



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Peter Eveleth

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Interviewer: Michael Eck
Transcriber: Claire Brindley



photo by Andrew Lightman, Hill Rag

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

[Note: some of the bracketed statements in this transcript represent edits made by the interviewee.]

ECK: Good morning. It's October 27, 2012. This is an interview of Peter Eveleth at 539 11th Street SE, which is Michael Eck's residence, that's me. Good morning, Pete.

EVELETH: Good morning, Mike.

ECK: As we start off, would you like to tell us about how you came to Capitol Hill?

EVELETH: Sure. I'd been intrigued with Washington for some time, and I was teaching at the law school at Indiana University—this would have been in 1964—and one of the professors there had previously worked at the National Labor Relations Board in Washington, and so he—since I was interested in labor law, he advised me this was a good position, so I decided to apply, and I came to Washington. And I knew Washington very little—

ECK: A position in what?

EVELETH: The position I was offered was that of an attorney at the National Labor Relations Board in the appellate court branch. That is, you argue cases before the courts of appeals throughout the country, enforcing orders of the National Labor Relations Board. And I was torn between Washington and San Francisco, because I was also interested in housing development and that sort of stuff. Well, my first acceptance came from the National Labor Relations Board, so I decided to go to Washington. A couple weeks later, I got contacted by the housing department of [correction: federal agency in] San Francisco, who said, "Where are you? You haven't responded to our offer." So it's pure happenstance—because they were pretty close interests, I think if the other one had come first I might well have gone to San Francisco and we wouldn't be having this interview now.

But in any event, I moved to Washington, and I think I stayed at the Y [YMCA] for a week because I didn't know where else to stay. And folks in my office recommended staying in Georgetown, or renting a place in Georgetown. And I looked at the ads, and they were all very expensive in Georgetown, and somebody mentioned Capitol Hill, and that looked a lot cheaper, and it looked very attractive—all the brick sidewalks, and it had this feel of a small town, and I said, "Yeah, this is it." So for \$117.50 a month in rent—that was during the summer time that the rent was that high, it went up \$2 and something in the summer for air conditioning, otherwise it was \$115 a month. I had an efficiency on the Hill.

ECK: Where was that?

EVELETH: This was at 217 Fifth Street SE, right off of Seward Square. And I loved it. The Hill was just as I imagined it would be, a nice little community, and so I decided this is where I want to live, and I've been living—not at that place, but a place that I bought after I was married in 19[69]—we bought this house on North Carolina Avenue, a block or two away from Lincoln Park, and decided to stay there. I'm still living there.

ECK: Great. Real stability.

EVELETH: Yes.

ECK: Well, the purpose of the interview is primarily to talk about Eastern Market, so do you have any general things you want to say about that, how you got involved with Eastern Market?

EVELETH: Sure. One of the attractions, I think, of Capitol Hill, is—it's always been the centerpiece of the Hill—is Eastern Market. And I used to do a lot of shopping down there when I first came to Washington. And actually the first date that I had with my [future] wife, we went down to Eastern Market and bought a steak, and went back to my place and I cooked the steak in the back yard. And I talked about Eastern Market and how much I liked it. I was also interested in local government; I had been since I was a kid in high school. We had model assemblies in the New York state legislature, and we drafted legislation, did all this stuff. And what I did—I admired lawyers because they were always involved in civic activities in my observation, and I thought, that's the kind of lawyer I want to be.

And so at one point in time, there was probably some notice posted at Eastern Market that they were creating Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, and in case you're not aware of what they are, they were created back in 1974, and they created the single member districts for ANC districts in the city by ward, so our ward is Ward 6, and our single member district was 6B06. That was my single member district number. So I decided, what the heck, this is the first time they've done this—it sounded very interesting, because the job of a commission was to give advice to the city on proposed actions the city was going to take that would affect your district, or the whole city, for that matter. And so I ran—and the city was supposed to [ed: required to] give great weight to these recommendations—so I decided, what the heck, I'll run for this.

And for some reason or another—I'm not sure whether I initiated it or Dick Wolf initiated it—he may have ... or Carol Santos, these were folks who were heavily involved in the Capitol Hill Restoration Society—and they knew that I was running for ANC, I believe there were two others, as well, and so they came over and interviewed me, because they were trying to determine who they were going to support in this election. And so apparently I said the right things because they decided to endorse me. And it was an

interesting campaign—we had posters, and we went door-to-door, and it was a very exciting time, because this was really the first time we'd had much in the way of self-government in Washington, DC, on a small level, certainly, and we were pretty new to home rule, and we didn't really have much of home rule at that time. So this was a great outlet, I think, for citizens to express their views to the government. So we proceeded along that line, and it was—we organized block by block, and so forth—so finally I was elected, and then I decided I would like to be chairman of the Economic Development Committee of ANC (we broke up into committees). And at that time we had heard that the city was going to—had a problem at Eastern Market, that is to say, the roof was leaking. So they decided that they had to replace the roof. And their plan was to evacuate all the merchants from the Eastern Market and then put on a new roof, and then the merchants would return—was the plan. But of course, that seemed unrealistic to us because we knew it would take quite a while to construct this roof, and as a result, we would probably lose the merchants, and we didn't want that to happen. And so we met with the city for countless numbers of times, and they decided—

ECK: At offices in the city?

EVELETH: Yes, this was—the director's name was Sam Staroban and he was head of what was in effect the GSA [federal agency General Services Administration] of the city of Washington, DC. So he was responsible for any buildings and grounds of the city, the city-owned properties, so he was responsible for the renovation of Eastern Market. So I don't know whether it was his idea or our idea, but what we came up with as a solution was to build a—as you know, Eastern Market is a pretty tall structure inside, and the roof is pretty high up, so what the solution was was to build, in effect, a deck on top of where the merchants were, a ceiling, in effect. And therefore they could then remove the roof, replace the roof, and then remove the ceiling, and you still have that airy atmosphere that's in the market today [without having to evict the merchants].

And so this was a long process, but when we got into it—so that solved the immediate problem of the concern over closing the market, but as we began to look into the market a little more, there were a number of problems that existed within the market—structurally ... wiring was old, there were no restrooms that were of any—they were really messed, and they really weren't available to people. It had a run-down appearance; a lot of the equipment in there was very old, and so forth and so on. And so we—and that was the south end, where the market activities were. In the north end, there was located John Harrod's operation, which was sort of an art gallery. And the question arose about what contributions were being made—what should the market be? Should it be all market? Should the arts end be enhanced? There were a number of views on that. Clearly the arts function was popular with some folks, but it really wasn't used that often, and there was some concern that people had about its operations. So at that time,

there weren't many grocery stores available on Capitol Hill. We had the Safeway across the street, which—I found out later—it was a very small Safeway, but it was the highest income [sales] per square foot for Safeway. At least that was the story I heard because I guess there weren't any other places to go, and it was convenient to central Capitol Hill, and there weren't many other things [options] available. There was an A&P store at one point on—I guess it was 11th Street, where the CVS is today.

ECK: 12th.

EVELETH: 12th Street, I'm sorry.

ECK: And E.

EVELETH: 12th and E, right. And we—a fellow by the name of Shelton decided that he was interested—George Shelton was interested in opening a market there to take over from the A&P, which had closed. So we got—our committee got involved in that to try to assist Shelton and to persuade the city to lease it to him. And that lasted for some time; he tried to open up another one on the Safeway that was located at Seventh Street NE, the one with a parking garage on the top. And I think he overexpanded and so that market—both markets closed. There was also a Safeway on ... that may have been Seventh Street SE down a couple of blocks ... I can't remember the address.

ECK: It's between E and G.

EVELETH: Yeah, that's ...

ECK: Now an LDS [Latter Day Saints] church.

EVELETH: Exactly. That was a Safeway, as well. And that was closing, or had closed. So there's a real issue about how can we have—how can the Hill be sufficiently served by grocery stores? And so we decided—our committee decided to work on this project to expand the amount of marketing activity that was going on on the Hill. What I didn't mention was after Staroban started to meet with us, we not only agreed with that direction that he was taking, but the city actually got us involved in interviewing—they must have put out an RFP, a request for proposals—we interviewed a number of architectural firms, as well, that the city had selected for consideration. And these folks put up proposed plans. And we made recommendations as to the selection of the architectural firm, and when they were selected, we continued to work with them through the various details on the market plans, and they made various changes to the plans, and so forth. So it was a very interactive process, and I guess I have to say that I was quite impressed that the city did go that far, they just didn't brush us off, but they took into account what we were recommending. And so I think the firm was Dewberry and Davis, was the principal firm [selected].

There's another firm, as well, the name of which escapes me at the moment, but I'm sure I'll remember it. Anyway, so there were very interesting plans that were drawn up. So our next step, of course, was once the plans had sort of evolved so they could be shared with the community, we had a whole series of meetings with the community. A number of them I remember were at the north hall of Eastern Market. And we were quite happy with the plans and thought this made a lot of sense.

Well, I have to say—and I don't remember exactly the order of things, but after a while, it emerged that there were some people who were disturbed by the plans. They thought, you shouldn't do these changes, because our change was to try to put—extend the grocery store [operations] throughout the market, in[to] the north hall. So [some] people were not altogether pleased with it, and they made their opinions known, and it became, after a while, a political hot potato, as you can imagine. And one of the things that I learned in this whole process is, it's easier to get a group of people to come to a meeting if they're against something than if they're for something, because the people who see something they like, they say, "Well, that's wonderful, I'm really happy they're going to do that, that's just what we need" [but they tend not to show up at those meetings]. And then there are the other people who think, "Well, what a group of philistines that we have here, trying to come in and ruin our market. You know, it needs to be preserved, not destroyed." And all this hyperbole which is created by that ... so I tried to be the—when you're—since I was chairman of the committee at that point, I tried to sort of mediate, and not be too vocal in my pushing this plan. I tried to listen to see what could be done, to see if there were some compromises we could make.

So this went on for a number of years, because as we tried to get the city to move on it, the city became more reluctant to do anything, because it was politically controversial. So at one point, the mayor [Marion Barry]—and I don't have—I've got files upon files of this stuff, and as I told you earlier, Mike, I don't—I can't recall with that number of years passing all the details on this, but there were at least two [Eastern Market] commissions that were formed at the appointment of the mayor to see if there could be some compromise worked out, and some plan developed that the mayor could then sign off on. So gradually, I think on the first commission, we came to some agreement. And then we put out our report, and once again, people who were sort of new to the scene were not pleased with that either, and I can recall some meetings—we would have meetings with our group, and I remember having a couple of meetings outside the market, it just happened to be convenient to people, at the picnic tables out there, and the people who were opposed—they came and didn't sit at our table, but they sat at a couple tables from where we were sitting, taking notes of everything that we were saying. So there's this feeling of—I don't know, I guess there was some tension there created, and in fact, it could have been [TV] Channel 4, one of the local channels, did a spot on television about the "Very Civil Wars on Capitol Hill" over Eastern Market. It

[was called] something like that. So that was sort of the nature of things at that point, and it took a long time to get anything going. And I think I'd spent—I think I was on the ANC for ten years. I was chairman [of ANC 6B] for two years during that period of time. And that—the Eastern market was—took up most of my time, my ANC time, I have to say, except when I was chair, and then I had a lot of other responsibilities, as well.

ECK: So that was '74-'84?

EVELETH: Yeah, probably so. I don't remember whether the election was in '74 or if it was created in '74, the ANC. So I'm not precise on the dates.

ECK: You were chairman at the end.

EVELETH: I was chairman probably not at the end, but close to the end. Once again, memory fails me on the precise dates, but I can provide that later. So one of the things I did when I was chair was to try to bring folks together, because we had many organizations that were very active on Capitol Hill, and I thought we could be more effective if we weren't quite so atomized, and got together on common issues. And so I thought, because Eastern Market certainly was one of those issues that pointed out that fact of the factionalism and things like that that occur, and the fact that, you know, if the community is divided, politicians are more inclined [not to act], because they don't gain anything from that, they may gain a few roads [supporters] on one side, but then they lose a lot on the other, and also they should do something to encourage folks to get along, to come up with a common plan that people can buy into, because they are spending government funds on this, and it's important that they do that.

So I organized a residential retreat at some facility outside of Washington, not too far from Washington, and we had representatives from all sorts of groups on the Hill—Restoration Society, I think you were involved with—anyway, there were a number of people that came to that from all sorts of arts groups and others. And we had a professional facilitator to come up with some proposals. Then I think some [ideas] were advanced, some were not, depending on the enthusiasm [degree of engagement] of the people who had agreed to undertake these particular tasks, but that's what community life is like. There's a small percentage of people who are very dedicated to particular causes, and they will work day and night to advance them, and I have to give them a lot of credit, I could name a bunch of them that have really been very influential on the Hill, like the Hill Center [opened in November, 2011]. We would not have had the Hill Center without the Cymrots and other people really pushing on it, and I admire their zeal and their persistence. And we had that in Eastern Market as well; I think that's essential to make a community work, because you're not going to get a lot of people willing to do that, but they are sort of the

cheerleaders of it and they will draw people into it, and hopefully not divide people. And that's why the Hill is such a wonderful place to live, I think. It's progressed so far from where it was before.

ECK: Was the City Council involved with the Eastern Market at that time?

EVELETH: Well, we tried to work with Nadine Winter, who was our councilmember for a long time.

ECK: She was probably—was she the first?

EVELETH: Yes, she was. She would have been our first, I think. I'm pretty certain that that's the case.

ECK: Under home rule.

EVELETH: Yes, under home rule. And we met with her a number of times. I think she was reticent to take a position. And I don't think that we really figured out a strategy that was effective in trying to persuade her to come on board and to carry our water, in effect, on the City Council with regard to that. Obviously, the building was fixed, that is, the roof was fixed. That went ahead, and that didn't become part of the controversy after we'd come up a solution, or the city had come up with that solution [in response to the concerns we had expressed]. But the—what would be done to renovate the market, to get rid of the dangerous conditions, like wiring and other things like that, to improve restrooms and so forth and so on, and the floor that was chipping and there were structural issues, I think, as well. [The structural issues were simply not addressed until the very destructive 2007 fire in the Market forced the issue.]

One of the things—as a sidelight—the basement unfortunately could have been developed, and it really wasn't, to the degree that it could have been. That is to say, that used to be—I was told by the Glasgows, or by Stroban, that at one time that [basement space] was [used as] a shooting range for World War I soldiers. But it was really a beautiful basement. It had two rows of parallel arches that went the length of the building—these were brick arches, and curving brick ceilings. Architecturally, it was really quite an extraordinary structure. And we had proposed—I think Andre Houston, who was an architect on the Hill, had done some drawings of this—a way to dig down a little bit, and to create more headroom. In other words, to excavate a bit, and do a little structural enhancement. That could have been a fantastic area for a restaurant, or any number of things like that. Unfortunately, we were never able to pursue that. I don't know whether it was cost, I don't know what it was, but that kind of got lost in the shuffle. But Sharon Ambrose—this was after I left the ANC—was very active in trying to pick up the ball on Eastern Market, and was quite successful.

ECK: When she was on City Council, or before that?

EVELETH: Well, even before that, she had an interest, but when she was on City Council—and by that point, I think I was off of the ANC, and so I was no longer really involved in it. And then you know what's happened since.

ECK: After you left the ANC, did you have other ancillary association with Eastern Market? Maybe with some other community groups, like the Restoration Society, or something?

EVELETH: I don't—I wish I knew, because I don't recall the timing exactly, but at one point—no that's not true. I know I continued on one of these—there was another commission appointed by the mayor, I believe, and I think I was a delegate of the Capitol Hill Group Ministry to that one, but I was not representing the Capitol Hill Restoration Society. I may have in an earlier time. I'll have to check my records on that. But basically, I had moved on, I was—I went to work for a law firm, and I just didn't have the time anymore.

ECK: When you were with the ANC, were there other experiences you had regarding the Hill, other issues with the market?

EVELETH: Well, that was a big one, but there was another one—I'm sure there were several—another one that took up a lot of my time and attention was a proposal by the city to expand the jail, and I think there was political pressure in Virginia to move the city [jail] out of Lorton. And I did a fair amount of research on that, and wrote a fairly extensive paper that was published in total in the Hill Rag. And there was a lot of history that indicated that that area should not be used for a big penitentiary. And I know we met with the mayor on that subject, and I thought we had considerable community support for that.

ECK: Who was the mayor?

EVELETH: Barry.

ECK: Initially, the mayor was Walter Washington when you were dealing with the Market?

EVELETH: Could have been. I don't know—I never dealt with Mayor Washington at the time, I don't know that any of us on the ANC had, but I don't know whether that was just because we didn't deal with him, or he wasn't the mayor at the time. I don't—

END TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

ECK: So we were taking about the mayor.

EVELETH: Mayor Barry no doubt was aware of the situation. But we didn't deal with him directly until I guess ... we certainly didn't deal with him directly concerning the decision to replace the roof, if he was the mayor at that time. And I don't think we dealt with him early on as we began to look at these studies, because it took a while for these studies to be developed by the architects. I think it was only after we were at loggerheads, or he saw that it was an issue that was dividing the the community, that he decided to proceed. I think I remember that we met with Harold Brazil in his office when he was a councilmember. I guess he was councilmember-at-large. I don't remember. I think he must have been, because I think Nadine was still in. We tried to persuade him to offer some sort of mediation services or something of that nature, where we could all sit down—like an architectural charette kind of situation, where a proposal could be—sort of keep everyone in the room until they come to some agreement. He didn't follow through on that idea.

ECK: So the issue primarily with regard to the market was how much it was dedicated to groceries, and how much to other activities?

EVELETH: Right. Well, one of the plans that we later came up with, I think, was to build, in effect, a deck in the north hall, so that the first floor of the market would run from North Carolina down to C Street—both the north and the south halls would be dedicated to food/groceries. [In effect, this proposal amounted to a restoration to the original purpose of the Market, where food stalls occupied the entirety of both buildings.] And that this deck would be created in the north hall, and that would be fully outfitted for an arts studio and all those kinds of activities, so it was a way of trying to preserve both the arts—

ECK: A deck meaning a second floor?

EVELETH: A second floor, right. Now, when you do that, you have to do it a certain way if it's an historic building, it can't be permanent—by permanent, I mean it's not built into the walls, it's done in some way so that theoretically, if at some time later on, you decided you wanted to “restore it” to its original configuration, you wouldn't do irreparable damage to the building. But in any event, that seemed to be a detail. However, I think one of the groups came along and decided that they would try to persuade the city that that was not historically kosher to do that. And so that became an issue. So—although there was, I think, some degree of alignment [on the plan], with the different views in the community about this, that did not turn out to be [politically] feasible.

ECK: Were the groups that—were the opposing groups identifiable by any particular people, or organizations, or anything like that?

EVELETH: Yes, I'd say—I mean, if you were to line people up, I think there are organizations, like the Capitol Hill Restoration Society, who were in favor of doing the renovation plan. There was an ad-hoc group that was opposed. There was John Harrod and people who were—I don't know if that's a formal organization—that was interested in preserving the space that he had because it was his operation. Tommy Mauro reminds me—I think he was his lawyer—he represented John. [People who supported John Harrod's Market V Gallery preferred to reserve the space he had then occupied on the ground level of the North Hall. My understanding was that Mr. Harrod operated the Gallery and charged them for the use of the space but that the Gallery did not pay rent to the city.]

I think the most—I think the Restoration Society and other organizations on the Hill that have been here quite a while had been—were probably the predominant organizations. I think that if you were to poll people on the street, I think most people would have said, "Let's go with the market expansion." Expansion of the market.

ECK: And the ad-hoc group was—were they a particular group of neighbors?

EVELETH: I can't identify [recall] them by name [now]—I mean it was an ad-hoc group in the sense that they were people who felt their way [i.e., were united in opposing the plan]. I think the merchants were of mixed minds on it too, because the Glasgows owned a master lease from the city on the south hall. They, in turn, sublet space to the various merchants in the market. I think there were some disputes between the small merchants and the Glasgows that may have been how well they felt there were managed, or were they being managed properly, or were their rents too high, or whatever. I'm sure they had various issues. So they did—the merchants did have representatives on at least one of the mayor's groups. And I think they took some persuading, as well, but I think they sort of came around. Now whether they—if you polled each of the merchants in there, they would have all agreed, I don't know. But we dealt with Mr. Calomiris, mostly, in our meetings.

ECK: Indeed. Mr. Harrod's group was an arts-oriented group?

EVELETH: Right. Art, and they did some plays, they rented it out for political fundraisers, they had rug merchants in there, flea merchants, you know, flea markets in there.

ECK: Was there a flea market in there at that time?

EVELETH: Inside the market. Inside the north hall. Because Hine was still operating as a school at that point—Hine Junior High School, so they didn't have all the room over there that they had later on when they began to use that area ... then you had the continual expansion of the farmer's line, and then you had more merchants coming into the—taking over from Harrod doing the weekend flea market in the north hall. So that expanded, and then you had the outside, and then of course, it's gone into the Hine parking lot, and so forth, so that all evolved over a period of time. One of our [early] objectives was to figure out the parking situation and the traffic situation, and we came up with various proposals on that, most of which went nowhere [at that time], but I think you have to be in for the long haul on a lot of these things, because things evolve. [Fortunately, our proposal to close off Seventh Street to allow more vendors to operate in the area on weekends has now come to fruition and has resulted in a more lively and varied marketplace.]

New people move into the neighborhood, and what they see is [what they consider to be] historic. Now, 20 years ago, it may have looked very different. [*Further elaboration by the interviewee subsequent to the interview:* Some of those folks may want to preserve what is there just as it is and are fearful that any change will destroy the character of the Market—we heard that many times. I can appreciate that viewpoint, because historic buildings have been lost through thoughtless renovations that are insensitive to the historic integrity of the building. That said, it is quite possible to make positive changes to a building that are consistent with its historic character. A “no-change” position is simply not realistic or good public policy. What snapshot view of an historic building is most accurate and should be preserved?]

It's like Rome—I mean, how many churches are built on top of churches that are built on top of churches? Now, if you were going to preserve them, which one would you preserve when they're all hundreds of years old? It's sort of like that, you know, you walk into the door—this is the way it has to be forever. Well, it never was this way forever.

ECK: Speaking of other projects in the immediate area, when was the—was the natatorium developed during your tenure?

EVELETH: No, I think it was [before my time]—[the pool] certainly went through a number of repairs and shutdowns and reorganizations and things like that since I've lived on the Hill. I mean, I went swimming there for a period of time, pretty consistently. I think that that preceded the ANC, though, the idea that that would be changed. Of course, the north hall was at one point—probably Dick Wolf went into this with you, or the earlier history of it—I guess that was—the north hall was a storage area for the Department of Transportation. They had [stored] old signs and things like that [equipment]. And there

was a thought back at that time, early on, before I even moved to the Hill, of tearing down the market and doing something else with it, or something like that. So there's always been an interest in preservation one way or the other. How about 11th Street, when they were going to have the freeway running up 11th Street—now, that got stopped, so citizen involvement does help.

ECK: Do you want to talk a little bit more about the jail, or the proposal to close Lorton or do something?

EVELETH: Well, I'd like to do that if we could have another interview, frankly, because I really—it is an interesting story and I don't have the facts at hand.

ECK: Then moving on, were there other major projects during your ANC period?

EVELETH: Well, there was the car barn. As you know, there was a plan to—and it has since been created—the car barn housing. And when it first came [was proposed] to us [at the] ANC, it would require some changes ... anyway, when it first came to us, there must have been some zoning issues or something, and it required some city approvals, anyway, otherwise it would not have come to us. And what we tried to do was to convince the developer to set aside a certain percentage of the housing units for lower income people. That was not—we were not successful in that regard. But all these things, of course, take a lot of time, conversations.

We had issues about the RFK Stadium. At that time—early on, I remember when Ray Gooch was the first chair [of the ANC], so that was the first term. And neighbors were complaining because they had rock concerts and so forth at the stadium on a relatively frequent basis, and there was a spillover effect on the neighbors that lived nearby, including parking issues, and a lot of things—that people were drinking in the street, and very noisy, and blah blah blah. So that came to our attention. So it was in that context that a developer [correction: concert organization]—or I think it was Kool's cigarettes—I don't know why I should remember that, but anyway, they were [proposing to sponsor] some kind of a tour of rock bands, or some kind of—what would obviously not be a symphony orchestra—that [we believed] would concern the neighbors, because, “oh, we're going to have more of this”. So I think they came to our meeting, the frontiers of this concert—proposed concert—and they say, “Well, you know, we have great crowd control, there's no problems at any of our [events]. We think that you ought to see one of our concerts. So we'll be willing to fly you out to X town (whatever it was) and you can see one of these concerts, and then you'll know that you can assure your neighbors that you're representing that there's no danger of the kind of stuff they experienced at prior ...”

Well, we were outraged, or some [commissioners] were outraged, anyway. [They felt that] this is obviously a bribe by this organization. They want to give us these bennies [benefits] so we'll vote in their favor. Here we were, we were a new organization, and you know, we were going to be ethically pure, or whatever it is, not that I saw any real ethical problems at all during my tenure there, or that there were many bennies to be had even if you wanted to have them. I think there were even debates about whether we should have a special [automobile] license plate or not—ANC Commissioner, or something like that, on it—and I think we concluded that that would be [inappropriate]—we're just, we're the people, we're just neighbors, you know, what is this stuff? All of a sudden we want to look like we're special people? No, we can't do anything like that! So we didn't do that.

ECK: That's great. So what happened with regard to the concert? Was there any—

EVELETH: I don't know that it ever went through, the concert, I just don't remember. I remember more the—but in some ways—of course, you get involved in a lot of little issues, too, [building construction] variances come up a lot of times, and so that—that's often a neighbor versus neighbor kind of thing, because it's all controversial.

ECK: Was the subway in operation at the time? And was that an issue?

EVELETH: Well, the subway was just starting at that time. I think the red line was the first one to open, and it started, I think, at Union Station. And so that was in ANC 6A, the northeast portion of Ward 6. So I don't believe we got involved in that. But Eastern Market followed that, and that was the blue line. And I remember we did—we had some intercession with that, because when they were doing tunneling for that, they created some real problems. People lost parts of their front yards, and their sidewalks cracked, and they had a lot of issues going down to the Capitol—particularly in the area going down to Capitol South, I guess it was on C Street. Anyway, we were aware of those things, I can't recall what we did particularly on that, I'm sure we wrote some letters, or did something to the city about that. And then there was a big ribbon cutting at the Eastern Market station.

We had issues about 1D1—that's the local police station—I think there was a plan at one point to close 1D1. And we got involved in that to see to it that it wouldn't be closed. It was heartfelt on Capitol Hill that it not be closed. I think they were going to replace it with one somewhere down in Southwest. They [the residents] wanted something more accessible, and they thought they'd get more protection if it [remained] on the Hill. And they did a nice renovation job on that, so that was a successful project.

We had a big issue about Providence Hospital site—Providence Hospital was down across the street from St. Peter's School, and the Congress was thinking of siting a new federal office building down there. And

we wanted it to be developed as a park, which of course it is now, with soccer and all sort of things played there, and so forth. But the feds wanted—the House wanted it. And we had a commissioner whose name was Phoebe Bannister, who was very active in the—what was the name of that organization? The voters organization ... The League of Women Voters. And she must have been in her late 70s, I think. Or to me, she seemed quite old. Now, she doesn't seem quite as old, but anyway—I don't know if she's still alive. Phoebe [was] a diminutive woman with lots of energy [and intellect]. And you couldn't say no to her. And she went up to the Hill, and I think she talked them out of it. I always thought it should be named Phoebe Bannister Park because she was very effective in what she did. And so all sorts of plans that were made [proposed] for the park—other people had plans, too—some people wanted to put low income housing in there, and I can remember we held a forum on that nearby, nearby to that location, and I was sort of appalled, I have to say, by some of the remarks that people made, because they were characterizing who the people would be that would move into low-cost housing, and [asserting that] you [would] smell the food cooking, and they'd have lots of children who would go into those apartments—just appealed to fear and, really, racism. And that was really appalling. But I think the solution that probably made everybody happy, if not Congress, was the—let's use it for a park.

It's funny, as I keep thinking, I keep thinking about all the kinds of issues that came up during my tenure there, and it's—I know there were issues about closing the bus stop at—right in front of 7-11, because it was a big transfer point from different parts of the city.

ECK: On Eighth Street?

EVELETH: Yeah, right.

ECK: And where was the 7-11?

EVELETH: It was right where—there is a 7-11 there now, and then it went right from 7-11 into something else, into something else, and now it's a 7-11 again. But that was a big transfer point for a lot of bus lines that came out from Anacostia and other places. And that became an issue for people, because they said there was a lot of crime, and we should close it down. [Yet] a lot of people depended on it.

When I first was on the ANC, this was a much more diverse community than it is today. Gentrification and all that kind of stuff that we were warned about really came to be the case. So it's a lot more Caucasian than African American at this point. And at that point, it was not. And our single member districts—our ANC was, I think, evenly split between whites and African Americans. So because of the disparity—economic, and differences between neighborhoods within ANC 6B, because of life experiences, you name it, there was, to some degree, what could be perceived as a racial underflow there

that was going on. But I think that would be much too simplistic. And in fact I think everybody on the commission was dedicated to trying to develop something, and take approaches to treat this, our ward, in particular our section of the ward, sensitively to everybody's interests as best we could.

So there was not—I mean, any situation like that where you've got a clear division like that—black, white, poor, rich—has the potential of being very contentious, and I'm sure there was contention over various issues, but it turned out to me to be much better than I could have even hoped for. And there's also, I think, a tendency for people to think—to characterize people, at least at that time—and I think, hopefully we're better than we were at that time—to assume that if you were white, this is how you believe, and that one white thinks the same way as the next, and that one black person thinks the same way as another black person. That kind of division. But I think that was absolutely untrue. There was not unanimity on race or color on positions. And expectations on that front were challenged—that assumption was seriously challenged, and I think people learned—I certainly learned a lot.

One of the things that—I don't know why it should have surprised me, but it did—I think you come into any situation with a set of stereotypes, and you just can't help them, but hopefully you will learn something through experience—for example, curfew was an interesting one. There was a period of time—there was a lot more crime, and a lot more fear of crime, when I first moved to the Hill, than there is now. We used to talk about how this was going to be a hot summer with riots and all that kind of stuff, and a hot summer [was a code word for] riots.

ECK: Of course, this was in the aftermath of the '68 riots.

EVELETH: Right, right. But that was still in the air at that time. And [the commissioners who were most] opposed to curfews, tended to be, "liberal whites." The people who were in favor of it, of curfews, were African Americans. And the assumption was, well, but your community will be mostly affected, because there were more black children on the Hill than there were white. I mean, there were a lot of whites that had no children, or very young people at all, if you looked at the demographics. Well, you think about it—well, who's most affected, then, by crime, and too many kids on the street, and all these other things. We in the white section were not. And so, I mean, that's maybe too simplistic an example, but I think that we tried, as a commission, and did a pretty good job of having civil discourse in an attempt to have an organization that really represented the whole of the community.

ECK: Bridged all the groups. That's great.

EVELETH: Certainly made that—that was our attempt, we had very serious-minded people. And they put in lots of hours and lots of passion.

ECK: Is there anything else that you'd like to bring up at this point?

EVELETH: Well, as I said, I would like to look at that prison thing, and once I get into those files I may have a couple other things, if that's all right with you.

ECK: Yeah, that would be great.

ECK: Ok, well, thank you very much.

EVELETH: Thank you very much, Mike. I appreciate this trip down memory lane, because it does bring back a lot of pleasant experiences and a lot of admiration for my fellow commissioners. And the city, to a large extent, did try to respond to what we were trying to do. They gave it a good shot, and that's good. So I hope these commissions continue on.

ECK: Thank you.

END TAPE 1/SIDE 2

END OF INTERVIEW