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University of California
Berkeley, California

Paul Nahm:
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens
in 2008

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Paul Nahm, "Oakland Army Base Oral History Project" conducted by Lisa Rubens in 2008, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2008.

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Interview #1: 10-14-08

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01-00:00:00

Rubens: Could you please state for the record your name and your title—how you currently identify yourself?

01-00:00:09

Nahm: My name's Paul Nahm. I'm currently director of operations for the District Council Sixteen Journeyman and Apprenticeship Training Trust Fund. It represents apprenticeship programs with about 3,000 apprentices enrolled in the program and represents everything west of Fresno and parts northern Nevada, so it's a big area.

01-00:00:35

Rubens: So you're placing people in areas.

01-00:00:37

Nahm: I train people. I'm the operations manager over four trade programs, and each program, combined total, about 3,000 apprentices.

01-00:00:50

Rubens: Now how is it that you first came to encounter the Oakland Army Base? Because you're going to be the first director of OBRA, but there may be some history prior to that. And perhaps we would should start with how you settled in Oakland.

01-00:01:05

Nahm: Well, first off, I'm born and raised here. I've been in San Leandro for sixty years. I was active in the community. My mother ran for city council—she was the first woman to run for city council in San Leandro.

01-00:01:18

Rubens: What was her name?

01-00:01:19

Nahm: Marge Nahm, back in 1963. And my uncle was a councilman, and I became a city councilman. I was commissioner from 1979 to 1993 and councilman from 1993 to 1994. So the family was active in community affairs. Simultaneous to all this, I was an employee at the Alameda Naval Air Station. And I first got involved in military base closure issues in 1981, when there was movements afoot in Congress and talk about closing military bases. And we were targeted in large part because there was a liberal congressional delegation—none in particular, but as a group—that just gave the Pentagon fits every time they had a defense budget. And we kept getting looked at. So I was out with Chambers of Commerce all over the East Bay, sending letters and memos and getting—

So when they first started doing this seriously—it first came on the radar in '81, but they first made an attempt to close bases in '88—and we stopped them. They tried us again in '91 at Alameda, and we stopped them again

in '91. They finally took out Alameda Naval Air Station in 1993, and the Oakland Naval Hospital at Oak Knoll. It was at that time that I left my civilian employment with the Navy and went to work with Alameda County as their liaison on base closure from the county administrator's office to make sure that the government of Alameda County was seeing to it that the workers, and their rights, and proper training programs and retraining programs, and things like that were moving smoothly, and that they had a sounding board—a person to talk to.

As they went, and anything that would come up—I'm not getting trained properly, I'm not this, I'm not that—they would bring it to me because I had a face with those folks. And they would come to me, and I would then take it to the appropriate authority to see what could be done to correct and address the situation. And sometimes it was just a matter of me going to the base and setting down with the gentleman in charge, who is a marvelous human being, but he's trying to deal with the logistics of 3,000 people being displaced and trying to work with job retraining, so sometimes, he just needed to get somebody to squeeze the soap up to the top. So I would just sit down with him, and we'd have a conversation, what about this. And he'd say, I can look into that, and [snaps] we'd get the problem solved. He was that kind of guy, and he was very effective in that position, so it worked out very well.

Then they were creating OBRA, and when they created OBRA, I applied for and was selected as the first executive director over the Oakland Base Reuse Authority.

01-00:04:22

Rubens:

OBRA was a—

01-00:04:23

Nahm:

It was a joint powers authority. And while I was with the county, I helped write the governance for the Oakland-based Reuse Authority and the Alameda Reuse and Redevelopment Authority at the Naval Air Station in Alameda. And then, because I was familiar with it and all the governance, I was a logical person to certainly apply for this OBRA position that came up, and I was, in fact, selected as their first director—executive director, I should say—and then worked directly for and with the city manager's office. It was not a political appointment; I worked as an employee of the city manager. So it was he or she were the individual that I was accountable to. And they did it that way specifically so there was nobody that—no council member, no mayor, anyone else—could put undue pressure on the executive director. They wanted a transparent process. And it worked very effectively. Unfortunately, Craig Kocian, who was a city manager at the time—was a fine individual—Craig had some tragedy in his family. His son was killed unexpectedly, and Craig left Oakland to pursue other things. A gentleman by the name of Kofi Bonner had been brought in as an economic development director from the city of Emeryville, and when Craig left, they dual-hatted poor Kofi, and Kofi

had to be acting city manager and economic development director, which meant both offices suffered. As good as Kofi was—and he was very good—he just couldn’t do both jobs as well as he could have done any one of them. So Kofi delegated—like any good manager does—and he delegated the authority to simply carry out the business of base closure, and I did so. And I started with the Oak Knoll Naval Hospital.

And then, 1995 came along. We knew that the Fleet Industrial Supply Center—or the Oakland Naval Base—was going to close because there was not a lot of opposition to it, it was going to be transferred over to the port, and all these other things. So we knew that was going to happen, but then all the sudden, out of nowhere, the Oakland Army Base pops up on the radar. It was never slated for closure, it was never on the preliminary list, it wasn’t discussed anywhere, and all of a sudden, three weeks before the decision of the Courter Commission, Oakland Army Base got put on the list, and I got a letter saying, you’re on the list. So I’m sitting there and I’m watching—I was reminiscing about this after I talked to you—I was sitting, watching the hearings on television—on CSPAN—

01-00:07:26
Rubens:

About base closure.

01-00:07:27
Nahm:

About base closure. Back in Washington. Jim Courter was the chairman of the commission. I had known Mr. Courter because I appeared and addressed the commission in 1993 about Alameda Naval Air Station. I knew Jim Courter very well because I had spent so much time back in Washington on that matter. So when this thing came up, I’m watching the commission, and they adjourned, all went behind the stage. My phone rings on my desk—it’s Jim Courter. And he says, “Paul, I need an answer. What are you guys going to do in Oakland? Do you want to close this base or not?” Well, the problem was the Raiders were coming back to town.

01-00:08:04
Rubens:

The Oakland Raider football team.

01-00:08:05
Nahm:

Oakland Raider football team. And Elihu Harris, the mayor at the time, was at the Oakland Coliseum, announcing this big celebratory function, the return of the Raiders. And he’s tied up at the Coliseum with the Raider announcement, and I’m on the phone with Jim Courter, the chairman of the commission, on one ear and Elihu on the other. And finally, Elihu said, “Mr. Nahm, you know this process. What do you think needs to be done?” I said, “Well, in all candor, I think it’s time to close the base.” I said, “Given everything that’s going on around it, I don’t think it will survive by itself,” because they were closing everything around it. All the infrastructure was disappearing that would have helped connect it to everything else.

01-00:08:52

Rubens: I think by that time, it was a very diminished workforce.

01-00:08:55

Nahm: Oh, it was profound—just profound. And everything—Treasure Island was shutting down, Hunter’s Point shut down, Alameda had shut down, Concord was on the list—although it took them several years to get them there—Point Molate the fuel station, was being shut down in Richmond—everything was shutting down.

01-00:09:12

Rubens: So who do you think had raised it in the first place, at that last hearing?

01-00:09:16

Nahm: I don’t remember the gentleman’s name. He was a major general in the army, this particular gentleman—and if anyone wants to review the film, they’ll know exactly who I’m talking about. And unfortunately, this is an individual that clearly did not know what he was talking about because he kept talking about troop movements, and there being no troop movements out of Oakland, all the troop movements were up in Fort Lewis, Washington, which is an accurate statement. So he kept saying, “So why on earth are we keeping the Oakland Army Base? There’s no troops out of here.” But all the supplies came out of Oakland. And this man kept talking about troop movement, and everyone on the commission bought it. First off, that’s why it was never on the list, because it didn’t fit the discussion. But this general pushed it in the discussion, incorrectly, as far as I’m concerned. Because he kept talking about troop movement, and Oakland Army Base never had anything to do with troops, *per se*. It was a through-put facility for supplies, equipment, armament, things like that. Yes, men and women shipped out of there, but—

01-00:10:28

Rubens: Well, up to the first Iraq war.

01-00:10:30

Nahm: That’s right. It was predominantly a supply center.

So it was unfortunate that this general drove the discussion and he stampeded the commission towards this precipice, and that’s when Jim Courter called the recess and went behind the stage and called me on the phone. And Elihu says, “Well, what do you think?” I said, “With everything going away around it, I don’t see how the base supports itself. I can’t see how it stands by itself, and the land will be valuable to you.” So he said, “Close it,” so I said, “Fine,” and I turned to Mr. Courter, and I said, “I’ve spoken to the mayor; close the base.” He walked around, called the meeting to order, and closed the base.

01-00:11:19

Rubens: Now was it really the mayor’s authority? Or is that the politically correct thing to do?

01-00:11:27

Nahm:

I would never presume to have taken that kind of liberty without full participation and consultation with the mayor. It was the mayor's town—and the council's town, of course. It wasn't the strong mayor's form of government at that time. It was still a city manager form of government, with a council and a mayor. But it was still the mayor, and he deserved that consultation. And I certainly wouldn't have done it by myself. But he had enough confidence in my judgment and my knowledge and experience in base closure. And I just kind of gave him the facts, what was going on, and he said, "Then go ahead and let it go." So that's what we did.

01-00:12:15

Rubens:

The facts were—

01-00:12:17

Nahm:

They had closed down Silas B. Hayes Army Hospital down in Monterey area, they had closed down Oak Knoll, they had closed down—

01-00:12:33

Rubens:

Letterman in San Francisco.

01-00:12:34

Nahm:

Letterman in San Francisco. And excuse me, it wasn't Letterkenny, it was Silas B. Hayes, down in Fort Ord. We had no hospital facility around there to support the troops, and that was critical infrastructure for our military personnel. And Oak Knoll was gone in '93 round of base closures. So we had to take those kinds of things into consideration, and of course, I'd had some consultations with Colonel Cadorette and Captain Ensminger, the two commanders at Oakland Army Base, and they were clear about that, too. They're concerned. Where do they send their people for medical care? They actually would have had to send everybody to Travis, and that just is not conducive. That was a big deal. Now, they had a PX at the Oakland Army Base, which was pretty good. The problem was, that was going to wind up being overloaded and just swamped by all the retirees who had lost their PX at Alameda, had lost their PX at Hunter's Point, had lost their PX at Treasure Island. Those people are all going to come to the Oakland Army Base and just swamp it. So it was impossible for one little base to serve the needs. Their infrastructure was very limited, when you look at the big picture. There were so many people that needed to be served, if Oakland Army Base had been left alone, they would have been buried by the workload, by the demand for their services. And they weren't equipped to deal with it. The higher commands felt like they had options for supply facilities out of the gulf, and they just said, this is the way it's going to go. And again, there wasn't necessarily a lot of political support for military facilities in the Bay Area.

01-00:14:40

Rubens:

I understand there were two commanders who really made vociferous opposition. One was Ensminger-

01-00:14:50

Nahm:

Oh, Scott Ensminger was very vocal about his objection, and I don't know any other way to put it, as I grope for something a little bit stronger than an objection. He was on the verge of outrage over the fact because when you look at it just within the context of the Oakland Army Base and the mission of the Oakland Army Base, it made no sense at all to close the Army base—absolutely none. They had run like ninety percent of the supplies—munitions and everything else—had been run through that base during the first Iraq war. It was a very functional, very efficient operation. And these guys, this is what they do. And they look at this, and they go, you can't do anything much better than we're doing it. Why on earth are we being singled out? We were never on a list. All a sudden, we get slapped on a list three weeks before a decision, and we're not prepared to defend ourselves. The typical process for base closure was anywhere from twelve to eighteen months of preparation, where people sent—there were letter-writing campaigns. There are phases and phases you go through when you're trying to save a base.

01-00:16:09

Rubens:

What you were talking about a bit before with Alameda—

01-00:16:12

Nahm:

With Alameda and all these others. And we would make visits up to Everett, Washington, and trips to Washington, D.C., and talk to congressmen, and talk to admirals—we're talking everyone back there. And in three weeks, we're going to have a final hearing. And we were completely stunned, and Scott was understandably outraged at the concept of this. And he was very vocal about it, as were several of us. I spoke and sent letters, but the simple fact that there was so little time, and it was so much like an ambush, that one had to wonder about the handwriting on the wall.

01-00:16:59

Rubens:

And you were writing letters—that's not a conflict of interest in your position of being head of OBRA?

01-00:16:04

Nahm:

Well, I wasn't head of OBRA until he closed it. Well, I shouldn't say that. I was head of OBRA, I just hadn't been assigned responsibility over the Army base, technically. I knew I was getting it, but I was asked—

01-00:17:17

Rubens:

This was in that short period of time when it was—

01-00:17:19

Nahm:

I was asked to save this base, and they insisted, well, here, you've got to save this thing.

01-00:17:25

Rubens:

By the command.

01-00:17:25

Nahm:

By the command, and by the mayor's office: you've got to save the base. And I looked, and I thought, I got three weeks to do this. So we mounted some stuff. I worked with the governor's office, and we put some letters out and this and that. And the governor's office and I and Scott Ensminger all appeared at Treasure Island at the hearing. But it was clear that there were a couple of folks on that commission who really were not interested.

01-00:17:55

Rubens:

And was it the BRAC Commission that you met with?

01-00:17:58

Nahm:

Yes, yes.

01-00:17:59

Rubens:

At Treasure Island

01-00:18:00

Nahm:

Most of the country called it the BRAC Commission. Those of us who worked with them, it was the Courter Commission. And James Courter was the chairman. He chaired it for the '93 round and the '95 round. And I think he threw his hands up after '95 and decided he didn't want to do it anymore. Very difficult process, very difficult. I have nothing but respect for Jim Courter, and the majority of the commission served very well. Dedicated, thankless work. Lot of travel, listening to people talk about anticipated financial ruin. That's hard to listen to. Traveling around everywhere, and everywhere you go, you're the bad guy. So it was really a thankless job, and I have nothing but respect for James Courter. James Courter was never anything but honorable throughout the '93 and '95 process. So I have no complaints. We got taken out in '93, I disagreed with it in '95—we acquiesced.

01-00:19:13

Rubens:

How long was the hearing?

01-00:19:16

Nahm:

Well, the hearings went on for days. They would take certain sections, and they would go on for a couple, three days, and then they would go out. They'd do it in sections. But they would travel around the country and do regional stuff, so everyone had an opportunity to meet and greet, and talk to people, and make presentations. I did that in '93, and I led the opposition and did the presentation at the Oakland Auditorium for the Alameda Naval Air Station before Jim Courter. The morning of that hearing, I was looking for something that was going to make us stand out, and I grabbed a little duck head letter opener—because everyone had laser pointers. Not me. I went there with a letter opener, carved out of wood, with a duck head on it. And I said, "I'm not fancy like all these people in the world." I said, "All I got is this little ducky." And he remembered that. So when I saw him in Washington, he goes, "Little ducky pointer! I know you." So Jim Courter was very good. He was very receptive; he heard everything we had to say. And to me, it was the epitome of

consideration to adjourn a meeting, and go behind the stage, and pick up a phone, and call and say, “Last minute—before we make a decision, I want to know what the city thinks.” I don’t know what more anybody could have asked for from the guy. And again, when you looked at the big picture, this base just could not have survived the demand that would have been put on it, the burden it would have had to shoulder.

01-00:21:00

Rubens:

So from the military point of view, and also from a city point of view, you make an argument to keep it open, but in fact, you know the writing’s on the wall.

01-00:21:13

Nahm:

From a practical standpoint, it could not sustain itself because all the other bases around it and the infrastructure had been closed, and all those personnel—all the retirees—would be looking to the PX, to the Officers’ Club, to this, to the sports arena, to the health club. The demand on the infrastructure would have just been overwhelming. So it wasn’t viable anymore.

01-00:21:40

Rubens:

So then what’s the next step? By the way, to be the director of OBRA, is that a full-time job?

01-00:21:46

Nahm:

Yes, yes. Absolutely. [laughs] It’s time and a half. Yeah, it was about a seventy-hour-a-week job.

01-00:21:51

Rubens:

Wow. So what’s the next step, then, what starts happening?

01-00:21:54

Nahm:

Well, once the decision was made, it was just like hit the deck running. Well, we knew. Fortunately, we’d already been underway for two years at Oak Knoll. So we knew that there was a stand-down process. And this, a lot of people didn’t realize, behind the scenes. There was a disposition of millions and millions of dollars’ worth of personal property, that was the property of the base: tables, chairs, desks, computers, room dividers, cubicles—God knows what all—typewriters, coat hangers and stands—just thousands. Warehouses full of this stuff. Plus, at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital, there were millions of dollars of medical equipment.

And I had gone to the mat with the Navy over seventeen million dollars’ worth of their medical equipment and had argued new law with the secretary at the time—the Deputy Assistant Secretary—William Cassidy. Another wonderful human being. I am very grateful—and the community should be grateful—for his ear because I remember this argument went back and forth, and back and forth, and back and forth, and finally, he picked up the phone and he called me. And I was doing a trip for the United Nations in Europe for

base closures, because we were shutting down 101 bases in Europe, and I went over there as part of a group of people to talk about this and talk to the other countries. And he called me in Germany and said, “What is this going on? You guys are still fighting over this medical equipment.” I said, “Read this thing.” “I don’t have to read it.” I said, “You’re an attorney. Read it.” And he says, “I have lawyers.” I said, “Your lawyer’s wrong. Read it. It’s only one page.” “Well, I’ll call you back.” He called me back in twenty minutes and he says, “I apologize. You’re right. The property is yours.”

01-00:23:59

Rubens: And where were you going to distribute it?

01-00:24:01

Nahm: Keep it right here. I wanted it here. The Navy wanted to take it and spread it out all over the Naval system. I wanted that equipment here, in the community.

01-00:24:11

Rubens: You mean in Oakland?

01-00:24:12

Nahm: In Oakland. Alameda County.

01-00:25:12

Rubens: Distribute it to different health centers?

01-00:24:14

Nahm: Clinics and health centers and hospitals. There was millions of dollars’ worth of X-ray and mammography equipment—just all kinds of things that needed to be distributed. And I wanted it retained by the community, and I read the law, and I saw the law, and I said, “Oh, no, this means us.” So we were successful, and I’m proud of that.

01-00:24:36

Rubens: So you’re facing a similar distribution—not medical equipment—

01-00:24:40

Nahm: Not medical equipment, but even bigger dollar-wise, volume-wise, at Oakland Army Base because it was more square footage, bigger footprint, and more logistical by its nature, okay? And that meant—

01-00:24:57

Rubens: And the law says that the community can take it?

01-00:25:00

Nahm: Yes. I’m taking everything I can get my hands on and putting it back in the community. And when the community’s done, then I excess it all through the state excess sales and GSA sales, and they went through the warehouse. But the main thing is, the community got first shot.

01-00:25:18

Rubens: And how was the community defined? I know that the computers went to a certain school, or some schools—

01-00:25:25

Nahm: Virtually all the computers went to Oakland Technical High School and Oakland High School. They had burgeoning computer laboratories, right, and these kids could just do wonders.

01-00:25:40

Rubens: So you have a staff that's helping you to identify what the items are?

01-00:25:45

Nahm: I had a very small staff, but I had great people. See, I had guys like Scott Ensminger and Colonel Cadorette who gave me points of contact and liaisons that I could reach out and put my hands on and say, I need this, I need this, I need this, and give them deadlines. And, I need this by this. I need this property inventory, and I need it in this warehouse by this date. See, that's when I called the public in, and the public went through all that property. They qualified on the list: yes, check, check, check, you're qualified. They had to be 501(c)(3) community-based non-profit. Could be the Elks, could be the Lions Club, could be the Homeless Collaborative. Whoever it was, as long as they met the criteria, they could come in, and they could say, I could use this, I could use this, I could use that. And they'd tag it, and then they brought their trucks in, they picked it up, and they took it away. Between those two hospitals, I think the number was \$147 million worth of equipment that went back into the community.

01-00:26:55

Rubens: That was coming out of Oak Knoll.

01-00:26:56

Nahm: Between the two locations. There was about seventy million out of Oak Knoll and seventy-seven million dollars' worth out of the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:27:10

Rubens: Oh, really. Not medical equipment; you're saying equipment in general.

01-00:27:13

Nahm: Right. And that could be chairs, desks, tables. But seventeen million of medical equipment out of Oak Knoll, and some fifty-three million in sundry items—office equipment, computers, and things like that. But seventy-seven million dollars' worth of stuff came out of the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:27:31

Rubens: Now is that process—taking the fifty-three million worth of items off of the Oakland Army Base and distributing it—did that go fairly smoothly? Had the West Oakland Community Action Group been created yet? I would think they had an opinion about where these things should go.

01-00:27:50

Nahm:

They had become active at Oak Knoll. And again, the Oak Knoll process was a good learning process because we knew what we had to do. We had to get this equipment through, and there was no way on earth I was giving anybody but the community anything if I didn't have to. Everything was going to the community. I was an advocate; that was my job. My job was to advocate for the city of Oakland, protect the city's interest. And I understand that the Port of Oakland wasn't always happy with some of the positions I took, but it wasn't my job to advocate for the Port of Oakland, it was my job to advocate for the people and the community of Oakland. So every single piece of equipment, I looked at. I walked every square inch of that property—both properties—and looked at equipment and said, this stuff stays, this stuff stays. And I had my people come in and snag military people, and then we separated the stuff that went and the stuff that stayed. Once we separated them, then I take the command representative, and I'd walk it with him or her, and we had concurrence, and then I opened up to the public access to the stuff that was going to remain in Oakland.

01-00:29:13

Rubens:

So there must be a report somewhere that says where this went.

01-00:29:16

Nahm:

There were records kept, but the way the records worked is that A, they had to meet criteria to even have access in the first place—

01-00:29:27

Rubens:

The organization.

01-00:29:28

Nahm:

The organization. Now, it wasn't a garage sale where they could come in and take stuff and then turn around and sell it on the street corner in a garage sale. They couldn't do that. They had to retain ownership for three years. After three years, then they could dispose of it. Because it was after that point that they were considered to have acquired ownership of the property. But for those first three years, they had to use it for the purpose it was intended. They were not allowed to come in and take this stuff out of the Oakland Army Base and take it to a street corner or a flea market and sell it off. And we watched. We watched.

01-00:30:10

Rubens:

So this dispersal took place over how long a period?

01-00:30:13

Nahm:

We got it done in a matter of months.

01-00:30:15

Rubens:

Really.

01-00:30:15

Nahm:

Yes, yes.

01-00:30:17

Rubens:

I read just somewhere there was an issue of a church window, anyway some structures from a church that many vied for?

01-00:30:22

Nahm:

Yes, yes. There was the steeple and the church windows and the church doors at the Oakland Army Base. It seemed to be an impossible task to decommission the little church, the chapel. And I believe it was a matter of timing for the responsible parties. It's not like they have a decommissioning squad that's got a job—you know, the strike force that goes out and takes down steeples—because they've got to take the steeple down. And with the cross and the steeple—it has to come down. And that's part of the de-sanctification of the church, of the grounds. And until they do that, it's not available for any other use. And that just seemed to take forever. And it was for no other reason, really, than that we couldn't get the people that needed to do it available in Oakland. Because there were people lining up. Oh, my God, there were people. I had church group after church group just lining up to take over that church and run that chapel. And unfortunately, it just took forever.

01-00:31:33

Rubens:

And so I think it ended up being moved to the East Coast, or do you know what happened to it?

01-00:31:38

Nahm:

The last time I was on the base, the chapel was still there. And that was not awfully long ago; that was in the last couple of years. But when the Port took over the property and started to clear the land and take the buildings down, I had heard that the Port was going to relocate that building rather than tear the church down, that somebody came in and said, "We wanted to move the church to another location." Whether it actually got moved and where it went, I'm not aware, because I had long since left the position.

01-00:32:18

Rubens:

Then what comes next in your position? You've now itemized and dispersed the materials. No big conflicts over that?

01-00:32:29

Nahm:

No, no. We'd made a lot of progress at Oak Knoll. We had addressed a lot of the community issues at Oak Knoll, so it was very smooth.

01-00:32:42

Rubens:

I'd asked you if you had worked with WOCAG. There was a predecessor to WOCAG. Oak Knoll and Alameda had their own community group. But here was this West Oakland Community Group that felt quite connected to the Oakland Army Base because the proximity.

01-00:33:04

Nahm:

We asked for WOCAG. And I have to tell you, I had a small staff of extremely dedicated people, and it could not have been successful without people like Henry Gardner's participation in this process, who worked with

me side-by-side every step of the way. He may not want to admit that he was a mentor to me, but he was. I have great admiration for him. The support of people, special staffers—my secretary, Countess Easley, and the gentleman that means a great deal to me that we lost recently, Mel Blair. Mel was my planner, my community planner. And these were people who were absolutely essential to the success of what we were doing.

01-00:34:01

Rubens:

Do you remember meeting with the two heads of WOCAG—George Bolton and Monsa Nitoto?

01-00:34:09

Nahm:

See, I asked for WOCAG. I asked for this. It was fractionated. When we walked it, we walked into a fractionated community. It wasn't that anyone was better or worse than the other, it was just that they were fractionated. Each one had a different agenda: I want to protect this particular interest in West Oakland, I want this particular interest over here. Then you had CWOR [Coalition for West Oakland Revitalization] over here, and you had the Merchants' Association over here. So I asked for a consortium to come together, and the WOCAG was the result of that. But I asked for WOCAG because we were not going to make progress meeting with individuals. You go to one meeting, and you get this, this, and you think you've got it figured out, and then you go meet with this group, and you find out that we're not even close. Because there was competing agendas and competing priorities and things like that. And I think the cement of that group were people that really, truly represented the community and that saw the bigger picture of community—people like Queen Thurston, people like Ellen Parkinson. These are people that have been there, long-timers that really understood the fabric of a neighborhood and that really understood that it's not about getting everything that you want, it's about working towards the best thing you can get. And it's wonderful to find people like that.

I was in a difficult position. You're walking into a situation, and you've got a community that's been disenfranchised and disadvantaged for a long time, and all of a sudden, 183 acres of land, shoreline property, gets plopped down, and it's return for economic redevelopment. And by God, they not only want, they're entitled to a piece of that. They're authentic stakeholders here. And it was the multitude of interests coming together and bound together with those real community leaders, the long-time community leaders, that made WOCAG work. It started out with George and Monsa Nitoto were the two co-chairs, and then George has endured over all these years.

01-00:36:34

Rubens:

George Bolton?

01-00:36:34

Nahm:

Yes. George is still there. In fact, I saw George not too long ago at a council meeting, and he's still doing it. And I asked him, "What's the matter, are you

a slow learner?” But he’s still doing it, and much to his credit. Not a lot of people have that kind of dedication.

01-00:36:1

Rubens: So did you attend some of the first meetings?

01-00:36:53

Nahm: All of them. All of them.

01-00:36:56

Rubens: And you were the face of—

01-00:36:57

Nahm: I was the face of the city, I was the face of OBRA, I was the face of the City Council. I was the face of Oakland to the community—and to the Pentagon.

01-00:37:10

Rubens: Now, how long did you stay there? You were the first, you helped set this up, you were doing distribution, and then—

01-00:37:18

Nahm: I want to say five and a half years. We shut down Oak Knoll, formulated a reuse plan at Oak Knoll, got it approved by the Pentagon and moved on from there to the Oakland Army base, accomplished the same thing. And what a lot of people don’t realize is that there’s only two people in this country that have ever done what we did in Oakland, myself and the counterpart back east that had three military bases close within one community. It was one of the two largest base closure efforts in the country. And what made ours doubly difficult was we weren’t just closing down more than one military base, we were working with two separate departments within the Department of Defense. We were working with the Navy on one side, and then we were working with the Army to shut down another base. That’s hard. A lot of people don’t think it’s hard because they think, well, you’re just working with Department of Defense. I am here to tell you that the Navy does things differently than the Army, and the Army does things differently from the Navy, and each one thinks they’re right. And who am I to argue, right? My job was to adapt and comply within there, but at the same time, not be manipulated or allow the city to be manipulated to their disadvantage. Work within each individual department of the fence, and work with and respect their chain of command and everything else, but at the same time, provide a very clear voice for the city of Oakland that said, no, these are our interests. And one of the things that I think was one of the most stunning accomplishments that we were able to do and that I’m proud of at the Oakland Army Base: There was an entity called AAFES, the Army/Air Force Exchange Service, and AAFES was a quasi-nonprofit, but they were also for profit. They were the exchange service. They’re the ones that sold the jackets to the PX, and they’re the supply guys. They stocked the stores.

01-00:39:34

Rubens: They had a building of their own?

01-00:39:36

Nahm: They had warehouses. Two-thirds of the warehouses were theirs. And they missed their departure date. And I went to the Army, and I said, "You owe me rent." They said, "Pfft, we don't owe you any rent." I said, "Oh, yes, you owe me rent if you're going to stay. You had a deadline, and I've been telling you for a year you had a deadline, and you never said a word. Now you've missed the deadline; now I want my money." And I went in, and I argued to the commanding generals back in Washington, and to the secretary, Secretary Johnson. And I had meetings—surprise meetings, because the staff back there, the military staff, did not want this meeting. I called the secretary at his home and said, "I've got a problem. I need to meet with you at this meeting at Boston. I need a side meeting with you." He said, "Fine, I'll call a few people." So we had this meeting, and this military staff was stunned to see me in the room. And I said, this is what's going on, blah, blah, blah, blah. And sure enough, AAFES paid millions of dollars in rent.

01-00:40:378

Rubens: How did you assess what it was that they should owe you?

01-00:40:42

Nahm: Square foot, market rate, and gave them ten percent discount.

01-00:40:48

Ruben: And how long did that go on?

01-00:40:50

Nahm: They got out a lot faster than they were going to stay. We used to ask them for a departure date. And basically what happened is they had this big meeting and all these muckety-mucks came in, with all this brass came in. And again, please don't get me wrong. I don't want anybody to think I disrespect these guys because I don't. I have nothing but respect for them. I'm an ex-Marine myself. I believe in the uniform. But at the same time, I wasn't going to be intimidated. And they showed up with all these colonels, and a couple of stars-on-the-shoulder and generals and things—

01-00:41:22

Rubens: From the?

01-00:41:23

Nahm: From the Army all came out to Oakland. And they were going to fill that room with brass, and they were just going to tell me what was going on. And I listened for five minutes, and I said, "It sounds to me like you've come here to tell me you don't have any intention of paying us rent." And they said, "That's right, we don't." And I said, "Then this meeting's over." "I don't understand what you mean, Mr. Nahm." I said, "I told you what our demands were, and if you're not prepared to meet them, then we're done."

01-00:41:52

Rubens: And what is this about?

01-00:41:53

Nahm: This is about paying us rent.

01-00:41:54

Rubens: And what year are we talking about?

01-00:42:01

Nahm: This was in '96, '97.

01-00:42:08

Rubens: Were there any other institutions that were paying?

01-00:42:11

Nahm: No. Everybody got out. Everybody vacated. The last people that hung around were the garrison people, around the housing and the bowling alley and that kind of stuff, but we knew they were going to stay there. It was the last functional entity, and it was AAFES. All the warehouses were empty. In fact, AAFES had started to spread out. They said, we'll take that warehouse and that warehouse. As people left, AAFES spread out. And I'd drive by, and I'd see this, and I'd see fences getting moved. And I'd pick up the phone and I'd call Scott, and I'd say, "Scott, got a problem." And Scott says, "Well, I'm leaving." He says, "I agree with you, but I'm leaving." And all the commands had left except—I forget the colonel's name.

01-00:43:02

Rubens: There was a woman that was the very last one.

01-00:43:03

Nahm: There was a woman, and she was the very last one, Col. Susan Halter. She was a very pleasant person, but she was very Army, and if the Army said so, then she said so. And I understood it, but I wasn't going to accept it. And she supported the Army's position, and I thought that was wrong because it didn't work. Remember, we're the impacted party here. We're the community that's losing all the jobs. We need money for this stuff. So anyways, the bottom line is she sided with the Army and the AAFES people, and I did not. And I elevated it up to the command and to the secretary's office, and the secretary ultimately agreed with me.

01-00:44:09

Rubens: And then they started paying?

01-00:44:11

Nahm: Oh, they paid us millions.

01-00:44:13

Rubens: So was there any civilian occupation of the base while they were still moving out? There was the Homeless Collaborative and—

- 01-00:44:23
Nahm: The Homeless Collaborative was there, the United Indian Nations started to occupy some space, the museum occupied some of the warehouse space.
- 01-00:44:35
Rubens: They were using that for storage?
- 01-00:44:36
Nahm: Yes.
- 01-00:44:37
Rubens: There were also some film companies.
- 01-00:44:41
Nahm: There were some film companies that were there. There wasn't large presence, but they were starting to filter in by the time I left.
- 01-00:44:52
Rubens: So not at the same time that—
- 01-00:44:53
Nahm: I set up the leasing plan, okay, and I projected around ten million dollars' worth of lease revenue. After the first year, this thing should be ramped up, and we should be fully leased and moving forward. And in fact, they hit that mark in less than a year. Because it was valuable property. We were immediately adjacent to the port, and there was a lot of warehouse space and lay-down space. So the port and their customers and ancillary support people quickly occupied the available space. And at market rate, OBRA was making some money very quickly.
- 01-00:44:32
Rubens: Did you have advisers? Was there a real estate person you would turn to?
- 01-00:45:38
Nahm: There was originally. We had been working with—I believe it was BT Commercial. But the stuff got picked up fast. And that was right at the transition, when I moved on, and I brought some real estate people to help advise. But when you brought them in, they essentially confirmed what we already anticipated—this is warehouse space, the port is a built-in customer. And its customers were screaming for lay-down space and storage space, so it got picked up very quickly.
- 01-00:46:19
Rubens: Now, under your jurisdiction, were any of the environmental impact reports initiated?
- 01-00:46:28
Nahm: Yes. All of them were initiated on my watch. They didn't all complete on my watch. But I have to say that one of the things that came out of this whole process was that of all the bases that were shut down in the San Francisco Bay Area, in the total base infrastructure, that Oakland Army Base was, in fact, the

cleanest base among them all. Because the Oakland Army Base was kind of unique in that it was a throughput facility. There might have been a whole lot of ugly, nasty stuff that may have come through there on boxcars, but it came through there on the boxcar, the boxcar got picked up, it got offloaded, put on a ship, and it sailed away. They found very little stuff.

01-00:47:15

Rubens:

There was a contest over what they found underneath Building One.

01-00:47:19

Nahm:

Well, you see, Building One had other issues. Building One was a sick building, as it turned out. They had mold issues in Building One. They were starting to look at Building One as I departed because they were looking at moving the police department there and making that the—

01-00:47:44

Rubens:

The Oakland Police were considering moving there?

01-00:47:45

Nahm:

The Oakland Police Department was looking at relocating to the Oakland Army Base and taking that whole building. There was just tens of thousands of square feet in that building. And it would have served that. It had a helipad. It would have worked very well. But the building was not suitable; it was a sick building, and as you know, it just got knocked down. It was no longer viable.

01-00:48:10

Rubens:

So when did your services at OBRA come to an end?

01-00:48:16

Nahm:

I believe it was in December of '99, if I'm not mistaken.

01-00:48:20

Rubens:

Had you just had enough, or was there—? Whatever you feel comfortable saying about this.

01-00:48:31

Nahm:

There were some changes going on. There was not just a new mayor, but a new form of mayor.

01-00:48:43

Rubens:

Jerry Brown creates a strong mayor system.

01-00:48:44

Nahm:

Yes, when Jerry Brown came in. Jerry Brown wanted his fingerprints all over the base. Jerry Brown wanted to change the plan. He wanted to do things other than what the plan and the community had approved.

01-00:48:55

Rubens:

He ended up putting in a military charter school.

01-00:48:58

Nahm:

Well, actually, it was ironic, because the school that went in there—the military school went in there—occupied space that the apprenticeship that I'm now operations director over was supposed to get. But that was the least of the problem. The problem was not that, it was that he wanted to put live/work space, he wanted to put condominiums, he wanted to put all sorts of things in there. He brought the dean of architecture from Harvard and from MIT out to tour the base. And we drove them around, and he showed them, I have this idea and I have that idea. And I'd say, "Here's the concern. You want life/work space, you want to put lofts in here—well, the lofts are right between, they look this way, and they look at forty-two railroad tracks this way, and over here, they're looking at port cranes. I don't know that that's the view that people are going to want. I don't know if that's the highest and best use of the land." And basically, the deans just acknowledged everything I said. And basically, the deans understood that the plan we had put together was a very good plan. And I think witnessed by the fact that Mayor Brown was there for eight years and nothing got accomplished proved that the original plan, as it was put together, was the most viable. It's the direction they're heading now.

01-00:50:36

Rubens:

You're speaking about The final Reuse Plan of 1999. **[check date]**

01-00:50:37

Nahm:

The final reuse plan was submitted and approved, adopted by the Department of the Army—all the departments—the Department of Education, everything.

01-00:50:54

Rubens:

You were at the closing ceremony?

01-00:50:55

Nahm:

And I was at the closing ceremony and the decommissioning. But the reuse plan had been completed and submitted. Everybody had signed off. And I just felt that with this big change in strategy—well, I don't want this, I don't want to do that, we're going to do this instead of that. And I just thought I had just spent a significant number of years working and building relationships, working with people, working with a community that had been told things for decades that never came true—and I knew that history—and I was not prepared to go to them now after all these years, and we put together this plan, and laid out these job opportunities and this plan to generate job opportunities, and say, "We're not going to do that." Now, it was Jerry Brown's absolute right as mayor to do whatever he wanted to do, and it was his right to pick whomever he wanted to take that message forward, and he had every right to expect people to be loyal to that. I could not be loyal to that. It made no sense to me. It was an about-face; it was a betrayal of the trust that the community had placed in me and in the city to move this thing forward. And I just felt it was a good time for me to leave. The reuse plan had been turned in and submitted; the timing was right.

01-00:52:37

Rubens: And then who did Jerry put in?

01-00:52:40

Nahm: He put in Aliza Gallo, and Aliza did a fine job. She and I spoke to each other quite frequently. My staff was loyal to me. They were good people; I love them. But now they had to work for Aliza. And that was only right; they needed to follow the new leader.

01-00:53:09

Rubens: I'm going to have to change the tape. What I'd like to do is just ask you that there's anything else that you'd like to say or think should be noted about your tenure as head of OBRA, and then talk about how you're back on the Army base.

01-00:53:24

Nahm: Sure. Well, the one thing I'd point out is that after all is said and done, after all these years, the city is right back exactly where I left them in 1999, nine years later, trying to find a developer to build exactly the same kind of a plan with the same kind of jobs, absent maybe bioscience, biotech, but the same concept is there. And I truly feel vindicated that the community did its job then, and it's witnessed by the fact that where they're looking at now and what they're trying to accomplish is what the community asked for in the first place. And I think they missed an opportunity.

01-00:54:10

Rubens: Can you tick that off, just what those few things are that you—?

01-00:54:12

Nahm: Well, they missed an opportunity with the Port. The Port was willing to give a letter to the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and they were going to limit their space, and the city did not accept that letter. The city manager would not accept that letter from the port. I think that was a mistake. They wound up having to surrender even more land to the Port of Oakland as a result of that mistake. And Jerry Brown got his hands in this thing, and nothing got accomplished in those eight years.

01-00:54:48

Rubens: Yes, and so it's now over fourteen years since this began.

01-00:54:52

Nahm: It's a lot of years.

01-00:54:53

Rubens: All right, so we'll stop here for a minute.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 nahm_paul_2_10-14-08.mp3

01-00:00:25

Rubens: That's not a common story to hear about, that the port could have written a letter, but—

01-00:00:35

Nahm: Well, the Port offered the letter. Because so many people came in with proposals, and clearly the port was a major stakeholder at the Oakland Army Base, there's no doubt about it—and rightly so. It's shoreline property, and it's immediately adjacent to the Fleet Industrial Supply Center expansion that the port had moved and expanded into. So the port was a major player and stakeholder there. So as we formulated our plans, we were doing our plan, but there was a section of the base that we left alone. And we were waiting—

01-00:01:12

Rubens: Assuming that the port—

01-00:01:14

Nahm: We knew that the port was going to come in with their proposal with that particular section of the base. And that proposal came forward at a meeting with myself; Frank Fanelli, who is the director of real estate for the City of Oakland; Aliza Gallo, who was coming in at the same time behind me, and she was coming out of the community economic development agency; Robert Bobb, the city manager; and Chuck Foster, then the executive director of the Port of Oakland. And when they put the proposal together, I was looking at the proposal, and just kind of looking at the way it was laid out, and trying to figure out what was going on. And I knew there was something not quite right, and I realized. I said, "I know what's not right." I said, "You ignored the reserves." And he said, "No, we're negotiating the departure of the reserves out to Camp Parks." And I said, "Oh, okay," and then he said—"he" being Chuck Foster—said, "And if you approve this plan, the port will give to the city a letter stating to the Bay Conservation and Development Commission that the port no longer needs another acre of land for port uses in this area." And I looked at him, and I said, "You'll write that letter?" He says, "I have the letter right here." And I said, "Okay." I said we'd like to talk. And after Mr. Foster left the room, I turned to the city manager, and I said, "I don't know if you realize it or not, but the value of that letter is inestimable. The port never writes letters like that. You've got to get that letter." And the city manager resisted and said, "Well, this is a small deal, and I'm still negotiating a deal at the airport, and I want to roll the Army base and the airport into one big deal." I said, "But you don't understand how valuable that letter is he's making an offer of. That letter is worth a fortune. I mean, we can plan now." I said, "You can take that to the state on Tideland Trust issues, you can take it to BCDC, and BCDC will no longer try to tell you—"

01-00:03:33

Rubens: Hold you up.

01-00:03:34

Nahm:

“—they won’t hold anything up. The port is saying, ‘If we get this, we’re done.’” And the city manager said, “Nope, I don’t need that letter. I don’t need that letter to negotiate a deal. I’m going to roll it all together on the estuary and the airport. This is small potatoes.” And I had another meeting, and I went back to the city manager—it was Robert Bobb at the time—and I said, “I really have to protest.” I said, “This letter is significant. You really need to do this. And what could it possibly hurt at the airport?” I said, “Go ahead and take this letter and settle this deal at the Army base. Get it done. They’re not even connected, geographically.” I said, “I don’t understand.” And he says, “Well, I only do big deals. I don’t do little deals; I only do big deals.” And I protested to Bill Claggett, who was the community economic development director at the time. Remember now, I worked for the city manager’s office. I don’t work for anyone else. I don’t work for the city council, I don’t work for the mayor, I work for the city manager’s office. Now, this is important to remember because—

01-00:04:52

Rubens:

That’s where OBRA was situated?

01-00:04:56

Nahm:

The executive director of OBRA works for the city manager. Does not work for the council, does not work for the mayor, does not work for the port—works for and answers to the city manager. So I’m trying to say, “You really need to make him understand the significance of this thing,” and he just didn’t want to hear it. And that, coupled with the fact that Jerry Brown wanted to dismantle the plan that was already improved and in the can, so to speak—I looked at that, and I thought, okay. You have a new city manager—and he was a new city manager at the time—and a new, strong mayoral form of government, and a new mayor with very strong feelings about what ought to be at the Army base. And when you put the two things together—a complete retooling of the plan and an unwillingness to accept a commitment by the port that would have set aside forever the land that would have been available for reuse by the City of Oakland and the redevelopment agency of the City of Oakland and would end any dispute over port land, city land, which has always been an ongoing issue—it was going to be clear-cut and defined, and I thought that was significant.

And I thought, when you marry these two things together and when you look at the lay of the land at that point in time, I thought, “It’s a good time for me to move on.” And again, these are opinions, and there’s differing opinions when you get into city leadership on strategy and what to pursue and when to pursue it, and I respect that. I don’t disrespect Mayor Brown’s decision to do what he did, I don’t disrespect Robert Bobb’s decision to do or not to do what he did, I just disagree with the strategy. And that doesn’t make me right. It doesn’t necessarily make them wrong. I felt it was a mistake, and it’s my choice, then, to say, I want to be part of this, I don’t want to be part of this.

And I felt I just did not want to be part of it because I thought it was an error in the long-term plans for the city and the benefit of the city.

01-00:07:33

Rubens:

So what did you end up doing?

01-00:07:35

Nahm:

I left. I left. I stayed there for six months on a contract basis to help the transition for Aliza and to make for a smooth transition. The city still had a lot of problems at Oak Knoll with the buyout of the homeless issue—much more of a problem than they needed to have, but they didn't want to contact the people they needed to contact to get that resolved. They finally got the thing done in the courts. They got their two million dollars back. See, they bought out the homeless interest at the Oak Knoll Naval Hospital, and my only point was if you're going to buy out the homeless interest at Oak Knoll, where are you going to put the homeless people? Are you going to put them all in West Oakland? You have to address this. This is a terrible, almost cliché at this point, but to say the chickens are going to come home to roost, but at some point in time—it's not like homelessness is going to disappear in the city of Oakland. So how do you reconcile buying out the homeless interest in a wealthier part of town where the hill folk live, and what then will you do when you must address the homeless issue down in the flats, okay, in the bottoms? How do you reconcile that? I knew. I had to go from Oak Knoll down to West Oakland, and I had to talk to those folks down there and talk about the same issues. And I had to somehow explain to them why. Well, you bought out the homeless up there. Where are you going to put them, now? You're going to stick them all down here in the bottoms?

01-00:09:31

Rubens:

What was the resolution of that?

01-00:09:33

Nahm:

They got their money back. The city got paid back from the sale of the land, and that's what they were supposed to do. They were supposed to get paid off from the sale of the land. And what they had planned on doing was buying the land themselves—the city—buying the land and selling it off to a developer. What they didn't plan on doing was coming in with a new mayor. And they submitted a bid of \$250,000 for the land. And while I was no longer in the picture, I got a phone call from an individual in the Navy that said, "We just go the city's proposal, and I'm wondering." I said, "Well, I'm not part of that. I don't even work for them anymore." "Yeah, I know that, but I'm just wondering if you've heard anything, because I think there's a zero missing." Okay? And it was a lowball bid—it was not a realistic bid, it was not an appropriate bid—and history has borne out that the city's wisdom was not very strong.

My strategy at the time at Oak Knoll was to hammer away for a no-cost transfer of property. No cost, no cost, no cost, no cost. Now, I knew that

wasn't reasonable, I knew that wasn't realistic, but I was relentless—no cost, no cost, no cost. And the plan, my fallback, was to negotiate a low cost. That was the only way we were going to get a low cost for the land at Oak Knoll. Well, the city thought, "Well, Paul's being hard on these guys at the Navy, and maybe we ought to try a new strategy." Well, they asked me to step back from the table; they put a new face at the table. Well, the Navy saw that, and the Navy went, "Oh, Paul's gone. Oh, we're going to put all this back on the table." Because I had beat all this stuff back off the table. And again, I knew that we were not going to get a no-cost, but I also knew that by hammering and hammering that I could reasonably go and accept and negotiate a low cost for that land. But we were never going to get that property at a low cost if we went in at some cost. And the city said, "I think we're smarter if we go and say we'll pay some cost." And the Navy went, "Well, then we should talk about what we think it's worth." Because with me, I wasn't talking about any cost. So the Navy was this close to a low-cost negotiation, a low-cost sale, and I just think it was a strategic error to change in the middle of the stream a strategy. I think it was just a blunder.

01-00:12:59

Rubens:

Now, didn't that strategy ultimately come to bear vis-à-vis the Oakland Army Base? There was swapping of land.

01-00:13:10

Nahm:

There was some swapping of land, and there was some swapping of homeless interest of Oak Knoll versus {inaudible} a payback, okay, at the Oakland Army Base. There was no way—and this was my point at Oak Knoll—if you are going to do this buyout of the homeless interest up in the hills, well, that's fine, but you cannot go down to the bottoms and say, "You've got to take them." You can't do that credibly.

01-00:13:50

Rubens:

So where is it now? Where are they literally?

01-00:13:53

Nahm:

Well, they lost the land at Oak Knoll. The city lost control of the land. And it was a lot of people that banked very heavily on the city being successful in acquiring the land for transitional sale to a developer. And I can tell you right now that Shea Homes suffered horribly because they banked big on the leadership from the city manager's office and this new strategy. They banked big time that the city manager and Bill Claggett from the Community Economic Development Agency knew what they were doing. It was a mistake. Their strategy blew up in their face. They had invested hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars in staff time on planning and the whole nine yards, anticipating city ownership and agency ownership of Oak Knoll and control of Oak Knoll. What happened was the city never wound up owning Oak Knoll, and all the city hoped to get, and they finally got, was their two million dollars that they paid back. That's all the city got, was their money back. Ownership of the land went to a private party, and then they couldn't

pay for it. \$122 million—they couldn't pay it. They defaulted, and it went back into GSA, it went back into a public sale. And that was the worst possible scenario for the City of Oakland. And if they had just stuck with the strategy: no cost, no cost, no cost.

01-00:15:33

Rubens:

It seemed to me that the city was able to generate revenue off of Oakland Army Base through the rentals, but there's been no sale of land. That's—

01-00:15:49

Nahm:

That's true. Oak Knoll, unlike the Oakland Army Base, had no real, leasable space as-is, okay? Oakland Army Base was a gold mine from a leasing standpoint. There was no viable leasing program to put in place at Oak Knoll. The roads were sub-standard, the housing was sub-standard, the buildings were sub-standard—could not be occupied without major revamping. The Club Knoll could not be reused without some major seismic issues being addressed. So there just wasn't any legitimate, viable leasing—outside of maybe the athletic fields, which were not going to generate any real money because the people that do are the people that don't have a lot of money to spend. But when you go to the Oakland Army Base and you look at all that magnificent warehouse space down there that is to this day viable. There's more money in value in the redwood, and the materials to build it has got to be recycled because it's all heart redwood materials that are going to be recycled and reused and reclaimed for another use.

01-00:17:12

Rubens:

That was all part of the original plan.

01-00:17:15

Nahm:

That's right. You know, there's some genuine authentic value and worth in each and every one of those warehouses at the Army base, never mind never mind the leasing value and potential that they have realized.

01-00:17:30

Rubens:

So let's make a transition, now. How is it that you come to head up an organization that, in fact, is based on the Oakland Army Base?

01-00:17:40

Nahm:

Well, that is kind of unique. When I left OBRA, I was approached immediately. I mean, as I was walking out the door, my cell phone was ringing, and I was offered positions with development entities that wanted my knowledge and background and expertise as a consultant, to work with them on land redevelopment at other bases in other parts of the country. So I became a team member with some of those folks and went up in Oregon and Washington, Letterkenny and Kentucky, and other military bases—Southern California, El Toro—to take a look at these bases and determine economic viability, redevelopment potential, and these kinds of things. So that's what I did for the first year and a half after I left Oakland. But I'm a people person,

and I don't mean that sarcastically. I truly am. I enjoy interacting with human beings and a community, dealing with people with real issues. And I've got to tell you, consulting was a lonely, solitary environment and existence, and it was not right for me. There are people that I met, marvelous human beings and terrific people, that were very successful. And I was successful—I made a lot of money doing it—but I didn't have any interaction with human beings. I would go up, look at a base, take a look around, write my report on the trip back. I'd send in my report; I'd e-mail my report. My check would come in the mail.

I was approached by the Painting and Decorating Apprenticeship Program, who had, in fact, applied for a community benefit transition of land, okay, public benefit conveyance. And they had qualified for it. My process with my staff and review of those proposals, I had my staff do. I was never a part of those processes. But I was aware, I knew what was going on. I knew who and what and where, but I was never—I did not participate in that; I let my staff do it. And part of the reason I let my staff do it is because yes, I knew people in the Painting Apprenticeship Program, and I knew people in a variety of applicants. Many, many applicants—I knew these people; I knew these organizations. So I was at arm's distance. I did not want to participate. I never sat in a room, and I didn't deal with this because it wouldn't have been fair, and it would have exposed the city to challenge. So I stayed away from it. I had good staff. I had marvelous people working for me that were very, very good people with a tremendous amount of integrity. So we sat down, and we went over the criteria and the review, and they did their job.

01-00:21:35

Rubens:

Are you saying that this painters' joint apprentice program had gone in under your watch?

01-00:21:44

Nahm:

They had been approved on my watch. They were approved by my staff, my the city, by three separate steps of the process. And I read it. I read them, among a whole bunch of other people that were approved.

01-00:22:06

Rubens:

So when they learn that you're now back available—

01-00:22:08

Nahm:

They knew that I was gone, that I had left the city, and—

01-00:22:15

Rubens:

When you decided to give up consulting, it just—

01-00:22:17

Nahm:

When I decided to give up consulting, and the apprenticeship program was beginning to get concerned about—they had been approved.

01-00:22:27
Rubens: How long have they been in existence?

01-00:22:29
Nahm: The apprenticeship?

01-00:22:29
Rubens: Yes.

01-00:22:31
Nahm: Almost ninety years.

01-00:22:33
Rubens: Oh, really? It's an old, well-established—

01-00:22:36
Nahm: Well, it's actually over a hundred years. The program's been around for decades and decades and decades, and they'd been training people for that same amount of time. They were a smaller organization. They were more fractionated. There were programs here, programs down in South Bay, and there were programs in San Francisco, they do programs down in San Jose and in Fresno. They were all fractionated, and this committee was a smaller committee, and they came to me. They had come to me after being approved for a public benefit conveyance at the Army base and asked me if I would take over as their director because they had lost their director. Their director had become the chief of the Division of Apprenticeship Standards for the state of California. So they needed a director. And they had a good guy in there before. He was good enough to become the head of all apprenticeship—

01-00:23:34
Rubens: What was his name?

01-00:23:36
Nahm: Henry Nunn. Two *n*'s—N-U-N-N. Henry Nunn—great guy. Henry moved on and became the chief of Division of Apprenticeship Standards. They had this vacuum that he left behind him, and—

01-00:23:53
Rubens: Voila.

01-00:23:53
Nahm: —labor and management came to me and said, “Would you consider this position?” It was less money, but I got to deal with people again.

01-00:24:03
Rubens: And they were already on the Oakland Army Base?

01-00:24:04
Nahm: They were already on the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:24:05

Rubens: Where are they, literally?

01-00:24:07

Nahm: Right now, they're not there anymore. They're gone. The Port needed their land, so we moved. We were there; I negotiated a presence there. And we got a great deal, and the city was wonderful. We had a good relationship with the city.

01-00:24:21

Rubens: How long were they there?

01-00:24:21

Nahm: We were there five years. But then, the Port simply had to get their land. They needed their land for their expansion. Then we're gone. We're in Hayward, now, and we're leasing land in Hayward. But we still have retreat rights, if you will. We have a terms of agreement for three acres of land at no cost at the Oakland Army Base, and we are still a stakeholder at the Oakland Army Base. And we continue to this day to be a stakeholder, and we are in discussion with the development community. The master developers have talked to us. The candidates for master developer are talking to us about our presence as part of their overall development scenario.

01-00:25:15

Rubens: That's where we stand now, October 2008. There are four companies that are going to develop a master plan, and then one will be chosen. So are all of them talking with you?

01-00:25:28

Nahm: Well, I met with one of them. The city has asked for my thoughts in review of those proposals.

01-00:25:39

Rubens: But the three acres is part of the final reuse plan?

01-00:25:45

Nahm: Yes. We have a place on the base. The city is required to turn over to us three acres of land and provide us with three acres of land for a training facility, and we have every intention of pursuing that. Our relationship and my personal relationship with the people and the community of Oakland, especially the people of West Oakland, and the social justice issues around, development of the West Oakland and the Oakland Army Base issue. I reached out immediately—when I took over this job as director of training for the apprenticeship program—immediately reached back into the West Oakland community and connected, and started to reach back to the jobs consortium, and these entities. And I started to pull people out of the West Oakland as a resource and bring people into my program because we had no Oakland—or very little, minority—participation in the apprenticeship program. And when I took over the program, there was about 250 people in the painting and drywall portion of my program. Now I have four programs. I've got painters, and

drywall, and glaziers, and floor coverers. And just the painting and drywall, there's about—from 250—we're at about 1,700 apprentices, and there's about 1,300 apprentices on the other side, so all told, I've got about 3,000 apprentices in the program that I am operations director over now. And the Oakland participation, while it ebbs and flows because it's a seasonal work, it will go from seven or eight percent out of that total to twelve to eighteen percent. So we're still doing outreach into the Oakland community. We're always going to be doing outreach into the Oakland community. The Oakland community in general, and the West Oakland community in particular, is a marvelous source for our apprentices.

01-00:28:22

Rubens:

Both to recruit and to then place them into jobs?

01-00:28:26

Nahm:

Yes. The beauty of our apprenticeship—and now I get on my little soapbox on apprenticeship—we don't require a tremendous amount of entry-level prerequisites. We are a walk in off the street, go to the local union, if you're eighteen years of age and you have a valid driver's license—which means you have a reliable form of transportation—you can get in the program—one program or another. The Spanish-speaking population—the Hispanic participation on the drywall side is just over eighty percent. We have gone bilingual, we have done outreach—the only thing we're missing—not missing, but we don't have sufficient participation from—are women. We need more women in our trades, and we're looking for them all the time because they're good. Don't have a lot of bad work habits. And this has been, just as a life issue—I'm an old rugby player, too—and some of the best rugby I've ever seen played were not played by a man [laughs]. The women don't have bad habits. The women do it the way they're taught. They learn it very quickly, and they're very good at it. So we're looking for women to participate in our program. But we greatly exceed our minority participation. We've done some marvelous stuff at the Fox Theatre. Our guys did a tremendous amount of work on the Fox Theatre—because we're finish trades. So our finish trade guys did some marvelous work at the Fox Theatre.

01-00:30:21

Rubens:

Now, how long do they stay with you?

01-00:30:24

Nahm:

My drywall guys stay with me for three years—two years of school, one year after school. But the whole time they're in my program, they are working on a job. They only come to me one week of school every quarter. The rest of the time they're working—earning a paycheck, paying their bills, raising a family.

01-00:30:45

Rubens:

And it's your group that also finds them a job.

[break in recording]

01-00:30:59

Rubens: Will you explain what JATC is?

01-00:31:05

Nahm: It's an acronym for Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee, and that acronym refers to our committee itself, which is a union program. The joint venture is between labor and management—management of the committee. They administer the committee; it's like a trust.

01-00:31:32

Rubens: So it's a separate union.

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Nahm: It's a separate union. And it's an individual union.

01-00:31:37

Rubens: It's not part of the Painters' Union or—?

01-00:31:40

Nahm: It is part of the Painters' Union, but it's not carpenters, it's not laborers, it's not plumbers. It's the painters and decorators Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee. Our name was so long: Painting and Decorating Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee of the East Bay, Inc. So they call us JATC. J-A-T-C.

01-00:32:05

Rubens: And now it's much more regionally based.

01-00:32:07

Nahm: Now it has grown. And the thing is that in the base closure process—and this is something that's across the country—very few unions took advantage of these base closure activities. Very few. There's a tremendous amount of facility available. I'll give you an example. There's one private company in the non-union sector, Jeffco Painting—went to Mare Island Naval Shipyard and took over their entire paint facility and runs his operation out of that facility on a lease. And it's huge! It's one of the largest industrial painting contractors in the area, in Northern California. And he went there and did this. Saw the facility, took advantage of the facility, and did it. An example, of an alternative use, of an unused facility, is at Alameda. Alameda spent seventeen million dollars to build a state-of-the-art paint facility at the Alameda Naval Air Station. And I know—when I was working with the county—that they tried to privatize that with the employees, to come together and form a company, to submit a pro forma business plan and come up with a way to privatize that. That was the only facility in the United States that had the capacity to take an entire C3 aircraft and put it inside the building, and close the door, and paint it. It was so big, it had the contract for all the National Guards in the United States to paint all their planes, and they could never privatize it. They never were able to do this. These military facilities—and this is not going to be the last time they close facilities, so I say this now—people need to be paying attention. Labor organizations, training facilities,

apprenticeship programs need to look at these facilities to see if there isn't, in fact, a way to take these facilities, these buildings, this equipment, these special-use facilities—like if it's a painting facility or a Freon facility or an electronics facility—and turn it into an apprenticeship activity. Because it's perfect. It's custom-made, it's tailor-made, for these kinds of uses. And unions miss the boat. And I made this suggestion to the International President about getting involved in some of these military bases and pursuing it, and he says, "No, no, that stuff's already been done. It's not going to happen." And what they don't understand is I'm not talking about trying to fight to save the base, I'm talking about after the decision's been made to close it and we're moving towards closure, they need to get involved in this because that's when they start divvying up the buildings, that's when they start deciding what uses are going to be there. And they don't even have to get in there and keep it forever.

01-00:35:15

Rubens:

What happened to that painting facility in Alameda.

01-00:35:18

Nahm:

It's dormant. In fact, you know who has used it? *Mythbusters*. There's a program on cable tv called *Mythbusters*. These two science guys—kind of science nerds—go in there and they try these experiments. And they've used Alameda Naval Air Station and some of the facilities out there for different activities out there, different experiments that they can't do anywheres else, but they've actually used that paint facility for some of their activities, simply because it's this enormous—you can imagine—it's this enormous building with a giant door, and it closes and shuts the whole thing up, and it's airtight.

01-00:36:01

Rubens:

So are there any missed opportunities you'd like to mention regarding the Oakland Army Base right now, while we're still waiting for the next round of proposals?

01-00:36:08

Nahm:

One of the best ideas that's come out that I think would best facilitate the people of West Oakland and address some of their needs is the issue of a truck stop. It's perfectly situated. And I was not allowed to advocate for this. I had a different role, all right? My role at the time was highest and best use, okay? Create jobs. Jobs per acre. Bioscience, biotech, some retail, commercial, those kinds of things. But I've got to tell you, when you start to look at the economic upturn of truck stops and being able to deal with getting these trucks off the streets, off the roads, give them an alternative place to go to, there are jobs to be had. And that's probably the single most missed opportunity that they've had at the Oakland Army Base. They could have been transitioning towards this ten years ago.

01-00:37:18

Rubens:

And what do you think accounts for why that didn't happen?

01-00:37:22

Nahm:

To be quite honest with you, the council has never been engaged at the Oakland Army Base. And this is not a criticism, it truly isn't. I know people are going to take it as that. It's not a criticism. The City of Oakland has so much going on—and they've got some terrible issues around crime, they've got some terrible issues around policing, community policing and things like that—so I absolutely understand that those poor council members—who work very hard—have not had an opportunity to just—

01-00:37:57

Rubens:

-focus entirely.

01-00:37:59

Nahm:

-just set some time aside, spend a few months—because that's what it's going to take—a few months of their time looking that base, walking that base, chatting with the people, getting out on that base and thinking about stuff themselves and really getting their arms about it. Because right now, all they're able to do is react to what staff puts in front of them. And their situation, their circumstance has put them in a box, where they have to sit in that box, and they wait for ideas to come to them instead of going out and looking at an international hotel as an entry point to the city of Oakland. With a pedestrian bridge and an international business center, an international trade center across the street from the hotel with connectivity, where they have international trade center, then they've got some residential and some retail and commercial above it so people can live there, they can work there, they've got restaurants there, they've got interconnection into the hotel so visitors can work there, there's got water activity—there's so much that they can do. Now, that may not be anything they're interested in, but until you're there, and you walk the place, and you spend the time there, you don't dream like this.

01-00:39:27

Rubens:

And you did it.

01-00:39:29

Nahm:

And you've got to get in there and dream these kinds of things by spending time. And again, I don't know if that's possible. Honestly and truly, I don't know if it's fair to even expect or even ask one of the Oakland Council members to do some of these things because they have so much on their plate. But if they can't do it themselves, they really need to commit a staff person from their office—each of them—to do this kind of stuff, to dream the dream at the Army base. There's so much to do. A hundred and eighty-three acres of waterfront property at the foot of a bridge!

01-00:40:11

Rubens:

So we'll see, won't we?

01-00:40:12

Nahm:

We'll see.

01-00:40:15

Rubens: I want to thank you so much for this interview.

01-00:40:17

Nahm: It's my pleasure.

[End of Interview]