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HOUSING FORMATS

Reshaping priorities

Elinor Bacon

People dedicated to building better communities.



ULAN KATZ

WHILE MOST SCHOOLCHILDREN were taking field trips with their classmates and teachers, Elinor Bacon and her siblings were taking outings with their father every Saturday. Edmund Bacon, the renowned Philadelphia urban planner, gathered his six children for extensive tours of blighted urban neighborhoods and areas undergoing major renewal. The experience, combined with the influences of a liberal activist mother, left an indelible mark on young Elinor, who today is president of Washington-based E.R. Bacon Development, LLC (ERBD), a real estate development and consulting firm.

One need only look at her license plate, which reads “LUVCTS” (“love cities”). It succinctly sums up her deep affection for urban enclaves, and the buildings and residents who inhabit them, that she learned from her father. Edmund Bacon’s legacy includes Penn Center, the heart of Philadelphia’s central business district, and Market East, one of the city’s major retail centers.

Over the years, Elinor Bacon, whose professional career includes stints in both the public and private sectors, has carved out a respectable name for herself in housing and real estate and community development circles. Noteworthy are her joint ven-

tures—for example, with the Rouse Company, managing the development of Port Discovery, the \$29 million children’s museum in Baltimore; or with A&R Development/Harkins, working for the \$52 million HOPE VI redevelopment of Baltimore’s Lafayette Courts public housing development, now Pleasant View Gardens. But Bacon’s biggest asset, associates say, are her people skills, broad knowledge base, and ability to bring diverse stakeholders—developers, advocacy groups, and investors (including minorities)—together for the good of communities.

“She’s not just concerned with bricks and mortar, but also with the human side of a project, the social services and community support,” says Michael Kelly, executive director of the District of Columbia Housing Authority, who first met Bacon when she headed public housing investment programs at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development (HUD).

“While at HUD,” Kelly continues, “she brought a level of intelligent diligence to rebuilding communities and using principles of new urbanism. She also brought together brilliant minds from across the country and served as a conduit for ideas. As a developer, she has taken that same knowledge and sensibility and applied them to her projects. She’s committed to affordable housing and ensuring that the principles of mixed-income housing are incorporated for the benefit of the poor. She brings a level of intellectual rigor to the neighborhood problem-solving process that allows for many best practices to be incorporated.”

Bacon served as deputy assistant secretary of HUD in the Clinton Administration under then-HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo. In that role, she administered the \$4.2 billion HOPE VI program, which, five years after its inception and at the time



The former Ellen Wilson public housing project in Washington, D.C., was redeveloped into a 134-unit, resident-owned cooperative with 14 for-sale market-rate homes. It was built as a HOPE VI project when Bacon administered the program as HUD Deputy Assistant Secretary.

of her arrival, was a recondite program that was just taking hold across the country. Many housing professionals contend that HOPE VI, which replaces severely distressed public housing projects with re-designed mixed-income housing, flourished under Bacon's leadership. Now in its 15th year, the program has dramatically influenced some of the most distressed American neighborhoods while also looking beyond housing to provide links to schools, recreation, daycare, and health care.

Renee Glover, executive director of the Atlanta Housing Authority, says that Bacon, who once worked for former U.S. Congressman Parren J. Mitchell (D-Md) and was a rehabilitation estimator for the city of Baltimore, helped to bring to the government side of the equation a better understanding of the private side. "She helped educate HUD officials on how to be more inclusive and bring in all the parties involved in the process. She was very effective in getting everyone on the same page. People respected her; [they knew] Elinor was going to be fair. She was going to have everyone at the table," says Glover. "You really need to know how to align all these major interests, and she brought the right intellect and energy to the job."

Bacon's track record has not been lost on developers and cities looking to assemble big teams for major public/private partnerships. In Washington, where she once headed the National Capital Revitalization Corporation (NCRC)—a quasi-government agency charged with spurring economic development and revitalizing neighborhoods through partnerships—her influence is almost as legendary as her father's.

In 2003, Bacon assisted Forest City Enterprises, Inc., the \$8.5 billion real estate company headquartered in Cleveland and listed on the New York Stock Exchange, in assembling a team and a proposal to redevelop the Southeast Federal

Center in Washington, D.C., once an annex to the Washington Navy Yard. Plans for the adaptive use of the 44-acre (18-ha) site, now called the Yard, include 2,800 residential units, 1.8 million square feet (167,225 sq m) of office space, destination and neighborhood-oriented retail, and a 5.5-acre (2.2-ha) park along the neglected Anacostia River.

"She's definitely a big thinker," says Deborah Ratner-Salzburg, president of Forest City Washington. "Elinor was very good at bringing the diverse elements to the project and introducing us to many players in town."

Last year, Bacon was instrumental in helping the team of PN Hoffman, Struever Bros., Eccles & Rouse (Hoffman-Struever Waterfront LLC), of which she is a partner, beat 16 teams for the exclusive right to develop Washington's southwest waterfront. The site of the next revitalization wave, the waterfront is just blocks from the National Mall. Plans to redevelop it include 995 for-sale and rental housing units—including nearly 300 affordable units for families with 30 to 60 percent of the area median income—a hotel; retail, office, and cultural space; and a 14-acre (5.7-ha) park and expanded waterfront promenade. The waterfront will be the first mixed-use, LEED Silver-certified, master-planned project in Washington, D.C.

Developing it will achieve a goal the Pilates and yoga enthusiast envisioned while at the NCRC years ago: to bring new vitality and an extraordinary design to the sleepy waterfront property. Monty Hoffman, CEO of PN Hoffman, is thrilled. "Elinor provided the team with substantial knowledge and insight, particularly about affordable housing. She understands subsidies and the different financing resources that



Bell Tower Commons in Baltimore's Otterbein/Sharp-Leadenhall neighborhood involved the adaptive use of a 100-year-old church, resulting in townhouse condominiums. Completed in 1989, Bacon's firm was codeveloper of the project.

are needed to make affordable housing work," he maintains. "In addition, Elinor has a passion for urban development. She lives it and breathes it."

Bacon, who serves on the ULI Washington District Council's Workforce Housing Task Force, received the Seaside Prize from the Seaside Institute in 2004 for making significant contributions to the quality and character of communities. Bacon has used her know-how to work on projects both large and small. Along with Hoffman, she currently is redeveloping the First Congregational United Church of Christ in downtown Washington. A new 40,000-square-foot (3,716-sq-m) sanctuary will be created, replete with space for the church's meals and social services programs for the homeless. Air rights above the church will also be developed to include 144 new market-rate condos.

These days, Bacon also is busy trying to keep HOPE VI alive. Up for congressional reauthorization this year, the program has been eliminated from President Bush's proposed 2008 budget. U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-Md), who created the program in 1992, asked Bacon and Glover to cochair a task force to examine lessons learned

from HOPE VI over the past ten years. They will help incorporate language from their findings into legislation for a new HOPE VI reauthorization bill. Bacon, whose mother once taught daycare in a public housing development, was eager to comply.

"To have [had] parents such as I did, who instilled in me such important values, drives what I do. I've been given extraordinary opportunities to partner and to work with truly amazing organizations and people. I feel blessed to have had all of these opportunities and to have seen the impact of my work on people and communities," says Bacon. **U**

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