the stats on what people vote on Councils. So really it only rises to the surface if there's a problem, I had, I think from a professional perspective, a sense of collegial relationship with the staff because I understood what it's like because if you work with Boards it's a similar situation. I understood what it was like to have the community with an expectation, have the Board which is what a council really is, with an expectation which is also politically tainted of course and the staff in the middle trying to keep everyone happy. So I certainly went out of my way to have a sense of relationship with the staff as was appropriate obviously because there are rules and regulations - and then the councillors I took it for what it was that this was an interesting group of people, different personalities that had come to Council for different reasons and some of it was very clear, some of it was a bit less than clear and one wondered. But I don't believe I had any particular conflict with anyone, it wasn't that sort of place. It was a very collegial place. I didn't agree with everyone everyday by any means - I was never behind the door, I don't think, in expressing an opinion. I was told I would never make a poker player because it was as clear as anything on my face what I thought. That was OK, that's what it is. It was interesting.

Council meetings - what were they like. We hear they that maybe they're very acrimonious, or were they harmonious...

No they were very - they were always very polite and very structured. In fact to some degree at the beginning I was a little bit disappointed, I thought I might have the odd stoush now and then to fire up the adrenalin but in general because the way our City of Armadale worked the business of discussion and debate - even if there was friction about a particular topic - often worked its way through at the committee, so the then committee would make a recommendation to full Council so more often than not by the time something came to the full Council a level of agreement had been reached so full meetings were more often than not an endorsement of the recommendation of the committee. But there were obviously

times when things were contentious and there would be debate on the floor but my sense all the time was that it was very harmonious – a sense of professionalism, there was a sense of responsibility and there was nothing to be gained by bad moods, bad tempers and so on. I never really encountered – you would encounter an odd expression, maybe something muttered under a breath – but very little acrimony or bad feeling. It was always an unwritten rule that when you finished Council and you went to the Council's lounge supper the business of Council stayed in the chamber – and people left that behind. And only once in whatever it was – eight years – somebody arced up a bit in the Council's lounge and was asked to remember not to bring that sort of stuff into the lounge afterwards.

You say eight years – that was two different –

It was almost three different stints – a two year and then another bit and then I had one four year stint so it was across three different elections.

Your first time in office – were there any major issues that were dealt with by you and Council that you would reflect on?

[19.45] The predominant one that comes to mind was about the time I was representing the Armadale Ward and the Armadale Ward included the area I live in which now is called Mount Richon¹ but at that time it didn't have a moniker, it was Armadale. And a group of people on the hill on that area where I live decided that it would be of benefit to them to change the name. They had a sense that Armadale didn't necessarily fit their view of where they lived and for various reasons I think they - - - anyway, they started an interest group and I was invited and quite happily attended and listened to their opinion.

They were citing how the group [Kelmescott] - the other side of Albany Highway had had a name change in previous years [1996] to Mount Nasura because that was the site of a vineyard apparently, that was the Mount Nasura vineyard. So this group felt they would benefit by a name change and I was able to give them some background as to how you negotiate a name change – what you have to do, how it works with the names committees that are in the West Australian Government and how you go through the process.

¹ Mount Richon, as a name change from Kelmescott, was approved as a suburb in 2003 [City of Armadale records]

And at the very first meeting that day I said to them: “you know if it comes to a conversation or debate or an interest that identifies an expectation that this would have financial benefits.” In other words if we change the name of our suburb the value of our properties will all go through the roof - if there’s an essence it’s a financial decision, I will declare an interest because I live smack in the middle of it. And that was out and it was open and that was understood and was discussed but as time went on that’s not how it panned out.

As the debate heightened and people began to really push to have the name change and then there were a couple of conversations and discussions and one in the paper that insurance values would be better. Once I had a sense that there was a financial perspective to this I declared an interest and that not sit well with my neighbours or with the group. And it came to a head at a meeting – and I suppose the other side of the story was that my co-councillor at the time, Councillor Frank Green, who’s since deceased, was also involved with the group.

Frank was a long-standing resident of Armadale. I was still a newbie. He was personally affronted that anybody would want to change the name from Armadale ‘cos he’d a great sense of community and historical significance for the name so that was his perspective. My perspective I believed was a bit more rational, related to the fact that I didn’t want it to be seen as a financial benefit. So it ended up at a big public meeting but we had to move into the big function room because the Chamber couldn’t hold the amount of people – there was well over 100 people.

And people hissed and booed when I spoke and I thought oh, I always thought I was nice and people liked me, I was really quite shocked that all these people were really, really angry with me. But I still declared an interest – I didn’t believe it was appropriate that I should vote. They weren’t happy but they got the name change in the end and it hasn’t made any damn difference to their property values and insurances are based on postcodes which haven’t changed, so it’s made no difference.

Leaving aside your concerns about declaring an interest, in your own heart what did you want to see happen?

I didn’t see any benefit, I thought it was rank snobbery and I really, really got cross with myself afterwards because I should have said, I should have been that blunt, at Council. I can’t remember what I said, I talked my way around it as best politically I could but I did

speaking against the motion when it was being debated but when it came to the vote I declared an interest. That sounds wrong, I didn't speak within the business of the motion but I did make my point of view well said but I didn't vote. I just thought it was a snobbish thing – it was nonsense – it makes no difference. If you dislike it that much leave, go somewhere else.

People were surprisingly then passionate. Did this surprise you?

Erm, no, no I think when people have a sense that they - - - I think it came to two things, I think there was a sense that they had decided this is what they wanted to achieve and then, you know, people were digging in heels, it was basically we don't want anyone to get in our way, this is what we want. And the passion was more an anger that anybody would stand up against them. I don't think they were too happy with that. But I've got broad shoulders.

When was this, what year?

Oh, must have been about '99 or 2000, I honestly can't remember specifically, around that time.

Any other major challenges or major issues that faced Council in that period?

[24.57] Not that stand out. I was involved – as many of us were – in what was routine and soul destroying-ly monotonous because it went on and on and on but which has shown benefit now and that was all the conversations and discussions that lead up to extending the Tonkin Highway, establishing the Forrestdale Business Park, conversations that ended up in the Armadale Redevelopment Authority being put in place in later years. So much of the groundwork for what is the re-development profile now, and certainly the change in perspective in Armadale was discussed and negotiated in these early years. I mean, it took months and months of discussion and negotiation to encourage Grand Cinemas to open a cinema in Armadale.

So each element came together to form what is now a much, much improved profile with obvious growth and obvious development and obvious benefits to everybody but a lot of that was led up to during those years from the late 90s into the 2000s. So while I finished in 2005, those things came to fruition a couple of years down the track. But that was fine – the groundwork for these things take a long time.

When you first came into Council did you have any special areas of interest, things that you wanted to achieve?

I never set out for a particular topic or particular outcome, I simply saw a genuine way to reflect the diversity in the community, and if a community is made up of men and women and young people and older people and professional people and non-professional people, well then I felt a local government council should reflect that. So I saw it as - I'm a woman, I'm relatively young at the time, had a young family, I was living in the community, my children went to school in the community, I worked within the community, my business needed local government support and recognition because I was dealing with – and still do – some of the oldest, frailest citizens within the community so I thought well then I would clearly have something that would be of reasonable value to add to whatever agenda came across the council table. I didn't set out to get lampposts or pathways or whatever particular issues people do.

Your second, long period of time you were in Council which was 1999 to 2005 a major issue did come up and raise itself for you. It became important to you. Can you talk about the Brookdale Waste Treatment Plant?

Well that came out of left field, it was a conversation in and around early 2000, er (looking up file) it was 2001 the original conversation - anyway it came up because as I said, two councillors involved, Councillor Cominelli and myself; Councillor Cominelli predominately went to Forrestdale meetings and things and she said to me that she'd heard there'd been a meeting of the Forrestdale community and there'd been some conversations to that group from the Cleanaway Services which was the group that ran the waste treatment plant at the time. She said her understanding was that they were suggesting that they change the licensing attached to how the treatment plant [operated] and in informal conversations she had said: "well there's all these kinds of queries around how the treatment plant worked." Nobody particularly liked having something like that in your area but it was what it was and Cleanaway as a group who managed the plant had been helpful, you know, they sponsored functions and made donations to the local footy club, those sorts of ordinary community things that these groups do.

And in conversation it came out that they had an expectation that they were going to put forward a proposal to increase the licensing, or the use of the plant to take a different category of waste. So again in discussions and conversations – all informal – trying to get information – it turned out that Alison and some others had had concerns that from time to

time some of the trucks that arrived at the plant didn't look necessarily safe, some of them – there was steam coming out of them and all sorts of things. And I was struggling to understand: well if it was a plant put in place to deal with septic waste, which is what it was intended to be - my understanding – well what else was coming and if it was coming how was it coming and who knew it was coming, who gave authority for it. So we started to ask questions.

[30.07] And it turned out there had been a formal proposal put in place by the group to change the process and to accept hazardous waste. And we asked the obvious question – what does that mean 'hazardous waste'? I didn't do chemistry in school, it wouldn't be something that would jump to my understanding so we began to investigate.

I understand that in 1999 they were operating outside their environmental approvals. Is this something you were aware of and how did you ---

No, not until this came up we weren't aware of it - once we had begun to ask the questions and investigate it became clear – it was brought to our attention that they had been accepting different categories of waste which were non-septic and that that was on the understanding of the Minister at the time. So that raised a query. And I began to get a sense - although it hadn't hit any particular public forum at this stage – I began to get a sense, which I think is part of your experience, that there are things that may literally blow up in your face both from a community perspective and from a political perspective. So before I knew the nature of the difficulties that were likely to be attached to this issue, I thought this is one you need to raise your antennae: "this is an issue so I need to find out more."

Was it driven more by Council, by you as the main players, or were there community concerns? Did the community bring this to you?

Not really, predominately we brought it to the community's attention. We raised it at Council. We took it back to Council and we asked because to all intents and purposes both of us were still relatively new councillors. We weren't as experienced, and the Health Act is the West Australian Act but it's run by local governments so we went to, at the time one of the most experienced staff on Council which was Peter Merrick, who has sadly passed away, and I asked him questions and I said: "what do you think, what should you do?"

In conversation anyway it was believed to be the best thing to do to kick start - and to make sure it was acknowledged appropriately - was to raise it as a matter of urgency at Council so

that we could put it on the agenda and begin to ask the appropriate the questions. That's what I did, I raised it as a matter of urgency at Council and said it had come to our attention that this was an issue and we would like Council to formally make representations to the Government and ask questions and begin the process.

Now all of that happened in the February and we moved very quickly when we got information that yes there was what was then tagged *toxic waste*, what we were still talking about as hazardous chemical and where this chemical had been taken to the plant, it was understood and accepted by the Minister, but it was outside what its [Cleanaway] license was. I then sent round a flyer, discussed it with Allison and brought it to the community's attention and asked if people were interested, and needed to know what we should do about this, they needed to get in touch with us and let us know. That's how we kick started it as a community issue.

What was the response when you sent out those flyers?

Some people did come back and say: "yes, we always knew there was an issue and oh yes we've been telling people for years and nobody paid any attention", but it was non-specific, nobody really knew what the issue was they just knew there was this thing locally that was from time to time smelly and they didn't like it. But once you put the language in place that said how much hazardous chemical, license, increased use - what do you think - well it certainly did raise some considerable concern. Out of that of course, which is often the case, came a couple of people, a couple of personalities from which we established a sort of working interest group and started to meet with them and from there be guided by what they would like to see us as Councillors do to increase awareness - or how we should - that was their decision to begin to campaign.

What was the response of the community?

People were very supportive. People get nervous when you say 'hazardous' and 'toxic' – people get rightly nervous as is often the case they wanted to know, they wanted more information and that's what we set out to do.

[35.00] Did you find that fairly transparent. How difficult was it to get accurate information about the waste that was being deposited?

Well on best reflection and looking at what I've got I think what happened was stock standard 'Yes Minister' stuff. We got loads of information but I'm damned if I understood half of it. I don't understand the chemical compounds of things and I felt that there was an effort to satisfy people and give them the information and attempt to resolve it by clever use of language (looking through file). For instance they sent us out a flyer that gave us a list of the chemicals and told us this was the sort of stuff you use to have your clothes dry cleaned, or this one is what you use in nail varnish. So an attempt to sort of minimise any concerns by associating the chemicals with ordinary domestic use, which was a clever ploy, but I don't think it really fooled anyone. And there were obviously people in the community who had a far better understanding of the nature of these chemicals and their likely hazardous outcomes if they were in communities or escaped or leaked, those sort of things. So a lot of information began to come through. My real concerns were two things – one, we were asked by the Department of Environmental Protection to meet with the group and that was fine because I was really in learn mode, I needed to understand this, and when the people came along one of them was from the Board of the Environmental Protection Authority and I thought why would the someone from the Board want to meet with a group of little people from Armadale about a smelly plant. There's something amiss. There's a reason this man wants - and he was lovely, he was eloquent, he was charming, very knowledgeable and I thought I'm being done like a dinner here (laughs). So that was OK, I took that on board and listened.

The other thing was when they subsequently circulated a document which gave a background to the proposal – and they identified the issue that they wanted which was to have community consultation but the language in the flyer indicated that the purpose of the community consultation was to seek approval for the licensing. So the way it presented was the deed had been done anyway, the decision was: we need to really validate what has already been happening and it was lip service to community consultation. That was the sense I got and I don't think I was the only one. I think that was understood by the community and that doesn't help communication. They got really cross then and felt they were simply being taken for granted and it was going to go ahead anyway.

What did you do?

Well we talked and we had arranged – we'd had chats with the various people within the community, but I did have enough political nous to know so I did go and see at the time Paul Andrews, again who's deceased, he was the member for Southern River because the actual plant was in the electorate of Southern River and to some degree - - - we had a long conversation. I gave him as much as I knew and said to him: 'You know, we need to know from you what would you like because this is in your electorate so I'm happy to work with you' – and he was very cooperative and keen to get onboard and get a sense of what the issue was, what the community wanted him to do, and obviously to take it back to the government and have a chat with his colleagues.

So I met with him and I gave him what documents I had at the time and then it all culminated in a call for a public rally. Clearly these are political manoeuvres to get public input to get some media, support and to raise it as an issue. So we did. We had our meeting in April, got a good public turnout and people had a say. In the meantime the Bellevue fire had taken place which was a fire in another plant which had resulted in quite a nasty fire – people had to be evacuated et cetera – and then there was a sense of here was another - - - I tried to avoid the hyperbole attached to language, I didn't think there was any benefit to anyone in trying to create a huge frantic storm out of it. It was a process; it was so far unacceptable and needed to be worked through and I believed everybody needed to keep a reasonably clear head.

[40.00] I'm not naïve, it was a political issue as well and to make it work you needed to push political buttons but I didn't think there was any need to go overboard. So we tried to contain it and keep it reasonable and within people's opportunity to have a say and worked on the principle that people would listen and everybody should listen and that those empowered should listen too. There was a great sense with the Environmental Protection Authority, there was a great belief that lots had gone on in the background that people had been ignored and taken for granted and perhaps exposed to what are genuine fears about their health et cetera.

What was the mood of the people - this meeting was 7 April – not sure of the year [2001]?

Oh, they were cross as people do at rallies. Part of a rally I suppose is to engender some sort of vitality and enthusiasm. People wanted to know, they were cross – I have something here (looking through file)

What did the rally result in – was it successful?

Its success was profile; its success was bringing it to some media attention. It was picked up on one of the television stations. There was some press afterwards and it resulted in more people within the community raising their hand. It did bring in some additional political interest. Some people from the Greens got involved - it certainly raised the profile in terms of politicians who perhaps should have been a bit quicker in their earlier enquiries. I had approached the Minister for Emergency Services because I felt if this thing goes belly up, it's your department's going to be called to deal with it.

We had written to various people we felt – not just local members – but we felt they should have an understanding and perhaps influence the outcome. Certainly it raised profile as far as that was concerned but the ultimate result was we called for a moratorium. We specifically asked that the plant cease taking any hazardous waste until it was considered resolved - the various consultation processes were complete. From that later, in the year, a group decided they would create an embassy – a tent presence on the site and make it a continuous presence and bring public opinion constantly by drive-bys and all of those sorts of things.

By that stage I had actually made a decision that as the community increased its ownership of the issue I began to take a step back because I felt that local government, while it obviously had a responsibility to work on behalf of its community, the issue was so driven by the State Government they had to resolve it and the community were far better placed to push the State Government's buttons than the Council was. But me as a councillor, I believed that the more the community raised their voice the better it would be so I personally began to take a step back – honestly in hindsight I think the community made a better fist of it than if it had been driven by individual councillors.

That's interesting, how did you see your role facilitating this and then stepping back?

I think there's a great benefit in leading from the rear. I don't necessarily think there's a need for - - - I suppose I didn't want to be a show pony either. I think I had done my job, I had participated originally in lots of meetings and lots of opportunities to learn. We had decided this was an issue and really needed to be raised within the public's agenda. We had done the appropriate things through Council and facilitated that with proper motions and minutes and all of those things. We had arranged meetings, we had produced the flyers and

the letters and things that were appropriate but as the community themselves took hold of it I believed that it was far more their issue and I believed they would be far better placed to continue the fight from the community's – the individual community's – perspective rather than be seen as the Council trying to drive it. I was quite comfortable with taking a step back.

How was the issue resolved in the end?

[44.46] Well the plant doesn't do what it did [then]. Over time they reduced its use, I think it's closed now. I don't think it does anything now. And that moved over time because increasingly as work was done to reduce its use and obviously the public were not going to tolerate it going on. There was additional energy going into increased [housing] development and proposals for Armadale as an entity and as an area so the more interest there was in increasing Armadale as an entity and as a nice place for people to live and all the things that goes into planning a community, the less likelihood there was going to be that a facility would be tolerated in what was, and is, predominately going to be a redevelopment area at the time.

The local media at the time described it as a '*triumph of community resistance*'

Yeah that's what it was. The community made it work. I think had the community not got on board and it had sat with the Council and two councillors continued to bang on doors it would have, as can often be the case, be perceived to be: "well it's a local government and they have to, you know, have to argue their case." The community was the one that a) had to live with it, and b) had to decide if they would accept or reject it. And they chose to reject it. And they were willing to put the time and energy into it.

The embassy was very busy - Alison, I remember at the time - we did the peripheral things - she organised for Council to provide portable toilets, things like that. They were the things we could do but it was far better that the community were there and visible in their groups – overnight singing their songs and campfires – all the things that go with that sort of protest and it worked.

You've touched on this a bit and I'd like your opinion of local government and its role between the community and the State Government and other government bodies. Where do you see local government fitting in?

Um, well I accept the fact that local government is accessible and is there. Local governments work because that's what they are - people see them as the nearest and dearest to what they are. They are community based so if you live in a street or you live in a community – it's similar to a school council, you want somebody that understands you, your space and represents you within your community. I do believe though that local government is very limited and so much of what particularly would cross the table in terms of planning, however much you may express opinions and have input and decide on things, ultimately the Minister for Planning makes the decision, so things can be overturned. I think there's a bit of unfair expectation on behalf of the community as to what councils can actually do and equally a lot of money goes to council. There's a very big responsibility to a council and the councillors and I'm not so sure that the current system of councilor representation is necessarily moving with the level of accountability and responsibility that sits on councillor's shoulders.

Are there changes in a local government administration that you would like to see?

I think, from a councillor perspective, I think you'll often have people like myself put their hand up because they're interested and they're keen and have some skills and if you're successful and get voted on that's great then you get offered some training opportunities with the Local Government Associations and things. If I was to do it from a business governance perspective I would say to people: "this is an opportunity to stand for this position. However, this is the training you have to do before you put your hand up." I really think that people should have an understanding of the role and responsibility prior to putting their hand up." It's far too late when somebody's been elected for them to likely spend four years without necessarily understanding the responsibilities and as accountability and litigation and transparency and all these things increase and communities expectation in governance increases, people need to have a really clear sense of what they're going to be putting their hand up for.

It's a big job, big dollars, big responsibilities – 30, 40 million dollars and 14 people around the table but nobody, prior to them putting their hand up, asking well what's your expertise – what can you offer, what's your skill set to make a decision on a 12 million dollar project. I mean you don't do it alone, you have the – clearly the expertise is within the staff, within

the council staff as it should be and you're not there to be an expert. It's trying to find a balance between being the genuine community representative, having a voice and having a say but I do believe you need to have some skill set before you put your hand up - just an interested amateur is probably not enough in this day and age.

[50.10] And other skill sets, what other training should people receive?

They should certainly have governance training; they should really, really understand what an Act of Parliament is and what your responsibility under it is - all the things around declarations of interest and your perception – they should have media training. They should understand what it's like to be a person in a community that if a contentious issue occurs that you're accessible and you've no protection. People know where you live so, if somebody gets really cross with you there are risks attached to that. You don't have parliamentary privilege so you're open to litigation if you say the wrong thing. People need to have a sense, well every time they go shopping they're there, accessible.

People need to make the sensible decisions, as I thought I did in the beginning – I didn't answer the phone every time it rang. I made the decision that the people rang me, they left a message, I rang them back when I had time to give them a genuine response. [If] you keep picking up the phone on the fly, you're not giving people a valuable opportunity to have a conversation with you. So if it went to message bank, they left a message and I could ring back when I had time to listen to them and to have a conversation, time to talk to them or whatever. It's a real balance between the high end governance stuff and the practical day to day stuff and how to balance that because at the end of the day most people are living active, working lives, perhaps within their community. It's not a full time job, even though it can become that so you're often trying to balance home or family or job otherwise, and there are skills you need [have] to do that.

Any regrets about your time in Council?

(pause) That's an interesting one - I suppose there were probably times when you felt - well I might have been a bit – the name change thing - I got cross with myself afterwards. I felt I'd tempered my personality too much, I should have been more forthright in what I wanted to say.

Overall I think I did what is reasonable to expect a community representative to do and that is to be there, be known, be visible, to be accessible, to listen and to put forward as best you

can the various opinions of people and to balance them. I think I did a reasonable job. There were times I got cross with people, no doubt about it. I didn't agree with everybody all the time and I did express that opinion but I don't think I did a bad job. I don't think there's any particular regret.

The other end of the scale then – major achievements?

Major achievements was – I think I was certainly part of what was changing the profile of Council – there was far more understanding, acceptance and working with as a colleague and as an equal – women. There's an awful lot more women in Council, has been since. I think that was an achievement. That was something I was happy to be involved with. It's only in the last few years that the first head of an executive group on Council employed a woman. It was a full male domain other than secretaries and things up to that – and that's only 10 years ago - it's not as if it was a long time ago. Those things were good to be involved in and those things are good to look back on.

From the other perspective, because I never shied away from that either, I was able to increase the understanding and profile of issues to do with seniors and older people within the City of Armadale. So certainly as [for] communities generally, it's not just on our council, communities in general are getting a far better sense of what they need to do to acknowledge the fact that an increasing amount of their citizens are older people with different needs. It's not a homogenous group. They're still ordinary people within communities but needs change.

I've worked very hard to try and take the sense of what you do for older people. There's a disability mindset. There's often a notion of: "oh well we have a disability access and inclusion plans, we do our stuff for seniors." Lots of senior people aren't disabled, it doesn't mean that they don't have issues or issues or different needs. I felt that was a benefit both from my day job, my paid job's perspective, and my work on Council. I was very careful and tried very hard to make sure that I kept separation [between work and council] so any particular issue that went before Council and might have a clear reflection on my employment, I declared an interest in [it]. But I'd make sure that I participated in committees and activities and seminars and things that had a focus on seniors so that I could – because if anything - that was my area of expertise.

You chose finally not to stand for Council again, was there a particular reason for that?

[55.17] I think if I was to be true to my original opinion, it was that councils should be constantly moving and changing. There should be new people. I do believe that it's inappropriate for some people to be on Council for years and years and years and years. I think people should participate, involve themselves, and then perhaps move on. So I felt that seven or eight years was enough. I had done enough, I had learnt enough, I had achieved enough, I believe I had participated enough and I felt there were lots more people now, lots more women as there is, out there that were younger and better able to take different approach and a different attitude and good for them.

And just finally, is there you'd like to add that I haven't asked you?

Only that I think the unsung heroes of local government are the staff. I think staff that work for local government have a really hard time because the community, the general public, are a hard gig, they can be very demanding and I think part of the political perspective is that you increase knowingly or unknowingly people's expectations as to what can be achieved and I think, sadly, there's a poor understanding, in a lot of cases, as to the difference in the roles and responsibilities of local government, state government and federal government. People get it all mixed up in their heads and basically turn to their local council for everything and local councils therefore cop the blame for things and it's often the staff that get that first up. The staff have a very difficult job and work really, really hard – none of them are perfect, no more than any councillors are and sometimes people get it wrong, but really they have a hard job.

Armadale's jumping ahead in leaps and bound it's really doing well.

How do you see Armadale developing in the future?

I think it has lots and lots of potential which is really being realised. I think it still has some difficulties. It has difficulties that are often a reflection of perception rather than reality. You do have this usual media thing: "Oh Armadale, Armadale". There are lots of other places that have problems but – maybe it's because it begins with an 'A' in the alphabet. It's in people's minds to jump on Armadale rather than Midland or somewhere. I think it has lots of potential and I still think, it still has a reasonable sense of a community centre, village, town centre feel which is nice. I really love that. I think it's nice to be able to walk

to Armadale and wander through what is the town centre and still have a sense that this is our community centre, this is our space.

Thank you Trudi

Welcome.

End of interview 58.06