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Interview with Ed Bacon - (2nd) 11/13/74

18. Do you know whether Hopkinson and Gates used their political influence behind the scenes to persuade the powers that be in the Republican City Hall to give the green light on the passage of the ordinance?

Hopkinson
and
Gates
re
city
blanning
ordinance

I never fooled around behind the scenes at all. You're the person that has to talk about behind the scenes, Walter. I, myself, was firmly under the impression that the councilmen went into the hearing which I think we discussed in detail in the last session we had with the idea of opposing it and that they indicated their change of heart publicly at the session.

....I would have an entirely different reaction - it would be based entirely on the evidence that was there. I already mentioned the fact that George Elliot was actually testifying against the ordinance and you didn't remember sufficiently clearly to counterveil that recollection. When Mr. Hopkinson strode in and simply said at the public hearings directly to the council that he thought it was a good idea and certainly the councilmen themselves didn't know he felt that way in advance because otherwise they wouldn't have reacted as they did. I know of no effort ... afterwards they were very clear. ? himself said that in 30 years in the council he had never seen such an impressive hearing in terms of

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the variety of people who were there. And (telephone rings)

...Well, I suppose I'm going back again to the question of whether there was any behind the scenes activity and I never thought that Gates was particularly interested in our planning thing, but perhaps you know differently. And I will repeat the point that it seems to me it was all a very simple and straightforward thing and that the reason the ordinance was passed by council was the extraordinary combination of people who came to the public hearing and it did, incidentally, include white people and black people which in those days was fairly unusual ... and labor people and professional people. But of all the people that testified at that public hearing and I think there were about 15 and Walter, I hope you have a list of them. Mr. Hopkinson was the only really influential and powerful leader.

Hopkinson
organizing
he
commission

So now we will go to question #19. Did not Hopkinson turn to us for guidance in organizing the commission and did not we suggest several of the people who were appointed as citizen members, such as Robert Young (sp?), Joe Burke (sp?), and Hopkinson himself?

Walter, I have the feeling that first of all Hopkinson did indeed turn to us for guidance in organizing the commission and I had the impression that we even recommended to him a budget -- you know more about that than I do. But I thought I had described in detail at the last session the fact that the citizen's council on city planning, which was formed about two days after the ordinance was adopted by the council as its first act submitted to Mayor Samuel a slate of eight people as I recall to ... I guess there were five citizen members and I guess it submitted a slate of five recommended people to be members of the planning commission to Samuel. I'm not sure if it was five or more, no, I do believe my figures here are wrong. There were nine members on the commission, three of which were ex officio and he submitted a slate of nine, of which he selected out of that slate, five. And I'm almost positive that of the original commission, five of the nine members were nominees of the Citizen's Council on City Planning. They included Hopkinson and Yarnell and Burke and I think they included two others.

I remember we didn't think a real estate man should be on a commission, but was there ~~w~~ one on the commission in those days? Wasn't it Joe Greenberg? In any case I do know that the some 60 or 80 members organizations of the Citizen's Council on City Planning within I would say a two-week period after the Council had adopted the ordinance creating the new city planning commission - and that was 1942 - that the Citizen's Council on City Planning, a new organization, agreed on a slate of nominees which we sent to the mavor. That of course was Mayor Samuel. I don't recall whether he asked for that or whether we submitted it without being asked. I am almost positive certain that of the six or so appointees that he had -- perhaps he had more than that -- that five of our nominees were appointed by him and then I made the point before that several years later in '52 when the great political revolution came and Mayor Samuel was thrown out on his ear and Joe Clark became mayor that he voluntarily, on his own initiative, reappointed three members of the old committee to the new one. And it was three of the five members that were recommended to Mayor Samuel by the Citizen's Council.

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That was Hopkinson, Yarnell, and Burke. Roy Heymann was the realtor I was trying to think of. He was an elderly and somewhat a retired kind of a person and had a rather statesman-like view of city planning.

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Q. Did you not play an important role along with Steve Sweeney in setting up a session for Ed Hopkinson to meet planners from other cities who might be helpful in a conference discussion about what should be done in Philadelphia? And one or another of those present might be spotted as Executive Director. Was it not that way that Ed Hopkinson chose Bob Mitchell? As I recall, Steve Sweeney arranged a conference and you saw to it that Bob Mitchell was there, Bob being your preference and at the time still serving as head of the urban section of the then-expiring National Resources Board. The planning division of the Resources Board.

Bob Mitchell becomes
Steve Sweeney, who of course was the director of the Fels Institute at the University of Pennsylvania, did set up a session for the very ostensible purpose that you mentioned to advise the new commission on the kinds of policies it ought to adopt and there were invited to that about a half dozen or possibly more.

Exec. Director of Planning Commission
We arranged it and we got something between, I would say five and seven national figures in city planning and we had an all-day session as I remember and they did come in one after the other I think separately and advised the commission on what they ought to do. But the Commission all knew that this was actually a job interview and I think most of those who came did. I think it was sort of a euphemism to pretend it was, especially since we were under Civil Service and the whole thing had to be done the Civil Service route as I remember. It is perfectly correct that I was very anxious to have Bob Mitchell in. I can't recall precisely how I knew him. I don't also remember Oscar Stonaroff's role in this, if any, but I do know that for some reason or other I was for Bob Mitchell and did see to it that he got there and I did indicate to Mr. Hopkinson that I thought he would be good. I was very close to Hopkinson in a way at that time.

The other side of it was that I had to keep Bob Mitchell of a mind that he really wanted to come to Philadelphia and leave his great national, prestigious post. And when he came here I took him out to my house in the country to spend the night and we went swimming in the moonlight in the so-called bubble bath at the bottom of the dam where the water flows over to the stream. And he enjoyed that very much indeed and thought that would be an added inducement for coming to Philadelphia and of course the fact was that I know that he will confirm with you that he was very amused at being invited to come swimming in the bubble bath immediately after this discussion about important city planning matters. Am I correct in understanding that Hopkinson made up his mind at that session and talked to Bob before the evening was over about his coming to Philadelphia? Well, I don't recall that as a fact myself, but it sounds very much like Mr. Hopkinson that he would do that and so Bob Mitchell can of course confirm or deconfirm that.

22 Do you recall whether throughout this early period getting city planning established in Philadelphia we called on Walter Blucher for advice and consultation?

Walter Blucher consulted re city planning

In those days I believe he was executive director of the American Society of Planning Officials. I seem to recall that we had him come to Philadelphia to confer. If that is correct, would it have been for the purpose of sitting down with Hopkinson and the then other newly appointed members of the commission to discuss how the commission should be organized and function in relation to various parts of the municipal government?

Well, my recollection of this is very hazy and I certainly would not have remembered the details of that. Walter Blucher was periodically a consultant to the Commission and he came on several occasions including at one point to evaluate me and my work. At that time he informed the Commission that I had a subconscious wish to avoid getting anybody in the Commission who was powerful or effective since there was my subconscious wish, according to him, I couldn't very well defend myself from my own subconscious. Nobody was too upset about that particular recommendation of Walter's and it was quite incorrect, but never mind.

23 Q. When did you leave the Housing Association in order to go into military service?

That was in December of 1943.

24 Q. When you were in the navy, were you able to keep up at all in regard to what was happening in Philadelphia?

Better Philadelphia Exhibition

Oscar Stonorov, I guess its clear that I had become a very good friend of his prior to going into the Navy. He was both a close personal friend and also his wife was an old friend of mine and also her parents and my parents were friends, and so our families were close as well. He wrote me while I was in the South Pacific about the Better Philadelphia Exhibition, which you, Walter, and he and others had cooked up while I was away. And Bob Mitchell. And I hope very much that you have a very full story on that. I guess it's proper to digress in this situation, but I was just thinking today about the Better Philadelphia Exhibition. That it was like nothing that had ever happened before and nothing that has happened since. Nobody has ever made the slightest effort to come anywhere near to matching it. I might mention that I had the National Committee out there last Friday of the American Institute of Planners -- people from various parts of the United States -- and I had it temporarily set up for this purpose and the people were just bowled over by it -- even its sad, 30-year-old remnants. Oscar indicated by mail that he wanted me to work with him on the exhibit and as a matter of fact the five plastic overlay sheets showing the growth of Philadelphia which was incidentally the thing that they were the most, of all the things there, enchanted with when they saw it. I designed on the board of the U.S.S. Shoshonee

between the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa and actually made a little model of it -- I think I still have it. So I came back from the South Pacific with this already planned and we did execute it and it did indeed turn out to be a very fine thing.

Q. When you returned to Philadelphia did you immediately go to work with the Philadelphia City Planning Commission?

No. I did not immediately come to work with the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. I lived in New York and worked to pass the architectural examinations -- which I did in New York. And Hans Blumenfeld met me. I brought Hans to work with me when I was Director of the Philadelphia Housing Association. Particularly, interestingly enough, on the utilization of vacant lots in what is now the Temple area and blighted areas, I was very concerned in those days about a land policy for utilization of the land of vacant houses and lots. Parenthetically, it completely repudiated the policy I was working on of getting ready to restore them. In any case, he stayed in Philadelphia and did become a member of the City Planning Commission and he encouraged me to make application for a job with the City Planning Commission.

It would have been my impression and actually I'm not clear on this at all, that I was on the staff of the planning commission before Oscar asked me to work virtually full-time with him on the Better Philadelphia Exhibition. I'm quite sure that's the case -- I guess you don't know the answer to that -- but I believe that's the case. But I did work on in the planning commission under Ray Leonard, who was the Director of the Land Planning Division, as a Senior Land Planner, I think. Walter says when did Ray Leonard die and I said I'll come to that shortly, but I do want to keep on with this particular line of reasoning -- that I did then join the staff of the City Planning Commission as a step down the scale and I would have even thought it was as a junior land planner, but I'm not positive. I eventually became a senior land planner and Oscar Stonorov asked me to work with him on the Better Philadelphia Exhibition design and I indeed did finally do that. I was paid by him directly because I'm sure the salary was much higher -- I think he paid me \$7,000 a year, which I began to really worry about whether I was honest-to-goodness worked that much, but it was much more than I was getting at the Planning Commission and I think that I simply went over for several weeks, perhaps 3 or 4 months or even longer, and worked full-time on the Better Philadelphia Exhibition. It was a very exciting thing and of course in that exhibition I designed a greenway system for Society Hill which was and still remains a very innovative concept. Of course the entire greenway system was constructed virtually exactly the way I designed it in '47 and I will digress here.... I remember now that this is for possible publication so I will simply say that I will write a more definitive account of this particular thing. I will change my mind again... I had the idea in 1947 for the Penn Center project -- exactly the

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Bacon
works on
better
Philadelphia
Exhibition
designs
greenways
for
Society
Hill

Bacon
work
on
Better
Philadelphia
Exhibition

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idea which I later got Vincent Kling to work with me on, which was publicly expressed in '52, of developing a coordinated plan for the whole of the Penn Center area and having a sunken, open plaza, one level beneath the street, directly visible from both the subway and the underground commuter railroad station, as a proper entrance to Center City and as a good way to get about Center City without being interfered with by traffic and I could not interest either Bob Mitchell nor Oscar Stonorov nor Louis Kahn in that idea. Stonorov and Kahn had been engaged by Bob Mitchell to design the Penn Center park - the Center City part of the project which was put into the Better Philadelphia Exhibition. And this was actually a great disappointment to me because I felt it was a very important idea and of course by the time it became operative I was Director of the Planning Commission so that I could do it the way I wanted to. But the Better Philadelphia Exhibition was finished and it was seen by the people -- 385,000 of them. The most important thing that Oscar and I did, and I can't recall really where the ideas came from, was to meet with the teachers of 13 schools, public and parochial and private, with classes ranging from kindergarten to senior in High School -- I guess we had the Boch Vocational School, I think -- and working with the teachers in getting a program whereby the children went out in their own neighborhood... we provided the teacher's with wood and various kinds of materials, maps, cardboard, glue, and so forth, and they made models of their own neighborhoods. They made surveys of them and models and then they made their own proposals for how they would like to see the neighborhoods be done, including in model form, in cartoon form (pungent cartoons) that criticized their elders for (?), and then Oscar, I think, very brilliantly took all these very crude in a way exhibits, all the way from kindergarten, and put them in beautiful walnut cases as the climax of the Better Philadelphia Exhibition, edge-lit with indirect lighting on plastic domes and then the bigger models he put in wonderful settings so that the final experience of the Better Philadelphia Exhibition was suddenly to be surrounded by this earnest and marvelously moving voices of the children about their dissatisfaction with the city and their neighborhoods and the kind of vision and urge that they had for making it better, and of course it wasn't very long before those children grew up and really started working in the neighborhoods and voting on the bond issues.

Parenthetically, this is an interesting contrast to the experience in Chicago in 1910 and '15 when the Burnham plan was made -- the Wacker manual was financed and given to all the school children which was a totally cut and dried thing. It said give seven reasons why the Burnham plan for downtown Chicago is the best plan that could possibly be evolved and tell how you are going to work to support it and so forth. And although it was a very good plan and in fact it had a tremendous on the development of Chicago, we had the different idea of having the children not study somebody else's plan which was obsolete by the time they grew up, but to experience the process of planning themselves and this really proved to be a very viable concept.

You say how do I evaluate the effect of the Better Philadelphia Exhibition on the public?

Effect of Better Philadelphia Exhibition

It was absolutely the basis for everything that happened since and there is just no two ways about it -- people were deeply moved by it. There's no way to convey the total quality of the exhibition. It was really an extraordinary thing. And Walter, it was amazingly comprehensive in the range of subjects that it covered. It previewed - it recommended the idea of reversing the row house and putting the garages in the front and putting private gardens in the back instead of the usual thing of the concrete alley and the garages in the back, too. And at the time it was done, it was supposed to be an extremely radical concept. We got Norman Denny to do it -- he did it. All builders told us we were crazy -- I worked on it for several years as Director of the Planning Commission -- that nobody would buy it. Norm Denny was young and kind of restless and he did it and overnight the whole pattern changed and almost all the building in the Northeast since then has been based on that. And we dealt as you know with urban renewal -- the whole idea of revitalizing neighborhoods without extensive clearance. And we of course dealt with capital programming -- it was really a very visionary exhibit.

Q. Had Ray Leonard died before you got back?

148 261 Ray Leonard dies and Bacon succeeds him as Director of Planning Division

No, indeed, Ray Leonard was my boss and he was the Director of the Land Planning Commission during all of the Better Philadelphia Exhibition and he ... in fact people told me that I was very foolish to join the staff of the Planning Commission because Bob Mitchell would stay there forever as Director and Ray Leonard would stay there forever as Chief of the Land Planning Division. But Ray Leonard died, I suppose, in 1948, he contracted leukemia and then I became ... it must have been '48 because he was certainly the chief while I was working on the Better Philadelphia Exhibition. Then I succeeded him as Director of the Land Planning Division and then Bob Mitchell took it into his head to set up the planning school at the University of Pennsylvania. Hopkinson, of course, being a trustee at the University of Pennsylvania, gave him full support with Harold Stassen, I think was the President then. And so Bob left the Planning Commission and so they were without a director. I was very anxious to avoid being Director and as a matter a fact a second session was held, similar to the first one to select a Director, where people came from various parts of the country. It was again through the aegis of Steve Sweeney and the Institute of Local and State Government and I was asked to make a statement to the Commission at that time and I very elaborately explained to them why I should not be Director and that I didn't want to be Director and then I don't know exactly what happened, but as I looked over the other people who were there I decided that the one thing that was clear to me was that I certainly had no intention of serving under any of those guys and so I then changed my tune and I guess I made an impression on the Commission too, but in any case I was appointed Director shortly thereafter.