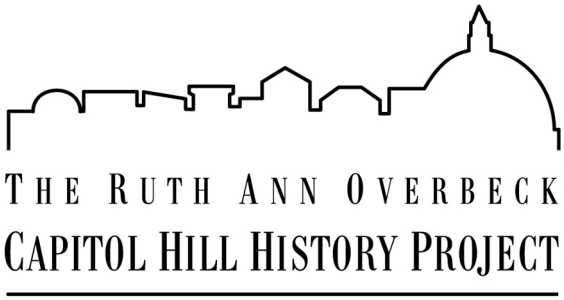

Interview with Tommy Wells

Interview Date: March 26, 2009
Interviewer: Dilshika Jayamaha
Transcriber: Elizabeth Lewis

TAPE 1/SIDE 1

JAYAMAHA: This is Dilshika Jayamaha. I'm interviewing Councilman Tommy Wells for the Overbeck oral history project. It's March 26, 2009, and we're meeting at Coldwell Banker premises at 605 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, Washington, DC.

Thank you very much Councilman Wells, Tommy.

WELLS: Happy to be here. Thank you very much.

JAYAMAHA: And thanks for giving us the opportunity to interview you. I'd like to start off by talking a little bit about the government and community response to the fire that took place at Eastern Market. And maybe you could talk a little bit about how the response to the fire was organized so quickly.

WELLS: Well, let me say that I was new, being elected as a councilmember, and I was sworn in in January and this, of course, was April. One of the things that happens as a councilmember is that, when there's a crisis in the community, I get a call. I was called in the middle of the night, woke me up from sleep. Woke up from dead asleep. I was called by the police commander for the area, Diane Grooms, and Diane said, "Councilmember Wells, Eastern Market is on fire and it's pretty serious. I just wanted to call and alert you." And I couldn't believe the words that I had heard. Usually the call is about some terrible crime or something. And I said, "What?" And she said, "Yes, Eastern Market is on fire." And I said, "Well, how serious is it?" And she said, "I see fire is going down the roofline. It looks like we're going to lose the roof. It looks very serious." I said, "Okay, I'll get there right away."

And so I hung up my phone and I turned to my wife and said, "Did you just hear me say that Eastern Market is on fire?" And she said, "Yes." And I said, "Am I awake?" And she said, "Yes, you're awake." And so I thought I was just dreaming this. And so I quickly just threw on my jeans and a shirt and I actually jumped on my bicycle. I rode my bicycle over to the Market, and they let me through because I was a councilmember. They let me go right across the street from the Market, and what I saw was just something you could never even imagine. It was a dark sky, and to watch the flames leaping all along the roofline of Eastern Market against the black sky, really illuminating the whole area, in one way was just a stunning drama to watch because there were so many firemen and so many fire trucks all swarmed in front and around the Market. And all the men were feverishly running around. The firemen obviously had their hoses trained on the Market, and they were dumping thousands and thousands of gallons of water all along the roofline and through the Market. And you could see where they were breaking out windows. It was just horrible. And neighbors were coming out of their homes. People were starting to gather as we just watched a sight that we never could have imagined in our minds.

The firemen had over 120 firemen there that night. And as I walked around to the fire trucks, they set up a command center and I asked the Fire Chief, Chief Ruben, "So, how are doing? Do we have enough water pressure?" And they said, "Yes, we're really lucky. All the fire hydrants are working." And they're telling me that we've got plenty of water and the pressure is fine. And I asked, "Are any of our firemen injured?" And they said, "No. No firemen injured."

And so what I watched that night until early morning—there were a couple of merchants, I believe Tommy Glasgow, who has a meat shop inside the Market, came with his wife—and we watched it together and talked about what we were seeing. And so we watched the firemen put out the fire at Eastern Market. And what they did was extraordinary. They mobilized quickly, they were very, very … they made really a heroic effort. In essence it was saved because the firemen did what they were supposed to do, all the water mains and the fire hydrants worked like they were supposed to work.

And also the Market was saved because Adolf Cluss did such a fantastic job in designing the Market. Unlike the O Street Market, the walls were so thick and solid that it held together and it held the roof together, and the roof did not collapse. And the walls did not collapse. The Market survived. And it really survived so that we could rebuild it.

So this was a time when the economy was really soaring in DC, and we were running surpluses. Now we have a very conservative chief financial officer, Dr. Gandhi, and we run surpluses because we are very careful to be sure that the city does not slide back into the days of being essentially bankrupt in the middle 90's. So, with conservative estimates, that meant that whenever we did better and as the economy was booming, we ran surpluses. And after the Market burned, I met with the Mayor, and I met with Dan Tangherlini, the city administrator, and they said that they would request $20 million right away to rebuild the Market. And I joined the Mayor in a press conference. We announced that we would get $20 million. At that time we didn't know how much it would cost, but we figured $20 million would cover it. Then I went to the City Council with a funding request to rebuild Eastern Market and to use of our surplus, $20 million to do it. There was unanimous support from my colleagues. Certainly, the city could have used $20 million elsewhere, but because the Market is a citywide treasure and not just an investment in one neighborhood, everyone recognized that the Market really is a treasure for the whole city. There was no controversy. At this time $20 million is a lot of money, so again, with the support of the whole City Council, we appropriate $20 million to begin rebuilding the Market.

At that time, the Mayor was hoping that we could reopen it as of January of this year, but of course as we got into it and really wanted to be historically correct in how we did the rebuilding, and to be very careful and thorough, and also to take the opportunity to rebuild the street plaza in front of the Market at the same

time, it really is about six to seven months longer. But at the time that we had said hopefully January 2009, we didn't know what all was involved. So the work is really going forward. The city has done an extraordinary job.

The other thing that happened right away is that the Mayor decided, along again with the city administrator Dan Tangherlini, that we ought to erect a temporary building to keep the Market going because this has been the longest continuously operating market in DC, that we would keep the Market going. So we started looking around. Where could we put an emergency temporary building? And Dan Tangherlini had had some experience with this and said that we would get a Sprung building. Had no idea what a Sprung building meant, but we all started researching it. And it really is like a very strong tent, with strong ribbing all through it that really could withstand a lot of weather. It is a temporary building more than it is a temporary tent, even though it's almost a canvas-like skin on it.

And so we started looking around the neighborhood for where could we put a temporary building, and we looked right across behind Hine Junior High School, which was one possible sight. We looked at the Eastern Market Metro Plaza as another possible sight. And we also looked at [whether] we should try to move the merchants up to the Florida Avenue market. And initially the city administrator was very favorable to putting the Market at the Metro Plaza because we knew where all the main utility lines were since the Metro had gone in and—the city's fairly old it, takes a while to remap where everything is—they already knew where the power mains were, where the water was. And so he was initially thinking, "Gosh, can't we just put it on that plaza there?" But then when we looked at the site behind the Hine Junior High School, we saw we could easily find the electrical mains and that the water was very accessible and that it would be just as easy to put it there.

And we had a community meeting, over 100 people came, and the mayor again helped put the meeting together. The mayor led it with me, and the community … There was really strong support for putting it behind Hine. Now we had a flea market behind there, and there was a lot of concern from the flea market folks that we'd be taking up their space. There was concern from the school system that we would be encroaching on needed space. But everybody really gave in, worked together, and supported where we put it. And the mayor, again unheard of with bureaucracies, immediately contracted with Turner Construction, and they just amended a contract. I don't even know if we went through bids. And they got to work right away.

Dan Tangherlini went out and found a Sprung building, and really got a building that was about the same footprint as the South Hall where all the merchants were. And, again, that's where almost all the fire occurred. It was almost completely in the South Hall, and he found a building with the same footprint.

They put in a pad behind Eastern Market [ed: Hine Junior High School] next to the alley there, and the pad really had all the infrastructure. They put enough in there that could carry a five story building. And, of course, all we did was put the flexible, reusable temporary building on top of it. We put in public restrooms, put in a huge air conditioner unit, and the building was up and running in a fairly short period of time.

And so the government response was just extraordinary. My hat's off to the mayor. The mayor came in—he was new as well, just like I was, we were first elected at the same time. He had only been on the job four months. And he showed—that was his first, I think, signature event—how fast government can move under his type of leadership. I was just really impressed. And I think they showed to the city that you don't have to go through a whole bunch of bureaucracy in order to get something done. You can just do it. And they did. And it's pretty breathtaking. So, that's the government response, and it's been extraordinary.

JAYAMAHA: I think I must agree with you, Tommy, it really quite amazing. Being in the community who saw some of that take place, we were really amazed at the speed. Perhaps you could talk a little bit more about your role in all of this. I understand what Mayor Fenty did, but perhaps a little on a day to day basis in those first couple of weeks what kind of a role you played.

WELLS: Well, one of the things that I had to do right away was to get an understanding of what would be the financial impact on these businesses that we've had there for so long. What did they lose? And I quickly had to work with them to find out who was insured. What kind of finances did they have to be able to survive? I didn't want to lose one merchant. And so I held a meeting at Tunnicliff's across the street from the Market and brought in as many of the, first, starting with the inside business folks. And the inside business folks at that time none of them had leases that ran more than month to month. Some had insurance, some didn't have insurance. Some of them have been there, in one form or another—at least one family, I think, since the turn of the last century. But they have been in there essentially from month to month. And what I had to determine was who was going to be impacted most and how do we help.

And I quickly learned that we had four different, very distinct groups. We had the inside businesses, who had been inside selling meats, fish, vegetables and such, and this was their primary business and livelihood. Then we had the outdoor, what we call Farmers' Row, and that's most under what we call the farmers' shed. And they had been there for many years and they would be impacted but they also had other, most of them, generally had other means of income. They may be able to be moved or we could accommodate them in different ways, but I needed to understand the economic impact on them. And then we had what we call the outdoor vendors, and they're generally craftsmen, artists, people that have been

outside of the Market for a number of years and, again, while they were not inside the Market, they would be impacted by whatever we did because they are very dependent on their business outside the Market to sell their goods. The fourth group were who we call the "bricks and mortar" folks. Those are the people that have their businesses across the street from Eastern Market, and that includes Tunnicliff's and, of course, the other businesses along there. And so you could say there's a fifth group with the flea market behind Hine, but they were not as directly impacted. So I brought in—again with the support of the executive branch—I brought in small business representatives from the small business office of DC to help figure out how we could be sure that no one lost their business if possible during this time.

The other thing I did is I worked with the Capitol Hill Foundation [ed: Capitol Hill Community Foundation]. The Capitol Hill Foundation worked with me to say what is it we need, and I worked with them to say, "Alright, this is what the government's going to be able to do, but we're going to need help because clearly people are going to be losing their jobs, people could be losing their businesses, and what we need to do is keep it going." And so I helped form a bridge between the neighborhood groups that came forward. We had a fundraiser, which of course I helped support. We had the fundraiser at Marty's upstairs, and we had so many people come in and donate money. And so what we had to figure out was what were the things that we needed to buy right away or fund right away that the government would take too long to do versus what the government could do so we used all the money wisely.

For example, the Foundation helped pay for a refrigeration truck for the Inman family, who have the poultry market inside the Market, so that he could continue his business under the shed of the farmers' line by keeping his poultry in that truck. Now it would have taken forever for the government to lease that truck for him, but the Capitol Hill Foundation could do that right away. When we were going into the temporary building, the government could fund most of the freezer space and the refrigeration, and so the government could do that. And so part of what my role was to help orchestrate who did what, when, help orchestrate with the community, but then also really help navigate "Where does everybody go?" And because of the different groups, it has impacted everyone by putting people from under the shed out in the street, bringing merchants who needed electrical and refrigeration under the shed, and trying to move people around.

The other thing that I did was I asked the mayor to close off Seventh Street on weekends. And the mayor did by executive order. Now by doing that, we could shift people who had been under the shed out into Seventh Street on weekends, and for the vendors who are displaced, who had been on the sidewalk around the Market, we could move them out into the street on the weekends, and then manage the people who had been inside the Market to be under the shed with the refrigeration trucks until we could move

them into the new building. And that has really been controversial with the bricks and mortar folks on the other side saying "This is hurting our business."

But the other thing is that why this was so important is that Eastern Market has been the economic generator for so much of the area. During the period of time that people thought that Eastern Market was closed … We've got a little fresh food grocery store called Yes! Market on Pennsylvania, fully around the corner, not right next to Eastern Market, walking distance but a little bit up the street on Pennsylvania Avenue. Their business fell off sharply when people stopped coming there for a while. Eastern Market is integral for the economic life around the Market. The man who sells carpets on Seventh Street—now, he started at Eastern Market, and so he moved down the street and bought or leased a building, and now sells his carpets there, and he brings them outside on weekends so that people walking to the Market will see his goods. The woman, Sue Weisenberger, who has Captitol Hill Art and Frame, started off selling pottery outside of Eastern Market on weekends and then eventually was able to purchase Capitol Hill Art and Frame and move in there.

So it was extremely important to keep the Market going, but we first had to take care of the inside merchants because the outside merchants are dependent on the inside merchants. If you go in for your refrigerated meat and then you want some fresh, whatever's fresh from the farms, then you came out to the outdoor farmers' shed and bought something from them. Often they have ways to taste the apples or tomatoes, whatever they have, and so then you would buy your fresh vegetables there. And then, if you also wanted something else, you know, buy a gift or something else going on, you have the vendors there. But it really started with the guys inside. And so a lot of my role was to try to be sure that everyone was taken care of, but also to respond quickly either to the concerns of people who felt like they weren't having their needs met or to mitigate unintended consequences, for example … And let me add, I took one of my personal staff members, Linda O'Brien, and Eastern Market became a major part of her job, to come out every weekend, walk and talk to the merchants, to talk to customers, to see what was going on and to be on the ground, to try to really be sure that nothing was falling through the cracks.

For example, we have a little deli that's in what we call the bricks and mortar side of the street, I believe named Petite Gourmet, a place to get food, and so when we closed off the street, people who sell food started setting up right in front of her store. And of course, their overhead is much lower than hers because she has to pay the lease and taxes for where she is in her building, and so she wanted to be sensitive to the fact to help the others, but that was not the right place for them to set up because people weren't making it to her store who used to make it to her store. So we quickly had to be sure that the area would be open in front of her store. She doesn't have a lot of signage, we had to help with that, and then to move food vendors elsewhere instead of covering her place. And then we have Forecast, you know an

upscale clothing and accessory store for women, and that's not the place to sell anything that could be competitive or divert people who are looking for clothes or other things right in there. So a lot of my role has been mediating between the groups to try to weigh what is a concern of just one group or a concern that affects everyone.

I've had at least three community meetings talking about how to manage things going on at the Market. When we closed Seventh Street and we opened the temporary building, the merchants inside there said "We're really concerned about parking." And there's about 15 spaces that they lost, and in fact those spaces were often used all day long by employees and others. They weren't really available, but it did mean that people could not drive up and down that street, and so they were concerned that people that wanted to buy two turkeys and didn't want to carry them all the way home wouldn't be able to drive up and get them. So I went and met with them and asked for their ideas of where we could add parking or how we could help. And they said, "Well, we have this big parking lot behind Hine Junior High School," which is where they located. Well, of course, that's where the flea markets are. And so trying to mediate to be sure that they at some point realize—remind them that they're all in this together and need to work together and that we do our best not to disadvantage one group against the other. And that's been a lot of my role.

And then, my role is also to appoint at least one person to the Eastern Market Community Advisory Committee and that appointee for me has been Donna Scheeder, who's been the chair of the Eastern Market Advisory Committee [EMCAC], and she's done a spectacular job. And I meet with her fairly regularly to say, "Okay, what do you know, what's going on, what do you need?" And so, again, a lot of my job is to orchestrate all this, not to be too far in front of it, because it's the Mayor's initiative, it's EMCAC, merchants have representatives, but I've been, as you can imagine, very, very involved, even behind the scenes.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1
TAPE 1/SIDE 2

JAYAMAHA: Tommy, if you can, talk a little bit about the major problems you came across both in the response and the immediate aftermath.

WELLS: Well, I think part of the major problems was to get everyone working together. There certainly has been controversy—it's controversial closing off Seventh Street, and I know that one of the major fresh produce merchants who used to set up along the Market, Dan Daley I think is his name [ed: Dan Donahue], he didn't like where his new site was. He said the sun would come down on his vegetables, and he wanted to be back where he was up against the wall, against the south side of the Market, but up against the wall. The construction folks used that as a staging area and they put fence around that. And so

he was very angry that he was put out in the street to sell his vegetables and he wanted to be placed back against the Market wall. But we had to keep moving to get the Market rebuilt, so he had a loyal group of customers that would call me saying, "we're so angry that you moved Mr. [Donahue], you've got to put him back," and, you know, I had to manage that, let them know that the Market is for a lot more than Mr [Donahue], and we've got to manage through this and get the Market rebuilt. And part of my overall goal, and so far I believe it's worked, is not to lose one merchant all through this. And, in fact, Mr. [Donahue] is back. I saw him there this weekend. Since the road's under construction, we've moved a lot of folks on the plaza in front of the Natatorium, and I saw him set up there. So the best I can tell, we've not lost one business since we've gone through this, and I think we're going to have them all with us when we open the Market in July.

JAYAMAHA: That's wonderful. Keeping that in mind, since you have been in the neighborhood so long and worked so closely with a lot the people working in the Market and also shopping in the Market, would you be able to share some of your own memories of the Market?

WELLS: Well, the Market has always been a place of somewhat competing interests, competing visions. It's always been a place where if you get too darned involved in it, you end up somewhere in a controversy. It's a wonderful place, but it only grew into this incredible place through somewhat controlled or semi-controlled anarchy.

When I first came to the Hill about 20-some years ago, the Market was interesting, nice, didn't have a lot to it. There was a Safeway right across the street where the health care building is, a small Safeway, and that kind of worked in synergy with the Market. And there had been I guess Eastern Market skirmishes over the years. And there were people that believed that the Market should only sell fresh produce. At that time, John Harrod, who was operating the North Hall of the Market, was renting out space on the weekends for kind of a flea market but trying to keep it to be, you know, handmade goods and things you couldn't get at a store, that it would not be a tee shirt souvenir place. It would be a place where artisans could sell their goods. And there was tension, tension in the neighborhood, like, was that a bad thing? And there were people that strongly opposed that. And the Glasgows had been inside the South Hall of the Market, keeping that going, and renting out space with or without the permission of the government, kind of just keeping it going, helping to pay for repairs, to keep the electricity on. And I know that John Harrod's group, the Market 5 Gallery, that came in at a time when they were looking at putting arts in the community. The government had some money, years back, to put arts in the community, and that was one of the sites that was essentially empty and they put it in there. And it's about the only site from that period of time in the 70's when they were doing arts in the community that has lasted as a community space for art. And it lasted, and the other part of the Market lasted, the South Hall. And then, of course, the farmers

on the shed line because of neighbors being involved [helped] to keep the Market going. And then the entrepreneurs who kind of created their own bazaar—like from John Harrod with the vendors and the Glasgows managing that side of the Market—they really took it on themselves to do this.

Now in 1986, Marion Barry was running for re-election, and he asked me—I had been a little bit involved in the national election right before that with Walter Mondale's failed campaign, but I'd gotten to know some people who had worked for Mondale who now were with Barry—asked me to run Ward 6 for them. When I got involved in organizing Ward 6 for the mayor, I found out that a huge, major issue for him would be Eastern Market. A plan that had just been crafted by … part of the plan had been led by the person who first ran Ward 6 and a good part of the city for the mayor the first time he ran. They had somehow gotten involved in writing a new plan for changing Eastern Market, to really upgrade it, put in air conditioning, to manage it and make it a very nice, more retail-oriented space with long-term leases, to really substantially invest and upgrade the Market.

Well, the neighbors and the Market lovers hated that plan and they thought it would turn it into the Dean and Deluca market like in Georgetown, and so they were actively fighting that plan. And so I had scheduled to bring the mayor to the North Hall for a rally and to talk to the community, and I knew we were going to have protesters, very active protestors or folks who wanted to stop the plan. And so I decided that politically, because so many of the community were against it, the mayor needed to come out against the plan. And it would be a plan that had been done by his own folks. So I met with the mayor, talked to him about and said, "This is a much bigger political issue, and my recommendation is that you go in front of the community and you say that you are going to preserve the Market and that it will not be substantially changed from what it is. And we need to do that in order for you to win Capitol Hill." Now of course we did other things to help win the Hill, but the mayor did go in and he said, "We are going to preserve the Market." And he said he was not going to go with the plan. And that was just one of many plans that got scratched, but that was my role in that particular plan that was scrapped, to continue the Market as it is.

I remember going into the Market once and noticed that they had no public bathrooms. And to kind of show how the controversy works around the Market, I said, "Now I've worked for the mayor and maybe I can be of some help, what if we get some public bathrooms for people that come into the Market?" And I was told, "Well, you know, if there were public bathrooms, someone would have to clean them. And if someone had to clean them, they would have to work for somebody. And if they worked for somebody, you would have to pay them. And then there would have to be somebody there to generate the money to pay them. And, frankly, by then, would the North Hall have to pay for them along with the South Hall since everybody uses the bathrooms?" And the North Hall was disconnected, at least governance-wise,

from the South Hall, even though it's one building. And it digressed into this complete major problem that would occur if we had a public bathroom for everyone to use. So it was easier to say, "Just go over to the Natatorium and use their bathroom."

At some point when we were trying to figure out how to move forward with what we do at the Market, the mayor [ed: Marion Barry] appointed a guy named Rimsky Atkinson, I think was his name. He was kind of like a Sam Rayburn kind of guy with a southern drawl, and we convened a group and met and talked about what do we do at the Market. There's always been groups meeting, talking about what do we do with the Market. And so that was part of my involvement.

Then, later on—I have to really give her a lot of credit—Sharon Ambrose anointed a group and said, "Come up with a governance structure, a new plan with how we manage Eastern Market." And by now, Eastern Market was flourishing. We had outdoor vendors, we had—this did not happen when I first came here—people who would advertise an apartment or a house "just steps from Eastern Market." Before that, Eastern Market was kind of like something you knew about and you liked, but it wasn't this thing that was actually an asset to help realtors sell homes. So just being "steps from Eastern Market" really showed how important it had become as kind of an iconic neighborhood asset that was becoming known all across the city.

So with their success, there became a concern that there was not a concerted way to generate funds or to spend funds to upgrade the Market. We needed to put in new bricks around the plaza, we needed to be sure the farmers' shed got replaced because it was getting all dented up, we needed to upgrade the electrical, we needed to do a lot of things. So Sharon Ambrose told a group, "Bring me legislation," and they started working on it. At that time, I was the Chair of the ANC. The Advisory Neighborhood Commission's role is more advisory, but we are elected officials, and so I started going to the meetings with this group, and I saw that they were starting to decide from all the controversies who's going to win and who's going to lose. I thought, you know, that's well and good for them that it is a place where old scores could now be settled by whoever got into that group, but I decided the ANC should not be in there, and that the ANC should be another body to advise and also receive any recommendations, to be able to say whether we liked it or not, because we shouldn't be involved in settling old scores. Now I did take the next step and say the ANC should have an opinion, so I invited every ANC Commissioner to appoint one community member to serve on a task force to start receiving testimony on what did they think should happen at Eastern Market. And it got fairly specific, and we decided to go ahead and write our own advisory to Sharon Ambrose. What we came up with was that there should be a governance board, like a board of trustees, like you have a board of trustees on other public endeavors, not necessarily a great example, but like the Smithsonian. And the board of trustees should help govern and actually do that,

govern the Market and also to hire the management group that would answer to the board of trustees. So the group that was working on the legislation, at least one of the leaders of that, was very upset that we had done that and thought that that would compete with what they were giving Ms. Ambrose. And in our response to what they proposed, we did say that there should be a governing body.

As far as the legislation went, it created an advisory committee, EMCAC. But EMCAC, while it can be very loud, has no authority, and so they didn't go as far as we thought they should go with the board of trustees. And so they did do that, and then the other thing that went in there which I'm not positive was necessarily as important as I thought it was at the time, was that the management for the Market be nonprofit. But part of that was a fear that someone would come and just go to highest use for the greatest return, and we wanted the Market to not just generate money, we wanted that there not be a profit incentive, we just wanted it managed so that we could keep the merchants that we had. At the time we grandfathered the legislation, grandfathered a lot of the merchants who were there into being able to stay at the Market. So that was my role during that time. That was about as deep as I wanted to get into the Market because of all the controversy.

I love being able to go to the Market and just seeing neighbors and friends, buy fresh produce, discover new plants that I can bring home. And you develop relationships with the artisans, the guy that makes jewelry, Larry Gallo for example. Since I buy Christmas gifts and birthday gifts from him all the time, whenever a family member comes in I like them to come and see Larry, who makes their stuff. But now, because of being on the council and, of course, the fire, I had to jump back in very deeply. Now when I go to see Larry Gallo, it's not about earrings or a ring, it's about his role on EMCAC and "How's it going out here? Is it being managed well or are we missing something?" It's part of my job now.

JAYAMAHA: Well, that's wonderful, thanks so much for that very comprehensive description, Tommy. Going back a little bit about what you said about EMCAC, so now that you're getting more involved, as you said, and also thinking about the reopening of the Market, how do you see the Market shaping up? Do you think you could beef up EMCAC a little bit now that you are so involved? Do you think there would be a possibility of doing that? And then also, overall, in terms of where you would like to see the Market head …

WELLS: I think there's one of two ways to go, either we have the government run the Market or we set up a board of trustees, which EMCAC would serve as. We may need to look to see how has the composition of EMCAC been working. Should we change it all? Give EMCAC the authority to oversee the management, whoever we hire, and let them figure out who to hire to run the Market?

I think that we should go one way or the other. Either the government runs it as they are and we have EMCAC advising us as the government, or we have EMCAC step in the role of DC government and be a quasi-governmental entity, kind of an Eastern Market authority that runs the Market and hires the market manager. I think we should go either way. I'm open to what the community thinks of which way to go. But I think that having a Market manager kind of being influenced by EMCAC, and having to go in front of EMCAC, but EMCAC having no teeth to be able to say 'We think you've messed up," or "We want you to do something different" because that Market manager's contract is with the government, not with EMCAC, has created a very frustrating kind of governance model that isn't satisfying to anyone. I think that the Market manager really chafed under that because they knew that they had to meet the contractual requirements set by the government, Office of Property Management, but EMCAC was very unhappy with their performance. But EMCAC did not oversee the contract. And so the lines of authority and accountability were too diffused.

We currently are going to have someone who will be managing the Market that answers and works for the Office of Property Management. So we'll get to see how that model works for a while. And if it works well, maybe that's the way we ought to go. If it doesn't work well, if it gets too politicized or the government does a poor job of seeing that there's a good person running it, the government's not responsive, and if the Market deteriorates because of it, then we need to maybe look to trusting the community. But at least now I think that we really can see if a government-run Market, essentially what it is, relying on advice and input from EMCAC—let's see if that model works.

JAYAMAHA: Okay, that's wonderful. One other thing, to tag onto that question, in terms of the Market itself, among one of the concerns we see in conversations that I've discovered, is that people are concerned, especially the merchants are concerned, about the competition that's coming from, obviously, Safeway and Harris Teeter. What do you think in terms of the future of post-reopening the Market, how do you think the merchants could be assisted to broaden the range of products? Or are there any other ideas that you have in terms of improving or coming up to date with the rest of the competition in the area?

WELLS: Well, I need to best understand what that means, because I want the merchants, the business men and women that have been there forever, to be successful. And I need to know what that means for them, to be "successful." But there's also kind of an American idea that you're not successful unless you're making more and more and more money, that somehow you're failing if you could have made a lot more money and you're not. I'm not interested in unlimited growth at Eastern Market. I have no interest in Eastern Market becoming Tyson's Corner, where we are continually bringing in more and more people from all around the region to be at Eastern Market. Eastern Market, first and foremost, is an

asset to living here, that people can walk to the Market, buy fresh fruit and vegetables, talk to the people that either grew them or talk to the people that know the farmer that grew them. That is fantastic. It is not my goal to say, "Oh, the Eastern Market has so much more potential, it could be making so much more money." What that will mean, it means more cars, it means kind of a different business model than what I'm interested in.

I do know that, as I'd said before, with Yes! Market—they've paid for their lease and all that, and they sell fresh organic fruits and vegetables and such—that they do better business when Eastern Market is open. There's a synergy between all these folks. I don't presume anyone is a competitor, even though it may feel that way. I mean, shoe stores often cluster around each other, they're competitors, but they bring business to each other. I know that Harris Teeter has overhead and they have to pay the utilities and all that, and they have to eventually pay for their lease amount. The merchants at Eastern Market, you know, they work and they are supported by a government building to where they have much lower overhead and they will continue to have lower overhead. Harris Teeter or Safeway might feel like it's unfair that the government subsidizes Eastern Market to compete with them when they pay more real estate taxes, they pay other things to the government that the merchants at Eastern Market may not have to. So we have to balance all the interests. But if the Market merchants say, "We're losing business, we may have to fold up shop because of that," then we're going to have to figure out how to help them. It may be that their lease amount is too high, or it may mean that there's something else that we need to do.

But it used to be that Eastern Market was not open on Sundays and now they're open on Sundays. The degree to which they adapt to the community is very important too, and they are entrepreneurs of their own, and they have to figure out how to have the goods that people want. For example, I remember there's a man that started selling organic meats under the farmers' shed and the folks inside the Market were furious, saying, "We shouldn't have that direct competition." But you know what, people wanted organic meats, so figure that one out too. You have to balance this. I absolutely have shown that we're all committed to keeping them in business. The degree to which we finagle the market on whether they have competition, we need to not be too heavy-handed.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2
TAPE 2/SIDE 1

JAYAMAHA: It is wonderful the way you talked about the challenges in balancing the various interests in the previous question. One of the things I'm interested in finding out is now that the building's being renovated and its hopefully pretty close to being finished, are there things that you learned about the building, things unique to the building, during the period of renovation?

WELLS: That's a great question. Two things that I learned that I just thought were fascinating: one is the materials. Even though it was very well-built, they had to use the materials of the time, and there are some particular—gosh, I don't even know what—kind of cantilevered, little elbow-armed type of structures, I don't even know the names of them, you'll see where the tie-rods connect with them in the ceiling of the Market—were made with a particular metal, probably more like a cast iron or cast metal that we would have never built with today because it's not as strong. Monte Edwards, who has an engineering background, from EMCAC, told me and explained it to me it's quite fascinating how they replaced every other one so that it would be stronger. It looks the same, has the same function, looks just alike, but they made it with a strong metal. And that was very interesting, to see how the structure of the ceiling is held together with these, and they had to specially make these things. That was fascinating.

But even more fascinating, I asked many of the people involved, especially the contractors who were doing the work, "What's different about the fact that we've got everybody out of the Market for your renovation rather than trying to work around the people being in the Market?" because initially we were going to upgrade the Market with the merchants in the building. "So having the merchants out, what's different?" They said, "Well, we can take a look at the floor." And I said, "Well why is that important?" And they said that the floor is held up by vaulted brick structure in the floor and they are about three or four feet across and they go from east to west. Then where the vault, the curvature, meets the end of the other curvature before it starts again, in between they run steel beams, so that the structure of the Market is held up both by the vaulting of the ceiling underneath there and by the steel beams. And because that's all uneven, they threw in a lot of dirt and debris to fill it up to get it level, and then they poured in the concrete. Now over the years, they've been concerned that as the material and dirt fall through the bricks below into the basement—the basement is huge, it's where the armory used to do their drills with I guess the Guard, and so it's big underneath there—but they've been having to put braces in to hold the floor up because they're concerned that so much material has fallen out that it's not a flat surface, that the concrete floor was on. And so they were not sure how much structural support this floor has. By having everybody out, they could cut a section out and just look at it and see what's in between the concrete and these brick vaults. And so I was fascinated by that because they also won the bid without knowing the answer to that question. That could be a very expensive surprise. And, indeed, what they found was that, first of all, in some areas where the debris had gone away and created space underneath the cement, that the vaulting of the brick had pushed up higher because there was nothing between it and the floor and it was just pushed up higher, the curvature. And they also looked at the steel beams and, I don't know how else to describe it, but some of them were just rotted. It's not what you would expect of steel, but they were rotted and had to be replaced. So they had to pull up with jackhammers, break up the whole cement floor and remove it and then repoint up all the bricks and restore the vaults and then replace many of the steel beams and then

take the rebar and create a lattice work for pouring all the new concrete across the top. So what's exciting about that is that it's been restored in a way that that floor's going to last another couple hundred years. It is a brand new floor built on the original scheme of structure, but they certainly had to adjust for the varying heights of the vaults that were now there. They created a new dilemma of how you put in the handicapped accessibility which cuts down below the edge of one of the vault lines but still keep it structurally strong. It really created a little bit of architectural challenge that they overcame, but it was exciting to see.

You know, during that time that was how you got the maximum amount of ability to hold the most amount of weight because certainly you go in Europe and you see stone buildings and they used the vaulting everywhere and no wood generally to hold the structures. So it was a mixture between using vaulting, the archways of the vaults, plus the steel beams, and I don't think we build that way anymore. So it was exciting to see, it was, again, redone, so it will last for another many more generations in exactly the same way that it was originally built.

JAYAMAHA: That's really fascinating. I do hope some of this has been documented by people who are renovating it. The last question really about the building, again, is do you know anything about how the building has changed over the years, have there been additions or changes prior to the fire. Do you recall any of that taking place?

WELLS: Just some of the changes about where they put the potters in a different part of the building. Certainly, before the fire, we put in a new farmers' line shed, we rebricked around the building. I can remember that the plaza going out of the North Hall used to be kind of a mud mess sometimes. We had more trees out there and such. That was all rebricked, and then little tree box areas put in so that it's usable now. It used to be more, you would think grass, but actually it was just mud pits out there. So those areas primarily, which is kind of the superficial areas in some ways around the Market.

Then also putting the potters inside in a little upstairs loft. Displacing the potters was a problem and, again, finding the potters a place, because everybody believes that they should all be treated equally, when the potters couldn't find a place but we'd created a temporary building. We needed to use Capitol Hill Foundation funds if necessary, should the potters need that. Now I believe the potters are going to go back in, but in the basement, that whole vast area underneath that we now have accessible. I believe the potters will be going to the basement of the building.

But for the most part, the building had not changed much. You know, they built a stage in the North Hall, they would bring in the special floor for the salsa dancing, the walls were kind of temporary but they had kind of inner walls with little office spaces in between the walls and the outside walls of the North Hall

for Market 5 Gallery. I did not see, and frankly the community helped to prevent, any changes at the Market for many years because, again, it was really like a family heirloom. Nobody wanted anything changed.

JAYAMAHA: Well, Tommy thank you very much, those were some wonderful insights. And like you said, it does seem like a big family and people do resist change quite a bit. Thank you very much for your time and for giving us the interview.

WELLS: My pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW