

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

The Reminiscences of
Gene Norman

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Gene Norman conducted by Interviewer Liz McEnaney in 2011. This interview is part of 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.

Gene Norman began working in government while studying architecture. He came to the Landmarks Preservation Commission [LPC] from the Harlem Urban Development Corporation where he'd had dealings with the LPC while renovating landmarked, city-owned buildings. As chairman of the Commission, he worked to improve the day-to-day workings of the LPC, such as dealing with the backlog of Certificate of Appropriateness hearings. He shares his experiences working with Mayor Edward I. Koch's administration and within the city government. During his tenure, he restructured the LPC, creating the survey department, and worked to make the Landmarks Commission's dealings with the public transparent. He also established a way to clarify the significant features of landmarked buildings in designation reports, to later aid in hearings for renovations or alterations of the site. During his tenure, several important issues were arose, including St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church's push to demolish the community house, the Flynn-Walsh Bill was proposed, and the Broadway Theaters began being designated.

Transitioning to a career in public service from studies in architecture at the Pratt Institute, Gene Norman served as Landmarks Preservation Commission chair from mid-1983 to late 1988. Arriving at LPC from the Harlem Urban Development Corporation, where Norman worked to renovate landmarked, city-owned buildings, Norman brought unique perspective to the position of chairman. Entering contentious skirmishes over designations during his term as chair, including conflict with the Municipal Art Society over a proposed Fifth Avenue historic district and the Rizzoli-Cody buildings, Norman positioned the LPC within an ongoing discussion on how to define historical and cultural landmarks. Norman notably responded to public critiques, making the LPC's dealings with the public more transparent through the creation of a survey department, more explicitly naming significant features of landmarked buildings in designation reports, and organizing the Historic City Committee. Norman's tenure as LPC chair witnessed numerous high-profile designations including the New York Stock Exchange Building and Rockefeller Center.

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Norman: I have this file, it's really a box but I call it a file to give it some more status, where I've been throwing things into over the years with the hope of getting back into it and digitizing everything and putting it all in a computer file. I'll look through that at some point and see what can happen.

Q: That'd be great. Because I think I mentioned on the phone, kind of the genesis of the whole of the archive project was that we have oral histories with Harmon Goldstone and Geoffrey Platt. And those are such a resource because you have the two of them sharing their perspective, what it was like getting the Commission [New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission] up and running and just the continuation of that story from the point of view of the chairs because you do have newspaper articles and things written from various people's perspective. But we need the chair's perspective to really fill out what was happening both in the public voice of the commission and then also as head of the agency and organization.

Norman: Public voice, I like that.

Q: Yes, it's true. I mean being out there and chairing all of the hearings and also all the PR [Public Relations] aspect that, it seems to me, I'd love to dive into this at some point too and get your perspective on it. But you were the PR voice of the Commission.

Norman: Funny you should mention that because I had a brush with the public and preservationist over that very same issue near the end of my term and we'll talk about that, maybe not today but we'll talk about that. That's the famous Tony [Anthony M.] Tung incident.

Q: Oh yes. You tell me when you're ready to go into that. I have it in my questions. It's somewhat down the end, kind of going in chronological order but I'd very much like to get your—

Norman: That's why your saying I was the public voice of the commission interested me because a lot of people somehow missed that then, but today they say it as if it were known to all.

Q: Yes. If you want to start by just giving me a sense of your background because you didn't come with a "preservation background" but no one did because that preservation wasn't even really an established discipline of sorts, at that time. So I'm wondering how—

Norman: Well it was established. The program was running at Columbia [University] by the time I got there. My appointment was in 1983, which wasn't that long ago, a little over 25 years I guess if you do the math. There were people and organizations even who were interested in preservation work here in the city. I knew of some of them. I was not involved in any

preservation work per se, but as an architect I did have some awareness and desire to do more in the line of preservation work.

Q: In what sense?

Norman: Well I need to back up a little bit and pardon me if I get to be long winded.

Q: If you're willing to do more than two sessions, I'm willing to be the recorder and help you edit it out.

Norman: I have to confess as I walked over from Grand Central, I thought to myself, gee, this neighborhood is changing but it's still recognizable. It's recognizable to me especially, because as a teenager I had a job, when I was in high school, as a foot messenger in this neighborhood.

Q: Wow.

Norman: I was like fifteen, sixteen years old. I thought delivering packages and picking up things and running around Midtown Manhattan would be a good way to get to know the city. And it was, but more importantly in terms of some futures, it helped me understand about buildings and what made up buildings and why there were two or three elevator banks as an example in a building because the elevators don't have to all go up to the top and cannot because of how the building is laid out. That's all about zoning and if you really get into it, you see how this stuff all comes together.

So here I am this kid from the Bronx who ended up going into the military before going to college, before going to architectural school. I actually did start college before going into the military but left—I was going to Hunter College in those days. Hunter College had just begun to accept male students in those days. Hunter College was an all girls school and they had two campuses. One is the familiar one on 68th street where they are now. You went there as a junior and as a senior. As a freshman and a sophomore, you went to the campus in the Bronx near where I live now, that is currently and has been for a number of years Lehman College.

Q: Oh, okay.

Norman: You got the experience of going to school with grass and ivy covered medieval sort of collegey-looking buildings and after two years of that you came down to hard edge Manhattan to go to school. So it was a wonderful experience. Anyway, I spent time in the military and was in the military—I was the [United States] Marine Corps where I got a chance to see buildings and what I would call architecture, I didn't call it that then. That was very different from what midtown Manhattan was all about. That was my only experience base, Midtown Manhattan and what I was told you. I decided that architecture was interesting enough for me to get involved in. Plus it offered an opportunity for a livelihood as a draftsman or many other affiliate skills and crafts. So when my enlistment was up I enrolled under the Korean War GI Bill [Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944].

Q: Wow.

Norman: *[Laughs]*. To go to college and learn about architecture. After awhile my first work assignment was with a firm called Voorhes, Walker, Smith and Smith.

Q: Can I ask is that when you went to Pratt [Institute]?

Norman: Yes.

Q: Okay so you came back and used the GI Bill and went to Pratt, commuting from the Bronx?

Norman: Correct. Actually, I first went to a drafting school out in Brooklyn, when I first was separated from the military, to learn drafting because that was a way to make money. I finally landed a job and then went to Pratt. The job that I landed was as a—I guess its best to describe as an office boy for this firm, very large, I want to say prestigious for its day—firm that was located in 101 Park Avenue, which was known then known as the architects building because that was a place where lots of architectural offices ended up and it was a place where architects could take clients to look at samples of materials and equipment and plumbing fixtures and so on. A far cry from what we have today.

Q: In what sense?

Norman: Well today we have computers so you sit there and you call up whatever you need to look at and in almost 3D it comes out to show clients, to show yourself. In those days, and we're

talking about the late '50s, you needed something tangible that people could look at, touch, smell, feel and that was the place to go to. As an office boy there, I didn't do any drafting for about six months or almost a year, but then got promoted and ended up in their production office which was located in Long Island City. It's a large office there. I think the total firm had close to five hundred people in it.

Q: Wow.

Norman: And it was arranged so that each—well, let me back up just a little bit. Although there were five hundred people in the firm total, the firm was broken down into seven groups. Each group functioned like a full range architectural engineering firm of its own. So that you'd have a chief architect who sat with a chief structural engineer, a chief electrical engineer, a chief mechanical engineer, and they all worked with their independent little staffs on projects.

Q: Interesting structure.

Norman: It was, very much so. Although, when you stop and think about it it's a spinoff of what was going on during World War II to get things done in terms of organization. In that system, I was able to flourish and within a fairly short time I was actually running projects. I worked on the Stony Brook project out in Stony Brook Long Island. They did the original buildings, this firm.

Q: For Stony Brook College [Stony Brook University]?

Norman: As part of the State University [of New York]. We did a lot of government work, and laboratories, and hospitals. So there's this whole range of very complicated things. You're learning about and supervising other people to get the drawings out and get the job done. So that was the start of my architectural career. I stayed with that firm for almost eight years and then moved on to a firm called Victor Gruen and Associates [Victor Gruen Associates].

Victor Gruen established his firm as a leading proponent of shopping centers and how the United States as a culture could marry the mobility of the automobile with shopping and commerce in one sort of wonderful, terrazzo floored, brightly lit, escalatored, elavatorred shopping place. I learned about that. Working on some shopping centers down in Pennsylvania and the Newark Center opposite the Penn [Pennsylvania] Station in Newark, with a hotel and other things. That was also a large firm based basically in California although they had a presence here in New York and that was where I worked. I'm trying to think of a name that resonate—I can't pull it up. The designer for the World Financial Center, downtown opposite where the [World] Trade Center used to be?

Q: Yes, the one with the window garden?

Norman: Who was that? Do you remember? Anyway, he was a designer in the California office of Gruen so his work, his name, his involvement was something I was familiar with and later in life, sure enough he pops up again. Lots of people did. I guess at that point I took a job. I left Victor Gruen's office and I decided that it would be great if I could get a master's degree and

since I was not a rich person, I thought I could find a job that would subsidize that bit of education that I was thinking about. The one place that came to mind was the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey who would subsidize people going to places like Columbia. I was able to get a job there because they were planning to do Newark [International] Airport as an in-house activity. Normally their work was always contracted out to architectural firms. For whatever the reasons were, they created this staff of outsiders that they hired, and those people all worked on the creation of Newark Airport from the ground up. I was part of that team and worked on the satellite and connector buildings to the terminals.

Q: What an interesting—

Norman: Yes it was, very much so.

Q: Were you serving as project manager on that?

Norman: I was a job captain for the satellite buildings. If you know that project, there was a sort of banana shaped terminal, three of them, and coming off that there were elevated corridors taking you out to a circular building where the planes were. That was my responsibility to make sure that those buildings and the connectors to the terminal were all produced and on schedule and correct. A lot of fun, a lot of learning about a whole new thing, transportation and aircraft transportation at that.

Q: I'm assuming then just the work for Port Authority for such a government agency, what was that like?

Norman: It was not unlike working in an office as I had been because they didn't operate any differently. The one thing that was different, we had a schedule coffee break twice a day
[laughter].

Q: We all should have that.

Norman: And you got a free pass to go across their bridges and tunnels. That was the one good thing about it I guess—extra thing. Without continuing a long kind of resume, I did that for almost two years and a friend of mine who happened to be also African American, just received his license and was opening a firm. We worked together at Voorhees, his name was Bob Wilson and he said—he used to joke when we worked together that some day he and I would work in a firm that he'd be the head of. I would say, “Sure just let me know. Call me up when you get ready.”

That was not an idle statement in the sense that there weren't very many African American architects in the '60s. The few that were to come about had just began working in architectural offices to learn the craft. Architecture then and probably still is now, requires kind of a long kind of apprenticeship, not just a degree that says here you know everything go out and do it. You have to spend time, and the requirement for a license means that you must spend time under the tutorship of registered architects working on a project and instructing you about what goes on. It

was in those days that many of the black architects to emerge were receiving that kind of mentorship.

Q: From one another?

Norman: From one another, from people they worked for before being able to pass the examination and be truly known as architects. Anyway, my friend Bob Wilson in fact did get his license, did open up his office, and called me and said “Okay I've done it now it's your turn.” That started a wonderful four year relationship of how do you run a small architectural office and keep the lights on and pay the bills and get jobs and do other things; and it was a lot of fun for awhile.

Q: Were you licensed at that time?

Norman: No, I was not licensed at that time. I was in preparation to get a license. But we did work. We did some work in Stamford Connecticut. We opened up a branch office in New York City because we were doing work in Newark. I ran the New York City office. Bob was at the “home office” in Stamford, and for four years it was a lot of fun. We did some housing and that was a field that I really had not done much in. A lot of it was subsidized housing, public housing, housing authorities—New York City, Stamford Housing Authority [Housing Authority of Stamford] and so on.

Q: Were you doing new construction in New York City?

Norman: Yes, new construction for the [New York City] Housing Authority.

Q: Wow.

Norman: And we were also doing office renovations for IBM.

Q: Up in Stamford?

Norman: No, in Brooklyn. IBM felt the need to demonstrate a commitment—we're talking about the '60s now so you have to keep that in mind, the context of it—a commitment to urban dwellers, urban residents, which happened to be mainly people of color, who were trying to change their life, change their neighborhood, change their environment. IBM, because of some encouragement from Bobby [Robert F.] Kennedy, I think, opened up a plant in Brooklyn where they would manufacture cables needed to connect computers and printing machines and all of the paraphernalia that went along with computers. This is long before the age of the PC or a computer this big.

Q: That we all have.

Norman: You needed a computer that would fill this room to do the simplest tasks. And to do that you needed to plug into other pieces of equipment. So they built this plant out in Brooklyn.

Q: Where in Brooklyn, out of curiosity?

Norman: Nostrand and Gates avenues in Brooklyn. They chose our firm to do the renovation. The building was an old cocoa storage warehouse, with huge timbered flooring systems. It had been so loaded with bags of cocoa and chocolate and things of that nature that the floor sort of had a sway in it—looks like a sway back horse. We did the renovation, they moved into it, they were happy. The plant was a success, they hired local people, they trained them how to make these cables, and it was a wonderful thing.

Anyway because of that experience and working with housing needs, I started getting interested in an organization that was recently started in New York State called the Urban Development Corporation. I applied for a job there and because of A, having gone to Pratt and B, having worked at the Port Authority, it was easy to talk to the leadership at the UDC [Urban Development Corporation] since the head of design and construction and his deputies all had similar backgrounds, having worked at the Port Authority, having been involved at Pratt and that sort of thing. I was hired.

I came on board and became the coordinating architect for projects outside of New York City, meaning housing as well as what we call civic projects like the library in Newburgh was one of my projects. The way that worked was that UDC, as “the owner,” would hire architectural firms, work with them on programs on these projects, whether it be residential or commercial, and then the UDC architect would make sure all the pieces came together, that's what coordinating meant. It was a great job and my responsibility included the—you talked about the Hudson River before.

All of the Hudson River projects that we were doing then, everything in upstate New York that was going on except in the cities of Rochester and Buffalo.

Q: That just extended outside of your district?

Norman: No, they had their own coordinating architects for Buffalo—

Q: Got you.

Norman: —and its surrounding area and one for Rochester where there was a lot of work going on. But the rest of the projects throughout the state fell to my team's oversight, and my team was like six people or something. We doled out the projects. We each had a bunch of projects to worry about and make sure happened.

Q: Were you traveling a lot at this point?

Norman: Traveling a lot.

Q: What was that experience like? Kind of seeing the—

Norman: That was great because from time to time we could travel by helicopter. What a kick it was to fly into upstate Ten Eyck outside of Albany. You land in a parking lot go into a restaurant to have lunch and then go over to the site and watch what was going on in terms of the

construction. Most of it though was just tedious driving up and down, *[laughter]*, visiting the sites and sitting with local mayors and officials making sure that the arrangements for the project were all in place. A lot of negotiating had to go on. And there was a whole public access and public project regiment that had to be followed with the public hearings and presentations by the architects that we hired by the UDC staff, the various components of the UDC staff—the legal department, the real estate department, purchasing sites and that sort of thing. And the coordinating architect was again the ringmaster for all of these circus acts going on, getting things done.

Q: That's a good way to put it.

Norman: That was a wonderful experience. It was a great place to work and Ed [Edward J.] Logue was an approachable person. The people I worked for directly, the head of design and construction, a fellow named Herb [Herbert A.] Tessler and my immediate boss, a guy named Carl Cordero *[phonetic]*.

Q: Was Ed Logue the head of UDC at that point?

Norman: Yes. Yes, and he reported to Governor [Nelson A.] Rockefeller who had a real commitment to making sure that affordable housing would be made available here in the state of New York. Something we lack now, nobody seems to care about that anymore, not enough anyway. Through that process I guess I was involved with something like 25,000 housing units.

Q: Wow. Throughout the *[crosstalk]*—

Norman: A unit being an apartment or dwelling. I came across one project that exposed me to historic preservation—I'm sure we didn't do such a great job of it. Up in Pawling, New York, there was an old hotel called the Dutcher Hotel [Dutcher House] that was going to be converted into housing, and what we tried to do was save some of the historic fabric. It was one of these hotels that had its own little music hall, which we converted into kind of a rec room, along with the housing itself. It was through that process that my interest in preservation of architectural stuff, sort of came up.

Q: In the sense of adaptive reuse?

Norman: Yes.

Q: What was it that really grabbed you about that?

Norman: Well, the building itself, it was a kind of a neo-Second Empire, mansard roofed, three-story building and it was the biggest building in town—now the town, not much bigger than this conference room. Pawling, New York, downtown Pawling, right across the street from the railroad station. But it was the kind of thing that became an economic generator for downtown Pawling because putting that building back to use, as opposed to being a kind of relic or ruin in the middle of town is a good thing. We did a number of—I forget the exact number, maybe forty units of elderly housing in it, and there was room for commercial activity on the street side, on

the lower floor. It was a good project in the sense of how you treat an older building and rebuild it without losing its importance visually, and trying to retain some of the historic fabric of the building. At least that was our intent. Now, was it totally successful? Absolutely not. In terms of preservation work, it was maybe a C, maybe a C minus.

Q: Why do you say that, out of curiosity?

Norman: Well, as I learned later at the Landmarks Commission, there's a lot more to perseveration than just creating a stage set and in a way we were doing sort of like a stage set.

Q: That's interesting.

Norman: Preservation has to have a little—a greater amount of depth, and not just create a kind of Disneyland pastiche of older elements, and sort of glue that on to a steel frame building, and say that—

Q: That it's more than decoration, that it's getting at something.

Norman: Yes. It should not be just decoration and sometimes that's what you end up with, but it's done so skillfully you never know it, visually. But you do know it. Things like the floor-to-floor height. Older buildings tend to have a greater floor-to-floor height. Today's world says "Oh no, you can't build twelve-foot ceilings, they have to be eight-foot, nine and a half." So

everything looks almost right but the scale is off, there's something there. You have an eye you see it and you say wait a minute it's not quite right.

Q: Is this something you really developed an eye for later when you were at Landmarks?

Norman: Yes. When you talk about developing an eye it's a cumulative. You don't wake up one day and say "Oh, I have this eye now, I can spot things." Oh, no, no. What you do is over time, and I'm talking about decades, you start to see and understand things with an architect's eye, and that's all there is to it. You begin to see things the way architects can see things. I don't know how else to explain that. It's like a doctor, a doctor can look at a person and say that person is well and healthy, and look at another person and say wait a minute, there's something wrong there, there's something wrong there.

Okay, so where are we now? You want to know how did all of this—background [*crosstalk*]—

Q: So you've gotten us up to you're working under Ed Logue—

Norman: We're talking over forty years of background from the '60s, '50s actually.

Q: So you're still at—we're at the start point where you're still at UDC.

Norman: Yes, still at UDC. Then UDC ran into financial trouble. UDC was being financed by, backed by state bonds for the projects and it was determined when there was a shift in who ran

the government, from Republicans to Democrats, that that was no longer the appropriate way of doing things. UDC was cut back and forbidden from investing state money into projects that would be backed by the full faith of the state of New Yorker with private development people. That's a whole other story and I'm not even prepared today to sit down and go through with you. It would take too long. I'd have to do too much research to recall the detail, and the detail is really what's important there.

Q: I can do a little background research on this too.

Norman: That's good. Get into it, you'll find it very interesting.

But through that whole process, since we relied on hiring architectural firms to do our work, I got to know a lot of the best architects that were out there doing things, not just here in New York City but throughout the state. A lot of people at firms and their names became familiar to me and ended up working with them on our projects. One of them was a small firm called Smotrich and Platt. We did a project in Haverstraw, New York together. I got to know David Smotrich and Charles A. Platt. Charles Platt turns up later in my life as being one person that I knew as a commissioner on the Landmarks Commission when I was assigned as the incoming chairman. Having Charlie be somebody from my past was a wonderful asset because it helped eased the strangeness of the new person running the place and not knowing any of the commissioners but knowing Charlie really helped a lot.

For the next six years or so—let's see UDC's cutback began in '74 when Republicans lost the election, and from '74 to '83 is what? Twenty years? No ten years. Well for that time period I spent, working in UDC subsidiary in Harlem, doing development work there. We were the only UDC component permitted to continue doing housing. An arrangement was worked out with the upcoming Democrats that the housing in Harlem was a useful thing to fund and if we could get it funded by the state of New York as seed money projects, and do the final construction and operating and so on by a combination of federal money and private builders it'd be a good thing. So we started doing that and we began working on housing renovation, most of it was renovation, using the Section 8 Program, [Housing Choice Voucher program] which was a new program in those days. And continuing wherever we could to do new construction under the old [Section] 236 [Program] projects. These are all federal funding mechanisms

Q: I know the Section 8. I don't know the 236.

Norman: Well it's a predecessor of Section 8. It guaranteed mortgage payments and it reduced the mortgage rates so it increased the affordability of builders getting involved and doing new construction. UDC had built several projects in Harlem and in New York City using that approach. And then one day, a UDC colleague of mine who had recently joined the [Edward I.] Koch administration as the building commissioner, his name is Bob [Robert] Esnard. He said to me, "How'd you like working for the city? I like working for the city and I think you'd like it too. Would you be interested to talk to somebody about that?" I said 'Bob, I'm always interested to see what's out there and yes, I'd be willing to do that."

Q: Sure.

Norman: So he arranged for me to have some conversations with people at City Hall. I wish I could remember the names of them. I have it all recorded somewhere. I notice that you asked, who did I get contacted by.

Q: Yes, kind of what that story—

Norman: I don't remember their names but they were assistants to the mayor. It turns out the mayor was looking for some new talent to come into the administration in 1983. He'd been mayor for a few years at that point.

Q: Koch?

Norman: Ed Koch. One of the things that I believed that he was trying to do was to get more African Americans and Latinos in his administration.

Q: Why do you have that belief? Was it things—?

Norman: Well just looking at how his administration showed that there were more people of color then, than there was in the beginning.

Q: Got you.

Norman: Not that there was any boycotting or elimination in the beginning, but a realization that in order to govern properly in this city, one has to have greater diversity or as much diversity as possible. But not sacrifice the quality of the people that you do select. That's what I remember. Let's take a little break.

[INTERRUPTION]

Norman: In Harlem for the bicentennial year, 1976, we came up with a program that we could get funded through our limited budget at Harlem Urban Development Corporation, where we would spend somewhere close to two or three hundred dollars on each facade of a brownstone building for improving that façade—doing patching and painting if it had been painted, steam cleaning if it had not been painted, preparing windows. We called it the spruce up program because we wanted to have the blocks look spruced up. We wanted to have the blocks look like somebody cared about Harlem. We wanted to have the blocks take on an appearance and a reality of the people on the block working together to maintain a nice environment. One of the things we tried to do was reinforce the idea of block associations coming together so that after the work was done people would maintain it. It was a successful program.

One of the things that made it successful was that we charged a nominal fee to the individual property owner to show some participation in it. The concept being if you pay for something you'll take care of it. It sounds pretty straightforward and un-gimmicky but it worked. Maybe it worked because it was straightforward and not gimmicky. We charged people I think it was

seventy-five dollars to enroll into the program and for that seventy-five dollars they got upwards of three hundred to four hundred dollars worth of work done on their property. Now to get that kind of work done was a little difficult because you couldn't find necessarily qualified tradesmen who could do the patching. We just didn't want somebody coming in and just slobbering on plaster. We wanted people who could take care of some of the wonderful detail that the brownstones built in Harlem in the late nineteenth century, early twentieth century possessed. These buildings are really terrific.

I was able to find a building maintenance contractor. His name was—his firm's name was Polonia [Architectural Restoration] and his name was Gerry Sanchez. Gerry had a crew of people that he had handpicked and trained to do the kind of work at the level we're talking about. It wasn't totally restoration work but something close to it on these brownstones. Gerry Sanchez and I became good friends and we worked on lots of buildings in Harlem together, got them done. His team did a lot of good work and we got a lot of benefit out of it, I think the community was better for it.

Fast forward a little bit, I go off to the Landmarks Commission in 1983 and a couple of years later we have the famous St. Bart's [St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church] case come before the commission. One of the applications was a hardship application where the church was claiming that not allowing them to tear down the community building posed a hardship on the operation of the church and they couldn't continue doing the outreach and do the things they wanted to do with that building, without having that community house torn down.

Q: Right.

Norman: And a sixty-story office building put in its place, and they got some revenue from it. The Commission's role was to examine that claim and see if it was really true, see if the church really needed costly repairs that could not be funded in any other way than by ripping down the community building.

That whole story in itself is interesting but we're talking about a little digression here about how people that you meet at one point in your life turn up at another point to do you some good. In analyzing what kind of work was needed on the church, I needed somebody who understood building restoration—how do you fund it, what do you need, and how do you do it. My mind brought me back to the days of Harlem with the spruce up program in the '70s and I thought Gerry Sanchez. Why don't I see if I can't get Jerry to take a look at this?

Q: Yes.

Norman: And I was able to locate Gerry and I found him. Together, he provided us with wonderful information from a contractor's point of view—this wasn't some ivory towered preservationist sitting on the Landmarks Commission saying what if, but this was a hardnosed business guy who was doing building restoration, had a great reputation around the city because of the clients he has had, saying yes, you can restore this church, this wonderful St. Bartholomew. You don't have to spend millions of dollars to do certain things. There are ways of

doing things and he would explain how. That was one of the chief elements that we had to combat their application.

Q: You had the exact cost of what the restoration would be from a contractor standpoint?

Norman: Not the inflated numbers that were presented to us, to make a long story short. Gerry Sanchez appeared back in my life for that time period and it was after I left the Commission that Gerry Sanchez turns up again [*laughter*]. Gerry Sanchez who happens to be of Cuban extraction, he wanted to have better relations with Cuba and talked to me and others and convince the Municipal Art Society—after I left the Commission I got onto the board of the Municipal Art Society—to promote a trip of preservations down to Cuba to meet the growing group of preservationists in Cuba to talk about how we can exchange ideas and people and things.

Q: Wow, this is kind of the impetus of Gerry Sanchez in putting this forward?

Norman: Yes. He put it together and there was a little group of us that went to Cuba under the auspices of the Municipal Art Society and met with Cuban preservationist and architects. Gerry was there and we had a great time for ten days or something, two weeks, whatever it was. So Gerry Sanchez pops up again in my life for that trip, because I was on that trip. One of the things Gerry kept talking about was Newburgh, New York because Gerry had discovered Newburgh, New York. When I told him about my own experience there with the UDC back in the in early 70s he said “Oh you’ve got to come up and see, I’m doing some wonderful things here.” I went up and spent some time with Gerry up in Newburgh, New York looking at wonderful

architecture, although in bad shape, that he was trying to restore and trying to find ways to restore, renovate and sell. I don't know how—

Q: This was in the late '80s then?

Norman: Well, '90s actually. I don't know how successful he got with it because things started to change in terms of available money and programs and whatever. I haven't seen Gerry in a number of years now, maybe a decade. But again it shows you how when you least expect it somebody from your past pops up and if you're lucky, you can reinvigorate each other and help to do things going forward in an area you never thought about.

Q: Absolutely, that's a great story from Harlem brownstones to St. Bart's to a Cuba trip to Newburgh.

Norman: So it's almost like somebody directing things, I don't know. I'm not trying to say that, but it's almost like somebody is out here directing things and how people meet and what they do and how they interact and when they interact. So put a pin in that and let's go back—

Q: Do you want to take a real break or are you good to go?

[INTERRUPTION]

Norman: We just did the first bullet, the background, I think? [*Crosstalk*] We did that to beat the band.

Q: I think so. We pretty much have—

Norman: Appointment as chair, we started talking about, and really didn't even get into it, [*crosstalk*] mention the LPC.

Q: No, but you also mentioned that Bob Esnard was buildings commissioner, you mentioned, when he started to have the conversation with you.

Norman: Yes.

Q: At what point did he become deputy mayor and move into that. Was that—?

Norman: I don't remember exactly when but it was shortly after I started at the Commission, maybe a year later. The structure that Mayor Koch had arranged for was to have deputy mayors handling groups of agencies and Landmarks fell under Bobby [Robert F.] Wagner's [III]—he was the deputy mayor. Bobby Wagner's little group of agencies that he gave oversight to, or if you had a problem you could call Bobby Wagner, he would tell you to come to City Hall and talk about it and he would try to make it go away.

Q: So was he the one who ultimately interviewed you for Landmarks?

Norman: No.

Q: Bob Esnard approached you and said would you be interested—

Norman: Right.

Q: —in having some city agency—

Norman: I didn't get interviewed Bobby Wagner, as I remember, but by other people. Assistants to the mayor as opposed to deputy mayors. The conversations were a little funny because there wasn't an opening that—they said, we've thought about it a lot and we think you'd be great as X or Y. It tended to be more like we have several openings and let's see if we can't find to have you become part of our administration. And I said fine, let's hear them, so one of them was [New York City Department of] Ports and Terminal. That seemed to be very promising for a while, on both ends, until the—I'm trying to think of the name of the tugboat company. There's a tugboat company that was in existence then and one of the family members of the tugboat company ended up being the commissioner of Ports and Terminals because of that relationship. Making sure that that tugboat company was happy, things were going on in the city.

So that was one possibility. Another one was the [New York City] Board of Standards and Appeals. Sylvia Deutsch was the chair of that group. They hear cases where owners want to have special arrangement given to them because of complicated circumstances having to do with their

property—they built something by mistake, they didn't follow the code but they need it and they show the hardship if they have to rip it down, and that sort of thing. The Board of Standards and Appeals hears these cases and decides on doing it. One of the requirements that I put on the table of working with the city is that it should be a real job not just serving on some commission or something, like Ports and Terminals or whatever.

Q: A real job meaning a full time job?

Norman: A full time job with full time pay too.

Q: With a salary comparable to other city agencies.

Norman: Exactly. How did you know that? Does it show *[laughter]*?

Well, I can't remember exactly how it came up but someone said, well you know, Kent Barwick is leaving. I didn't know who Kent Barwick was. In fact, my only brush with the Commission at that point had been several years earlier like in 1978 or so, HUDC [Harlem Urban Development Corporation], my old outfit, where I served first as chief architect and then became executive vice president, we got a hold of an arrangement with the city where we would take, for a dollar, vacant city owned properties, that we would pick, out of a huge inventory of buildings that the city was finding itself stuck with, so to speak.

Q: So this is the '70s with the financial crisis?

Norman: Yes. And you know, the Bronx was still burning, and the exodus of landlords, and people having trouble paying mortgages and so on. We went around, our staff did, and I was part of that, helped direct it—we went around and looked for buildings, that if they were rehabilitated would reinforce the neighborhood. Not just a building here and a building there, but let's do something that's going to bring back a neighborhood if we can. We would paid for this through a federal program called the 312 program [Section 312 Rehabilitation Loan Program]. Most federal programs are connected to the legislation—was passed to allow the money to flow.

So you had the 312 Program, and if you're looking for federal listings, there's a federal program called the 312 program, just like there's a 236 program. They all have these numbers and you get to learn them and you learn the alphabet soup that goes with it. The 312 Program paid for rehabilitation of vacant properties and HUDC could qualify as a rehabilitator. We'd hire a contractor and go in and rehabilitate the project and what we thought we'd do is have a lottery with some restrictions in it in terms of the new owner showing that they're going to live there for X number of years and if they sold it and made Y dollars, they'd have to kickback money. Did I say kickback? *[Laughter]*. They'd have to say no, no, no, we're not trying to make a killing here we just want to get paid for what we did, you know what I'm saying?

Q: Yes.

Norman: One of the sites that we thought would make the most sense was Strivers Row in Harlem, which is formerly called I think the St. Nicholas Park Historic District [St. Nicolas

Historic District]. It's a collection of three or four blockfronts of town houses, detached rowhouses, that were designed by three architectural firms so that each block had a sort of distinctive appearance. One was done by Mead and White [McKim, Mead, and White], and they were in the, sort of Italian, dark brick appearance, handsome buildings. Another blockfront was more French in appearance; light brick, some delicate terracotta framements around windows and doorways, I forget the name of the firm now. The third one was sort of English, a mixture of limestone and brick.

Q: Wow.

Norman: You don't know these buildings?

Q: No, I've got to go up there.

Norman: Oh you do. It's 137th street to 140th street between 7th and Frederick Douglas.

Q: Okay.

Norman: It became known as Striver's Row, and Striver's Row, meaning all three blocks, not just one, tended to be upper-class African Americans—upper-class meaning they had money and education—would live there, and as a magnet draw in others, because this was going to become the place to live. When Harlem started changing from a bedroom white community to a mixed African American, people of color, recent immigrants, as well as the previous white bedroom

middle class people who lived there. We ended up with, I think, four buildings within Strivers Row that were owned by the city, rundown condition, fire damaged in some instances, vacant, that if we rehabilitated them, they would really add to the appearance of the particular blocks that they were on. Because it was Landmark, we had to get Landmark approval.

Q: Because it was the historic district so any new construction—

Norman: Right. Any rehab, any alterations, they needed to see it. We hired a firm called [*taps on table*] LST Architects [LST Design Collaborative]—Roger [C.] Lewis, Frank Turner principals. They came up with the rehabilitation drawings and we had to make an application to Landmarks Commission. I, as representing the owner, HUDC, I went to that and gave a presentation as to why we were doing this and how it was going to happen. I remember at that hearing it was conducted in the conference room, not much bigger than this room, or about the size, and Beverly Moss Spatt, who I later got to know, was chair at that time and some of the other staff people who I also got to know were there. I doubt if any of them really remembered my appearance there, years later, maybe some of them did—Dorothy Miner claimed that she did. That was my first brush with the Commission and I think I may be the only former chair who ever appeared before the Commission.

Q: What was your experience before the Commission?

Norman: I was unclear as to what they were seeking. They seemed thorough in terms of the questions they asked, but we were easily prepared to answer any question. We had a good project, socially it was fine, and architecturally it was restoring things that were almost in ruins.

Q: Yes.

Norman: It was a good experience but I was wondering who are these people, what are they doing and why? Anyway, we got approval and we went ahead and actually did the work. But it was my first experience with the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I did some research, not a lot, to find out what jurisdictional areas they covered, and how the permitting worked. We ended up getting certificates of appropriateness with the three or four buildings.

Q: So kind of getting a sense of their requirements to new additions or additions to historic districts, just getting the basic sense of what it was—

Norman: Well it wasn't really an addition in the historic district. It was a rehabilitation of a building in the historic district as opposed to a new building there. That's a whole other thing we learned a lot more about later on.

Let me just go back to why I ended up at the Landmarks Commission. People said it would be great if you talk to Kent Barwick. I tried to call Kent to sit down and talk to him. He was getting ready to go back to the Municipal Art Society. It was through that process that I learned that the Landmarks Commission didn't have a full time chair or a full paid chair to put it that way too.

And I thought well, you don't want to talk to me about that. I've got three kids and two of them off to college in a couple of years, and a third I hope to get into college and I—no, no, no. I have to have a salary here. In the conversations I was having with the various people at City Hall, they said wait a minute, don't let that stand in your way, we think we need a fulltime chairman there too. This is an area that needs more attention and it'd be good if we had a fulltime chairman there.

We started talking about it more seriously as a place where I could fit in, with my architectural background, my knowledge of the city, my knowledge of the political process, coming from the state but understanding and having worked with HPD and other city agencies. It could have been a good fit and the more I thought about it I thought well, it is a good fit. What was still an unknown though was the preservation community. City Hall, I guess gave me the impression that they were interested in not rocking the boat with the preservation community, but it wasn't the primary goal that they had in mind. If I was a suitable candidate in their minds, the preservation community would just have to accept that. That's the impression that I got.

Q: Accept that you were coming on as the first—were they concerned that the preservation community wasn't going to be fully on board with having a fulltime, paid landmarks chair?

Norman: No, no, no, an unknown. An unknown to them. I decided that yes, this would be a good thing, and let's take it as many steps as we can and see where we go with this, let's find out what the details what's expected and how it will work.

I finally got a chance to sit down with Kent Barwick one night at the Century Club [Century Association]. In those days women couldn't go there, the Century Club—couldn't be members I should say. You could go there but you couldn't be a member. Kent was a member and I was his invited guest and we sat and talked. He gave me a sense of what kind of support you could get from the Commission—from the city rather, from the administration, which tended to be not to be very much, and he talked to me about the relationship that the Commission had with the Parks Department [New York City Department of Parks and Recreation] where the Commission once upon a time functioned under the Parks Department for a lot of things administratively. He made it sound like that was moving to full separation, which it eventually did move to while I was there.

Q: What about the administration, what did he tell you about the relationship with—the administration was supportive of preservation and what did that mean exactly? They would back your decisions or they would [*crosstalk*].

Norman: No, he thought they were supportive but not enough money was coming to the Commission. That's just the way it goes I guess, and that one of the things I'd have to, if I took the job, work on was to get more staff and they were working in sort of horrendous conditions. I'd not been to the office at that point. He talked to me about how the staff was organized. Some of that didn't make sense to me but I said well, let's see what really happens here, how this is working. He said it would be a good thing if I would talk to the counsel. And I said who's that? He said that's Dorothy Miner. I said, oh, here's my phone number, give it to her and I'd be happy to sit down and talk to her.

A few days later I get a call from Dorothy Miner and she tells me she's going to come up to see me and sure enough she came up to my office. My office in those days was the state office building on 125th street. You have to recognize that while not a critical issue, but it's still an issue, in those days there weren't a lot of white people walking around in Harlem. Dorothy had no qualms about coming to 125th street and [Adam Clayton] Powell [Jr.] Boulevard. I thought, wow that's great, wonderful, sounds like a winner to me. So we sat down and we talked and I think we hit it off right away. She's that kind of person, well organized in terms of what she wants to get accomplished and can describe preservation law and objectives and tactics and strategy in ways that anybody would understand the issue quickly.

We spent a few hours together, talking about—I was scribbling down some notes and so on. Again, I think we hit it off. The fact that she and I did, sort of mesh was one of the determinants that told me this is a job that I can pursue, and if she was going to be there I'd have a friend who understood the process, was supportive, not so much of me as a person, but of the position of the chairman.

Q: That's an interesting point.

Norman: And you know, she's like the Praetorian Guard that would fight to the death to save the emperor not because it's emperor so and so but because that's the seat of power, at least that's what's in my head.

I got back to the folks at City Hall and I said yes, I think this is something that would fit. They said great. We worked out the salary, and an announcement was made, and the next thing I know, a reporter named David Dunlap, who I didn't know, working for *The [New York] Times*, wanted to interview me to have a little piece. In those days they used to do a feature called “Man in the News.” I have a clipping of it, I’ll send it to you. He did this little story, which was terrific. I couldn't have written—not that I'm a writer, but I could not have written a story that made me sound more like somebody who could do a terrific job as the chairman of the Landmarks Commission. And he had right quotes in there from the right people. It was a great story.

Q: In a way was the story then, your introduction, this is what the preservation community, this is their first—So what difference do you think something like that as having that be your calling card?

Norman: I thought it was great and I found later how wonderful David Dunlap could be, in terms of a writer and reporters, and in my way of thinking, as a friend too. Because we’ve had several interactions over the years while I was at the Commission. He was always honest, forthright, and unlike some reporters who would say one thing and print a totally different story when it came down to it. Okay it’s 12:15. This was supposed to go from ten to twelve I got here it was almost a quarter to eleven. I’d like to keep it to that two hour so we’re into the last forty minutes or so?

We finally got to me now at the Landmarks Commission. In that process, I got to meet the leadership at the Commission. Since the chair was not full time, and it was unclear as to how many hours the chair would be at the Commission, physically. Certainly the chair would be there

for hearings and in those days, Tuesday was the day that the commission met. On certain Tuesdays there would be designation hearings where properties would be being presented at public hearing and testimony gathered for designation. The other times, Tuesdays would be certificate of appropriateness hearings. Those were basically the schedules and it was up to the chair what days or how many hours and so on, they would be there. On the other hand, the staff was always there and their office in those days was at 20 Vesey Street, rented space, not very adequate, with a conference room or hearing room, if you will, that was maybe twice the size of this space, two and a half times the size of this space, not very large.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcriptionist: Unknown

Session: 2

Interviewee: Gene Norman

Location: Unknown

Interviewer: Liz McEnaney

Date: 2011

Norman: Now, I don't know how the editing is going to work, so what I'm going to talk about just for a couple of minutes is going after the job so to speak.

Q: Okay.

Norman: I'm being selective.

Q: Let's talk about that, because just in terms of editing my thoughts, and I don't know if you feel this way as well, I think that because a lot is going—that we'll insert things. We're going to jump back to questions we answered earlier. My suggestion is in the edit we just combine everything from the four interviews and move things around where they make sense, if that sounds good to you.

Norman: No, that's fine. That's fine.

Q: Alright, let's hit it.

Norman: Okay. We were talking about being sought out by the city to come to the Landmarks

Commission as the chair. I think that's very different from what I understood other people in similar situations experienced. Other people started out with the idea of being the chair of the Landmarks Commission, I didn't. I started out with an idea of responding to a request from the city to come to work with them. They have made up their mind—and I found this out later from talking to people within the administration and some of their close friends outside of the administration, that I might be a good candidate for the Landmarks Commission, and that's what they broached me, this idea.

Gordon Davis who has been the Parks Commissioner – I guess I'm the [*unclear*] actually. He's African American, an attorney. He's not somebody that I knew very, very well but I knew of him. Every now and then he has been approached as to whether or not he knew of someone who could fill the role of chairman once Kent was leaving, and Gordon passed along my name. A few other people who I knew or knew vaguely did the same thing. So I was already thought of as somebody that the city wanted to hire to do that job as opposed to a candidate trying to get the city interested in hiring them.

Q: Good point.

Norman: It's very different situation. Not that they were wooing me necessarily but there was a little bit of a difference between how one approaches the job if you already know you're one of the people they want to use.

Q: Right.

Norman: So, I thought I'd mention that because I think it's important in how we proceed here. My taking the job was not because I stayed awake nights dreaming about it, in fact I didn't know a great deal about the job at that point. I learned a lot more of course very quickly once I accepted the decision. Just to stay with that for a couple of minutes – I'm sorry to be so long.

Q: No, it's really succinct. That's why I'm not interrupting you, go with this, this is great.

Norman: There were a couple of things I was interested to make sure that happen, and quite frankly one of them was to make sure that the job was going to be converted into a full-time job. The chairman of the Landmarks Commissions has always operated up to that point – and we're talking about 1983 now – as a part-time position for the chair. The chair was the only commissioner of the eleven who got paid. As the chair of the commission, it was expected that this person didn't have to be in the office everyday. I think most of them didn't stay in the office everyday, they left things up to the executive director and basically appeared when there were public hearings. I don't want to make it sound like they slacked off on the job, but it was not a full-time, eight-to-eight job.

I was given the assurance that my coming on was a full-time, and that was a nice thing. Plus I further understood that I was the first full-time commission chair receiving a commissioner salary. The city had a system where they had a different pay range for large agencies and then medium agencies and small agencies, landmarks was considered a small agency. The starting salary for small agency heads was a little bit closer to what I've been receiving when I worked at

HUDC. But I thought that's a good experience, it's not that much difference in salary – yes, I'm getting up a little bit but let's move on. That's what happened, I took the job and moved on.

So I became the first full-time chairman for the Landmarks Commission along with being the first African-American chairman of the Landmarks Commission. I want to make sure that that got on the record now that we've melded it in.

Q: I'm glad that you added that point. I think in some ways that also dovetails with the next subject heading, which is really leadership of the commission. I'm wondering if you would like talk about the difference you think being of a full-time chair, what did that allow you to do that you wouldn't have been able to do had you not been there everyday. I guess, arriving in, not knowing very much about the Commission, what were your initial hopes?

Norman: Okay. Before I think publicly passing the word around that they had selected a chair, I began meeting through her initiative with Dorothy Miner. Dorothy Miner was the, I have to say, the esteemed counsel at the Landmarks Commission. While she works for me as my council once I got there, our relationship was much deeper than that. We became very good friends and she was in a way my mentor when it came to understanding the origins and the operations of the law and how it's applied to the landmarks process, and we got along I think wonderfully.

So, I went through a kind of boot camp let's call it, with Dorothy Miner before it was publicly known that I was going to take this job. I had a very hard time catching up with Kent Barwick, who was very busy at that time, to sit down with him and understand some questions that I have

had. When that finally happened, I was then prepared at least to say I'm ready to take the job on and let's set some dates and that all happened. Now, do you wonder—?

Q: I guess I wondered from this boot camp, going in, what you perceive of the job to entail?

Norman: I guess as I look back on it now my initial reaction was there was a lot of legal implications here on this job more so than I imagined. I'm very grateful to Dorothy—who being the kind of lawyer that she was—who could not only explain the implications, but talk about why they came about in the first place. Knowing of all of that made me think that I go into this job and needed to do a sort of prioritization of my time. There weren't enough in the day to do all the things that needed to be done adequately. So I then decided that steps of a kind of a triage approach to it, and I felt that was most important to me coming into this job to learn about the operational aspects of it. So I spent my first few weeks, maybe first few months actually, of making sure I understood the operational aspects of the job; knowing about what terms, what issues, how permits came in, the workings of the staff and the workings of the commission members.

I also decided at that point that I would set aside thinking and developing any policies that the Commission should adopt. So, I put aside the whole motion of understanding clearly enough policy matters and how to implement policy.

Q: You put that aside, you didn't think that was a priority?

Norman: It was not a priority given the time that I knew would be available and the workload that had to be dealt with. The workload was really one that required a great deal of attention for conducting Certificate of Appropriateness hearings and all that, as well as looking at the organizational set, up of the staff. So again, to me it was an operational imperative let's say, overriding the need to get into policy issues, develop policy and implementing policy. That would come later. So that's how I decided to prioritize the work. Given my past experience working at public agencies like the UDC – especially in the UDC and *[unclear]*—and then working in a private sector architectural offices with some responsibilities for management and directing staff. I then also focused on understanding how the staff was set up. Within short order I felt that they needed to be some changes there.

Q: Could you talk about that?

Norman: Well, the way the office was set up—I don't know who started it, maybe it was Kent, and it may have been his predecessor Beverly Moss Spatt. The city was broken into areas and the boroughs were linked together. Going by memory I may be wrong. Area below Manhattan 96th Street was considered what one called zone, above 96th and the Bronx was another zone. Brooklyn, Queens and Stanton Island was yet another zone. Each one of those zones had a component that took care of preservation issues, meaning permit issuing and permit review, participating on Certificate of Appropriateness hearings within those prescribed areas. At the same time also there was a research component in each of those teams, I guess you call it, so that there was a story and some people doing research and writing designation reports and things of that nature.

Q: So it's all in zone base, that's within each zone you have—

Norman: I think they call it teams.

Q: Okay.

Norman: I believe that that was a bit too fragmented and that there needed to be a more centralized research department, a more centralized preservation department. Then I found out that it had been that way going back a few years. I felt more comfortable with that arrangement and began to do things to put them in place. It took awhile because the staff was either reluctant or nervous—it works like that I guess—for this new chairman to come in and overturn their whole way of doing business. But once we got into it and this change came about, I think even they were happy that it came about, and productivity seemed to move along a little bit a lot better.

Q: I'm curious about your thinking about the centralized work staff, did you feel one zone had a larger staff and there was more interest being focused in a certain area. What was the rationale—was it more of money or economics thing?

Norman: The team areas were trying to be responsive to the wealth of preservation *[unclear]* within that team geography. So, below 96th Street in Manhattan was very important historically, deep in history having to do with the development of the city. Most our work in fact was coming

out of that area, but what that meant was that most of the staff was in the Manhattan teams so to speak. Then other parts of the city wasn't getting the same kind of, either quality of staff people or numbers of staff people, so that became a problem in my view.

In addition, having a team that was so focused on that area meant that there wasn't enough flexibility to move people around when new problems came about, when new approaches to look at the city came about. But a centralized preservation department as well a centralized research department, and then finally I created a survey department, having all three of those work from some central place where you can assign people as needed, drawing from those three pools seemed to be a much better way of doing it.

Q: Did that help you also prioritize your agenda in terms of individual landmarks or historic districts? By centralizing it where you able to—if you had the teams, so there may be a priority for each team, how did the centralization of this process impact the areas of the city you are looking at and the areas that became a priority for the Commission?

Norman: I think it did help it, but more importantly it allowed more people to be more focused on getting rid of backlog and Certificate of Appropriateness [*unclear*] and applications. That's number one. Number two, the people within the reconstitute and preservation department began to work more team-like—I hate to use the same word because I used it before, but more in concert with each other and fed off each other. Information and approaches to solving problems moved around within the preservation department very easily because they were sitting close to each other. You could get up and look at what Sally was doing or what the team leader was

doing to see what was happening. In fact the team leader now has much more resources to be able to pull on.

Q: Good plan, a really good plan.

Norman: So that really made a lot of sense, so we went that way. To *[unclear]*, but we went that way.

Q: We're somewhat combining leadership with the commission, LPC staff and office, but you mentioned that backlog of C of A [Certificate of Appropriateness] applications. I'm wondering if you can talk about that because from what I've heard, a lot of hearsay, there's so much regulation work, there's so much paperwork that in some ways that prohibits the amount of research going on, everything like that. But I'm wondering how you perceive this backlog—maybe problematic was the wrong word, but why it's important for you to deal with this.

Norman: For a couple of reasons. Property owners deserve to know quickly the outcome of either their application or what the Commission is intending to do in terms of designation. So the language around I thought was wrong, unfair. You also have to remember that my background was not just on the side of righteousness in terms of preservation, but I have spent and knew a lot of the development community. I was so much sympathetic to that approach that the development community needed to know, they needed some *[unclear]*. How could you spend money and resources to work on a development project when out of the blue here comes a land lock. So in the sense of fairness—and that's one of the overriding goals that I think I tried to use

was to conduct myself and the Commission in a fair way in doing our job to preserve buildings here in the city. So, that was an important component of approaching it in that way.

Secondly, the backlog just wore out the commissions members of the C of A I think anyway. We used to have C of A activities, hearing would be once a month and the calendar, meaning the numbers of items we have to look at, was pretty expensive. We started, I don't know, at ten o'clock in the morning—I'm trying to remember, maybe it was the second Tuesday of the month, I can't recall now, but it was a Tuesday, sometimes with a break for lunch it would last until after dinner, we'd have a dinner break.

Q: Wow.

Norman: That became a problem in to itself because you can't ask people who are not being paid anything to put in that kind of time, which is mentally challenging. You have to pay attention and listen to testimony and get annoyed or get worked up or enthusiastic or whatever, listening to testimonies, some of which is untrue, some of which is very true and factual and interesting so you can get engrossed at it. But you can't do that without wondering, "Gee, I'm getting worn out here." Most of them have their own businesses to attend to so they needed time, and we've provided time for them to leave the table and make phone calls and talk to their office and colleagues and keep their own lives together.

Unfortunately, we still have to maintain a quorum if we were going to vote on items, and after awhile I started loosing my quorums. I started hearing about this from the public, from people

complaining to City Hall, people complaining all over the city about how we're not able to make decisions because we don't have a quorum. So we discussed something and not have a quorum and we can't vote on it, so we push it back to the next month's hearing.

Q: Which is contributing to that backlog that you were referencing.

Norman: Exactly, you got it. So that are some of the factors that the backlog was creating. The backlog for preservation items went badly, backlog for designation items was another issue, but similarly piling up. The Commission would hold a public hearing after a process that the Commission has participated in to select buildings to go to public hearing. Public hearing would be held and then the record would be left open to accept comments and new information for a couple of months. Theoretically, the research department would be finalizing a report during that period. Well, the research department not only had to do those reports but also has to look at new things all the time.

So, before you know it what had been taken to a public hearing often just sat there for months – I should be more dramatic, for weeks, for months, for years. We sometimes we had to redo a public hearing because enough time had passed that we didn't want to be in a position where situation have changed and we didn't take that in to account in making a decision to where something should be designated. So, we had to redo it all over again. All of that became really messy, really messy.

Q: That's something I'm curious about because I know that there's been some criticism in some

ways of the number of buildings in districts that are designated during your time.

Norman: Or not designated.

Q: Or not designated.

Norman: That's where the criticism came.

Q: I wonder if you could speak to that in light of kind of what you just said. How do you respond to that criticism?

Norman: I'm sounding like I'm whining. I thought that it was somewhat unfair in that people didn't take into account what was going on in the Commission in general. I've just talked about the time of the commissioners, gobbling up that time. After a public hearing is held, whether it's a designation hearing or Certificate of Appropriateness, the Commission would have to meet and discuss what they heard and reach a decision and a vote taken, all that takes time. So, that's number one, the time available for the commissions to act.

Number two becomes what else is going on at the Commission at that time and how much of the commission staff and the commission's attention was being placed on new things that keep coming in. Shortly after I came to the Commission—I'm almost going to call it a deluge, almost a tsunami of complicated applications that came in that had to be dealt with and required often multiple public hearings. To gear up to a public hearing, to someone unfamiliar with

bureaucracies in government, may appear to be something simple. Well, it really isn't.

Q: Would you like to elaborate on that a bit more? If you choose not to we can keep the flow going if it's going to—

Norman: I don't want to slow us down. There's a lot that goes into preparing for a public hearing. I mean little things like copying papers, the copy machine breaks down—and that whole process is up to lunch—so you have to go outside to a copying store. It's not like today where you had computers and it's all stored somewhere and you just have buttons in it. It happens. This is pre-computerization. It's almost a step above quills and parchment. So, things didn't happen very quickly for that reason and it's unfair in a way to judge the operation then with how we can do things today, and I think people do that.

Q: That's a very good point.

Norman: Well, the public and critics didn't seem to think that that was a very good point and they still complain about it. But we had the St. Bart's [St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church] application, which is very complicated. We had an application for this historical society addition, which required a lot of discussion and work on the commission staff and members to understand what was involved. We had two or three other large projects which were following each other along the Broadway Theaters, it was probably one of the most complicated applications we had because of how the owners fought it and we had to satisfy the owner's request, and sometimes the request were just made because they believed it couldn't be satisfied. But we were able to

find ways to satisfy them so they moved onto something else.

There were times when the whole process, because it was linked in a way to what [New York Department of] City Planning was doing, became consensus between the two agencies, just as there were times when things having to do with the Buildings Department [New York Department of Buildings] and Landmarks became a consensus because it hadn't been worked or accepted or the ball has dropped somewhere along the line. That caused the preservation community to lose its, I guess support, faith, regard for the landmarks process and the Commission that's run by this Chairman Norman.

Q: I think we're hitting a lot of key points here, this is really good stuff to me. This is *[unclear]*. I just want to clarify just one point which is you come in and there's this major backlog, there's the C of A, so you've got the commissioner looking backlogs of C of A—correct me if I'm wrong now on any of this—then you've got commissioners looking at some of the new districts, the times for looking at new landmarks obviously are significantly less because you're dealing with backlogs of C of A *[crosstalk]*—

Norman: It's the same commission, I mean don't walk away from this discussion thinking that there's groups of Commission—

Q: No, I know that there's one group of—

Norman: —that can handle some of this and keep it moving.

Q: But I just want to make sure because for someone who's reading this and just trying to wrap their head around it, the moment that you came in some of the big group things they were looking at on the table where that you were having to focus on the backlog of C of A, these major issues, St. Bart's, and all of these complicated projects that are coming in. This sounds to me, from what you were saying, that obviously gives less time to act on your districts when the limited of the commissioners who aren't getting paid are left to deal with major—

Norman: That's exactly right.

Q: That just helps me kind of—

Norman: Okay. Then in addition we have this looming problem—it may sound silly now but in those days it was really a problem—about window applications. A couple of years before I got to the Commission, the Commission created the Upper East Side Historic District. It's really a large district. There was this battle continually going on about co-op owners or individual property owners who wanted to change their windows. At the same time this is right after the energy crunch that has happened in the late 70s and the gas prices went from \$0.25 a gallon to five or four dollars, whatever it was. Everybody suddenly became conscious about energy.

Interviewer: Good point.

Norman: So one of the things that was determined—we lost a lot of energy and made a lot of oil

imports come in—was heating buildings. One of the big problems about heating buildings was windows, who let air out and that cold in air. So, everybody wanted to replace their windows to get more efficient windows, and historic building's windows are a very important visual element. These windows look like they may be replacement windows, not the original, but they are in keeping with the original.

Well, a lot of the applications that we had to deal with had nothing at all to do with what was in keeping, they just were expensive aluminum, tilt and turn and twisted windows. So, it took a great deal of the Commission's time going over these window applications. I'll just ahead a little bit and say that that finally got solved, not so much by me, although we started talking about it then, but by David [F.M.] Todd who was able to pass us a guideline which took it away from the Commissioner's table for decision and let the staff approve window changes as long as they apply and follow the guideline which the commissioners had established. So, that was a good step.

Q: Yes, that's a really good point to raise.

Norman: In fact in those days, 1985 and 1986, all these window applications and violations kept coming in all the time, from the Upper East Side especially but not exclusively. So, there's all this activity that needs attention, there's a small staff, not enough people, the commissioners who have to spend most of their time together going over a whole plethora of items: designations, regulations, historic districts, you name it, it was all happening under the few hours that the Commission came together on a monthly basis. Maintaining a quorum became an issue too in

terms of how things got rolled over and over and over.

Q: It sounds like you started talking about the idea of new regulation would obviously alleviate a lot that was going on before the Commission. In response to just the overwhelming backlog that you had, were there any other initiatives or ideas on how do you get rid of this backlog? I mean was there stuff that you saw could be seen at a staff level and didn't have to go before the Commission?

Norman: No, not many. Because of how the law works the Commission had to do certain things, the commission members had to do certain things. It took awhile for the idea of guidelines to gel and become procedural enough to take some of the work away from the commissioners. I'm kind of leaving out another issue that became sort of a headache. It's not because people didn't want to serve with me—but I came in at the end of '83, in the fall of '83 on September or October. There were some commissioners who I think wanted to leave before I got there and not because I got there, and once I got there they decided to leave. So they needed to be replaced. As I recall there were three commissions who had left that needed to be replaced. Some of them were the required architects, so we needed to bring on new architects.

One of your questions is can you describe the make up of the Commission, what was your relationship to the commission and so on.

Q: Exactly.

Norman: So let's talk about that for a minute.

Q: Okay.

Norman: When there was a need to bring on new commissioners, I was always chairman approached first and knew about it first because they would come to me first and say, "I'm going to leave, I've had it and this is too much."

Q: "I need some freedom."

Norman: "It's driving me crazy" or whatever. Then I would have to report this to Deputy Mayor Bob Esnard who worked for the high-ranking deputy mayor who oversaw what the Commission did. He would report to the mayor and sometimes we would do it together. Bob Esnard was the person that worked with me, we worked together at UDC on a couple of occasions and we got to know each other. He was also from the Bronx, so there were some personal linkages that allowed the good relationship to develop fairly quickly. Bob unfairly gets pointed at as being a bad guy by some of the preservation community in those days, hopefully that's all changed now. But some of them felt that he wasn't as supportive or helpful or forthcoming and they would like things to be. I want to go on record right now, I'm saying that he was always supportive and helpful to me as chairman.

We'll talk about some things that he helped make happen that were good for the Commission, like a new office, increasing morale—but people never seemed to give credit for any of that—

and the fact that we were working in antiquated surroundings on top of what we just talked about and no computers. Again, I don't want to sound like I'm whining because I'm not.

Q: No, you don't.

Norman: We've dealt with it, and that's one of my hallmarks I'd like to think. You get it done.

Q: Yes, and I think that's what it comes across as. I've love to talk about the administration. But we'd hold that because I feel you were going into the route of the Commission and your relationship with the commissioners and making new appointees. From what I've heard it sounds like during much of your tenure, as you've said a hint to that, having a quorum was difficult. It sounds like a lot of commissioners at that time were serving even though their terms had expired. I wonder if you can just talk about—

Norman: Well, they've been a long-standing relationship that I walked into that said that everybody on the commission is appointed for a three-year period. When the three years are up they continue serving until such time as they were reappointed or were not reappointed. That seemed to be okay except some people felt that it left them in limbo and were unhappy about it, "Am I going to get reappointed?" It was like, "I better be careful, if I don't say the right thing I won't get reappointed." Quite frankly a lot of people like being on the Commission, they enjoyed it. Even though there was no pay there's still certain civic fulfillment that they believe they were performing and there was a little bit of camaraderie about being on the commission; it's us against them, we were holding back the bulldozers. We're the only ones doing it.

So, people wanted to be on the Commission, but they didn't want to serve necessarily with some cloud that says, "If I open my mouth and say the wrong thing, is this going to mean I won't get reappointed?" So that became kind of an issue. But let's talk about the replacement factor.

Whether or not people were appointed was never as much of a problem as it was getting new people to fill the vacant seats, truly the vacant seats and not just maybe there's going to be a vacant seat because the terms expired and they don't get reappointed. So for me, after discussing it with Bob Esnard, the need to fill in new people, it was my job to go and look for people.

In the beginning I had to find at least three people to come onto the commission. You want to make the Commission make up, the commissioners, reflective of the city as much as you can. So they all shouldn't be gray-haired, white guys; they all shouldn't be frivolous young, white ladies or blue-haired white ladies. You try to make the city reflect itself in the make up of the commission members. So with that in mind, one of the people that left was a wonderful commissioner named Black, Ms. Black. I forget what her specialty was, she may have been historian, the identified historian. You know that the make up of the Commission calls for certain occupational skills to be present on the Commission. So that was another restriction, to make sure that if somebody left that have one of those seats you need to bring in somebody who brought along that same specialty or you maintain that specialty in some other way.

So I am short two architects and a historian. After thinking about it and asking around and phone calling and getting suggestions, and sometimes helpful, sometimes not, I ended up thinking about bringing on Adolph [K.] Placzek who was a librarian at the Columbia University School of

Architecture [Columbia Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation] very well respected and known quantity as the historian on the Commission. I believe that was his working title. An architect Frances Halsband, a woman architect, I'm trying to remember if I knew her before she came on the Commission or knew of her. I think I knew of her from my days at UDC and heard about her and knew her firm and thought that she'd be a good addition. She's level headed, knowledgeable and just a real contributor. Then David Todd, who I did know from being contact with him somewhere along the lines before I came to the Commission, I liked what I knew about him. I thought he brought a good level of experience as well as temperament and can talk with a firm degree of "I've been there, done that, so don't say anything outrageous."

So those three came on board, there was a whole process. Of course you had to go through the [New York] City Council in those days, there was a hearing that was made and they had to present themselves and I had to testify as to why I thought they were good candidates. Various groups around the city, in defense of Upper East Side, I guess Historic Districts Council, had been started by them. They were new Municipal Art Society, and other groups could testimony and support [*unclear*]. So we started off that talk we had I think somewhere in '85, '84 or '85, not too long after I've come to the Commission, with those new additions. There had been other that I was involved with, but that was basically the process.

As some people used to like to think or say, "City hall told him who to vote on the commission." Yes, the mayor appoints people but the mayor never sent over the list of people that should be on the Commission.

Q: So, Bob Esnard, really left it to you to find the replacements and then it went the mayoral process from there.

Norman: Which is not say that Bob Esnard may have heard of someone and he would say to me, “Do you so and so, look into it,” and I would. I’d come back and say, “I don’t think that’s a good fit Bob.” He says, “Fine.” All of that happened in that way with the exception of one case, which we will talk about, not today but sometime when we’ve got lots of time with a bottle of scotch to go through that.

Q: I’ll hold that question then. It’s here but I’ll hold that, we’ll cut that until later.

Norman: It’s really bizarre, and I think that’s really crazy and unnecessary. I’m still trying to figure out why it happened and what happened.

Q: If you’re willing to go on the record at some point at the end of our oral history sessions about this—because that’s something that always comes up with the Commission at the time. In leadership of the Commission I think there was a great of the dynamics of appointed commissioners. The role of the commissioner is you are the public voice of LPC, I’m wondering where in that path and what did you see your responsibilities not only in chairing the meetings but also in going out in the community and rallying. You know, being the chairman, being the PR spokesperson, being the one who takes the abuse and criticisms of all of that that goes with being the public voice of the Commission; if you can kind of talk about that hat, wearing that hat?

Norman: Well, it was not a strange hat for me to wear, I've done this when I was up in Harlem for many years because I've worked on Harlem from—I came to UDC in '72 and came to Harlem in '75 or '75. So, from '76 let's say or '75, to '83 I was in Harlem. A lot of what I had to do meant interacting with the community board and local groups, helping organized local groups, lot associations and so on. So that was all stuff I could do without even thinking about it. I understood that processing, how people needed to be treated and how the public could abuse you when they felt that you weren't saying things that they were in tune with. So, it's not a big surprise.

Also while I was at UDC I did that not just in New York City but upstate, I was involved with a pretty big region upstate that we required an interaction with local communities in small town areas and small town city councils and so on. So I understood all of that. Without blowing horn, I think I did a pretty good job at the Commission reaching out to the public. There were all sorts of event, and that's was a little surprising, I didn't realize that there was that many public events that required the chairman to be at.

Q: Such as?

Norman: All kinds of things. A group needs a speaker and they say, "Can you come and speak to us? We're at Greenwich Village Bird Watching," And that was an opportunity to get the message out. What was the message? The message was that the city cares about landmarks, that in that process there's something called the [New York City] Landmarks Law and you'd have to explain

that and who's on the Commission and why we're there and what we do and how we do it. I always thought that it was important to convey the idea that this is not some backroom smoke-filled area where decisions are made almost in the dark, this is all open to the public, and you can come down and see it happen.

In fact one of the things I take a lot of personal pride in was the fact that many applicants came to the Commission for small items to be approved, who had never had anything to do with government before, government regulation. I took it upon myself once I understood the *[unclear]* in that category to make sure they treat it respectfully and not dismissively, got the chance to talk their points out as much as they could, and felt that there were people there who cared about their point of view and were listening. I just thought that that was necessary and needed to happen.

Yes, it took time. Yes, people said, "He runs meetings that go onto the next week." Yes, sometimes they did. But at the same time I think we were achieving some good in doing that. We gave the citizens of the city an opportunity to understand the process and to be part of it and not and not just stand on high and issue edicts about what to do, when to do it and how to do it.

Q: Yes, that's a really good point, Gene. I think you just raised a really good point too about Landmarks, in some ways, the only chance citizens interact with the government. I mean in what ways do you interact with city agencies or city officials? Maybe Landmarks is the one agency where more people are interacting with the elected official.

Norman: I guess there are instances where people interact with city government, often nothing having to do with landmarks like parking situations, street cleaning, sanitation and so on. But there isn't a process that's comparable, there isn't a forum that somebody could come there and say, "Yes, I painted my building green. I didn't know there was a rule that you couldn't just paint your building." So you have to sit down and explain to them that this is what happens. You're being asked to not to that, you're being asked to get rid of that paint because you're affecting what goes on in the historic district, and then you have to explain what is the historic district and why does it exist. So, there's this whole exposure and interaction that most citizens didn't know about.

You talked earlier about being a spokesman, and I gave you a little bit about what I felt about that. In addition, for whatever reason, the whole idea of architecture and the built environment sort of took hold in the early '80s. *The New York Times* assigned David Dunlop, a very skillful writer, an interesting and kind of cares about the city and knows how to write about it to sort of follows what goes on at the commission. [Unclear] said, "What are you our personal recorder?" On a Tuesday when we kind of have a meeting, when some of the decisions were going to come down, you'd look around the hearing room and then you see David there writing down. We're not amused, but that's that.

So, there was that part of it—and this I was not used to—I became a sort of recognizable person on the street and around town so to speak. I could be speaking in an outdoor restaurant and then somebody will say, "There he is, Commissioner Norman, how are you?" There's this whole interaction with the public that was necessary as being part of the job, and some of it I didn't

realize would be as intense as it turned out to be.

Okay, I think we finished these.

Q: I think we have definitely finished the third bullet. Gene, that was really informative, on all of that. What was your interaction with the staff, the council? Interaction with the staff, once the reorganization happened and there was director of preservation, a director of research, director of survey—

Norman: I, who have somewhat of an exposure to the military, look at things a lot like that rightly or wrongly.

Q: Of having a director heading each of the operations.

Norman: Yes. I of course what I used to call it my kitchen cabinet, those directors would meet with me on a fairly regular basis and we'd go over what was going on in the office. That's another factor I believe came about because of my being there as a full-time person along with the executive director of the parts of the organization, people who handles budget—I mean you need to know where things were—talking about budgets. In that process as time went along we were able to get more budget money allocated to the commission. Some of it had to do with wrangling and cajoling, and other parts of it had to do with the improvement of our work product; we could show that we're doing better. It's through that process I believe that we were able to get enough money to have a new office.

Q: Yes. What do you think it really was, that improvement of work product, what product in particular? It sounds like a lot was spent dealing with the backlog, I mean was that what you think the—

Norman: Yes. Not that the backlog went away.

Q: No.

Norman: Because what we do creates a backlog just inherently. But what we were doing I think demonstrated to City Hall with the director of budget and so on that at least we were organized to reduce it and that we would be taking steps to become more efficient. It's a management report that used to have to come out at some periodic basis, which I don't recall now, where we'd have to cite all of the numbers we had so many C of A and so many of them were disposed of and some of them were carried over. All the statistical information that was handed into the City Budget Office, all of that started to improve and it was reflected by being able to hire more staff. By the time I left the staff has doubled and had moved from Vesey Street which was totally inadequate to what everybody said—I agree, it was a nicely designed, attractive offices at 225 Broadway with a nice hearing room that had a good sound system, you didn't have to shout like Occupy Wall Street, people do that and everybody stands up and says, *[unclear]*. It was almost like that. So, there were some improvements.

Q: Can you talk about the role of research department versus regulation?

Norman: Well, the only way I can talk about it is just contrasted with the old team system where applications came into the team and the team then dealt with it, and ones that have to go on to the Commission for a resolution, they went. The team issues permits and so on and took care of that much of the business. I think that by having separate departments we increased that because the research department can pretty much concentrate on doing research as opposed to being part of a team and going out and looking at things in that way. So, by the time things really got coming we had a research department that was really doing a good job I thought. I wish I could cite some names but I'm really not prepared. Maybe before this is all over, I think I have some rosters, put some names and get some *[unclear]*.

Q: Do you feel the research department ever got frustrated about the fact that the Commission didn't have time to hear all of the proposed designations? I mean was there a response in that way? It sounds as though—maybe I'm misstating it—that you got a lot of designations ready and they were directory led. I'm wondering if you would agree with that and whether you think the research department felt held back by the fact that the new designations, new districts weren't being considered by the Commission on a basis they might have liked?

Norman: I don't know, I don't think that's the case. The research department is comprised of researchers. If you're interested in history or architectural research, it's fascinating. If you look at some of the reports that were made over time you'd find all sorts of little tidbits that you say, "Gee, how did they find out?" Yes, how did they find out it's because they spent hours and weeks and days digging around all sorts of places to get the information.

So, if there was anything that I try to pass along to research, it's that what they ended up being responsive to was the idea that we needed to have research and designation reports that were more focused on things that can be used to preserve the building as opposed to a full-blown history lesson about that architect, or that technique of the building, or about that appearance or that design logo, things of that nature. I came to call these designations report that I wanted the *Reader's Digest* version. I'm sure that Dorothy, and not only Dorothy, Marjorie Pearson got sick and tired of hearing me talk about "We need to have the *Reader's Digest* version of this as opposed to that that you guys are working on." Because we can't designate unless we have a report that's ready, and report is a critical path. It can take months and months to do, we got to move it.

After awhile that message I think started to be responded to in a more positive way and the reports started coming out more quickly, and there was more help given to them too. I don't want to make it sound just because I'm stepping my foot this thing happened, but there was some other elements that were made available to them.

Q: On that note of the reports, I feel that people don't quite understand how those reports are and the fact that that's what the Commission looks at when deciding and thinking about everything, so in a way this report becomes such an important document in almost shaping the future of the city. Maybe I'm overstating, but—

Norman: I think you are a little bit, it doesn't really affect the future of the city, what it affects is

how decisions can be made that will affect the appearance if changes are required.

Q: Yes. Can you take a bit more about that because that to me seems to be a point that a lot of people don't think about, the impact that Landmarks has isn't just preserving a building at that moment. But for every subsequent application that they make, the landmarks report and the decisions of the Commission are altering the appearance of that building over time. So they can become a *[unclear]* historic districts or—

Norman: Well, as time moved on the priority and the focus that I had increased and changed. Earlier in this conversation I said to you I wasn't so much interested in policy, creating and implementing policy. But as time went on I did have the chance to do that because the other stuff was totally understood, it was almost you wind it up and set it down and it does what it has to do. I use the Broadway Theaters as an example when it came to designating groups of Broadway theaters, and that's how we chose to do it, we chose to do the Broadway Theater in groups. The owners who approached us thinks, especially Gerry [Gerald] Schoenfeld—rest his soul—he wanted to know why we were picking on him. We weren't picking on him, but he had the biggest mouth. He was very influential, if he said things were going in a certain way and the other owners generally said, “Gerry's right, I agree with Gerry.”

We had to sort of find ways to bring him around, and one of the ways was to identify what we call this—I forget to the exact terminology—protected features in the designation report. We kind of came up with this very simplistic way of doing it by underlying phrases and sentences in the designation report to show that that was the important thing about the molding and the

entrance doors. If you get your chance you ought to read one of those designations. You'll see that there's a description of an east wall of the orchestra area, there's a series of doors which have very distinctive carves around, and you'll see, the distinctive carves around, would be underlined. So, that meant that the distinctive carves around on the doors is a protective feature.

Q: Are they actually underlined in the report?

Norman: Yes.

Q: Interesting.

Norman: Because that eliminates whether or not they change something just because they want to without affecting the interior of the auditorium. Because it was underlined Mr. Schoenfeld or anybody, *[unclear]* can't say, "Well, I don't like that. I want to make it more elaborate or less elaborate." You can't do that because it was designated with those door enframements being a particular significance. Now, because they were identified does not mean that forever it can never be changed, but you better have convincing argument to change them.

Q: Good point.

Norman: It's not freezing necessarily in time, but it's identifying what things should not be very likely changed just because somebody wants it.

Q: That's a really good point Gene.

Norman: That was a feature that together with the research department, sometimes kicking and screaming I used to say, we were able to come with. Tony [Anthony] Robbins, one of the chief researchers for theaters, and I along with Marjorie Pearson and others worked up a way to doing that. So much so that even Gerry Schoenfeld accepted it, and I took that as a very personal triumph that we can underline and identify them by significant features in the designation report. So that when an application came in to make a change, the preservation department wouldn't have to rely on, "Well, I like windows," or "They can't change it." No, the windows have to be identified as being significant, and we only did it in the theaters at first. I haven't looked at a designation report a long time, but I think that same approach may be used in other places for similar reasons.

Q: I'll look into that, that's such a great history of how that got going. So it's a way of prioritizing the significant features of the buildings.

Norman: I wouldn't call it prioritizing, I would call it identifying it because we've been trying to say that "Feature A was more important than Feature B than more important than Feature C." We identified what was the important element of that building outside or inside, whatever. The best way to do that was in the report, and the best way to do it in the report was to just simply underline it so that anybody reading would see the label, that this needs something.

Q: Yes, great point. I think we are on to page two. Is there anything you would like to add to—

we talked about your interaction with Dorothy and the boot camp, but we actually haven't really talked about your interaction with Dorothy at—

Norman: Before we do that I just noticed that we talked about the new offices at 225 Broadway. Believe it or not, that just didn't happen overnight, we moved twice before we got to 225 Broadway.

Q: I didn't know that.

Norman: Yes, most people didn't either know that or cared to know. In that interim, moving around like homeless people, we still kept the Commission working. We still conducted public hearings, we still did business; people could still come to us but we're working out of cardboard boxes. But we were in 2 Lafayette for a little while.

Q: Why did you move, was it just—

Norman: Well, in the first instance we had to get out of the Vesey Street immediately after our lease ran out. I forget where we ended up first but we had to move out of there right away, so out we went. Then there was lag while they were doing demolition work and improving plans for 225 Broadway or even selecting 225 Broadway because we didn't have a place in mind when we lost the lease. So we ended up moving twice before we ended into the 225—not back because we've never been there before—with an office that we looked at.

Joe [Joseph] Bresnan was the executive director who worked ceaselessly to make that all happen. Joe terrific, he worked with all of the varying city agencies that had to approve things like that, membership and budget and that alphabet soup that I haven't never even heard about. But he was able to find his way through that thicken and we all had the plans and I offered some minor suggestion. Joe was an architect as well, so understood that process since he worked for a long time at the Parks Department, he knew that. It was through his hard work. The department, we ended up a layout that really worked and made sense.

Q: Do you want to elaborate more with your relationship with Dorothy?

Norman: Yes, let's talk about that.

Q: Okay.

Norman: Dorothy cared passionately about the Landmarks Law. Most cared passionately about the US Constitution and how the country's made up legally to do things in how it performs. She understood that but she cared about the Landmarks Law. Well, Dorothy doesn't have any children, but guess what? The Landmarks Law is her child, and she conveyed that love and understanding whenever she could. She conveyed that to other attorneys who represented property owners and almost shamed some of them because of the things they were saying and trying to do in violation of this, potentially in violation of the Landmarks Law.

That approach didn't always make her have a lot of friends, and a lot of people felt that she was

too heavy-handed and too unbending and not flexible enough. I never felt she was not flexible enough, but I felt that she sometimes had blinders on and she didn't look at the big picture. If she were here right now she'd kick me—because she really did look at the big picture. But there were things that one has to do in government that we do because it is government. It may appear that it's violating some special credo or outlook in the maintaining of itself, and it really doesn't.

So I enjoyed working with Dorothy, and she was in a way a mentor to me when it came to the law. She was a really a counsel for me. Although I didn't accept everything she said, most of what she said after reflecting on it made sense to me. So, I was supportive of things that she did. Our first big challenge came about when it was a proposed change for a Flynn-Walsh Bill, and it has to do with religious properties and exempting them from Landmark oversight. It was through that that *[unclear]*, bare her teeth and had her claws coming out. I like to think that together we were successful enough to help keep that *[unclear]* a lot of people, including Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis who went to Albany and we had a high of the day on the trains ride to Albany and running around the capital. So, Dorothy was a standing person, a special person. I'm a richer person by having known her and worked with her quite frankly.

Q: You were right on the scene when you had St. Bart's and the Flynn-Walsh Bill on the table. I mean there were a lot of legal issues on the table during your time, so I'm sure that this is going to pop up when we talk about religious properties as well as some the other issues of the understanding of the wall and even some what could be called in the US terms such as—

Norman: I think there was room for interpretation.

Q: That's what I mean, we can jump to this section about the Landmarks Law itself, how it read and understood by the Commission, do you think there's room for interpretation and how do you allow that discussion to happen as a chair especially with the words such as harmonious and appropriate?

Norman: I encourage the Commissions to ask questions when we're in executive sessions. Now, what does executive session mean? It means that it's a public meeting. I don't think this has changed, although it may have. In my day it was a public meeting where the public could sit there but could not participate by asking questions or giving testimonies. It was intended to allow the Commission as a body to ask questions and to understand the background of a particular application or subject, so that when a vote was called by the esteemed chairman people casting a vote would cast it with some modicum of understanding of the issues involved.

In executive session, between Dorothy and I, we sometimes we would go over what things should be brought out to make sure that the commission members and the listening public understood a direction that we may go in or understood the direction that we're forbidden to go in because it violates the law. I would sometimes ask those questions and have Dorothy, who knew what the question is going to be, recite various aspects of the law to the commission members. I will also encourage the commissioners themselves to ask questions or understand most directly what happened. Dorothy could recite without almost any preparation past cases that had come before various courts regarding landmark issues, particularly ones that involve the Landmark Commission because we used to get sued all the time.

I don't remember the exact win/loss number. But we lost very, very, very few—and notice I said very, very a few times. There weren't many cases that our position based upon the decisions that we made did not prevail in court. So we would go over that and Dorothy would be able to explain these things in vast detail during the executive sessions. So that's how the commission members would feel some comfort in, being able to take a vote when the vote was called. There are also the instances during a hearing—a Certificate of Appropriateness hearing or maybe even a designation hearing – when a legal issue may come up either from the public or the owner or whomever where I would call upon Dorothy to amplify our legal position on that, and she was able to do that every time.

Q: You got the Landmarks Law and talking about meaning of words: harmonious, appropriate, was there kind of unspoken set of standards or understanding of what these terms meant, what appropriateness meant, what harmonious was?

Norman: Some of those words are included in the Landmarks Law, our definition, and some of those words become clearer through application over time. So there is a set and dried way of looking at words like that, in my mind anyway.

Q: That's what I'm curious about, was there often a conversation around some words, is this an appropriate building, what does appropriateness mean?

Norman: I don't remember many conversations about that because the bottom line would be, is

this either appropriate or not, and they need to have to ask why. When you ask that why, the speaker has to be prepared to recite some very clear reasons why, not because I like it. That's not an answer and that doesn't determine appropriateness. But you can say, I like it because it was designed by Architect X,Y,Z in the style of a tudor or a gothic or whatever and it's a wonderful example of that. Now we don't have many samples in the City of New York, you can go along those lines, and therefore it's appropriate.

It's almost the same thinking and logic that we ended up using when a motion was needed. What we needed to do often was to make sure that the land will show the motion to have the attack because the motion was made where it boiled down to someone actually saying, well, I like this and therefore I think it's appropriate.

Q: So the language and motion was never the "I like" but always the—

Norman: A reason why, and sometimes we have to correct the motion prepared as you spoke, "You don't want to say that way Ellie, you want to say—" whatever.

Q: "This is significant because—"

Norman: That's right, and it became a whole routine that the commission members understood.

Q: In part because Dorothy was the one was—

Norman: Yes, we talk about that and we make sure that we didn't end up designating or approving or denying something simply because I don't like it. That's not an answer.

Q: So really the language, one of the key legal things was making sure the language of those motions was impenetrable in some ways.

Norman: Yes. You have to see some of these to really get the flavor of what I'm talking about.

Q: Then my other question is Grand Central [Terminal] had already gone to the Supreme Court, but were there still concerns about threats to the Landmarks Law or challenges. I mean you obviously had the challenge of Flynn-Walsh.

Norman: That was one challenge, but in general there was always the fear that somehow somebody will want to change the Landmarks Law, even though it may be a wonderful idea and a good thing to do, but it would open the door for the opposition to come in with a change that would be disastrous. So as far as to a great extent, myself, and people like Dorothy, for sure don't change the law. There are some problems in it and there are some inconsistencies perhaps, but don't go in and tinker with it because if you do you don't know when the end the line is going to be when the tinkering stops.

Q: Do you still feel that way?

Norman: Yes, I still feel that way. I think it's dangerous to just like yourself who can change the

law. Yes, you might be able to, but as soon you start to change to the other side—whatever that means—will want to change something, and that something is not good.

Q: Dorothy is one of my professors at Columbia and I remember her always saying, “Don’t change anything about it.”

Gene: There you go. People would criticize it, particularly people from the other side would criticize her, “That’s what she was saying but this doesn’t work and that doesn’t work.” I said, “Yes she does, but it isn’t going to change not while I’m here, you’re not going to get my support.”

Q: We’ve covered a heck of a lot more than we did the last time Gene. We can either continue going in order, I know we’ve talked a lot about landmarks, designations and hearings, but is there anything else with about fifteen minutes to go—do you want to dive in to Flynn-Walsh or do you want to save that to next time?

Norman: We’ve touched on it already so let’s finish it. Flynn-Walsh was a bill that we see the support in the legislature and in the State Senate where religious properties would be exempt for landmark protection, and I think it was even going be retroactive—I mean go back and remove religious properties that were already designated and certainly prevent any designation of exteriors because as you know the interiors of a church is not designate-able so to speak. The religious community had certain spokesmen who were pretty good at what they were doing, Rev. La Roux [*phonetic*] was one of them and the Catholic Diocese had a guy named Kevin

something, an attorney. La Roux was a minister. They were eloquent guys and they even at point, not for the Flynn-Walsh Bill but later on maybe during St. Bart's, they'd come and give a testimony—I can remember but I can't remember the words—"Being damned to hell," for preventing the church from carrying on its duties and making church money be spent some building when that's not part of their religious outlook and that I should be ashamed.

Q: "Damned to hell," that's strong.

Norman: They really tried to use more moral persuasion to influence us, it was kind of rough. What that really amounted to was a bill that looked like it can move in Albany. The Municipal Art Society and some other groups like the [New York] Landmark Conservancy very much concerned. We had meetings prior to the hearing that was going to be held up there to try to dissuade them for doing this. I met with the sponsors of the bill—what happened in Albany, let me get to that in a minute. So the thought was organize a delegation to go up to Albany, and sure enough the delegation was put together. We met at Grand Central, in those days the train to Albany left at Grand Central now it leaves from Penn [Pennsylvania] Station I think.

Jacqueline Onassis through contacts, Fred Papert at the Municipal Art Society, was able to get Jacqueline Onassis to come along and to speak. I had a delightful two-hour or so ride with Mrs. Onassis sitting together with me and talking about all sorts of things on the way up to Albany, it was incredible.

Q: Wow, it's amazing.

Norman: She was part of the press conference—and because of my first position on HUDC and then later as Landmarks Chair—and quite a few elected officials up in Albany, we went around and people wanted to have their picture taken with her. A lot of them lined up almost, it's almost like having me cut out, but this is the real person. It was great, it was really great. During the hearing, I gave a testimony and Mrs. Onassis gave a testimony, bottom line is because of the outpouring people giving testimony—I think Kent gave a testimony too for Municipal Art Society, he was president then and Peg Green, I believe from the Conservancy. or maybe it was Laurie Beckelman—I think maybe she was head of the Landmarks Conservancy. Anyway the testimony was really compelling I would say and the Flynn-Walsh folks retreated.

Q: Just to sum up what the gist of the testimony was, what was the real message that you were hammering on why you were fundamentally opposed to that?

Norman: I can remember my testimony because I wrote it. We didn't have speechwriters in those days, you did the best you could and you got some input from folks. It's not like where I guess it happens today when you hand it to a speechwriter and you say, "This is what to say," and this comes out. I think the gist of what I was trying to convey was that religious buildings tended to be buildings that receive a great amount of care and attention in their design and construction and have a lasting physical presence in any cityscape and built environment. Therefore if we are interested in conveying what our societies are all about we need to protect that image, we need to protect that image just from a visual point view and we also need to protect this from a historical point of view. How our city has grew, who's in there and why they're there, all of that comes

from a connection to religious buildings and the upkeep and the maintenance of them and it should not be thought of as an amorous burden. That's basically the gist of what I was trying to put across. Others used that theme as well, some other very creative ones which I can't remember, to convey that there was an interested public out here to make sure that religious buildings didn't get treated in any extra special way.

I think Dorothy, either in her presentation or somebody was coached by Dorothy to say things like, "If we start exempting a particular owner's category or category of owners where do we stop? Should owners of apartment houses band together and say"—I mean think about it. So there were good reasons, and I didn't hear too many reasons coming from the other side except the old ones that kept coming up over and over about how the religious community is interested in performing good works and they don't really care about buildings, they were designed by the religious community but money should not be siphoned off to take care of this architecture when there are hungry people out there who need coats, soup kitchens and things of that nature.

We on the other hand say you can do both. St. Bart's case demonstrated who you'd expect to be truthful because of their religious connections are not necessarily truthful.

Q: Do you want to go in St. Bart's today?

Norman: No, I can't do it today. When will the next one be?

[END OF SESSION]

Transcriptionist: Unknown

Session: 3

Interviewee: Gene Norman

Location: Unknown

Interviewer: Liz McEnaney

Date: 2011

Q: Well Gene I have to say that what we got through on Friday, compared to what we got through that first session, was tremendous *[laughter]*.

Norman: Well I'm happy to hear you say that.

Q: I hope you feel the same.

Norman: Well I tend to be long winded sometimes, most times, always. And I'm trying to get information conveyed, which I imagine somebody will look at, you know, twenty years from now, "What the hell were they doing?" And I'm trying to do it in a way that makes sense.

Q: No it does. I think the longer the answers are actually better.

Norman: Yeah well in the interest of time, I'm going to try to not do that as much.

Q: Well we'll jump right to it. So looking on our list of questions, next up was relationship with City Hall, and City Government. And I think we talked, we dived into that when we were, started to talk about your appointment. But I'm wondering if there's anything else you'd like to add, about the Koch administration. From what I've read, it sounds like he's a big a supporter of the

Broadway Theater designations, but how involved was the administration in LPC policies, and kind of the daily business of LPC?

Norman: Well let's see, the short answer is that they were not really involved in what we did. But they wanted to know what we were doing, and you could understand why. Nobody in government, or business, or family even, wants to have things going on and hear it from outsiders. So the watchword would be make sure you keep me up to date. And I would do that, through periodic phone calls with Bob Esnard, who was the deputy mayor in charge of our activity. Along with lots of other things too, it wasn't just solely landmarks. And that was a good thing to do, because we had business that had to be transacted with the help of city hall and the Mayor's office.

Back in the days that we're talking about, the, any designations that the Landmarks Commission performed, had to be, I want to say ratified, I think that's the right legal term, by the City Council. Sorry, by the [New York City] Board of Estimate. And the Board of Estimate was comprised of the borough presidents; I'm not going to get this right I know. The borough presidents, the mayor, the controller and the president of the City Council, I guess.

Q: That sounds right, but we can check.

Norman: Okay. And we ought to check that, just to make sure we don't convey bad information.

Q: Yes.

Norman: So what does that mean? Because the votes were weighted, for instance the borough presidents only had one vote. The mayor had two votes, anybody who was holding a city-wide office, like the controller, the mayor, and the president of the City Council—they had two votes. So you needed a majority of those votes, to have anything become accepted. And you had to start to know these people, and their staff, because I'd come from government being at UDC, and at the Harlem subsidiary. I knew some of these people anyway. I also knew a few people in the City Council, although their role was far less important, than it is today. So by keeping close tabs with Bob Esnard, and tabs means that you let him know what's going on.

Q: Sure.

Norman: As opposed to waiting for him to tell you what to do, that never happened, let me just say that.

Q: Yes.

Norman: He would say to me, I hear that so and so's going to leave the commission and I said, Yes, they are and I have some names I'd like you to look at. And there's two or three people that I think I want to have you vet, and take them through the process. And he would do that, come back to me and say, "Oh yeah we like number one, number two, number three. And we have no problem with that, so you know we'll appoint these people if you want them". So it was that kind of relationship, plus, and this is the part that I found very, very useful, it allowed me to have

access when there was a problem to solve. We talked at length about the moves that the Commission went through, when we moved to 225 Broadway eventually. But there was a need to have certain things, like that move, coordinated with different other city agencies. So that we didn't get bogged down, or lost in the shuffle or whatever.

Q: Good point.

Norman: So having a good working relationship with Bob Esnard, and others, was very, very important. And I'll touch on this later, for the St Bart's hearing, since we were such a small agency, we didn't have the in-house talent that was needed, to review the mountains of information that the church and their attorneys and consultants fed us, during the hardship applications. I thought it was a great idea to look upon the City, to help. So I let Bob Esnard know that I was going to be working closely with the [New York State] Office of General Services. Why General Services? Because they have lots of engineers, architects, people who are knowledgeable about buildings, a part of their staff. But most importantly the head of, what would they call it? DGS I guess it was called, the Department of General Services.

The head of DGS, the commissioner there, was a person I knew from my prior life at UDC. A gentleman named Bob Litgey [*phonetic*], who was a planner at UDC, and was very much involved and ran the Roosevelt Island development at UDC, they did out there. And we knew each other, and when I went to him over the St Bart's application, and said, "I need some help". His first remark was, "Well what kind of help do you need, and how soon do you need it?" So that's the kind of thing that people at certain levels in City Government are able to do. And it

doesn't mean that you are capitulating your responsibly, or your authority and your now beholden to those people who help you. It does not mean that. It could mean that, but it does not mean that. Did not mean that at the Landmarks Commission. I don't know how to say that more emphatically.

Q: *[Laughs]*. You're speaking about all these city agencies, what was the relationship while you were chair between LPC and City Planning? Parks? The Arts Committee? I mean how, what were the dynamics like?

Norman: From time to time, certain city agencies became applicants to the Landmarks Commission, because they were responsible for city properties that were landmark designations. And the Landmarks lawyer recognizing that there can be a different approach to properties owned by the city, vis-à-vis properties owned by an individual for a private person, does not make the rulings on the Landmarks Commission mandatory to the city agencies. You're shaking your head, because I think you know that. So consequently applications having to do with work going on, in Central Park as an example, or any park that's designated space would come to the Commission, and we would review it the way we reviewed any other application. And we'd discuss it, hold public hearings, make a decision and the decision would become a report as opposed to a certificate. And we'll get back to this too, later on in this conversation.

The Bryant Park application behind the library building, fell under that kind of an arrangement. It was on city land, library of course is owned by the city. And what we did regarding the application for a restaurant was a report, not mandatory. Now anybody in city government

doesn't like to make enemies in other parts of the city framework. So when we issued a report, and at the Landmarks Commission, to a city agency, like parks or the library or whatever, they would really care if we said, no to them.

Q: Yes.

Norman: And in fact they, in a couple of instances I remember, people saying, "Wait, wait, don't make a final report yet. We heard what you guys were talking about." You guys and gals I guess is the politically correct way of saying it. "And we're going to make some changes, and those changes are going to be to satisfy the concerns that you raised". And they'd go away, and we'd put their application on hold, or not act on it. And then they'd come back with certain changes they felt were in keeping with what we wanted. And low and behold, it was improved. Improved enough sometimes so that we could give them a positive report. Because they didn't want to have bad feelings, or new problems, down the road.

So we did work with other agencies, and I think you know fairly harmoniously. What does that mean? That means that we got our way, more than we got pushed around. We didn't always get what we wanted, but we were able to show that what we did in terms of the review, was necessary and important and above board. Not from some back room somewhere. The Planning Commission worked with us in a different way, the way the zoning resolution is written, there are certain activities that can become enhanced. And a benefit to the city, and the owner of the property. If the Landmarks Commission votes to have certain things happen, I'm trying not to be vague here. But I'm also trying to be correct, and I don't remember exactly the sections in the

zoning resolution. I think there's [Zoning Resolution] 74-79 and [Zoning Resolution] 74-711. 74-711 was the transfer of air rights, from a landmark to an adjoining, or close proximity property. And owners and developers often looked for properties that were near a landmark building, so that they could transfer the unused air rights to enhance their own new development. Now in doing that, they leave themselves open to review, by the Landmarks Commission, of the design and the makeup of the project. But people felt that it was still worthwhile to go through those hoops, jump through those hoops. And they'd make an application to have that happen.

Once the Landmarks Commission satisfied the requirements of the 74-711, I guess it was, it would then go off to the City Planning Commission for action on their part. So it was a combining, or dual activity. The Broadway theaters, had a relationship between the Landmarks Commission, and the City Planning Commission. And that had to do it, the City Planning Commission, its ability to make a special planning district. And prior to my becoming chair, there was arrangements made where the theaters would be handled in a very special way, so as not to impede, or lose, that wonderful benefit of having Broadway theaters in New York City. That were operable, and not just musty, closed-up museum buildings.

Q: Well put.

Norman: I don't remember the exact relationship for the 74-79, but it had to do with something similar to transfer of air rights, and I'll have to look that up.

Q: Okay.

Norman: And we can fill that in later.

Q: Sure.

Norman: We didn't do many of those, we did more of the 74-711.

Q: Gene I have a question for the 74-711, because in my mind this is one of the term appropriateness comes up so much with the 74-711. In terms of what the new building, the building adjacent to the landmarks will look like. And it seems like that's, and maybe you don't feel this way, but it seems a though that's one of the real times that the Commission gets to use, to debate appropriateness. But I'm just wondering if there are any interesting cases, during your time there, in terms of using the 74-711, and influencing new design?

Norman: Yes there were. Now what were they? I can't recite them.

Q: No.

Norman: So that's something we're going to have to fill in.

Q: And then I guess my other question—

Norman: After some research.

Q: I can do that. My other question regarding the 74-711 is, and this is somewhat a future question, but I think—I've been reading a lot about how people aren't always convinced that the 74-711 actually enhances the character of the historic building. I mean obviously money goes in for the restoration, but—

Norman: Yes, in fact there's a plan that has to be prepared, and approved, by Landmarks. It's not prepared by Landmarks, but submitted to Landmarks for approval that talks about the maintenance of the landmark building, and inspections and things to that nature.

Q: Do you see that the 74-711 as a real tool for preservation?

Norman: I did then, I'm not positive now that they work. I mean that would an interesting thing to go back, and take a look at the individual cases.

Q: Yes.

Norman: And see how they turned out, maybe we could do a grant one day with somebody, and come up with that.

Q: No, seriously. Okay, yeah that would be great. All right, so we'll move on from zoning, but I'll look into the 74-79 and send you some info, if that would be helpful.

Norman: Okay, I'll look at my notes some place, I've—my wife complains all the time. I still have boxes, filed boxes, in a closet somewhere from prior jobs, of prior employments. “Can't you get rid of those musty old boxes?” *[Laughter]*.

Q: “No, not until we find an archive for them”. So just moving onto some of the real estate, and development pressures facing the LPC at the time. I know that we could start perhaps by talking about some of the specific mid-town development pressures? With Rizzoli-Coty [Rizzoli Building and the Coty Building] perhaps being an example, of—asking LPC to consider that district, but it being turned down.

Norman: Say that again.

Q: The Rizzoli-Coty buildings, that was somewhat before, I think that started in Kent's time.

And then—

Norman: No, it didn't.

Q: It started in your time?

Norman: Yes.

Q: Could you talk about, because Kent went with—at MAS when that happened.

Norman: Let's do that, let's do that. It's an interesting situation, because as a result of the designation of those two buildings, some very good things came out of it, and some bad things too. Let's see, how do I start? We started hearing about it through Andrew—

Q: Dolkart.

Norman: Right, who used to work at the Commission. And I can't remember if he was still at the Commission when this happened, he may have just left. He started talking about having uncovered—discovered, some very unique windows on the Coty Building. And based on his own independent research, he felt that these windows were part of [René] Lalique's glassworks, decorative glass installations. Now if you went there, as I did, after hearing Andrew talk about this, I said, "What are you talking about? That's just dirt on those windows. Come on now, we have enough problems here, don't bring new ones". But he insisted, and I firmly believe if somebody insists enough, you've got to look into it, you really do. So I turned lose a research department to look into that, and come back with some ideas.

And they came back, Marjorie and others came back, Marjorie Pearson, came back, were saying, "You know what? It looks like it's real." These windows are very highly decorated, glass examples done by the Lalique Company, who was an important producer of decorative glass. So at the same time, the Rizzoli Bookstore, which is just south of Dakota building, closer to the church. I guess that's St Thomas' Church, well maybe, I'll have to look that up too. They were going to sell, and move their business. And somebody started acquiring those properties along

5th Avenue, we later found out it was the [David S.] Solomon husband and wife team. And they were the head of this group of investors, and developers, who started buying up the property.

They had other people involved, Trammell Crow is a name that I remembered. An English real estate firm, that was looking around to try to do some things in New York City, I believe.

Because in the '80s, the early '80s, New York, Manhattan in particular, became the destination where people wanted to invest in real estate. Unlike what's going on now. So here we are about to start a foot race, to see if we can protect these buildings, which we believed that the Landmarks Commission, and our supporters like MAS and so on, believed should be protected. Maybe for different reasons, and we could spend a minute talking about this.

Q: Yes.

Norman: The Landmarks Commission, in my view, protects things based upon the law, and the law only. You might have your own personal likes and dislikes, and the rest of that, but at the end of the day in order to sustain the action of a city agency, it's got to conform to the law.

Q: Yes.

Norman: On the other hand, all of our supportive preservation organizations, these little private groups, they give recognition of the Landmarks Law. And support to the actions of the Landmarks Commission, most times, not always, but most times. And their motivation can be sometimes different. Their motivation might be because of some activities that they are involved

with, or some person which is in their organizations who feel that perhaps their wonderful view from a 5th Avenue apartment house, is going to be spoilt because a new building is going to come and block their view of Central Park. Now nobody says that, nobody comes out and says, “Oh we don’t want that, because it’s going to block my view”. But really when you pick at the statements they’ve been putting out, that’s what it’s about sometimes. So there is this tug between, it was for me anyway, as chairman of the Commission, I couldn’t hear that stuff. Nor could I respond to it, in that way. And sometimes people got annoyed, you know, “Why aren’t you on our side? We want to have the building”. I said, “Sure I want to save the building too, but the rational and the legal basis for it, is something that I must do. You on the other hand, have a different rational sometimes, and it’s something that you want to do”. So there is that. Now we always had a problem of how do you protect a building, before the Commission actually acts.

Q: Yes.

Norman: And what does act mean? Acts means schedule or calendar, a designation hearing. That was the trigger, and if a building was calendared, there was an arrangement at the Buildings Department. And some people, in the real estate community, said, “Illegal arrangement.” They would complain about this, but if we calendared a building you could not get any other permits, to do things to the building. And the time I’m talking about, we had recently had a couple of run-ins with developers and people doing things, because of the intense real estate pressures going on in Manhattan at that time. I happened to take a one week vacation, in the winter time, my wife and I we went down to St Croix, in the Virgin Islands. And we weren’t there ten minutes, before the phone started ringing. And you have to appreciate there were no cell phones in those days,

just like there were no computers. So the kind of instant response, and access that we take for granted today, you know we almost used smoke signals back in the '80s. But anyway, the executive director at the time, Lenore Norman, no relation, although a lot of people thought so. For some reason, a lot of people said, "Oh this is a husband and wife team?" And Lenore and I always got a big chuckle out of that, and Lenore's a wonderful person. She's been at the Commission, prior to my coming there, for a number of years and did a terrific job, as executive director.

Anyway, she would tell me, "Oh there's something going on at the [Wendell L.] Wilkie Building". Now if you know the Wilkie building name, it's a building just east of the American Radiator Building, that Raymond Hood did on 40th? Do I have that right, 40th Street? Maybe it's 41st Street, no it can't be 41st Street. Maybe it's 40th Street. And it's called the Wilkie Building, because when Wilkie had offices there, as I recall. And it's a building that sort of a bull's eye building, with classical elements and features on it. Well in order not to allow it to be a landmark, because the intent was to knock it down, the ownership of that building started chipping away all of the decorative features on the building. Stripping it away, and we got stuck, because we couldn't do anything about it.

We hadn't calendared that building for a public hearing, or taking action on it. I can't remember exactly as we sit here, if it had been calendared once before, and maybe had a public hearing, but no action taken. That's another category of limbo land that the Commission sometimes get stuck with. And they rendered the building from a visual point of view, just about unacceptable to become a landmark. Although I don't believe that, because features on a building are missing,

either deliberately, or just over time, renders it totally unacceptable to be a landmark. A lot of art deco buildings, as an example, have casement windows. And they're steel casement windows, and they rusted out and don't work, and the rest of it. So they've been changed, in many instances. That's no reason to not designate those art deco apartment houses, in my view, because technology can come up with ways, in the future, after we're, after it's been designated. And windows have been changed and so on, to come up with a window that is acceptable, in terms of site lines, and color and size and all those good things that you look for. So technology could work for you, sometimes. There I go getting long winded again, back to Coty Rizzoli. I was just giving you a background, about what was going on in mid-town and—

Q: Yes that's helpful.

Norman: The Commission also had done certain little studies, and we'll talk about this too, about particular areas in town. In other words we'd focus on an area, and see what buildings were of interest. And then we'd take those buildings, maybe as a group, maybe as individuals, to public hearing to see if we could designate them. So we had mid-town east, and a mid-town west and dah, dah, dah, dah, different locations.

Q: Not to get you off-track there, but in terms of thinking of those areas, mid-town east, mid-town west, were you thinking about this also in terms of development pressure? Like almost looking at the city, and thinking about where—?

Norman: I was.

Q: Yes could you talk about that? Just you know—

Norman: I would think that way. Now that doesn't mean that people in the research department, or the later created survey department, looked at it that way. They tended to take the attitude, or the position, that yes, there could be development pressure, but that's usually a nebulous thing, because it comes and goes. And, "You Mr. Chairman, you can worry about that. We on the other hand, we want to worry about the pure worthiness of properties". And that's fine. In fact I prefer that, because I think sometimes the staff getting involved in political things or things that require more muscle, than they could bring to the party, cause more problems. So I encourage them to stay away, from that sort of thing.

We had Coty Rizzoli, and we had a history of things like the Wilkie Building, being stripped. And I and others felt that the Coty Building, and Rizzoli Buildings, were important to the streetscape of 5th Avenue. And that there should be a way to have new development happen, and still keep those buildings. And this is where I maybe have some people will be upset with me. Because that's an attitude I take almost very naturally, you can do both.

Q: That you can have both development and preservation?

Norman: Yes. And you have to be creative, and there has to be some give and take, but you can do both. You can do both. And a lot of people say, oh no you can't, you know. You're going to

destroy the historic building or you're going to have this ugly new building looming over it and that sort of thing.

Q: Yes.

Norman: Well some of that maybe does happen, but it's a visual thing. And there are instances where you can enhance a streetscape, from a historic point of view even. To show the development, we don't live in a static city.

Q: Yes.

Norman: The city's always changing. Most times if you give enough time to pass, the changes are good. Okay, so how do we deal with Coty Rizzoli? The first thing we did, was to try to get the Buildings Department, while we got our act together, to not give out any permits. And low and behold, a permit did come in requesting demolition. And as I remember it, and I could be wrong here, but as I remember it, it got lost somehow.

Q: In the Department of Buildings or—?

Norman: Yes, yes. Not in our department, because we don't give out those permits. It— somehow it got lost, didn't get acted upon. And in that interim, while it was being looked for, the permit, we called a public hearing. So almost immediately, the Solomons and their partners, they thought that this was an ambush. So the expression started floating around, in the real estate

community, the Real Estate Board and so on, about how Landmarks was ambushing developers, and preventing them from getting their work done by underhandedness and—

Q: Got it.

Norman: And, you know, unfair practices almost. Which wasn't true, it's just that sometimes government works fast, and sometimes government work slow. And what we did, was to, just take advantage of what was happening in general, we at the Landmarks Commission.

Q: Yeah. So Department of Buildings loses, they can't find what they've issued, it gives you the opportunity to step in and—

Norman: That's what I heard happened when the developer went to get his permit, knowing that we were about to take some action. And we took the action, while it was being looked for.

Q: Got it.

Norman: So we calendared the building. And that set off a firestorm. In talking with Bob Esnard, Bob is telling me that these people are pounding on the mayor's door, just about. People meaning the Real Estate Board, complaining about how they've been ambushed, and this is terrible, and it has to stop and blah, blah, blah. So after some discussions with Bob Esnard, and even the mayor I think got involved a little bit, and I explained what we were doing. And why we were doing it, and my own philosophy about you could do both, you could have preservation as well as

development, but you have to calm down and work on it. Well I'm going to compress this a little bit, because it took longer than my telling it will indicate. We were able to designate the buildings under the—

Q: If you need to get it, I'll pause this.

Norman: I do.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: All right, we're back.

Norman: We're back, with Coty and Rizzoli.

Q: Yes. With the Real Estate Board claiming ambush, I think was one of the last things you were saying.

Norman: Oh yeah, ambushed, ambushed. But somehow, and I'm not totally sure how it happened, we began talking with the Solomons, I think their name was Solomon. And either they both were architects, or one was an architect, this husband and wife team. One was an architect, the other one may have been an attorney, I can't remember that. But they weren't totally evil developers, you know, rapacious, uncaring folk. And they were trying to do the right thing perhaps, I have to say perhaps, because they didn't operate solely alone. It was part of, what's

the word I want to use? Syndicate is the word I want to use. That was really calling the shots here, and they had hired a pretty good architect to do the building that was going to take the place of Coty Rizzoli on that corner of 55th Street, I think it was.

Q: Yes.

Norman: Yeah, and who was the architects?

Q: Oh I didn't write it down.

Norman: Kohn.

Q: Pederson Kohn [Kohn Pederson Fox Associates]?

Norman: Gene Kohn, [A.] Eugene Kohn, Kohn—

Q: I'll check that.

Norman: Yes. Okay so because I was interested in trying to do both, I thought about how can we do this? That they had a good architect doing the high rise portion, our action at the Commission prevented them from knocking down the two buildings. Because they were going to have an entrance right off 5th Avenue, to this high rise building. And what we did was prevent that from happening. I think I'm going to have this right, there was a church here, St Thomas I believe.

Then there was Rizzoli, then there was maybe slightly smaller, Coty. And they owned the rest of this, they even own these now, but they were landmarked right?

Q: Right.

Norman: So the new building was going to do this, this was going to be the new building.

Q: And ideally they wanted these demolished, Rizzoli and Coty?

Norman: Yes, yes so they would have an entrance here on 712 5th Avenue is going to be the entrance right there. And it was going to be, I don't know, fifty stories, forty stories whatever. And thinking about it, and looking at the maps and thinking about it, it came to me that these buildings, although commercial buildings, were a lot like residential buildings, of that era. Meaning that if it were residential buildings, the buildings might be fifty feet deep, and I thought, what would happen if we let them remain, but we made sure that the buildings were just fifty feet deep? Be careful what you wish for, because sometimes it happens. Keep that, and somehow integrate those buildings with their facades. And the fifty feet was to make sure that it wasn't just façade-ectomy. So let's get fifty feet of building to remain, and see what we could do with this site. We get good architects working there. And I even encouraged them to go and get Beyer Blinder Belle involved for the historic buildings. To make sure that somehow that all worked together.

Q: Did BBB [Beyer Blinder Belle] join on?

Norman: Yes, they worked with them.

Q: Okay.

Norman: Now it's not the same, but it's almost like leading from behind, which I an expression which came about when the President Obama was dealing with Libya. And he didn't want US forces out in the middle of this, so he was sort of, puppeteering things from behind. That's what it amounted to, I mean to use today's analogy. And sure enough, it worked. It worked in the sense that the developers bought into it, and they said, "Oh yeah, that's so bad". Because they had in mind, and who knew this, that they were going to have a department store down there.

Which one is it?

Q: It's the—

Norman: Women's clothing, it's a big feature with this store there. Anyway, we'll have to look into that.

Q: Do you think there's a takeaway from this story, about what the Commission can do in terms of impacting design? And, you know, it's—

Norman: I think there're two takeaways. One, the Commission needs to work faster in selecting buildings of importance, and acting upon it okay? And get rid of this heard, but not designated or

whatever. And secondly, people need to be more flexible about how you solve problems. And I firmly believe, you heard me say this not five times I think, you could do both.

Q: Yes. And when you say, people need to be more flexible, you're speaking about the Commission, as well as the developer?

Norman: Yes.

Q: All players involved?

Norman: Well that's mostly the Commission, but the preservation community. Because a lot of this is fuelled by the preservation community. Don't you know that before this idea of maintaining fifty feet of the building, and then still building the tower, was worked out. The Municipal Art Society, your good friend Mr. Tony [Anthony C.] Wood, organized a protest to stop that tower from going forward. And they, it happened to be around Easter time, and they said, "Don't parade in the shade". They came up with a very creative little gag. And I thought, Ah come on! Come on guys, you know, let's not throw gasoline on the fire here because the building could happen, and you could still maintain something. I didn't know what it was at that time, but that helped me think through it and it got done. Now did I run around saying to the world, I did this or I came up with this idea? No.

Q: Yes.

Norman: And that's where the leading from behind can, you know.

Q: Oh, good point. Really good point. Going on this topic, I was reading something that there was a system then to flag buildings of landmark interest in the Building Department records. That this process was codified during your time there?

Norman: No, I don't think so.

Q: Oh God, I had written codified and memorandum between you, and Charles Smith Building Commissioner, but I can check.

Norman: I don't remember that.

Q: I prepared these questions a while ago, so I can find my back notes on that.

Norman: Yes I don't remember that, it's possible that something like that happened. I know that we worked out a way of, a way of the Landmarks Commission knowing if somebody came in, and tried to get a permit or something.

Q: And what was that? Could you—

Norman: No it's just give me a call, you know.

Q: Gotcha. Somewhere just making sure those channels of communication were open?

Norman: Yes. So bottom line now, is that this project gets redesigned, [Henri] Bendel is the store.

Q: Oh, yes, okay. No I would—I was not going to come up with that. Good one.

Norman: That's the store. And Bendel uses these two buildings as entrances to the store, only to the store. The entrance to the high rise, is happening on I think this is 55th Street. There's an entrance to that building on this side, and the first couple of floors of the new construction of the tower, is really the department store, Bendels. So you might say, "Hooray, hooray, this is all working out nicely". Except the Real Estate Board wanted a pound of flesh. I mean the developer had gotten them all riled up to help him stop this from happening, so he wouldn't have to deal with these two buildings on his site.

Q: Yes.

Norman: And lose the prestigious 5th Avenue address, and lose the footprint for office space. Because, you know, his building wraps around this now. So the Real Estate Board, and this is, no one told me this, but my own understanding, my own reaction, they put pressure in City Hall. And I have to think the mayor must have been involved in some way, to not have anybody else get ambushed the way the Solomons had been ambushed. And the way you do that is to have a study done of the Landmarks Commission's activities. Hence the Cooper Committee is formed.

Alex Cooper and some others were given the assignment of looking into the whole designation process. And what's going on, and how we select buildings, and why did this happen, and blah, blah, blah, blah. Alex Cooper was a friendly guy, I knew him, I was part of the committee in the sense of sitting down and listening to their deliberations, and talking. But what did that do? It took me away from doing things at the Commission, so when people say, how come you didn't designate more buildings? Part of that is just distraction. Coty Rizzoli ended up being a huge distraction, of time and energy, when it didn't have to be that way. Because out of Coty Rizzoli, here comes the bad part, there was the Cooper Committee.

Q: Right. And in a nutshell then, what were the objectives of the Cooper Committee? Was it to try to make the process clear for developers? I mean was there a clear stated mission or? Because to look at the workings of LPC sounds broad, was there something—?

Norman: It had to do with designation, how does LPC designate properties? What's that process? Is it fair?

Q: Got it.

Norman: Can it be improved? If it can improve, what does it take to improve it? Does it mean more money, more staff? Those are the things I started crying about—I need more staff, I need more of this, I need more of that. We need a better office.

Q: We need to get rid of the backlog.

Norman: So good came out of it, don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying it was all bad, but it was a huge distraction when it was going on. A huge distraction.

Q: Was there any thought of, from, of what the Cooper Committee was looking at? You know, maybe Dorothy Miner are saying something. Was the Cooper Committee—was there concern that the Cooper Committee was going to, in some way, threaten the Landmarks Law? Or was that not as much of a concern?

Norman: No I don't think that was a concern. And I think in discussions, as the Committee was, you know, looking at things and gather up information. When I say distraction, part of it is that, oh we need to understand how you do things. We're going to come to the office, show us where things are. Bring the files, do this, do that.

Q: That's a distraction.

Norman: And in talking with them, certainly Dorothy made it clear, without tipping her hand so to speak, that changes to the law shouldn't be part of what they're suggesting. And I think I was less stringent about that. If the changes to the law made any kind of sense, maybe we ought to look at that. And of course that, earlier I told you that I wasn't too much interested in policy at the time, because I wanted to get the operation done.

Q: When you first arrived on the scene.

Norman: Get the operation going. But things like the Cooper Committee, made me think about policy. And some of it I started to latch onto, things like, should the Commissioners receive a pay in some way? Why should we rely on people just giving up their time? Because now, huge amounts of time is going to be needed, to get rid of backlogs and do other things. Why not give a little relief? City Planning gets paid. That never got any traction, although I still think it makes some sense to do something like that. A lot of people felt that, oh no you can't do that, because people will then be influenced in terms of their actions. And don't want to lose money, or pay or whatever. I mean you're never going to pay them enough, to make that meaningful.

Q: That's true.

Norman: But the thought was the appearance, you know, the appearance of something improper, would be the result of that. I also started thinking about time limits, because that was something that seemed to me should be looked at very carefully, because maybe there's a way to use time limits to have things happen. As an example, there'd be a time period within which the Commission could look at buildings, and determine whether or not it should go to a public hearing. I don't like this kind of agreement we had with the Buildings Department, there'd be a definite time, we'd send out a notice. Mr Owner, your building is of interest, and for the next—I'll make up the numbers now, I don't remember what we put out there as an idea—for the next six months, you can't get any kind of demolition permit, or stuff like that happening to the building. At the end of that six month period, the Landmarks Commission either has to, or anywhere within that six month period, has to vote to designate, vote to have a public hearing.

Q: Yes.

Norman: And if it doesn't, then that building is able to be put on another kind of list that says, Landmark isn't really that much interested in this building, and let them get whatever permits they need.

Well the preservation community got upset about that, and me too, for even thinking about that because they were saying, well you know, people's desires change over time. And what may not be important enough to have designated today, might become important five years from now, three years from now. And my point of view was that could happen, and if the building is of meritorious enough worth, it ought to be designated. And you won't have to worry about that, because the six months will elapse, but the building will be designated. And if it's not meritorious enough, well you can't make every building, every old building can't be a landmark. And you're going to have some that won't make it, and just get over it. You're going to have some that won't make it.

Q: But was this going to be binding? I mean if it got on this list of not landmark-worthy enough now?

Norman: Oh yes.

Q: I mean ten years from now—

Norman: From my point of view, it had to be. And if they didn't do anything about it, if the owner didn't change the building in some way, or demolish it, so be it. I think, you know, in the interests of fairness, these properties are properties owned by individuals.

Q: Yes.

Norman: And to have it sort of interest, and no action really taken, prevents that owner from utilizing his property.

Q: So I just want to make sure I've got the idea. The idea is you look at buildings, decide if it's of interest, and then Landmarks has six months to take—the idea was it would have—

Norman: A time period, I don't remember if it's six months.

Q: We're making up the time, but a time period to take action. And either action would be taken, or it would go into the category of this is not—

Norman: And the action would be to have a designation hearing, calendar hearing.

Q: Okay. And otherwise it falls into the no interest category?

Norman: Yes.

Q: But once in the no interest category, ten years from now someone could review a building, that's been in this category and try to have it calendared again? Or is that not the idea? I'm just curious—

Norman: You couldn't go back.

Q: Okay.

Norman: You couldn't go back ten years from now, and say, oh you didn't designate this then, so we want to designate it now.

Q: Okay.

Norman: That's almost the ambush scenario, which I'm trying to avoid.

Q: Yeah.

Norman: By doing it this way. But you know there are lots of ideas, and some of them I floated out there at meetings, and statements, and talking to the Cooper Committee and so on. But as it turns out, there wasn't any real action taken.

Q: By the Committee, Cooper Committee didn't take any action?

Norman: Well they provided a report and so on, and then I forget the exact sequence of events here, but then William Copeland created through MAS a committee, to look at how the Cooper Committee did, or did not, do its job with the Landmarks Committee. So another—

Q: That was the Historic City Committee?

Norman: Yes, yes.

Q: So was that another distraction, the Historic City Committee?

Norman: Of course, or course because anybody who thinks they know what's going on at the Commission, has to have some basis to acquire that knowledge. They want to look at your records, "Let's see this, let's see that". And all of this had to be fed to them, and you'd sit down and give lectures about what we are doing, and how we're doing it. So that takes the chair away from being the chair, and running things in my view. Now maybe some people are more creative, if they were the chair, and could do all these things. I, you know—*[laughter]*.

Q: I don't know.

Norman: I don't know either.

Q: Was there a take—the Cooper Committee didn't really take much action, was there a takeaway from the Historic City Committee? Did they come up with—?

Norman: I don't think any of them wanted to do anything that would hurt the Commission. Let me say that very clearly, I don't think Alex Cooper, or Bill Copeland wanted to do anything that would hurt the Commission. But they did want to look at the process, to make sure that there weren't ways to make it more acceptable to the real estate community, and to the preservation community.

Q: Yes.

Norman: I think everybody felt that this backlog, and things in limbo, was not the way to conduct business. And so it was, let's look at ways, maybe we can change that, improve it.

Q: Yes.

Norman: It wasn't easy, didn't happen.

Q: *[Laughs]*, yes that's the, seems to be the takeaway. Well with all these distractions, I just, I'm thinking about midtown development pressures now. Because you know the asset at the time, as you said, were people were investing heavily in the city, unlike now, or unlike this moment. But I'm just curious, with all these distractions, I mean do you feel that that was a time where the real estate, aside from them feeling ambushed in Rizzoli Coty, that they were able to find

opportunities elsewhere in the city because of this distraction? I mean I guess do you see this distraction as being an opportunity?

Norman: Well it depended. It depended because this is the same time that St. Bart's was, you know, chugging along.

Q: Yes.

Norman: You know these things don't happen in neat little compartmentalized timeframes. This is all happening together, you go from one to the other.

Q: Yes. it's crazy.

Norman: One to the other, you know. I don't know if they were looking in other places, this is a big city. But back then—it's easier today, back then to really make money, people wanted to do things in Manhattan.

Q: Yes.

Norman: And sometimes they would look at properties knowing that there was a landmark nearby, because that was going to enhance the new development.

Q: Because of the 74-711?

Norman: Yeah it could be, or just from some other prestigious, you know, coupling. There were instances when properties would become available, or sites would be assembled, and there might be a building in that geography that said, it's an old building, look out for landmarks.

Q: Yes.

Norman: So there was a concern of the real estate community. And sometimes it was like a foot race [*Laughter*]. And, you know, it's like [*unclear*] lay in front of the bulldog.

Q: Yes.

Norman: I don't know if that answers your question?

Q: No, it does. Drum roll, do we move onto to St Bart's?

Norman: Yes let's do that, let's do St Bart's.

Q: Okay. So St Bart's, the modern glass tower proposed by Edward Durell Stone [Jr.], and turned down twice for inappropriateness. Applying for hardship, yes do want to just kind of talk through the whole, the whole case?

Norman: Well I've already told you that I start out from a point of view that says maybe you can do both, maybe you can preserve a historic building. And at the same time, do a new development. Well I told the people who are applying for this new building, that they ought to be more creative. Maybe they can do both, and they tried, but whatever pressures they were trying to satisfy, in terms of income or future generation of profits of whatever, lead them to continually bring in buildings that were too big. And so we had to, you know, turn them down.

Q: Yes.

Norman: Turn them down. And because of turning them down, they felt that the only recourse they had was to try the hardship application. And the Commission hadn't done very many hardship applications, and this was going to be an economic hardship, because the church is a not for profit.

Q: Right.

Norman: And I guess they thought, if they brought in enough heavy consultants who could show that the building—we're only talking about the community house too by the way. That was the idea, that the community house should be demolished, so they can build in its footprint a tower.

Q: Yes, and you said the two proposals before the tower, was too big.

Norman: Yes.

Q: And what do you mean by that? Too big in context of the landmark church or—*[crosstalk]*?

Norman: No you'd have—yes, in terms of the church, it's not appropriate *[laughter]*. Yes it's not appropriate, and you'd have to look at the motion that was made. And sure enough there's motions that were made, that talked about why. You know, the materials are not harmonious with the new buildings, materials are not harmonious with the qualities of the landmark church.

Q: Yes.

Norman: That the height of the new building, dwarfs and minimizes the importance of the dome of the, the outstanding dome, the *[unclear]* dome, covered in wonderful tiles. You know, you just go on and on. And the fact that the community house was built at a different time, they latched onto as, well it's not part of the church really, that was added later.

Q: Yes.

Norman: And, you know, we felt that the ensemble of the community house, and the church was truly an ensemble. And you can't just rip out a piece of it, and expect that you don't damage the value, the appearance, the qualities of the remaining church building. So it's inappropriate. Anyway, they came in with an idea that said they couldn't carry out their mission, and they indicated what their mission was going to be. And they talked about they wanted to have a kind of soup kitchen, they wanted to have a multitude of activities that would not fit within the

community house, current, present community house. So our approach, after hearing all the testimony, and trying to understand more clearly what it was they were trying to do, we said, well wait a minute, let's see if all of these things that they're talking about, could in fact happen in the community house. And to do that, I organized some of the commissioners into little committees. David Todd headed up one of those little committees, and Frances Halspin *[phonetic]* headed up another one of those little committees. And they spent a lot of their time along with the staff, to look into how much of the application could, or could not happen, if designed properly in the footprint, or in the existing community house. Which would negate the need, and remove the hardship, because you could do it.

Q: Right, right.

Norman: And we had another component of what they wanted to have us look at, was the expense of all the repairs that would have to be made to the church, and the community house. And after all, this place is falling apart you know. And it was there that I approached Bob Litgey, who was the head of the Department of General Services, for some help, because a lot of engineering work needed to be done. Because they said things about the boiler plant wasn't any good, and this wasn't any good, and lighting wasn't any good. And the stonework wasn't any good, you know and they just made it sound like the whole thing ought to be swept up and tossed into the East River. And we got a lot of good help. There was an engineer, Bronson Binger, who worked for the Department of General Services, who was a church member. And had worked on another building, a church building, further uptown, I think it was called The [Episcopal Church

of] Heavenly Rest, whose, the church design, and the components of that design, like the boiler plant and so on, was the same as at St Bart's.

Q: Got it.

Norman: And Bronson had upgraded some of the things that this other church, Church of the Heavenly Rest, I'm going to say, but I don't think that's the real name. So to look at St Bart's, wasn't necessarily easy, but it was not a complex stranger. Manageable, it became manageable, so he started working on that, and had a very lengthy report to show that what the applicant was saying, just didn't make sense. He didn't have to do all these things. And you have to recognize that the material that came in from the applicant, I mean it would fill this table up to there maybe. You know, reports, books, pictures, statements, a lot.

Q: So they went all out and hired everyone.

Norman: Oh absolutely.

Q: To make this argument.

Norman: And as far as the repairs on the building went, I found a restorer who I knew from my prior days, masonry restorer who did an assessment of the building and put numbers together about how much it would cost in his doing it, as opposed to their theoretical contractor and estimates doing.

Q: Right.

Gene: And, you know, it's like a third of what they were talking about. So all of that, when you added it all up together, and gave the Commission good reasons to turn down the application. Now how long did that take, and how many man hours?

Q: Yes.

Norman: I couldn't tell you, but it was an achievement to put that all together. And go through the public hearings, and keep the record open to get other people involved. And discussions with the applicant, and what if conversations, what if we did this? what if we did that?

Q: Right.

Norman: Try this, try that dah, dah, dah. It just went on and on and on. And I'm going to guess that it was maybe three, four months worth of activity.

Q: Wow.

Norman: That was going on, almost on a daily basis. And I have to say this, along with what was happening in a normal routine of things in the Commission.

Q: Yes.

Norman: Like Coty Rizzoli and like the Cooper Committee, like you know all that was happening in those years. So it became quite a thing, and to make whatever your products going to be, we need to go back and check some of the names, and those kinds of things.

Q: Yeah.

Norman: So that we don't misspeak.

Q: I've got some names here to check, we can put together a little, you know, check sheet of names and then go back over the points when we next—

Norman: Yes, we're going to have to do that.

Q: What do you feel, I mean this, St Bart's, that was in Dorothy Miner's law class, one of the first ideas she talked about, was how important that battle was. And I'm wondering while working on it, if you had any sense of kind of the city wide, or national, implications of St Bart's in the hardship application?

Norman: During the testimony, a public hearing testimony for the hardship, the religious community came out, you know, guns blazing to support what was happening at the church. And to make sure that the world knew that here were these Godless bureaucrats preventing the church

from doing its business. And the business is not to maintain mausoleums, but to deal with human suffering, and pain. And provide for people, regardless of their religious point of view, it's open to anybody.

Q: Right.

Norman: You know, when you have a, what do they call it? They had a, it's not quite what they called it, but it was known as a coat closet, where in cold weather you could come in and get a coat?

Q: Oh, okay.

Norman: So that you didn't freeze, you know. You can get a bowl of soup, you know, just to help anybody. Now that's a compelling story, and it breaks your heart to think about people who are down on their luck, or whatever, not having the ability to receive help and comfort and solace, from a religious organization. And here we were, you know, cold-hearted government preventing that from happening. Yes, it had a lot of implications. And it was in a certain way like an extension of Flynn-Walsh, which we had just put to bed.

Q: Right.

Norman: And it was like round two of Flynn-Walsh, you know.

Q: Yes you really stepped into it with the religious.

Norman: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay, so there's some things, so I'll—between the two of us, we can back and forth and figure out what names we need to fill in the blanks on that. Well moving onto designations, and hearings. All right I know that we talked about the numbers last time, but I was going to ask you there's several real high profile designations, New York Stock Exchange, Rockefeller Center as a complex.

Norman: Stock Exchange really wasn't, as I remember, a problem.

Q: But do you see—are there several kinds of high points, in terms of things that you designated, just looking back?

Norman: Yes any building [*laughter*]. No, I'm sort of joking. There was an apartment house on Riverside Drive, called The Normandy. It's a large classical neo-Romanesque building, as I remember it where people wanted to change windows, and they were doing it willy-nilly. We thought the building, because of its size, its relationship to the streetscape, being part of a sort of historical portion of the west side, was important enough so that that shouldn't happen without Landmarks getting involved. We called for a public hearing, and we designated it the same day.

Q: Wow, wow.

Norman: We designated it the same day.

Q: That's impressive.

Norman: And we whipped the research department into getting a report, so that we would be in track with the time elements involved. So that stands out in my mind, the importance of protecting something that was about to be destroyed, if we didn't move quickly.

Q: Would you

Norman: Others, Rockefeller Center was an interesting thing, because in the beginning they weren't very interested. Let's see if I have this right, the land was owned by Trinity Church, or Columbia, I forget now.

Q: I don't know, I'll check that.

Norman: Yeah. So Rockefeller Center is a land lease, and there was a lot of pulling between Rockefeller Center, as a place, as a commercial entity, and whoever owned the land.

Q: Oh interesting.

Norman: Because I think the lease was up for negotiation, and so on, and I guess Rockefeller Center was saying, if it becomes a landmark, you know, it has less value. I'd have to look at this again, but there were issues like that. And finally, they saw the light and started to cooperate, with the designation. There was even a Japanese group, who was interested in buying it.

Q: Wow.

Norman: And that got used as some leverage, to make sure that it happened in a way that made sense. So there are all these other designations that I guess I'm not prepared to recite names now. Maybe I ought to make a list.

Q: Yeah if you want to take—

Norman: Along with the Broadway theaters.

Q: Do you want to go into the Broadway theaters now? Or do you feel—?

Norman: Well let's talk about that.

Q: Okay, let's hit that one.

Norman: Because again, all of this is happening within a two, three year period.

Q: Yes, and I think that you've done such a great job of framing the, what was happening overall in the city too at that time of the dynamics between real estate, and you know all the city agencies. So Broadway theaters.

Norman: Well because of the demolition of the Helen Hayes, and do I remember the name of the other theatre that was demolished? No. There was a kind of moratorium imposed upon the owners that you couldn't go around knocking down, demolishing buildings, what is it? The Marriot Marquis? The hotel that was built there? They have a theater in it. So there was a lot of pressure, and a lot of complications about identifying the buildings to be landmarked.

Q: Was the moratorium put in place by Kent? Or was that—

Norman: It was during his time.

Q: Okay.

Norman: Now I'm not saying that he did it, but it was done during his time. And it had to do—I don't remember the whole details of it. The City Planning Commission trying to work out something, and by the time I became Chair, and we started looking at that, there'd been a lot of pressure building up about, let's move with these theaters, because the owners wanted to get better control over their buildings. And there was some buildings that needed to be worked on, and improved, and there were shows coming in. I worked mainly with Gerry Schoenfeld, he became the corner coach spokesman of the three theater groups. And Gerry was a formidable

opponent, and a smart guy, and really knew how to take advantage wherever there was a way to do that.

What I recall most of all about three things. One, we finally found a way to identify the importance and significant features of the interiors, and exteriors too of these theaters. By way of, and we talked about this before, underlying phrases and sections in the designation report. We also decided that there was a way to go through the designation of the theatres, in a logical way. So as not to, so as not to set up a system where all the Shubert theaters were going to be designated, you know, in mass. So we started going down a listing alphabetically.

Q: Ah okay.

Norman: And as it turned out, the first three buildings alphabetically, were owned by three different groups. So everybody was going to carry the burden of a designated theater.

Q: That worked out *[Laughter]*.

Norman: Now how did that happen? It happened *[laughter]* it happened. And as we started continuing going down the list, it turned out that it really wasn't as bad and onerous as the theater owners thought it was going to be. Once we could identify what was significant, and we created, I created a committee headed up by an architect named Martin [D.] Raab, who working with theater designers and scenic designers and so on, looked at the buildings, and created a set of guidelines which I think is still in use. At the same time, as we designated them, as you know,

we had to go through the Board of Estimate to get that ratified. So the theater owners were putting a full core press on the members of the Board of Estimate. You know, things like you can get a free pass to any Broadway show, if you do it our way. I'm making that up, that's not true.

Q: I was going to say, God, can you get away with that?

Norman: Nobody actually did that, but you know it almost came down to that. And here's where Mayor Koch I think stepped up to the plate, and hit a home run by coming out and indicating that he thought the designations should go along, just the way we were doing it at Landmarks. And he said this, I remember one day on the steps of City Hall, to Gerry Schoenfeld, who he knew, you know friendly guys, they knew each other. But there was the Mayor supporting Landmarks, to Gerry Schoenfeld, in terms of what we were doing, and how we were doing it. And not to worry, it'll be fine, and it was great. It was really great to see Ed Koch step up like that for us.

Q: And was that, were transferred air rights an issue in that? Were the theater, Joe [Joseph] Papp and others kind of trying to involve, create fund established out of the sale of air rights? Did that turn into—?

Norman: Yes that did come along later on, there were transfer of air rights. The problem was how far you could move the transfer to air rights. And that got resolved after I left the Landmarks Commission. But that was the big point, because if you let them have the ability to move air rights around, where are they going to land?

Q: Right, yes if the whole district's theaters, then you can't.

Norman: That's right. But as it turned out, along 8th Avenue today, there's some buildings there that are built using air rights from some of the theatres. And I believe one or two theatres even got demolished.

Q: Well do we do it? Or do you want to go into the Tony Tung?

Norman: Yes let's do that.

Q: Okay.

Norman: Let's do that, Tony Tong. Tony Tung was appointed to the Commission, during Kent's time. And Tony therefore was in place when I came to the Commission. And Tony and I got along, I thought, well. Tony had some strong ideas, and views, about preservation. And in many instances, was a help to making sure that properties were getting the right kind of review applications for changes and so on. And for a few years there, in the beginning, we got along very, very well, I thought. And I think he might say that too, if you asked him. So what happened, because things deteriorated dramatically? We received an application, which would call for the construction of restaurants behind the public library. And at the same time, they wanted to build some underground areas, underneath the park, Bryant Park for bookstores, and other uses for the library. That didn't seem to have any problems getting approved, or getting accepted. But there was a great deal of concern, about the rear façade of the library, and

obscuring the rear façade of the library. Because it's not ornamented in any particular way, like the other parts of the building. And that's done for a reason, because those are where the stacks are and so on.

Q: Good point.

Norman: And we deliberated a long time, and during the public hearing on that, and we ended up, and I think Tony cast the motion. We ended up putting forth a motion not to approve, or not to write a favorable report, because it was city property and so on for this application. And what I believe get's overlooked so often, is the fact that it was a unanimous vote, a unanimous vote. Now, there was a lot of concern out there in the public, about how the Commission prevents development from happening. And this was being used, us turning it down, was being used by some people as another example of how we're slowing down the process, we're not letting things happen.

I get a phone call from Tony, telling me that, essentially that he had written up a piece that he was submitting to *The [New York] Times*, explaining why the vote was taken the way it was. But he decided not to let them publish it, he pulled it back in other words. And I think that's important, because even in his own mind, he had certain doubts I guess, about putting through an op-ed piece, under his name, explaining what role the Commission had. As far as I know, that's never happened before, where a sitting commissioner has submitted an op-ed piece to a newspaper, and having it published. When I heard that, I was very upset. And I was upset for a number of reasons, chiefly among them was the fact that as chair, I think it's my prerogative to

explain what public actions the Commission takes. And any kind of statement, about what we were doing, should come from me. Either because I wrote it, and submitted it, or I had somebody on staff whose been delegated to do that, submit this. And at the same time, Tony was up for reappointment, and quite frankly I was so annoyed and disappointed in his taking this action, that I decided not to support his being reappointed on the Commission. And I let Bob Esnard and the Mayor know that this had happened, and I was withdrawing my support. Because prior to this happening, I was willing to have Tony remain on the Commission.

Q: Sure.

Norman: I guess Tony's point of view, and I really shouldn't speak for what he thought, but let me just throw this out there. It's possible that his concern was why should one action, which really didn't happen, the piece didn't get published, cause so much concern, in my view, to withdraw my support for his reappointment. Well why it happened, is what I just told you. I felt that this was clearly a breach, and it was a unanimous vote, it wasn't a case where Tony and a few others, and five others giving six voted not to give back a favorable report. It was a unique unanimous vote, meaning that I participated in it, I went along with it, I thought it was a correct vote to make.

Well a fire storm erupted, where the preservation community in a certain way, took sides as to who to support in all of this. And it just came from left field, as far as I was concerned, that the concern that was being placed out there. And in addition, there came now the need to replace the sitting commissioner, from Staten Island. And you heard me say earlier, that in instances during

the earlier years of my tenure, I would go out and find people and submit their names, with my recommendation, do the Mayor's office and they would be appointed.

Q: Yes.

Norman: I tried to help find somebody from Staten Island, and the kind of press that was being passed around, over Tony not being reappointed, chiefly by Sydney Schanberg.

Q: I don't know that name.

Norman: Yeah, he's a reporter that I think was working for *The [New York] Post* at the time. I think it was *The New York Post*, who had done a series of articles about the horrendous things going on in Cambodia, regarding ethnic clearing, cleansing. And the killing fields, that were in Cambodia, at an earlier time right after the Vietnam War stopped, or ended. And he was very well respected, and he took, for whatever reason, he took the position that the Mayor was inappropriately not reappointing Tony to the Landmarks Commission and wrote a series of articles about it. And strangely enough, the target of Sydney Schanberg, and maybe others, was the Mayor and not me.

Q: Interesting.

Norman: Which is not to say that they didn't mention that, you know, I was involved in all of this.

Q: Yes.

Norman: But it wasn't really directed at me, it was directed at the Mayor, and the administration of the Mayor. And this went on for a while, because now we had to find a replacement. And City Hall came up with some names, and one of them was a landscape architect, from Staten Island. Who, as it turned out, had done some strange things, in terms of landscape design, in one of the parks outside of the Borough Hall in Staten Island. Her name was DePalo [*phonetic*], and her name was put forth, and then withdrawn when it became clear that there was an issue, or a series of problems with her being selected. And it took a while to finally get somebody to sit in the Staten Island commissioner's seat. And in that interim, Tony was still on the Commission, and it wasn't until, you know, a date certain was set that his term really expired.

Q: But you had to find the new Staten Island commissioner before?

Norman: Yes, and we ended up finding a guy, who I didn't know, but got to know who I thought was terrific. Let's see, what was his name?

Q: Is he still—who's the Staten Island one now? Pablo [E.] Vengoechea? Okay, I'm making a note to check who is Staten Island.

Norman: And during the confirmation hearing, a lot of noise was made about the fact that this person who was selected, to come onto the Commission, was a landscape architect who had done

work for the city. He worked on parks for the city, and it was like this man is tainted somehow, because he's worked for the city, how can he be there? And a lot of ridiculous things were being said, by members of the public. And the whole experience was, in my view, very unfortunate. And in certain ways, very disruptive to what was going on. And a friendship that Tony and I had, prior to this happening, was now destroyed.

Q: Yes.

Norman: And I still regard that as being too bad, because it was a good friendship.

Q: I don't know if you have anything else you want to add to this? Or if you want to move onto the next question?

Norman: Yes, let's go on because I think there isn't anything else to say.

Q: Okay. Which is, we've touched upon this topic, I think in a lot of the issues that have been brought up. Which really is, what's the role of preservation advocacy, and civic groups? And I guess, I think you've spoken to this on a lot of specific cases. But I'm wondering in general, if there was an overall takeaway in your time of being on chair, to what these groups successfully, how they successfully push landmarks forward? What your interaction, relationship with them was? Kind of how they could be a pro-preservation, pro-landmarking tool? And if, in some ways, they were hindering sometimes, I mean however you choose to, kind of talk about the role of these groups.

Norman: One of the problems that comes about, by having regulations that have to be followed, once a property is designated, is that owners don't always follow those regulations. So there's this whole issue of compliance, and the Landmarks Commission, in my day, it's changed since then, did not really have adequate staff to do that. And quite frankly, we relied and encouraged community groups to organize themselves, so that they could look at what was going on in historic districts. And on individual landmarks, that fell within their parameter of activity.

Q: And when you said that, was there training that would go out? Kind of teaching these groups how to monitor and?

Norman: Yes there was. And, you know, depending on the sophistication of the group, sometimes they did their own training. Sometimes some of our staff would meet with them, and visit with them, and indicate, you know, how to go about it. And so that's a very positive thing that can happen.

Q: Yes

Norman: And Helena Rosenthal was the chair of, well the president actually, of the Friends of the Upper Eastside Historic Districts. And that group was a very active group, who would do that sort of follow up, on properties that were designated. And at that time, the Upper East Side Historic District was the largest historic district that the Commission had created. So a lot of buildings there, and there was no way to limit it, you know. I think we had like one and a half

persons on staff, who would go out and look at things when we heard about there being a violation. And an issue of violation report or an order. And if wasn't for the community groups, like the Friends of the Upper East Side, we never could have even done any of that.

Q: Good point.

Norman: And I mentioned earlier, that one of the big issues before regulations came into being, not regulations, guidelines was window replacements. So you know there was no way this Commission could know about all of the changes to windows, because you can change your window in twenty minutes, if you're skilled enough. And to irreparable harm to the appearance of the building, so we relied a lot on the groups like Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, to do that. And at the same time, recently formed somewhere in the mid, or early '80s was the Historic Districts Council. And they, as an organization, took it upon themselves to become organized enough to be able to have, you know, monitors out there looking at things.

And there were other groups, you know, who did that based upon their own geography. So that kind of participation was welcomed. In addition, people became knowledgeable about preservation, and research and would appear at public hearings for certificates of appropriateness. Or for designation, and offer sometimes very compelling new information, which would sway and provide for the commissioners, myself included, information about how and what was going on, on a property. Or a tidbit of history, if it were designation, so lot's of things that individual people could do.

Q: A very good point.

Norman: It became a kind of regular group of people, who would show up at our hearings. And I would call on them to come up and offer comments, and it was great to have public shy men and say things. My only admonition to them, was to make sure that whatever was saying, applied to the law, and not because I like it.

Q: Yes.

Norman: And after a while, that became an easy thing to do, they were very, very helpful.

Q: That's a good point about that. So looking back, so [David] Dinkins comes in and Laurie Beckleman is appointed chair. At that moment, thinking about, or even now looking back on your time as chair, what do you kind of hope your legacy is as Landmarks Chair?

Norman: Well first of all, I need to say that when I stepped down from the chair of the Commission, I stayed on as the representative for the Bronx for a bit. To offer David Todd some help—

Q: Oh that's right, David came in.

Norman: Right, some help with the transition of there being a new chair. So I had the advantage, or the pleasure, of serving as chair and then also serving as a member of the Commission, you

know. It was, it's a great experience, I really enjoyed that. And quite selfishly, part of what I was doing was to make sure that I still had something to do with some historic districts that were being created which I had started the process on. Like Ladies' Mile [Historic District], and like the Upper West Side [Central Park West Historic District], or the West Side Historic Districts.

This is happening at a time when there was a great deal of concern about the numbers of properties that were designated. And those two districts, the Ladies' Mile and the West Side, were large districts with important and dense buildings, groupings of buildings. And it was my thought as chair, when we were going through the pre-designation phase, that we'd go out and visit these sites as a group. And we'd walk the areas because one of the problems creating historic districts, is where do you stop.

Q: Yes, good point.

Norman: What are the boundaries going to be, and I always made it a point of taking the commissioners out as a group, along with the research department and other staff members. To point out, you know, what it is that they're being asked to consider, as a historic district. So those are things that I look back on, and regard as fond, good things that I was involved with doing.

Q: So in some ways, it sounds like part of your, like I see as well, is what was passed. Or what was designated early in David Todd's tenure as chair, that you and the research department, under your guidance, really got the Ladies' Mile lined up and ready to go. Upper West Side lined up and ready to go.

Norman: Yes, but that's always true, there's always a leftover bit of work, that any chairman has started, but it never reaches completion before that chairman is moving on to other things.

Q: Well we talked briefly about kind of when you first arrived on the job, that you were really interested in kind of putting the ship in order, in some sense of not as focused on policy. But initially focused on kind of, you know, efficiency and making sure that the office functioned, and the Commission was working. But I'm wondering when, if looking back, how your role as chair evolved over that time?

Norman: Well there came a point when the operation of the Commission, was understood by me inside out. So I could have, and did have, opportunities and time and energy, to look at policy issues. So policy issues, you know, got right up there with the other things that were on the table. And some of the policy issues had to do with the theaters, we talked about the creation of a way of identifying significant things in the designation report, which carried over into all designation reports. Not in quite the same way, but emphasizing the fact through the research department, when they write a report, that they have to really concentrate on helping the preservation department, in the future, who knows when, understand why this property was designated. So that to me was a kind of a policy approach to it.

Another one was to create the survey department's work, so that we had a little survey committee of commissioners in order to satisfy the sunshine requirements. In other words, whenever six or more commissioners get together, it has to be a meeting open to the public. Now

the reality says that there's activities that go on that I felt in was important to have some input from other commissioners. I mean I did not think that I knew it all, had it all, or even with the staffs' involvement, should be making decisions without having some input, more input from other commissioners.

I created a committee that looked at properties for designation, potential designation, there were five of us. Therefore you didn't have to have public involvement, that would meet with the staff, the research staff and the survey staff, which was newly created, or reinstated, however you want to say it. And looked at these properties, and sometimes we, as a little committee, would go out and look at the properties in the flesh. But most times, it was looking at slides that were taken to show that there's interest coming from some place, whether it's internally from the staff, or it's from letters that we received. We were able to make a judgment as to whether or not these properties should go to the full Commission, to schedule or calendar a public hearing. And I think that worked pretty well. And it's a good thing, and I think that from what I'm hearing, are there are a lot of people who feel that what goes on now, does not include enough input from other commissioners. It's just the chair, and they seem to upset about that.

I made a note here, the selection of commissioners is something that, you know, I think is important, it needs to be looked at. No doubt about it, the Mayor has the authority, and should have the authority, to select who works for him and enforcing the law. But at the same time, I think that there ought to be some way of sort of pre-screening people, who are thought of as potential commissioners. And the thought being that the Landmarks Preservation Commission should be made up of people who are there, to preserve landmarks. And do it in a fair way, but

overriding that fairness should be preserving landmarks. And I think it would not make any sense to have people on the Commission, who were not interested in landmarks, or didn't believe in the Landmarks Law. And with that sort of idea in mind, I got involved with an organization called The Citizens Committee for—The Citizens Emergency Committee [to Preserve Preservation] for blah, blah, blah, of landmarks.

Q: Right.

Norman: I forget the name. And try to put together a format, as well as organizing former chairs, and former commissioners, to create a panel that would interview and discuss with potential Landmark commissioners, people who had been recommended for going onto the Landmarks Commission, by the Mayor's Office. And we would, as people who had gone through it, who had lived it, who better to help select, or at least identify attitudes and positions, that people may or may not have. I got some good response, but it didn't go far enough, fast enough. I had some medical problems, that kept me from going full blown into it. My time got gobbled up by that, as well as some issues in my family were, I ended up becoming a caregiver for people in the family, and didn't have the kind of time that's required to do it.

Of course I still think it's a good idea, and if there was a way to reconstitute this, I talked to Beverly Moss Spatt about this, and she seemed interested. And Kent seemed interested, and some of the other commissioners like Frances Halspin, and Bill Davis, who served on the Commission with Laurie. And there were others, who seemed interested in working to create

such a screening committee. And that would be a good thing, if somebody could pull that together.

Q: That's a great point.

Norman: While I was chair, an issue came up about owners' consent. And it didn't come up so much while I was chair, but more directly after I was chair, after I left the Commission. Where it seemed to me that all too often, if an owner complained to the Landmarks Commission that they were not interested in having their property become a landmark, the Landmarks Commission would go some place else. Like that property, not go through the process. I won't say every time, one hundred percent of the times, but enough to make it, enough to make it get recognized as an issue. And I think there should be ways found to not walk away from properties, because an owner doesn't agree with it, in terms of a landmark. I mean there should be a way to select properties, for their intrinsic value as opposed to what owner was going to cooperate with you.

Q: Right.

Norman: Or not cooperate with you. So that's another thing that I walk away from, thinking about how can that be put in place.

Q: Yeah how can we really strengthen Landmarks today?

Norman: Yeah. And in your list of questions, 2 Columbus Circle appeared, and I've already gone on record, a couple of times, saying that I think the Commission owes it to an interested public to hold a public hearing, if enough people are clamoring for let's say. Even though the staff, and maybe even our designation committee, doesn't feel that this should happen. During my tenure, early on, a few blocks from here, there was a, McKim Mead & White small building that was a convent for a religious order, on Lexington Avenue and 81st Street, I think. And when the Upper East Side Historic District was created, that building was not included, it was away from the general focus of the Upper East Side Historic District. And the Commission started getting a lot of interest from people who lived around that building, because it was clear that the building was up for sale. And again we're talking about the '80s, when things were red hot and people were trying to develop cracks in the sidewalk.

They started expressing out of concern about how, if that building is demolished, in its place there's going to be some ugly apartment house. And so much mail and interest floated our way that I thought it was worthwhile having a public hearing. For a couple of reasons, because it was owned by a religious group, and clearly the Flynn-Walsh situation was fresh in my mind. And I wanted to try to find a way to do both, you know, preserve a building and also work in some sort of cooperative way, if possible with the religious community. And as it turns out, this Convent of the Little Sisters [of Assumption], I think it was called, wanted to sell their building so that monies could be used to promote charity work, in the South Bronx, not far from where I grew up. And that came out during the public hearing. I mean somebody on that team said, "Oh you know Commissioner Norman, if this goes through, and you don't designate it, it's going to allow funding for things to happen up in the South Bronx". A reminder.

Q: Yes, friendly.

Norman: But we went through the public hearing, and we gathered the testimony, and started to deliberate on this. And Adolph Placzek, who was a specialist in McKim Mead & White architecture, was very instrumental in helping the rest of we commissioners understand that this building, while done by McKim Mead & White designed by them, was not their best effort. And it was clear that, you know, simply because a building is designed by a well know prestigious architectural firm, does not mean it has to become a landmark. And we turned it down, I've told this story a few times, because I think it's a good indication that the Landmarks Commission doesn't necessarily knee jerk, and designate, everything that it hears. Now we have to be fair and say that over ninety percent of what we hear gets designated, but that's because it's selected in the first place.

Q: Right, good point.

Norman: As opposed to something that just came in over the transit, or someone wrote letters, or a letter writing campaign was created. But nonetheless, the way you solve that is to have the public hearing. Because there's always new information, that comes out at a public hearing. So my point of view would be, as it was on Columbus Circle, that there should be a public hearing, and let's collect the facts. And let the Commission, who are selected and operate under the mantle of the Landmarks Law, to make a decision as to whether or not the particular property is

meritorious enough to become a landmark. And let that be a decision that the full Commission makes, as opposed to some sub-committee, or cabal or whatever you want to call it.

Q: Good point. What do you think are some of the real both challenges and opportunities? Not just at LPC, but with preservation in the city in general today? I mean are there things that you see happening in the city now, in addition to what you mentioned, you know your ideas that the establishing the committee to kind of interview, or the screening committee you called it. But just—so much of what you said is when you were chair, was in response to New York City in the 1980s. And I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on New York City now, 2012, what the big preservation challenge is?

Norman: I have thought about it, a bit, and a couple of things I wish could happen. First of all, I think it's important that the preservation community somehow bring into it a more diverse group of preservationists.

Q: What do you mean by that?

Norman: I mean I think there should be more of a cross section of income background, ethnicity involved in preservation work. I mean all too often, I've sat in preservation meetings and I'm the only person of color in the room. And it's not because people of color are not interested, I don't think that they understand, or have been exposed to, what preservation can mean for their community. So I don't how you'd do it, people always say, well, bring us some names. Well you

know, it shouldn't be left to those of us who are involved in the preservation community, to always come up with names.

Q: True.

Norman: I mean it should be done in a more open and collective way. And at the same time, I think we need to bring in young people. That's what I mean when I say diversity, more young people, more people of color, more people of different backgrounds. And get them interested in preservation, because they receive something from it.

Q: Yes, exactly.

Norman: By being a citizen in the City of New York, you receive something from it. So that's something that I think the preservation community needs to try to focus on. In addition, I think the preservation community would be well served, if somehow it had linkages directly with elected officials. Not just when there's a problem, but in general. I mean I could almost envision a political party that's, you know, the Preservation Party.

Q: Yes, yes.

Norman: And I don't see anything wrong with that, because there are issues and particular situations that would be well served, if there was enough attention placed on them. And given the

way legislation goes, or enforcement goes, it would be great to have a Preservation Party candidate.

Q: In terms of perceptions of landmarking in preservation, do you see that as something that in a way a rebranding of preservation today? And making it more applicable to more diverse groups of people? Or really showing that it can be an economic driver for a community, for not just developers, but for—?

Norman: Well that makes me think that yes, there is a whole educational component, that somehow needs to be formulated, and provided out there for people to receive better information about the benefits of preservation. And that's all part of, in my mind, getting more diverse people involved. If you can come up with a kind of an educational process, that shows how more people benefit from it, you're going to bring in more people.

Q: Yes.

Norman: And I also wonder if there's enough emphasis on the professional training preservation get. I mean I'm not sure, although I know some of it happens, that the educational facilities, Columbia, Pratt, Hunter College, places that have preservation courses, are really preparing people to go out there, and become involved. So in other words, I guess there should be a way to provide a tonic, to more and more people. Or dip them in preservation law, more often, and have them really see how their life is made better, by more preservation activities. And being more supportive of the work of the Commission.

Q: Wow.

Norman: We're almost done.

Q: We're almost done.

Norman: I'm done.

Q: We're done. Gene, again, we tore through so much stuff today. Let me turn these guys off.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcriptionist: Jackie Thipthorpe

Session: 4

Interviewee: Gene Norman

Location: Kress Foundation

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

Date: August 23, 2013

Q2: This is an interview with Gene Norman, August 23, 2013, at the Kress Foundation.

Interviewer Liz McEnaney. And we're rolling.

Q1: Okay. Well, we'll just hit it. So, Gene, can you talk about the importance of making the LPC chair a full-time position? What impact, if any, did it have on the way the LPC was perceived within the administration? And what impact did it have on the day-to-day activities of the staff? So just if you can repeat what Anthony said, if you can somehow incorporate that question into your—?

Norman: Oh, that question is the longest questions I've heard in a long time. *[Laughs]* Well, let me start a little differently and you can edit however you can. First of all, I want to say good morning.

Q1: Good morning.

Norman: This being the twenty-third of October—of August in 2013 means that roughly thirty years ago I started at the Landmarks Commission. And your question is what was the effect of having a full-time commissioner at the Landmarks Commission heading it up. Well, I was the

first one, so there is not a history trail to look at to say so-and-so did it this way and so-and-so did it that way. That was one of the conditions I felt was very important in accepting the job. I thought that the Commission needed to be run on a full-time basis in order to gain more respect from the community, more respect from the real estate community, I'll call them the opposition because often they were, and within the city government, the Landmarks Commission was always a kind of step-child. I didn't know a lot about it, but I knew that much about it, and I thought by having it become a full-time position, maybe some of that could be turned around, and I believe it did turn around. My coming there on a full-time basis allowed the staff and the management of the Commission, senior staff, to interact on a daily basis when they needed to with the chairman, and I thought that was a useful thing.

Q1: And do you think that perceived the way the LPC interacted within the administration, that suddenly it was less step-child, and that the LPC was more of force to contend with?

Norman: Yeah. One of the benefits of having a full-time chair there, was that that chairman, or chairperson I should say, could establish relationships with City Hall, and in other agencies, because they're there all the time. Unfortunately, if you're a part-time person, and you have other duties, and responsibilities, and just kind of arrive at the Commission for a hearing or a designation, which is all important and worthwhile doing, you're not there enough to do all the other little, you know, chores that have to be done to keep everybody aware of what the Commission is doing, and how it's doing, and so on.

There is also a need to make sure that the right kinds of connections are available with people in government like when the Commission designates something. There has to be a follow-up by, nowadays, the counsel. When I was there thirty years ago, we had to report to the Board of Estimate, which was made up of the mayor, the controller, the president of city council, and the borough presidents. So you had to know these people, because they would vote to affirm a designation, and what better way to know them than to appear in their office from time to time, or have their staff come by, or visit with their staff to get to know them and they know you.

Q1: Great answer. What do you see as the key designation that happened during your term as LPC chair?

Norman: That's a tough one because there are so many designations, but a couple do stand out.

Q2: Could you just repair the question, sir?

Norman: A couple do stand out as being important and key designations that happened during my tenure, which is the gist of your question. The first one I think that I would like to say something good about is the fact that— I believe it was the first time the Commission ever did this. We designated a property the same day of the designation hearing. This is a property called the Normandy Apartments on Riverside Drive on the Upper West Side, and this was before the Upper West Side Historic District had been created. And it's a very outstanding building, it takes up the whole block front, it's a large, sort of neo renaissance looking structure, very impressive. And there was a problem with windows being changed.

And in order not to have the window situation get out of hand, and take months for the Commission to work before it made a decision on whether or not it should be a landmark, I, and others, thought it was important that we call a public hearing for this property. And out of the public hearing testimony was very clear to say that there was a group in the building that wanted to change to full plate-glass windows and the building had some very nice casement windows. And I thought that if we could we ought to designate it right there on the spot. And sure enough, there was enough consensus among the commissioners that we did that. So that's one designation that I look back on and think wasn't that a good thing.

Another one on a very personal level is 346 Broadway. This is a city owned building and it had been used by the city as a courthouse, as a training session, as a warehouse, you name it. It originally started out as an insurance company facility. When I was eighteen years old, I decided I wanted to join the Marine Corps. And I had to report to 346 Broadway, on a chilly October morning, with my meager possession, stand in the hallway with a huge Marine officer presiding, raise my right hand, and became enlisted in the Marine Corp. I stayed for eight years.

So I always look back on that building with a special amount of pride, that somehow fate made it so, that years later I was instrumental in having it become a New York City landmark. Not because of what happened to me there, mind you; it's because the building was a terrific building, it's outstanding, and if you don't know it, you should go see it. It's a great building. So those are two things that stand out in my mind. There are lots of others, but those are two that stand out in my mind.

And the last one I'll talk about is the Coty Rizzoli designation. This is a little complicated and I'm going to truncate it. Anybody really wanting more information has to look at the written material that the archive is maintaining. But this is a property that the Commission heard about and held some public hearing, I believe, prior to my coming to the Commission. However, while I was there, a former staff member named Andrew Dolkart did some research on his own after he left the Commission, and discovered that the Rizzoli building—the Coty building actually, contained some unique glass windows, which were produced by the Lalique Company. And covered with grime now, or then at the time, and one could see how important, and significant, and outstanding a characteristic this building had, those windows, to say nothing about the scale of these two commercial buildings that were side by side on Fifth Avenue between 54th and 55th Street I think. And we began to get more interest in it, and lots of letters came in, and information about the importance of saving these two buildings, because a developer was about to demolish both of those buildings, and use that site to erect a fairly substantial, well-designed high rise office building, by the firm of Kohn Pederson Fox, I believe.

Through a stroke of good luck, they didn't file their papers quickly enough at the Buildings Department for the demolition work, and the Landmarks staff was able to put a hold on those buildings, and we started the process for a designation hearing. Sure enough, the hearing was held, the demolition did not happen. The hearing was held. Everybody on the hearing list got up and spoke about the virtues of the building. The people who were about to buy that property, or maybe they bought it at that point—they complained bitterly about how they felt they had been ambushed by the Landmarks Commission. Not true, but they felt so.

Bottom line is that the property got designated and we came up with an idea that said, you can do both on this site. And I've often said this, you can do both, you can have preservation and you can have new development, and any time you have that possibility, it should be pursued. It turns out that by maintaining the first fifty feet of the two buildings, you still had enough of a building footprint to let those buildings live, and to incorporate them into the lower floors of the new building, which would rise behind them. So as you walk along Fifth Avenue on the sidewalk, you would not feel that these two buildings had been incorporated in a way to the new construction that they didn't have a presence anymore. If you don't think I'm right, go there. Look at these two buildings and you will feel that these two buildings are, in fact, individual standing buildings. Right behind them is an office tower, which runs along parallel to Fifth Avenue, and then turns the corners onto 55th Street where its entrance is. So that's an example of how a designation can happen, and I like to look back at that and think that it was a good thing.

There is a department store, Henri Bendel in the building now, and it uses those two buildings as entryways into the shopping area. It's a very attractive way to maintain an entrance to a department store on Fifth Avenue. Here again, if you don't think that's a good idea, you need to go see it. It really, really works. So let's take a little break.

Q1: All right.

Q2: Excellent.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: And we are rolling.

Q1: Okay. We're back. Can you talk about how real estate pressures in Midtown led to the formation of the Cooper Committee and the subsequent role that this committee played?

Norman: Sure. I can talk about the pressures in the '80s not only in Midtown Manhattan but throughout all of Manhattan and into some of the particular sites in the boroughs. And that pressure kept mounting during the '80s. New York was on a high and people—developers were trying to develop cracks in the sidewalk I used to say. That's a little over-dramatical but there was a lot of work going on. The fact that this Coty Rizzoli property that I mentioned earlier was viewed by the real estate community as an ambush by the Landmarks Commission—which it wasn't but it was viewed that way—heightened the need to make sure that the Landmarks Commission was acting fairly. Of course, I thought it was always acting fairly. But there were others who felt that it wasn't acting fairly.

To make sure that the procedures and steps necessary for designation were better understood, the mayor's office felt it was worthwhile to create a committee that became known by its chairman's name, Alex Cooper, it became known as the Cooper Committee. It consisted of talented people, architects, people involved in the real estate business. And some of the Landmarks staff, myself included, from time to time met with them to make sure they understood the various steps involved in landmark designation. It turned out that they had some suggestions. But the best

suggestion they had was that the Landmarks Commission should be given a greater budget, and have more people, because without money to invest in doing its work, and people to get the reports done and the research done, we would always find ourselves running to the potential demolition of an important building, and that just did not make sense.

The Commission, with the help of city hall, after hearing some of that, began to improve its own staff. We got an increase in our budget, so much so that in short order the budget was allowed to hire double the staff actually, and there was talk about moving us into better quarters. That came about—and we can talk about that later, but that came about because we lost our lease on Vesey Street. I look back on Vesey Street as being a starting point at the Commission and very inadequate, not being able to hold us in a way—to house us in a way that made sense, and later we got into a much better situation at 225 Broadway. And I think that did a lot for staff morale, for the community's morale when they came for public hearings, and for the whole tenor of the work that the Commission was doing became much more professional, much more with it.

Of course, in the '80s, we didn't have computers. They hadn't come to us yet. Well, they didn't come to many places around the city. So that was a factor that made things continue to be a little slower. I wish we had had the technology that's available today, that would have helped a great deal.

Q1: Great answer. So moving on to talk more about the religious property issues, you had your hands full during your tenure with issues relating to religious property. Can you talk about the efforts to defeat the Flynn-Walsh bill and the importance of that ruling?

Norman: Shortly after I came to the Commission in 1983, there was a movement by the religious community who had been trying unsuccessfully up to that point to have religious buildings become exempt from landmark designation. They were able to convince two people in the legislature in Albany, a gentleman named [John E.] Flynn and a gentleman named [Daniel B.] Walsh, they introduced a bill for consideration by the [New York State] Assembly, which would make landmark designations unavailable on religious properties.

As you can imagine, the preservation community felt very threatened and the loss of, potential loss actually, of religious buildings from being protected by the Landmarks Law was a deep concern. Through the help of the Municipal Art Society, and some of the other preservation groups like Landmark Conservancy, there was a visitation I'll call it, planned up in Albany to show support for keeping religious properties within the designation purview of the Commission. And the Municipal Art Society, through Fred Papert I believe, did a wonderful thing in getting a lot of attention brought to this visitation by inviting Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis to come along. And I had the distinct pleasure of spending a ride up to Albany sitting alongside Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

I have to tell you, the ride to Albany, which I have taken many times on the train since then and before, is pretty boring. And if you're on the right side of the train, the proper side of the train, you get to see the Hudson River and often if you're not it just looks like rust belt all over again. But what a wonderful day that was sitting next to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and exchanging first small talk I must admit, but then substantive talk about how we would conduct ourselves at

the press conference which was going to be held in Albany, and why the Flynn-Walsh bill was so dangerous, and making sure that Mrs. Onassis was able to meet a lot of the legislators to make it very clear that their voting for this would not be one of her favorite things to happen.

And we went through that day basking in the glory of Camelot in a way, and sure enough, the Flynn-Walsh bill was rejected, withdrawn, and put away. I count that as a big success for the New York based preservation community and how it was able to mobilize, work with the Landmarks Commission, had the support of the mayor who came down to Grand Central—in those days was the taking off point for the train ride to Albany. It's now in Pennsylvania Station. The mayor and lots of other elected officials were there cheering us on. They weren't there when we got back I have to say. A little bit of a shortcoming. But I know their support was with us one hundred percent and that was very gratifying.

Q1: Wow. That's a—I can't imagine a train ride with Jackie Onassis [*Laughs*] That's absolutely awesome.

Norman: Is your voice coming through on this?

Q2: Yes.

Norman: Are you going to keep her voice asking questions?

Q2: Yes.

Norman: Well, why do I have to incorporate—?

Q2: Because who knows what we are going to use in the future, you know.

Q1: Yes, Ideally, if there was an exhibition, no one wants my voice in it. they just want your voice, *[laughs]*.

Q2: Yeah, like we talk—

Q1: So I'm off camera. I'm just more of a prompt to get you to say kind of what you want to say.

Q2: Wonderful things you're saying. This is just purely archival footage.

Q1: It's all archival.

I didn't know if you wanted to touch upon St. Bart's? And just thinking about Flynn-Walsh, if you wanted to talk about how St. Bart's related to Flynn-Walsh.

Norman: Well, I do, and I'm going to expand that and talk about the busyness of the Commission at that time.

Q1: For the response to—

Q2: Let's take a break for a second and you can drink some water.

Q1: Okay. Yeah.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: Okay. Just to let you know that I am rolling again. Let me just give a clap [*claps*].

Q1: Well, I just have a quick question for you. Do you want to go into what you're most proud of, what you regret, or do you want to respond to the criticism and talk about St. Bart's?

Norman: No, let's talk about St. Bart's.

Q1: Okay.

Norman: Let's talk about St. Bart's. It's worthwhile coupling a discussion about Flynn-Walsh Bill and its demise, to an application which the Commission spent, I think, close to two years resolving, and investigating, and taking public testimony about, and it's the famous St. Bart's case. We got an application shortly after I came to the Commission, I believe it was in the beginning of 1984, for a new building to replace the community house of St. Bart's on Park Avenue and 51st Street, between 50th and 51st.

Now if you don't know the building, St. Bart's Church, St. Bartholomew's Church to be more correct, is a wonderful Byzantine inspired building with a glorious dome, and it was designed by Bertram Goodhue, a well-known architect who did a terrific piece of work on that site. And St. Bart's is a part of the Episcopal Diocese here in New York City.

After it was built, several years later, in keeping with the texture of the façade, the decorative elements, the Byzantine features, a community house was erected—not at the same time as the church but later—and coupled with the church. So the two buildings stood together, and if you didn't know better you'd think they were all built as one. Those two buildings were designated as the New York City landmarks, and the church was now applying to have the permission under appropriateness to demolish the community building, and erect I think it was a forty or fifty story office building.

Now keep in mind that the Commission's major job is to make sure that landmarks are protected. But in doing that protective work, it was always understood, and desirous actually, to allow owners to make changes to their buildings that the Commission would find to be appropriate, and that's where the rub comes in. What does appropriate mean in the minds of the viewer? We at the Commission, and the commissioners themselves, all had a good concept I believe of what appropriateness was, and we always tried to approach an application with an open mind hoping and believing that it was possible for an appropriate solution to come about regarding an addition to a landmarks site.

When the conditions were right, the application came to the Commission and we began holding public hearings. In fairly short order, I think most of the commissioners felt that it was inappropriate to create an office building after demolishing the community house, which was an integral part of the site, and the church, and we finally voted to turn it down.

The church decided that they would try to modify their design and they did submit a new application. I believe they submitted two new applications. Each of them were also turned down. The church then decided that what they could apply for was the demolition of the community house based upon the hardship provisions of the Landmarks Law, and that brought us into direct activities of trying to understand their full-blown application for the demolition of the community house and replacing it with an office building. The church had to submit to us lots of material and information describing why the building as currently arranged was not suitable just to make alterations to it to fulfill its mission. And the public hearings that accompanied those applications, or that handicap application—I don't mean handicapped that—

Q2: Hardship.

Norman: —hardship application were very, very contagious, testy, and full with a lot of statements being made about how we on the Commission, the commissioners themselves, were impeding the spread of religion, and the maintenance and care of their parishioners, and we should be ashamed of ourselves. I clearly remember one clergy person saying, as part of his testimony, that we should be damned to hell by preventing, or trying to prevent them from going forward with this wonderful good works project.

Well, it was important for the Commission to prepare itself to respond to all of the claims in the hardship application, and luckily we were able to call upon the City of New York, and here again it's a case where the Commission's relationship to other agencies comes into play. As luck would have it, I used to work with the commissioner of the Department of General Services at the Urban Development Corporation before coming to Landmarks, and we were good friends, and I approached him, and sought his help. He had a staff of engineers and architects that were well versed in economics, and cost-benefit analysis, and those kinds of things, and he agreed to work with the Commission's staff to respond to the things that were being said from a design point of view, and an engineering point of view on the building, and why it was imperative for the church to be able to demolish the community house and move forward with this office building that was going to generate income to allow them to continue their mission.

In addition to that, in order to make sure everybody understood the costs of repairs to the building, I was able to get a well known building exterior restorer to participate, on a pro bono basis, because the Commission didn't have within its budget monies to retain somebody, to go over the estimates that were submitted by the church, and to verify whether or not they were reasonable or inflated. As it turns out, on both cases, the Commission received reports back from these two pro bono sources, one the City of New York and one a private contractor, that the material being submitted to us by the church was inflated. And that the cost of making changes to the building, and repairing the building to make it more suitable for what the church said it wanted to do on the site, could easily have been done. I think it was quite a case of their

submitting prices in the range of six million dollars versus our estimates talking about three million dollars, big difference.

So we turned it down, and they proceeded immediately to go off to court. And the court that they chose to go to was the federal court. And without making this wonderful story any longer, if you have time you should look into it, read the materials and understand how people on the Commission's staff like Dorothy Miner, our counsel, and the head of our preservation department, head of our research department, Marjorie Pearson, and Bill, whose name I am forget, head of preservation, all worked together in a lockstep way showing that we did the right thing. And the public and the press even thought that we did an even-handed approach to this.

When it went to court, we all were on tether hooks trying to see if we would win in court. And years later, I guess almost towards the end of the '80s, we got a court decision from Judge [John E.] Sprizzo, federal judge, saying that the case was handled properly, and that the addition could not go forward as requested under the hardship provisions. So it was a tremendous victory. And part of that had to do with the argument that was raised during the Flynn-Walsh situation. But most of it, almost all of it, was dependent upon the hard work of the Commission, and the City of New York, and all of the other people who were on our side so to speak helping us get it done.

Q1: Great. Do you need a water break after that one?

Norman: No. No. No.

Q1: Okay.

Norman: I'm on a roll now. Let's go. Let's go.

Q1: You are on a roll *[laughs]*.

Norman: Let's go.

Q1: Okay. So what are you most proud of having accomplished as LPC chair?

Norman: I think if anyone asked me what I am most proud of accomplishing as the LPC chair, I would have to say that that list could be long, and I'm not a person who is a braggart. So I'm going to tailor it down to just a few items that made me feel good, and from what I could tell from the press and people who followed the Commission closely from the communities, would agree with.

One of the things that the Commission did, I believe, was to tackle difficult situations head on.

We didn't try to shrink away and say, oh, no, we can't handle that, we won't do that.

Simultaneously, we had to take care of St. Bart's, we had to take care of Coty Rizzoli, we had to take care of the Broadway theaters, we had to move our office three times because of losing our lease and waiting to find a new place and we were in interim quarters, and never missed a beat.

We conducted ourselves as if we were always open, and we were. We never postponed a public hearing or a Commission meeting.

So those are the things that I look back on and think that it wasn't a bad run. We did our job. It could have been better I suppose. But given what the circumstances were, I think that anyone who is being objective would say that yes, you did a good job and it was terrific. There is however a fly in the ointment. Doing all those things meant that we weren't able to keep up with the designation flow in a way that kept pace with prior years and prior chairpersons. And that was too bad. It's a shortcoming. Of course when you understand how the Commission operates, you have to take into account that Ladies' Mile, the research, and the other things done to prepare for that, all happened on my watch. The Upper West Side public hearings and investigations all happened on my watch. The designations though happened on the succeeding chairman's watch, so I didn't get credit for that. I'm not being a crybaby. But I think I should have gotten some credit for at least setting the stage for that.

But that's the way the Commission works. Each chairperson is always subject to taking advantage of getting the benefit of his predecessor's workload maturing enough after the predecessor left. And the new person, new chairperson, comes in and takes advantage of that, in terms of the record keeping that some people like to keep.

Q1: Great.

Q2: Do you want to take a breather or just keep going?

Norman: No, let's keep going.

Q1: Okay. You hit upon the response to criticism, so we're done with that.

Q2: Actually, let me just pause the cameras for a second, as I've just had a new thought.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: Okay. So looking forward. So those are the two key things left to cover.

Q2: Excellent. Let me just clap [*claps*].

Q1: Gene, do you want to touch upon the Tony Tung incident?

Norman: An interview of this type would not be doing justice to my tenure without having to talk about what happened regarding the New York Public Library application, and what people have come to call the Tony Tung affair. Just the background of that, one has to keep in mind that Tony Tung was on the Commission prior to my getting there. He's an architect designer of, I would say, a lot of talent, and Tony was an intelligent contributing person on the Commission during my tenure there with him. I thought of him as a friend and I believe at the time, he thought of me as a friend. What happened is a shortcoming on the part of everybody involved I suppose, but it happened, and Tony was removed from the Commission and not reappointed. Now, let's talk about what led to that.

The public library [Stephen A. Schwarzman Building] on 42nd Street made an application to the Landmarks Commission because it's a landmarked building, and Bryant Park right behind the library is also a landmarked site. The application was in two parts so to speak. One part was to allow underground stack areas to be built in Bryant Park connected to the library as a repository for some of their material, and manuscripts, and books underground in a safe environment. And at that the same time, it was thought that by erecting one or two restaurants in Bryant Park, west of the rear wall of the library, but not touching it, would be a good thing to do to bring in more traffic into Bryant Park, and to make sure that Bryant Park stopped being a place where drugs were being sold, a place where people felt unsafe, and a place where there wasn't much activity going on in terms of being able to get a cool drink, or a hot dog, or anything, in Bryant Park at that time.

Well, the Commission looked at the application, came in, we deliberated upon it, and immediately we found that the underground stacks, the creation of an underground stack area, was not a problem. We felt that the design for that, and the reconstruction of the lawn areas, and paving areas, and so on, could all happen without any lasting effect, and could be repaired, and just reworked, and still get the proper facilities underground. On the other hand, the restaurant structures, which were designed by the firm of Hardy Holzman [and] Pfeiffer [Associates]—I only throw that in because they were nicely designed structures. But they were not compatible with the rear of the public library building, because that building was designed so that the stack areas face out on Bryant Park. And in fact, the fenestration for that area, on the building was a series of slit-like vertical windows, which formed the aisle ways between the stack areas. So it

was a reflection of form following function. Like many other parts of the library building it's a wonderful design.

We on the Commission unanimously voted not to send back a positive report for the inclusion of library—not library but restaurant facilities, at the rear of the library building. And I want to just say it again, it was a unanimous vote that was taken. Somehow people forgot that, and made it seem as if there were two factions voting, and there was a faction led by Tony Tung saying, “That you shouldn't do this,” and a faction led by, I don't know who, maybe me, well, that's incorrect, saying that because it was a city project let's go ahead and do this, forgetting about the harm that it was doing to the library building. That's speculation on my part but I've heard people sort of say that.

In any event, it was a unanimous decision; one that I knew was not going to make people at the library or the Bryant Park restoration area, or city hall, very happy about. And you have to keep in mind that when the Commission does an application, takes action on an application by a city owned property submitted by a city agency, it's a report that goes back that's not binding in any way. When we do an application for private ownership, our action is a binding action, and the ownership has to abide by what the decision of the Commission ended up being. On the other hand, if its city owned, it's a report that goes back, not binding, and the agencies involved usually follow the report but don't have to. Well, that caused some confusion. But what I just stated is in fact what happened.

The next thing that happened is that shortly after that there was a hue and cry coming from various sources about how the Commission acted inappropriately and should have let this restaurant scheme go by. Tony Tung called me up and said that he was, or he had, prepared a letter signed by him, explained the position of the Commission as to what happened, and that letter was going to be published in *The New York Times* on its Op-Ed page. I told Tony that I didn't think that was a proper thing for him to do as a commissioner, and that if there's a response that we have to make to *The New York Times*, or anybody else, it has to be done through me and my office as chairman at the Commission.

In a subsequent phone call shortly afterwards, Tony told me he was withdrawing the letter and it would not be published. I thought that was a good thing. But it made me question Tony's judgment as to who would be the spokesman for the Commission. As it turns out, Tony was also up for reappointment, and I was of a mind to allow that to happen up until this incident, and once this incident happened I felt that it was a question of judgment that I did not any longer support Tony, and he was not reappointed. That created a firestorm. For reasons still unclear to me, there were certain factions in the community, and elsewhere, who felt that Tony had been abused, and that they didn't understand why he wasn't appointed.

I guess people still think that way in some instances, but time heals all sorts of wounds. It was a difficult replacement that had to be found—a difficult time to find a replacement for Tony—and a replacement was found, a landscape architect from Staten Island. That was one of the requirements that we needed to fulfill in not reappointing Tony, we needed a person from the borough of Staten Island. The makeup of the Commission is such that we must have at least one

person from each of the five boroughs. And we were able to find a landscape architect that served very well on the Commission and—

Q1: Pablo [*crosstalk*].

Norman: —Lee Weintraub was his name, and he, I think, did a very credible, outstanding job as a commissioner during my tenure while we were together on the Commission. Tony Tung and I did not speak for a while, because of what went on. Years later I guess it was that we had a kind of *rapprochement* and we speak to each other in amicable ways now, and I think we've put it behind us. And as far as I'm concerned, it's an unfortunate thing that happened, and I regret it, and it took a lot of energy away from doing other things at the Commission while that was all going on.

I'm very sorry now that it turned out that way but I still feel that I was in the right and that the chairman of the Commission is the one who has to speak, and make a decision, as to how the Commission will respond to criticism, praise, or detrimental remarks being made in the press, or elsewhere, and not individual commissioners on the Commission. There should never be any confusion as to the actual official position of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Q1: Gene, this is just going to be [*crosstalk*].

[INTERRUPTION]

Q2: Hold on, I'm just going to get a clap [*claps*].

Q1: Okay. Just touching upon, at the beginning we had started to discuss whether we wanted to talk about future questions. But you started to respond to the question of what should the Commission do moving forward. Based on your experiences as LPC chair, what direction do you think the Commission needs to take moving forward?

Norman: Well, we're at the point now when this interview is starting to wrap up and I guess I should indicate what in my judgment the Commission needs to do going forward. And I have to say that I have observed the Commission from a distance most times, since I left the Commission. I did appear as a speaker offering testimony on a few occasions in that period, and will, in future periods if necessary, to support the Commission's work, and to also point out how it can do a better job.

And one of the things that I think the Commission has to find ways of doing is to close the, what appears to me to be a breach between the community and the actions of the Commission. Right now, the community appears to be in an adversarial position with the Commission time and time again. And it comes about because of a lack of understanding on both parts. The Commission doesn't really understand the community when it raises issues, and the community doesn't understand the Commission when it tries to go about its work in ways that it can accomplish its work. So that needs to change. I think during my tenure one of the things that I felt was very important, and could always call upon, was community support for what we were doing. And while the community's positions on items was never the reason why we did something, we

certainly paid close attention to what they wanted to do, and we had a lot of good dialogue with the community, and I think it ended up in ways of both of us, the community and the Commission, getting our work done in ways that made sense.

So I'd like to see the Commission somehow find a way to make the community believe that it supports the Commission and the Commission supports the community's desires. Some of this revolves around designations, and how slowly it takes, and how designations are resolved and identified, and some of that has to do with resources that come to the Commission. And what better way to have more resources come to the Commission than having an active community put pressure on the mayor's office, and whomever else, management and budget, or whatever you want to call it, to give more attention and money to the Landmarks Commission. So the Commission would benefit by having an active community supporting it when things are necessary and needed.

In addition, in order to get designations approved through the council now, it's always wonderful and good to have a community actively approach council members and get them on the side of the Commission, and not just sit by and say, oh well, we're not interested in that. So that's one thing I think that work should be done to bring those two points of view closer together.

I also think that the Commission has to continue trying to find ways to broaden its outreach in general. I think that it needs to, whenever possible, get more diversity among its membership. It needs to get younger people involved, and I think that it has tried, and must continue to try, to get the Board of Education—or the Education Department I guess it's called now—to help get the

young students of the city to become more knowledgeable about the landmark process, because after all, most of what we're doing we're doing for the future. We are safeguarding our history and our architectural treasures for the future. What better way to do that than to make sure the future is more aware of what's going on and begin to play a role as early as possible.

I would hope that going forward that those two areas get worked upon and there's an improvement in both of those two areas.

Q1: Great.

Norman: I'm talked out.

Q1: Gene, we've covered everything.

Norman: Great.

Q1: This was fantastic. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]