

Detroit Renaissance Oral History Project

Detroit, MI

Glenn Lapin

Interviewed by

Meghan McGowan

November 14, 2014

Troy, Michigan

As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Library and Information Science

Kim Schroeder, Instructor

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Brief Biography

Glenn Lapin obtained his BA in Sociology and Political Science and his MA in Urban Planning from the University of Michigan. He began at Detroit Renaissance in 1981 as Project Director, a role that evolved into Director of Planning and Development. Lapin remained with Detroit Renaissance until 2009. At present, Lapin is the Economic Development Specialist for the City of Troy.

Interviewer

Meghan McGowan has a BA in History and a BA in Communication Studies. She is presently pursuing her MA in History and MLIS in Library and Information Science, with a concentration in archival administration from Wayne State University.

Abstract

The Detroit Renaissance was founded in 1970 by local chief executive officers of Southwest Michigan's most influential corporations as a non-profit organization designed to boost Detroit after the riots of 1967. Detroit Renaissance was largely a strategic development firm designed to plan and fund projects to improve Detroit. The firm began by creating and promoting events such as Formula One Racing (later the Grand Prix), The Montreux Detroit International Jazz Fest (later the Detroit Jazz Festival), and the International Freedom Festival. The Detroit Renaissance is also responsible for the building of the Renaissance Center and the People Mover, as well as saving the Thanksgiving Day Parade when Hudson's could no longer fund it.

Glenn Lapin joined the organization in 1981 as a project director and later became the Director of Planning and Development. During his time with Detroit Renaissance, Lapin worked on projects such as Harmonie Park, the Woodward Corridor Development Fund, and numerous beautification and housing projects including projects in Midtown and along the Riverfront.

This interview covers Detroit Renaissance and Lapin's involvement with Harmonie Park, Midtown and Riverfront development, beautification projects, the Historic Home Improvement Program, the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts, the Jazz Festival, and bringing Formula One Racing to Detroit.

Detroit Renaissance became Business Leaders for Michigan in 2009.

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Transcript of interview conducted November 14, 2014 with Glenn Lapin

Glenn Lapin, Troy, Michigan

By: Meghan McGowan

MCGOWAN: This is Meghan McGowan interviewing Glenn Lapin on November 14, 2014 about Detroit Renaissance. So, what was Detroit Renaissance and what was your role with the organization when you first began?

LAPIN: I started with Detroit Renaissance in October 1981. I started as Project Director, my role changed over the years and became Director of Planning and Development later on. But the organization began back in 1971 founded by Henry Ford II and Max Fisher, two very large philanthropists, with the idea of providing the private sector resources through the CEOs of the major corporations in the city and the region to help Detroit to help act as a catalyst for redevelopment and to boost the city in those post-riot years, riot being 1967 and this coming shortly thereafter.

So in the early years, the 1970s, the organization focused on numerous projects, various redevelopment projects in the city, probably the largest one being the start of the Renaissance Center, with Henry Ford II spearheading that and Detroit Renaissance playing the role of bringing together the private sector resources to build the largest private sector development of its day in the City of Detroit and nationwide it was the largest private sector redevelopment project during that time, in terms of the scale of it. So that was a major project that Renaissance focused on.

I got there in '81, during a time where the economy was in terrible shape with high interest rates and redevelopment slowing, developers not coming along with that because of the interest rates and other reasons as well. So image became a huge issue, image in terms of worldwide and locally and also nationally as well. So what the organization did in the early eighties was to really focus on some special events that they felt could be game changers for the city. So, that's when the Detroit Grand Prix Formula 1 Auto Race began in 1982. Again,

Formula One Racing is probably the largest worldwide audiences there is in terms of sporting events, and the creation of Montreux Detroit International Jazz Festival began as well in 1980. Detroit Windsor International Freedom Festival began in 1979. Also during that time we started getting the Thanksgiving Day Parade, so all of those events started coming together and Detroit Renaissance had a hand in all of that. Alongside of those races and the events to help boost the image, the organization also took part in numerous additional development projects, a lot of them in the downtown area, a lot of planning projects and providing some of the seed capital to get some of those projects going.

[03:09] MCGOWAN: So, earlier you had mentioned that Henry Ford II had brought in some CEOs and corporations, can you talk a little bit about who those CEOs and corporations were?

LAPIN: Yeah. Henry Ford II, Max Fisher, they each chaired the organization at different times throughout those decades. So, the major corporations: the big three automakers had their CEOs. One thing about Detroit Renaissance that really set it off from other civic organizations was that you must be a CEO, chief executive officer, of a major corporation. They would not accept having the second in command or the third in command because in many cases the CEO is too busy, they won't come. No, it had to be the CEO and that was the agreement that they had when they formed the organization and that held true for many years, so we only got the CEOs coming. So the big three automakers, Kmart Corporation back in the day, all the major banks, back in that time was the National Bank of Detroit, Detroit Bank and Trust, you know those are all the original corporations. Al Taubman of the Taubman Corporation, Taubman Company and the shopping centers, he was a major player early on in some of the original boards, Alan Schwartz, so really they were the captains of industry during that time.

They all played a major role in the organization and as CEOs changed with various companies, the new CEO came on board as well to replace the former one. The key being is that in those early days the Board of Directors had a huge interest in Detroit. Many of them grew up here, many of them started here, it was a big part of their heart in terms of the organization and wanting to do something for the city. So, that kind of interest really helped the organization in those days.

[05:09] MCGOWAN: So we've talked a little bit about the history, can you tell me about some of the things you accomplished or witnessed during your time?

LAPIN: Yeah, back in the early days I was involved with most of the planning projects. My background is in urban planning, Masters of Urban Planning degree, so I was out there doing a lot of the seed work, working with a lot of the architects and the designers on various projects to get them going. Also, I had a role with the Grand Prix. I was the site manager for the Grand

Prix and also for the Jazz Festival as well, and the Freedom Festival. So, having the role of kind of laying out the services for the track, and it was such an all-encompassing project to work on that, along the streets of Downtown that everyone got involved with it. So, it was a pretty exciting time to do all that. But in those early days, my major project probably back in the early eighties was the Harmonie Park Redevelopment Project. Harmonie Park was an area with historic buildings, I remember one of the first things I did when I first came aboard the Detroit Renaissance was to walk the streets and take pictures and kind of doing an analysis of the buildings in the area and what the potential might be for redevelopment. So, Detroit Renaissance shepherded and funded a plan for that part of Downtown Detroit because that area had such great potential for mixed-use on housing and park development and that kind of thing. That was a major project and the example of the kind of project and the kind of role that Detroit Renaissance would play: providing the seed money, hiring contractors, hiring consultants, and then having our board kind of take the lead in terms of advocating for projects and putting money behind it and getting it going.

[07:06] So we did that with that project, and numerous other projects ranging from Riverfront development, physical improvements around the city, we had a physical improvement program and partnership with the City of Detroit where we redid many of the monuments Downtown. So a lot of it was quality of life, you know improving the quality of life and having a role in that and trying to improve the city, which was certainly part of that mission was to help encourage housing development and working on some of those projects as well.

The major projects I worked on specifically: the Woodward Corridor Development Fund, some of the predevelopment housing funds that we created to help act as a catalyst for housing development in the Midtown area because again, we looked at a lot of where the assets were and tried to advance those areas through seed money and planning and redevelopment.

[08:04] MCGOWAN: So, as you've already mentioned Detroit had some heavy hitters in charge, can you talk about a little bit what it was like to work with Max Fisher and Henry Ford II?

LAPIN: They were the life and soul and the heart and soul of Detroit Renaissance. Henry Ford II, he retired from, as I recall, he retired shortly after I got there. I do remember kind of the going away party for him which was fascinating as I was just coming out of grad school to see. But they were so dedicated to the organization and to the city, both of them- Henry Ford II and Max Fisher. Max Fisher played a huge role going forward for many many years to come. So, it was a major part of them and there was such great dedication amongst the other board members as well. You always have some board members that, you know, they did not participate as much as others, and you expect that in any group. But generally speaking, this group was very engaged.

When I think of back in that time, Joe Hudson as an example from Hudson's Department Store, and they had committee work, and Alan Schwartz from Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn, the various banks and the financial institutions, they were very involved. I always saw them as a dedicated group overall, some more than others, but that dedication I think helped act as a catalyst for a lot of the improvement that went on.

[09:45] MCGOWAN: Someone else I'd like to touch on is Robert McCabe. What was it like working with him?

LAPIN: It was great. Bob McCabe was great, kind of the funny thing is he was always Mr. McCabe. Nobody on staff would call him anything but Mr. McCabe, so it was a sign of respect and all that, but that's how he wanted to be called and that's how we always referred to him. He had such great vision and experience. Prior to coming to Detroit Renaissance, he was recruited by Max Fisher, Max Fisher directly went to get Robert McCabe from the New York State Development Authority. They got him from there. Bob McCabe, he grew up in Detroit it was part of his salt, he went to Central Michigan University, he knew cities. I mean, he just had a feel for it, he knew what they should be accomplishing and what direction they should be headed in.

He was definitely, as the first CEO President of Detroit Renaissance, the board knew what they wanted and what they got in Bob McCabe, he just knew his stuff. He was very well connected at the federal level and the state level and the local levels as well, he developed some great relationships. You know, some funnier than others as well. There were columnists, Pete Waldmeir was the columnist for the Detroit News back in those days and he used to call him Champaign Bob. So there was always this Detroit Renaissance sometimes was look at this kind of elitist organization and Bob McCabe as sort of the head of that got the Champaign Bob name. But, McCabe always did everything with class. He knew his stuff and I think it boded well for the organization.

[11:41] MCGOWAN: So, you already talked a little bit about Formula One, can you maybe talk a little bit more specifically about it and how you guys managed to wrangle it into Detroit?

LAPIN: When I first got there, they had just announced that they got it. So it was like two months after I got there, a month and a half after I got there, when they announced it. And I remember the press conference when they announced it, it was a lot of work to get it done, but that was all Bob McCabe working with the Formula One team. I think probably the biggest accomplishment of that is to really have the vision of putting it on the streets of Downtown Detroit, which was unheard of. Such a hard thing to do, but he had the vision to make it happen and we made it happen.

You've got to allow people to get to their workplace, you've got to have people climbing over barriers, but Bob McCabe knew that to have the cameras focused on the buildings of Downtown, on the river, on the people in that area, that's what was going to give it the most exposure. So, that's why we had to take that challenge on. It was a challenge, it was hard, it was very difficult but we made it work. And having Formula One was a huge asset as well because of the worldwide exposure.

Now eventually, with the Grand Prix, it became too difficult to run it on the streets of Downtown, it had to move to Belle Isle. But that wasn't until awhile later, back in 1992 when it actually moved out of Downtown. But they did also switch from Formula One Racing to Indie Car, which brings in a different audience totally, so you don't necessarily get the worldwide exposure but you get a different exposure here in the states. The event morphed based on the times, and it was exciting. It was a very exciting thing, planning for that, working with all the track designers and all the contractors, it was a mammoth undertaking to put tents up on parking lots and right-of-ways and sidewalks, you know.. turn streets into race courses and put barricades up at the same time. It was fun, a lot of fun, a lot of work, but I think it really became an institution here in the city.

[14:18] MCGOWAN: I would definitely agree. You stepped on a couple years after the first International Jazz Fest, but with that being said, can you speak to the energy or work behind the early Jazz Fest years?

LAPIN: The early Jazz Festivals was done in conjunction with Montreux, the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland, that is no longer the case today, and for the past several years actually. But again, it was for the international exposure and that's why we did it. So, there would be an exchange back at that time, where Bob McCabe would go to Montreux, Switzerland to their event and the folks that headed that festival would come to Detroit, so you got that exchange and the international world flavor, the world music as a part of it.

The Jazz Festival has always been, I think, on a worldwide basis considered one of the finest jazz festivals in terms of its purity of music, more so back in the early days than today. It's kind of branched out a little bit today, which is okay, but back then it really focused on Miles Davis, you know some of the real classic jazz artists and they were great. I was a site manager for the events and a venue manager, so I had the chance of managing some of those venues.

When they had different artists come in and musicians come in and it was great, having that both indoor events, inside the Renaissance Center, inside the Music Hall, inside the Pontchartrain, at that time, Hotel, and then having the outdoor events at Hart Plaza, now it's more strictly the outdoor events at Hart Plaza. I think the crowd every year it's just been great crowds, diverse crowds, and that's what's important in terms of making sure we can encourage that in the city. Jazz Festival has always been a huge amount of fun, so great.

[16:32] MCGOWAN: So, we already mentioned that Detroit Renaissance was involved in reinvesting in Cass Corridor/Midtown, will you discuss some of those projects and accomplishments and challenges?

LAPIN: In the early nineties there was a study done, I think it was 1991, a housing study done for the University Cultural Center area and out of that housing study came a recommendation to start a predevelopment loan fund. That predevelopment loan fund, the purpose of it, was that back then investors and developers were not willing to take a risk. They did not, they might have identified a project, but they didn't want to spend the upfront money, put that money at risk to hire the architects, to hire the lawyers, to hire the title companies, and to do all the due diligence works that goes into developing a project, a housing project, during a time when housing was not being built in the City of Detroit, at all.

So, out of that study came a recommendation to start a loan fund to provide, through Detroit Renaissance, funding so that these developers could go ahead and hire them and hire the consultants and hire the due diligence folks, the attorneys, the architects, so they can get the project going. So we funded that, we got Hudson Weber Foundation, who was the lead funder at that time. We had to get an IRS ruling that said we could provide funding from a nonprofit organization, Detroit Renaissance, to a for-profit entity, a developer, and we received that okay to do because we were doing it in a blighted area. And at that time, Midtown, known today as Midtown, but back then University Cultural Center area, a lot of blight was taking place.

But you had strong assets there with Wayne State, and the Cultural Center, the art museum, the historical museum and everything else. It was ripe for housing. We created this fund, I managed the fund, and we worked very closely with the University Cultural Center Association, today its Midtown Detroit, and we worked with the developers on some of those early projects and that was really the catalyst, those funds, which was really a small amount of money for a project, it might have been on some projects could be \$50,000, could be \$100,000, relatively small dollar amounts but they helped encourage these projects to be built. They acted as a true catalyst for redevelopment. So, some of the early projects along the Cass Corridor, working with some of those early developers, and a lot of the projects, a lot of the housing, and loft projects you see down there today received benefit from that fund. Today, that loan fund is managed by the Invest Detroit, which is another organization that is a spin-off from Detroit Renaissance, one of the organizations we created back then.

[19:33] MCGOWAN: So much like Cass Corridor, the Riverfront has made dramatic changes in the last decade, which Detroit Renaissance also had a hand in. What projects were you guys involved in and how did Detroit Renaissance shape the Riverfront into what it has become?

LAPIN: There were a lot of different Riverfront plans that Detroit Renaissance engaged in. Some didn't see the light of day, there was one proposal for a Motown Museum along the river, there were some other major attraction, visitor attraction. We did a (merdu? Metropolitan urban Detroit?) traffic studies for the East Riverfront area back in those days, Rivertown was the name of that. Back then, you had a lot of bars, clubs, Warehouse District as it was referred to back then. So that was kind of blossoming, and so we did an East Riverfront plan for that area that tied together the riverfront parks, Chene Park, Mt. Elliot Park, and St. Aubin Park back then, today the state park, and making the whole area come together and working with the Rivertown Business Association at that time, so that was kind of a precursor to some of this. Then there were proposals, you may recall, for the casinos when they were coming in and the initial location was to put them on the river, which a lot of us were not necessarily in favor of. But just by designating the area, a lot of the business that had sprung up over there, a lot of the bars and restaurants ended up going out and the area became quite vacated as a result, which was very unfortunate because we felt that area had a lot of potential back then. So that was kind of the first iteration of some of redevelopment planning along the riverfront.

Once the casinos went somewhere else, we had a clean slate. The Riverfront was always a mix of parking lots and under-utilized land and vacant and abandoned warehouses and it was tough to find a place to start, but one thing Detroit Renaissance did was provide the seed money to do a stretch of the Riverfront, to redo it from behind Cobo Center and along Hart Plaza, that was kind of the first phase of it. So, we provided the seed money, the consulting, the planning work, and design work to do a riverfront promenade to get rid of the parking that used to be behind Cobo and turn that into a promenade.

[22:21] So, that was the first stretch that was done. From there, you had continued momentum because you can see it as an example of what could be and a precursor to a lot of.. The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy which was established, and then further improvements along the riverfront. Detroit Renaissance had a hand in kind of again creating that initial spark, the initial plan, the initial idea, and to be the private sector support to make that happen. But in doing that, we worked very closely with the City of Detroit and the Recreation Department and others to make that happen.

Hart Plaza again, improvements along Hart Plaza, Detroit Renaissance was very involved with. Dodge Fountain, which didn't work for a number of years, so we raised the money to fix it and create a maintenance plan for that as well. We had a lot of other projects as part of the physical improvements projects. We worked closely with the neighborhoods and made improvements along that area to help spark some of that redevelopment along the riverfront, which thank goodness today you look out there and it looks great. It's just so nice to see that a lot of that has taken off, which is great.

[23:41] MCGOWAN: So, I guess to tie into kind of the Riverfront but not really, you guys also worked on the Historic Home Improvement Program. It was a smaller program for Detroit Renaissance, I guess in terms of the money involved, but can you talk a little bit about the Historic Home Improvement Program?

LAPIN: Yeah, we partnered with the City of Detroit and their Community Economic Development Department. They had home repair funds and used to have through block grant money, so we had a Historic District Home Repair Program where we worked with the city and hired contractors and that was actually one of the first projects I worked on when I first got there in the early eighties. So, we went out to various homes and provided some matching funds because we saw the historic areas as tremendous assets for the city and we didn't want to see those assets diminished. Working in the Indian Village area, the Boston Edison area, the West Village, at that time and stabilizing some of the homes that were there that were starting to deteriorate at that time. We felt that that program would help do that and it did, it covered them... I'm not sure how many houses were actually improved over time, but probably about 85 to 100, something like that. So, it had an impact in terms of stabilizing some of those neighborhoods, which was good for everybody.

[25:07] MCGOWAN: Can you talk a little bit about how you guys saved the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts?

LAPIN: That was Bob McCabe. Robert McCabe did that totally on his own. The Music Hall was his passion. If not for Bob McCabe, the Music Hall would've been demolished. There was no doubt in anybody's mind. He single handedly saved that building. He had such an understanding of the history of it and the architecture. He did not want to let it go, so he was the one that really did that using Detroit Renaissance and the corporate power behind it to help do that, but he really single handedly on his own saved it. After he retired, he was very involved in the Music Hall for many many years. It was just a passion for Mr. McCabe, it really was.

[26:05] MCGOWAN: Can you talk a little bit about Empowerment Zones?

LAPIN: Empowerment Zones were a federal program and various communities throughout the country started to target that concept and so Detroit Renaissance worked closely with the City of Detroit in terms of developing an Empowerment Zone plan for that. But it was the city plan, really. I mean we provided some assistance on that and out of that came some of the programs

for targeting some of the Renaissance Zone concept and the tax free zones in some industrial areas.

We worked with some of those areas to try and encourage redevelopment. We were involved with some of the industrial parks on the West Side, and ICLL Industrial, the Intervale, Cloverdale, Livernois area and industrial development. Dave Bing, who was on our board at that time, helped shepherd that. Again, using the Renaissance Zone as a base and to use that again to put the seed money down, to create a plan for the area for some physical and public improvements, new sidewalks, new trees, streetscapes, that kind of thing, and trying to work with some business there to encourage growth in that area. So again, Renaissance playing that role to work with the local community to try and provide the private sector resources to help improve it.

[27:42] MCGOWAN: We talk about how you guys worked with the City of Detroit quite often, can you talk about working with the city and how that was?

LAPIN: During a lot of the time that I was there, Coleman Young was the mayor and back then, Coleman Young, Mayor Young, and the governor at the time, they had seats on our board. Mayor Young would be very involved, he would show up at the meetings, as I recall, he would participate, he was very involved with it. Eventually after Mayor Young left office, they did not allow the mayor and the governor to have a seat on the board, they felt it was better to have more of a separation- for better or for worse. Mayor Young was very involved, he developed good relationships on the board with Al Taubman and some of the others- the other corporate CEOs, and we did work together on various projects.

It wasn't always a positive relationship, which you would expect. Some projects maybe that the Detroit Renaissance wanted to do did not make sense from Mayor Young's point of view, or from the city's point of view. The whole Strategic Plan, Detroit Strategic Plan, which was 1987, there was friction between some of the elements of that plan and what the Mayor saw as a vision for the city. It was both good and both bad in terms of the interactions, and there was always kind of a tension, as I recall, between some of the CEOs and the mayor at the time, but we've always had a working relationship with the city, particularly at the staff level. We worked with people on a daily basis with various city departments. Me, personally, with the Recreation Department and with the Community Economic Development Department and the Planning Department, I worked very frequently with each of them to get projects done.

The city didn't do a whole lot of planning at that time, Detroit Renaissance almost played that role as the planning organization, so again you get that friction. Why is this private sector non-profit organization playing the role as planner? Shouldn't that be the city? Well, the city didn't always have the resources to do that, nor the time. That makes it difficult because if we put together a plan for an area, say Harmonie Park or another area, and the city doesn't buy

in 100 percent, it makes it that much more difficult to implement a project, so you want to be on the same page in order to make things work. Partnerships were crucial, but it didn't always happen in the way that you want them to.

[30: 57] MCGOWAN: As we kind of already touched on, a lot of the early leaders of Detroit Renaissance came from different backgrounds and had different professions, can you talk a little bit about the interplay between the different minds in the board room and how you guys negotiated to make the decisions you guys made?

LAPIN: As I mentioned before, the early board for Detroit Renaissance, most of them were homegrown and had a passion for the city. It was a much smaller group, I think at the beginning it was 25 or 26 board members when I first started there. That kept growing over the years, kept expanding out. As times changed, CEOs come and go, more CEOs came from outside the city into Detroit as a stop along their career path basically.

So you had to get them up to speed, although part of their job description was that they were going to become a board member of Detroit Renaissance in most cases. But as you lose some of the native Detroit experience and knowledge and passion from those early board members to folks that came in from out of town, I think that it made it more difficult for the board and the focus that they had. Many board members had certain interests, so we started more into a committee structure over time to try and basically get the strengths that the board members had and to utilize that in the best fashion that we possibly could.

There was definitely a group of board members that had great passion for the city and wanted to see things happen, and others that did not. Over years the mix changed so much, the dynamics changed a lot, the dynamics changed when the mayor was on versus when the mayor was not on, the dynamics changed when Max Fisher was there or was not there, when Henry Ford II left, it all changed. Different chairman come in, different chairman of the board, you get a different focus and different aspects of it. There came a time when there was a decision made that special events wasn't the way we were going to go, and we needed to focus more on the city and the redevelopment on the city. It's kind of a natural thing that happens over time as personalities change and missions change, and dynamics and the economy changes, and I think the organization had to change with that as well, and it did over time.

[33:54] MCGOWAN: So you guys had your hand in building different park spaces around the city. Previously we had talked about more business and housing development, can you talk a little bit about the parks?

LAPIN: Yeah, we had an annual physical improvements program that we had in conjunction with the Detroit Recreation Department. We would provide annual funding for that in

conjunction with the city. We would pick a project in conjunction with the city that we felt was important and could lead to results. Through that program, we restored a lot of the civic monuments that were out there, we would hire the contractors, so we restored the [Michigan] Soldiers and Sailors Monument which is in Campus Martius Park. It was like falling apart, so we got somebody who was an expert in bronze monuments and we did that. The Scott Fountain, we redid that. The Dodge Fountain, we redid that. We did everything from planting trees along Hart Plaza, doing the Riverfront Walkway. In the earlier years, including Harmonie Park, the actual park area itself, doing a redesign plan for that. The physical improvement programs focused on a lot of different civic projects, helping provide that private sector support.

We also got into starting the concept of the Business Improvement District in Detroit, it had been used throughout the country but it really didn't come to Detroit at all. We tried to help encourage that redevelopment, create a voluntary Business Improvement District Downtown. We redid the medians on Woodward Avenue because the city wasn't doing it. The city did not have the resources and it looked terrible. There was no plantings on there, there was nothing. So our board members who had companies facing Woodward Avenue were saying we don't want to look at that, what are we gonna do? So we had each of the companies that are on our board contribute to a fund that would go toward improving those areas. So we used those dollars are hired the contractor and worked closely, back then with the Central Business Association, which morphed into Detroit Downtown and the Downtown Association, the Downtown Detroit Partnership I think at one time, it's had different names over the years. Again, Detroit Renaissance was putting the CEO dollars in as seed money to try and make things happen and create a better environment for everyone.

[36:40] MCGOWAN: So, how would you summarize the greater role of Detroit Renaissance?

LAPIN: The role was as a catalyst, that's kind of the overall role as I see it. To be that spark, where nobody else was stepping forward to do that, whereas the CEOs were. The corporate community was really putting forward the effort and the dollars behind that effort to try and create change. That's where Detroit Renaissance really excelled, I think, in doing that. Identifying what the needs were, and those needs from the eyes of the CEOs, but also taking into consideration the expertise and what is needed in terms of city and urban redevelopment in general.

A lot of things that had a difficult time in tackling, we always knew that schools were an important issue, and actually in the nineties we got more involved with that. Paul Hillegonds was the president of Detroit Renaissance and he became more focused on some of the policy issues that impacted city improvement and the urban life, so it wasn't just bricks and mortar, we were getting more into the policy arena, the Detroit Strategic Plan and other things as well. I think Detroit Renaissance recognized a lot of what it might take to improve the city and trying

to adjust and tackle various issues as they became critical, trying to look in the future as to what might be and then provide the resources and try to help address them. I think just the ability to have the CEOs and their resources available to the city was a huge asset.

[38:48] MCGOWAN: Stepping away from Detroit Renaissance a little bit, when you first became involved with the City of Detroit versus how it's looking now, because it has obviously gone through many many changes in the last three decades, what do you see... what do you think?

LAPIN: It's great. I'm very pleased. It's had a rough road, you know, the city, it's been tough. I think a lot of it just goes back to the stemming of the history of the auto industry and the Motor City and coming up from there, but that's our legacy. The age of the city, you can go on and on in terms of when the freeways developed, so it enabled people to move out into the suburbs and further and further out, and the five dollar a day industry jobs, the factory jobs, enabled everybody, all the workers, to be able to afford homes with backyards in the suburbs, and away from the dirty city, the polluted city, created that urban sprawl. So Detroit is Detroit, it's who we are.

It is very gratifying to, thank goodness, just this past week came out of bankruptcy, nobody anticipated bankruptcy, nobody ever thought about that back then. Nobody ever thought that that was even possible. Sometimes you got to do that, you have to hit rock bottom before you can come back up again. I think the city is on the right road. I think Detroit Renaissance, in terms of some of the early aspects of that, I think had been able to assist with that, to help promote the city and to help make things happen, make good projects happen. When I go down there today, it's nice to see Midtown area vibrant and new housing that's in there, it's just exciting to see. I'm encouraged about the future of the city. The tough part is that it's such a big city, 139 square miles. Yeah, Downtown and Midtown are looking great and I think improving, and now the challenge is going to be the neighborhoods. How do you deal with the schools and how do you deal with the blight and the city services? But I think we're on the right track. I'm optimistic.

[41:24] MCGOWAN: Me too. Your career has been centered around community development. How did your work with Detroit Renaissance shape your career path and what were the take-aways for you as a professional?

LAPIN: With Detroit Renaissance being my first job out of college, so starting there as a post-grad and then working there for 28 years, it was a great experience. I mean, I remember as a student doing a project where I had to come Downtown and went into Detroit Renaissance, the offices, to interview somebody there for a project that I was doing on the history of the Renaissance Center of all things. And I remember after doing that thinking, "well that's kind of a

cool place to work, that's kind of neat, it's always forward thinking and always visionary." So what I liked Detroit Renaissance was that it had such a wide variety of projects, and to be associated with the CEOs of major corporations and on a daily basis, you couldn't beat that in terms of urban planning type jobs. It was great. It was great to be able to be able to work on special events, which I never ever imagined, you're asking me to work on a Grand Prix auto race? I mean, really? I don't know about that. But it turned out to be a lot of fun. You start realizing that there's more to the viability of a city, more than just bricks and mortar. So many different things have to come together, from the image of the city, to the schools, to everything else, just everything has to come together to make things happen. So that kind of shaped me and my career, having the opportunity to be able to do that, I mean it was great, it really was.

[43:23] MCGOWAN: Last question, what did you take away from your experience in Detroit Renaissance as a community member?

LAPIN: As a community member?

MCGOWAN: Yeah.

LAPIN: I think similar, Detroit Renaissance was always at the forefront in terms of various projects. There was rarely a major project in Detroit that Detroit Renaissance did not have a hand in, in some way. I mean from doing the early studies for the People Mover, before that started, which by the way, was supposed to be part of a larger [laughing] regional transportation system, it wasn't supposed to be just a little loop around Downtown. Doing some of the initial work on some that regional transportation plan, I mean Detroit Renaissance had its hand in everything. So as a community member, if Detroit Renaissance wasn't there during that time, I don't think you would've seen a lot of that advancement and some of the projects and some of the things that went on. Because the city at that time, the public sector, it wasn't able to do it. It didn't have the funds. It didn't have the drive. It didn't want to do that and they weren't doing a lot of the planning work that this required. You know, the upfront planning work to get projects going. So, I think the role for Detroit Renaissance, and seeing that as a community member, was very critical for the city's redevelopment and the city's improvement over the years.

MCGOWAN: Thank you very much for letting me interview you.

LAPIN: Thank you! Appreciate it.