THE LEADING THE COMMISSION: INTERVIEWS WITH THE FORMER CHAIRS OF NYC'S LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

The Reminiscences of

Sherida Paulsen

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Sherida Paulsen conducted by Interviewer Liz McEnanaey in 2011 This interview is part of the the *Leading the Commission: Interviews with the Former Chairs of NYC's Landmarks Preservation Commission* oral history project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The views expressed in this oral history interview do not necessarily reflect the views of the New York Preservation Archive Project.

Sherida Paulsen was the chair of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission [LPC] from 2001 to 2003 under Mayors Rudolph Giuliani and Michael R. Bloomberg. She speaks of the major projects before the LPC during her tenure including the Morgan Library's addition, and the Hearst Tower. She also touches on some of the more controversial issues from her time on the Commission, such as the fight surrounding 2 Columbus Circle and the Whitney Museum's potential expansion on the Upper East Side. Sherida Paulsen is an architect, working in the city both before and after her time on the LPC, and brings a unique perspective from having been both a commissioner and an applicant to the Commission. She sheds light into the process of designating historic districts, the process of reviewing applications, and working with building owners and architects to move projects forward.

Paulsen served terms as both Commissioner, 1995-2001, and Chair, 2001-2002, of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Paulsen is a Bronx native, and was influenced by her background as a New York architect and educator. Chairing the LPC in the last six months of the Giuliani administration, Paulsen brought outside architectural perspective to her work in city preservation. She faced the unique challenge of grappling with preservation practices in New York in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks. Though her tenure as chair was brief, Paulsen refocused the LPC's attention toward industrial sites in Long Island City, Catholic Church properties, and mid-twentieth century properties deemed "inappropriately" modern to designate as historic. Paulsen promoted preservation as a public cause and garnered positive press for the agency. In addition to her service with LPC, Paulsen has acted as President of the American Institute of Architects' New York chapter, as Chair of the Van Alen Institute's Projects in Public Architecture, as President of WX Women Executives in Real Estate, and as Director of the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation.

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Q: So Sherida, With most of the chairs we're starting with basic background of how you found your way into preservation because all the chairs have come at it with various backgrounds—although you and Gene [Norman] have the architecture background—but I'm wondering how you got engaged in preservation. If you can talk about your educational experience as an architect and as an educator and how that played into your interest and awareness of preservation?

Paulsen: That's a good question. Most people ask me why, because you grew up in California and there's nothing worth saving—which is not true—and you came to New York. I think I have always had a real passion for the city as a form, and whether it's an American city or a European city, the layering of building types, really to me, tells the story of a people and a place. It's really the storytelling that first engaged me, and then as an architect, working in New York City for thirty years, it's really something you have to grapple with because there's not many clean sites, there's always something. When I look north, at Worldwide Plaza, which was one of the first really big projects that I did in the city, we were building on the site of the old Madison Square Garden—not the McKim, Mead, and White one, *[laughs]* but the one but the one people remember with the elephants and everything else. So as excavation proceeded, they weren't saving it because the building had been knocked down so many years before but there were a lot

of interesting layers of archeology, if you want to call it that were there. And people would reminisce about the elephants and the circus and the sporting events and all those things. Again, it was part of a story.

When we worked on a project at 86th [Street] and Lexington [Avenue], which was the Upper East Side Gimbels store, and we did a whole renovation to convert that into condominiums and add more floors. Again, it was learning to deal with an existing structure, and it was going to be completely re-clad, but we had to go to a whole history because of the regulatory history. So sort of coming at it from my love of history, and then architecturally, just being a problem solver and I think it's that problem solving aspect that both attracted the people appointing people to the [New York City Landmarks Preservation] Commission [LPC] to me, and my interest in being on the Commission which I saw as a huge way to address—in the mid '90s, the need to really think about what direction the city was going to go. Because at that point—early in [Rudolph] Giuliani time, things were still a little rough around the edges. It was really fun. And coming from California, I lived near San Francisco and I went to [University of California] Berkeley and then I lived in LA [Los Angeles] for graduate school. Despite what people think there were really some great buildings, mostly 20th century. But that also was important to dealing with a lot of things dealing with a lot of things we were dealing with Landmarks in terms of 20th century buildings.

Q: I'm very interested in your perceptions on Modernism and *[unclear]* in particular.

Paulsen: Oh yeah. I can be the good guy or the bad guy.

Q: You mentioned your interest in history and story telling and problem solving were what attracted people to appointing you to the Commission in the first place. Could you talk a bit more about how you were approached to join the Commission? What you were doing at the time?

Paulsen: Easily. It was actually very funny because I was leaving SOM [Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill LLP] in November—October of '94? '93? '93 and I was at a meeting with the leaders of the Real Estate Board [of New York]—this is out of left field this is. I told them that—we didn't even know who was going to win the mayoral election. I said to them, because I knew they were powerful people in city government, I said, "Look, if there are any opportunities for me to serve in the city government, I'd really love to do that." I've done a lot in architecture and I was a design associate at SOM. I really enjoyed what I was doing but I felt like—I mean I've always been attracted to public service and I thought it was a good moment because I had sort of gathered enough experience to be useful in some way *[laughs]*. So they put my name into the interview committee after Giuliani was elected and I was interviewed by his—I don't remember what they even call it, the interview committee.

I had been sort of promoted to them as somebody who could be a good executive director at [New York City Department of] City Planning. I went in for my interview and the head of the Real Estate Board called me the next morning and he said, "They loved you. They think you should be chairman of City Planning." And I said, "No, I think that would be a big mistake." I would love to do it but I didn't feel that I had the expertise or the gravitas to really tell all the

developers in the city *[laughter],* and all the other things that City Planning does. I really didn't feel that that was an appropriate role for me. So they said okay.

Q: That's interesting

Paulsen: It was really interesting, because Joe [Joseph] Rose was going to get that position, I think from day one, but apparently that wasn't clear to everybody else—I didn't know it. I just was so flabbergasted that anybody was going to recommend me to do that position, I just said I think that's a little bit of a stretch. So a few months later, again it was the Real Estate Board. I had been working with them on a design committee looking at different zoning proposals and that's why they thought I had some sense.

They then called up and said there's an opening on the Landmarks Commission for a Bronx resident. I lived in the Bronx at that point and they said, would you be interested in that? I said "Absolutely." Because I had only heard how bad it was to go before the Landmarks Commission. Every architect hated going there and the neighborhood groups were upset all the time, so it just seemed like it was an interesting place to go. And to me, if you're revealing architectural plans, it should be about architecture in some way, shape or form. I met with the interview committee again—a new group—and they all said, very nice. At that point, Jennifer Raab had not been announced. She was nominated as chair of the Commission that summer and I met with her, because she didn't want to have somebody she hadn't spoken to and didn't know.

Q: Had she been nominated at that point?

Paulsen: She was probably in the background check phase because she took office the fall of '94 I think—late summer. Then I went—my appointment hearings were humorous *[laughter]*. Well, I went to my appointment hearing in February of '95. I was eight and a half months pregnant and the mayor, being Rudy, had not bothered to consult with the Bronx delegation about the person he was nominating as the Bronx commissioner for Landmarks. So when I got to the hearing—

Q: Had not met with which, the Bronx delegation within his office?

Paulsen: The [New York] City Council and since they do get to approve you, that was a problem *[laughs]*.

Q: So he basically—his committee had decided to nominate you?

Paulsen: He and Jennifer and her council, I had gone through everything. I had done the background checks from City Hall, I had done the background checks at the City Council, I had met with all the investigators, I had passed all my things I needed to pass, but the Bronx delegation—and this was the City Council and Rudy Giuliani always were, like, at loggerheads in a lot of ways. So this was one thing they could do, is say they were not going to take action on this nomination until we've had a chance to meet with her. Fortunately the delegation members were actually—one of the key people was my own council member, who was not exactly in

favor of me taking the position because the reason I lived in the Bronx at the time was my husband was in medical school at Einstein [Albert Einstein College of Medecine]. So long story short, they saw how pregnant I was and one them took pity and said, “We’ll meet with you right after we’ve closed the hearing.” I said, fine. I met with them, everything was happy and positive and they said, “We don't know if we’re going to have another appointments hearing next month but we’ll bring you back as soon as soon as the schedule allows.” So that was February and I think I went back in April.

Q: Of 2005?

Paulsen: Of 1995.

Q: Oh, 1995.

Paulsen: And was appointed.

Q: So that session was your first interaction with Giuliani or had you had interactions with him before?

Paulsen: I had no interaction with Rudy Giuliani at all. I met a deputy mayor, who sort of—the one that the Landmarks commissioner appointed to, which at that point was Randy [M.] Mastro, and I met with him. He and I had met through the Real Estate Board before that so he kind of

knew me and I kind of knew him, so that was okay. I never met with Rudy until much later and so they appointed me *[laughter]*.

Q: So you have such an interesting background by being an architect and having the hands on skills, being able to read drawings *[crosstalk—]*

Paulsen: Yes, that helped a lot.

Q: —so valuable, being able to talk about conceptualism, having worked in the field, having done zoning with the Real Estate Board, and having that sense of things—how do you think having that combination of skills really helped you as a commissioner? To understand urbanism and to understand these layers and to think through that?

Paulsen: I understood process, both the regulatory process—I mean, I didn't understand all the landmark side of it until I was actually at the Commission, but I understood the city planning process because almost everything I had worked on was either a BSA [NYC Board of Standards and Appeals] case, which required a lot of interaction, or it was a special permit from City Planning, so I knew the process. And the other part of it was really, being a real problem. Most architects are trained in what some people called design thinking. Design thinking is really all about, these are all the things on the table; how do you prioritize, how do you make decisions about what you're going to do?

My very first hearing—I'll never forget this—there was an application for a new storefront for a skiwear store that wanted to go into a building on Madison Avenue. They had proposed something and people were just saying, I like it or I don't like it. I thought, what I'm hearing around the table are such little things, there's got to be a way to put this together and come up with a solution. I didn't say if I liked it or I didn't like it, I said, this is really good except could you do this and could you do this? You know, consultation with their clients and then they said yes, we can do that. And so, it got approved. Instead of, well, we need you to do this and we need you to do that, they came, they got approved and it was done. I was told afterwards that some of the commissioners who had been there for awhile had said, she's going to be good. She can actually get the resolutions.

That was how I always took my role on the commission, to get to answers because whether you're an applicant or you're an advocate, I think it's just terrible to leave everybody hanging. This is a public—it's paid for by the tax payers, who are all of us, and if people are just left trying to divine "What do they want?" It's just not productive. From my perspective leaving historic buildings without purpose or use is the first step in a demolition process because if they're not in use, they're not being taken care of. And that's why I say I'm very pragmatic and that's about the best I can say *[laughter]*.

Q: I think that's interesting on so many levels. Once thing I'm curious about, it sounds like communication was key for you, that nothing was going to be big, that you were going to help work people through this process, and I'm wondering—I know that Landmarks isn't a design review board but it sounds like you were able to engage—or maybe you want to comment on

that—but it sounds like you were able to engage the applicants and work with them on their design and that you were able to bring it to another level, I'm wondering if you could talk about that because I think a lot of people are uncertain about the role that Landmarks play in design and how much impact it has on design.

Paulsen: I think Landmarks is all about design. Even for the buildings that may not be beautiful, every decision that you make as a tenant, as an owner, or as an architect is about how things are going to be constructed, because usually you're not going to a public hearing if you're just restoring what's already there. You're doing something to that building whether you're taking things out or you're putting new things in, there's an action that's being proposed, and putting new things in really requires some kind of design attitude, whether you want to say you're replicating what was there before, which is almost impossible to do, and there a couple good object lessons from the Commission. But mostly you're dealing with things that are gone, a lot of storefronts—and most of the stuff that comes through the Commission is not big, fancy building projects. It's storefront infill, new windows, back of the buildings, interventions and they need to have some design quality and that, I think, Commissioner [Vicki] Match Suna and I were both always very consistent.

That this was about design and it wasn't—once you were before the Commission, it was definitely a design decision that had to be made. There were applicants who were very articulate at sort of outlining what the choices to be made were—you could try and replicate what had been there before, you could interpret based on the surrounding neighborhood something new but that was kind of post modern historic, or you could do something completely different, but it still had

to be able to fit in. That's a design decision as far as I'm concerned, whether it's the detail of it or whether it's the overall proportion of developments. I really believe that it is a design review process, a lot of it.

Q: And you believe then that the Commission, by advising applicants has the ability to shape the design and bring it to a higher level that there's a—maybe I shouldn't say higher level—but that there's a backing for making recommendations and whatnot?

Paulsen: Yes, I remember very early in my tenure as a commissioner, Alex Herrera, who was the director of preservation at that time, he came to me and said, "You know, do we dumb designs down by trying to get all of these ideas from the community?" and I said, "It's not that you try to dumb the design down, it's that you come up with a solution that's the least offensive to the largest number of people and it's not necessarily the right answer." Because there are a lot of projects that have an attempt to be contextual, but they're made out of thin materials with no proper detail, with crappy windows, sorry. But at the end of the day maybe something that looks on a piece of paper like it fits in doesn't mean that the reality of it is going to feel like it belongs in that neighborhood. There were a lot of things that came in like that. It was interesting.

Q: It sounds like also then, the quality of materials and the quality of construction in your mind—as an architect, could you just see this when you're looking at an applicant and how did that—you're bringing something that, historians for the most part can't bring that, or a planner. How did that technical ability come in to the Commission and being able to read those types of details and understand that?

Paulsen: I think that was where some applicants wanted to kill me because they would have—and then I think the staff at that time was not as populated with people who understood the construction technology and the design thinking that went behind some types of buildings. The staff would review and understand it as a two-dimensional paper application and may not have the full understanding, I think. With Sara Carroll and especially under Brian Hogg whose knowledge on architecture was just extraordinary but they and the staff that work for them are extremely knowledgeable today. And working with staff as I do now; it's really terrific because they are really understanding what is being proposed.

But when I first started it was slightly different. Alex obviously has an architectural background and really understands how things go together but how to get to either a denial or an approval that was based on something more than looking like the neighboring building, because looking like the neighboring building may not be the right answer for your building. Also, there's the second layer which is if it was worth designating these building and telling people they had to keep them up, then there has to be some quality that's being preserved and why on earth would you allow someone to put a really junky, flat façade just because it has punched windows and a red brick? It's not going to feel the same.

I think one of the really good things about the time that I was on the Commission was that we did have a lot of architects, and with Vicki Match Suna and Richard Alcott and Jan [Hird] Pokorny, who was the best, and Pablo Vengoechea, because he's an architect and a planner. We had a really extraordinary wealth of thinking available and we were lucky because Tom [Thomas F.]

Pike and Meredith [J.] Kane were two of the smartest people—they understood aesthetics and architecture in a way that a lot of lay people don't just by being there and being smart. Chris [Christopher] Moore's another one, just an incredible group of people and we had a very collegial, and I think hats continued to today. Prior to Jennifer, the commissioners I think were more argumentative and less respectful of both applicants and each other's opinions.

Q: How did you see that manifested?

Paulsen: Well because I came on the Commission afterwards, it was only after talking to commissioners that had been there for a while. Before Jennifer the Commission would start I think in the afternoon and they would work till late at night and they only got to eat bad pizza and so nobody was in a good mood. Some of the people who had been appointed in the past were particularly argumentative and critical. They took what they used to do to students in architecture school and did it to professionals in the field.

They told me—I replaced Rick [Ulrich] Franzen, They told me that Rick Franzen used to go up and mark people's drawings, their boards. I thought, you can't do that. People have paid—and this is the other part. Being an architect I understand what the client is asking you to do, what the client is investing in you and what you're doing, and even if it's a terrible proposal, you have to at least respect the fact that somebody wanted to bring it forward. They invested some money in this and you owe them at least a hearing and constructive criticism.

Jennifer was a hundred percent about that. A, she got the Commission to behave in a much more business-like manner by starting the hearings at nine-thirty in the morning. She got a caterer to do the lunches. These are stupid things but she got this woman who did incredible, healthy, wonderful luncheons, so you had good food to eat and it was good for you. She instituted a coffee hour break in the afternoon.

Q: That's nice.

Paulsen: Well it was important, we all paid for it because the lunch took up most of our lunch budget, but she made sure that there was a coffee break. And if we could have cookie or something in the afternoon, that way you can go from nine-thirty in the morning till seven at night, if need be. She really insisted on a collegial atmosphere and treating people nicely *[laughs],* which is not what I think most people would expect, but she really, really made it possible and she totally understood that it was about buildings. She didn't know anything about architecture. She would always say this isn't what I do, but she said, but you know it, Richard, Jan, you guys know this, you need to tell me what the right answers are, and I will fight for it if I can. So it was an incredibly collegial working relationship amongst all the commissioners.

Q: And where were most of these discussions, were these in the public hearings?

Paulsen: She never said that in a public hearing.

Q: Well not saying that, but getting the dialogue going of hearing your voices.

Paulsen: Well, at that time, lunchtime was, we couldn't talk about matters that were happening in the hearing, but she would say that some issue was coming up and there might be some preliminary discussion. At that time, both she and I benefitted tremendously—and I think the Commission benefitted—from the use of committees, which were not public to meet with applicants and be able to have a very free dialogue with them beforehand. I know that it drove a lot of advocates crazy but it was very productive.

Q: No, that's what I think. Since advocates are going to be reading this, to hear more about the productivity of why you think they're so valuable would be great to have on the record. So I don't know if you want to say anything more about it, about what it was that those allowed you to do, work that you otherwise wouldn't have been able to do.

Paulsen: I think in a very short sort of description, people who, either the owner, or the owner and the architect, who wanted to do something—and Jennifer had a very good sense of when something was going to be controversial or difficult—she would bring them in to meet with three or four commissioners.

Q: As part of these committees?

Paulsen: In the committee. She would give them the opportunity to make a presentation or show some sketches. That was very productive because now, I think an owner or an architect feels that they need to do a full blown presentation of an idea and file an application and then go to a

public hearing. That could be six months worth of work, which could be, that could be a quarter of a million dollars that somebody has invested in a very bad idea whereas in the committee session, you wouldn't get yes we'll approve of that or no we won't approve of that, what you would get is a conversation about why do you want to do it this way, and maybe you should think about doing something either in this direction or this direction. We never told people what to do. We never told them you're going to get something approved because we were only three or four people—and there were times when the committee was completely off base about a project, when it had really big political highlights to it.

But I really, I think, was a practical way of dealing with the very early time in a project because to invest the money into something that is just going to get knocked down at the first hearing is really crazy. And some of these projects are so small that it doesn't make sense to even advance it. I know that they have ways of showing things to people, but that initial back and forth with an applicant was really important. The project that was most interesting with that, and most successful at a hearing, and has caused some people heartburn afterwards was Hearst [Tower]. Hearst was entirely done through a committee. We never knew if we were going to get to yes, but we knew that all the issues had been put on the table.

Q: Can I ask a bit more about the committees themselves? How many committees were they, their worth, what was the composition? How did they work?

Paulsen: There were two standing committees, one was the Designation Committee and one was the Policy Committee. The Designation Committee was a group of five commissioners, it

couldn't be six, so I think it was five. One was the chairman and then there were four others. I did not become a member of the Designation Committee until I became chairman. There was a formal process for reviewing potential designations, and the Designation Committee had to say, we think it's of interest. It wasn't a designation but that would lead to a letter from the Commission to the building owner saying we think you might have something of value and then the process could start.

Q: I just want to make sure I get it. So the applicants submits the application to LPC and then the Designation Committee would decide whether it merited a certain amount of—

Paulsen: It was even more complicated because Request for Evaluation the RFE's, could come from anywhere. It could come from the building owner, it could come from an advocacy group, it could come from a member of the Commission, it could come from staff. It could come from anywhere. All you had to say was I'm interested, will you look at this. The first step was an internal committee that was made of the chief of staff, the executive director, the head of Research Department, and there was another member of the research department, the chair and the council. So it was entirely internal and that group would look at whatever that building or place was and say, does it meet the criteria? Is it thirty years old? Is it whatever, is it distinctive for its place or style? Is it this or is it that. The Research Department had been led by Marjorie Pearson for a long time when I was first appointed to the Commission and Marjorie had real internal criteria that were applied across the board and they were clearly a continuation of the things that the Commission had looked at before and it was really quite strict.

Q: Strict in what sense?

Paulsen: Well, just because there was a neighborhood that neighbors felt was a special place, it may be so completely altered that you're dealing with nothing but a bunch of buildings that are really, really not original fabric and not substantial historical fabric—it's trying to make your own district so you can control what's going on. That was hard to say was a historic district and that really put a lot of neighborhoods, I think, out of contention for a lot of the evaluations.

The individual landmarks were in some ways more problematic because you could have a really old wooden house, which you get in Staten Island a lot. It would have a lot of original fabric but it would be in terrible condition, so you were left saying, what do we do with it once we designate it? Because unlike a lot of commissions, there's no money. There may be grants available through the grant program but even that was pretty slim pickings and you'd have to go to the [New York Landmarks] Conservancy and they're going to make you match *[laughs]*. There was always this sort of what are we doing kind of aspect to individuals.

But I think I opened the door to consideration of more cultural kinds of designations with Sugar Hill. Because not being a historian, and not being an architectural historian I had to say—the research staff would come back and say, well we can do these five buildings and these five buildings and these five buildings. Then I would say, you know, if I go walk around the Upper West Side, which is a humongous historic district, and a lot of these buildings were in pretty altered states or not in the best of shape when the Upper West Side District [Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District] was designated. And now I go to Sugar Hill and I'm

going up to a neighborhood that's not in great shape, but it has a feel and it has a lot of buildings that look the way the Upper West Side looked in the 1980.

Q: Oh that's an interesting comment.

Paulsen: I felt we could draw the boundaries more expansively. Not as generously as the neighborhood advocates wanted it, but I felt we could do something that encompassed what could truly be revived and turned around. I'm very proud of that designation, which was very tough to do, because I think we were able to respond to a community who desperately wanted something recognized there, and it allowed for consideration of a lot of the neighborhoods in Brooklyn—that really did merit consideration but had been shut out for a long time because they didn't have cohesive or original fabric throughout but they were still recognizable as districts.

The one I felt the sorriest about was Richmond Hill. I mean it's a sad, sad situation because it's such a committed group of people and the homeowners who have renovated their buildings have done terrific jobs. I took the whole Designation Committee out there and I said you tell me. They just looked and said this is not a historic district.

Q: What were the reasons *[crosstalk]* people talk about it a lot.

Paulsen: It just wasn't a cohesive place. There were very attractive buildings—maybe two on this block and one on this block and one on that block—that the advocates were owners and had done restoration for, but the rest of the place was rally hodgepodge. There was no streetscape.

When you do a historic district you're doing the buildings, the sidewalks, the streets, and it just didn't hang together. Nobody—if one commissioner had said to me *[laughs]*—that's always my joke is that all you really need is three commissioners because you need someone to make the motion and someone to second. Because you don't have to calendar something at a full meeting of the Commission. All you need are three people who will say, I'll vote for this.

Q: We'll hear it.

Paulsen: Yes. There was just nothing there. I'll never forget one of the commissioners walking around going, "This is not a historic district. There's nothing here." *[Laughter]*.

Q: How did you see the difference between Sugar Hill, where you described this sense of place, and then the lack of sense of place in Richmond? Could you describe what it was beyond—?

Paulsen: Oh yeah. In Sugar Hill you had buildings that still looked like rowhouses, mansions, whatever they were—stables. There were building there that still made up a real urban fabric. Richmond Hill was some renovated single-family homes, and some single-family homes that had been turned into six-plexes as far as I could see. The thing is it was so obvious, windows were gone, siding was on half the buildings, The yards were not coherent in their form or their materials. It was just totally—confused imagery was one of my favorite terms in preservation, it was great.

I had a very big perseveration project in White Plains and the preservationist working on the project wrote this sentence, “These are areas of confused imagery.” That’s it. That is the term to use. The thing is when you look at Richmond Hill and you compare it to Ditmas Park or some of the more recent ones—I’m blanking on the name—where even though there have been changes you still have the building, the porch, the yard, and yes the windows had been knocked out but the buildings still looked like the building. You didn't have that at Richmond Hill. It was really a mishmosh. Then you could go to someplace like the Grand Concourse, which staff had resisted for a long time. The reason they resisted—and they resisted not for historical or planning reasons but because from a regulatory viewpoint there were no original windows in any of those buildings and they said what are we going to do.

Q: That’s interesting the regulatory view came into play.

Paulsen: Well it does. Jackson Heights [Historic District] had been designated before I was appointed to the Commission. And the staff said many times, when projects came in, they said, you do realize we did not recommend making this a historic district because we did not think we could regulate it.

Q: In what sense, what were their regulatory concerns?

Paulsen: They had buildings with no original windows. They had buildings that had major modifications along the sidewalk and the streetscape, and that’s where all the violations came in. It was really heartbreaking because as an architect, Jackson Heights and Sunnyside Gardens are

really preeminent models for development. They have really cohesive architecture, really interesting history and a really true sense of place. But for staff, they were nightmares, and they were nightmares for probably fifteen years. The council member from Jackson Heights—I remember when I was chairman—said that she could not see how the Commission could keep designating things because they couldn't enforce things like Jackson Heights. It really was hard to do.

Q: How did those regulatory challenges play out? One thing I'm curious about is, having recently walked around SoHo and looked at SoHo from the eyes of—okay, what was SoHo like when the Commission designated it? And it's not like SoHo is now. In a way because the Commission had the power to regulate, SoHo has more probably compatible fabric. The place we know feels more cohesive architecturally than it did at designation.

I'm wondering what your thoughts are on that and how that factors into your decisions. If it does in a place like Sugar Hill, if you saw that potential of we can designate this, we can regulate this and that same phenomenon is going to happen—someone's going to make an application to replace their cornice, and then you're going to have a whole intact row at some point, ten years down the line. But I'm wondering if that was a thought consideration for Commission.

Paulsen: I think we just felt that in—if we designated something we had to be partners with whoever owned these buildings it couldn't be an adversarial relationship because we would never be able to regulate. I think that was part of the problem in a place like Jackson Heights. That community did not want to be designated. They saw it as an intrusion into the way that the

community was evolving. There was a small group of people, and very good advocates for designation in Queens, the very strong historic support, but it wasn't the residents and the business people in the neighborhood. I think that was something that we worked very hard on, both under Jennifer and under me and I know that Bob [Robert B.] Tierney has done a good job with this, it's really getting people to buy in to the designations because just doing it over their objections is really tough.

Q: That's curious because I was reading when you went to Fieldstone which was long before it was actually designated going to talk to owners up there. But if I could just jump back to, you were commissioner from '95 to 2001 before you were appointed chair. So Jennifer Raab went over to Hunter [College] and six months left of Giuliani's administration, you were vice chair at that point?

Paulsen: I was never vice chair, Pablo has been the vice chair all along.

Q: I'm sorry for that *[laughs]*.

Paulsen: Yes. Pablo said, he was someplace and they said, "You're just going to be the chairman now." And he said, "Am I?" and I said, "I don't know."

Q: So you weren't vice chair. How did then the appointment to commissioner come about?

Paulsen: Jennifer—she had been interested in an educational career appointment and she had asked me if she was awarded or given the job of the presidency of Hunter, would I be interested in being the chairman. And I said, of course *[laughter]*. Once her appointment was confirmed, which is a whole other story from her side, she then introduced me to the deputy mayor and he then had me meet with Mayor Giuliani. Then I was just appointed because we managed to sidestep going to the Council.

Q: May I ask how so?

Paulsen: Because the law allows the mayor to appoint any member of the Commission as the chairman and since I was already a commissioner, I was just appointed as the chairman. The Historic Districts Council likes to say I was an acting chairman, I was not. I was fully appointed—

Q: This is for the record *[laughs]*.

Paulslen: I was fully appointed, *[laughter],* not acting. I did it with the knowledge that I may not be the chairman come January first. This was May of 2001 and I didn't know who the next mayor was going to be *[laughs]*—

Q: No one did *[laughs]*.

Paulsen: No one did, it was a little chaotic at that time. And so, I got appointed.

Q: What were your thoughts? Being a commissioner you had seen the way Jennifer ran the Commission, you knew you were coming in, you had six months, maybe more, I'm assuming what's going through your head. What were your thoughts on how you envisioned your role as chair? Did you see it, in that six months, being different than Jennifer's, being a continuation in some ways?

Paulsen: I knew it was going to be different. Jennifer had been a member of the Giuliani inner circle. I was not a member of the Giuliani inner circle. I really felt that I was going to be a more hands on manager of the Commission and I was going to, I don't want to say lead the Commission, but I was going to be more involved in the decision making about the projects, for new buildings, et cetera, that were coming before the Commission. It was a time when we had a lot of major projects brewing. We were looking at Hearst, that was coming. The Morgan Library [& Museum] was coming. The Whitney Museum [of American Art] they still thought they were going to do something on Madison Avenue.

Q: Oh I didn't realize that.

Paulsen: Oh this is the back story, *[unclear]* the Whitney Museum,

Q: I didn't even—

Paulsen: Oh yes, it was actually the biggest one *[laughter]*. So there were those three brewing.

Q: When you were appointed chair?

Paulsen: When I was appointed chair. Then the other part of it was I really felt that the designations had—Jennifer had set up a sort of—because she's a very good manager—she had set up goals for the research staff each year; we're going to do this many individual landmarks and this many historic districts. Knowing what we had the limited staff and limited budget that we had, and there was this real desire to get Sugar Hill done, I said that I felt we could shift and do a larger historic district and less individual landmarks and still come out whole at the end of the year.

Q: Whole meaning having met these expectations?

Paulsen: We would meet the goal. Yeah, so it was really that and really focusing on the mid-Twentieth Century buildings that were sort of lingering in the background. We had done probably the most significant landmark designations for the mid-Twentieth Century office towers. The most important ones had been done by that point.

Q: The individual landmarks?

Paulsen: Yes, But you know, the Bob [Robert A.M.] Stern wish list [Stern 35], which everybody likes to say oh these are—some of those buildings were never going to get designated, but some of them truly merited it and we needed to really look outside the Manhattan core. This was not—

Jennifer didn't have a really big agenda for the five borough approach but I started by saying I think we should look to find something in each of the boroughs—whatever it is, whether it's a district, whether it's a building—we should tried to make it around the city. I was not as successful at that as I would've liked but at least we looked.

Q: Do you think also by looking kind of set the pieces of what happened later?

Paulsen: What I think I did do, is by asking Mary Beth [Betts] and the research staff to sort of give me their top priorities in certain categories; industrial buildings in Long Island City, the Catholic church. I went to the research staff and I said give me the best twenty-five.

Q: Wow, that's great foresight.

Paulsen: And let's try to—nobody can make any inroads with the church, but if we could get a meeting, if we could get a conversation going, let's go in there and say these are your best buildings, give them to us. And maybe they won't give us any, *[laughter],* but at least we have a shot of having a conversation and we might get one. But it just seemed like it was important to strategize. I'm a big picture person. I'm not the world's greatest manager and I'm not a great politician, but I am strategic. I do understand how a lot of different pieces fit together and I felt like if I could just sort of say, okay let's look at these specific things, industrial buildings, mid-Twentieth Century, and this is a long shot but the Catholic Church. Let's see what we can do with these, and let's—we know that there's so much interest in historic districts outside of the Manhattan core, let's look at the boroughs and see what can we do. Is there something that we

can at least push a little bit further. I had gotten the Grand Concourse signed off by the Designation Committee and I thought we were going to be able to get that moving. There were just too many other things in the way, but it was there and nothing much was changed in the designation.

Q: So is that in terms of your relationship with various staff, with the Research Department which was Mary Beth Betts at that point, it was more your idea industrial, Catholic Church—?

Paulsen: Just setting an agenda.

Q: You set the agenda, and then she and the research staff went out and—

Paulsen: That was what they do with any chairman I think. There are so many things that you could put on a designation list and you could either have a chronological, sort of, calendar of things and just review. Do a check list, where are we this, where are we this, and go along the list, or you can actually say okay I would like to do this. And that was the only executive motion you could take and that's—my impression is, that that is how priorities have been set. Either from city hall or the chair of the Commission, that's of course how designation priorities get set unless of course there's a real demolition threat.

Q: So you feel it's either the chair or it can be this city hall influence of—

Paulsen: Yea, if there's an interest.

Q: There's one great quote that you said that I came across, it came up, and I'm just going to read this because—you say "It doesn't matter what happens at the administration level, we're consumer agency." And I thought that was such an interesting quote of kind of defining—

Paulsen: You did read my interview then *[laughter]*. But it's true.

Q: Could you talk about that? Because I think there's always—from a preservation perspective—there's always this, is there collusion between LPC—so can you talk about this, as chair, what was the relationship to the administration. You've pretty much said that you were setting the agenda. You were there under two mayors, Giuliani and then [Michael R.] Bloomberg. Was there a difference between the two of them?

Paulsen: Yes, not in the day to day of working in the Commission because I think both Giuliani and Bloomberg, had real respect for the responsibility of the city agencies and neither one of them would call you up and say don't do this or do this. The only thing—sidebar *[laughter]*.

The only thing I was told I had to do was move the Commission out of the [100] Old Slip into the [Manhattan] Municipal Building. Well, I didn't have to move it to the Municipal Building but that's a different part of it. That was really—Landmarks, I hate to say, is not the biggest or the most important to their political wellbeing. It's a thing that's over here. And it's important to people who care about buildings and other historical events, but it's not up here the way Sanitation [The City of New York Department of Sanitation] can be *[laughs]*.

Q: We've learned.

Paulsen: We have learned. What was different under Rudy Giuliani, he did these meetings in every community board, every month. So it was a rotation around the city and the way he did it was he came, the deputy mayors came, and every commissioner came, and you sat at the front of the room and people could come and ask anything they want and Rudy, he was extremely good on his feet and he could immediately say "Sherida you answer this question." Or "Ronnie, you answer this question." And there was immediate responded to people and that was an incredibly powerful outreach mechanism and I think it's one of the reasons that the outer boroughs and probably the middle class New Yorkers felt Giuliani was listening to them. He was there.

Whereas the Bloomberg approach was if he was going to go to a neighborhood, they were called town halls. If he was going to do a town hall he only brought the people that he thought were going to respond to matters of interest to that community, which—you never know what you're going to hear. Somebody may have, it's a food stamp issue. You never know. It may be traffic lights, it's all kinds—it may not be the hot button issue that you heard about, there may be something else that takes over the evening. I think that's one of the things that the Bloomberg administration is a little bit more disengaged with all of the communities on all the different matters that are out there. He just has a very different managerial style. I think under Giuliani you had a more direct connection among the real decision makers whereas under Bloomberg, he really does believe in management in a whole different way. There are more liaisons, there's more chief of staff communication, it's just different.

Q: How did that effect, if you and Giuliani were going to these town halls and you'd have the chair of Planning there—

Paulsen: Everybody.

Q: Yeah. So how did that, in terms of Landmarks deals with Planning issues and Transportation—did that impact the ways the agencies worked together or the agencies understanding one another? Did that kind of—

Paulsen: Well under Giuliani the agencies communicated directly and there was a lot of—and I didn't even think about this because I wasn't so involved in a lot of bigger projects during a lot of the time. But a lot of land use attorneys said they felt very confident in what they were doing because they knew that Joe [Joseph B.] Rose and Jenifer Raab talked to each other about things and that there would be no surprises down the road. Under Bloomberg it went back to, I would say probably, the [David] Dinkins or the [Edward I.] Koch model, where each agency sort of does their own thing and they communicate but they're not necessarily coordinating. Which, as an architect, communication is really important.

Q: Project management.

Paulsen: It's simple when you have a projects, an actions that needs to be reviewed by ten different agencies, it is important that you know that they all can arrive on the same page because

if you're going to get ten different answers then your project isn't going anywhere and—this is not about being chairman of Landmarks, this is about the AIA [American Institute of Architects]—but we've met with Deputy Mayor [Stephen] Goldsmith and we've shown him the charts and said this is what has to happen and this is what does happen, and he was horrified.

Q: The charts, in terms of what specifically—

Paulsen: Just who has to review something and this is how review happens. I think everybody agrees, if a city like White Plains can do coordinated review, I think New York City can find a way. It's not to reduce public input, it's really to get the ability to coordinate the pieces of the projects together.

Q: Are their specific examples you can think of where—projects you worked on that might not have happened as easily if it weren't for that coordination?

Paulsen: From Landmarks there was an amazing project. There was Cass Gilbert warehouse building in the 20s or 30s [streets] I think. It was a—I loved the designation—it was a Neo-Byzantine *[laughter]*. But it was a building in the area that Joe Rose had determined should not be a residential area. They wanted to preserve as much of the manufacturing as possible. But here was this building that merited designation, and an owner who really wanted to do residential conversion, and was going to invest money, time, etcetera, into making this happen. So this was a building that was not really in use for anything and he was going to do something good with it.

Jennifer and Joe had talked about it, and then Joe and I talked about it, and his executive director and I talked about it. It had gone through all of these sort of checks and balances so that the Commission could designate the building, the Commission could review and approve the changes that were required, and it could go to City Planning for the special permit to allow for the use to change. Well, it got to City Planning after Bloomberg was elected and Amanda Burden was in charge. Amanda was still operating on this, how can you make this building a residential building. They got held up because she put a moratorium on everything that she didn't know about when she became chairman. And so this poor guy who thought he had all his ducks in a row got held up but it did ultimately the happy ending occurred, the building got renovated beautifully and everybody was happy. But that's exactly the kind of coordination that is really, really important to happen.

Q: That's interesting to hear the case examples of showing that coordination is the key.

Paulsen: But that was one of the ones that were so sad, because it started before I was chairman. This guy had really done all his homework but if you suddenly have the landscape shift and people are not operating in a coordinated way then the whole thing can fall apart.

Q: There are so many key issues in cases you were doing, The Whitney, which I don't even know the story about.

Paulsen: Nobody knows about the Whitney.

Q: I don't know whether we should start with Whitney, whether we should jump to Modernism but do you want to dive in on the Whitney?

Paulsen: Oh, I'd—*[laughter]*.

Q: Are you ready? I'm excited to hear this one.

Paulsen: It's so sad. The Whitney, this was when Max [Maxwell L.] Anderson was the director and—there were two directors there was a sort of artistic director for the shows and things. and then there was managing director who ran the museum day to day. They. with their board had selected Rem Koolhaas as—this is the missing scheme *[laughs]*.

Q: This is great.

Paulsen: Yeah, well, they selected Rem Koolhaas as their architect for their expansion. Rem had come up with an incredibly interesting scheme and it was brilliant. Here's Breuer [Building], and here's all the little row houses, and the one that was a non-contributing, and here's the mansion back here. I guess this actually goes like this. Rem had decided to approach the addition as something that started here and then grew and went over this but it was an independent structure.

Q: That went over the Breur Building?

Paulsen: Yes. It was so brilliant and so big *[laughter]*, it was by far the most interesting scheme that anybody could've ever come up with and it was really like this tornado of a building because it landed in this very small footprint and it expanded and grew up.

Q: Up and over.

Paulsen: But I felt, and I think the other commissioners who were looking at it on a small committee, felt that for the first time it was a building, a group of buildings, and a third building. It didn't look like an addition to any of the historic buildings, it was a third building, which made it easy to look at from the museum perspective, harder to look at from the district perspective because it was a new building in the district. So it had a different layer of review potentially, if it had gotten there but it was worth looking at it. Because there were other new buildings that had been approved in the Upper East Side Historic District, if we looked at it that way as opposed to an addition to the building, it changed how you parsed this whole process.

Q: New building versus addition, and the different requirements?

Paulsen: Your standard, you're still looking for your harmonious and does not affect and all those wonderful terms that you have to say in your motion. But it changed the terms of the discussion in a really interesting way.

Q: How so, can you just elaborate on that in some ways?

Paulsen: If you're looking for a rooftop addition, you're always going to need to minimize it so that it doesn't read as—depending on what buildings you're looking at, but in theory if this is the major historic building on this block, how could you add something to that? It would have to be small, minimally visible, not read as overwhelming the building et cetera, et cetera. Same thing with these. This is an intact row of row houses with commercial fronts. How are you going to add to those in a way that doesn't detract from those buildings? So if you take down the noncontributing building and you put a new building in its place, that reads really as an independent structure. Rem being smart, he got that and he was designing this to be a truly independent piece of architecture. They had Arup working on the engineering. I have no clue how they actually thought they were going to build this because it was really tough.

Q: I'd love to see the drawings.

Paulsen: But the theoretical idea of this not being an addition meant that you could look at it as an independent structure and was it an appropriate addition to the historic district. As long as they could keep the height down and from the longer views it was—and he really did design this thing so when you were looking down Madison Avenue you saw this little bit but you weren't seeing it as the primary thing. It was one of the smartest design I've ever seen. But—

Q: I'm hearing all this, what happened?

Paulsen: The board of the Whitney lost faith. They were totally one hundred percent behind it aesthetically. I think internally things just went wrong. Max was—I don't know what was the

first, the board's lack of faith in the Koolhass scheme or their lack of faith in Max. He left, so when your big cheerleader leaves that's a problem. The other part of it was they had done a real financial analysis of A, what was it going to cost to build this thing and B, what was it going to cost to operate it. They had come to the conclusion that a vertical museum was really going to cost a lot more money to operate, especially in the configuration that he had developed

Q: Oh, interesting.

Paulsen: Because he—all of the collection exhibition spaces would be on existing floors and this building on the lower floors, because the footprint was so small, wasn't really adding to the permanent exhibition area. What it added was these big floors at the top for larger pieces which they couldn't exhibit and some additional storage and collection space. But their offices were here, this would basically be the same building and they weren't getting as much true expansion and coordination as they felt they needed to, to operate more efficiently. And like everybody else, they were looking whereas the money going to come from et cetera et cetera. Koolhass presented this to Bloomberg.

Q: Oh he did?

Paulsen: Oh yeah. It was a brilliant presentation.

Q: The committee had seen this proposal—*[crosstalk]*

Paulsen: The Landmarks Committee had seen it and the Landmarks Committee decided that they couldn't say it would be approved, but that it was worth having Bloomberg and the deputy mayors take a look at it, and the other commissioners because Amanda Barden would need to look at it. She could see the presentation as well, but this gave the mayor an opportunity to look at it, hear from his senior advisors and if he felt he couldn't defend it, then he could've said to the museum just pull this back. But it was a very exciting moment because Rem did one of the best presentations I've ever seen.

Everything was positive and then the museum did their review and realized how expensive it was going to be and started to pull back. Rem did one of the most—I was horrified. He asked for a meeting with me and the museum leaders and he wanted me to tell them that this was the only thing that would ever get approved and so they had to go for it. I went to this meeting and I knew full well what was going on—I don't remember if Max Anderson was at the meeting but the other director was there and he was furious. I could not say you must go forward I just said if the support for this building is not here from the museum side, the city's support cannot be here as well. This is really up to the museum to decide what they can do. And that was not what Rem wanted at all. But I felt like he had really done a heinous thing in trying to put a public servant into that position, it was the wrong thing to do. And it died.

They went back and they hired Renzo [Piano]. Well they did two things, they hired Adam [D. Weinberg], the current director who's phenomenal and Renzo. That was a much happier marriage. They will probably abandon the Breur Building at the end of the day unfortunately.

They could never get what they really wanted without tearing all these buildings down. As great as the Rem Koolhaas idea was it really would not have satisfied their needs so it was tough.

Q: What an interesting conversation it must've been about the idea of new addition to, and harmonious means and what this means, and all of those terms that people struggle with.

Paulsen: We were very lucky—

[INTERRUPTION]

Paulsen: I don't know all the real things that happened in the Whitney board meetings and all that, I only know what was presented to me. When I was on the Commission we were coming out of the really horrible early '90s recession, which was really bad, and there was a lot of new building going on and historic districts are desirable neighborhoods and so there was a lot of new construction. We really, I think, in the six years before I was appointed chairman, we really built up a good record of how to review new buildings. I think it starts with the condominium building at 23rd [Street] and 6th [Avenue], which had started before any of us where even on the Commission. I think it's called the Caroline, and Costas Kondylis was the architect and it just wasn't getting to yes at the Commission for the façade design. They brought in Ray Cook *[phonetic]* to do the façades and he did a terrific job.

Q: Oh, I know the building.

Paulsen: Yep. That really set the template for—even though a lot of it was given because there had been negotiations and decisions before a lot of us were on the Commission, but it came to the conclusion because we were able to start to define for ourselves what we were doing in terms of looking at new buildings. And that was a big, big building at the edge of a historic district really.

Then I think the next significant one was the Scholastic Building in SoHo, which was really fun and really interesting, because [Aldo] Rossi, working with Morris Adjmi had done a very Post-Modern contextual design for the Broadway side, and then had done what a lot of us think was his real heart's desire on the Mercer Street side. And the Mercer Street façade is so much more successful as architecture than the Broadway side.

Q: Can you talk a bit more about that *[crosstalk]*—?

Paulsen: Well because I think, the Broadway side took—and when I say Post-Modern, really Post-Modern approach, oversized columns, colorization, it's more of that two dimensional look. I like it very much but it's not a cast iron building, it's not a brick building. It's a façade pasted on a building whereas you to go the Mercer Street side and you've got those amazing Cor-Ten [steel] frames and it's really where, if you're looking at a cast iron façade, you can see that as a development of a cast iron façade and it established the base plane I would say for us to review the Nouvel building [40 Mercer Street].

Q: How so?

Paulsen: Because we had learned. You have a Modern construction design and installed on the Mercer Street façade; it wasn't fake anything and it didn't try to look like anything. It felt like an extension of the district, an evolution of the architecture of the district. So when the [Atelier Jean] Nouvel scheme came in, that was really a remarkable glass design and it related to the cast iron, it related to the large openings in a really interesting way. It gave every commissioner around the table the sense that we had more success on Mercer Street side because we looked at it as what would this district be like today rather than let's make it look like the district did one hundred years ago, which was a very different way of approaching it—and harmonious.

Q: I'm curious about that. I'm curious about standards within the Commission and how you build this process and what becomes appropriate new development. Even in terms of the Rossi building, I agree the façades are – I love the Mercer Street façade even the whole overhang of the old—

Paulsen: It's cute.

Q: It's wonderful. But I'm wondering too, even in terms of using words like contexualism or harmonious, looking at both façades of that building, how that led the Commission—whether it did or didn't—just in the process of developing a Commission standard for new construction. Where did the Commission come from and where was it going?

Paulsen: The thing the Commission prides itself on is that there is no one standard. It's very much—and this is every council to the Commission will say this, it is a case by case basis. If it's individual landmark, you're looking at every decision you're making within the context of that building. If you're looking at a historic district and the district is designated for X, Y, Z, you're decision has to be defensible based on that criteria,

There was a very beautiful building proposed for a corner in SoHo by H. Stern [Jewelers], the jewelers. Beautiful, beautiful design. I think they came to three hearings, making modifications. At the end of the day, Richard Alcott, who would go to the mat for the design anywhere, he finally just said, "Its beautiful but it doesn't belong in this district." And that was really where the standards came to. They really are defined by the neighborhood that you're looking at. So contextual can be as much about scale as it is about materials. There's a building in Tribeca—I forget—it's a corner building. I think it's east of the Holland, east of the Holland Tunnel ramp.

Q: A new one within the past two or three years?

Paulsen: No, it's in the last ten years, and the Commission approved. Very modern, very—almost cubist kind of façades. This one woman from Tribeca, who came to hearings frequently, just couldn't understand why we weren't telling them to make it a brick building. We said, it fits the scale, it's a nice design, it uses industrial materials. It's not brick but not everything in Tribeca is brick *[laughter]*. So it's hard but I think when you're dealing with a group of architects and planners around the table—and that is the majority of the Commission at any

time—you're looking at people who are looking at design in a continuum of the city and architecture and trying to make sure that it fits because each district has its own story.

SoHo has—it's got some brick buildings with little windows, but it really is designated because it took a whole new way of building. These were taller than their adjacent, they had incredibly large expanses of glass, they had all this exuberant metal on the facades, and they had a very coherent kind of appearance, but they had lots of different colors and lots of different individual sort of design elements, and they felt good together. So that's what we were looking for in SoHo, whereas in Tribeca it was about height and it was about keeping the walls. You wouldn't have a building that was set back and all this other stuff—that would just be stupid in Tribeca. It was a very simple form that you could make a little bit of playful stuff going on but it wasn't about brick or cast iron, it was the form and the height and the scale.

So it's really—the Upper West Side you're looking at a different kind of rhythm. On the Upper East Side—that's a whole different story, the Upper East Side is a little broad in its building typologies. You're looking at an apartment building within the apartment building typologies, and mansion buildings within that scale, and the rowhouses with the commercial fronts, you're looking at that. You've got all these different typologies that you got to kind of look at. Then does it fit with the typology and then does it fit within its immediate context, sort of go through this whole list of things.

Q: I never thought about the two-prong, for a district as big as the Upper East Side. That's interesting *[crosstalk]*.

Paulsen: Well because it's so—it was designated primarily for residential buildings, but residential buildings that either have things happen to them, with the retail store fronts beings added on Madison, or apartment buildings or mansion buildings. It actually is written about that way in the designation report because it's not for a single type of building.

That's an interesting thing because when you look at the earliest historic district, not Brooklyn Heights [Historic District] but the ones that came after like Carnegie Hill [Historic District] which was two little groups of five buildings. The attempt that was made by the city at that time, which was make these two little bunches of buildings the landmarks, and we'll do preservation zoning, which allowed for fifty-story buildings on Madison Avenue *[laughter]*. It didn't accomplish what they were trying to accomplish. So yes, you had to do Carnegie Hill, it had to be a much bigger district which encompassed a lot of building types, but still allowed for other things to happen.

Q: Speaking of Upper East Side, the Carnegie Hill Woody Allen issue happened.

Paulsen: *[Unclear]*

Q: Yeah, *[laughs]*. Could you tell me about that and that whole experience, coming down from the seventeen-story building to was it finally a ten-story building?

Paulsen: I think its nine stories with a penthouse *[laughs]*.

Q: Can you explain the back and forth? Because that seems like a case where the community groups and individuals were very involved and I'm wondering—

Paulsen: And nobody was happy in the end, nobody. I don't know a single architect who thinks that's a good building; it should be taller *[laughter]*. And yet, you would never have gotten consensus if it was taller. That barely passed, the way it is now.

First of all it was a really horrible building on that corner. The people in the neighborhood thought it should be a three to four-story building on the corner and that would've made no sense because there's no development in a three to four-story building. If the ground floor were available maybe, but the ground floor was already taken so nobody would've done anything to get two stories of residential on top of the bank. You were either going to live with the ugly bank building, and it was really ugly *[laughter]*, or you were going to allow something bigger. At the end of the day setting the datum to relate to the two taller buildings on the other corners, just made way more sense. Way more sense, and that was the only way that the Commission came to a decision. The seventeen-story building was nicer proportions but it stuck out like a sore thumb. As a building it was a better building, but there was just nothing in the neighborhood that would've really given a reason to approve it. Its footprint was so small, the height was too tall, it just didn't fit and so we end up with not a great building. But at least the windows are nice.

Q: Do you think there's a lesson to be learned from something like that? A takeaway?

Paulsen: I don't know because again, it's case by case.

Q: Yes.

Paulsen: And the Commission, I will say it's design review, but at the end of the day you do have to respect context, and you have to respect precedence of the of the district or the neighborhood that you're looking at or the building. This was not a place where you can say a seventeen-story building that's like a spike, fits. The apartment buildings that were that tall were huge. They were full block-front buildings. They weren't ninety by seventy or whatever the size of the footprint—it was tiny. So it just didn't feel like it belonged. You can sort of come up with all the mathematical, factual reasons in the world for why, and so we've got a building that fits into all those factual things, but it's not great. It's not a landmark building, as much as you want it to be. Charlie [Charles A.] Platt and Paul Byard, they were always disappointed.

Q: It's *[unclear]*. Well, I'm wondering if you want to jump to, since we're on the subject of additions and things like that to Modernism since that was one of your big concerns and I know that's a big preservation issue today *[laughter]*. We know the biggest issue of the street, but even organizations like Docomomo [International], they're certainly champions of Modernism.

Paulsen: Oh yeah.

Q: Now, no longer just here in the US and New York but all around the world.

Paulsen: Oh no, Docomomo's amazing around the world.

Q: So I'm wondering it seems to me you're leading the Modernism bandwagon in some ways with protecting things.

Paulsen: I think the Landmarks Commission didn't get enough credit for what it did do with respect to the mid-century Modern buildings. I mean long before my time, Lever House and Seagram's [Seagram Building] were designated—and Seagram's was <u>really</u> designated *[laughs]*. I mean, to do the Four Seasons [Restaurant] and the building. And our office, quirkily enough, we were the mangers of the Seagram's building preservation plan

Q: Oh wow.

Paulsen: We, our founders, Gio [Giovanni] Pasanella and [J.] Arvid Klein had gone to school with Phyllis [Lambert]. So, Mies [Ludwig Mies van der Rohe] and Phillip [Johnson] got to do the building but then when it came time to write a perseveration plan for the building, which had to be done when they sold the building to the insurance company even though Seagram's would continue to be a tenant and the name was on the building. What they did was develop this book of standards which were for the interior and the exterior.

Q: Wow.

Paulsen: Yes. It was amazing. And for thirty-five years our office basically either did the work or blessed the work that was done to the Seagram's building. It was an amazing preservation act and that's the reason it looks as good as it does today.

Q: I didn't realize that. Was that a requirement from LPC to have this preservation handbook *[crosstalk]*-?

Paulsen: No, I think this was before the building was actually designated as a landmark. It was around the same time. But it was really because the Bronfman's—Phyllis especially—they really wanted to preserve what had been created by their family. Our role with the building stopped about five or six years ago when it was—as long as there was a Seagram's presence, we had to review and this plan governed what was going on. But when the building was sold, when Seagram's went away and Aby Rosen took over the building, that plan went in the garbage, so now it's the Commission that rules on everything.

Q: That's really interesting to know *[crosstalk]*—

Paulsen: It was really amazing.

Q: I had no idea, so progressive of—

Paulsen: Oh, the whole thing, the windows—they were quite dictatorial about everything that happened to the building and the Commission's role really came into play only a couple times.

When Diller Scofidio was working on the new entrance to the Brasserie, they did come to the Commission for a proposal to modify the revolving door and it went away so somehow that was able to be done on the staff level. Then it came back again with Aby when he was doing the application for the Norman Foster condominium on Lexington, where the Y [YMCA, Young Men's Christian Association] used to be. There were other reviews for how things would touch the Seagram Building on the back but no changes to the rest of it.

Q: I didn't realize that.

Paulsen: It's a real trophy.

Q: So from the time you arrive on the Commission in '95, landmarking of individual Modern buildings was that *[crosstalk]*—

Paulsen: Well Jennifer took the Stern thirty-five list and she said, okay what should we do with these. We designated the Ford Foundation Building, the CBS [Building] tower, there were a bunch of towers.

Q: Was the interior of the Time-Life [Building], was that—?

Paulsen: That was me. They were doing a lot of work on the exterior. There were a lot of things going on there, CNN, ESPN, their different television studio leads, that we decided not to deal

with the exterior and to go for the lobby because the lobby was so amazing. They were incredibly cooperative at the end of the day with that, which was good.

Q: Yeah. I know there was some—the Bronx.

Paulsen: My [Marcel] Breuer building [Begrisch Hall].

Q: Yes. Which wasn't thirty-nine years old at the time, is that the—?

Paulsen: No it was.

Q: Oh it was.

Paulsen: No we did do it.

Q: Oh you did do that? I am thinking of the Myer building, is there another? What's the – I don't know what Breuer building that is then in the Bronx.

Paulsen: It's Bronx Community College and it's called Begrisch Hall. Breuer has done these sort of classroom dorm buildings that you can see from the Deegan [Major William Francis Deegan Expressway] and from the part of Manhattan its opposite, that are sort of like boomerangy and then the focal point was this little auditorium that sits really like this punctuation piece, and it's this concrete building that just comes down. It's a real brutalist structure, but it's very cool, very

intact and I said, let's do this and the college was fine. They would've been very confrontational if we had gone to them and said we must designate the classroom and dormitory buildings because they needed a lot of work. They said let's keep talking but the Begrisch one, it was so iconic and it photographed beautifully and it was an easy one. They said yeah, let's do that *[laughs]*.

Q: So you had approached them saying this—*[crosstalk]*.

Paulsen: Yeah. When they gave me the list of what's sort of hanging around out there, I said well lets go after these. So Begrisch Hall, the Time-Life interior and the Socony-Mobil [Building] which was just hilarious to do.

Q: How so?

Paulsen: It is huge. I mean go down 42nd Street and here's this really wacky building, and the attorney representing them said, "I will not let you designate this." And I said, "Well if you say that then you know I'm going to get it" *[laughter]*. I will do it over your objections, because the history was there. It was the first building to be fully air-conditioned, it was the biggest, it was the this, it had this façade, and it was intact. There had been like one modification of anything on that building.

Q: That's incredible.

Paulsen: And it's overbuilt. It was never going to get torn down. I said we can do this, it's out there but let's just do it and so we did it

Q: What was the reaction, public reaction when you started focusing on Modernism?

Paulsen: Not much, everyone had their own Modern buildings they wanted to focus on. Sometimes it wasn't the designation but the ability to just provide a platform, like for the TWA [Trans World Airlines] Terminal. It was designated but there was all this stuff going on in the background.

When the Port Authority [of New York and New Jersey] came to us to explain what they kind of thought what they needed to do, I said well it's not a hearing but why don't we have a public presentation and the opportunity for the public to respond. We won't do a hearing because we don't really have the ability to tell you not to do this, but we can at least provide a platform. Because we did it in a friendly way, everybody as well behaved. They presented it earnestly and the public didn't go in with this, we hate you and you're just desecrating a landmark, they came in with very constructive criticism. At the end of the day, I think it really set the sort of space for the negotiations that then went on between MAS [Municipal Art Society] and the Landmarks Conservancy and the Port Authority to arrive finally at something that would allow everybody to move forward. Because it was sitting. It was just sitting. You had a building that was empty and that was always my biggest worry. And it's still empty which isn't happy, but at least it's been renovated.

Bob Tierney picked up the ball and I said to him, get Jet Blue to take the building. Just get them to take—don't let them continue to sit out here and worry about stuff. They're going to get their terminal. Get them to take the building and do the right thing. Ultimately the agreement that was able to happen allowed all this stuff to finally fall into place. Unfortunately, there's still not a use.

Q: But hopefully that will change.

Paulsen: Some buildings just don't adapt very well, sadly.

Q: I think that's what some people see as the challenge of some Modern building is the reuse. I'm wondering about that and then also from your experience, was there a concern with how you regulate a Modern building?

Paulsen: Yeah, oh yeah.

Q: What were those conversations? Were there internal conversations within LPC of alright if we're designating—Seagram's was before you, but that same type of issue. What do you do with a curtain wall? What do you do—?

Paulsen: Well Lever House was on the table the whole time. It was a very early designation, as soon as it became eligible it was designated. And yet it had a curtain wall that had failed and failed miserably. The initial proposals that came in for work on the building were to encapsulate the failed façade behind a new façade that replicated the old façade. That to me was the most

insane thing anybody could do. But from a perseveration standpoint that made sense. If what you've designated is that ephemeral then I think you can look at other models, the Japanese temples that are taken down and rebuilt in the same way—that's design preservation, cultural preservation, whatever you want to call it.

I think everybody ultimately agreed that you could address preservation of Modern buildings in more creative ways. But that's us here in New York; we don't follow anybody else's standards but our own. It doesn't sort of set a template for any of the other multiple organizations looking at perseveration but I think it does sort of open the door and really start to say, do the parameters and the guidelines that we use today make sense? The [United States] Secretary of the Interior guidelines come from almost an art conservation kind of a viewpoint, and is that really what we're trying to do? Because it may result in very bad architecture and has. Some of the stuff that has been approved under the Secretary's standards is really awful. But it allows you to build something new that is not terribly good because it doesn't detract from the main event.

Q: Can you give an example of that? I mean is there something specific you can think of?

Paulsen: Yes, The Octagon on Roosevelt Island. The Landmarks Commission had signed off on a completely different scheme and then it went to the state and the state decided that they wanted the massing to be what's been built today, and they take precedence because it was a state property. It was so bad because The Octagon used to be a focal point from afar and you can't see it. But again, sometimes the parameters are different and sometimes they can coincide. I come from a design standpoint. If you're designating a Modern building, you're trying to keep that

design. If any of these buildings that you've designated—Richard Alcott and I used to talk about the Jewish Museum because it's beautiful the way they expanded it, but they destroyed the Warburg Mansion [Felix M. Warburg House] to do it. Was that really the best thing to do from a preservation perspective? That's why I think it's always sort of a moving target what appropriateness is. It does depend on the time and the place.

Q: The place being the specific location within the city and the time being the factor of idea around it.

Paulsen: And the community around it. I mean communities change and they change dramatically sometimes.

Q: Yes, I can imagine. For other museum, the Morgan you had already—Renzo had come in on the Whitney plans, Renzo had already—

Paulsen: He came afterwards.

Q: Oh he came after.

Paulsen: Oh, way afterwards. He had gone—the Morgan Library as well underway before he was contacted by the Whitney and asked to be their architect.

Q: How did the Morgan come into being? Because I know there are some people that had such strong opinions about that building, what should or shouldn't be done to it. Could you kind of share that story or what—how—*[crosstalk]*.

Paulsen: The back story on the Morgan Library was very interesting because the Library had commissioned a study on how to do an expansion. The study had concentrated all of the square footage sort of in that garden area, because that was the only space available—and that funny little sliver that comes out on 37th Street I think.

They had invited three or four architects to do a little design competition. One of the architects was Steve [Steven] Holl, who's been a friend of mine for years with, and he invited me over to look at his scheme and invited the director of the Museum. He didn't tell me he was inviting the director of the museum *[laughter]*. So we all sat there and I said, "You know, I can't really give you any specific feedback but I can tell you I think this is really big." What I ended up doing was calling Jenifer and saying these people are doing these studies I think they're wrong, the way they're approaching them. The director of the Library, when the three schemes came in, he was horrified and he—I respect Charlie [Charles E.] Pierce [Jr.] more than anybody in terms of these building projects because he went to his board and he said I have done the wrong thing and none of these designs is appropriate to this building or this museum or this commission and we need to start over.

I was flabbergasted but they had all started from a premise that was just wrong. It wasn't because they had reached out to the preservation community or the neighbors or anybody else. They had tried to divine how it would be reviewed—and this a good one.

Q: So they were kind of catering to what the thought LPC may or may not say in some ways.

Paulsen: Yes.

Q: Is that something that you think happens a lot?

Paulsen: Yes, that's another reason that the committees are helpful. I think it did something like this *[refers to sketch of site]*. I'm not going to have this one hundred percent right but—

Q: It's far better than I can do.

Paulsen: *[Referring to sketch]*. This is the real library. This is the annex. This is the house, and that was the weird building. The Bart [Barthlomew] Voorsanger, the building, sat here. The Commission had reviewed the Bart Voorsanger pavilion, but it was the opinion of a lot of lawyers that that review had been inappropriate and could've been challenged in court at some point.

Q: Why?

Paulsen: Because this was designated and this was designated and I think there was a little connective piece between them. That was the landmark site. This had been designated but had been overturned by the courts because the Lutheran church had gone to the courts and said we cannot maintain it as a landmark and so it had been overturned. So this, owned by the same institution but not on the landmarks site. This was one of Dorothy Miner's great coups to get them to review this and somehow—but no other lawyer felt that that was really a defensible position.

This study that had been given to the first three architects said this is something we like and we'll keep it but it's not a landmark. These are landmarks, this is not a landmark and this is not a landmark, but everybody loves this so put all the square footage here *[laughter]*. Whereas I looked at it—and they had named me as chairman and then Jennifer started taking me to meetings, so I met with Renzo and the head of the Library and I had talked to their land use attorney. I had said this is a landmark, this is a landmark, this should be a landmark, and this should be the land on which the landmark sits in a new building. I said this isn't a landmark but who cares? Let's say its all one site. Well, that made the attorney crazy, "Well how am I going to do a review for that?"

Q: It made the LPC's attorney?

Paulsen: No, the museum—library's attorney crazy. "How are we going to do that?" So the I meet Renzo. Renzo says "This is a landmark, this is a landmark and this is a landmark. What I want to do is put them all together." I looked at him and I said "We're on the same page. We're

going to get them to do this." I said, "The way to do this is we designate this as a landmark and the landmark site is all of this." We essentially cerate three individuals with a very large footprint. We could make it a historic district but that kind of would be stretching things, so I said, this is what I want. I want the building back and I want to review the whole thing. The museum, the library people looked at me and said "Our board is going to go crazy." I said, "They won't." They're going to get what they want. They're going to get demolition of all these things. I said I want this restored and we're going to get this whole thing. I thought Renzo's approach was so brilliant.

You know, Bob Stern's sitting there whining about where you enter the building. He didn't enter this building, you don't enter this building, you haven't entered this building for one hundred years. You went in over here in this little—I mean the man obviously never went to the Morgan Library *[laughter]*. I'm a big patron of the Morgan Library and I thought this was so interesting, as an idea, to create—and what was so amazing was that Christabel Gough at the hearing, brought in the plans for the garden that sat here. That was the garden between the houses. I went, I'm sorry, this scheme makes more sense than anybody could ever imagine. The neighbors were one hundred percent in support because the scale was okay and it wasn't going to have party lights in their backyards and whatever. From a scale perspective, from a material perspective, from everything this scheme worked. The bad thing is, that the way you get into the library is that you go through a back door but it's a nice back door.

Q: It is an nice backdoor *[laughter]*.

Paulsen: They and the Hearst Corporation, as far as I'm concerned, these were people who care about their buildings, and they cared to hire who were appropriate for their institution and businesses, and they put their money where their mouths were. Those were two buildings that really got done right. I mean, everything about them. I get to look at Hearst.

Q: I was just going to say I came in knowing I was going to ask you about it but this couldn't be more perfect.

Paulsen: It is so interesting because—I've said this before, the building changes depending on the weather, the daytime, it's amazing. And I do I wish it was taller I talked to more people who say it should've been taller. I say well, I would've loved to have made it taller but they used up every inch of FAR [Floor Area Ratio] that was available to them.

Q: Oh they did?

Paulsen: That is as tall as it can be.

Q: I've always wondered about that. So what's the story behind that building. Was that a contentious addition?

Paulsen: Not at all, that was—everybody including Ed Kirkland, for [Manhattan] Community Board Five, everybody supported it.

Q: Why do you think that was because normally you know there's no battle where you don't have someone.

Paulsen: I think Historic Districts Council was concerned about the precedent it would set, but it was—

Q: How so or for what reasons?

Paulsen: The Commission had never approved a tower on a landmark and the great case was Grand Central where the Commission said no and it was upheld by Supreme Court. This was approached—you know, Jennifer Raab, being a lawyer—it was approached from a very legalistic view to begin with. They, and again, this was done in committee. The Hearst Corporation hired lawyers and historic preservationist consultants to research that building. What was its story and they were able to prove, because the drawings existed, that it was designed to hold a tower and not just designed as somebody's idea but they built the elevator shafts, the structure—it was all there to support the additional floors. So putting a tower on top, yes, it was possible. The design of the tower on top was the real question mark because there was a George B. Post [and Sons] scheme but the actual Joseph Urban scheme didn't exist.

Q: What had happened to it?

Paulsen: I don't know and it's funny because I could have sworn that I saw an early design drawing for it when some zoning consultants were looking at this when the building was first

designated but they said no. There was no extant drawing and Mary Beth Betts is a Joseph Urban scholar and she said she had never ever found anything, no reference, no nothing. It didn't exist, which opened the door. So you have what the successor architect would have done which wasn't terribly exciting or you could envision whatever you wanted to. So they then, the Hearst Corporation, whoever their leaders are, then selected a member of the board to be the architectural selector and he spent a year touring buildings.

Q: Wow, *[unclear] [laughs]*.

Paulsen: That's why I was saying, when you look at these two buildings and you see the amazing commitment to doing what they thought was the right thing, that was an extraordinary process. To select somebody and tell them, you go find the architect, you have a year to do it. A year. It's amazing.

Q: That's such a—I'd take that job *[laughs]*.

Paulsen: I know. So, he was an amazing man and he toured and he looked at everybody's stuff. We had seen the first sort of round of questions and their presentational—what their research had found and two years later they came back to us and said we've selected Norman [R.] Foster to do the building. It was really interesting because he was probably, from an appropriateness—he was the absolutely most correct choice for a corporation in terms of the way he designs and the way he works, he was the right architect for them.

Q: What do you mean by that? Just—*[crosstalk]*.

Paulsen: They're a private corporation and they just the way that they work and make decisions—do you need to do something?

Q: As long as this one's going we should be fine so let me just check that this one's going. Yep, this one's going.

Paulsen: He—I think just personality, his professional sort of portfolio of real big corporate structures. He was the right architect for them. Just the way Renzo was the right architect for Charlie Pierce and the Morgan and Rem was not the right architect for the Whitney *[laughter]*. But he was selected, and right around the time I was appointed chairman was when he started to do initial design presentations. And so we—

Q: To the committee, the Landmark committee?

Paulsen: This was actually just Jennifer and I went to the very first meeting. He had his zoning analysis and he didn't have a design, he just had sort of how he was approaching. And very shortly after that he came back and I pulled together a committee and it was the first time I ever saw anybody do this—he had this whole bunch of images around the room and he talked about his practice and his work and what he thought that brought to the design of this building. It was really interesting because almost everything he's done incorporates a public space within it and

the design for this building was all around that elevated lobby space which was supposed to be public.

Q: I haven't been in it for obvious reasons.

Paulsen: It's beautiful but it was really interesting because he really felt that you don't do projects like this unless you're having some ability to give something back in terms of the design. This building had a lot of other things, it had subway entrances and all the things City Planning was going to be looking at but the building itself was really all about how do you build on top of this base and such a quirky base? And he had where the tower was going to go, that was about it. Then he sat down and he said what should we do.

Q: Wow it's just you and Jennifer and him?

Paulsen: No this was the second one where the committee was together. I just thought, you have never done a better job of catering to the people who are going to decide, than to sit down and ask them what to do. And because we were well-trained as commissioners, we didn't tell them what to do, we asked questions. Well we can see that there is a problem or an issue to be solved here because you've got a tower that's going to land on this base and where's the transition. How are you going to deal with the fact that this is this, and this is this, and you've got these pylon-things at the corners that are doing what they're doing.

I think we had a couple of meetings where it was still this very boxy tower and he had solutions for lifting and landing and all this other stuff. Then he had the diagram which was really so interesting because it kind of dealt with the corner pieces, those weird flamey things by talking to them in a way and so it worked. It really worked. But they are my 9-11 [September 11 attacks] story because the Hearst Corporation's board meeting was scheduled of September 11, 2001 where they were going to decide whether to do the project or not. They—we were supposed to have that meeting late in the afternoon and of course other things got in the way.

Q: It wasn't happening.

Paulsen: No, but, but this is my favorite story because nobody's cell phones were working, nothing was working. I had managed—I live in Riverdale and I had managed to get home and I was ferrying children back and forth from school to my house because I knew the Manhattan kids weren't going home that night. So I was running back and forth because I didn't have my car *[laughs]*, picking up kids, putting them in my house, and during one sort of break period my cell phone rang, and Sandy [Samuel H.] Lindenbaum who I swear has some sort of direct line to somebody, his cell phone was working and he called and he said I think we won't be meeting this afternoon. I said I kind of figured that Sandy. He said, but the board would like to know if you can meet tomorrow. I said what time. I don't remember what time I said. He said "Let's try for one o' clock that'll give everybody time to get where they need to go." I said "I believe the subway will run tomorrow morning, I will be there and I'll see who else can I round up who lives in Manhattan who can be there."

We met the next day and board had decided to go with the project and I said if they're willing to go, I'm willing to go. You can't ask for a better vote of confidence, because everyone was just convinced that after this horrible attack, Manhattan was going to fall off the face of the Earth. There would be no confidence by business in continuing and to have this project proceed, to me was the most important thing, get it going. So I came the next day *[laughs]*, honestly I'm amazed I got here.

We were talking about 9-11 the other day and it really was the most eerie, because there were no cars on the streets, there were no people it was like Dodge [City]—the paper's blowing down the streets. It was really eerie and they were there. I had managed to get the director of preservation, Brian Hogg, who lived on 96th Street so he was able to get there and there were a couple of people who were able to make it and they were there. The only thing that was sort of missing at that point was the final material selection and there are issues with the material because it's a little more silver than you want it to be but in a certain light it does what it's supposed to do which is be a little more warm and gold.

Q: What happened with materials, was that something you had advised them on and they just didn't go with—?

Paulsen: No, no, no, we always asked them, what's this going to look like? We like it a lot but what is it really going to look like. And it always looked like that and they came back with sample boards the week before the hearing and they had found this really beautiful, dimpled metal that sparkled gold-ish, and it really looked good with the stone at the bottom.

Unfortunately it looks silver most of the time. There are certain times of the day when it gets the little sparkley gold-y kind color. And the glass is darker than I thought it should be but at the end of the day I love it. I'm happy with it. It looks good from so many places.

Q: It does it is a whole landmark now, you know, the new and old come together.

Paulsen: Yes. It was when the car ad campaign came out with the car driving along the edges of the building.

Q: I never saw that.

Paulsen: Oh, it was an amazing car campaign. It was great. TWA was in sort of this iconic portfolio of photographs and people were whining about TWA and I said no it is a landmark, look. And this car commercial that was all about driving up and down the façades of the Hearst Building—*[laughs]*.

Q: That's cool, I should google, youtube this and find it.

Paulsen: It was really good. So it came to hearing and David [W.] Dunlap was covering it for *The [New York] Times* and he said "What's going to happen?" I said, "David I don't know what's going to happen. There are no precooked answers here, they're going to make a presentation and we're going to go around the table." And they made the presentation—and people that day had said, "I really don't know."

Q: Really? People on the Commission and—?

Paulsen: Oh yeah, commissioners said, "I just don't know if they can pull this off." He made the presentation and went around the table and everybody said I think it's appropriate because, I think its appropriate because. And only Deborah [S.] Gardner was worried about the storefronts and so she felt she couldn't vote because she thought she needed more information. But I'm sitting there and I looked at Mark Silberman and I said "We have the votes to approve this, what should we do?" He said, "Take a vote." *[Laughter]*

Q: Did you anticipate it would've been a much more intense discussion? What were you gearing up for?

Paulsen: I thought, most of the complicated projects, you get so many comments about what people would like done to it, that you feel like you need to give them a chance to bring that project back to answer those comments. But the only thing that was being quibbled over was the storefront infill and mostly because it was the most sketchy part of the presentation and so what we had done in the past was, if there was something that seemed like there needed a little more work was, do the approval for the whole and then come back with this piece to complete it. So we voted and David Dunlap wrote this thing after two hours and thirty-one minutes—the fastest approval known to mankind.

Q: The most congenial *[laughs]*.

Paulsen: And the thing is nobody opposed it. But I've always—there were those who looked at that and that's, well you can do the same thing at 980 Madison [Avenue]. They showed me 980 Madison before they brought it forward with an application. I said, "You know, it's beautiful but this is not an individual landmark. This is a building in a historic district. Does this rooftop addition—back to the Whitney question—does this roof top addition make sense in this historic district? Why is this appropriate here?" Whereas here, it's a commercial building, it's not a real residential neighborhood and you're only dealing with the context of that base, that's it.

Q: That's a good point.

Paulsen: And that's a big difference. It's a big difference. Morgan Library was as quirky as you could get because you had two designated landmarks, you got a third, and it wasn't a district. It was kind of an addition to an individual bunch of buildings.

Q: That's an interesting way to put it.

Paulsen: So that those—and I think a lot of the writing and interviews I've seen have picked up on that as part of the way you look at a lot of these things, because when you're looking at changes in a historic district, the issues are so much more numerous and it is hard. It's very hard. Whereas an individual landmark, you don't want to desecrate it, but you can, you're only really related to it, and building on top is—actually there's ample precedence for building on top of individual landmarks, which is funny *[laughs]*.

Q: That is true. I don't know how you're doing for time.

Paulsen: I should probably wrap up. I'm going to try and leave around five, since I don't have to do my meeting.

Q: Do you want to go a little longer?

Paulsen: I can go a little longer. I'm an energetic person.

Q: Perfect, you just tell me when then *[laughter]*.

Paulsen: Ok, where are my questions?

Q: I'm curious about the whole idea of additions in historic districts. Did you deal with any cases that have to do with the transfer of air rights and building new construction that then has to be sensitive to the historic building? Is that anything that ever came up while you were on the Commission?

Paulsen: It would come up and I would discourage people from doing things like that.

Q: Why I'm curious because it seems to be such a big—

Paulsen: That's a good question. The Woody Allen, the 91st and Madison building, they initially came in with air rights from the four story buildings *[laughs]*.

Q: From the four stories next door to them?

Paulsen: They had bought their rights from two of the buildings and I remember just looking at this, why, why would you do this?

Q: Why would you buy the air rights?

Paulsen: Why would you even try to add to the top of this? It just doesn't make sense. It makes sense when you have a landmark to transfer the air rights from the landmark to someplace else. If anything, I would expand the circle of transfers so that some of those buildings actually could make those trades, because a lot of times it's so constrained that even though they got air rights they've got nowhere to go and it's a really tough thing to do.

Q: Do you feel expanding would be better too because in some ways it would protect the—you wouldn't have the landmark then with such a—

Paulsen: Maybe, because I know the Nouvel building next to the MOMA [Museum of Modern Art] that's very tall, and they're transferring air rights from a long way away to get to that site. I don't think it really impacts on the landmark structures because it's far enough away but there are other buildings where that could be a help. I mean the place where it's failed is South Street

Seaport because the Planning special district [South Street Seaport Subdistrict] that was created actually created receiving areas for the square footage and it's never worked.

Q: Why don't you think it worked?

Paulsen: I don't know. I think that was just a deeply flawed strategy from the get go. Because first of all they changed the boundaries of the historic district and receiving sites got added to the historic site and then taken out of the district and put back in the district. So I think part of it is just people not knowing where they're supposed to go with certain things, and then the other part of it was just its a really tough district from a design perspective because it has to be—there's a low datum and what are you going to do? Where are you going to put the square footage and not have it have an impact on the perception of the space as a whole?

Q: Do you feel that big of an area that was developed just to the south of it, with all the transfer rights is just completely inharmonious in some ways with the district?

Paulsen: No but the edges of the district are still kind of like this. There's some parking lot sites to the south that have never been developed and I think the owners want to develop them but they don't know what to do. There's the big parking lot at 250 Water Street that has an approval for a building that I think we all feel is not a good design, but it's the only thing that ever got approved out of the twenty thousand applications. I don't know, it's tough.

Q: Yes, I was curious about that question. What about preservation in the city after 9-11? You had such a great moment on 9-11 of the city's moving forward—what were some of the challenges? Particularly Downtown and in Tribeca, either with concern for individual landmarks or concern for lack of activity or—? Did you feel effect after 9-11, did it manifest itself?

Paulsen: It wasn't something that happened with 9-11. The Tribeca neighborhood had always felt they were under designated because they had wanted a much larger area as the historic district than the Commission had settled on the three areas that they did, Again that was drawing boundaries around buildings that were largely intact, and everything outside that was not as intact and so had not been designated. I think there were other real estate arguments going on but they had the three districts. The neighbors had been complaining for years and they're still complaining because large rooftop additions got added to buildings that they were very upset about and other kinds rooftop additions happened that they were upset about. That was just ongoing.

Q: Oh, okay.

Paulsen: That was just a neighborhood that always felt that more should've been done for them *[laughter]*.

Q: What's the challenge of actually drawing the boundaries?

Paulsen: That's an excellent question. Boundaries are very difficult and I don't know that there's a good answer for the drawing of boundaries for anything. I would always come back to—from a regulatory standpoint, what can you confidently be able to regulate within the area that you're designating, meaning if the building has been so modified over time and it's on the edge, why would you include it? What are you gaining by including something that's so mucked up, just take it out. If it's in the middle then I could say, okay you got ten buildings in a row, one of them is bad, but the other nine are fine so that one'll get bought and it'll get worked on and it'll be a headache but ultimately you'll get a nice something out of that.

Whereas the Madison Square North Historic District, which is mostly commercial buildings, the old ASPCA [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] building on the corner had a demolition and extension approved at DOB [New York City Department of Buildings], and I ultimately said take it out. It was on the edge of the district and what would designation do? We can't save it because it's already permitted and what are we going to gain? They're going to build this thing and people will think that's its okay to add five stories to a four story building. I said I think it's just a bad idea so take it out. So we took it out.

Q: So the idea of regulatory, kind of public perception as well, of what Landmarks can or can't regulate, does or does not do it part of the thinking.

Paulsen: Yes, because especially for the lay person who—there are neighborhoods in Brooklyn where people would come in and say—they would get a violation because they put the wrong window but they put in the window that matched the window that was there before. Trying to

explain to somebody that, that window was the wrong window and now that you changed it, you need to put in the right window—public perception was never served by doing that. If you're going to designate it if you're going to draw those boundary lines, somehow it has to make sense, not just to you the professional, but it's got to make sense to the public in some way. And it's not easy.

Q: That brings you to—as chair, you are the public voice of LPC.

Paulsen: Yes. I was a noisy voice *[laughter]*.

Q: How is that? What were you doing?

Paulsen: I just made sure I got in the paper as much as possible so people knew what we were doing. I was lucky, the reporters liked to talk to me so I got good coverage for the Commission.

Q: Did you feel that was part of the importance of the chair?

Paulsen: Absolutely.

Q: Being out there, getting good PR.

Paulsen: You have a Commission that is not loved by the vast majority of people and is tolerated by some advocacy groups *[laughs]*. They'd be happier if they ran than you but that's okay and

then you got the professional community, who actually does care about architecture a lot, and if their project that's featured in one of these articles that makes them feel good. So yes, I feel that the head of an agency's job is to promote what their agency is doing and try to represent it positively if you can.

Q: What about all the preservation organizations in—*[laughter]*?

Paulsen: Well I was one of the few chairmen who actually created an advisory council.

Q: Oh, I didn't know that.

Paulsen: Yes. I had an advisory council and I invited all the citywide organizations. I didn't want to get bogged down dealing with one neighborhood group at an advisory level. But I thought it was as important to bring together around the table, once every month or once every couple of months, everybody—MAS, HDC [Historic Districts Council], the Conservancy and the Real Estate Board [of New York]. It was just—we did it in the morning and I would tell them what the Commission was working on at that particular time and ask them what their concerns were, for anything and it was just a really good way to touch base. I don't think we accomplished very much but at least it was an open door.

The other thing that I did was—and this was in response to requests from [Manhattan] Community Board One and [Manhattan] Community Board Two—was they really felt like the Commission was not understanding them and they asked if we could have meetings. So I said

yes, if you have something that's on your mind lets create a working group and figure this out. It really came up in the context of, for Community Board Two, which is Greenwich Village. They had a lot of things that they were trying to accomplish, they had one group working on what they call the Maritime Mile Historic District, they had the group working on Gansevoort—they had all these things they wanted. I said to them, "This is a little agency with a three million dollar budget and five people. I think it would be helpful if you told us what was most important to you." And hence the Meatpacking District. They said, okay, we can do that, and they put together their lists and they really wanted to do Gansevoort [Market Historic District], so I said, if you want to do Gansevoort, let's move forward. You do your work and we'll do ours.

They made presentations to us about their Maritime Mile, which overlapped with Gansevoort and extended—it was so big and so tough. But the thing is they laid the groundwork for a lot of other things. All the South Village stuff, that was started by a committee of that working group. The told us what they were doing and I said great, this is what you need to do to get moving, and they did it. They just started working and they did it. With the Community Board One—

Q: Where is Community Board One?

Paulsen: That's Tribeca. Tribeca, South Street Seaport. That was never as organized and it really all ultimately revolved around expanding the Tribeca historic districts. We did do a small southern expansion to include some building that probably could've been included in the first go around, and I said we'd keep looking.

Q: Do you feel like the model with Community Board Two that you developed could be a takeaway? Is that something—?

Paulsen: Yes, I think you could do that. Community Board Two is—is it two or three? Maybe it's three. Anyway the Greenwich Village Community Board, they're a really good board. The people on the board and the people who chair the committees know the process. They're professionals in the field. They're community organizers. They know what they're doing. If I took the same thing to a Community Board in an outer borough that has almost no expertise it would be really hard for them to respond and they would be under designated because they wouldn't really see that as a priority.

It's like Simeon *[phonetic]* had called me one day and said, well where are the preservationists in the Bronx *[laughs]*? I started laughing and I said well they live within half a block of me because that's where the commissioners are. And he laughed. But he was desperately trying to drum up support for all these designations that were sort of languishing.

Q: In the outer boroughs?

Paulsen: In the Bronx especially. I said you know, you met, you know who's really supportive and that's it. You're not going to find this sudden trove of preservationists because the people there who support preservation, don't want you to designate their house.

Q: Is it because of property ownership issues?

Paulsen: Yes.

Q: Do you see that a lot more in the outer boroughs than you do in Manhattan?

Paulsen: I saw it most in Staten Island and somewhat in the Bronx when we started delving into residential areas like Fieldston [Historic District].

Q: Why do you think those areas were—*[crosstalk]*?

Paulsen: They're private houses sitting on plots of land and people don't want you telling them what they can do with their house, it's that simple. I mean because the houses—I live west of the highway in Riverdale, so I'm not in Fieldston. My house is actually listed in the report as being of interest *[laughs]*. I think it's of interest but I don't know that anybody else really would want to touch it—and a couple of others. The thing is there are some really extraordinary houses but it's so hard to get to Riverdale it would be really tough to do a district.

Q: Why so, why do you think it'd be tough to do a district?

Paulsen: You'd have no community support *[laughs]*

Q: Yes, so that *[crosstalk]*.

Paulsen: It's so interesting. There's a very contentious application brewing in Fieldston, and yet the opposition to the application is almost entirely on environmental issues, whereas from my perspective, the application should be dead in the water because from a preservation standpoint it's just wrong. It's so wrong it's not even worth talking about. But to explain that to the community, they would just not be supportive *[laughs].* And I have to do that *[laughter],* but that's okay.

Q: Well the other hot topic issue, I think there might be two more, 2 Columbus Circle.

Paulsen: Yes I'm the bad guy on 2 Columbus Circle, not Bob.

Q: Do you want to talk about 2 Columbus and the back story there?

Paulsen: I can talk about a little bit, obviously the final resolution took place after I left as chairman. But people talked about this groundswell of public support, and I was only chairman for about a year and a half and in that time I got a few direct letters from a couple of people who were worried that the new building on that site would be not white and taller than 2 Columbus Circle. Then there were a few people who really cared about the building and that was it.

The major, sort of push to designate anything was Childs Restaurant in Coney Island. I had more post cards for Childs—that was the easiest designation I have ever done. Not politically, that took a lot of convincing of the council member and others, because the owners were totally opposed.

Q: I'm curious how that one came to be too, especially since Coney Island now, there's so much interest, re-interest in Coney Island.

Paulsen: Coney Island is really tough. It had some of the moist beautiful terra cotta, it was intact for the most part, and the owners ultimately didn't oppose. We met with them, we explained to them that this didn't mean they had to re-open Childs Restaurant they could put a book store, they could do whatever they wanted. We would introduce them to the Parks Department [New York City Department of Parks and Recreation] who owned the land. They could be a parking lot. There were lots of things that we were able to do that mitigated the anxiety that the owners had. They were really opposed and what the building was being used for was to make—not Peeps, but something like Peeps. That's it. I had never visited it but Ronda Wist went out there and she said, "They make Peeps." *[Laughter],* I said, "Well that's a really great use." Highest and best use.

Q: A once a year commodity *[laughs]*.

Paulsen: Yeah. Maybe now it expanded the Christmas holidays, but its marshmallow things. But that one was easy to do. We were able to say to the council member that we will make these conversations with other city agencies happen so that the owners can try and do something with the building. I saw they just designated another Childs.

Q: Yes, I saw that yesterday.

Paulsen: So that was good, But I think with 2 Columbus Circle, there was a lot of misinformation about the building. That façade was going to come down. It was so deteriorated that there was no saving it. The concrete structure was actually the most interesting thing about the building. This was a poured in place tube, column free, essentially column free with a core. It was a terrible plan but that tube, it was so interesting to me because this was really quite a revolutionary approach to doing this gallery building. The building is not a landmark now and Brad Cloepfil is a really good architect, and I think his budget was cut too much.

Q: You think it would've been a different building had it—?

Paulsen: The things that fail about the building are really detail things. You go up in it—there's a lot that I like about the gallery spaces and the layout was vastly improved and all of that. But the details are so clunky and you could see them because of all the lovely holes that they cut to allow—you can see how things are attached and it just fails on a lot of detail levels. The old building actually was very beautifully detailed but it was so dysfunctional, it's that old question what do you do with it. It really didn't work.

Q: So you didn't think it worked as a landmark for a number of reasons?

Paulsen: I didn't think it worked A, because the façade was so deteriorated. What were we doing, what we were saying had to be preserved? And if we wanted to say it was like Lever House and you had to take that thing down and put the new one back, fine. But then you were committing

the new building to having all the problems of the old building, which was no windows *[laughter]* in a spot that should have windows. It didn't make any sense and you know after, two years—this was 2001, 2002.

Two thousand-four rolls along and all of a sudden people are reminiscing about how fabulous the building was, and all the things, and it's quirky and it should be saved. I thought where were they in 1999 or 2000, whenever they started talking about selling this building. The only people who complained at the outset were people who wanted to make sure the building wasn't going to be taller or darker because of what had happened with the Trump building across the street.

They weren't talking about a landmark and it was the only Landmark West! really got energized. I think because—and this is not something Kate Wood and I had ever discussed but I have spoken to people that said Kate Wood felt really, really felt strongly that this building should be a landmark, she really believed in it as a landmark. I said "Well that's great but nobody said that at the outset." It was too late when they got themselves organized to try and save the building.

Q: Too late in the sense of that the development plans—*[crosstalk]*.

Paulsen: Everything had happened so long before, and the kinds of objections they raised at the eleventh hour were really too late.

Q: It seems the kind of objections that were being raised were lawsuits against Landmarks or trying to do these various things to slow them down. What's your response to those arguments

that it never had its fair hearing, all of that? Because that everything I read about 2 Columbus *[crosstalk]*?

Paulsen: That was my–my op-ed piece was really to—I didn't want to take it head on. But the bottom line is, if under the currently regulatory system, once a building is calendared—that's the only way you can have hearing—Landmarks owns it. You have to hold the hearing, you have to vote whether or not to designate them and the Commission historically has not voted. So that would just put the building in limbo, which is not a good thing on a building that has a façade that has failed. That was just a lawsuit waiting to happen as far as I can see.

I simply have believed all along that the Commission's current designation process doesn't really give it that kind of flexibility. To me, the real moment for a public discussion is, should it be calendared or not, because once its calendared the Building Department is not issuing permits, the Landmarks Commission is going to review whatever you want to do, whether you've designated it or not there's an application to Landmarks that are required. There could be a very different designation process at some point.

It was interesting—one of the things when we started talking about fees of Landmarks was looking at how other landmarks reviews happen across the country. There were two that were really interesting, San Francisco and Washington DC. Washington DC does not do designations basically that are generated by the commission. It is on the applicant's head.

Q: To approach landmarks, to do *[crosstalk]*.

Paulsen: And prepare the reports, and pay for everything. They don't—and San Francisco is the same way. It is on the proposer's head to substantiate the designation and it's a way of not having to spend any civic money.

Q: Yeah, but what's the carrot for doing a designation?

Paulsen: You get a designation. You get designated. I think in other locations the ability to use tax credits for the designated properties is much more of a critical item than here in New York. Here's it's so expensive that sometimes it doesn't make enough of a difference but in other locations it can make a big difference to get those tax credits. It should make a difference here.

Q: You feel like it doesn't make a difference here?

Paulsen: I know people do use them and I think they do make the difference. I don't think that they're as well understood because you're not applying to the New York City Landmarks Commission for those tax credits. You're applying to SHPO [New York's State Historic Preservation Office].

Q: Right.

Paulsen: And the Internal Revenue Service and the criteria are different. I have projects that are totally approved by Landmarks, and then somebody says okay we're going to get tax credits or

we've entered into some easement agreement with the façade preservation people. I just sit there and go “Oh god.” They don't play by the same rules and we may not be able to get you those tax credits for this because of what we've done.

Q: Because the city’s regulations are so different?

Paulsen: They're just different and we’re allowed to do a lot of different things with historic fabric.

Q: Do you think that leaves the city in a better place, deviating slightly from the secretary standards that there's more—?

Paulsen: We have more options for what we can do and we have real teeth to prevent demolition. Most other places do not have the teeth to prevent demolition. That’s been the real strong point in New York City Landmarks Law. We can really save buildings.

Q: That’s a good point. Maybe that’s a good—It’s five o’clock.

Paulsen: It’s almost five.

Q: It’s almost five. Do you want to wrap up today? I think we've almost hit everything as I'm looking back and thinking about LPC today, Congregation Shearith Israel.

Paulsen: Oh yes we should talk about that.

Q: We should.

Paulsen: Oh yes. Okay.

Q: Today? Next time?

Paulsen: Next time.

Q: Okay because that's what I'm curious about as well.

Paulsen: *[Unclear], [laughter]*.

Q: Then just looking back on your time as chair.

Paulsen: I do want to say one more thing about 2 Columbus Circle.

Q: Please, I'm not in a rush here at all. I want you to get it all out.

Paulsen: Well I mean the thing that was tough is that it had been presented to the designation committee at least two or three times.

Q: How early? Before—?

Paulsen: Well before me, I think as soon as it was eligible it was brought to the designation committee, so that would've been '96.

Q: Do you know who brought it to that designation committee? Was it Landmarks that brought it to the designation committee or was it an outside—?

Paulsen: I don't know who raised it and it may have come from city hall because they wanted to do redevelopment there so they asked for an opinion. I don't know that for a fact, Jennifer would know. But the commissioners on the designation committee turned it down every time. Same way there was a project on the Upper East Side, the—I forget what it was called—I want to say The Gardens but I think it was something else.

Q: Oh with the tennis court in back, that property?

Paulsen: Probably.

Q: Two little low—one or two story—on 70th [street].

Paulsen: Yeah. It was in the 70s. You had to go inside to see the little—it was almost like a town, a little private garden surrounding, yes, it was a tennis court. That was one that the Commission had consistently had turned down. I would've voted to designate it because I thought it was an

interesting typology, but nobody ever asked me, I wasn't on the designation committee *[laughter].* And it was so interesting because it had such a sort of Modern exterior façade and then the sort of thematic little townhouses on the interior. But the commissioners turned it down because they couldn't see what you were going to get other than that Modern façade because what was cute about was the inside not the outside.

So with 2Columbus Circle it had been taken to the designation committee so many times and what was so funny, after I wrote the op-ed piece, they called all those commissioners who said oh I would vote for it now, things have changed *[laughs],* and I thought, well, but you didn't vote for it then. Nobody at the Commission ever said we must do this.

Q: Why do you think 2 Columbus Circle has become such a rallying point? I mean in some ways it seems like the case—

Paulsen: I think Landmark West! is really good at getting in the press and making noise about things. They—unfortunately I think that press was really good at raising a profile and making it a cause, but they really angered a lot of influential people who did not see that this building was worth causing such a ruckus about. It wasn't that important. I think they, in a lot of ways did not gain preservation friends from people who mattered to expanding the preservation supporters.

Q: Why do you say that? out of curiosity what do you think it was that rattled these would-be supporters?

Paulsen: The people who supported the museum were a pretty interesting and diverse group of people, and they and their friends were really turned off by the way Landmark West! conducted themselves. It hurt, it really hurt, I think the preservation committee at the end of the day.

Q: You think it hurt them because it's more divided now?

Paulsen: No, I think you can't accomplish preservation without supporters, and those supporters have to have passion and they have to have money because this work doesn't happen for free. There aren't that many places to get the money to do preservation anymore.

Q: To do the actual restoration?

Paulsen: To do the real work of restoration. And the harder it is to do the regulatory review and if you think you're going to be faced with fight upon fight and bad press you're just not going to want to touch it. You're just going to want to walk away.

Q: Is that the thing with 2 Columbus circle? Thinking about designating it, the regulatory aspect of this facade, the challenges of the façade, how would you perceive that from a regulatory standpoint? Seems like someone would've had to pump money in. Just what's—?

Paulsen: I don't think that the museum felt they could do the kind of gallery spaces they wanted to do if they were forced to keep a façade that had no windows. Those port holes were cute but they're a—they don't call themselves the Craft Museum [Museum of Contemporary Crafts]

anymore but they were the museum of things, not paintings. Those things need, not a ton of light but they do need light in order to be exhibited so I think their vision for how to use the building was very much influenced—or that vision influenced the need to really do something to that façade. They said that from the get go when they started interviewing the designers, whereas the other possible uses of the building would've required either knocking it down and doing something completely different. I mean there were a lot of other issues. It's the whole adaptive reuse question—what can you use it for? That's why warehouses and industrial buildings are the best *[laughter]*. You can do anything.

Q: Well the industrial buildings we'll have to touch upon as well.

Paulsen: Under represented but they're getting there.

Q: I'd like to hear that. I live in Brooklyn, in Gowanus, I'm surrounded by industrial buildings.

Paulsen: Yes you are.

Q: So I'd love to hear your take on that as one of your key issues if its modernism, industrial buildings, and the catholic church, kind of how industrial—how the whole idea of protecting industrial came into being.

Paulsen: Well I think from my perspective there are really good examples of architecture that are industrial buildings and there are sort of early to 1970s even. There's a whole lifespan of

American industrial development. From Kahn—the early Kahn, not the later Kahn—they're very much about the American story and the rise to preeminence in the ‘50s. Finding those buildings, and there are really interesting industrial buildings in New York, not a lot, but there are some. I mean I would've approached it as architecture more than industrial districts.

Q: More on an individual?

Paulsen: Not necessarily, Dumbo was really interesting because I did go out there with building owners and look at what was there. It was really quite fascinating because before the Highline [Park], they had buildings that had train lines going into them and stuff. They were on the ground not up in the air. They had a whole different typology of industrial buildings that had been done over time. And Domino [Sugar Refinery] that was a real interesting kind of mess of a building *[laughs]*.

Q: Was that after you?

Paulsen: We were on the short list of architects to consult on the one building that was going to be maintained and so we got to tour the whole site. It was really fascinating because that was a building that was never used for anything other than machines. And it wasn’t a building, it had some platforms and an enclosure and it was built in segments, and it stunk. The whole thing was impregnated with burnt sugar. It smelled so bad. So cutting windows and putting floors in, I think Fred [Frederick A.] Bland and BBB [Beyer Blinder Belle] did a really good job with what

they did ultimately get approved, it was really good. Because that was not an easy building to play with at all. All right, I do need to go.

Q: Thank you so much for all the time I really appreciate you willing to—

Paulsen: Oh you're welcome, this is important to have a real—

[END OF SESSION]

Transcriptionist: Unknown

Session: 2

Interviewee: Sherida Paulsen

Location: Unknown

Interviewer: Liz McEnaney (Q1) Anthony Bellov (Q2)

Date: 2011

Q1: Okay. So just to kind of—so we have on camera talking about your appointment as chair. I'm wondering why do you think you were selected to succeed Jennifer as chair?

Paulsen: Well I was selected to succeed Jennifer's chair of the Commission, I think partially because it was toward the end of the Guiliani administration term. It was actually about six to seven months to go and there were a number of projects that have been, I think, brewing like the Morgan Library, the Hearst Tower, and potentially the Whitney Museum with Rem Koohass as the architect. Those projects were coming to the point where they were going to start, or really get to their design process and I had been on the Commission. I had sat in on many of the predesigned kinds of conversations that were going on and I think that the deputy mayor and the mayor, both felt that I knew what was going on with these projects, that I had been a good contributor on the Commission in terms of discussion, making the points that needed to be made especially on complicated projects.

When you get to the discussion around the table with the commissioners, one of the things that counsels to the Commission and Jennifer, who was an attorney were very aware was that in discussion you couldn't just say I like it or I hate it; you have to give reasons for appropriateness. I think they felt that I was a good articulator if you want to call it that of why something was

appropriate and why it wasn't appropriate. But more than that, that I also had a good sense of how to advise and direct applicants to move their projects forward.

Q1: That was something I wanted to ask you about.

Q2: Hold on, we have to stop for a second.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: So with six or seven months of Guiliani administration to go when you took over as chair, and having served with Jennifer, when you took over what can see as your agenda? Was it a continuation of Jennifer's or there were certain other projects or ideas that you wanted to move forward, designations to look at?

Paulsen: The things that I wanted to do after I was appointed as chairman in terms of an agenda really were to focus on the Modern buildings and move the designations of both interior and regular individual landmarks forward. To look at the—and Bob Tierney has really exploded this part of it—but really to look at the under designated, either northern Manhattan or outer borough, potential districts and begin moving that agenda forward. Designations take forever, so I could make the first steps, but I didn't know how many I could bring to fruition. But I thought that was important.

And third was to continue Jennifer's insistence of design excellence, but I think also put my own stamp on it because I really saw the Commission as a customer service kind of an organization. Historically it had been bad for everybody. It was bad for the advocates for preservation and it had been bad for the architects and owners coming to the Commission. I think that Jennifer's agenda to make it professional and to make it as, I think not painless, but at least to make the process clear to everyone. I thought that was an important agenda to continue. There were internal things that I wanted to do at the Commission to build staff morale and to really streamline some of the way the agency was organized as well.

Q1: Do you mind going to a little bit more depth about the workings of the agency in terms of streamlining about the operations?

Paulsen: Well the Landmarks Commission's operations at that point in time had been impact by a lot of budget cutting. After 9-11 there was more budget cutting that was being proposed. One of the things that came to my attention is that we had an archeology department that was responsible for reviewing every environmental report for the city because it's the only place in the city where there's any archeology review. And yet it didn't—well, they had the right people–-they didn't necessarily have the right leadership and they didn't necessarily have the profile that I thought that they deserved.

Archeology is considered in the federal regulations but it's minimized in the city's regulations. I thought it was important to celebrate that. We did a conference, which was incredibly well attended. They issued the new guidelines during that time period. I think that Amanda Sutphin,

who's still kind of the key archeologist down there did a terrific job on the research and the preservation sides. Preservation is the regulatory side of the Commission, when you've gotten something designated you go to that group of people to have your project or your changes reviewed. It seemed that they really needed to have a little bit more support in terms of staff training and other items, which we were able to push forward.

Then on the research side, it's a small department and they have wonderful leadership in Mary Beth Betts. But I think that they needed to have a clearer relationship to outside writers who would sometimes do the initial draft of a designation report, which would then be reviewed and edited by the in-house staff. That kind of flow of work just needed to be clarified a little bit.

Q1: I haven't realized about the archeology—I think that's really interesting. Have post—raising awareness of the archeological work of the Commission—what are the impacts of that initiative or that focus that made?

Paulsen: Well on the archeology side, the focus on the impact was really to make it much clearer to, I think both other city agencies and to people, applicants to those other city agencies especially City Planning, DOT [New York City Department of Transportation], et cetera, where they didn't know who was reviewing that section of their environmental report. And they would say, "Oh, Landmarks looked at it." But they didn't understand that it wasn't Landmarks looking at it for necessarily the historic component. It was for this below ground kind of archeology.

There are a lot of sites around the city where you don't necessarily, under our law, have to do any extensive archeological monitoring, but with Amanda's guidance, it was possible to really articulate these are the standards, this is what you're supposed to do. I think it made it much easier for people because then they knew what they were supposed to provide instead of having to go back and forth twenty times during the review process.

Q1: Yeah absolutely. I wonder if we could talk about some of the external pressures of being the chair, you know, both from the administration, from the Real Estate Board and from the general public. But I was wondering what the administration's view of landmarks was? Did you feel a support by the administration or pressure? What was some of the interaction or Guiliani's overall feeling for preservation in general?

Paulsen: Pressure from an administration as a commissioner is interesting. The Guiliani administration didn't ask me personally to do anything with respect to any project before the Commission. The support or pressure came with respect to our offices. We were—when I took over as chairman, we were still at 100 Old Slip in the old police building. And about a month after I was appointed, they came to me, the several of the key deputy mayor-level people and said, "You need to move." And I said, "Oh" *[laughs]* "That's exciting." And they said, "No, we're promised this building to the new police museum." And I said, "Well that is a very logical thing to promise to the police museum."

I was aware of something that a lot of people have really not focused on, the Landmarks Commission had outgrown 100 Old Slip. Anybody who had visited those offices had to have

seen how the filing system was over capacity, that a mezzanine that had been constructed to help solve some of the material storage, that was well beyond capacity, and if you went into any of the departments what you saw were applicant's boards—because we didn't have PowerPoint presentations at that point in time—boards everywhere. There were no conference rooms. There was really no meeting space. For the hearing room, it was a lovely hearing room, but you had the hearing room and you have a little antechamber. There was no place for an applicant and their staff person to prep before going in to the hearing.

I had done courthouses in my years as an architect. One of the things that had struck me in courthouse design is that, well, you have that sort of foyer space that allowed for noise not to go back and forth. There were always these conference rooms, I think they were called breakout rooms, on either side of that so that the attorney and their client or the plaintiff or whoever could meet briefly before going into the court room and making their case. Since a hearing is essentially a court-like proceeding, I thought that was very, very useful.

So they offered us a number of spaces and senior staff and I toured them and we decided to go to the Municipal Building [David N. Dinkins Municipal Building] for a number of reasons. It allowed for us to get significantly more floor area, a lot more floor area. It allowed for us to try to improve the sound system and it allowed for us to accommodate some of these things that I thought would make for a better experience of the hearing process—like these breakout rooms.

So that was the key pressure that I got from the administration. That project was completed on the Friday before September Eleventh. It was essentially between Labor Day and the following Friday that we moved to the offices. It was quite exciting *[laughter]*.

Q1: *[Unclear]*.

Paulsen: No, no. But in terms of projects, no. The only things that would occasionally happen in terms of the administration asking the Commission to do something, had to do with the town hall meetings that the Giuliani administration conducted. If something came up at a town hall meeting, they would immediately say, "Okay, Commissioner Paulsen, this is your bailiwick, you need to address this for this concerned citizen." I think that happened once, Landmarks was not usually at the top of the issues that people came to town halls with. But at least once it did.

Q1: I'm wondering in terms of communication with the other agencies within—I mean I know that there are committees within Landmarks, we talked about last time of meeting with people. But I'm just wondering in terms of—I think Landmarks is always, perhaps unfairly, accused of having close doors conversation with various agencies whether it be Planning or something like that. And I'm wondering what the policy was in terms—or what the format was when you were there. How much interaction you had with the heads of various other agencies and helping to move projects forward?

Paulsen: Communication with other agencies in the Giuliani Administration was fairly limited only because most of their major agenda items had already been accomplished. If there was

something in an environmental review that was still lingering, Joe [Joseph] Rose would call and say, "This is happening. Are you okay with this?" et cetera.

The [Michael R.] Bloomberg administration was a totally different experience. They had appointed a number of new agency heads and Deputy Mayor [Daniel L.] Doctoroff had created essentially a cabinet, which included all of the commissioners who reported to him, but also all of the commissioners who addressed things to do with economic development and design and construction. That was a high level meeting that he held once a month so that everybody could put on the table what kinds of agenda items they wanted to move forward with and we could confidentially talk about what the issues might be with those things. That was really so that they could develop their own agendas moving forward. So there was a lot of communication at a very high level there.

Q1: Do you feel that was a good thing, that preservation have it say? It became a part of the agenda?

Paulsen: Oh, I think that it's always a good thing when the city leadership at the highest levels, the mayor, the deputy mayors, when they're really listening to all the different agencies related to design and construction to get the pieces together.

This is a little off the topic, but as president of the AIA and the past president, one of the things that we've continued to harp on with this administration, is that an applicant or an advocate has a real struggle trying to understand all the different points that you have to hit in dealing with any

kind of building project or development project. Whether it's a plaza or a building or a road or a streetlight, there are so many different agencies that review things. We counted up that there were seventeen agencies that could come into play on any one project and you don't have a lead agency. What's interesting is that the Department of Buildings now has the new hub, which does begin to create this cross communication potential. I don't know if it works yet, it's just opened, but I think it's promising.

Q1: That's interesting, think about the future—*[crosstalk]*.

Paulsen: It has nothing to do with my tenure as chairman, but I'm very happy to see something.

Q1: No because I think that is does all tie to it, you know. It's still about preservation, and you're still so much involved with the city and urbanism today—of how you've seen it from both being in those inner meetings to then also advocating for architects and helping to ease the process there.

As an architect, one thing I'm curious about, is about your ideas about appropriateness for new construction or additions like maybe we could even use some case studies or talk about some specific projects. But it just seems like you had a background in architecture and I know that there are terms that address appropriateness or context. What do these terms mean? How did you see that and how are you as an architect able to influence design projects that were coming forward?

Paulsen: Well appropriateness is one of the land use attorneys has said is whatever six people agree on any particular day. But the standards of appropriateness are broad enough that it does have to relate at least in scale or material to the building or the district that the work is being proposed on.

I think I come at it from a slightly different perspective than someone who has been through a preservation program because I think historians and preservation programs tend to focus on the idea of style and they come at preservation from an art conservation kind of a background which has always advocated if you have this great work of art, you're not supposed to change those materials. If you do change something, you want to make very clear where it's different from the existing or the original work of art. Whereas I think as an architect, we look at buildings as living creatures, and it maybe a work of art, but it still has to evolve. Because from, I think, any owner or advocate or architect's perspective, a building that goes out of use is on its way to demolition. I mean that's just the sad truth.

Buildings need to be able to change, subtle or unsubtle *[laughs]* kinds of changes. I think that what always hit me, and going back to the very early commissioners—Harmon Goldstone always was sort of a touch stone for a lot of the architects—was the notion that the Commission was created to really encourage quality, high quality. This is a long answer, but the whole sort of tour into post-Modernism where people used classical forms, but in very cheap materials had not produced for the most part the kind of architecture that I think I wanted to see the city building. I think it also left some of the advocates feeling like what are we doing? It's okay, but it's not really right.

If somebody came to the Commission and wanted to do a modern intervention that was a very high quality, I would look for that to be in materials, in scales, in proportion, something that—and this is an architect term—spoke to *[laughs]*, the landmark building. Whereas if somebody came with a totally traditional kind of a design, I wanted to see that they were using real materials. That authenticity was very important to us. And there were projects that some of the with more modern kinds of eyes might have said, "Well it's not the way I would do it." But if they came in with real details and real materials and a real thoughtful way of approaching a traditional or matching kind of design, I would say that's totally appropriate.

But I think on the modern side, the challenge was to really use as careful a though process in coming up with those wall details, those window details. It wasn't something that just came from the storefront manufacturer with the flat window section. It really had to have quality and it had to also contribute that shade and shadow. One of the things when you look around New York is that ornament adds a layer of complexity to a building and that's what we see as pedestrians. It breaks the scale of the building down and it gives it a real user-friendly kind of walking background. That's really important in New York. It's designed excellence in a very hands on way and I was less concerned about just freezing things forever.

Q1: That's a big—

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: —in some way that, you know, we preserve the old. But in fact the Commission has such an impact on new design that's coming in to the city. I'm wondering for – I mean if this were to air where someone doesn't really understand the complexities of preservation thinks of it as just "Oh, that's over thirty years save that." But doesn't understand that the Commission is shaping the new environment today as well. I'm wondering if there's—whether it's either maybe talking about the Morgan or the Hearst Tower. Something that could kind of convey this idea of the power of the Commission has to influence design—new design in the city and kind of the role that the Commission itself has been working in those architecture or helping those projects and move forward.

Paulsen: I'm not sure how to rephrase the question *[laughter]*.

Q1: I don't *[unclear]* so much.

Paulsen: I think the Commission's role in working with applicants to develop the design approach that they use for new buildings or additions to their historic buildings is a really interesting one. There's a number of different sort of levels that that happens as. In historic districts, when you draw the boundary of what's going to be the district, there are often vacant sites or sites that have less than stellar buildings on them. So the Commission is well aware that they are going to be looking at a new building in historic context.

The sort of advice that you would give somebody is, if you have a vacant lot, look to your left, look to you right. You need to fit in. So you're looking at height. You're looking at materials.

You're looking at the way the window pattern works. And that's where projects like the Jean Nouvel building in Soho and the Aldo Rossi building and Soho for Scholastic—that's what those came out of. And there's a number of buildings, small residential buildings in Greenwich Village that also came through that.

The individual landmarks are a different kind of question because with an individual landmark like the Hearst Building, what we had was an incomplete building. We knew it had been designed to have a tower. They have done the research, the steel was there, the elevators were—the shafts were there although the elevators weren't there. They had built that building to be tall. But in the mists of time whenever the design for the tower was had disappeared. So the Commission had encouraged the Hearst Corporation to find a good architect and be imaginative, but respectful of the building.

They were incredible. They did about a years worth of research to establish that, yes, this building was designed to be much taller. They sent a board member on a one-year odyssey to meet and look and interview architects to find the right match and they came back with Norman Foster, who was probably for them the most appropriate architect. He had a strong background as good relations in a corporate setting. He himself is a very polished and presentable person. And he has a lot of experience working with historic buildings using his very modern vocabulary in juxtaposition to those. He brought that experience and expertise. But he came to that project with a roll in your shift sleeves up way of dealing with the Commission. He never said, "This is what I'm going to do." He would say, step by step, "This is the zoning analysis. This is my first idea." And then he would sit down and say, "What do you think?"

The staff at the Commission was able to have an exchange with him about how he was thinking about the project. One of the key concerns was that the base of the building was so heavy and so it was very flat in some ways. But it had those incredible sculptural columns with the flames at the top. It was very important to us that whatever happened on top had some acknowledgement that the corners were special and that there was something else going on. So when he came back with the triangulated façade, it was because of the corners, because it allowed him to really do something unusual that served as a backdrop for those funny flaming things that had been sitting up there by themselves for so long.

It also is a challenge because he—instead of having a tower sit on the base, he'd lifted it up and it was almost like this crystalline form much like a stone in a piece of jewelry is sat on prongs, and that's what that does. It's not all as visible as you might like it to be. But in terms of the story of how you develop a design, it was very compelling. The sad thing was before 9-11, that whole experience of going into the building and going up to the massive lobby and seeing the tower was supposed to be a public experience. After 9-11, they had to make a decision and they decided that security concerns trumped the public concern. But that all got dealt with in City Planning as well.

On Morgan Library front, that was a whole different situation and very complicated because the Morgan Library had one designation—one designation that had been overturned by the courts. And an addition that had been built under the supervision of the Landmarks Commission although it was not on the landmark site. So it was very muddy. I wish I had a drawing, but you

have the McKim Library on the side street. You had the annex building at the corner of Madison and 36th Street I think. And then you had the garden pavilion which Bart Voorsanger had designed. It was a very lovely and very well appreciated building. It was not on the landmark site. You had the house, that had been some [William Earle Dodge] Stokes, Phelps, Dodge [& Company] *[laughs]* house and that had been designated an overturn. Then they had this office building on 37th Street that wasn't a landmark, but a piece of it was on the landmark—it was so murky.

When I first looked at it, I said, "This makes no sense." The only way to really do this right is to have the whole thing be designated. I said "Can you make it historic district out of all these buildings?" And the lawyers all said, "No don't do that." *[Laughs]*. I said, "Well," I said, "It would be really helpful to the Commission to be able to look at this in the entire context. We need the house. We need the house back. We need to be designated and we need to be able to look at what you want to do in the context of an entire landmark landscape." Luckily they had—and this was some back story—the Morgan Library had done a design competition. They had hired Beyer Blinder Belle to write guidelines and they had produced a brief to guide a competition and they had paid three architects to design things.

One of those architects was a good friend of mine and he invited me to a meeting at his office to look at this. This was before I was chairman, before, you know, there was anything sort of coming down the pipeline, they were doing a design competition. I walked in and listened to this presentation and I was horrified. Because basically if you took the logic that we have all these undesignated parcels over here and we have the library and the annex that's over here, we should

put all our square footage in the middle of this site where we can build it and then we're protecting the landmark buildings *[laughs]*. I said, “Well that was very interesting, but I think it looks awful and it's so uncontextual to the neighborhood especially on that block.” I said, "This is just a bad idea."

When they finished the competition, the director of the library apologized to the trustees, said they had made a horrible mistake and he was cancelling the whole thing. There was one architect who have not participated in the competition. He had been invited but he didn't participate and that was Renzo Piano. They went back to Renzo and they had several meetings with him. And they—by that time, I was chairman. They had called and said, "We'd like to show you something." And we still haven't discussed who was designated and who was not, but Renzo walked in with a model and—*[laughs]* I can’t do it a *[unclear]* have to say while I—but he said, "These are the jewels and these are the prongs that hold the jewels. And the precious things need to be in a vault. They need to be safe in Manhattan schist." That's exactly how he spoke about it.

It did everything. It respected and highlighted the historic buildings. It provided new buildings that were beautiful but unobtrusive and it put all the bulk below grade. To their credit, the Library bought it. They went for it. And it was absolutely the right thing to do. So we got the house back and we got a very lovely building I think. And more importantly that complex really adds to the streetscape of the city. You know, people complain, well you don't go in to Morgan Library on 37th Street. Nobody went in to the Morgan Library on 37th Street for sixty years. You went in through that little entrance in the annex and to this little hallway and stood in a line. It was ridiculous.

Now, you have a generous, sort of, mini plaza that takes you into a light airy space and then into what Renzo called the *piazzeta*, *[laughs]* the little piazza.

You can quibble with all the things about whether it's mall-ish or the other things. But the bottom line is their exhibition space is phenomenal and their curators, the new director I think is doing incredible exhibitions and the space is sublime. It is beautiful. And they got that new concert hall, before they did that—their concerts in this sort of very flat space. It was awful. Now they have something that you can really listen to the music in, that works. So inside and outside, they lost some things, but I think overall they gained something. The city really gained something tremendous from that whole exercise.

Q1: Do you think that exercise of the way you looked at that complex has affected subsequent landmarks, the way that the Commission has thought about sites? Because it's not a historic district, but you've created something that was greater than—the sum was greater than the individual parts. You created this platform or cultural landscape as you put it?

I'm just wondering if there is—it seems like it's such an interesting project to have pushed forward. I'm just wondering if there's any takeaway of that thought process from the Commission in viewing projects like this?

Paulsen: The thought process for viewing projects of the Commission was sometimes very narrowly focused because we did take very seriously that the boundary did define what we were

looking at. Previous commissions had been a bit more expensive and said, well we're going to look at the impact on what we've designated, but they really had no statutory right to do that. I think what my work in planning and urban design, and I think Commissioner Vengoechea's—and he's the vice chair—his expertise, coming from city planning and architecture, and I think Richard Alcott, who was then on the Commission, the three of us really felt very strongly that you needed to look at things as a totality.

When we started going out and looking—I don't—to answer the question. I don't think it affects projects so much specifically as it does how you do designations. Because designation—one of the things that I think always drove everybody crazy is in Soho that the district boundary went down the middle of West Broadway and that things on one side of the street were in this historic district and things on the other side were not. There was a good reason for that, but I think it makes it easier for the Commission to review new work by having both sides of the street designated. I mean unless there is something really, I guess, fortress-like about that perimeter that you do want to protect and preserve, that I can understand.

But most times, like when you're looking at the Meatpacking district or you're looking at the sites up in Harlem, you want to be able to capture the ambiance as you're walking down the street. I think it did matter in terms of being careful and looking at designations of what you were trying to capture in drawing the boundaries around the districts. And I think that's what the Morgan Library kind of gave us a concrete example of how you would look at this within the context of a larger group of buildings.

Q1: That's a really good point.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: I just wanted to jump to dealing with the public and the media because you've been the public face for the agency—dealing particularly with criticism. It seems like people are quick to criticize landmarks. I was wondering if you could talk about the Congregation Shearith Israel fight that ensued at points while you were there. Reading some things, preservationist for claiming the fix was in and this project was going to move forward one way or the other *[laughter]*.

No, I was doing a scan of articles and it's amazing what—

Paulsen: It was really interesting.

Q1: On oral history, the chance of just kind of to say what really happened or what the project was really about.

Paulsen: Well Congregation Shearith Isreal was a really interesting project that had been working its way to a hearing for two years. They had actually come in when Jennifer was still chairman. They had an architect who specialized in historic religious buildings and they had a board member who was very anxious to do something for the congregation. And they had a land use attorney who was very smart. They came in with one idea, and at that point in time, we had

subcommittees of commissioners who would look at projects to give people feedback so that they could improve their proposal. It was never meant to be, you know what you're going to get when you get to a hearing because you don't have enough people looking at the project to ever know what's really happening.

That small group of commissioners looked at their first proposal and said, "This really is going in the wrong direction. You need to make some changes." Then about a year later, they came back and they had another idea. We looked at it again with them and said, "You know, you're closer, but you're not really ready for a hearing."

When I became chairman—so that was probably right around the time that I became chairman. Shortly after that, they retained a good design firm to work with them on the development of the new building design. And they decided that they wanted to make the application. I said, "Well, you know there's going to be some changes." Because this was actually fairly late in the Bloomberg, after the term. I knew that I would be stepping down as chairman and I didn't know for sure who was going to be the next chairman.

But they decided they wanted to move forward and I said, "Well, I can't tell you not to move forward, but I can tell you that there will be a lot of opposition to this." They said, "Oh no, no, we've been to the community. They think we're being very responsible." I said, okay, you can get the process started. And that was it *[laughs]*. So they started the process. It was interesting. I did see some of those letters that there have been all of this back room deals and stuff. There were no deals. There was nothing. That project had a really high bar to get over. And it's like, I'm doing a

project that has a very high bar to get over right now. You can't expect that you're going to go in and get people saying yes when what you're asking for is really at the upper limits of what the Commission can feel comfortable with. Those never happened quickly, as anybody watched the Commission can say, especially in the residential neighborhood. It's tough.

Q1: 2 Columbus Circle is also a project that you're tied—I mean so many commissioners, 2 Columbus Circle falls under so many—

Paulsen: Everybody.

Q1: Yeah, everyone's commissioner. You've written that op-ed piece, and I'm wondering if you wanted to talk about that, about your feelings about 2 Columbus. I think that it becomes such a hotbed issue for preservationists and in some ways it gets defined as kind of the hot issue of maybe the past decade. I'm wondering if you agree with that or what you think the takeaway from 2 Columbus is? What can we learn from what happened with that case?

Paulsen: Well I think the 2 Columbus Circle, the Huntington Hartford Museum [Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art]/Department of Cultural Affairs [New York Cultural Center]/whatever else it became—that became a flash point I think for all the wrong reasons. It became a flash point because I think the public felt that they were not included in the decision making about that property. I think that's it in a nutshell. And the process of how things happened in New York City is not always a public input situation. The things that came to the

public were the sale of the land, which had nothing to do with the building, the decision or no decision to designate the building as a landmark and then the subsequent design.

And on the first one, there was no issue regarding design, past or present, in those public sessions and yet that's what people brought to them. On the second, the decision not to designate, it was very interesting because the building—I had nothing to do with this; it started I think under Laurie Beckelman. The building became of an age to be considered and it was included on a wish list from the Municipal Art Society and Bob Stern which put it at a level of visibility for things to be considered.

At that time, the designation committee of the Landmarks Commission was a subcommittee of a group of commissioners who would get information from senior staff; the executive director, the director of research, the chair, this whole group of people. They would have looked at a proposal to designate that building and then it would have been reviewed by that subcommittee of commissioners. It was looked at and they decided it didn't merit consideration. I don't know what their reasoning was at that time, but they decided it didn't merit it. Jennifer Raab, as head of the designation committee of the Commission, she took a second look and again they said no.

When I was chairman it was not really a hot button topic, but I did have a designation committee where I said, "Look, this is, it's back in the press again, that they think of selling the building. They seem to have some different proposals. Do you think this should be designated?" It wasn't a formal vote, but again the commissioners on that designation committee said, "No. Why would

you designate this building?" That was really the end of my participation in looking at it as a potential landmark.

Then when Bob Tierney became the chairman, there was the whole sort of kerfuffle and blow up about it. But my own view about the building, and it was interesting because Laurie Beckelman, I think, took a very similar view, which was why she went to work for the museum when they got the project. The building's cladding was gone. As an architect, I could not have told anybody to keep that stone that was on that building. So that had to go and the building had to be reclad. What was actually the most interesting element in the building was not its exterior. It was a poured in place concrete tube to create a calm, free museum space. And that tube is still there. From a purely architectural technological, what was significant about this building, that was significant and that for a large part got saved. The cladding had to go, whether you replaced it with exactly the same cladding or you did a new design, was going to happen regardless.

Designating the building would have put it under the review of the Commission and that change would have been talked about. Would that have helped things? I don't know. I think at the end of the day when you have something that is so poor in condition—and the Commission has done this many times. If it's not in a salvageable condition, you're not doing preservation. You're just taking something so that you can do a design review. That may not be what you want a Landmarks Commission to do. You may want somebody else to do design review, but that I think is why I personally did not think it should be designated. It just had too many issues. But I understand why people wanted it designated. And I think it became emotional more than anything else.

Q1: Yeah. But one thing that I'm curious about and I'll jump to it thinking back about—looking back or thinking back preservation today is the changing role of advocacy. You were a commissioner, then you were chair, and you're—

Paulsen: Now I'm an applicant *[laughs]*.

Q1: Yeah, and now you're an applicant. I wonder—it's somewhat jumping from your time as chair and we can jump back to that. But what you see the changing role of advocacy in preservation and the impact that it's having?

Paulsen: Well I think the changing role of advocacy in preservation has a lot to do with a shift from architectural excellence and more of a, I don't want to say emphasis, but an interest in history. It's very interesting because in many towns you go to the historical commission for review of your work and they use the Secretary of the Interior standards which are actually much more broad when they consider history in the important of a landmark or what they do is listing on a landmark site list.

But New York City's Landmarks Law is very different. It's a Landmarks Preservation Commission and you're designating for history, culture and architecture. The people who wrote the law were architects and the people who advocated for the law were primarily architectural historians who were very focused on preserving these objects. It's really interesting to look at early designations because they were so constrained by looking for buildings that have almost

one hundred percent original fabric, that had a really cohesive little grouping, and against that you juxtapose Brooklyn Heights.

Brooklyn Heights was a very different preservation advocacy kind of viewpoint. They were looking at a neighborhood. They were looking at we want to encourage private home ownership. We want to maintain the ambiance of historic Brooklyn Heights. And that's a very different agenda than preserving high quality works of architecture. I think they can coexist, but I think they can coexist better when you don't have the focus on the architecture in that neighborhood preservation kind of an advocacy. The rules need to change. They really do need to change.

Q1: In what sense? How do you think that—what would make them better?

Paulsen: I think that some of the—first of all in a historic district. If you have a historic district which, like many of the newer ones, does not have buildings with a whole lot of historic integrity and that are sometimes not contributing to the district or a lot of stuff is gone. I think you really need to look at the scale and material kinds of issues, which we focused on the Context/Contrast [Context/Contrast: New Architecture in Historic Districts] exhibition at the AIA a few years ago, and it's now at the Historical Society in Brooklyn [Brooklyn Historical Society].

The thing that was interesting was you could really live with very modern, almost not stylistically compatible buildings in a historic district as long as they were sort of at the same scale. And that's born out when you go to Europe. Everybody always sort of walks around and goes well, it all feels good. I say because it's high quality design and they're not trying to stick

out within their neighborhood. They just—they're very, very contextual in terms of scale and materials. But the style isn't necessarily the same. Whereas I think the way that we have the rules now, it's—there's such a burden on an owner and an applicant to try to divine what—am I copying something, am I—there's just so much confusion about the review process.

I don't know if that's necessarily the right thing. And the other part of this where you have a building that has limited historical materials. I think the Commission and the advocates really need to look at other ways to address infill replacement and even additions on those buildings that allows for them to be maintained and in use.

Individual landmarks are a different story. Those are buildings that are important for design or history or some important cultural event. I think there, those are the buildings that really need to have a discussion when they're being designated, why are we designating this? Because if we're designating this house because somebody lived here and something important happened, but it's a suburban tract house—that's an extreme way of looking at it—then I think you almost have to say we're gong to create a historic house fund for this, there's a not-for-profit with it. There has to be a way of really doing this house right because if it's historically important, it deserves something else. That's why I think that has to happen during designation.

Q1: That there's a clear emphasis of this isn't architecture per se, but we're more focused on the history of this building for who lived here. Not to simplify I think who would care about it.

Paulsen: No. But I think—it's interesting. I attended sort of a roundtable discussion about a month or so ago where a discussion about the Tin Pan Alley buildings came up. There's a lot of advocate saying we should designate these buildings because this is where Tin Pan Alley started. The buildings have been altered over time and they're in an area that's prime for development. The question was, and it was really an interesting question, "Can you commemorate something, by doing signs, by doing a museum, by doing an interpretive something? Are there other ways of remembering these important things and places when the building itself is not so great?"

I think that's a discussion that's worth having because it does ask you to be more creative. It was really interesting because, I mean the question was being asked by someone who's not a great supporter of preservation and landmarks. But he was opening the door to a broader thinking about how we commemorate, which I thought was a really good question. As an architect, I'd rather see the buildings preserved but *[laughs]*.

Q1: It's a really good question. And thinking about in terms of regulate, how you regulate. If you were the Commission and this would have take us to a new direction.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: And we're rolling again.

Paulsen: How you would regulate a cultural landmark is a really good question. And I think the Commission has struggled with this kind of designation from day one. I think in some instances,

like Weeksville in Brooklyn, that was nothing. The remnant of Hunterfly Road was there and there were buildings on Hunterfly Road. But if they hadn't created the museum and if they hadn't taken a very specific approach to how they were going to communicate the story, that is not a straight pristine preservation result. They were allowed to restore buildings to different time periods, to mix time periods in one house because they're commemorating the family who lived in the house for a very long time. They allowed for different periods in the family's life to be commemorated in the redevelopment of it.

There are buildings that were completely recreated. They didn't exist anymore. That's almost the Williamsburg approach where you might have one or two things and you sort of fill it in to communicate the story. I think if you're doing cultural designations or historical designations, you really have to have a different way of looking at it that allows for a broader latitude and what an applicant brings to it. But it's very hard to communicate that in a written set of rules *[laughter]*.

Q1: And then to regulate it.

Paulsen: Yeah. It's much more—it's almost as though you would say that to the Commission, right now you look at everything. Maybe if you change and look at the way the Secretary of the Interior Guidelines looked at things for certain kind of work and projects, and maybe if you look at individual landmarks the way you traditionally look at them. I think there's a dialogue that could be had about this. And it's worth having.

Q1: Yes, a really interesting topic. To jump back to your time as chair sort of the final things with your time as chair, what do you see as some of the key designations of policy? Like looking back on your time, what are the—whether it's historic districts, Tribeca, whether it's certain designation, your focus on Modernism, things that you got the ball in motion that happened during Tierney's chairmanship?

What are the things that you, on the record want to say, these are my accomplishments, these are things that were really important to me and we're now seeing the fruit of those initial, the seeds or the something?

Paulsen: The things that I did and the things that I started as chairman. I think the things that I did really exemplified the focus on excellence. I really do think the Hearst Tower and the Morgan Library; I'm very proud of those two projects going through the process and geting done. Getting it improved and getting build in a time where nobody thought anything could happen. I'm very proud of those. I think they were so good for the city in so many ways. It's interesting to see as they age and I look at the Hearst Tower out this window everyday. I don't think it's in the urban background *[laughter] [unclear]* but I look at it everyday. What is remarkable about that building is that it is different at every time of day and under every weather condition, which in a way channels the ephemeral quality of the tower whereas that beautiful warm stone base remains. There's a wonderful juxtaposition. I just wished it could have been taller, many people have said that. But zoning is done *[laughter]*.

Morgan Library I just think that we were able with that institution to move them to a next platform. Having been to it recently with my sister, I'm very proud with that one. I think it worked out really well.

On the designations though, I think that's the longer ark of work and influence because I actually did take very seriously looking at the Twentieth Century, the mid-Twentieth Century buildings. The two designations that I was most pleased to be able to—actually there were three designations I was very happy to be able to accomplish, were the Begrisch Hall up the Bronx Community College by Marcel Breuer. It's a tiny building, but to be able to have a dialogue with an academic institution and achieve a designation, however small, that was a good one. It also allowed for a Breuer building to be an individual landmark because the Whitney is not. It's in the district. It's not an individual. So that's "Ah*"—[laughs]*. That's a little thing.

The other Modern mid-century was the designation of the Time-Life Building's lobby which was a long back and forth about how to deal with the building. The building is important, but it really didn't rise to the level of the other mid-Twentieth Century skyscrapers that we were looking at. But that lobby had just so much going for it. They were going to start doing a renovation of the lobby and so we were able, working with them to protect it, to position it, to accommodate new security and to, I think also really begin the dialogue about the important of inside and outside in modern buildings, which we now see coming full circle with the bank building on Fifth Avenue [510 Fifth Avenue] problems, but, you know, problems that were there. I don't think we've seen the end of this discussion. It's going to keep happening—it was the beginning of that discussion.

On the districts, the Meatpacking District was one that I was very happy to start and be able to, you know, get a preliminary boundary in place. And Bob Tierney came with me to the first community outreach meeting and he understood it and he carried it forward. I was still on the Commission when we voted. so that was really nice to see that whole thing. Now in a few weeks I have a building. I did a new building in the Meatpacking District and it turned out—I hope everybody likes it—but I think it turned out really well. It's just nice to see that this was a designation that made sense, had support, and that has actually resulted in the kinds of fun, vibrant, and jazzy kinds of architecture that I think everybody was looking to preserve there. It's turning out really well.

The long arc was the Grand Concourse [Historic District]. I started, I stood at Historic Districts Council cocktail thing and said, "We've got the commissioners, the committee's looked. We feel really good about this." And it just—it was such a big district. It took a long time for them to do the outreach. But the vote happened a couple of weeks ago. I was able to go to up here last year when they were considering it and say, "Yes I support it."—*[laughs]*. But I'm just so pleased that recognition of that important neighborhood was able to happen. And that it finally got solved.

Q1: That seems like it's such an interesting one because I mean you've been working on it for so long, but I'm wondering if it's a point to talk about what it takes to create a historic district. That it takes going into communities and talking with people, explaining that process. I'm wondering if you could just share some insights onto what that's like, both the ups and downs of that because I think that people don't quite understand how much is – how much is involved in—

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: It's something where the Commission suddenly decides, "Oh, these buildings in this area are great. Document them, do it." That it is this long, ongoing battle.

Paulsen: Well designating a historic district is—I call it a campaign, not a battle. But it's a really interesting thing. Usually it starts because a group of neighborhood residents. And it could be a commercial area like the Meatpacking District or it could be residential like the Upper West Side or Harlem. They'll say, you know, we think our neighborhood is nice and we're seeing some bad things happened here. We should be a historic district so bad things won't happen here. They'll send in a request for evaluation to the Commission and they'll propose fifty thousand buildings. I exaggerate, but they'll say, we think this is a historic district.

And the Commission senior staff looks at it. The research department, the executive director—all the key people including the preservation department because they will look at things and say, "Yes, this merits designation, but we will never be able to regulate it." They usually get over written *[laughs]*. But I think it's very interesting and I'll talk a little bit about some of the results. The key thing is you look at why. What is it you're trying to acknowledge in that designation?

The Grand Concourse is really interesting because people think the Grand Concourse is this premiere Art Deco district. There are maybe five art deco buildings on the Grand Concourse. There is Neo-Georgian. There is sort of neo-castle. There is all these other sort of 1930s

architecture up and down that boulevard. But as a place of aspiration, there is a level of quality. And so you can say defensively, this is a historic district because it does exemplify something.

But then there's other historic districts, one in particular that came many times to the Commission to try and be designated. The commissioners, when it gets to the point of people really feeling that something merits investigation, the commissioners will go out and walk. That's when they sort of hold finger to the wind, feel it. They'll walk around and they'll say, "I don't get it," or "Of course this is a district." You really do get that kind of a span of reaction. What that's important for is that in order to move a district forward, you have to draw a boundary. And you draw the boundary and then you send staff or yourself out to the community and you say, "We're thinking of making you a historic district. What are your concerns?"

In the situation in Fieldston, the concern was we all have slate roofs and they're falling apart. Are you going to make us keep the slate roofs? A legitimate concern. You go to the Meatpacking District and the concerns were, "I have a one-storey building and everybody around me is three stories. Am I always going to have a one-storey building." You come up with a way of looking at it. So there's a lot of back and forth in a public setting. Then you draw your boundary, you firm it up, and you send letters out to each of the property owners. Then they contact their land use attorney and they come in and then meet with the chairman one on one to say why they don't merit inclusion in the historic district.

So when I say it's a campaign, it's a long process especially if you're looking at a bigger district because you may be doing multiple public meetings to give everybody an opportunity to talk

back and forth. The reason this is important is that unlike the individual landmarks, the City Planning Commission and the City Council, they should and usually do vote on these items and they can overturn them. Or they can change the boundaries which they did in Tribeca and a few other districts. It becomes this back and forth where if the constituents are really opposed and they go to their council member, the council members are going to listen to them. I think we're going to see some of that with the Downtown Brooklyn skyscraper historic district. There's not unanimity amongst the people who live and own the buildings there about whether they should be a district. So that'll be interesting to see how that plays out. But that back and forth goes on for quite some time.

When you go to the City Council—you voted to designate, you've had your public hearings, all the good things that happened, and you get to the City Council at the end of it, the one thing they want to know is did you talk to the owner. Did you explain to them what this means? Because if you're doing things over their heads without having this kind of back and forth, we're not going to support you. So it was really important working with the City Council to understand that that was a concern.

If you're trying to do a big district and there's a lot of property owners, it's going to take time because you're going to have to talk to everybody. And they all get—this is backing up—before the final vote, they get the description of their building and they get the opportunity to change that description. Because no matter how much research you do based on DOB records and something else, there maybe something that they know about their building that you don't know.

And it's just important to be able to have all that exchange of information before it happens. So that's why it takes so long.

Q1: I think that's great for the general public to get that sense. Yeah, that's really wonderful. Thanks for talking us through that process. Jumping to the future preservation—one question first, are there any big disappointments you had as chair? Things you hoped would have been designated or was designated?

[INTERRUPTION]

Paulsen: Disappointments are chairman—I think that the main disappointment was not really being able to modernize the review process. The designation process I think works. It takes time but it does work and it really does need to take the amount of time that it does.

But I think the review process, the rules, the ways that applications are made—I still feel, and as an applicant I went through this everyday—there's got to be ways to be able to make that process flow more smoothly. I think at that point in time the ability to do a lot of things online that we have now, was not possible. And Mayor Bloomberg really has I think modernized a lot of the infrastructure of the city communication systems. We hope so. That will, I think allow for the next level of regulation to hopefully go forward. But again, I was not a chairman for eight years or ten years so my agenda was a fairly narrow one. While I looked at how the Commission was structured and trying to streamline some of its functioning, I think that I did what I could at that time.

Q1: What do you see some of the challenges or opportunities for preservation today?

Paulsen: I think preservation really needs to think hard about what it is they're trying to preserve. It's very interesting to me to see how the National Trust [for Historic Preservation] is shifting. I don't know the full extent of what they're doing yet, but they're shifting away from these massive main street, neighborhood revitalization, almost urban planning kinds of projects, and they're getting much more focused on place. I think that's interesting.

I think preservation need to talk to architects more. Because the juxtaposition of what a preservationist who has no architectural training thinks is what should be done versus an architect who's worked in preservation and understands how buildings are put together—its miles apart. It really does need to come together because a lot of what people advocate for is based on misunderstandings of buildings. Real misunderstandings and misreadings of what they see on a building. It can happen with, you know, very well trained people.

For example I worked on a project in New Jersey a few years ago. It was a huge industrial site that had a 1930s factory building. The preservationist had written this very long description of the buildings and talked about the 1930s factory building with its curtain wall. A curtain wall—the building had large expanses of multi-light, you know, a lots of little windows. They were big expanses, but it was a concrete frame building with brick walls and industrial glass. They were essentially what people call punched windows. They sat within an opening and they were supported by that opening. Not curtain walls. A curtain wall is a very specific item and it means

that your glass wall is hung off of your structural frame. But this was a very senior, very *[unclear]* preservationist and they were describing it as a curtain wall. And I said, "You can't do that. It's not a curtain wall."

It's that knowledge and understanding of what a building is that I'm always amazed at the gaps. A town that has an architect trained in preservation as their adviser, usually you have a very good and I think very productive exchange about what to do with buildings under the Secretary of the Interior Standards. But a town that—and most towns actually do have architects as their preservation advisors. But some towns where they just have a historian who's looking at something, they get very different advice on how to proceed and so it's a long exchange.

I think the two groups really need to come back together and really think about what we're preserving and why we're preserving it so that cities stay cities. And we do get the ambiance that we want and quality.

Q1: And do you have any thoughts about how that could—how we move these ideas forward *[laughs]?* Or that's another book.

Paulsen: Moving the architecture and preservation groups together, I don't know how to do that. I think there are a lot of really good preservation architects who are involved in preservation advocacy. And they’re good designers and they have all the right agenda, ideas and somehow when it comes to advocacy, they come down on sides that are just always no. No isn't going to

get us a better city. There has to be some yes somewhere in those discussions. Otherwise, as I said, the buildings just die.

Q1: Well is there anything else you want to add for the record?

Paulsen: I wouldn't know. I answered the questions and stuff *[laughter]*.

Q1: This was great. And thank you so much for your time today.

Paulsen: You're welcome.

Q1: And three hours of last winter.

Paulsen: I can't believe it's three hours.

[END OF INTERVIEW]