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| Metadata Field | Description | Data Entry |
| Title | Title of Document | Sheila\_Hill\_With\_Marion\_Smith\_120822 Complete |
| Accession Number | Catalogue Number of the File | (Administrator Only) |
| Interviewee | Name of Interviewee (SURNAME, given name(s), middle initial) | Marion Smith |
| Interviewer | Name of Interviewer (Surname, given name(s), middle initial) | Sheila Hill |
| Interview Date | YYYY/MM/DD | 2022/12/08 |
| Interview Date (non-preferred format) | E.g. November 13, 2014 or MM/DD/YY | December 08, 2022 |
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| Series |  | (Administrator Only) |
| Summary | Brief summary of the interview session (Copy and paste from Form 13 – Session Summary) | Marion Smith begins by reviewing how her family moved to the Lower Mainland / Richmond, BC. She talks about how she got involved in activism to preserve the rural lands of Terra Nova. This involved getting signatures for petitions, raising public awareness, and fundraising for legal action. Marion moves on to discuss the factors she believes led to her success in preserving the Terra Nova lands for future generations, and ends the interview by reflecting on her accomplishments and what she’d like to see for the future of Terra Nova. |
| Keywords | Keywords indicating interview subjects (Copy and Paste from “Keyword” section of Form 12 Interview Summary.) | Riverdale, Terra Nova, Agricultural Land Reserve, Lum Family, Agriculture, Farming, Court, Trial, Fundraising, Provincial Cabinet, City Council, Activism, Petition, University of Toronto, Mainframe Computer, Riverport Business Park, Aquatic Centre, RIVA (Richmond Independent Voters Association), Save Richmond Farmland Society (SRFS), Heritage, Habitat. |
| Subject | Subject headings applicable to the Interview. The OHC uses Library of Congress Subject Headings. | Riverdale, Terra Nova, Agricultural Land Reserve, Agriculture, Farming, Court, Trial, Fundraising, Provincial Cabinet, City Council, Activism. |
| Duration | Length of Interview Session (if applicable) hh:mm:ss | 00:32:42 |
| Interview # | Number of the interview (interviewees according to date) |  |
| Session # | Session # of the recording (X of all interviews in the session) |  |
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| Media Type | Audio or Video | Audio |
| Restriction Type | Open (Open access)  Restricted (Interview has some restrictions detailed below in “Restrictions”)  Closed (Closed/No Access) | Open [[1]](#footnote-1) |
| Restrictions | Details regarding any restrictions on the file’s use (as outlined in Form 6 –Consent) | N/A |
| Rights | Release Information regarding copyright and access through the repository (as outlined in the Release Agreement) | All rights given to the interviewer (Sheila Hill) and the Oral History Centre |
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| Type | Document Type. E.g.: Oral History Interview, Conference Proceedings, Presentation, Sharing Circle, etc. | Oral History Interview |
| Repository | Location where the project/collection will be stored. | The Oral History Centre |

**Transcription Legend:**

. . . = Ellipses used to indicate where an interviewee does not complete a thought.

[?] = Used to indicate indecipherable words or unknown spelling of words.

START OF TAPE PART ONE OF ONE

[00:00:47]

SHEILA

I’d like to ask if you could tell us a bit about your family and how you ended up living in Richmond.

MARION

Well, it was an accident, really. My husband’s company moved us down here. We were both down here in December of 1972 at the end of the year meeting with the company. They told us we were moving to Vancouver. We had just built a new house, so we had a weekend to find something down here that suited us. We knew the floorplan [we wanted] and we knew how much money we had in a brand new mortgage. So, we went looking and we found a place and bought it, just days before the agricultural land reserve actually came into being. That’s how we ended up here. I had never intended to live in the Lower Mainland.

SHEILA

When you say here, did you live in the Terra Nova neighbourhood? Is that where you moved, or. . .

MARION

No, no. We were actually in Riverdale. In what was called then, New Riverdale. It’s just to the east of Terra Nova.

SHEILA

Thank you. Can you describe how you got interested in Terra Nova, what the time period was?

MARION

This was in the 1980s. I had seen something in the newspaper about public hearings to take Terra Nova out of the land reserve. I knew what the land reserve was and I was familiar with Terra Nova to a certain extent. So, I went to one of the hearings and came home that night and I said to my husband, “People don’t know this is going on. We have to let people know in our area.” So we made up a flyer and we called around and asked people who we knew – we didn’t know very many people in those days – if they would take the flyer around our neighbourhood, and they did. Then, I think a week later… was the next meeting.

SHEILA

Had you been involved in this kind of activism before?

MARION

No, not at all. Not really. It was just something that struck me at the time. Terra Nova was a very rural area at that time; part of it was farm. There was a nut farm, which is still there. The trees are still there. There was an equestrian facility where kids would go and ride horses. We would see them riding horses in our neighbourhood. The Lum family had a big area that they were farming there. They had a little market on Westminster Highway, west of Number One Road. We’d buy vegetables there. I just knew it was a good agricultural area. It was only later on that we’d found out that it had been farmed since the 1880s. For one hundred years, it had been farmed. It’s a very fertile area. It has good soils. It has an excellent climate compared to the rest of Canada and it has ample water. So, it has the three things that you need for good agriculture.

SHEILA

So, you decided it was worth saving. You knew that and you started this process of letting people know. And then can you tell us what happened?

MARION

I think it was the last meeting of the hearings to take Terra Nova out of the land reserve – I spoke at that, briefly, to give them my opinion. Before I went to hand in my notes I asked for a show of hands for the people who thought Terra Nova should be saved and, because of where I was sitting, I didn’t see because everybody behind me. But I went to hand in my notes and one of the alderman leaned over and he said you lost in the show of hands. I believed him and that was the end of that. I found out later that almost every hand in the house was up. So, he had lied to me, basically. That’s where it started. Oh, then a friend of mine who lived on Number One Road, right across from Terra Nova, she said there was a woman who had a petition on the dike. Her family lived in Terra Nova – that was Pat Montgomery. So, Pat and I got together and we took the petition to the next city meeting. We waited for people as they came out the door and asked them to sign the petition to save Terra Nova. That’s how that whole thing started with Pat and me. We ended up with something around 7,000 to 8,000 names on that petition, which was sent to the provincial government. They ignored it.

SHEILA

What was your next tactic?

MARION

Well, at the point when where we were still in those first meetings, we decided that we needed to challenge the removal of Terra Nova from the Agricultural Land Reserve. That [task] needed to be done through the provincial cabinet; they were the ones who would do that. They had pulled it out of the reserve and, so, we had to go to court to challenge it [to get them to put it back in]. We needed to raise some money, of course, for legal fees. That’s when we started fundraising. We started off with selling shopping bags, fabric shopping bags, t-shirts, and sweatshirts. Then, a local printer gave us one thousand “Save Terra Nova” bumper stickers, which was quite a surprise! Then, somebody else came up with “Save Terra Nova” buttons to wear. We were fundraising as much as we could because we were in and out of court a number of times and, in the meantime, still trying to convince the city council of the day that Terra Nova should be saved.

SHEILA

How did that unfold? When you say “we were in and out of court,” was that left in the hands of lawyers or . . .

MARION

Oh, yes, you had to have a lawyer. First of all, our lawyers went to court to challenge the removal of Terra Nova from the land reserve, and we won. So, [Terra Nova] came out, and then went back into the reserve. But then the provincial cabinet took it out again. I don’t recall exactly what happened after that, but I know that there were a number of legal actions that would try to grind us down -- to try to basically bankrupt us. So, we just kept on fundraising.

One of the things that we did was to inform people, trying to get the word out, about Terra Nova so that people understood what was going on. We had what we called the dike table which was at the end of Westminster Highway at the West Dike. We would set up a signboard and stopped people as they walked by – people walked along the dike like they do now – and informed them about what Terra Nova was and the value of saving it and so on.

We actually were a little bit ahead of the game in those days because my husband had worked on computers, mainframe computers, at the University of Toronto in the ‘50s and ‘60s. So, he had a home computer. This was before most people had a computer. We realized that we needed to be able to produce materials quickly. So, he built me a computer and then I could make up flyers which gave information and then had a request for funding and help. So, we could produce flyers, we could produce news releases, and get them to the local papers and so on. We had that communications ability very early on. That helped a lot because we could get our story out. We could inform people and get them on our side, and let them know what was going on.

SHEILA

And you felt very well supported by the community?

MARION  
Yes, we did. We were well supported. I took the petition door to door in our neighbourhood. Ninety-one percent of the people would sign it and would say yes. The only people who wouldn’t sign it were people who thought they might personally benefit from development. People who were either in the real estate business or the construction business. They were the only people who wouldn’t sign it.

SHEILA

How many of you were involved in this?

MARION

Oh, gee, it’s hard to say. There were groups that would work on some things, but it was probably eight to a dozen people who would run the dike table. There were a lot of people who would take the flyers door to door. All I had to do was phone somebody up – complete strangers! – and say “Would you take 200 flyers and deliver them in your neighbourhood?” and people would say “yes.” You have to realize, this was before the Internet, before social media. In those days, you would either phone somebody or you wrote them a letter, or you sent them a telegram. You couldn’t just spread the word like you do now.

I think, so many people were supportive of [this cause]. At first, of course, anybody who lived down Number One Road, anybody who lived on the west side, knew where Terra Nova was and they had seen Terra Nova. You knew it was a rural area. You knew it was a big farm. So, it wasn’t hard to convince people that this was a good thing.

SHEILA

I think we’ve talked about it being developed but what exactly were they planning to build on Terra Nova?

MARION  
It was going to be a high-end subdivision. There were going to be rules about what you could plant in your front yard. I forget the details, but it was houses that were well out of the range of the average person.

SHEILA  
Was there a lot of space put aside for parks or preserving any of that land, or was it going to be a pretty well-developed subdivision?

MARION

Well, they did have a little park land. I think there always has been a rule in Richmond that you have to have a certain amount of park land for the housing that you have. At one point, one of the developers said that there was going to be a park all the way around the length of the north side along the North Arm Dike, and then on the west side, a twenty-foot park. Well, that’s basically filling in the ditch. That’s not a park. But, yes, there was supposed to be park in there spread around in the area. That’s when the Richmond Civic [New] Democrats were in power. They started to assemble those lands toward the dike, north of the golf course, and that is now the Terra Nova Natural Area. They also did some land swapping with the developers as well. So, by 1996 there was an area, what we called the northwest quadrant – north of Westminster Highway and west of the houses that are built there now – that was still undeveloped. That’s about a quarter of the land that we started with. It was originally about 400 acres. That is the land that, in the 1996 election, showed up as a referendum question.

SHEILA

Can you read the referendum question for us on the ballot from November 16th, 1996.

MARION

Yes, and it says, “Do you assent to City Council having the authority to adopt by-law number 6656 which would authorize the borrowing of the sum of money not to exceed TWENTY EIGHT MILLION, FIVE HUNDRED AND THIRTY EIGHT THOUSAND, FIVE HUNDRED (**$28,538,500)** DOLLARS to acquire lands in section four, lot four, North Range, Seven West, more commonly known as the northwest portion of Terra Nova for public purposes including but not limited to recreation, wildlife habitat protection, open space, diking, trails, and ancillary buildings and facilities.” And then you marked it yes or no.

SHEILA

And you had an observation before we started this interview about how this question, number three, was phrased.

MARION  
There were three referendum questions. Question one was about extending the lease for the rinks at Riverport Business Park. Question two was about extending a lease with the Aquatic Centre on Steveston Highway. Those were just yes / no’s. Question three, which was the Terra Nova question, spelled out in ALL capital letters the $28.5 million price tag. The first two questions had no price tags attached, although they were for multiyear leases. So, they would have been multimillion dollar leases, each one of them. But the Terra Nova question was burdened with this terrible price. $28.5 million was a lot of money in those days. You have to remember people did vote for this. Many people were quite invested in this because they had bought t-shirts and sweaters and shopping bags. They had given us cash donations. At one point we were getting $400 a day in cash donations coming through our mail slot. People had already put money towards this. So, it wasn’t that much of a move forward, I think, for a lot of people to think, “Okay, I’ve already put some money into saving Terra Nova. I’m going to just finish it off now and say yes.”

SHEILA

How many years was this campaign that you waged?

MARION

We started in 1986. It kind of died down after about 1993 when RIVA, the Richmond Independent Voters Association, got elected. Things were quiet and then all of a sudden when the new election came up for ’96, here were the new questions on the ballot. It was a surprise, because we had been asking for it for years – “give us a referendum question” and had been ignored. So, I think, somebody thought “Well, it’s been a long time. We haven’t heard from these people. Let’s put it on the ballot and see what happens.” I don’t know.

SHEILA

It’s interesting the way it’s come about and it sounds from, perhaps, the wording of it the result might not have been anticipated. That’s speculation of course, but . . .

MARION

Well, the first two items, the skating rink and the swimming pool, they passed by much higher margins in the range of ninety percent each. The Terra Nova one was more like sixty-one percent, I think. Somewhere in that field, about sixty. It didn’t pass with as much support but, still, it passed.

SHEILA

As you said, it also had a huge price tag on it as well. So, that’s something. What was your role in this? You talked about producing flyers and realizing the need. Were you part of a committee? Were you the driving force?

MARION

We had an organization, the Save Richmond Farmland Society which we referred to as SRFS. I was not at that meeting the day that that was decided. I was at a preschool meeting. The people who did meet, there were about a dozen people, decided that it was a good idea for us to have an organization, partly because we needed to fundraise. We knew that. As far as the day-to-day operation of the society and the decision making, that was driven a lot by what was going on with the lawyers, whether we needed more money right now. There was a lot of decision making by a few people. There weren’t big meetings all the time for votes or anything like that.

SHEILA

Who were those people? Do you know?

MARION

Well, Don Cummings was the president of the Save Richmond Farmers Society for years and years. John Roberts was also a big supporter. Our treasurer was Jan Timmer. He did an amazing job as a treasurer because he had processed all this incoming cash and sent everybody a receipt. He was very meticulous about that. We were really lucky to have him. Of course, there was Pat Montgomery. I don’t have a list of names.

SHEILA

Just wanted a few members. And you all worked together as a group and then, depending on what was going on, you had different activities?

MARION

Yes. One of the things we did was we had a big garage sale in one of the school gymnasiums. We made $5,000 which was a lot in those days. It was equivalent to what you would get when a whole school came together for a garage sale. Like I said, people were sending us cash. We sold thousands of shopping bags and hundreds of sweatshirts. It was amazing. There was one lady who would travel to Europe every year and she would come and buy a bunch of shopping bags to take with her as gifts, and she would do it year after year. It was just amazing.

SHEILA

Do you know if most of your supporters were local, from Richmond?

MARION  
Yes. There were people from Vancouver, obviously, but the real work was done in Richmond. When it came to the public hearings, that’s when we heard from people in Vancouver because we had experts. We had botanists, ornithologist; we had the people who were expert in the issues around the Terra Nova area, because it is on the Pacific Flyway. If you come through Terra Nova and stand there for a length of time, you’ll see tons of birds and Swishwash Island is just off the corner. That’s where the eagles feed in the springtime. So, there’s lots of wildlife. I’m glad we saved it because it is an important area for wildlife.

SHEILA

The Pacific Flyway, of course, is the migratory route of the birds.

MARION

Right, the migratory route from northern Canada and Alaska down. Some of them go all the way to South America.

SHEILA

Why do you think you succeeded in preserving Terra Nova for future generations?

MARION

Partly because we were given this gift of this referendum question where people could actually vote on it. Like I said, people weren’t just supporters, they’d already invested in it. They’d invested time and effort, but also they invested their own cold, hard cash either giving us a donation or buying something that was for sale, or supporting us in some way. So, when they had a chance to vote, they did.

SHEILA

When you saw that question, you saw it in advance of going to the polls? Did you?

MARION

I think it was probably published in the paper.

SHEILA  
And did you mobilize or . . .

MARION  
Yes, we did. We ramped up the dike table again and we set up a similar thing at Garry Point because there were lots of people at Garry Point who didn’t go all the way to Terra Nova. I’m sure we put out at least another flyer door-to-door to tell people what was going on. Of course, there were letters to the editor. That was just amazing, the amount of support that we had in the local papers, in the Vancouver Sun, in the Province [newspapers]. Even national magazines were carrying articles about Terra Nova.

SHEILA

And they were largely supportive?

MARION  
Yes. Nobody said to develop it.

SHEILA

And, as I shared before we started this interview, I remember hearing numerous interviews on CBC Radio about this. So, you definitely were successful with your publicizing the issue and getting your perspective out which, I’m sure, was enormously helpful in your success.

MARION  
Yes, well, it was the biggest land issue that Richmond had had up until that time. I think it’s probably still the biggest land issue that Richmond has had. We had record-breaking public hearings.

SHEILA  
How many were there? How were they record breaking?

MARION

They took place in 1988 and ’89. In 1988, it was eleven days in May and June. In ’89 and the end of ’88 – there was one night of hearings in ’88 – and then it ran into January 1989. So, for instance, in the first set of hearings, there were 184 speakers, and in the second set of hearings, 146 speakers. I have the records and they are inches thick with all of this information. It was amazing to see the professional qualifications and professional knowledge of the people who came to speak to the hearings, as well as regular people like me, who would go and say, “This is what I think.” It was just amazing.

SHEILA

Are you satisfied with how much you achieved with the Terra Nova you see today? Do you . . . You must have had a vision of what you wanted to achieve and do you think you did that?

MARION

Yes, we did. We saved it, but it is not nearly as big an area as it was before. Terra Nova in its original form was big enough that a farmer could farm it and not have to move his machinery back and forth along city roads. It was big enough as a whole, intact area for even more than one farmer to farm at a time. We ended up with about 100 acres.

We have some of the original ideas that people had. We have The Sharing Farm. We have the garden plots. We have the schoolyard gardens. Great things have been done there. People from the city who are working in Parks have been able to put forth various projects and they’ve won quite a number of awards for work at Terra Nova. So, yes, I’m pleased with what we’ve accomplished. I walk over there all the time. It makes me happy to see what we have, and to see the birds and what people are growing in the gardens. It gives me a great deal of satisfaction to know that we’ve accomplished that.

SHEILA

I’m sure it does. Now, is there anything I didn’t ask you that you would like to share?

MARION

We’ve really covered it. Except, there is a quote that I came across recently. It’s from the 2003 Terra Nova Northwest Quadrant Biophysical Inventory Assessment which is a huge name, but it sums it up. It says, “The Terra Nova Northwest Quadrant in Richmond plays a significant role in the ecology of the Greater Vancouver Region, as well as the Fraser River estuary ecosystem. The Terra Nova area is particularly important because it provides habitat diversity and serves as a backshore habitat to Sturgeon Bank. The combination of open fields, ditches, treed areas, landscaped gardens and hedgerows is rare in the City of Richmond and it provides a protective habitat for a variety of wildlife.”

SHEILA

And just one last question – what do you see in Terra Nova’s future?

MARION

I don’t know. In 1996 I think, we gave the city a document called “Investing in Our Future: A City Park in Terra Nova.” We had taken ideas from all over Canada and other places for what you could do there. I was told at one point that the City used it.

We saved the land. After the vote and after we knew it was saved, the City had consultation meetings with the public and said, “Okay, why did we save it and what do we want to see there?” The three things were: we saved it for agriculture, for heritage, and for habitat. So, my hope is that all the future goals, all the future projects stay true to those goals.

SHEILA

Well, thank you very much and for your wonderful activism and work to contribute to Richmond.

MARION  
Thank you.

SHEILA  
Thank you.

END OF RECORDING PART 1 OF 1

[00:32:42]

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)