

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Ellen Wyrick-Parkinson:
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens
in 2008

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Interview #1: 10-28-08

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01-00:00:00

Rubens: Would you please tell me your name and how long you've lived in Oakland?

01-00:00:23

Wyrick-Parkinson: My name is Ellen Wyrick-Parkinson.

01-00:00:33

Rubens: It's delightful seeing you. I appreciate so much your participating in this oral history project.

01-00:00:56

Wyrick-Parkinson: Thank you.

01-00:00:59

Rubens: And basically, what I want to get to today is to talk about your role in the formation of and then your long-term participation and leadership in WOCAG, the West Oakland Community Action Group. But I want to start by asking you a few questions. How long have you lived in Oakland?

01-00:01:23

Wyrick-Parkinson: I've lived in Oakland a number of years.

01-00:01:25

Rubens: Were you born in Oakland?

01-00:01:26

Wyrick-Parkinson: No.

01-00:01:27

Rubens: Did you move here as an adult?

01-00:01:30

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:01:34

Rubens: Did you go to high school here?

01-00:01:35

Wyrick-Parkinson: No.

01-00:01:36

Rubens: And what brought you to Oakland?

01-00:01:41

Wyrick-Parkinson: What brought me to Oakland was the family.

01-00:01:48

Rubens: You had parents, or extended family?

01-00:01:50

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:01:55

Rubens: And did you always live in West Oakland?

01-00:01:57

Wyrick-Parkinson: No.

01-00:01:59

Rubens: When did you first come to West Oakland?

01-00:02:02

Wyrick-Parkinson: Oh, I don't remember.

01-00:02:09

Rubens: So was it after the war? After World War II?

01-00:02:12

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:02:19

Rubens: That you lived in West Oakland.

01-00:02:30

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, we came to Oakland. But we didn't move to West Oakland.

01-00:02:35

Rubens: No?

01-00:02:36

Wyrick-Parkinson: No. We lived downtown.

01-00:02:42

Rubens: And that's what I'm trying to get to. I'm trying to get to when you moved to West Oakland.

01-00:02:46

Wyrick-Parkinson: I don't remember when I moved to West Oakland.

01-00:02:52

Rubens: Did you ever have any interaction with the Army base before you got involved with WOCAG? Had you ever been to—

01-00:02:59

Wyrick-Parkinson: No.

01-00:03:01

Rubens: —ever been to activities or the PX or—

01-00:03:05

Wyrick-Parkinson: No.

01-00:03:07

Rubens: —new people who would—

01-00:03:09

Wyrick-Parkinson: No.

01-00:03:10

Rubens: You know, the Oakland Army Base had a remediation advisory board. And I wondered if you had known anything about that—if you had—apparently the Army base adopted Ralph Bunch School to mentor. They sponsored a humanities week and then a humanities day.

01-00:03:39

Wyrick-Parkinson: No.

01-00:03:39

Rubens: I don't know if that caught your attention or if that was anything that you were involved in.

That's what I was trying to—if we could pin anything to if you have any association with when you moved here. Had the Cypress Freeway fallen?

01-00:04:03

Wyrick-Parkinson: No.

01-00:04:04

Rubens: Ah. Now, when the Cypress Freeway fell, that was in 1989.

01-00:04:11

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:04:14

Rubens: Were you involved at all in any of the efforts to have the freeway rerouted out of—

01-00:04:21

Wyrick-Parkinson: Greatly involved.

01-00:04:25

Rubens: Could you tell me a little bit about that?

01-00:04:31

Wyrick-Parkinson: We got involved due to the fact that they were going to rebuild the freeway. And we did not want the freeway back where it was. We wanted it to go outside of the neighborhood. And we became involved. There were other community organizations, but I worked very hard with WOCA, which was West Oakland Commerce Association. And we worked very hard for the rerouting of the Cypress Freeway. And that was a long, drawn-out, difficult thing. But we finally accomplished our goal. And the fruits of our hard labor and everything is that the freeway is outside of the neighborhood, and we have the beautiful Mandela Parkway. And that was the result of all of our

long hours and work. And it wouldn't have happened if we hadn't stayed with it. And we took a lot of abuse from the state and the city, but we kept pushing, and we made it.

01-00:06:09

Rubens: When you say "we," what's the organization—

01-00:06:12

Wyrick-Parkinson: The community. We had a lot of community meetings. And, of course, there were times that—well, at one time, they had totally decided to put it back. And I think it was Caltrans [California Department of Transportation] that we dealt with the Cypress Freeway. And we had met a particular Saturday morning to accept the plans to put it back. At least, that's what all the officials thought. But when they got there, they found out there was a picket line that said "No, we disapprove of the plan," so then we went back to the drawing board.

And so I can't remember the different people that were involved at that time, because it was long ago, and the people are not active now—they're all gone. Some moved away, and I really can't remember some of their names.

01-00:07:23

Rubens:: Well, I'm asking you this as a background to WOCAG.

01-00:07:25

Wyrick-Parkinson: To that. Yes.

01-00:07:26

Rubens: And I'm wondering if that was your school of politics. Was that the most politically active in the community that you had been up to that time?

01-00:07:39

Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, I had always been interested in what was going on in Oakland. So I had attended a number of the council meetings, campaign events for various government officials and other political events. So I've always been involved in the political world and things that would make for a better Oakland or a better country or what have you. So I have always had that interest. So it just went from one to the other. I never discontinued one to go to the other. They all went along together.

01-00:08:19

Rubens: Well, then, let's talk about the formation of WOCAG. There's an announcement that the Oakland Army Base is going to close. There's the origin of OBRA, the Oakland Base Reuse Authority, and there's a mandate that a representative community group—

01-00:08:43

Wyrick-Parkinson: Involvement.

01-00:08:43
Rubens: —be created. And I think you were at that founding meeting, were you not?

01-00:08:49
Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:08:51
Rubens: Do you remember that?

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:08:53
Rubens: Would you tell us a little bit about that?

01-00:08:55
Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, at that particular meeting, at that time, our council person was Natalie Bayton.

01-00:09:08
Rubens: I think you're right.

01-00:09:10
Wyrick-Parkinson: Council Member Bayton, was our councilperson at that time. And if I'm not mistaken, Elihu Harris was our mayor at that time, and Congressman Dellums. And they were all at this particular meeting at Taylor Memorial Church. And that's when we had our first meeting. And they had sent out applications that they had chosen as possible candidates for the board.

01-00:10:35
Rubens: Oh, I see. So it was not a nominating meeting?

01-00:10:37
Wyrick-Parkinson: No, it wasn't. The meeting was that we were confirmed at that meeting.

01-00:11:02
Rubens: So you knew you were going to be on the WOCAG board.

01-00:11:04
Wyrick-Parkinson: Right, right.

01-00:11:06
Rubens: How many people, about, were at that meeting?

01-00:11:08
Wyrick-Parkinson: There was about—well, there was a lot of people at the meeting, but I think to start off, I think it was a board of around sixty-seven board members more or less.

01-00:11:18
Rubens: That's a big board.

There were other facilities that had gone through this process.

01-00:11:46

Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, I don't know that they're going through the process, but the Army base was the federal government, so it wasn't confined to just one thing. And so we had representatives from different areas, which meant that it made the board large because of what was included from the beginning. And a lot of them attended the meeting for a long time, but then they began to drop out and drop out and drop out and drop out. But there were about five of us that remained from the beginning, and we're still there. So we never gave up. We kept going and kept going and kept going. And one time, they almost discontinued it because of the participation. But we never stopped, and we insisted that the city do not let the WOCAG die. And so we would constantly talk to the mayor and our councilperson to please keep it going.

01-00:13:00

Rubens: Oh, I see. You're saying from the city, there was a—

01-00:11:02

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:13:06

Rubens: I think the first city administrator was Paul Nahn

01-00:13:07

Wyrick-Parkinson: First Paul Nahn, and then we had staff under him. And Miss Cantrell, I believe, was the first person. And they would take the message back. Because, you see, the Port of Oakland played a big part in it. So there was a lot of different involvements in the Army base. And it just went on and on and on. We had meetings and more meetings and more meetings; we had committees and more committees. And then I was on this particular committee, but I can't remember the name of it. That was the cleanup group. It was called the RAB.

01-00:14:01

Rubens: That was the primary place where you worked?

01-00:14:04

Wyrick-Parkinson: I didn't work, I was a volunteer.

01-00:14:06

Rubens: Well, I mean for WOCAG. Where you did your—

01-00:14:12

Wyrick-Parkinson: No. That was an environmental clean up committee. They had a clean-up program to clean up the waste and stuff that was left on the Army base. And so I was on that committee also, which meant that we met with the environmental air quality staff in San Francisco, Sacramento. We met with them once a month, and I was on the committee also. Our lead person's last name was Keller. He was a coordinator.

01-00:14:52

Rubens: Keller?

01-00:14:54

Wyrick-Parkinson: Keller.

01-00:15:03

Rubens: Okay.

01-00:15:04

Wyrick-Parkinson: And I worked with him. Now, it wasn't but two of us from WOCAG that worked with this committee that was the cleanup committee. I think the company was named Kaiser something, was one of the environmental cleanup companies. And they would report back to us at this particular meeting. And now, this particular meeting committee, we met always on the Army base. But when we went there, this was where we met with the air quality people and everything, was always on the Army base. But we had a regular small committee for the cleanup. We met mostly over here at the senior center, after it became available. And then, of course, then there was all the WOCAG meeting.

01-00:16:12

Rubens: What was it like meeting on the Army base? Was this before it had been shut down?

01-00:16:16

Wyrick-Parkinson: No, no. This was all before.

01-00:16:23

Rubens: WOCAG formed in ninety-six.

01-00:16:25

Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, when it started, there were still activities out there, but it was in the closing phase. And the environmental cleanup group, we were looking at areas that really needed a lot of cleanup.

01-00:17:02

Rubens: There had been waste that had been disposed.

01-00:17:04

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. Toxic chemicals. They were out there in barrels, or whatever you might call them. And when they took them away that land needed to be cleaned to a certain—

01-00:17:28

Rubens: Standard.

01-00:17:29

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:17:31

Rubens: So you were an oversight committee.

01-00:17:34

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, for the cleanup.

01-00:17:37

Rubens: They were accountable to you. Did you feel that they listened to you?

01-00:16:41

Wyrick-Parkinson: They did. We worked together. And then that committee was discontinued, and that was when we were supposed to be just about done with the cleanup. And then that was turned over to the city, and then the city was supposed to continue with the rest of the cleanup, and that's when we, as a citizen committee, was dissolved.

01-00:18:15

Rubens: Did you have a strong feeling about building one? I know that there was a debate about it.

01-00:18:21

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, that was headquarters. That building could have been saved, and we tried so hard to save it, but that was destined to go. Because I don't think they ever found—maybe they did, but I don't think they ever found all this stuff that they said was there.

01-00:18:34

Rubens: Some people claimed that it was a, quote, "sick building"—that there was a toxic plume coming from underneath it.

01-00:18:39

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:18:41

Rubens: But you would have liked to see that building?

01-00:18:45

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, we would have liked to have seen that building remain. It was a beautiful building.

01-00:18:50

Rubens: Did you meet in that building before your cleanup meetings?

01-00:18:52

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. It was a beautiful building, and so we really wanted the building to remain, because it could have been used for a lot of activities. But that was the way we were looking at it then, and a lot of those plans were changed, and the plans that we as a community made—most of those, they didn't come to fruition.

01-00:19:31

Rubens: Well, let's talk a little bit about that, because it ended up that there were three reports that WOCAG produced.

01-00:19:34

Wyrick-Parkinson: Produced, right.

01-00:19:35

Rubens: One of them was within a couple of years; by ninety-eight, there was a first-use draft plan. Were you part of the writing of that?

01-00:19:46

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, we were.

01-00:19:47

Rubens: How literally would that happen? Would different committees write a—?

01-00:19:55

Wyrick-Parkinson: No. See, we had WOCAG. And CWOR [Coalition for West Oakland Revitalization] was the community part. And by being the community part, well, we were constantly meeting, and we had committees. And so you served on this committee or that committee, and then the committee would report back, of course, to the body and tell the findings. And then we had a representative from Congressman Dellum's office, and she would attend the meetings. So it was quite a thing. Because, you see, what made it interesting from the beginning was the nonprofits. We had nonprofits, and the nonprofits were promised from the beginning that they would eventually own whatever site they had established on the Army base. They would be there forever. But at least thirty years. Well, that didn't happen, as you can see.

01-00:21:05

Rubens: And these nonprofits included the homeless collaborative?

01-00:21:13

Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, yes. At that time, homeless wasn't like it is now. But we did have a small homeless collaborative, and yeah. We had that, and I can't remember who they were, except Tim Thomas. I remember he worked with the homeless. And then we had the Indian—I can't remember. I know it was Indian something.

01-00:21:31

Rubens: Indian Nation?

01-00:21:35

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, Indian Nation. And anyway, that was very strong, and that was a nonprofit. And it was OCCUR. It was a number of nonprofits. OCCUR [Oakland Citizens' Committee for Urban Renewal] was going to put a campus there.

01-00:21:56

Rubens: Oh of course, it's fourteen years.

01-00:22:00

Wyrick-Parkinson: And so we had all these things going on, and we were looking forward to the nonprofits. And the nonprofits were looking forward to going on the Army base. And then that program was cancelled when a representative from the Army defense department, through Congressman Dellum's office I'm almost sure, came and we met to finalize the nonprofits. Well, when she came to bring what was necessary for the nonprofits to qualify to go on the Army base, they didn't qualify. They didn't make the qualification. So that ended that program. So we started all over again, and then we went forth with another plan. There were multiple organizations and nonprofits. But I must say that one of the ones that stayed until the end, that Councilman Dick Spees supported very strongly, was—I guess it was the Indian Nation. And that particular nonprofit stayed with us until the end, in that they stayed with us until they figured out it really wasn't going to happen.

01-00:23:44

Rubens: Do you think you were taken seriously as a group? Though you've now mentioned two roadblocks?

01-00:23:51

Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, we thought we were, because we had a representative—he worked with us—and I've forgotten what committee he did, but I was on his committee. And we thought we were making headway. Mr. Foster met with the committee.

01-00:24:17

Rubens: Chuck Foster?

01-00:24:18

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. Because he came to the meeting from the very beginning and said that he wanted the entire Army base, because he needed it for his expansion of the Port of Oakland. So they were very involved. And so we just went on and on, and as things began to not materialize—what happened was that then people began to drop off the board. Because, as you know, we were an advisory board. So when they found out that this isn't going to work, and they just got tired of meetings and more meetings and more meetings. Because we had people that were on the environmental committee, and people that were also working with WOCAG. And so it was just too much, and they had their jobs. And it just looked like there was nothing that was going to happen. And so that's when we began to lose our board.

01-00:25:24

Rubens: And you held on for ten, twelve years.

01-00:25:28

Wyrick-Parkinson: Oh, yes, we're still holding on.

01-00:25:35

Rubens: Now WOCAG reports to CEDA, and it doesn't have the same kind of...

01-00:25:42

Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, no. See, we have a representative from CEDA that works with us, with WOCAG. And her name is Sullivan, I believe, is her last name.

01-00:25:48

Rubens: Peggy Sullivan? Margaret Sullivan?

01-00:25:49

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. And so she works with us and reports back to the Council.

01-00:26:00

Rubens: How do you account for why a plan would be made and then the rug would be pulled out from under it? It's not as if any one interest ever was realized. Nothing has taken place on that base. Aliza Gallo told me that at least the rents from the different organizations that have been there have paid for the administration of the base so far.

01-00:26:39

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. But, you see, before that, the government was paying for it, because there were still military activities out there. Aliza came very late, and so she was one of the last ones to come. And the one that was really there for the longest time and was really involved was Naomi Cantrell.

01-00:27:06

Rubens: Oh, Naomi Cantrell. She's moved from the area, is that right?

01-00:27:11

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:27:12

Rubens: You felt that she was representing WOCAG's interests?

01-00:27:20

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. Well, she was only from the city—from CEDA. And her thing was to listen to us, and whatever questions we had, to come up with the answers. She wasn't the one who was supposed to know all the things; she was just the one that was over us to keep us informed.

01-00:27:35

Rubens: But you felt she was representing your interests and working on your behalf.

01-00:27:38

Wyrick-Parkinson: Oh, yes. She did well.

01-00:27:38

Rubens: On your behalf.

01-00:27:40

Wyrick-Parkinson: Oh, yes. She tried very hard. Very hard. And she worked with us. She was very devoted to the job. When they cut back, when they began to cut back, she was one of the employees to be let go. And then it just got smaller and smaller and smaller.

01-00:28:08

Rubens: Do you remember the excitement when you came up with your first plan?

01-00:28:13

Wyrick-Parkinson: Of course . We thought we had done great. I mean, we were all excited about it, and it didn't go. So then everybody said, "Well, we knew it wasn't going to happen, that they weren't going to let those nonprofits have the Army base for free." But the nonprofits—they were the ones that were really hurt, because they were sure that they were going to have a home. And I think the requirements were that they were going to do that—I can't remember, but I think they were supposed to do the infrastructure for the site. And then whatever else they did on their space, after thirty years it would be theirs, or something to that effect. But anyway, one day it would be their site. But it didn't happen that way. Because as I say, when the representative came from Washington, D.C., the requirements said that—the nonprofits just couldn't meet the requirements.

01-00:29:18

Rubens: Now, I think you told me at some point when I talked to you earlier that Roberta Brooks, from Delham's office, had been—

01-00:29:23

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, she was his representative.

01-00:29:25

Rubens: And that she had been really helpful to you.

01-00:29:30

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, she was very helpful.

01-00:29:31

Rubens: One of the questions that had always circulated is, why did Dellums promoted the closure of the Army base?

01-00:29:47

Wyrick-Parkinson: That he was against the war. And his thing was to close the military bases. Well, we always say that's why in California we were hit so hard, because he did not approve of the military. So we were hit very hard, because in this city, the military was actually one of the major workforces here. And when the bases closed, a lot of people were unemployed. And so that really hurt Oakland, and they had to make their recovery after that. But we always wondered why Congressman Dellums never came back to our meetings anymore.

01-00:30:37

Rubens: You met him at that first meeting at Taylor Church.

01-00:30:40

Wyrick-Parkinson: Right.

01-00:30:41

Rubens: And then you never saw him again.

01-00:30:42

Wyrick-Parkinson: No, we asked him to come back, but he never came back.

01-00:30:46

Rubens: Has WOCAG ever had a meeting with Dellus since he's been mayor of the city?

01-00:30:53

Wyrick-Parkinson: No.

01-00:30:59

Rubens: I don't think he's ever articulated what he would like to see the land or the Army base become.

01-00:31:02

Wyrick-Parkinson: Not with us.

01-00:31:07

Rubens: Jerry Brown wanted the military charter school.

01-00:31:12

Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, the reason why Jerry Brown wanted that was because he wanted to help the youth. But that wasn't what he wanted from the beginning. And at that time, crime had begun to happen through the United States. And so we said, in order to help the youth, maybe we need some kind of a school. And so we said, the schools should go on the Army base. And so that was a community thing .

01-00:31:43

Rubens: And so that came out of WOCAG.

01-00:31:47

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. Not necessarily that particular form of a school, but we wanted—No. We wanted something where the kids could go, like a CC camp—that's what we had said—where they could come back rehabilitated, ready, job-ready—educated and job-ready.

01-00:32:08

Rubens: CC is the California Conservation Corps?.

01-00:32:10

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, I believe so. CC was all throughout the United States to educate people who weren't able to educate themselves and have the funds and things like

that. And so they could go there and better themselves—come out a better person. And that’s what we wanted. And everybody wondered where it could be, and we said, “The Army base.” And so that’s how that idea really came about. I don’t remember Mayor Brown ever saying that, but we know that’s where it came from.

01-00:32:55

Rubens: Good. Good to get it on the historical record here.

01-00:32:59

Wyrick-Parkinson: Maybe.

01-00:33:00

Rubens: You know, you mentioned schools, and I know that a lot of the Army equipment and computers and some of the medical equipment did go to Oakland Tech. I don’t know if it went to Ralph Bunch school.

01-00:33:19

Wyrick-Parkinson: I don’t.

01-00:33:20

Rubens: I wondered if WOCAG took a position—

01-00:33:23

Wyrick-Parkinson: No.

01-00:33:24

Rubens: —or had anything to do with that.

01-00:33:25

Wyrick-Parkinson: No. Because we tried to get some of the equipment from the base, but we weren’t able to. So that was a no-no.

01-00:33"34

Rubens: One of the planks in the plan, the first WOCAG plan, was that there be green and sustainable development.

01-00:33:49

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:33:51

Rubens: And a new job base, a work force development.

01-00:33:55

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:33:56

Rubens: Were there other things that you remember that you were committed to and that you would have liked to have seen?

01-00:34:07

Wyrick-Parkinson: One of the things that we had wanted was a beautiful park. We have a park there, and that's the Shoreline Park. So that was one of the things that the community had talked about, and that did happen. That was, of course, a different committee that worked on that.

01-00:34:29

Rubens: Were you involved with that as well?

01-00:34:30

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:34:32

Rubens: That's an example of that you just keep adding activities and commitments.

01-00:34:38

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:34:39

Rubens: It abutted it. It was next to it.

01-00:34:49

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, but it had a name. I don't know if it was Naval Supply, or what it was. Because we had a number of them right here. And so that was part of that land. You know, in-fill, I guess it's called. And so that was part of a program.

01-00:35:12

Rubens: But you would have liked to have seen a park—

01-00:35:16

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, but now that you think about the port and you become more involved in Port activities, then you find that maybe more park wouldn't have been advisable, due to the fact of the traffic. Because very heavy truck traffic that goes to the Port. And for you to try to go there with that traffic, it really wouldn't have been a wise thing, I don't think. So maybe it didn't happen for a good reason. Because the Port has to survive, and you can make the trucks less dangerous with the environment, but just the same, you still have the traffic. You clean up the environment, but you don't clean up the traffic, because it's still there. In fact, with the Port looking forward to expansion, we're going to have more trucks rather than less, but they will be safer as far as the environment is concerned.

So some things that we thought about, they probably wouldn't have worked anyway. We thought about shopping and retailing. Well, when you think about it, it really wouldn't have been ideal for the Port, because of the truck traffic. Now I go down on Third and Adeline Street once a month. And if there's a ship at the Port, those trucks are almost bumper-to-bumper. And with my little car in those trucks, it is scary. And so I would not go to the Port to shop. I mean, to the Army base to shop. Because of the truck traffic.

And so if we had put those things out there, probably they would have suffered anyway. Because we had spoken about a hotel—a hotel that would bring night life.

01-00:37:30

Rubens: Kind of a destination...

01-00:37:31

Wyrick-Parkinson: Right. But when you really think about it, would it be? With the traffic? Unless we would build a different form of transportation. It would need to be separate from the truck group. You'd have to have just automobile traffic only.

01-00:37:51

Rubens: Some kind of overpass, or throughway?

01-00:37:53

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, to get the people there.

01-00:37:54

Rubens: You'd need some public transportation as well.

01-00:37:54

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:38:04

Rubens: To encounter the transportation.

01-00:38:07

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. And so you would still have to have a different roadway or something that would be automobiles only and that would make shopping conducive to the Army base. And so really, when you really think about it, with all the activities that are planned to go there now, actually the best thing in the world for the Port of Oakland and for the Army base would have been, as far as I can see, sold to the Port of Oakland for their expansion .

01-00:38:39

Rubens: I see.

01-00:38:42

Wyrick-Parkinson: But that's just my way of thinking.

01-00:38:43

Rubens: You're saying this personally, not as a WOCAG position.

01-00:38:44

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, yes. We are working with three developers now, and trying to figure out which one—

01-00:39:02

Rubens: Four groups have been asked to—

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Wyrick-Parkinson: But one dropped out.

01-00:39:03

Rubens: Oh, they have already? I didn't know that.

01-00:39:04

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. One dropped out. And so we only have three.

01-00:39:09

Rubens: You mean in coming up with a proposal?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. And so we—because we were writing a recommendation, that doesn't mean it's going to happen.

01-00:39:16

Rubens: Now, when you say "we"—

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Wyrick-Parkinson: I mean WOCAG.

01-00:39:17

Rubens: Do you mean WOCAG is literally meeting with them?

01-00:39:21

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. We're part—we're still, you know, part of the Army base reuse planning. So they came to us last week.

01-00:39:32

Rubens: I saw you had a pretty heavy schedule.

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Wyrick-Parkinson: No, maybe they came to us this week.

01-00:39:35

Rubens: The twenty-third on November, 2008.

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Wyrick-Parkinson: That was this week, right?

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Rubens: That was the last meeting.

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. But they were with us the last two days.

01-00:39:41

Rubens: All three of them made presentations?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. And so we listened to them, and all we do is make recommendations ourselves.

01-00:39:52

Rubens: How many WOCAG people were there? How many were at the meeting?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, we have a board, I think, of fifteen or something like that, and I think it was about ten of us there, but not the entire board. And so we listened.

01-00:40:08

Rubens: Are these night meetings?

01-00:40:10

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. They were night meetings. They started at six o'clock.

01-00:40:15

Rubens: And was there anything that caught your ear that—

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, they were all very interesting. They were interesting. They all had their points, and—

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Rubens: Do they differ very dramatically?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, not really. They all had similar ideas. Because what happened was that it had been talked about, what should go out there. So they would all have similar ideas, due to the fact that it had been talked about, what should go out there. For instance, they had talked about the automobiles going there; they had talked about retail going there, they had talked about movies going there, or—

01-00:40:54

Rubens: Moving the recycling—

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. The recycling as well had already been talked about. And so it wasn't a problem for them to come forward with a plan, because they knew what the community and the city had expected to go there. And so it was just a matter of putting it together, and how they would do it. But that's years off. It's not going to happen tomorrow. And so it was very interesting.

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Rubens: Have you been able to recruit new people to WOCAG?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:41:40

Rubens: Yes.

01-00:41:41

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, because, you see, we had this huge board. And we'd gotten down to about five board members. So we recruited new members. But when they come and it's a long, drawn-out process, people don't have that kind of time or patience. And when you do something and then it comes back and it didn't go forward, then the new ones will say, "Well, why should we stay here? We're just marking time only."

01-00:42:07

Rubens: It's dispiriting.

01-00:42:08

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. And we sort of felt the same way. But we're not going to give up; we're going all the way. In fact, at the last meeting, the meetings we had last week, I asked that we be continued as an overseer for whatever happens on the Army base. Because they should have ongoing community involvement, it is our suggestion, as the original community, that we should continue to a part of the activities at the army base.

And the next thing I wanted is the trucking and the recyclers to go there.

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Rubens: So you'd move it further away.

01-00:43:43

Wyrick-Parkinson: Right. Different land use. And that was one of the suggestions I made as a member.

01-00:43:52

Rubens: And you're making this suggestion to—

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Wyrick-Parkinson: These developers.

01-00:43:55

Rubens: Okay.

01-00:43:56

Wyrick-Parkinson: To each developer, I had made the same suggestions. I didn't change them. Because why change them because there was something I as a board member wanted to see happen on the Army base? And that was recyclers and trucks that go out there. And then we use the land for some of the things we want; like shopping, schools, libraries, parks and things like that to enhance the community. Because there's a big change in our community: a lot of housing. So that means that the environment changes. So with the environment changing, that means the shopping would be different, and they can support those entities that come into the communities. Each one of us had different recommendations, but that was mine. And so we shall see what happens.

01-00:44:52

Rubens: I was asking you in the beginning when you came to West Oakland, because I'm sure you've seen such a change. I mean, in the community.

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, when I came to West Oakland, it was nothing like how it is today.

01-00:45:02

Rubens: How so?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: It was a nice community. It has changed all over not only West Oakland; the whole of Oakland has changed. And this part of Oakland was nice. It was very nice.

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Rubens: It's a beautiful sunny day today, and the homes look really nice now.

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:45:23

Rubens: But the community has suffered. There's just a lot of jobs that have left.

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, that's the whole city, that the jobs have left, unless you create your own job, or you work, as I say, in some big company or something where you practically make your own job. But Oakland was a flourishing city, because what happened was, we had stores, we had everything. We need self-supporting. People were working, there was the Army base, there was all the military jobs, there was the canneries.

01-00:46:00

Rubens: There was the downtown commercial, shopping center.

01-00:45:59

Wyrick-Parkinson: Downtown. Oh, yes. Downtown wasn't suffering at all. So what happened was, time brought on these changes. And one of the changes that happened in Oakland was the freeways. When they decided to take the freeways and run the freeway around Oakland into San Francisco, we told them that we have been working for a long time. And we told them that once you do that, the traffic is not going to get into Oakland anymore. It's going to San Francisco. And that's exactly what happened. Because once you got on the freeway, why would you get off when it would take you for a major city for you to do your shopping—not downtown Oakland?

And then, another thing, the shopping centers is what killed the downtown, also—the shopping centers. As they developed shopping centers, then people began to go to the shopping centers, because of parking. This is what happened. It's just one little thing after another; you have to sometimes

blame your city administrators and what have you for not being on the ball and seeing that this was going to happen. Because, you see, when they did Emeryville shopping center—when they did Emeryville, that's when they cut off the traffic from the freeway, coming into the city. You could only go one way, and that was to Emeryville shopping. That stopped people from coming into the city, and we fought that. And it didn't work, because we had people on the planning commission that were determined for this to happen. We said, "Because you're even making it difficult for us. When we come in, we have to go one way to get into our residential areas, because everything goes to Emeryville and not to Oakland."

But we had people on the planning commission at that time—"This is what happened"—and it happened. And so we worked with Emeryville to do that little shopping center at the beginning where Pack and Save is. That's one of the first stores we ever worked together because that's supposed to be part in Oakland and part in Emeryville. So all of those things fell in together and they've all been less conducive to jobs. And it was just between one thing and another.

01-00:48:31

Rubens:

I noticed one of the early documents I had was a questionnaire of people in West Oakland, and you were listed as one of the people. This was done by H&H Ecoprises in ninety-six, right before WOCAG formed. But you were listed as representing the Oak Center Neighborhood Association.

01-00:48:57

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes.

01-00:48:58

Rubens: That's your—

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Wyrick-Parkinson: We're in Oak Center.

01-00:49:01

Rubens: We're at your home on Magnolia Street, and we're right near the family park.

01-00:49:03

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. Well, Oak Center comes past from Brush to Cypress, and from Tenth to Twentieth Street—that's Oak Center.

01-00:49:17

Rubens: And so when you said "we" fought the Emeryville development, was that one of the organizations that you worked through, the Oak Center?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: At that particular time, I was working with WOCA.

01-00:49:27

Rubens: WOCA. The West Oakland—

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Commerce Association.

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01-00:49:34

Rubens: Were you ever in business yourself? Did you—

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. We were in business. We had a service garage. And retail boutique.

01-00:49:53

Rubens: Here in West Oakland? Where was your boutique?

01-00:49:55

Wyrick-Parkinson: It was on Foothill Boulevard. And the storage garage—what was it called? Well, anyway, it was on Foothill. And then we had our storage garage, which was on Jackson Street.

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Wyrick-Parkinson: So you had a natural affinity to the commerce associations.

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Rubens: Yes.

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Wyrick-Parkinson: I think you had told me one time you had worked also with the Downtown Merchants Association?

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Rubens: Yes, that was many years ago—a long time ago. Yes.

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Wyrick-Parkinson: And I think Mr. Isaac was the chair at that time.

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Rubens: You know, another change in Oakland that seemed very dramatic was the role of the newspaper, *Tribune*. The *Tribune* had really been a powerful voice

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, it was.

01-00:50:56

Rubens: For commerce and politics. And I was wondering if you felt that WOCAG had adequate publicity and adequate circulation of its reports.

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, by the time WOCAG came around, the *Tribune* wasn't what it used to be. You see, after Knowland left, the *Tribune* went this way. And so it didn't have the clout that it had when Knowland was with the *Tribune*.

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Rubens: Was WOCAG covered in the *Tribune*?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes—oh, yes, we were covered. I mean, WOCAG was covered in the *Tribune*.

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Rubens: You have the *Oakland Post*?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Oak Center was covered in the *Tribune*. Well, the *Post* wasn't so involved.

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Rubens: Why is that?

01-00:51:42

Wyrick-Parkinson: I don't know. Maybe they didn't want to, or maybe we didn't engage them. Because that was up to the coordinators to do that, through the city.

01-00:52:01

Rubens: To publicize. To make sure that the various outlets knew.

01-00:52:07

Wyrick-Parkinson: When we had our big general meetings, then they were publicized, because a lot of people always come out. Or we had something on the agenda that they were interested in.

01-00:52:22

Rubens: Of course CWOR was the organization that you worked with.

01-00:52:23

Wyrick-Parkinson: Right. That was on the Cypress Freeway organization. It still goes on

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Rubens: That's the Coalition for West Oakland Revitalization?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes. That was formed when the Cypress Freeway fell, because again, that was a requirement for community organization.

01-00:52:52

Rubens: What else do you think is important for us to talk about and make sure we have on the historical record about WOCAG? I mean, its longevity is really...

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Well, one of the things I must say: it was a learning experience, it was a beautiful experience, and I would do it over again. The only thing is that with the knowledge I have now, I would probably do it better. And we can't say what WOCAG did or didn't do until we have a developer. Because right now, it's just land with renters. And most of them will be leaving.

And so we're going to say it was a success. Regardless of what happened, it was a success. Because we held on this long. And so we're not going to give up. We're going to be there. And so we're not going away, and we want all the officials to know we're not going away. We've been here this long, and whoever is the developer, whatever happens to the Army base, WOCAG will always be a part of it.

01-00:54:07

Rubens: That's a wonderful closing. Let me turn this off for a minute. [break in tape] Ms. Wyrick-Parkinson, how do you feel you worked together as a group, WOCAG? You've just made an eloquent statement about you're going to keep going. Did you work harmoniously together?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, we did. We worked beautifully together. It was a beautiful board, and we enjoyed each other.

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Rubens: No real conflicts?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: No, none at all.

01-00:54:44

Rubens: Most of you were of like mind?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: No, none at all. That we didn't have. We just worked very well together. And we had some disagreements; we didn't all vote together, but the majority always ruled, and it worked out beautifully.

01-00:55:01

Rubens: And in the time remaining, can you say—are you involved in the redevelopment of West Oakland?

01-00:55:06

Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, I am involved. I'm on the advisory board. And one of the things we're stressing and that we need a lot of support on is undergrounding BART. We would like very much to have extra support to underground BART where it goes straight down the center of Seventh Street. We're trying to develop businesses and housing on Seventh Street, but it's very noisy. It's very noisy

for the businesspeople to conduct their business with the noise of BART. So if we could undertake the retrofit money that is destined for the BART in West Oakland, if they could take it and add more money and underground BART, it would really, really be a blessing for West Oakland.

01-00:56:00

Rubens: How likely do you think that is?

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Very likely, because we are going to work on it very, very hard and very diligently. And it's in our West Oakland plan, the underground part, so we're sure somewhere that the government will come up with funds to underground in less wealthy neighborhoods; regarding the wealthy neighborhoods, BART didn't go near them. And the less wealthy neighborhood, we took the blunt of BART. So we're asking now that you come back and you reconsider an underground BART down Seventh Street.

01-00:56:46

Rubens: And that land could be used for it.

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Yes, the land could be used for more housing and more businesses.

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Rubens: And more businesses, yes.

01-00:56:51

Wyrick-Parkinson: And so we're asking that you support us on that. And please come and help us. And another thing that we worked on was Raimondi Field, which is an old park here in West Oakland that we would love to have some developers or someone to come and help us complete the Raimondi Field. Thank you.

01-00:57:16

Rubens: I wish you lots of luck.

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Wyrick-Parkinson: Thank you.

01-00:57:19

Rubens: Thank you for this interview.

01-00:57:21

Wyrick-Parkinson: Thank you. It's been my pleasure.

[End Audio File]

[End of Interview]