

John Cort

Side 1:

His father was with Southern Bell and moved to Asheville when John was four years old. He became interested in building a motel. Tunnel Road at that time was a dead end, and the Chamber of Commerce advised against it; however he was successful in building several motels and several homes. As a boy he worked with his father and decided to become an architect. [Arthur B. Cort]

[23] He graduated from Lee Edwards High School and NC State University.

[31] He became involved with the city soon after joining Lindsey Gudger in 1967. [The firm was founded in 1938 and built the first Asheville auditorium.] His first job was building the Biltmore gate house, which had originally been a florist, and creating a gift shop. He also worked on the First Union Bank in Biltmore (enclosure). We discuss the letter to the editor stating that local architects should be recognized (see Mathews tape re Jewish Center). [Lindsey Gudger, Jane Mathews]

[59] He said that business always has and always will go away from the city. This is the result of large chains and specializing (jails, hospitals, airport).

[71] His firm did half of the renovated airport - the curbside half. For the second story space a Charlotte firm, which specialized in airports was chosen. Banks frequently have standard building designs and franchise from their central office.

[100] His firm has had great success with work in the mountains. The Asheville Civic Center is on a 50 ft grade. Erwin High School deals with a 60 ft height differential. They have been hired to do a job in Greenville because of the grade. Enka High School, built in the early '80s used solar energy conservation (see enclosure).

[139] We discuss the Chestnut Ridge controversy. Taking down a hill is not always so bad - it is a matter of how it is done. It can be "re-sculpted and made to roll at a 5% grade which you can park on" and blended so that it looks natural (see enclosure).

[158] The Southern Highland Folk Art Center guild president said, "This building is just like a toad stool - it looks like it grewed here.". This was a great compliment (see enclosure).

[170] His firm does not do private homes. Several architects worked from a basic master plan to construct Givens Estate (a retirement home for 450 people). The project was difficult because a creek had to be drained and pilings driven in land to make the building stable (see enclosure and see Bill Moore tape). [William "Bill" Moore]

[203] He likes institutional building because it requires team effort and affects a lot of people.

[231] He joined the Planning and Zoning Commission as a county representative. He was chairman of a Subdivision Review Board. In 1976 the resolution was passed and the next year, because of lack of popularity, it was repealed.

[259] The purpose of this ordinance was to set standards for land so that roads, water and sewers would be properly installed before the land was subdivided for development. There is still no county-wide subdivision ordinance.

[288] He became a county resident when he lived in Beaverdam (before it was annexed) and the county had one seat on the Planning and Zoning Board. Annexation has little to do with zoning but with revenue for the city. Most people are not aware of this. P and Z tries to anticipate annexation plans and keep several years ahead so the property will be properly developed.

[350] One of the hottest issues regards mobile homes which are allowed in the county but prohibited in the city. When the city expands and annexes land the already existing mobile homes have to be recognized. Many people need the alternative housing but it is necessary to have correct zoning. [Augusta Young]

[406] A large apartment complex was proposed on a hillside in Kenilworth. Because of the steep terrain it was possible to build only part of it (see Augusta Young tape interview by Bob Potter). Ordinance are passed in accordance to building conditions. This slope was too steep.

Side 2:

The Windswept Apartments on the ridge of Beaucatcher Mountain were discussed. He does not object to their placement aside from the fact that access is difficult for firefighters. The buildings received bad press because of the construction.

[2/12] There was a great deal of discussion concerning the cut vs. twin tunnels (see Betty Lawrence and Robert Griffin tapes). He feels that the tunnels would have caused safety problems. In the 50's the city was like a bowl containing smog. He feels transportation has been well served, the smog blows out and in several years you won't know it's there. "You can't stop mountains very long."

[2/41] His only comment concerning the present controversy regarding Chestnut Ridge is that the site is still inaccessible for heavy traffic. How the garage is developed depends on planning. He had seen rougher terrain than this "remodeled." Early photos of Grove Park and Biltmore looked awful when newly built but when trees grew up they were lovely.

[2/58] One of the big events for P&Z was the controversy about the Strouse Greenberg & Co. proposal. This involved a multi-level parking garage and would have rejuvenated the city. Penny's and Sears would have stayed in town and the city would not have been sucked out to the malls (Many interviewees discuss this).

[2/82] There was a controversy over land between Kenilworth and the Asheville Mall. (The retail need and tax base vs. the residential needs.) It was possible to swap a piece of land satisfying both sides (see enclosed).

[2/102] Pressure for rezoning by commercial outfits is a constant problem. On Merrimon Avenue Teeters (grocery store) would have purchased Winn-Dixie if more space had been made available, but the nearby residents resisted expansion.

[2/110] He was involved with the 2010 plan and remained on the board long enough to see it go into effect. Many meetings were held throughout the city. It took three years to set the long term goals. It is still being used and is constantly being referred to.

[2/144] Before the 2010 plan was adopted, a lot of time was spent in listening to issues one at a time. Now everyone is on the same footing. (Leslie Anderson Tape)

[2/152] City Hall, the schools, zoning staff are to be commended in putting it all together. Different areas have different growth patterns.

[2/164] Because of its topography Buncombe County and the city of Asheville have very distinct neighborhoods and attitudes. Areas are separated by ridges. He does not feel this diversity creates a problem. The areas feel unified in that they all identify with the city - but they hate to pay its taxes.

[2/206] West Asheville doesn't have to feel left out (see Luke Atkinson tape). West Asheville is well laid out and has preserved its integrity: Stores are laid out along a spine with parking in the rear. He discusses the B&B pharmacy. Local folks don't have to go to the malls (see enclosure). This has been a shopping center for 100 years and the local people support it well (see Luke Atkinson tape).

[2/236] The river divided West Asheville from the rest of the city until the Patton Ave. bridge was constructed - before this a ferry was needed or low bridges on the stock yard level. A bridge couldn't have been built like this until the 1950's. Then I-40 was developed and patterns changed.

[2/276] Downtown Asheville is becoming a specialty and business-office area. The major retailers (except for Tops for Shoes) have gone to the malls, not to return. In the 1900's buildings were constructed with "zero property line." They were once stores and are now used for offices; however offices are also moving to the suburbs. The city is still trying to find out what is best.

[2/317] When he was growing up the center of the city was vibrant. He went to David Millard Junior High School (where Beverly Hanks is now) and could ride the bus for 5 cents, see a movie for 5 cents, "move around" for a quarter and see all his friends. "The malls have become downtown."

[2/346] There has been a slow evolution over the past 10 years. The city will seek its own market. He thinks it is on a good path.

[2/353] The new Biltmore Square Mall is part of the Biltmore Estate. Most of the best land is in the south and is being developed. [John Cecil]

[2/381] He discusses his family. He married Lee Steel Kincade from Statesville, NC. Hamilton, 17, is an avid soccer player and would like to see the Buncombe County land fill become a soccer field so there could be tournaments in the city. Jonathan is 13. [Lee Steel Kincade Cort, Hamilton Cort, Jonathan Cort]