Background about how the URC was set up and how he came to be a member. Setting up procedures for acquiring property and areas in which purchases were made. Conditions of neighborhood quite deteriorated. Primary problem for the city was acquiring the property. Redevelopment Authority eventually set up for acquisition purposes. Population decline in the Old Third Ward. First secretary of URC was Willard Downing; budget of less than $5000 and 15 people on the committee.

Mayor appointed the committee to begin with; role of Housing Authority in studying (1966-7) the Third Ward to determine what to do there. URC began to put together guidelines of what had to be done before anything else could be undertaken legally. Redevelopment Authority was then put together. Mixed feelings in the Lower Third Ward about redeveloping the area. City had closed some facilities in the area already. People outside of the ward were not afraid of redeveloping the area. Alexander Haas (from the area) was supportive and helpful. Black population not an issue until later; population very small until after WWII. Big question was how to pay for the project. Federal money provided the start. Housing Authority did almost nothing; no real concept of urban renewal. Had to learn the law as they went because the idea was so new.

Public housing issue not directly related to redevelopment. Georgia Bockl was largest owner of inner core residential units in Milwaukee. No room for new people coming in during the war, which was a big contributor to the housing problem. Sixth Ward was the first one to decline in population after the war. Zeidler more interested in residential housing than redeveloping the Third Ward (which was too close to downtown for housing). Ethnic divisions/neighborhoods and related changes in the city. Development of UWM helped increase property value along North Avenue and in the surrounding area.

Zeidler concerned about redevelopment displacing people; supported public housing because he did not want people to have to leave their homes. Milwaukee had a good neighborhood public school system; "shifting" idea came into play when more minorities moved into the city. People began to move to the suburbs and neighborhood schools could no longer maintain their facilities and didn't have enough students. Bitker spent about a year on the Housing Authority; had a hard time because Dick Perrin didn't have much of a feel for redevelopment. Bitker suggested taking houses that the city had foreclosed on, renovating them, and letting people live in them like normal citizens. Perrin didn't like the idea; high rises were easier to service and the city would have no control over scattered sites. Chair of Housing Authority was Reverend Fisher; he and other board members went along with whatever Perrin wanted.

Blacks moved into the Hillside Project; manager was also black and he would ask the board for help because the situation was difficult to handle (blacks from the South had always avoided the police, didn't have indoor plumbing, drunkenness rampant, kids running around all the time). Race issue became important to redevelopment and public housing issues. North-south division of the city ended up as a racial divider also; blacks' economic conditions and areas in which they shopped and lived (3rd and North area). When blacks left the area moved southwest and northwest, whites of a lower economic status moved in.

Bill Jahn was chair of Inland Steel Products and Bitker convinced him to take the chair of the Redevelopment Authority. Succeeded by Bill Coakley; Coakley and Bitker decided to forget about the south side and concentrate on the east side. They had many problems getting things done.
Assessment of Zeidler's years as mayor. Weakness was that he "considered anyone who had $1000 suspect." He was a good administrator and avoided overly political situations because he just wanted to do his job. Blikr thinks Zeidler would have been re-elected if he had run for a fourth term. Property values in the downtown area changing over the years and potential for redeveloping depreciated property in general (law- Judge Robert Tedhan) (end tape 1, side 1)

Story about trying to get the Common Council to go along with a proposed state law regarding property acquisition; new office building put in under that law was the first development in the downtown area in 40 years. Zeidler was not a man to make deals and to engage in politics with the Council; he went by the book and the deals he made were minor. Disagreed with the Council over appointments. Redevelopment Authority concerned about the legal end of operations and people going to court. Dick Pentin was a good man but he epitomized mediocrity. Pentin was mostly interested in building housing and managing it; focused on the technical side of things.

Closet in Milwaukee was with the Common Council (1940s-50s-60s), which had control over funds and decisions that the Redevelopment Authority could make. Haas was powerful on the Council. Businessmen not unhappy with Zeidler at all; he wasn't trying to raise taxes for some unneeded project. Zeidler was in favor of public transportation. When first in office, he was busy with annexation which created problems with water, police, schools, etc. Properties demolished but pipe/steamers left; problems for people wanting to build on the land.

Labor unions in Milwaukee were strong. Helped clean up the city and people began to respect government more (Dan Hoan's administration). [stories about getting rid of mounted police, LaFolloutes losing their appeal, WWI, his brother Bruno, McCarthy getting elected].

GMC very influential in the forties. Committee of 25 created to generate ideas; another group called the Forty Eight Corporation headed by Fitzgerald which raised the money. GMC eventually emerged from these groups; GMC decided it would have projects. Studied transportation, enlarged membership and collected dues. Problems with annexation gave rise to new areas of development and jobs also. GMC not self-interested, just wanted to make Milwaukee better.

Library and museum buildings. Original locations. Federal money appropriated for postwar projects around the country; Dick Krug (librarian in Milwaukee) got over $100,000 in grant money to remove the museum and extend the library to Wells Street. GMC helped separate the library and museum. Stories about getting things going with the museum and the library. There was resistance to expanding the library because it would cost money; Common Council didn't want to spend the money. [stories about giving the committee a tour and convincing them to spend the money for the library, donation of the building that housed the Calumet Club to the city, operations of the Wisconsin Club]

Discussion of Henry Maier. [stories about getting insurance for Henry after the war, Henry living in Bob Tebben's mother's house to qualify for elections in a particular district]. Henry was a bully and wanted to control all of his appointees; always had to be "number one." Henry Reuss was the only real competition Maier ever had. Business community in Milwaukee supported Maier. (end tape 1, side 2)

Heritage Bank story. Henry was not a good guy; took credit for some things that he did not plan out. Maier's turned around the strong Council-weak mayor system. Got some key appointees in, won over several important aldermen (Whitlow), did a lot of horse trading, etc. Milwaukee is and has been very clean politically, due mostly to the leadership of Dan Hoan and Frank Zeidler. Problems now that the clacks have taken over a third of the community, Milwaukee should cut bussing and go back to neighborhood schools; put kids into CCC camps. [story about Marquette Redevelopment Project]