



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Ken Golding

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

JAYAMAHA: This is Dilshika Jayamaha. I am interviewing Ken Golding, director of the Market Row streets merchants' association, for the Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project. It's May 18, 2009, and we're meeting at Coldwell-Banker premises at 605 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, Washington, DC.

Thank you very much, Ken, for agreeing to talk with us today. And to start things off, if you could tell us a little bit about your involvement with Eastern Market.

GOLDING: Sure. I'm the president of Market Row Association, which is an association of merchants and owners on Seventh Street, all the way from North Carolina to Pennsylvania Avenue. And I'm also a developer and I have built buildings on Seventh and Pennsylvania Avenue SE, such as the 660 Pennsylvania Avenue where Le Pain Quotidian is, and Yes! Organic Market, and where Dawn Price and Montmartre are, as well as the National Association for Home Care and 216 Seventh Street. So that's my involvement.

JAYAMAHA: And since when have you—let's say been involved with the Market in an official capacity?

GOLDING: My involvement is working with EMCAC, Eastern Market Citizens Advisory Commission, and then primarily with Monte Edwards—and I, together, in the year 2000, decided we would like to see the street repaved and renovated. And to that extent, we've spent the last nine, almost 10 years, the fruition of which you see today, a brand new street, new sidewalks, new curb and gutter, new signage, Washington globe lights. And perhaps my pet project—this is worthy of note—is that I said five years ago that you needed to put pavers down in front of the Market to make it a courtyard, a piazza, a plaza, anything that would induce people to walk there. And thankfully, the city saw the light and has done that, so when it's done, which should be in another month, it will look spectacular.

JAYAMAHA: I think I agree with you there, because I've just seen the work that's been happening, and it seems—

GOLDING: Looks great, doesn't it?

JAYAMAHA: it's very pretty. If you could talk a little bit about your work as the director of the Market Row street merchants, in that role, what types of work you do and what have you been doing in that position thus far?

GOLDING: Well, as president, I rekindled the interest in that association, which dates back to the early 1980s but hadn't done much. But with the advent of the renovation of the street and the fire at the Market,

there was a need for the merchants on Seventh Street, and the owners, to have a voice on what happens on Seventh Street. And that would include the conduction of the Market itself, the outdoor flea market, the vendors, and so forth. So our function is to weigh in on things that mean a lot to us, and in particular for example, during the fire, with the temporary Market open, the merchants—the bricks and mortar merchants, how we like to think of ourselves—had their traffic impeded and their view impeded by the way the vendors were set up. So that's an issue. The quality of vendors and vendors that would compete directly with the bricks and mortar is an issue. And we have opinions and positions on that. And parking, the trucks—all that stuff impacts in some way the merchants, so they have a say in that. They took a real hit with the fire, a real hit with the renovation of the street and they sent letters off to Councilman and to the Mayor to see if they could get some relief in that regard. And that's the role we play, one of the roles.

JAYAMAHA: And in context of negotiating some of those issues with the various agencies, EMCAC, the District government, and so on, could you talk a little bit through the process of how you sort of negotiate what is good on the one hand for the community, for the patrons, but also for the brick and mortar merchants as you said?

GOLDING: Sure. Well, there are several issues, some of which work in concert with EMCAC and the Market. We all want to see more traffic there. We all want to see a great looking street. We all want to see it properly managed. So in that regard, Market Row Association and the Eastern Market have a lot in common. The one thing that they may not have in common is that the bricks and mortar people, who pay anywhere from 250 to half a million dollars in real estate taxes, want to make sure that their businesses are open and available and accessible, and not blocked by flea market or other vendors and to make sure that the area is clean and properly managed. So whereas some of that overlaps, that is a primary concern of theirs. And so we work in concert for the most part with the Market in that regard.

With the city, we are directly involved in inviting the Office of Property Management and the DC Department of Transportation representatives to come to our meetings, to explain and to work together. We're doing that right now, on a parking plan for cars and a parking plan for merchants and a parking plan for trucks. And also a layout plan for how the vendors in the street could actually assemble and work in concert with the retailers on the street—the bricks and mortar people—so that there's a flow of traffic and everybody's visible and in the best of all possible worlds, the optimal world would occur. And that's where we are today. And I think we're about to reach an agreement with everybody.

JAYAMAHA: And is it possible to share with us a few of the details in terms of where you would

GOLDING: I could show you the plan, but it's not that complicated; there's nothing, it's not that—it's not rocket science. The merchants would be back-to-back down the middle of the street facing the stalls at

Eastern Market and, to the East, the shops on the other side of Seventh Street. This means, though, that Seventh Street would remain closed on weekends, which is a hot issue in my group, because many of the merchants in the 200 block want to see the street opened on weekends. And the majority do, in fact. Over my objections—I would like to see it closed. But, be that as it may, we'll see how that works out. That's not my decision to make, that's the city decision and the community decision.

JAYAMAHA: And in terms of things like parking, would it be possible to use the Hine playground space, maybe demarcating it for parking if at any point—I'm just sort of suggesting

GOLDING: Well, Hine is used now weekdays but weekends that's a problem because the flea market's there. I'm one of the groups that responded to the RFP from the city to redevelop Hine. And in our proposal, and I think in many of the proposals, there's underground parking, which should be great. It would be available on weekends particularly since our proposal includes office, so they're not going to be there on the weekends. So we'd have parking for merchants, shoppers, and guests and so forth on the weekends in a scenario like that. But that is probably five—three to five years away.

JAYAMAHA: And in the interim, what would you suggest?

GOLDING: Well, there are a lot of surface parking lots that seem to be underutilized. The one at Citicorp, 600 Penn, there's ways to do short-term meters on North Carolina and elsewhere. You do have a 20 billion dollar mass transit system that we should rely on more than we already do. There are places to put trucks. I was talking to Barry Margeson of OPM, and one idea is to put the trucks on C Street. Just close that off to cars and put the trucks there. So they no longer are on the Seventh Street, blocking the view, blocking the traffic, and in all ways, in my opinion, impeding the traffic flow. So, that's I think a good plan for trucks. Cars: always a problem in every city. So that would be it on that.

JAYAMAHA: It's good to sort of see everybody getting involved in that process. Do you think that the brick and mortar merchants would be sort of willing to consider maybe having the trucks on C Street and try to work out some kind of

GOLDING: Oh, absolutely. I think that would be something they'd prefer. They would like to get the trucks off of Seventh Street. Many of them, you know, feel an empathy for the merchants on Seventh Street, because of course they've always had their trucks there. But I've asked them to stop thinking about everybody else and think about what they want first. And when you do that, they'd like to see the trucks gone. And I think you need to shoot not for making one group happier than the other; what you've got to shoot for is the thing that works best for the community. That would be first. What do you think works best for the community? From what I hear, having the street closed on the weekends and the trucks gone

and turning that into a pedestrian marketplace on weekends works. That's what I hear from the majority of people. It's not scientific, it's not empir—it's empirical. Excuse me, it's not scientific or empirical, it's anecdotal. But that's what I hear.

JAYAMAHA: Right. If you could talk a little bit about—maybe we'll sort of revisit that in a bit—if you could talk a little bit about sort of what happened when the fire took place. Sort of what was your involvement? How did you reach out to the bricks and mortar merchants? Was there any kind of coordination, any kind of sort of assistance between them and the Eastern Market merchants who were affected by the process or directly affected by the fire?

GOLDING: Well, well, I'll tell you—what I can address is that the money I had spent 10 years setting aside for the renovation of the street was used to immediately build the temporary market. [laughs] It's been refunded, and the work's been done, so that's, you know, that's over with. I think that the merchants on the 200 block were devastated. Everybody was devastated. And the fact that the Market opened up quickly and the Mayor was quite responsive, was a relief to all, and it's helped.

Actually, what's interesting—if I may digress a bit—I've started this marketing committee, composed of EMCAC, CHAMPS, the BID [business improvement district], I'm on the Board of the BID, Market Row Association, and ... um, I'm sure I'm leaving somebody out, to try to find a way—Cultural Tourism is another member—to find a way to promote the street when the street is completed. Now they're be a promotion, the Mayor will be present, in June, but that's only with the opening of the Market. The south side of Seventh Street will not be open and will take another three months, open at the end of September or the beginning of October. So I was thinking, and I think others feel the same way, that maybe we have to take it on ourselves to do a promotional, to do a grand opening that attracts not just the neighborhood, which is the June one, but the regional attract, magnet. It should be a catalyst for making the region aware of the fact that this fabulous, you know, amenity exists in Washington.

And expanding on that thought, I've always felt, and my vision for this street would be—you know how great cities around the world, and you know, you're from the Orient, or the subcontinent. You know that great cities have great markets. You have San Telmo in Buenos Aires, you have the Paris market, the Lyon market, you have great markets in Montevideo, and Tokyo—I've been to a phenomenal outside market. That's what makes a great city great, in many respects. So Washington could make this a showcase for the United States, at least for Washington. And how can they do that? Well, here they have the oldest market, and one of the most beautiful markets, on the East Coast. And they have this fabulous street in front of it. When Hine gets done—in our project at Hine, C Streets goes through to Eighth Street, and we would do it in pavers just like in front of the Market. Continue it down to the Metro plaza—

another committee I'm on—and convert that disparate pieces of park into one park, so there'd be a circle, or a square. And suddenly you'd have this wonderful situation where you could flea markets, arts and crafts markets, farmers markets—you could do three to five days a week and have it flow all the way to Eighth Street, which'd now be physically and visually connected, with the re-doing of the Metro. And Hine's gone. And so you could have a place where the people who come to the city who are sick of looking at museums all day long, and they don't want to go inside to their hotel but have a market to go to. That would be an exciting thing to see.

JAYAMAHA: That is indeed an exciting idea. And so you're coordinating with some of the entities that you mentioned earlier, at least for this piece of the work, not so much the broader plan just now, in terms of the opening of the Market. Could you talk a little bit about some of the specifics in terms of how you would work with those entities to promote the Market?

GOLDING: Well, that's one of the reasons I invited everybody. Because everybody's doing their own independent plan—everybody has a web page, everybody's thinking about it, but nobody's doing it. So I said maybe we ought—and I'm not a marketing guy, but maybe we ought to sit in a room together and somebody will take ownership and maybe that's going to have to be this committee. I said, you know, to all the representatives of the different organizations, I said if we want to do a Fall opening marketing campaign that's a week or a month or whatever we want to do it, we have to, you know, not just talk about it we actually have to do it, come up with a plan that's realistic and get money for it. And let's get in sync and see if we want to do that. See, each of us is responsible for going back to our constituency and asking if they agree with this. And if they do, then we meet again and we decide on a plan and they we try to get the money for it. And I would include EMCAC, it would include the Eastern Market, it would include Market Row Association, it would include Barracks Row. It would include CHAMPS, it would include to some extent the Business Improvement District. And hopefully Cultural Tourism could give us some advice and has a 16,000 person website—client base—and get the word out. So this could be a metropolitan-wide event. You know?

JAYAMAHA: And this would be, if at all possible, in the Fall, you're thinking about it?

GOLDING: In the Fall, right. Well, when the street's done. It would be a completion of Seventh Street—you know, everything will be done, the sidewalks, the street, the curb gutter, the lights, trash, everything will be done and the contractors will be gone.

JAYAMAHA: And on that subject, Ken, the Barracks Row Main Street, the Capitol Hill town square project, I believe. Would that be also part of it in terms of what you're visualizing?

GOLDING: That celebration version would include Barracks Row, the Metro, from what it is right now, and Seventh Street. And it would wrap around retail on Pennsylvania. Yeah, that would be the definit—the idea is to get, you have to have a center, you have to have enough density, enough activity for somebody to want to come there from Maryland, Virginia, or other neighborhoods in the District. And the way to do that is to make it encompass that whole area. And it's like—and I think this is just the beginning and when Hine gets done, that project, we'll have enough gravitas, you know, to be able to compete effectively with what I fear, the other competitors, which includes the Navy Yard, the Transportation center down—the Department of Transportation's market down there. Of course, all these neighborhood markets in Dupont and Georgetown and Bethesda. And you know, someday I can guarantee you Whole Foods is going to open a store down here somewhere, somewhere around the baseball stadium, and the baseball stadium as a competitor, and the waterfront. In order to be competitive, we have to put it all together. It's no longer just you know, *fait accompli*. You have to make it happen.

JAYAMAHA: And on the subject of making it competitive, one of the things that I've sort of heard during the course of interviews from various people is the potential competition—or the competition—between Harris Teeter and the Market. But also having said that, that the Market as you were explaining in some ways has a unique place in the neighborhood, it caters to a sort of segment of people in terms of what your needs are. It doesn't carry everything and anything and sort of more specialized things that are being sold at the Market. Sort of, keeping all of that in mind, again getting back to sort of brick and mortar vendors, how would you overcome some of the competition between them and the Eastern Market sort of vendors and the merchants who are there—the vendors who are there during the weekend and the regular merchants? Is there some way to sort of balance things, again keeping the re-opening and the bigger picture in mind? Sort of where you are hoping to take

GOLDING: Well the big picture is, you know, the more the merrier. If you had more restaurants, that's always good. It brings more people. If you had more dry goods, it's great. In fact, I always think dry goods are preferable, but the problem with dry goods is landlords—you know, they're harder to keep as a tenant. You don't pay as much rent as a restaurant does. But you need dry goods to attract people other than just people who want to eat. People want to shop for other things than just food—restaurants. And we have some good dry goods on Seventh Street and I'd like to improve that. And one of the things I'm going to propose to the Mayor on our Hine submittal is that we are very good at local retailers. I'm into getting local and regional retailers. I don't believe in franchises and if I can avoid them, I will. I mean, national franchises are like a death knell in my opinion in any market. I've seen a lot of markets around the world and I can tell you if—only in the United States do we have retailers like, these franchises like we do here. You can go to Toronto and walk on Young Street and it's nothing but Mom and Pop shops

and they're all wonderful. And that's true with everywhere, practically everywhere you go except in the United States. And why would you go from Boston to Los Angeles to shop at the same stores? You wouldn't do that. So the idea—and I think that's a resurgence that's occurring in this country. So that's something I would really want to put into the Hine site.

JAYAMAHA: In terms of the sort of broader neighborhood—again, if you could remind me Ken, how long have you been living in this area?

GOLDING: I don't live in the area. I've been working in this area for 25 years.

JAYAMAHA: Okay.

GOLDING: I've done a dozen buildings here. They've all won local, national and some international awards. Not just for architecture but for developers as well.

JAYAMAHA: I see. And what are some of the

GOLDING: We're finalists in the Urban Land Institute three years ago. We won the charter award from the Congress for New Urbanism, and we've won multiple local and design awards from the AIAA and some national awards, gold medal, gold and silver—you know, I actually don't know all of them. We've got a list on the website. We won historic preservation awards, we won the Mayor's award—preservation, renovation, restoration of 300 Independence. You know we built townhouses over—the Lenox townhouses over at G and Fifth and Fourth.

I've done projects all around the country. I mean I don't only just do them here. I did the Willard Hotel downtown. And I've done—I'm a partner in hotels in Virginia, and I've done boatyards in Massachusetts. I did a 450 unit New Urbanist community outside of Santa Fe, I'm a partner on that. And I've done solar powered buildings in Colorado and New Mexico and Arizona. And I got stuff in Florida that I operate with my brother-in-law, shopping centers. So I've done a lot. I've been around. But I think the Hill is the most exciting area of all. And this market happens to be the best market in the United States [ed: meaning real estate].

JAYAMAHA: On that subject, could you tell us a little bit about maybe some things about the Market building itself, in terms of what the rehabilitation of the original building. Have you seen anything that's, again from your experience, unusual or unique that you could maybe share with us?

GOLDING: Well, what they did is right. I mean, they had good people overseeing it and good architect. I forgot the architect's name, I know him, and he's very good. He's all about restoration but he's also about light and air. So they've got—and I know the merchants were adverse to air—light—because they said

the light has infra-red and ultra-violet so you get the heat in and deterioration of food products and so forth. But you know they found a light that screens that stuff, and so now you've got great so-called "spectrum visible" light without the deleterious effects of infra-red and ultra-violet. And you've got air—they've ventilated the darn place and they got those stupid freezers and refrigerators out of there so you can see. It's all about air and light and visibility. Ditto for the street. Getting those trucks out of there now enables you to see—oh, there is another part of Seventh Street—there's a right side of Seventh Street! An east side—or west side I've never seen before. So it's inside and outside it's the same thing: open it up, make it visible and clean. Clean is another one. So hopefully these merchants will keep it clean.

JAYAMAHA: And how could the brick and mortar sort of merchants and the merchants inside the Market and the vendors—are there ways you could sort of promote how so they could sort of complement each other in terms of work, helping each other, are there any suggestions you could make?

GOLDING: Well, thankfully the city paid for this one—on the Market. The merchants themselves all need to upgrade. Those that have facades that need to be cleaned up should. I won't mention any names, but you know the fact that the city went out of the way to put in a new sidewalk for these people, and you may not have noticed but that sidewalk had ruts and holes and different elevations and concrete pads on it and so forth. The city went in and tore it all out. Put down one level, all brick. And did a big favor for everybody. So now, it's—I think the merchants have an obligation as the Market picks up, to clean up their act and clean the windows, paint their stores, and renovate the facades where needed.

JAYAMAHA: And things like signage—have you been talking a bit about that as well, because one of the sort of challenges—again, getting back to the brick and mortar merchants—is the trucks are blocking the view or some of the vendors blocking the view but also sometimes their own signage potentially may not be prominent enough or

GOLDING: There's a sign code in the city and they just need to comply with the sign code and make sure they do it. I mean, if the street looks good and the facades are new, the sign is as important as the merchandise in the window. I keep trying to tell retailers, "You don't need to put the crap on your windows, they can't see what—if you're so ashamed of what you're selling you don't want anybody to see it, is that the idea here?" It's amazing to me how much they put on their windows. I do not allow it on—I mean, if you go down to LPQ, Le Pain Quotidian, or you look at Peregrine, they've got nothing on their windows. I had to fight Greenworks, the new florist, to get rid of all those vinyl décor they wanted to put on their window. I wouldn't want—flowers look a lot better than vinyl, but it's the same with the 200 block. I mean you've just got to make sure they don't mess their windows up.

JAYAMAHA: Do you work that out with them on a sort of one-on-one individual basis, or do you go and talk to them, or...

GOLDING: I try. I fight it all the time. I go down there and I rip some of this stuff off sometimes and so forth. It's just a constant battle. It's an education.

JAYAMAHA: Do you think there would be something you could do in that sense, maybe, I don't know, bring a designer in, maybe I'm overreaching at this point, but would it be useful to have somebody or entity come in and

GOLDING: It may be. I don't need it on my properties. I know what to do. But on the 200 block—and other merchants, yeah, maybe. I mean we have some recalcitrant owners. I won't mention names, but there's a guy at ground zero on the 200 block in a building I built—you know, I tried to put a retailer in there and he decided to put in a medical welfare program on the first floor. After the city just spent 30 million and making that a beautiful street for retailers, and adjacent to a 20 billion dollar Metro, he decides to put in a—something that would be very contrary to the good will of the street. I don't know what that's about. I don't know why people do those things but they do. So, that's the kind of battle we face all the time—that's a neighborhood. [laughs] That's called a neighborhood!

JAYAMAHA: And speaking of the neighborhood, will you be able to share with us a little bit about sort of what are the fundamental changes again through your experience, even if it's a personal experience we'd be happy to hear that if you're willing to share it with us. Through your involvement in the city and this particular neighborhood for last 20 plus years.

GOLDING: Right. What'd you want me to do? Share—repeat the first part.

JAYAMAHA: Certainly. If there's anything you could share with us about sort of what you've seen in terms of the changes over a period of time, in terms of the Market, but hey but

GOLDING: Yeah, well, you know, the reason we won the Congress of Urbanism charter award in 2003 was for the project on the corner of Seventh and Penn, because it turned the neighborhood around. In many ways, it was the catalyst. You know, at that time, in 1989, when I put Bread and Chocolate in there, I had to cajole them to come in. I mean it wasn't an easy thing to get them to come to the Hill. But over the course of the next 10 years, the Hill—that street and the Hill became transformed. It suddenly help—it wasn't just me, it was a lot of factors. But the idea that somebody was willing to invest that much money into a block was part of the inspiration and the catalyst for the rest of the street in many ways. I mean, I—you know, it's the way it works in a neighborhood. And it's true, if one person can control a block you can do some wonderful things with design and that becomes a stepping stone to a lot of other people

taking part in renovating their buildings. Just like Eighth Street. You know, the city went in and rebuilt Eighth Street and made it into a beautiful street and then everybody said, “Let’s go there.” You know, there [not clear] once the Market picked up and now everybody thinks it’s a done deal. But that’s how that happens—someone has to take the risk. And I thought that we took the risk with that corner, you know, 20 years ago.

JAYAMAHA: That’s wonderful. I’m going to just pause here for a moment.

GOLDING: Sure.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

JAYAMAHA: So, picking up from where we stopped and given our conversation about sort of your vision and what you’ve been doing for the neighborhood, if you could quickly tell us maybe a little bit about in terms of the second life of the Market as it were for Eastern Market and this neighborhood. I understand sort of visually what you’re trying to do—you sort of talked to us about it—but in terms of the overall neighborhood, how Eastern Market impacts the neighborhood, do you have any sort of thoughts on that, something you’d like to see, in terms of how the neighborhood would move on or change around the Market?

GOLDING: Sure. Am I on tape?

JAYAMAHA: Yes.

GOLDING: I can’t add anything new—I can add a few new things though. I think the Market, when it opens, and I know they’re obligated to keep the existing merchants, but as I said, we have to be competitive so things have to change. And I know the neighborhood would like to see this become a great market. And what does it take to be a great market? Well, in my opinion, you have to have top merchants. You have to have farmers that are selling original products and not reselling—no one should be reselling anything. I mean, if you want to compete with these other markets around the city, you’ve got to be doing what they’re doing and better. And the reselling that goes on is a no-no and that has to come to a stop. And that comes to a stop by having an overview or committee that makes sure, and screens, that these people aren’t allowed on there that are doing that, are encouraged, or told to change. That’s number one.

There is a movement in this country to only be selling things from the region and only eating things that are grown in the region, that sort of thing—that may be faddish, trendish, I don’t know but right now that’s where it’s at, so we should try to be like that. I don’t think it’s a bad thing actually [chuckles] —if

you want to be green and you want to be organic, that's what you should do. So that's another part of it. I have been to some amazing markets, and I'm sure you have too, where there's great originality. There are people selling things and merchandise—I can't even tell you what they are, but there must be dozens of different vendors selling unique items. Even my brother used to sell Indian gods, hand cut wooden Indian gods, from India, back in the early '90s because he lived in India, he lived in Benares for five years. But that kind of thing. We need to be there. And if you were to take this vision I mentioned where it goes all the way down to the Metro and all the way over to Eighth Street, which would be a fraction of the markets that I've seen in other cities. I mean just a fraction. These other markets go on for blocks. You know, remarkable things. Antiques—I mean just, I can't even—I mean there are thousands of items. We could do that. And we can do that. Not just the food, not just the regional, but also do arts and crafts and antiques and God knows what else that's original and creative. And artistic. We can be a fabulous place and that's what I'd like to see the Market become. Not just the Market but the whole area.

JAYAMAHA: Thank you very much. Thanks so much, Ken, for sharing and for being interviewed.

GOLDING: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW