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PROJECT

**KBMF & BUTTE-SILVER BOW ARCHIVES**

**JON SESSO**

**The Verdigris Project**

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## Oral History Transcript of Jon Sesso

*Interviewers: Aubrey Jaap & Clark Grant*

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[00:06:16]

**Aubrey Jaap:** Please tell me about your father. Your father came from Italy?

**Jon Sesso:** Yeah. Yeah. So 1920 was when he was born. And then my grandpa, he came to Racine, Wisconsin, and he came over on the boat and then used the canals in the Great Lakes to get to, you know, Kenosha, which is the last county in Southeast Wisconsin and Chicago and Racine. And seven years later, he went home to get my grandma and my dad. And he was seven when he came over and he didn't speak any English and, you know, so he made it through . . . he became a chemist, worked for Johnson's Wax. He invented a lot of the products that are part of our daily lives, Glade and Pledge and wax and Off and all in the lab back in the fifties and early sixties in Racine, Wisconsin.

And I don't know if you know, Racine, the Johnson's Wax tower and grounds were designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. And we used to play in this research tower as little kids. Because my dad would go to work on Saturdays and the five of us would just go with him and have a ball in that tower.

But Racine, Wisconsin and Butte, Montana have a lot in common. Butte mines copper and in Racine, other than Johnson's wax, they made tractors and motors and it was a blue-collar manufacturing town. And I went to Madison, Wisconsin, and I went to school there, got my master's there.

And Dorothy Bradley got a job at NCAT in 1978. And she was a guest lecturer. Her dad was the Dean of the Geology Department at the University of Wisconsin and she had come to speak at a lecture series on Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic, revisited. And she was one of the speakers because she had just been instrumental in passing the Montana Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act and Major Facility Siting Act. And so she had a lot to say about the land ethic. And my job at the time was a radio script writer for Earthwatch radio in Wisconsin. We did scripts on a lot of water scripts for the Great Lakes, but I drifted into alternative energy. And so she left in early August of 78 and then by late August, she called back and said, "Hey, are you interested in moving to Butte, Montana?" And a sight unseen, I said, "Yeah." I had come to Montana in 1976 to visit. I went from Madison to Missoula. It was a little microcosm of Madison at the time. And, I really loved it out here.

And so I took the chance and you know, the rest is history, 40 years later, 41 years later here I am. And, we've made a great life here in Butte. But for me other than what the industry was, you know, Butte and Racine Wisconsin were very similar because blue collar work hard, play hard. You know, drinking and religion and sports and family, it was all the same to me. And so I fit right in when I got here. When I met Barb here, my wife, she came from Coatesville, Pennsylvania, which was a steel mill town, same diff you know what I mean, very similar in

terms of the values and attitudes. And so yeah, we've made a great life here in Butte. But my dad was sort of a self-made guy and, you know, he put emphasis on education and learning things. We'd ask him questions. And the first thing he always did was to force us to go look it up on our own to figure out how to do things on our own, but then he would tell us in long, long sentences exactly what we needed to know.

So it was a great thing to come to Butte. And now, you know, living on the Continental Divide, I think has been a, sort of a gift that I chose her treasure all the time. And so that's where I came from. And I started out at NCAT for 10 years, started out as a technical writer. The guys were researching, you know, innovative, renewable and alternative energy technologies, wind energy, solar energy, even conservation techniques. And they, you know, were science guys and they didn't really communicate with the layman as well as they needed to. So our job was to interpret what they said, write it down in a series of publications that could be understandable to the general public. So I started out as a technical writer. Then Dorothy resigned and I got her job as information director and then ended up as vice president of operations there at NCAT.

And then I left that job and took the job as the director of the Natural Resource Information System at the Montana State Library in 1988. I worked there for four years and then in '91, Jack Lynch was elected mayor and took a chance on hiring me as the planning director. I had a lot of natural resource planning and resource planning background, but not so much specific land use degree, but his agenda at the time was to make the planning department, zoning and subdivisions, a friendly topic rather than a controversial topic. And so I brought sort of a consumer oriented receiver centered approach to what people wanted to build. You know, Butte is a kind of a hodgepodge of construction and buildings.

And it seems a little bit oxymoronic to not let people do what they want to do in the neighborhood, because, you know, right next door, there's a mansion and a mobile home and, you know, sort of the Houston approach to land use planning, where there is no zoning. And so we were consumer-friendly. And then no sooner did we start working on land use stuff when Butte was named a Super Fund site in 1991. We fought being named a PRP for a year to no avail. And the chief executive Lynch asked me to sort of coordinate the Superfund piece because it was in our minds a direct tie between the environmental cleanup and land use planning in our community. And so we made it our business to make sure that any reclaimed area was not complete until there was a beneficial land use for our citizens, an asset that would be valuable to our citizens. Otherwise, people wouldn't, wouldn't take care of these reclaimed areas.

So, 30 years later in 2017, I resigned from the duties of the planning director. And it was ably filled by my assistant director. And then just have been concentrating on the Superfund piece for almost two years now and trying to get over the finish line on our final decision for, at least the Butte site and move our community forward. So that's the nutshell of my time in Montana.

**Clark Grant:** Well, that about wraps it up. Right. Nice talking to you. So he invented Off?

**Sesso:** Well, he and a team of researchers, but yeah. You guys are too young, but if you ever remember the commercial, the guy puts his arm in a swarm of mosquitoes. Yeah, that was my dad's arm. There were three or four of them that were proving how good the product worked. There were eleven patents. And it was funny, Clark, we never knew, you know, and so he passed away, tragically, because of an experiment he did in the lab at work. Four guys who were

working with a means, these are chemical formulas that break down soap and they did a couple of experiments and all four people in the room died of the same cancer 30 years later. But he died young, you know, he died at 61. And after he died the Chemical Manufacturers of America Magazine did an obituary for him and in the obituary, it listed all of the patents that he and his one friend, Earl Moyle, had filed on behalf of Johnson's Wax. And, you know, they were all of the big, you know, Glade and Pledge and Raid, Off, Glowcoat. You know, there were 11 of them and I'm thinking, "Oh, geez, who knew?" And then, you know, the more you learn about, you know, at the time, you know, you've worked for a corporation and the corporation actually held the patents, but he was the one who filed them. And it was his chemical formulas. I remember he used to bring home the products to the house. And instead of the labels, they would just have the chemical formula on the can. And my mom had to figure out which product was for which application, which one was Pledge, which one was Glade, which one was the floor wax. And so that was always funny because once in a while she would get the chemical formula wrong and do the wrong thing. But it was interesting, the science background, I didn't get into science. I was more environmental sciences than the hard sciences, but it was a great lesson to learn, but, yeah, that was one of the products that he tinkered around and invented on behalf of everybody who wanted to have no mosquitoes.

**Grant:** I thank him for that. I was just using it in Oklahoma.

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**Jaap:** So, you said you're very proud of your Italian heritage. So did your dad bring over a lot of traditions then?

**Sesso:** Well, it was funny, the first thing he did when he came over is he changed his name. My grandpa, his name was Sessa, and he changed it to Sesso and we don't know if it was a mistake or what. We remember asking him. And he says, "Well, all the Sessa's, you know, ended in 'a'. And I just wanted it to end in 'o', because it was a masculine versus a feminine, vowel in the Italian language. But I don't really know if that's true. I just think that they made a mistake and he was much more interested in becoming an American and doing what you do in America rather than what he learned as a boy in Italy. He brought over the traditions of the gardens because when we got to go to Southern Italy and Cosenza, and his little town of Marana . . . When we were growing up, he had in the backyard and, you know, he had plum trees and all kinds of tomatoes. He tried to grow tomatoes. It was a little difficult.

But he was really interested in that. We never really knew why. And then when we went and saw his home where he grew up in Italy, it was almost an exact duplicate of our backyard, you know, with big trees and plum trees, et cetera. So he was big on wines and cheeses and fruits of his Homeland. But as far as social things, you know, we went to all the Italian places in our community and we were part of the Italian clubs and all that, but he wanted to teach us to be Americans more than Italians. We were Italian Americans with an emphasis on, you know, we were in America now, and this is how we live, and this is how we think. So he learned English. They kept talking Italian, you know, when, especially, you know, you hear about the parents who didn't want their children to know what they were talking about. So they would switch right into talking Italian at the dinner table when they didn't want us to know what they were talking about.

He was much more inclined to want to be an American from Italy rather than an Italian American.

But, you know, all of the customs, all of the parties and the graduations and the anniversaries and stuff, they were all caked in . . . because I'm a hundred percent. His mom and dad were Italian and my mother's mom and dad were Italian. And so you know, we're kind of rare in that regard. Although, I have not taken one of these tests to see if it's actually true, that I'm a hundred percent Italian. But it was much more about being an American than overdoing the customs of Italy. But, he was proud. He went back several times and we have a lot of cousins that go back and forth from Chicago and Kenosha. And so, but we were more Americans than we were Italian.

**Jaap:** So what got you into Environmental Science? What was the draw for you?

**Sesso:** Well, in college I was studying communications. That was my degree. But I was looking for an emphasis, you know, what particular background. And it was interesting and this kind of goes back to my dad too. One of the biggest disagreements we had was back . . . I don't know, again, you guys are young, but in the early seventies is when the ozone layer and the problem with the ozone layer was started to come into the forefront.

And as it turned out the products that were being developed, that my dad was developing, they really weren't as useful to American households until they invented the aerosol valve, the little valve that allowed you to spray the product. And it turns out that the aerosol valve and mostly the fluorocarbons that were dispensed were bad. They were bad for the environment. And so I came home one day for Thanksgiving or something from college and, you know, I was just, you know, telling him that. These fluorocarbons are bad, you know, and he says, "Oh, really? You think they're bad do you?" And so we had this heated debate. And all the while he had already figured it out that the fluorocarbons were bad and he had already started to convert all of the products that he invented to hydrocarbons so that the fluorocarbons could be eliminated from the product line. But it took a couple years for that level of a change in a manufacturing process to actually get implemented. So here I was, you know, essentially being mad because my dad was contributing to the deterioration of the environment when he had, you know, already figured it out. He'd already done something about it.

And like a month later, he's on one of the talk shows like, you know, the Today Show or something, talking about the necessity to convert to hydrocarbons because of the environmental impacts of the fluorocarbons. It was just another lesson along the way. But I took a class that was part of my undergraduate degree in wildlife ecology. And in Madison, the professor was kind of a renowned and a really flamboyant professor. He made every lecture like something you'd go pay to see, you know, because he'd bring in the birds and the animals. And then he would explain exactly what role that particular species and that particular bird or animal has in the hierarchy of all things alive. And I was just enamored with the class.

And so when I decided to pursue a master's degree in communications, I asked that I get an environmental studies background. And it was great. Then I got into the energy, you know, 1973. And then in 1976, we were going through the oil embargoes and the energy crisis in America. I don't know if you remember a guy by the name of Barry Commoner. He wrote a book called *The*

*Closing Circle* and then the *Poverty of Power*. And he, at the time, was the leading scientist in the United States. He organized a group called the Scientists' Institute for Public Information with the notion that if the public understood what you were talking about and you gave them enough information to make a decision, you could rely on a decision of the general public, because they would generally always do the right thing. And I was just, I'm really enamored with that notion. And so my master's thesis was on him. It was on him because he was the master at taking a complex scientific thing and putting it in terms that the public could understand and to get people to think and act in harmony with the environment.

That became my thesis. And how do you do that? And I remember writing the thesis and the first draft used the term "environmental thinking." And then my major professor asked, "What's this term environmental? How are you using that as an adjective?" And I said, "Well, you know, to think and act in ways that are in harmony with the environment." And so they didn't allow me to use the word "environmental" in the thesis. And I had to write the line act. And I think in harmony with the environment in every instance, because at the time this was in 1977, 78 it was not in vogue yet in terms of communications. But I got to go to St. Louis. Barry Commoner was a professor at the University of Washington in St. Louis and I drove down there three times and he opened up his library to me. And he spent hours or so on three different occasions explaining to me how he went about the business of trying to get people to think about taking care of the world we're in. And the book, *The Closing Circle* is still a major piece of literature that he published in the fifties. It was about the nuclear test ban. Nuclear test ban treaties, and how, you know, doing these nuclear tests over the Mojave Desert were infecting our environment.

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And he converted that to stories about mothers' milk and then people got it. "Do you mean that, you know, the milk I'm feeding my child might be infected?" It was like, "Oh Jesus, we got to do something about it." And then in the sixties it was about Lake Erie starting on fire. And how could you have one of the Great Lakes catch on fire from the pollution that was so prevalent and everywhere. And so he wrote *The Closing Circle* and conjured up the four laws of ecology. The first of which is that everything has to go somewhere. And if you produce something it's never going away and you gotta think in terms of where it's going to end up. And then in the seventies it was *The Energy of Peace* and *The Poverty of Power*. And then in the eighties, he ran for president. He ran as the vice president candidate on the green ticket when Reagan was elected. So you know, it's been a long process. And then coming here and then working for NCAT for a decade and, you know, immersing myself in renewable energy and alternative energy technologies and understanding the world from that perspective. And in our case, at NCAT, it was about marrying alternative energy and self-reliant technologies with the needs of low income. And to try to make them more self-reliant and self-sufficient, so they could deal with their economic hardships by using self-reliance and alternative energy technologies. And then building the natural resource information system at the library and making sure we had access to information to make good public decisions.

And then of course, coming on as the Butte Planning Director and Superfund coordinator, you know, it's been a challenge these 30 years to get Butte cleaned up and deal with the environmental impacts of historic mining and even current mining. And it's just been sort of an evolution over time that's sort of been my focus. It's been a little bit of a twist, you know, really,

I was much more bullish about environmental protection and trying to convince people that we needed to move towards these technologies. And getting the job at the local government was a really big change in my perspective because the needs of and looking out for people who pay taxes and people who have to pay for their sewer and water fees was a big deal. I mean it's one thing to desire to have like a renewable energy future. And I'm certainly no less committed to that today than I was when I was actually in the industry, but the economics of the world and society's balancing of its priorities really comes home to roost as a local government official because people care about what things cost and you got to defend what you're doing in terms of how it's affecting their lives and their disposable incomes and how much they can afford to pay in taxes and in fees.

It's been a good modifying criteria to my thinking in terms of making decisions in the best interest of our citizens. That, you know, everything has a cost and weighing the costs and benefits of a decision are very important to citizens. And so they became very important to me as a representative, as a local official. And then, of course, it was even heightened when I became a state legislator, you know, where you actually are representing their interests at the state level. It's just more heightened that everything has a cost. And you got to balance that out and make your arguments work, not only because of what you want, but with what other people's needs are.

So it's been an interesting ride in the course of the environmental piece in Butte which is now somewhat of a legacy. I believe that we have come miles and miles in terms of improving our environment and making Butte a better place to live, work and play. My best example is the water system. When I started with Butte Silver Bow in 1991, we were under a boil order. The provider of city water was violating federal standards for the delivery of drinking water, state standards. A class action lawsuit was brought against Dennis Washington. Because he inherited the water company from the Anaconda Company when he bought the properties. And little did he know that the water company was dilapidated. And we had really the worst drinking water in the state. And now 30 years later, I'm comfortable saying we have the best. We have filtration plants and, of course, we've got the best source water in between the Big Hole and Fish Creek and the Basin Creek and up here on the Moulton Reservoir, we've got the sources. Now because of environmental regulations, we have to filter all those sources, but we've got the best water and we've spent more than probably a hundred million dollars now rebuilding the distribution and transmission system for bringing water, drinking water to our town. The Anaconda Company back in the 1900's, they knew they were gonna hose up the groundwater, that the mining activity was going to have an adverse effect. And they were farsighted enough to decide to build our water system with sources from around Butte to displace the lost groundwater. But a hundred years later it was a mess. And so I think we're most proud of the fact that . . . Because to me, that's the critical thing is the water we drink.

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The water we discharge, you know, the water that discharges to the Creek. I've been a sort of a advocate these days of there's a limit to how much we should be spending as citizens to take care to make sure the fish are comfortable. But there's no quarter when it comes to drinking water. And we've got the best drinking water in the state now and that's a big accomplishment that's kind of got done by our community in terms of the environment. And I think we're most proud of



that. The environmental piece, I think we've come so far and now we're on the cusp of making some final decisions so we can get on with the rest of our future as a town. We are so proud of our history and we got to get to making a new history for our citizens and in our community. And so the environmental thing has been heart and soul of what I've been doing for a long time.

**Jaap:** It seems a little serendipitous you ended up here, you know, and then ended up in a position as planning director and then have Superfund happen.

**Sesso:** It is. I'm kind of one of the luckiest people in terms of being able to apply everything that I went to college for to my daily job. It is kind of remarkable in that regard. I mean, this is basically why in college I chose communications. There were two sides of it, you know, radio, TV, and film and rhetoric and persuasion theory. And I chose the latter and read all the speeches that have been made in the world since, you know, the early days of Aristotle and tried to learn persuasion theory from the best professors that I had. And then connected to that environmental piece and then came here and, you know, in 1978, when I got here, you know, Butte was a rough, rough looking place. It was kind of a dirty town, a mining camp from way back. And I think we're way, way different now. And we got work to do, and we got to keep it this way. But it is sort of serendipitous that I've been able to apply what I've learned and then the experiences over these many years to directly to the job that, that I have had here in town.

**Jaap:** So you mentioned making new history, you know, after this cleanup and what is that to you?

**Sesso:** It's about closing chapters and starting new ones. I think the hardest thing to communicate is that we are really so far ahead in terms of environmental protection. When I started with Butte Silver Bow in '91, I'll never forget, a guy named Bill Pascoe, he ran the water treatment plant since its inception in '69. And I was responsible for the environmental piece now and I was thinking, "Well, geez, Bill, we're discharging nutrients into the stream." And he would kid around with me and say, "Hey, Jon, you know, when it rains in Butte, the whole Valley goes toxic. Every time it rains." Because there was all this exposed mine waste on the Hill, stormwater would collect it in our stormwater system and discharge it into Silver Bow Creek. He says, "Our nutrients are the only thing the Creek's got going for it. We're the good guys. And it's the metals, that's the problem."

And here we are now 30 years later, and we have reduced the amount of pollution, you know, 92 to 94% that used to go into the Creek and the stream is back, you know, they've rebuilt the Silver Bow Creek from Butte to the Warm Springs ponds. There's a burgeoning fishery returning to Silver Bow Creek. And it's working. The environmental cleanup activities that have occurred are working and have been working now for several years. And so when we're making these final decisions, we just have to do better. We're going to take it from 94 to 96 or 97, but I think people have to understand environmental science and environmental cleanups are not 100% decisions. You don't get to a hundred percent and particularly given Butte's . . . you know, we've got an 11-degree pitch coming off the Hill and we got a stream that's narrower than this table that we're sitting at. It's simply impossible.

You could spend all of our disposable income trying to protect that stream. And you're still not going to meet the standards that have been established because these standards are not established for just small streams. They're established for rivers, the Clark Fork River, the

Missouri River, the Yellowstone River. It's a lot easier to meet certain standards when you have a 1,000, 2,000, 5,000 cubic feet per second of water going by, than ten! And so in my mind's eye that we have come such a distance and we have improved our environment so much that it's time to make these final decisions, build another a hundred million some dollars worth of improvements to how we manage stormwater in town, and then get on with the rest of our history. What I long for is the headline that says, Butte, formally the largest Superfund site in the United States, has restored itself, has reclaimed itself. And now is a thriving community that is serving families and in an economy that works. We have not grown over . . . this is sort of my cross to bear. I'm the planning director of Butte for 27 years before I resigned, you know, and the population was the same when I left as when I took on the job. It's actually less. People say a lot of land use planning for you. You're actually smaller than you were when you started, but we're away better off. And certainly we've spent a lot of time dealing with the environmental piece in the context of growth and some of the changes that we've gone through.

But to me, you can't just use superfund and this environmental piece as really a crutch to not move forward. We can move forward as a community. We are better off. We have made good decisions. We have cleaned up the stormwater as it reaches Silver Bow Creek. We have eliminated the direct contact with heavy metals for our children. In '92 when we started the Superfund programs the University of Cincinnati came in and did the initial studies, and more than 10% of our children were testing high for lead in their blood. And more than 10 micrograms per deciliter. I mean, this is like you know, a lot of children were exposed to heavy metals. And today there's less than a handful and we have pretty much documented that the handful that still have lead in their blood, it's not coming from mining waste. It's coming from other activities where lead is used whether it's batteries or bullets or whatever. But we learned early that we had to do what we've done and now we've done it.

Now we got a program set up, and we're going to run this residential metals abatement program forever. I mean, that's what we agreed to is that we need the resources to abate any metals that are affecting residential environments forever. That's what we've agreed to. Not that, you know, at some point, this program's going to end. What we've agreed to is a residential metals abatement program that is going to operate for the better part of forever. A hundred years, the funds are in the bank to run it for that time period. Same with the care of the Hill. I mean, this doesn't work if we allow these vegetative caps that we've put on the Hill and the clean soil we've put over the copper and the metals in the indigenous soil. It doesn't work if we don't take care of the Hill. So, in the agreement is a hundred years of operations and maintenance money. So there will always be a maintenance program to take care of our hill. That said. And then this stormwater piece, these 30 some management devices that we've built over the last 20 years. Those will be taken care of and integrate all that work with the current public works activity that we do.

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And we've got a good program that'll serve us well into the future. Now it's turned to a different challenge and that is more economic growth, you know, making sure we have the best education system, making sure we have healthcare for everybody. It's my desire for Butte to move forward from superfund. And we solved that problem. Be proud of the fact that we solved it. We got it done. And we were practical and reasonable in getting it done. And, you know, I've said it a few

times, we have done our due diligence on the historic mining waste and dealt with that problem, but we still have a challenge right here every day. We have an active mine, you know, within a driver or a nine iron of the urban core. And it's got environmental impacts. Now I give MR a lot of credit for doing a lot of good work to mitigate those environmental impacts. The dust control that they're doing, the monitoring that they're doing, trying to minimize the environmental impacts, but, come on, we're a mining town and we got a mine in our town and we're all proud of it. Many of our families, many of our children, our future are the families that are supported by that mine and it's not going anywhere.

And I don't think anybody wants it to go anywhere. We want it to last as long as we can. And because we're Butte, we're going to deal with it. We're going to make sure we can have an active mine and a healthy environment at the same time. That's a challenge. And we got to move forward with the many challenges that any community faces. And I think superfund will have run its course. And I think the legacy will be that we did a pretty good, darn good job of dealing with what was a pretty complex sort of a challenge. And how do you deal with stormwater coming off a Hill into a small stream and try to meet standards on that small stream? It's not easy. It'd be a lot easier if we were discharging into the Clark Fork River proper because we'd meet all of the standards, absolutely, all the time because of simply the amount of water that we're discharging into.

But now we've got a situation where the Creek that we're discharging into already has more, in our case, copper than the standard allows. And so it's like, well, it's going to be a little bit difficult for us to make the water cleaner that we're discharging into. And that's sort of the notion behind this technical and practicability waiver. We're getting on the one standard, this so-called total recoverable standard that it's virtually impossible to make. But again, it doesn't mean that we haven't come miles and miles in trying to make it. And it doesn't mean that we're not going to continue to try to meet that standard. But again, at some point, you got to call it, you got to call it good. The fish are living in Silver Bow Creek. The corridor is looking really good. The riparian area is as healthy as it's ever been since even before the flood of 1908. And so there's a lot we have to be proud of. And that's the legacy that I'd like people to remember.

**Grant:** I've been wanting to revisit this notion that a properly informed public will make the right choice. Over your decades in public service, have you observed that to be true?

**Sesso:** Yes. You know, SIPI, the Institute, Scientists' Institute for Public Information still exists today. But as the planning director and having adjudicated over, or having written recommendations for literally hundreds of zoning cases and variances to the zoning code. We have relied on a quasi judicial board, the zoning board to make the decisions. And, you know, our job as staff is to be objective and write the report and make a recommendation. And our emphasis has always been to just make sure that those seven people that serve on the board understand what the question is and understand the two sides of what they have to decide. And, invariably they make the right decision.

You know, sometimes they go against our recommendation because if you evaluate it according to the ordinance, now we probably shouldn't do that. But then we have the hearing, all of the neighbors show up and they're for it, or no neighbors show up against it. And so the board says, "Well, geez, seems like this is okay. Why did you recommend against it, staff?" And we'd

explain the technicality on why we had to say, "no," but in the practical world and in reality, it's probably okay. And so that board votes in favor of the variants. And invariably, you know, I would say, you know, 30, let's just say 30 years of doing, you know, 40, 50 cases a year, I can count on one hand the variances that were let and didn't work out. Same with the council. The councils are sort of a part-time citizen legislature of our community. 12 council people. The goal is to make sure they understand the question and they've got all the information in front of them to make the best judgment. Majority rules. If seven or eight of them think it's a good idea, it passes. Same thing. Because of the representative government that we have, our job is to put information in front of them. So they understand what they're doing and then whatever they decide is okay with me.

And then my 16 years now as a legislator has reinforced that. As long as the legislative body is given accurate information about the topic that they're voting on, you live with the result. You live with the result, because invariably it's the right one because, you know, we're all citizens. Just like the justice system and a jury of our peers and, you know, you live with their results.

And so our emphasis has always been to make sure they have the accurate, right information upon which they're making their decision. And I think you're always in good shape if you get that done.

**Grant:** Thank you for that. I have a question that's a bit more abstract, a lot of people in various contexts, but especially in government, use the phrase moving forward a lot. I'm wondering towards what?

**Sesso:** Well, I think it's about our next chapter. To me, moving forward is a term that's used to not get stuck in your current reality. Not get stuck talking about the past. Not overweighting a decision that you're making today with the data and information you remember from the past. And so I use the term in the context of Superfund, because I believe it's time to make these final decisions, get the actions implemented and to live with the result. We have made dozens of decisions over the course of the 25, 30 years we've been dealing with Superfund and each of them have had their impact. And I'm here to say that they've all worked out pretty good. We've learned some lessons on how we've done things, but the decisions to do them have all been, I think, pretty sound decisions. So I think it's meant to take the step to the next chapter, build your own history of what's going on in your life. Don't - don't get stuck in the present or in the past.

**Grant:** When you first moved to Butte, why was this an attractive place to live and to stay?

**Sesso:** Well, you know, to me, it was all about the outdoors. I've said it a million times. I mean, when you live in Butte, you're 20 minutes away from places everybody in America aspires to be. To be where they want to be. The space that, you know, we have this sort of urban culture where we're sitting today and you know, this historic uptown district, but you get, you know, 10 minutes out of town and you're in Montana. You're living on the Continental Divide. You're in the blue ribbon trout stream. You're rafting in class two, three, four waters. You're hiking at the top of peaks that are part of the spine of the continent. Just the natural beauty and the space was one thing that made it attractive to me, you know, outdoor sports, whether you're skiing or whatever you're doing fishing and the hunting that people enjoy. That was big to me. My first 10 years in town, I lived out on the Wayland Ranch out on Little Basin Creek Road.

And, you know, I was just surrounded, you know, by looking at the Highlands and Little Basin Creek coming through right past my little rented farm house. And so the pace, the space and the place was real suited to my life. And then the second thing was the pace of life here in Montana. It suited me also. In Wisconsin, we weren't that populous either, but, you know, a hundred thousand people in my hometown and 200,000 in Madison, you know, there was traffic and this and that and the other, and standing in line and dealing with crowds wherever you went. Literally, we can take off, you know, you're going to go to the movies here in Butte, you know, you can take off from your house at the time the movie is on and get there, get in. And you're in your seat before the actual feature film comes on. The pace of life here in Montana is something that I have found and continue to find extremely attractive.

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And in Butte, it's just that much better. I mean, I appreciate our citizens who wish we had grown a little more over these last two decades of really exponential growth in some of our other Montana towns in Billings and Bozeman and even Helena and certainly Missoula and Kalispell. They have all sort of exploded with growth, but I'm here to tell you that Butte enjoys a way of life, a pace and a space that is enviable among those who live elsewhere.

And I've said this many times because all of our visitors, they remark about how about the big sky country and the space that we have per capita. And it makes a difference in our lives, our health, our wellbeing. I feel way more healthy living here than my family all over the country and where they live and what they deal with. So I guess those are the two things that were attractive to me when I got here and remain so today.

**Grant:** Is it possible that all your years of work will result in an economic explosion in Butte that will make it a less comfortable place for you to live?

**Sesso:** Well, I think I shouldn't be too bashful by saying I hope so. I won't be around so it won't affect me. I'm getting on myself. I'm moving into my retirement years, you know? So when you're retired, you can miss, you can avoid lines and rush hours and the weekends, when everybody's doing stuff, you can avoid that. But I think that as a Senator for Butte and I'm hoping. I'm bullish about Butte's future. I always have been. And I think people are recognizing that now. I think the stigma of Super Fund has had more of a stifling effect than we want to admit. I want to get past it. And I think when we do, when we start speaking out about how proud we are, of how well we've reclaimed and restored our environment. I think it will be attractive to people. I think Butte is a safe place to live.

Like I said earlier, we have the best drinking water in the state. We've got a program to deal with metals in residential areas. So I'm hoping that we make this decision this fall. We get on with a bunch of good work that needs to get done. And we get delisted, we're no longer a Super Fund site. We are a reclaimed, restored area that is taking care of business from its mining heritage. And, yeah, I hope it grows a little bit. People have talked about this. The one thing to keep in mind is that the infrastructure that was built for Butte, you know, it was built for a town that could serve, you know, 60, 70,000 people. You know, we got the wide streets and we've got the now first-class drinking water and sanitary sewer system. So we've got, I think we've got the infrastructure. Geez. We have an airport right here in town that's doing its best to grow. So we have the infrastructure to serve more than 35, 36,000 people.

And the question you ask is a good one because how big do we want to get? I think getting to 50,000 would be perfect. We would have 15,000 more people. Let's say four or five, 6,000 more families and that would connote 6,000 more jobs. I think we'd have the school system that could accommodate that many people. So there's that breaking point where growth starts becoming a problem for city planners and governing bodies, but those are problems I think we want to have. And I sure would work towards that objective going forward.

**Grant:** This is a bit more technical in nature. Why doesn't RMAP include commercial properties?

**Sesso:** Well, it will. I think that we're working that out. The science of it is that except the fact that multifamily residential buildings are classified as commercial properties and as such, that has to be fixed. And that's in the plan. We're going to have a program so multifamily, residential will be covered under the program. But commercial properties proper, if you will, a tire shop, the carpenters union, et cetera, as you may know, the Superfund law is a risk-based environmental law, and it's designed to reduce risk to an acceptable level. And risk is based on levels of exposure and levels of exposures based on time. And when you're in a residence, you're there two thirds of the day, you're sleeping eight hours, you're hanging out eight hours and you're going somewhere to the school or to work eight hours.

And so the level of time you spend at home is greater. And so you have to make sure that that environment is clean. The eight hours you're at the commercial property is a lower level exposure. And so the amount of exposure, as per the law, is within an exposure that is not harmful to your health. And so it was decided that . . . now certainly if there is like, we're gonna . . . we've done these schools now, you know. And, at first, you know, we only dealt with the school yards, you know, the playgrounds because they were out there. And we had to make sure that there was no elevated metals in the play areas outside, but now we've come to realize that we've got to make sure that all the schools are clear of any metals in the attics and in the wall spaces. And so that'll get done as well.

But the commercial properties, it's all about that levels of exposure thing. And minimizing the risk of exposure. The other part of it is that commercial buildings, generally, don't have attics and areas where the contaminated dust were and had been accumulating. I don't know about your building whether or not you've been up. But you know, there's just a small rafter space above the third floor there.

**Grant:** There was plenty of dust up there that we tore out.

**Sesso:** I bet you there were.

**Grant:** For people listening to this interview, you know, 20 years after the fact, whoever they may be, when you say that we're going to have this opportunity to be delisted and complete the cleanup, be proud of the fact that what we did was protective. For people who don't trust the EPA or governments in general, what would you say to them now? We did the best we could, even if you don't believe that it's actually safe now?

**Sesso:** Well, I would say we have to look at the data, trust the science. I think there's generally a misnomer that the Superfund law was written to clean up the environment. That's been the most difficult thing to explain to people. Superfund is a so-called CERCLA, Comprehensive Environmental Responsibility and Regulatory Act. It is the only retroactive law in the country. And in order for Congress to have passed the law that allows you to go back and compel polluters in the past, who, when they were polluting, did not break a law and say, "Well, too bad. You got to clean up anyway." In order to get a law like that passed, Congress had to figure out what was fair. And they came up with this risk-based formula. And the law is written to protect human health in the environment. It's not meant . . . The current laws of the land, the clean water act, the clean air act, they're designed to make sure new industries do not pollute the environment.

And if they do there's fines and you gotta deal with it right away. But this retroactive law is a little bit different. And so I would say that the first answer or the first part of the answer is look at the data. If you study the data, particularly where we're focused on - the stormwater piece and actually look at how much less metal, soluble and otherwise, are reaching Silver Bow Creek today. You'll be a lot more confident that we got the job done pretty well, and we've got several more things to do that's gonna make it even better. On the human health piece, it's pretty complicated because while I'm confident we've dealt with the historic, the environmental impacts and risks of historic mining waste, and now have a program to deal with it long into the future.

As I said earlier, we have an active mine in town and it's got its own impacts. I think they're manageable. They also do their share of monitoring. We've just upgraded the monitoring in the Greeley neighborhood and in the whole area that is closest to the mine. That data will have to be looked at carefully. The impacts of current mining activities, juxtaposed to mitigating the impacts of historic mining activity has been a real yin yang conversation when it comes to the human health piece in our environmental posture. So for those who are skeptical of government and the EPA and the Department of Environmental Quality . . . and there's always been a benefit to questioning authority and questioning the regulators, making sure they're doing their job, making sure they're not missing anything.

So I have always had the deepest respect for the skeptics. Because they drive us to the best possible solutions. As I mentioned earlier about putting the best information in front of people so they can make good decisions. It is important that people question that information because, you know, there has been many an instance where the public has been given wrong information and not accurate information.

And so I know Butte Silver Bow, its staff has never pulled any punches. We have an obligation to make sure that we're operating and acting on the best information and best data available. And then you make your decision. [inaudible] The safety of our tailings dam is a good example of how the folks who are responsible for that dam are questioning each other now to make sure it is as safe as it can possibly be. And it's interesting to observe. The local government has been given the reports by the people who come in every year to monitor and evaluate the soundness of the dam. And they conclude, these are smart people with the skills to make those evaluations . . . I think we are blessed by the fact that the Bureau of Mines and Geology and the Earthquake Program and the smart guys that are there are citizens of our community.

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And they're among the people reviewing what information is put out and they have on occasion called foul and say, "No, that's not right." I take great comfort in the fact that having Montana Tech and a community of scholars and very smart people that are, is directly relevant to the environmental challenges we have gives me confidence that good decisions are being made when the Bureau of Mines and Geology is the selected body to monitor what's been going on in and around the pit for these last 30 years. I mean, it's not like they're going to pull any punches, it's their community too. And they want to make sure that we're acting on the best information.

So all I can say, Clark, is that it's healthy to have a skeptical citizenry challenging the decisions that are being made. I think that only leads to better decision-making and time will tell whether or not the decisions were as effective as I trust that they are. I can only say that we make decisions based on the best available information at the time you need to make the decision. You can't just keep putting things off, waiting for more information, more data. I bristle when people use the term "rush" in the same sentence with Superfund, you know, haven't been involved in it for 30 years and how the geologic pace of the thing and saying, "Jesus, well, why do you have to decide now?" It's like, "Because our community, pardon me, needs to move forward, needs to move past Superfund and can, and should. We are ready to make these final decisions."

Like I said, I respect critics and skepticism and distrust to a point, but at some point I think we deserve to, especially on behalf of young people like you to get on with it and not use it as a means to obstruct.

**Grant:** Was there something that compelled you to get into government as a child? Did you want to get into it?

**Sesso:** Not that I can point to. I have been very comfortable in public service. I like working for my community. I like the idea of public service. I'm not adverse to making money and companies being profitable and successful and growing economies. I believe in our capitalism, in our economic systems, but I like the public service side of things. It's always been comfortable to me. My better half, you know, she owns a small business and I understand the hard work involved in running a business and making money in the private sector. It's been a good balance for us. But I can't point to anything. When I graduated and came to Butte and worked for NCAT, the nonprofit sector, working in that sector, I think was a harbinger of public service. When I went to the library and built that natural resource information system, I think that that's probably when I kinda started thinking that, well, I'm probably going to be a public sector guy. I went into politics kind of purely by accident. When a deputy county attorney Newman was my representative here on the Hill. And he just summarily declared that day in 2004 that he wasn't running again. And we just got together.

We had gotten so used to having a guy in local government, in the legislature that we needed somebody else, because it was really helpful to have somebody who understood local government issues pulling for you at the legislative level. And so I just kinda got into that by accident. I would say that now that I'm completing my legislative career, it was okay. I liked it. It was different. It was different being an elected official than a public service employee. There's a connotation that is associated with elected officials, politicians that I didn't like, don't like, I don't



think it's all together true. But at the same time, there is so much money and the insidious role that money plays in politics. It's hard for citizens to trust people who get elected. Not in Butte in particular, in my district in particular, I mean, I have had the pleasure of never having to . . . only one time out of six elections that I ever had actually had to raise money. Where I had to actually ask my neighbors and friends for money.

So for me, it's not been the case. And legislative races, even some legislative races in Montana are going for 50, \$60,000, which is beyond the pale to me, you know? I'm not saying I regret being a legislator, it's been a really rewarding experience. We've gotten several things done for Butte. And I'm very proud of that, but I sure liked being a public service guy better. And the public seems to have a greater respect for public service employees than they do elected officials.

**Grant:** It seems to me in the legislature, you would be very linear, tactile, trying to achieve goals that serve the citizenry in a tactile way in their daily lives. But then you have ideologues, you know, of course, who are in the legislature, Greg DeVries comes to mind from this most recent session who introduced a personhood bill in the house. How do you contend with your colleagues in the legislature? What is it like?

**Sesso:** I have been focused on building relationships with people that are focused on doing work and solving problems, figuring out how to deal with issues. And I have come to ignore the legislators that bring only ideology to their role. They come with one or two things that they want to talk about. And even though they know when they introduce the bill, that it has a low chance of passing the legislature and zero chance of becoming law. They still want us to debate it and talk about it and use the precious time of the legislature to discuss their ideology all in the name of their constituents that told them to do it and asked them to represent this particular ideology and whether it's personhood and some of these issues having to do with the right to life or to choice.

I just have kind of put up a wall and immersed myself in the work of the legislature. What do we have to accomplish? What kind of starts and stops with the budget? There's things that I was willing to work on, infrastructure, educational stuff that I just focused on. And it doesn't take long to identify the people who really want to work with you, regardless of whether they're in your party or they're on the other side. I'd never let the person's letter, D or R, dictate who I worked with. If you were wanting to get something done, I was willing to work with you. If you just wanted to come and spout off about an issue that wasn't going to become legislation. I just didn't. I just didn't talk to you. I didn't pretend to want to work with you because they had no intention of working with me on the stuff that we needed to get done. Now it's probably not, you know, I would never recommend people to ignore other legislators, but that's how I got through it. I just understood whether the person really wanted to solve a problem or not. And if they did, I was going to work with them.

If they were just there to spout off about their ideology regardless of accomplishing anything, I just ignored them. And it worked. I'm almost done now. I mean, it was the fastest 16 years, you know. You'll know, youngsters, as each year goes by, it seems to take less and less time to get through a year. But I was fortunate that my main responsibility in the legislature was the budget and the dollars and cents of it all. And I did not sit on, as a matter of fact, the only committee I sat on were on the last two sessions on the local government committee, otherwise I was

exclusively in the budget room. I was on the appropriations committee, all four terms in the House and I was on the Senate finance and claims all four sessions, both terms in the Senate. And so by nature, there weren't a lot of bills that came before our committee that were more on the etiology side of the fence. And so I didn't have to sit through a lot of hearings of bills that I had no interest in because they were all related to the budget. And then when some of those bills that were ideology based came to finance or appropriations and they cost money.

It was with some sense of satisfaction that I was part of the team that killed the bills. But that's sort of been my contributions and much, much more financial and a lot less policy driven. So that, that helped me, I think, a little bit, not have to deal with etiology so much.

**Grant:** Seems like you have been tracking this ascent you've made within the Montana democratic party, local government here, and also in the state legislature. And so I'm wondering, if you had to characterize, how does it look up there? How does it look differently from when you first started, from your vantage point, your perspective in state government? What can you impart to us?

**Sesso:** Well, I have had the benefit of working in the legislature under two democratic governors my entire 16 years, first Governor Schweitzer, and then Governor Bullock. So we have always had the backstop to make sure not much bad legislation got passed, not any bad legislation, etiological legislation got passed in my time. And so in that regard, it's been pretty much the same throughout. I have lived through a little bit of a transition. When I started in 2005, the legislature was 50/50 out of the house anyway, where I was and it was a perfect training ground for a punk legislator coming in, greenhorn. I'm thinking you had to work across the aisle. Every bill required a vote from both parties, any bill that passed. So I thought that's the way it worked. You had to work with the other side. I also was mentored by the Butte guys and gals, Debbie and Judy. They taught me how to work with the other side. They said, "Hey, don't, don't shy away from that."

The most effective legislators worked both sides of the aisle. So I came in with that mentality. And then 50/50 and then again, in 2009 it was 50/50. But in 2007, it was four 50, 49 to one. And it was like night and day to the 50/50, because the 50 Republicans thought that they were lording over the 49 Democrats. But somehow because of that one vote, they could do whatever they wanted. They stacked the committees, you know, with two, three and four more than we had. It was ridiculous. And then in 2010, the Tea Party Revolution occurred. And 2011, it was 68 to 32 and there was a good half of the 68 in the house who had no interest in passing any bills. They hated government. They wanted to eliminate government. They came in with the notion as a legislator, their goals were to eliminate government, get them out of our lives. You know, all these one liners they had used in their campaigns. And so the acrimony and attitude was really something that I almost didn't bother to run for the Senate in 2012 because I didn't want any part of it, but I did. And then over the course of my Senate career, 13 was almost as bad as 11, very acrimonious. And then we've kind of rebuilt 15, 17, and then just this year, I think that we got along quite well.

The real irony is the president of the Senate, Scott Sales, was my absolute nemesis in 2007. He was the speaker of the house in 2007 when he was 50/49, and one, a constitutionalist who voted with the Republicans more often than not. And I despised him to no end. I thought he was just

ridiculous. And then it turned out in both 17 and 19. He was the president of the Senate and I was the minority leader and I had to deal with them every day. And we actually came closer to being like-minded and trying to get things done. Of course, he was way more conservative and we had different conceptions of what to spend money on and how to pass a balanced budget, but we had to work together and we did. And so I think I've lived through the worst of times in 11 and 13 to get the legislature back to a more working together type of institution. Brought back the decorum and the respect that it deserves.

But at the same time, we have not done enough on the dark money. We haven't done enough about the insidious nature of money in politics. And it permeates Montana too. I mean, it's much more of a national issue, a national politics. And, you know, when there's 50, \$60 million being spent on the Senate race out of Montana and hundreds of millions of dollars on Senate races in the bigger States, there's something wrong with that.

So I'm getting out, I think at the right time for me, because I'm very concerned about the adverse impact of money in politics. And I don't have the stomach for it. And that's something that I hope maybe to work on. Term limits, for example, I think it will be a lot easier for me to work on term limits and maybe change in the public's mind about term limits, not being an elected official than being an elected official. Same with the money thing. Maybe working in the direction of how to improve the system, get money out.

Maybe through some constitutional amendments and stuff. And speaking parochially with respect to the democratic party, I think that we've come a long way. I think in Montana, we're in a lot better shape than we might be nationally. We're pretty willing to . . . and I think that Governor Bullock's trying to convey this message in his presidential campaign is we work with people in Montana. We'd like to put down the labels of Democrats and Republicans and say, you know, we're elected officials to try to do good work for our citizens. I think it really is true in Montana. I've made a lot of really strong relationships with Republicans who have wanted to work with me to get things done. And still, you know, sustain our progressive values and our convictions to make the world a better place and do good things. I think that that's possible. It's been interesting.

But I got to say that I have been somewhat insulated from the downside of elective politics because, you know, the citizens, my constituents have been so supportive and sending me back, I only had to run twice. I mean, I only had a sort of an opponent, you know, my initial primary in 2004 and then when I ran into the Senate, I had a formidable candidate that ran against me as a Republican. And other than that, you know, 16 years, really two contested races and people sending me back by acclamation really. So I have not had to deal with some of the things that are kind of bad about elected office.

You know, I think we got to move towards a system where . . . first of all, I think that the campaign should be less time. I think you should, if you're running for a legislature and the filing deadline is March 11th for the primary, I don't think there should be any campaigning before then. And then, you know, April, May and then a June election, that's it. And then for the general, I guess you could campaign, but the summer should be off. And then you should just do September and October. For starters, I think there just should be limits. And I think there should be caps on the amount of money that you can raise and spend in an election. And it should be

sufficient to communicate with your constituents, maybe a couple of times by mail and a few ads. You would set some bar and that's it. And maybe that would help. Maybe I'm being Pollyanna about the thing, but something's got to change. Otherwise, people are going to buy . . . I mean, I think we've seen it a little bit in Montana where, you know, they think Montana's for sale and they can come in and buy an election here. And that's not good. That's not good for the body politic. And I hope we can do something about that.

[01:41:50]

**Grant:** Well, I have plenty more questions. We could talk all day, but we're coming up on noon. I just wanted to ask you one more. You know, part of Butte's allure obviously is its history and architecture. And I was curious if you have any favorite aspect of Butte history or a favorite anecdote from way back in the day, you know, is there some aspect of Butte history that you love most?

**Sesso:** Well, I like the pride in where we've come from. I never get tired of the stories of where Butte was in the history of the development of the West. Certainly, the role of copper in the World Wars and the electrification of America, but I'm enamored with the stories about Butte and the development of the West. You know, I don't know if you guys ever watched that show Deadwood. And, of course, that was in South Dakota and the references on occasion that they would make to Butte about the Motherlode and the activity going on in Butte. And the role it was playing in the development of the West. Of course, it's manifested in these magnificent buildings in the historic district. But the stories of the labor. The development of the labor movement in the United States, a lot of which started right here in Butte, Montana, and how much good those labor unions have done for people. The blue-collar people working hard in all different areas - mining and manufacturing, et cetera. So to understand that, and to know how much of American history, primarily through the labor, that Butte's role was, is what comes to my mind. And also the far reaching impact of people who started in Butte.

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I've been fortunate enough to take a lot of trips in the United States and even in foreign countries and, you know, there's always something. You either run into somebody from Butte or has been in Butte or has family in Butte or knows somebody who invented something that had far reaching impact. It's incredible how well, to me, the reaches of the citizens of this town from the days of the Copper Kings, 120 years ago to right up through the present. The most recent, which is our friend, Eric Jacobson, who was on the job here in Butte on superfund work and he ends up being the guy who fixed the Deep Water Horizon problem, you know, and took care of that after that tragedy occurred. It just doesn't end. And, I am proud of having spent my time here. It's been a great 40 years and I hope to have a couple more decades anyway. And I guess, it's been that, Clark.

**Grant:** Well, thank you.

**Sesso:** I don't really have a hard stop if you wanted to ask a few more questions.

**Jaap:** I kind of have just something that I've been thinking about throughout the whole thing. So, you've talked about all the Superfund work that's been done, and then you also talked about how slow moving it is and then this stigma of superfund. Do you think the general public is aware of all the work that's been done? And do you think that's part of a stigma? Is there just not . . . you know, to hear you talking about it, there's just been a huge amount of work done. Do you think everyone knows how much work has been done?

**Sesso:** No, I don't. There are certain citizens that have never been on the hill in Butte, not when it was an ugly mess and not now. It's pretty much been environmentally reclaimed. It's not front and center in terms of in the minds of all of our citizens. If you live on the hill and you live right next to an area that's been reclaimed. But other than, you know, going to the Folk Festival at the Original and maybe going and having a family picnic or something up at Foreman's Park, I think that the Granite Mountain Memorial gets its share of review.

I mean, people go up there, but I would venture to guess that there's probably, you know, 20, 30, 40% of the citizenry never been to the Granite Mountain Memorial. Never been to Foreman's Park. I think that even though there probably is a certain percentage of folks that are skeptical of government and what's going on, there's also a big chunk of folks that are pretty satisfied. Well, you know, they trust what's going on. The local government's doing their job. The areas are getting cleaned up. They believe in the statistic. When they're told that things are improved. They agree with it. They don't need to see it to believe it. But the answer to your question is no. The fact that it's taken 30 years, I mean, some people here never saw it when it was ugly and environmentally hazardous. They were born in the nineties, you know? And so all they've seen is the place as it's been getting cleaned up. So they have a lack of understanding and say, "Well, hasn't it always been that way?" I mean, it looks pretty natural the way it is. And we don't want to truck out the photos of how it used to look, you know, just to make sure you understand.

I will say this, we are not good, government in general. Me personally, in particular, I have not been very good about promoting what's been done. Making sure people see it or "have you seen this, are you sure? Have you seen that?" You gotta get into kind of a little public relations mode to declare something is complete or done, and we don't do that very good. We just go on to the next task. We go onto the next project and we don't ensure that the citizenry and the citizenry in general takes note of what's been done. And I think that's probably a little bit of a problem because you should stop and explain that things are way better, but you just don't, you figure it's not your task. Your task is to get the job done. Now that it's done, you go onto the next job. You don't, you know, you just don't worry about it. And to an extent, then the public really never bothers. They're busy, you know, they got their own lives, they're doing their own thing. They're working hard at what they're doing.

And so they didn't have time to . . . Yeah, yeah, that's great. When we had the opening of the Stoddard park, as just an example. You got to do more of that, but you know, a sort of a ribbon cutting of a reclamation project.

**Grant:** Stormwater retention pond.

**Sesso:** Oh, check it out. We got a new pond here! What does it do? You just don't do that with a lot of the environmental stuff, as much as you do with a park or a new building or a new business, et cetera. So kind of out of sight, out of mind, to a certain extent, and, you know, I guess you're left with . . . It's been cool to have the Folk Festival, because that has really shined a light on the hill each summer. And so that's good. Everybody comes up and they enjoy the folk festival and have fun. And I think when they're there enjoying the show they get a sense of pride in the uptown district and then in the mine yards. And some of that carries over to a recognition about how good it actually is. But in general, people are living their lives. They don't have time to pay attention.

**Grant:** Would you mind sharing a bit about the process behind the end land use policy for Superfund sites and to that end, are we ever going to see fences removed at the mine yard?

**Sesso:** Well, first of all, on the end-land use idea. We found out early . . . it was three things . . . Environmental, the end land use, and, in our case, historic preservation piece because so much of the environmental cleanup was gonna affect some of our precious historic resources. And so we didn't want environmental cleanup to always trump historic.

So we wrote this plan, the regional historic preservation plan that tried to have equal respect between the economic land use piece, the historic preservation piece and the environmental piece. And so we worked on that in the early 1990s. And as I mentioned earlier, our mantra has been, okay, it's one thing to make sure that that area now is environmentally safe. But if that means we can't use it, we failed. That's no good. I mean, to not be able to use Foreman's Park and the Mountain Con area for fun things, you know, would have been a disaster. There are acres and acres of use. Now that's a good example. For the most part, there is no fence.

**Grant:** The Original. The Anselmo.

**Sesso:** And in those cases, they're kind of left over from the way it was. Because they were, you know, they were active mines and they built those fences around them. So those fences weren't necessarily built to restrict access to the reclaimed area. They were just there. Now the most recent one we did was the Lexington and you'll find that it is a little more open. And we do have a four-foot . . . it's not a security fence . . . it's a four-foot fence, mostly to just demark what the recreational area is from the natural area. But more importantly, the land use piece has been very important to us and whether it's the reuse of the Original, and now the Steward from an historic tours campaign.

The Anselmo, the mine yards proper, they're still fenced primarily for security. I mean, we have had some serious problems with vandalism and scavengers of the copper in the buildings. I mean, I can't tell you how many times we have caught people, you know, just stripping wires out and grabbing the copper for its salvage value. And so there's still going to be some of that to protect some of the built infrastructure. But it's my hope that the open spaces . . . it's like what we did on Big Butte. On the big M, we built the jackleg fence mostly to change the culture, because of the guys on the motorbikes and who were sort of going up the hill and having their way with the landscape. And in order to sorta kind of tell them, "Hey, no, this is a sort of an open space area. We want to keep this non-motorized." We didn't want to put up a chain link fence and make it look like a security thing. But yeah, we had to have some sense of what areas were motorized,

what areas weren't motorized. But more importantly, the land use piece. I think we're very proud of that in Butte, because in the beginning EPA resisted it. Their idea was, "We have no role in the land use. That's on you. You gotta work that out with Arco if you want to. But EPA has got no role in that." And we changed that. We said, listen, we've got to pick the remedy that we're going to implement based as much about how we're going to use that property long into the future.

As much as we're going to clean the environment or protect human health and the environment. We've got to have that end use in mind as we pick the remedial action we're going to implement. That's the only thing that's going to work because in Butte, the neighborhoods we're right next to the areas that we were reclaiming. It's not like the mine here is on the outskirts of town and, you know, you can reclaim the mine and you could do it however you want to. Or a typical mine in the middle of a thousand acres that's you know, five miles away from any residential area. You don't have to think so much about reuse and land use, but when the reclamation activities are interwoven and integrated with your residential areas in your community, you gotta have end-land use in mind.

So we have, you know, whether it's the Missoula ball fields or the Alice knob walking trail or the Granite Mountain Memorial interpretive area and the Foreman's Park and even the Chamber Building and the Blacktail trail, the BA&P trail, the Copper Mountain Park, Skyline park, Big Butte. If it's got environmental reclamation or restoration associated with it, I think we've done well to make sure that the community came out with a beneficial end land use that provides an asset for our community. And it's been front and center, at least in our time, since 91. And finally EPA started coming around and then the benefits of the restoration lawsuit, where we were able to get restoration dollars to sort of enhance the end land use piece. Even there, we had to fight with the NRD program back in the late nineties, early two thousands in getting them to recognize that beneficial end-land use is as important a goal as the restoration of the natural resource. You know, getting them to give us some money for rebuilding Thompson Park. And they say, "Well, what does that have to do with natural resources?"

Well, it is replacing the lost recreational resources we had in town by having this park there, same with Skyline, same with Big Butte. So our ability to sort of parlay the restoration program with the remedial program has also contributed to some really impressive end land use strategies that I think have turned out really well for the community.

**Grant:** Thank you for that work. I want to ask you another question related to planning. I found a report while looking through some archival documents. I think it was from the late seventies, early eighties called RUDAT where a group of architects and engineers, and economists came to Butte at the behest of the local government to give a report on what is Butte to do, knowing that the mines were declining and the urban core was deteriorating.

So one of the engineers on this report noted even then that there was what he called American commercialism at its rampant worst developing to the South. And I've heard commissioners in the recent past insist that we develop South of Walmart. Do you as a former planner director see that as a priority, or is there a debate in the local government here about where development should focus?

**Sesso:** No, I haven't shared that goal as a matter of fact, I think that the city fathers back in the seventies did, this is a little bit before my time, did well to resist, you know, the main recommendation of the study was to make the corner of Elizabeth Warren and Harrison Avenue, the new center of town. I think it was driven by the property owners who had acquired the land in that area. It was also driven to a certain extent because this was before, of course, the pit closing in the late seventies.

There was another plan to expand the pit. And it would envelop a good portion of the uptown district and it sorta would go from the Berkeley sort of northwesterly up towards the Ryan Mine and the Big M. And the company started buying properties, and you can see where there's houses that used to be there that are no longer there. They'd buy them and they'd remove the houses. And they basically started down this plan to, you know, basically take the corridor of the Kelley, the Con, the Steward, the Original, the Anselmo and take that swath because they felt that there was a lot of ore that was left behind on the underground mining in that area.

[02:03:51]

And yeah, that was the recommendation of the RUDAT. And they said, "No." I think the community did well. I think we benefited greatly by the fact that the historic landmark district had been established and that the importance of these buildings sort of led to the resistance to not let that plan go in place.

From a planning perspective the challenge has been infrastructure. The infrastructure is up here, the roads, the water, and the sewer system. And we have made infill development the hallmark of our, at least on my watch, the 86, the 96 and the 2006, and now the most recent one, the 2018, master plan growth policy, that infill development is where it's at. We have, as a community, significant infrastructure to serve more people in the urban core that we have. And to go out is just an expensive endeavor. We studied, you know, the extension of the sewer system going South. And it's very, very expensive. And when we went to the citizens and told them, "Hey, if you want to develop this, guess who's going to have to pay for the development of the water and sewer system?"

And all these people that were on wells and septic systems said, "Well, not us, we don't want any part of it." And so it's one thing to think that's a good idea. It's another thing to pay for it. And so I've always believed that infill development . . . back to our point that about maybe 45, 50,000 people would be sort of the perfect amount of citizens, I think, of population here. I think there's enough room for that kind of growth within the urban core. With some fairly cost-effective extensions, you know, down on the East side of Timber Butte, there's a good bit of room for development. And there's some to the West that could grow up if we wanted to accommodate within a reasonable extension of the water and sewer system.

But you know, then we got some issues out there and even with the wells, you know, we went through a period here because of the, what's called, the Nondegradation Law of Groundwater. It's tough building subdivisions in the South side based on water and wells and septic because of the high nutrients in the soils. And so, you know, that system that was built in Homestake Meadows, where they built a packaged sanitary sewer system that serves the 50 lots in that subdivision. It



maybe has some promise because then you can drill more wells and not worry about them being polluted with the septic sanitary.

The thing that distinguishes Butte, from a land use policy perspective, is the uptown. I mean, once you get below, certainly the interstate, if not Grand Avenue, you could shut your eyes and be in any town in America. But once you get up above Front Street, you know where you are. And Butte is one of a kind, and we would do well to continue to focus on preserving the buildings we have here, particularly this urban core here in the historic district. And to infill with in-character types of housing that sort of matches what we've got.

So I never been a “develop the flats” kind of guy because anybody can do that in terms of building a town. But this uptown is the jewel.

**Grant:** Hmm. Well, I share that perspective. Thank you, Jon. Yeah, I think that does it for my list here.

**Jaap:** Yeah, I think we, I think we'll let you go.

**Sesso:** Okay. Well, thank you very much for asking me to do this.

**Jaap:** And thank you for all the work you have done. Really. Like you are naming all those parks and all those improvements. And I know there are things me and my family use all the time. I mean, really, it is when you talk about it, you know, I'm down on the flat, but Skyline Park is right by my house. So I walk my dog there all the time. And there are things that are used just all the time that do have a real, tangible impact on our community.

**Sesso:** Yeah, I think we've really, we've really done well again, starting with the water system and essentially the complete reconstruction of it and combined with, you know, I think we did a little bit of an investigation a few years back and, you know, park space and open space per capita. I mean, we're top 10 in the country, you know, I mean, we got it going on here between the trails and then what they're doing with the Butte 100 and the trail system on the Continental Divide.

I mean, it doesn't really get any better than this. And it's time for us to take stock of how cool this community is and have repeated news stories about what a really great place to be. And I'm looking forward to getting some of these decisions made and then we'll see. 20 years from now, we'll do it again. You guys will be running the show. We'll take it from there.

**Jaap:** Thank you, Jon.

[END OF RECORDING]