

WeHome, Episode 7 Transcript  
Unicorns

Erica Ciccarone [host]: On a given day, if you walk to the top of Nashville's Fort Negley park and look north to downtown, you can count as many as ten tower cranes jutting up into the sky—sometimes more. Rarely fewer. The construction boom shows no sign of stopping.

ODESSA KELLY [to an outdoor crowd]: For every crane that you see, and for every crane that's going in the air, you should ask, is this building a pathway out of poverty, or trapping somebody into debt?

EC: WeHome is a podcast about the Wedgewood-Houston and Chestnut Hill neighborhoods in Nashville, Tennessee where history, policy, people, business interests, and housing intersect in a way that says a lot about the future of Nashville. If you don't live here, you might find that the stories we uncover apply to your neighborhood, too. Each episode, we bring you on the ground to hear from a chorus of South Nashville voices. Then, two community members tour each other's lives and tell each other stories. I'm Erica Ciccarone.

Today's episode is called Unicorns.

It's a Wednesday afternoon at Napier Recreation Center in South Nashville. The center sits on Fairfield Avenue and is named after the prominent local politician and attorney, James Carroll Napier, who was the first African American to preside over the city council. He also served as the Register of the U.S. Treasury under President Taft.

Despite the fact of its namesake, Napier isn't the shiniest community center in Nashville. In recent years, rec centers in other neighborhoods have had major upgrades. But Napier isn't shabby, and the people inside are warm and welcoming. Today is the last day of winter break, so there aren't quite as many kids as usual. But a couple dozen hang out playing games and socializing. One offers to give me a tour.

Mevalyn: My name is Mevalyn. But I go by Mev though. So when you come into Napier, the first thing you're gonna see is the game room on your right. That's where I like to go when I come, just because I like playing pool and stuff and getting beat. [laughs]

EC: The mood in the game room is light and happy. Three teenage boys play ping pong. The oldest wears a red jumpsuit and stops a lot to give the other boys tips. Across the room, two kindergarteners—a boy and a girl—play pool. They can barely maneuver the adult-sized pool cues, but they manage to sink some shots with a little help.

EC [on tape]: What are you guys playing?

BOYS: Legos!

BOY 1: I'm building a house!

BOY 2: What's up y'all? Whatch'all doing?

Mevalyn: The bulletin board, you got stuff that people put up there promoting what goes on in the neighborhood. You've got the TV right here, which is, like, the chillin' spot because, like, when the football game's on, you can watch the game. People—a lot of people may not know that the center's got a swimming pool, which is one of my favorite parts and places to go. Then you got the gym. You can also go in the gym and hoop and do other activities, too. Like, right now, since it's a school day, we got kids in here that come after school just to hang out. Usually, older kids on one half of the court, and then, like, the other half for little kids 'cause they wanna hoop, too.

EC: Mev's been coming to Napier Rec Center since 4th grade. She works here in the summer as a youth mentor and sort of carries on that role unofficially during the school year.

Mevalyn: I guess you can put it, like, I'm a mentor, and I work with the kids, and we have fun. I'm just one of the older kids they look up to. We can do field trips, do an activity in the gym, go outside, play kickball, anything to have fun.

EC [on tape]: Do you like working with kids?

Mevalyn: I love it! I wouldn't trade it for nothin'.

EC [on tape]: What do you like about working with kids?

Mevalyn: I like relating to them. They look up to me. Whether they know it or not, they make my day go by a whole lot faster.

EC: The director of the center is a woman named Odessa Kelly. When I mention her, Mevalynn's face lights up.

Mevalyn: Oh yeah, yeah! I can describe her. Like, that's an amazing person. She's open-minded, strong-hearted, very willing to help anybody—a very good mentor. I call myself her “mini-me” though. She's, like, a good mom to me sometimes, like, it's just good having her. I don't wanna get emotional though.

D'Andre: Miss Odessa is awesome, like, that's the only word I can use to describe her. She's real, like she'll be honest with you, but she's also caring. If you're, like, doing something wrong, she's gonna tell you, like, 'Hey. That's wrong, don't do that.'

EC: That's D'Andre, another high school senior who spends time at the Rec Center and lives in South Nashville. Like Mevalynn, he works at Napier during the summer. After graduation, he hopes to attend a college close by and maybe work at the Rec center, too.

D: I want to be a part of it. I want to give back, like the same way they did me. Like, when I first came here, I was weird. Odessa brought me around girls 'cause, like, I used to be scared of girls, like, really scared of girls. And then she started introducing me to people, like, talking to people like you and stuff. First, I didn't make eye contact with people, but I do a lot of that now. And I experienced a lot of things, and it would be nice to do the same thing that she—that they did with me for the other kids who live around here.

EC: Odessa even coached D'Andre through talking to girls who were in a mentorship program at the center, and he grew in confidence. She helped him with his basketball game, but she also gave him career advice.

D: People be like, 'You're going to the NBA,' and she's like, 'You're not going to the NBA.' When she told me that, I wasn't hurt because she being honest with me. Really, she don't have to—she don't have to care. She just cares. And she wants to see all of us do good 'cause she knows where we at and what happens 'round here. She's told me a lot of times, like, you're gonna be the one to get out, and you need to, like, focus on this and all that. And she cares about everyone who comes in here. Even if you don't talk to her, she still cares about what you're doing.

EC: Odessa introduces D'Andre and other kids to business owners and council members—D'Andre even met the mayor. She's also helping him apply to college. All this has boosted his confidence.

D: When I first started coming to the center, you could not keep me away. I used to be here, like, every single day. And then I started running track, and I started taking harder classes to challenge myself because I never thought I could do anything like that. I take AP Lit right now and Pre-calculus. When I first had stopped coming to the center, I was kind of upset about it 'cause I wouldn't see her that much. I didn't get to play basketball that much. And then she was like, um, 'I'm glad you're not coming to the center more because it means you're growing up. There's

other things to do besides just coming here to play basketball all day.” And she was like, “I’m trying to get other people to realize that.”

Odessa Kelly: My name is Odessa Kelly. I too am a Nashville native. My connection to community is I am the director of Napier Community Center. I've been working there for four years now. I have fallen in love with South Nashville. It's funny when I first came over to work there, I did not want to be there. It only took me 4 or 5 months to gain an affinity for the neighborhood. So I'm all things South Nashville now.

EC: The Odessa I met first was intelligent, friendly, funny, and outspoken—everything you want in someone you're interviewing. I knew Odessa was someone with a point of view I needed to hear more about. And I did, on January twenty-first at the second annual Nashville Women's March. And this Odessa was all those things I first mentioned...and much, much more.

OK: I'm up here representing all of you who feel the same way about this city. I represent the working class. I represent all of you who graduated from a public high school in this city. [cheers] I represent all of you being priced out of this city and those of you who are trying to figure it out every day! I represent all of you who have to go into debt just to survive—not get ahead, but just try to make it. I definitely represent all of those who recognize that Black Nashville is disappearing! I represent all those who are sick and tired of this city becoming the IT CITY but you not being included in that equation.

EC: Odessa spoke as the co-chair Stand Up Nashville, a coalition of community organizers and labor unions advocating on behalf workers who are affected by the city's development boom. What also comes across in Odessa's speech is her intense love for Nashville—a love that's inseparable from who she is. But with that love comes a sense of mourning for what's been lost.

OK: How many of y'all out there remember Fountain Square? 12th Street Mall? Here we go—how many y'all out there remember Opryland Theme Park? Oh what I would give to get on the Wabash Cannonball ride one more time! How many y'all remember standing on that bridge waiting for the water to hit you? It hurt when they tore that down. When they tore down Opryland Theme Park, they took a little bit of the soul of this city with it, and we've been letting developers chip away at it ever since. When does that stop?

EC: Stand Up Nashville helped draft the Do Better Bill. The bill targets companies that receive tax incentives or subsidies for new builds. The proposal requires that before the council votes to give the subsidies, companies must disclose the details of the jobs they'll create: how many, what kind, whom they'll hire, and what they'll pay. They also must report any safety, health, or

wage violations lodged against them in the last ten years. And if the tax incentive is approved, companies have to file quarterly reports to stay accountable to their projections.

Here's the bill's lead sponsor, councilman Anthony Davis, at December's council meeting when the bill was on second reading.

ANTHONY DAVIS: Nashville is red hot like we've said many times. Like many of you, I've supported these incentive deals. I've never voted against one. I probably never will. But I truly think asking these questions up front will help us raise the standards for workforce overtime, and I think this is a start for leading the way in pushing higher standards simply by asking for information.

EC: Enthusiastic supporters of the bill even got a friendly scold from Vice Mayor Briley. This was after CM Murphy spoke to the council in support of the bill. Here she is:

KATHLEEN MURPHY: We need to move forward. The councilman has done a great job bringing people to the table. We're not going to agree on everything. Sometimes we've got to update things later on. This is a great first step, and I would appreciate everyone's support tonight for it.

VICE MAYOR DAVID BRILEY: Council lady Weiner...

[applause in chamber]

BRILEY: I know you guys might not come here every two weeks, but we don't applaud here. I'll move this one to the heel if we keep applauding.

EC: The vote happened on January 2nd at the tail end of a council meeting that droned on for over hour hours. It had been packed with residents voicing concerns about four different short term rental bills. I recommend watching it on YouTube if you have insomnia. Toward the end, the camera turns to show the remaining audience, and you can see Odessa and couple other Stand Up Nashville members waiting for the vote.

BRILEY: There's a motion to approve. It's properly seconded-ed. All in favor?

[MEMBERS: Aye.]

BRILEY: Opposed? Motion carries.

EC: It passed without applause. It's a landmark bill for Nashville, and a huge gain for labor organizers.

To get to our interview today, we'll turn to another Nashvillian who grew up not far from Odessa.

EC: Chestnut Hill is just point-four square miles and shaped like a wedge. Like the surrounding neighborhoods, it is on the cusp of change, that that causes some odd juxtapositions. An upcoming development of micro-apartments will charge renters \$1200 a month for just 300 square feet of living space. Meanwhile, Census Reporter data shows that about 35% of Chestnut Hill residents live in poverty. Which brings us to the man Odessa is about to interview.

Ed Henley: My name is Edward Henley. I'm a Nashville native. I currently reside on Chestnut [Street] in South Nashville in the Chestnut Hill neighborhood. I moved there in 2013 and have loved to meet the people and to see the change that is happening there as well as just observe the efforts to maintain the character that made it what it is.

EC: Ed Henley is tall and lean and affable. He's worked on some pretty high profile Nashville projects, such as downtown's Music City Center, the State Museum, and Riverfront Park.

Our original idea was for Ed to interview Odessa. She's entrenched in the neighborhood nextdoor to him, and she's on the front lines of housing activism. But when Joseph and I met with her, she wanted it the other way around. And Ed agreed.

We've decided to let nearly the entire conversation stand as it is with very few cuts, and very few interruptions from me. This episode is a bit longer than our others, and we encourage you to listen to the end. OK? Here goes:

OK: Can we Start? Ed, what's up? How you doing?

EH: Good how are you? Nice to meet you. I've heard the name, so it's good to meet you.

OK: Yeah. Sorry, everything that you hear is probably true. [laughs] When I was first approached with doing this. They were like, "Do you know Ed Henley? I was like, "No. Who's Ed?" They were like, "He's a developer." Ughhh. I was like, "Yeah. Let me at him!" Because I have not had any good interactions with developers so far in Nashville. Just looking at it from a perspective of what we both know is happening to black and brown communities. So it was refreshing just in past 15 min to hear, do you say you went to Maplewood?

EH: I did!

OK: So you're an East Nashvillian?

EH: I am!

OK: Wassup! I'm from East Nashville.

EH: OK. Where'd you go to school?

OK: Born and raised. Went to Stratford High School.

EH: We rivals, but we love the struggle together. We appreciate it.

OK: We understand each other. I'm class of '04.

EH: I graduated in '07

OK: Oh you a young buck. [laughs.]

EH: I'm still in the '80s!

OK: That's true. You're '89. I'm '82. That's cool. Did you live in Maplewood Heights or where'd you live at?

EH: I lived near the intersection of Dickson Road and Trinity Lane. Right between Meridian and Lischey Ave.

OK: I know exactly where you were. Did you ever go to any of the community centers of there? McFerrin? Cleveland?

EH: Absolutely. McFerrin and Cleveland. Played basketball at Cleveland a lot, so that was the favorite. Then definitely wandered close to Stratford. Margaret Maddox YMCA was the stomping grounds.

OK: Before it was Margaret Maddox.

EH: Before it was Margaret Maddox was the stomping ground for sure. Tried to figure out ways to convince myself to walk back then all the way to get there.

OK: We all did that, right?

EH: 'Cause we were just out of range for it being comfortable but definitely was worth it every time I did it.

OK: My father was the manager at McFerrin and Cleveland for a little while. So that's interesting to know you went to those places. It's funny to see the YMCA now, too. It's all nice and fancy. Remember when it had the one gym and raggedy playground?

[both laugh]

EH: And the playground in the back. And you'd argue every time, "Look we need more space. We need more to do."

OK: Exactly. Where'd you go after you graduated from Maplewood?

EH: I went to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. I was lucky to be the recipient of Pell Grant and Promise and a lot of things that got me there. I started out majoring in engineering. But as much as I love Maplewood and love the public education system for what it gave me, I was not prepared for university math and sciences. I ended up transitioning into the College of Business and ended up dual majoring in finance and enterprise management, which is now titled Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Management.

OK: That's awesome. Was it a culture shock going up there to UT?

EH: You know, it was, it definitely was, but I found out the black and brown community, we gather and do similar things regardless of where we are. There was a lot of influence there from the Memphis area, so quite a big population. It wasn't too much of a culture shock. I don't really have a propensity to avoid awkward stuff. I get bothered very easily, but awkward situations help you grow. I was definitely culture shock, but it definitely helped me grow, and it mimics the environment I'm in now, so it prepared me for future.

OK: What year did you graduate college?

EH: I graduated in 2011. Right in middle of recession. I did enjoy college, but my last 10 months there were very stressful. I didn't want to go home without something or to end up somewhere I didn't want to be. But definitely enjoyed the experience. I'm starting to reconnect with the



university now. But Nashville is my home. I love being here. I was blessed to come here to work on Music City Center project, and I think that set me on path I'm supposed to be on.

OK: Can we talk about that some? Did you know what you were gonna do when you were coming out college?

EH: Absolutely not. I knew what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to be in the construction and real estate realm. I had an affinity for that.

OK: You like legos. I get it.

EH: I definitely wanted to build. I went to school to be an engineer so I could design and build things, so I took a different path that got me close enough. Hopefully we can dive into this, but now aspiring to be a developer and to create things that truly help a community and not just say they will. I got on the Music City Center project and was able to see the real legos get put in place on a project that was amazing in a city I love. It seemed like it was the perfect fit for me.

OK: And what do you do now?

EH: I have a firm that was birthed out of that experience on that project. I work as a consultant with the city on large civic projects. Same story, different projects. As the city's still continuing to grow, there's been opportunities there for me. I've also expanded and am working with the state on the State Museum project. I've acted as a consultant with Parks on the Plan to Play project. I really found a passion in the planning side. Understanding that if you put a good plan together you can make some great things happen. I really have decided that I want to do that a lot more. I make an intentional effort to do a lot more because I get to engage with the people, which is something I don't necessarily get to do on the day-in-day-out of the project. I'm mostly budget and finance, so spreadsheets. Put your butt in the seat, and do spreadsheets, send emails, review contracts, stuff like that. When we're doing a planning effort or an exercise or a study, you're getting out and talking to people, and they're telling you what they think. They're telling you something you probably need to hear that you're not getting in your day-in-day-out environment, and it's very rewarding. I'm trying to move towards being that kind of developer that listens to community first and then tries to do something, versus telling the community what they need.

OK: Man, you're a diamond in the rough. Where have you been at? [laughs]

EH: I've been here! [laughs] I'm from here. It's not the norm. I agree with you. And the perception you explained is a very common one that hopefully will be changed. It won't happen

quickly. There will be some diamonds in the rough. You have to wait for them or find them or help shape them.

OK: So it seems like you do a lot of large scale development?

EH: Yes, very big.

OK: What are your aspirations? Are you going to do development in South Nashville? Are you going to do housing, affordable housing?

EH: Yes, I definitely want to do housing, affordable housing. I tell people a lot when they ask me what do you want to do—'cause now I do large civic projects—I want to do more community-scale projects. I want to do mixed use and affordable housing because I know that's what will help our city thrive as we move forward. I think the transition is going into the neighborhoods like South Nashville and North Nashville and East Nashville. I'm not particular on exactly where. I know it's needed in all those different places. In South Nashville, kind of like you said, when first came here, I didn't really care for it at all. I live a stone's throw from the railroad, so heard the train, and I was like, "This isn't going to work." People were always up and down the street asking questions. I grew up in East Nashville, and I wanted to be back there. But the timing of things and how they were changing, South Nashville was where I ended up.

OK: Can we talk more about that? I'm just interested in why you say that, 'cause we're not afraid of the word gentrification, right?

EH: Not at all.

OK: East Nashville is extremely expensive. Did that take it off the plate?

EH: I did. I will say this. I think gentrification has a very negative connotation just like developer does, but I think gentrification is something that can be done in a way that's positive. It's just like anything else. If you have the opportunity to go into an area that is underserved and provide services as well as underdeveloped and develop in a way that something is wanted, that's great. It's the pushing people out that's always the problem. Gentrification's definition doesn't require you to push people out, but it definitely happens. East Nashville, when I was looking for a home, had already hit that up tick of being the cool spot. Nothing was there for me in terms of what I wanted: something either extremely affordable that I could build and grow into. Those were flying off the table faster than I could approach them. Also, my funds at the time couldn't make it. I couldn't really compete with people that wanted to get to that cool, hip spot. South

Nashville, it was a little bit of a longer shot at the time, the transition and the path of progression was a little bit farther away, and it worked out for me.

OK: How do you like Chestnut Hill? Have you made it home now?

EH: Yeah, I have. I love Chestnut Hill. I used to have my apprehensions about it. I had some challenges when I first moved there. I will say that the community there—I'm part of a townhouse association that was product of Housing Fund affordable housing program. That small community made it a lot easier. I'm not the best neighbor. I'll be honest with you. I'm definitely a to-myself kind of person. In that community there was one other male homeowner, and the rest were female. The females were of course, "Hey how are you? How you dong?"

OK: Very engaging.

EH: Absolutely. Absolutely. What it did was it forced you to come out of your shell, and it created this sense of community almost instantaneously.

OK: What's the demographics of Chestnut Hill now? I remember what it used to look like when my auntie lived there in early '90s.

EH: Chestnut Hill proper is still, I'll say, about 70 percent black. The other 30 percent is Hispanic and white. When you start to cross the other side of the tracks in Wedgewood-Houston, there's been a lot of transition in terms of housing types. Those occupy more of a white populace coming in. Chestnut Hill, to be honest, the most active people in the community are white that will come out and tell you what's going on, welcome you to neighborhood, encourage you to come to SNAP meetings or to any type of community meeting. They'll inform you about proposed to development. They are on it. They've welcomed me as if I was there forever even though I had just moved in.

OK: This is something I've mentally struggled with. It's more the displacement than the gentrification. Coming up in East Nashville, it's like, "We're getting sidewalks? Yeah! This is great!"

EH: Yeah! Like I talked about walking to those community centers, you were walking in the gravel and the grass.

OK: Exactly. It was a lot different. Then you start seeing white people running up and down the street, waving. OK that's different. Then all of a sudden, we got firemen and policemen moving in as neighbors. These things are wanted changes. It's funny. They always think we want to stay

in our own conclaves, but we want to diversify our neighborhoods just like anyone else would, but because of socio-economic issues, it's been historically hard for African American communities. Why is it so hard for us to do it in African American communities? The only one you hear about in Nashville that's engaging and gets out the listserve and tells you about all the meetings going on is Bordeaux.

EH: Yes. Very much the model.

OK: So why can't other African American neighborhoods do this? So have you ever thought of this or struggled - why does it have to be predominantly white neighborhood for it to operate that way?

EH: That's a loaded question. I could dig very deep. I would say the best way I can answer that in this short period of time is that the mindset of "what you have is yours and that everyone around you doing better helps you" is something that's been broken in our community. We talk about gentrification. Gentrification only happens with displacement when a few people move in and band together and say, "We actually want certain things to change around here," and when you do that, you can have the political leverage to demand sidewalks. You can have the political leverage to go to Codes and say, "Somebody's not cutting their grass, and it looks awful. There's immobile vehicles along the street. That's not what we want our neighborhood to be." That sense of ownership and that sense of pride and possession pushes these areas to gentrify quickly once you have a certain type of people there. It's the same plan. It's the same logic. It's just our community seems to have a detachment from that. That you and your neighbor can make all the changes that we want to see. You can make it as perfect as you want it to be if you're willing to work for it.

EC: If you've listened to episode three of WeHome this stuff might sound familiar. And if you haven't yet, please listen today. In it, two women talk about the changing black community in South Nashville. Ms. Leola Cullom was born in 1944 and has lived in South Nashville for most of her life. Odessa will mention her in a minute. On that episode, we dig into some historical events that have altered the black community. Mainly, 1931 Meharry Medical College left South Nashville, taking with it many white collar professionals. Then in the '40s and '50s, Tennessee built two public housing complexes that concentrated poverty and still stand today in states of disrepair. And in the '60s, interstate 40 came through, bisecting the neighborhood and cutting it off from downtown.

OK: OK, here's another question you might think is loaded. I'm sorry if you think it does.

EH: Please. I love it

OK: Do you think that the projects—or public housing—has added to the decimation of our communities? In just the sense that you're talking about...When I talk to people about North Nashville, South Nashville, and what it looked like before public housing came or before interstates got cut through communities, it's exactly what we're talking about. It's funny that here we are 50 to 60 years later where we as a people should have progressed and jumped some of these wealth gaps, but we're still in the exact same place. And we almost reminisce on the times in the '50s and '60s when Jim Crow was relevant. I find that odd. That says that there's something wrong today. Are you thinking about those things as a developer and someone who wants to do affordable housing?

EH: Absolutely

OK: I get jealous when I hear people like—there's a lady you need to meet named Leola Cullom. She's been in South Nashville forever. This woman is best storyteller I've ever met. You get jealous when she tells these stories. You can feel the emotion and love that ran through whole community. She can put you in that place. I want to be there! I hope you're the type of developer that has this in mind when you do affordable housing and redeveloping the neighborhoods.

EH: From what you asked, I think I'll take a little bit of what you said earlier. You don't have that perception, or it shouldn't be the perception that we want to remain in these enclaves. But I feel what you said about the segregation of putting everyone in a housing project, cutting you off from a side of town and then seeing that part of town prosper while yours remains the same, creates the impression that an outside force, whatever it may be, wants you in this enclave. I think the problem is people aren't stupid, especially not intrinsically. People know how to feel things. And when you feel that's what somebody wants from you, and it's all you've ever known, you either accept it or you combat it with a form of hatred versus a form of action. I feel like a lot of communities that have been cut off or divided, they begin to accept that division and to say it's lesser than. Or if you're put in a project, it's not yours. You don't own it. It's somebody else's problem. This is just your way of surviving and making ends meet.

OK: Exactly.

EH: You talked about it. In the '50s and '60s, you didn't have those projects. You might have had a more meek existence in the home. It wasn't 1000 square feet. It might have been 900, 800, 700 (square feet,) but it was yours.

OK: You're rooted in it.

EH: And you're rooted in it, and the people across the street from you feel the same way. "This is mine and I take pride in it, and if you let it deteriorate, that affects me." Now that needs to be rebuilt in communities, especially in ones that we're talking about. Another big point I'm really big on is connectivity. Connectivity and creating a sense of place. I think that's what you're saying, it's missing now. What I want to do is create things in community that aren't necessarily the norm. I don't want them to not be the norm because I can make a profit. I don't want them to be the norm because the norm's not working right now. I also want them to not be the norm because they you create a sense that, "There is a change coming." You have a beacon that something is going to be different now. That's really something that our communities need to see in all shades. They need to see that the affordable issue is one that's going to affect you no matter what color you are. A lot of people want to move to Nashville and take part in what all this city has to offer, and what they're getting is...They're getting the great, but they're also getting the grim. The grim side of Nashville is there are people that have been here forever and have yet to really get a foothold in a city they have given their all to for years. And this needs to be addressed.

OK: Yeah. And with that too, I talk to people that have moved here and we talk about that. It's almost unfair to native Nashvillians. The reason I say it's unfair is because this has been a low wage state forever, and we don't talk about wages enough. I have family members who were custodians for 30 years and owned homes and retired and lived a really good life because Nashville appreciated the work that they did. Now it's almost criminal not to overachieve. What do you think about the fact that we have a wage issue in Nashville, and that directly contributes to the affordable housing crisis?

EH: I feel that the combination of two is crippling. For lack of a better way to put it, it's going to hurt the city in long run and create animosity between different types of people. One thing I've learned to appreciate is the value of teachers and civil servants. One because they're always going to be underpaid. When you affect and touch as many lives as a teacher does, it's hard to quantify how much you really make. But it should be more. I feel also, the thing people seem to detach...the fact that a home for someone is the beginning of stability. Growing up and not always having the best financial situation and stability, I think you realize that as you first make that leap into a different situation, you have an appreciation for something different, but you also realize that those that were providing for you at that time and those that helped you at that time, how impactful it is because you know how to appreciate it. I think a lot of times when people talk about affordable housing, they really look at it as a numbers game. You know, "We have this many people coming, and we have to find somewhere to put them." Somewhere to put them is not really the solution. Putting them somewhere they can build on and progress to the next level if they want to, or to have somewhere that's comfortable where they can stay for years, decades, raise a family, age in place, whatever term you want to use. All that needs to be considered when you're creating a place for people to live in versus not just a slot for mail.

Sometimes I think that's how people look at it. "You've got this much, so you've got to put enough." You touched on this as well, when you see that people are coming, it does seem unfair. When you have the wages set at a certain point, you have a lot of businesses and a type of entities coming in from out of town. They're going to try to take advantage of that because the people that are here or moving here are like, "We can set a really low wage for all the services," which are the things that amenitize an area. "But we'll pay our people X so they're happy." Again, it's shortsighted, and in the long run, I think it's crippling.

OK: What does affordable housing look like to you? I grew up as you know in East Nashville where most people lived in single family homes. Even if they lived in public housing, they lived in the projects. Rare did I see people that lived in apartment complexes. You knew of some, but for the majority, affordable housing might be the difference between a flat and two level home. So what does affordable housing look like to you because I think that's a lot of pushback. When I first heard there was going to be affordable housing in Nashville, I thought, "That's great." But it's apartment complexes going into the sky. That's a paradigm shift, especially for people in the South, so there's a lot of pushback. They wonder why Antioch is getting so filled and people are going out to Laverne and Lebanon. That's part of the reason. They don't consider living in an apartment to be living.

EH: I love that question. The reason behind it, and this is where you'll see some of the developer come out, I feel like there is a great value in having a diversity of offerings. My perfect world of affordable housing, and I prefer the term affordable living—to me affordable housing fits into affordable living—I think that with the density you get from having...I stay in town home now. I prefer that. You share a wall [with your neighbor.] In an apartment it gets a little more invasive. The privacy's a little less. In the single family home, each one has right fit for somebody, but ultimately what comes with each one. If you have single family home, do have that because you want kids to play in the yard? Do you want that space to stretch out? But with all that, guess what comes now? You are the single burden-carrier for all of the maintenance and all of the things that happen in that home. If you're prepared for that, if you're educated about it and understand it, and that is affordable to you, you can now have affordable living with an educated decision. It's "Come to Nashville! Come to Nashville! Come to Nashville!" and when you get here, you have pay \$1000 for a single bedroom. You look for alternatives, and they're absent. With a townhome, now that I share a wall with you, we're also sharing the fact that our landscape is being shared, our maintenance is being shared. When we need a roof replacement, we all take on that burden. Especially in the black and brown communities—and why gentrification has such a negative connotation to it—it's perceived as an area that has gone in disrepair. Or that people don't care. I feel like if you have a community of people that understands that yes, if I'm going to stay in this house for 10 to 15 years, from day one, I need to have a plan for how I'm going to maintain this home. My roof is going to leak. It's going to happen. Technology is getting better

and there are ways you can do things, but over times things deteriorate. Costs around you are going to increase. It costs a lot more for water now. It costs a lot more for electricity. Your taxes going to go up.

OK: Way up!

EH: Way up. Just because something worked for you at one point doesn't mean it's going to work for you forever. Understanding that you still have to always have a mentality that the world is not going to stop spinning just because you're comfortable today. You need to be comfortable for years. That's really where affordable living comes in. Another part of that is transportation. Understanding the dynamic of, "I'd love to have a single-family home, 2000 square feet, but I have to go all the way to Laverne to get it." That's great! Are you gonna work in Laverne? Guess what? Your commute going from 15 minutes to 25 and by 2020, it's probably going to be an hour, hour and a half.

OK: Especially. [Interstate] 24 ain't no joke.

EH: Now, you say, "Oh wow. I have to pay how much for gas? I have to pay how much for all of my utilities?" The cost of living is just going to increase as more people come. I feel like affordable living gives you the opportunity to be in a place where you have enough space for you, and you can traverse the city and neighborhood without being impacted by other costs, such as transportation. And a cost being time as well. If you're 15 minutes from a park, from a restaurant, from a store, if things get really bad, you can still walk to the park and enjoy your day. You can walk to the store and get some food. You can walk to a restaurant and actually have an evening and enjoyment and outing and some form of entertainment. It's a different lifestyle.

OK: That's exactly what we're getting to. This is something Nashvillians have to face. What you consider quality of life is going to change. With the density, we're the "It City," so people are coming here.

EC: Also back in episode three, Andrea Evans talks about a major project called Envision Napier/Sudekum—the redevelopment plan for the two public housing complexes in South Nashville, as well as the community around Napier Rec Center. It's not the first of its kind in the city. James Cayce Place has already moved people into the first new building out east. These developments aspire to break up poverty by creating mixed income housing paired with retail. In a minute, Odessa mentions a precursor to the Envision Projects: Hope VI. A nationwide HUD program, Hope VI has been criticized for displacing residents, including here in Nashville.



EH: Can I ask you a question?

OK: Sure go ahead!

EH: The developer thing. I wonder if you could summarize in a couple ways. What's the most irritating thing that you've run across with a developer? Has it been something that seems disingenuous or is it other issues?

OK: It's always that. It's the lack of trust, the disingenuous things that I've seen happened. Working with several organizations or just being in community, I remember a developer came to a community meeting just when I was getting out of college in West Nashville. He was working on the Hope VI project. It was Envision project back in day. They renamed it and wrapped in new ribbon and called it Envision today. They go in and redevelop and revitalize a neighborhood, not just the public housing but the neighborhood that surrounds it. Preston Taylor has historically been an African American community. They come in with bells and whistles and play on emotions of people. They know what the socio-economic situation is for a group of people. They show them these shining things that are going to happen, and of course they're going to buy in. But what they didn't tell them is, "We aren't planning for you to stay in this community." Like a lot of other people, I'm always skeptical, and I think I have good reason to be. The inner urban core of Nashville has always been African American or diverse, and that is rapidly changing. We used to be at Preston Taylor, all of South Nashville, Sevier Park, Acklen area, East Nashville—all the way around—West Nashville what they call the Nations, Georgia Street. All of those were strongholds of the African American community. And they're not anymore. And all of them have the exact same story. Developers come in and tell them about new things that are going to happen, but they didn't tell them property taxes going to raise. They didn't tell them they weren't going to be able to rent units. For those in public housing, they weren't guaranteed that they would get to come back and live in whatever new establishment was gonna be made. For those people on Section 8, they didn't know there wouldn't be a stock of housing for them to use, so they had to go outside the city. Those things are always sitting in back of mind when I hear the word *developer*. That's why I said earlier that you're a diamond in the rough. I hope more developers I meet are like you.

EC: MDHA says they hope to avoid that displacement by building the Envision developments in phases. That way, so many people don't have to leave during construction. People won't have to find housing on another side of town. But a lot of Nashvillians remember Hope VI. Many people who could no longer afford Hope VI property ended up moving into Napier and Sudekum homes. I think you have to appreciate that skepticism. And I also think MDHA knows this. But it is a tricky situation. How can the government improve the well being of the working poor

without causing displacement? Why hasn't gentrification benefited everyone? Why, in so many circumstances, do poor people, who have the least, also have the most to lose?

EH: I'll say this, and I think you described it very well when you talk about Hope VI and now the RAD program, which is the impetus for Envision. It's all centered around looking at an area that's perceived as underserved, perceived as underutilized. There's a mechanism now to provide funding for revitalization effort. I think the key is going to be educating community on what that revitalization can look like and what is needed. There's a lot of pushback with Envision now because like, you said, people have that feeling of "We've been lied to before."

OK: Yeah, they lived through it. They remember it.

EH: It's not that their skepticism or their beliefs are based in nothing. There's a fire behind that smoke. It's now going to create a different type of environment for certain developers to live in. Same thing as it's going to create a certain type of environment for certain public officials to live in. You have a more educated populace that says, "You won't be able to ram this down our throat." What I'm hoping is on a more and more frequent basis, we continue to have more educated people come that aren't steered by bells and whistles and pretty pictures. That aren't steered by conversations that detract from micro issues in this community. You have to understand as a developer on any development, this one project can have a lot of impact on a community on whole, but won't solve all the problems. You can do one project now and put 1,000 units of affordable housing, as perfect as you and I could image, right smack dab in downtown of Nashville and put all black people in it. There's still going to be 29,000 other people who are going to have an issue, and it's not solved. You can help people; it has to be incremental from a lot of different directions. As the populace becomes educated and they hold people more accountable, that can happen. The issue with that is, you're going to have developers as well as certain public officials who their profits are going to get squeezed or their dollar's not going to go as far for what they had envisioned. Just like anyone else, when you are more aware of things, you want to get more of the full picture. When we talk about affordable living, I don't want you to put a hole in wall and say, "You go stand there. That's your spot." I want this to be vibrant. I want to actually belong here. It is for me. Show me it's for me by putting things like this here. All that's not usually not in somebody's plan. That's not what they thought they were going to have to do. But it's part of what you would do to create an entire place anyway. I think asking developers to put a more complete product into market is where we are going. It seems odd to you because it's a little bit ahead of the curve, but the thinking is there. The thinking is just not there and married to affordability.

OK: So, Chestnut Hill, right? you were talking about walking to restaurants. What grocery store do you walk to?

EH: Yeah I don't walk to a grocery store. I'm in the middle of a food desert. That's one of the things that I aspire to change the most. To understand that even with a lot of development going on in communities, people's basic needs aren't being met. You wonder why they feel a certain type of way in their community. I don't walk to a grocery store. I think the closest one is a CB or something. I've never been in that store, and I never plan to go to that store.

OK: Don't.

EC: I get in my car and go to another community that's not my own to spend my dollars, which is something again that I think has plagued communities for a long time. There's no reinvestment in community whether it is dollars or time. If somebody's yard looks bad, you don't have to pay a landscaper to do that. You can go out and cut your own grass. You can go out and pick up litter. You can go out and knock on your neighbor's door and say, "Hey, I wonder if your kid and my kid could get together and clean up the yard, and we'll give them money for that." There's creative ways in solving all these problems, but the effort's not there because mentally you've broken that type of bond between people in terms of pride and ownership.

OK: The community is stressed out. In Chestnut, y'all are neighbors with J.C. Napier and Sudekum. You're familiar with that area, which is prime real estate, given its location to the urban center of Nashville. It has two large public housing complexes there. It has Sudekum Apartments and J.C. Napier Homes. They're going through the Envision Napier process. Cayce was first. Napier is underway with planning. It's funny you say "perceived." I think it's OK to say that community *is* underserved.

EH: Absolutely.

OK: There are no job opportunities, which is why I fell in love with that community. A lot of the people, especially the kids that I meet, they are enclosed into those eight blocks. Way over half of that community doesn't have private transportation. There's two or three bus routes, and all of them go downtown to transfer to get to where you're going. That's a barrier itself to expand your knowledge and perspective of Nashville alone. All you get is what's in those eight blocks of concentrated poverty. I see kids who come into the community center and out in the street every day who are amazing. They are living miracles because you come out of this, and you still grow into the person you potentially can be. I say that to say, where do they go? I can't think of any pathways out of poverty that have been built to help that community. As a developer, do you have a responsibility to think about those type of things as well? You have this vision of this great community that I want to live in too, but we have to be able to sustain it. How do we sustain it if we're not thinking about avenues to make it sustainable?

EH: As a developer it's a very important piece of puzzle. One of the reasons I want to be more of a developer and less of a project manager is that vision. You can shape the vision. I'll put this disclaimer out there. I actually proposed to be part of team for Envision Sudekum. I wasn't selected, but it was near and dear to my heart for that opportunity to shape it. I guess it's available for public consumption now that I'm part of the team that's going to do Envision Edgehill. One of the things that I want to bring there is the market study. Someone that is from a community like this and isn't afraid to get into the community and understand the community is desiring. And then bring in the outside knowledge of, like you said, it's concentrated. You only know what you know. And being able to look at national, regional trends and say, "Here are things that have worked well in other places." Bring that to them and say, "This is something that can happen." So when we put a plan together, why would we not give them the opportunity to have these things? In terms of a community needing sustenance, needing something to be sustained: When I first started working, my first job was at a clothing store. My second job was at a supermarket. Like you said, we're two people that are residents or work in that community. We're saying, "The one supermarket that's there, don't go to it." That's our advice. To me, young people from 15 up, they can enter the service industry and learn a lot from it. You understand the simple mechanics of being polite to someone, customer service, being able to step out of your shell and talk, as well as earning a wage. Because there's so few retail options, they don't have anywhere they can walk to and work. Like you said, the bus system. The time you spend trying to get to somewhere you can earn a wage after you get a job in this type of environment, you're wasting hours and hours on end. If you don't have a car, it's made difficult. My main thing would be, there should be incentives and programs for people to live in a community literally be able to roll out of bed and walk to their job. One of the things I enjoy the most although I don't do it very often is being able to work from home. I do that because I have an internet access that's quick and fast. It's not something you get in most of the housing projects. They're not built to be up to speed. You start off at a disadvantage that just adds to all the other disadvantages that you have at the time. Connectivity is major issue. You said they're blocked into those eight blocks. It's not a metaphor. Physically, they're blocked in. To me, connectivity means—I'm not saying tear down the interstate. By why don't they have a dedicated bus system. The Gulch which has probably one of the most affluent populations now within a certain radius of downtown, they have a green line that takes them to all the entertainment, retail, and they'll continue to get more supermarkets and things like that. Why can't you put a dedicated bus system in this area and say, "We understand!"

OK: Preach, brother.

EH: "We understand that you're walled off. We can't tear [the interstate] down. That's millions of dollars and years and years. But we can give you one bus or two busses that run on this route.

But before we put that route in place, before we tell you where your route is, do you think it needs to go, and where do you want to go? I don't know why that's not a solution.

OK: have you heard of community benefits agreements. CBAs?

EH: Yes

OK: How do you feel about those?

EH: I am a big fan of those because I feel like, with anything else, transparency, building trust, all those things are valuable to a community. Especially when you have someone who's not in the community coming and saying, I'm gonna do something that's quote-unquote better for you. I feel like those intentions should be laid out.

EC: I paused them here and asked Odessa to describe CBAs. They are pretty awesome.

OK: A CBA is short for a Community Benefits Agreement, and that's when a private developer goes into an agreement with a entity of the community, whether it's a community association or a group, and they agree to things that will come out of them building in a space, especially if it's something using public dollars. A lot of times, you'll hear the cliché, "we want sidewalks." They'll have people build sidewalks out of that. But you can use a community benefits agreement to build anything. One of those things you can create is that you will hire contractors and subcontractors who don't have wage theft history, who pay a prevailing wage and do certified payroll. Certified payroll is a way of tracking that this person's getting adequate pay for the jobs that they're doing. The construction boom is big here. It's going to be big for a while. Developers hire contractors to do the work. I'm surrounded in community by people who work on these multi-million dollar projects and make eight or nine dollars an hour for skilled labor because they have to go through temp agency or readymade service.

EH: When you get into the business of it, I'll be gentle when I say this, but I feel like what will happen is the wages will have to increase or they'll become the least well-staffed entity when every entity around them is so much better that they'll be forced to change.

OK: Do you think they have a moral obligation for us to do better by sustaining our communities that way?

EH: I believe that they do. But it's like everything else. Trickle down economics didn't work so well because you're relying on every person along the way to get to the bottom. You have to

continuously push and say, "That space, that desire for us is part of our mission, and we have to pursue it."

OK: I'm hoping that the city makes Community Benefits Agreements the new tradition because that's part of the problem. Do you think there's a moral obligation for us to sustain our communities that way?

EH: I definitely feel like it is. To finish the answer, you're trying to push that through a society that has historically been a low wage society. You look at our wage laws. One big hurdle is the fact that the city is subsidiary to the state. Our city doesn't necessarily play as well with our state as it could, and that's an understatement. Wages and wage rates are set by the state, and you have to have a certain agreement with the states just to elevate those. Certain cities, prominent cities, are doing that, and they're adding a dollar or two, and what you see from those is the businesses then, or whatever entity employs the people, then have to communicate that to the populist and say, "Hey, our rates are gonna go up." Not, "I'm gonna take on the burden." There's a moral obligation in there, but where do you tie the obligation to somebody taking less. That's been something that's way bigger than anything we're gonna talk about today. It truly is. Everybody says, "Grow the pie. Grow the pie. Grow the pie and everybody can share it." But if you grow a pie, you gotta understand that growing it, the percentages are not the same. Just because there's more money coming into Nashville, people still want it to be divided the same way. They want their returns and percentages not in dollars. When you grow the pie, you devalue the dollar. When you understand economics work like that, that somebody's going to have to be condensed for somebody else to expand. Ultimately, the moral obligation will have to turn into somebody saying, "I'm willing to make less or earn less so that a greater amount of people will benefit." In the developer realm it's hard to get people on that. In the business world it's hard to get people onto that. In the public realm it shouldn't be hard because they're supposed to already be that way. But understand that most governments are run more like businesses. Often, you hear them say, "Our budget can only hold so much. Somebody has to lose in order for somebody to win." Those are the realities. You have to more and more work to get people to step up to the plate and say, "I'm willing to take less so that someone else can have more."

OK: Is it a reality that we can ever have the utopian neighborhood? Black white and brown all come together in the same neighborhood and live together?

EH: I think that's really interesting. Not now. Not right now. But I think you definitely have pockets that they're working almost as close to utopian as you can get right now. You have to understand that the reason being is that most of those people have one thing in common. It's region and they have some socioeconomic bond. You look at the population, and if 90% of black people live at a certain level that's below middle class, and you look at another population and

see so many of their people live at...how are you gonna get it? You're not blended well enough for it to be that way. As we continue to work toward inverting the pyramid, or at least working the pyramid back to where it's more balanced, I think it will become more and more possible. But a lot of times, it will have to almost be forced. Something has to be forced to change to get to that. If you were to give everybody \$75,000 salaries, I think you get it because then people would start to associate themselves based on where they like to live and what that area has to offer. The barrier to entry is going to be, "Can I afford it?" We talked about that at the beginning. East Nashville. I grew up there. I loved it. There were plenty of white people moving in. I would have been right next door because I could afford it. This street, I can tell you what it used to be like and you can tell me what's coming because you know somebody and I know somebody. All that would happen, and it would happen more organically because people could afford to be there. Affordability is the issue. Trying to create mixed income development can slowly start to force that to happen. Somebody has to say, "I'm going to make a unit that's going to not be at the same rate as this one." I think when you do that, you create a diversity in a neighborhood. You're starting to meld or boil away at the socio-economic imbalance to get people in the place.

OK: I had a conversation with a person who had recently moved into the Chestnut Hill area. They were talking about safety. They said safety is a big issue for them. They love the neighborhood. When they first moved over there, people were coming up greeting them. They were here from Boston, so very different mindset. They got their first taste of Southern hospitality.

EH: Absolutely. Sometimes it's unwanted, but it's coming.

[laughs]

OK: With that, they started talking about safety. I asked them to dive a little deeper into what safety looks like to them. They were like, "We need more police presence." And of course, me being right on the other side of Lafayette, I see police every two seconds. Have you ever thought of safety looking like more job opportunities? I meet kids all the time who are scared to death of graduating high school, and the reason is because college is not the path for them. But them entering something like a trade school, it's a lot of angst because they don't know what that looks like. That's a safety issue. Because we all know that the ills of the streets are hard. They can get to a person after a while. But if we ever thought about tackling safety in a way where we build in economic opportunities for everyone...Do you hear safety come up a lot?

EH: Absolutely. So I'm the president of the HOA, and I have been since I started there. It's a big issue for us. The problem is what happens is people look at safety, and they think about throwing money at the problem. And I think the way they think of throwing money at the problem is

because of the propaganda that they've seen. Police are there to protect and serve you, and so if more police are here then I will be protected. That immediate connotation. What our complex did was, there was money in the budget, but it wasn't funded at the time, so you have a line item but there's no money for a fence because the neighborhood was known as being unsafe. Until we had a fence and every time it breaks, we have an incident where someone was seen or someone has found that their car was rummaged through. For me, a way to solve it, or one solution—because I think it has to be multifaceted—is you create opportunities to engage the community so people's free time isn't used to do something that's detrimental to their neighbor. When you have the opportunity to do something positive for yourself or you have an outlet for yourself, whatever that may be, you become enthralled. I think when you have a sense of opportunities like that, other than knucklehead things cause I grew up in the hood too...

OK: That's growing pains. Never once have I heard of someone get off of their job and commit a crime. It doesn't happen.

EH: Absolutely. They're too fatigued. And you think, "I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to risk what I have." It's two fold. Give people something. Give them something, and they won't risk what they have for something lesser. Until you create the sense that petty crime is less than what you have, you'll continue to have it. That's all profit-like, but it's the truth. If you give people several outlets, several opportunities... What kept me out of trouble was having a community center to go to. It wasn't always the easiest thing. But having something to go to a some way to engage and occupy my time. Then it so happens that when they're doing that, you grow from it. I knew I didn't want to risk what I had. I felt like my day-to-day life was more valuable than risking it for something that could take that away from me. I think what happens is you have a lot of people who are discouraged and defeated, and they feel like the risk-reward formula is off. Give them an opportunity to do something great. Start with good and give them the opportunity to do something great. I think that will make a world of difference.

OK: South Nashville, as we know it, especially the JC Napier, Chestnut, Wedgwood area: Should I be optimistic or nervous?

EH: That's a good one. I think you should be optimistic, but the reason I think you should be optimistic is because there are a lot of people that are like me that need to be given an opportunity, a chance. What happens is South Nashville got hit really hard by all those people that are more savvy. They knew how to come in and manipulate a system. And I feel like, now you have people who have seen that manipulation on both sides, and say, "You know what? We can do things for this community that can impact it a lot better than it has been." They've been given—I won't call it garbage—but they've been given a lesser thing and sold a bill of goods that it was better than what it was. Now, somebody has to step up to the plate or a group of people



have to step up to the plate and and say, "We can correct that. We can give this community what they need. We're not gonna just dump housing here and push everyone out. We're gonna connect this community to the rest of the city. We're gonna amenitize it because it needs it." If you never amenitize the community for the people that are there, [they think], "I should leave. You're telling me it's not for me." I think what needs to happen is a group of people who have realized that something needs to change can come in and say, "They're deprived of these certain things which you can find if you go to Percy Warner Park. You can find if go you to Green Hills." I get it, dollars-for-dollars, it might not be the same level. But the concept should be the same, and they deserve those things, and they've deserved them for a long time. There's no excuse for not doing it right now because you can make the dollars work. It might not be pleasant all the time, but can make the dollars work now. There's enough people who are educated to demand it.

OK: Ed, thanks for being courageous, man.

EH: [laughs] So please, share some stuff about you. I talked a lot.

OK: I'm a Nashville native. You and me both are unicorns. They should be honored to be in the room with us 'cause it's a rarity.

EH: You put us together and something magical happens.

OK: Yeah, Nashville natives. It is. We can have a real conversation because we can talk from a past perspective. I grew up in East Nashville. Went to Stratford. Graduated from TSU. Got my master's from Cumberland. When my dad cut off my credit cards, he made me grow up and get a real job.

EH: There you go. [laughs] Similar experiences.

OK: Yeah, you know, sometimes your parents know you better than yourself. My objective when I was 23 and crazy was to take over the world like Pinky and the Brain. My dad was like, "Why don't you just slow down and work in the community center?" I said, "Yeah. I'll do that for a couple years." And here I am, 11 years later, and I'm absolutely in love with it. There's something about working with people. I almost forgot. Did college do that to you any? A lot of us, especially kids in the hood of hoods, "I'm gonna get up out of here. I'm gonna get away from here." That's why I feel for a lot of pro-athletes. [Critics] are like, "They should give back." Their whole life, they've been told, "You can do good and get up out of here." Never once were they told, "You can grow up and be something and come back create change in your neighborhood." You're just told to leave it. We're always told that white is right and black neighborhoods is automatically a negative connotation to that. Going to college and being young, I had forgotten a

little bit of what the plight of our people can be in our neighborhoods. When I got to Napier, I was reminded. Oh yeah. I was literally on my way out the door of working with Metro Parks when I got to Napier. I was like, "Oh. That's what my calling is." Through that, I joined up with an organization called NOAH: Nashville Organized for Action and Hope. Are you familiar?

EH: I am familiar.

OK: It's a watchdog. It's a faith-based group of people who have come together. They have identified a lot of the major ills of this city. The three major platforms that they work on are economic equity and jobs, which I chair that taskforce. The other two being criminal justice and affordable housing. We just touched all of these.

EH: You have to.

OK: You have to. You can't be in any city and not talk about those things. Those are the pushing benefactors with the forefront being education, which we have a large subcommittee that works on the school to prison pipeline. All of those things hit South Nashville very, very hard. It has been eye opening to all the opportunities that we have let us as a city pass by because of tradition, and I have to keep reiterating that because I found out that's what the problem is. I'm a Nashvillian. I should have a say in what new traditions are, as you should too, Ed. We're stuck in this is how things have always been. Well, traditionally things have not always worked out. [laughs]

EH: That's a simple question I ask people. Do you like where you are now? If not, change something.

OK: NOAH has opened my eyes to all that. We work really hard to try to give people in these neighborhoods a voice. Like you talked about, I never want to have a group of people sit with a developer again and not know what questions to ask. Or like you said, I don't want a developer to just tell them what it is they're going to get. They need to have the surety they can own the right of caring about what something looks like and being evasive and asking questions. A lot of times, especially African Americans and Hispanic people we feel unsure about pushing against the grain. We know so many times, that can turn into job insecurity. Home insecurity. It's funny that it only happens to us. I'm always envious of Jewish people, white people, or even like African immigrants because when things that are directly affecting the neighborhoods happen, oh they speak out. And they have no issue in doing that because there's no type of job security or anything like that that's tied to it. Well, that doesn't happen for us. I love NOAH because NOAH is pushing against that. I tell people all the time, and I really mean it. I consider myself a

Christian. And my walk with Christ was always rocky until I found him at a NOAH meeting. Oh, Christ was an activist. I am too. Now we can walk this road together.

EH: You said a lot there, and I appreciate what you're saying. But it did beckon me to ask another question. It's about that separation from and then that reinsertion into that African American or black community, but when you see the struggle again and you have had an awakening or been exposed to different things. When you enter back into that, that's what's really engaged you. When you were in it, you were *in it*, and it was what it was.

OK: It was life.

EH: It definitely happened to me. And one of the things that I've found from that is going against the grain. It becomes something that you don't just do because you like it. You do it because it's right. Because the way the grain is going now is wrong. When you feel that you can get around like minded people and they get exposed to it, you find a place of belonging and a sense of being able to effect change. And I think one thing that has to happen is that type of awakening has to come throughout the people. It's because they have to be exposed to something else. I think people talk about education and the power of education, and like I said, the education system, I think it's a different type of education that needs to happen. It's one that engages you in how the dynamics of your city, your community, your economics works. Then, you mentioned the Jewish population. You mentioned the African immigrant population. You can even mention some of the Korean population. They are educated on our system better than we are. And that's the biggest problem. The other thing is, they don't mind unifying. I've very close to some people who are immigrants from Nigeria. They do have a certain base that they can live on because they have an M.B.A. or Ph.D degree, their bottom should only be so far whereas our bottom is a lot lower. But I think they can definitely rely on their community, although it's much smaller, to continue to uplift them. And we have to create that in us and understand that it's out there for us.

OK: You think we're gonna get there?

EH: We have to. We have to.

OK: A new study came out that said in 20 or 30 years, the African American community will be broke. And that's chilling, you know, because now we're talking about my children.

EH: But you don't think we're broke now? That's what rubs me is people don't understand where we are.

OK: Yeah, we're broke already as a people. I tell people that all the time. It's hard to fight against that. As an educated African American female, it was funny. I grew up as a rarity in our community. My parents have been married for 50 years—or 49. I was a kid who had had two parents. My daddy was at home.

EH: You've been unicorn for a long time. [laughs]

OK: Exactly. It's awkward, I guess, because I want what's best, right? I also am a true believer that the most disenfranchised of our people have to be helped if the whole community is going to be helped. A lot of people that I deal with as you might as well too come the same way. They're educated and have come out of college. Because of the angst and hopelessness, they just want to deal with those who have also come of the same mindset or went through the same college experiences. It's almost like they want to ignore the rest of them. You can only be as good as the opportunity for them.

EH: It's because it's easy.

OK: Yeah, I know.

EH: You said it. You're gonna take on the challenge. You're gonna be courageous. You have to put all these heroic adjectives behind somebody saying, "I just want to help my people." It seems like this major Herculean effort. You can realize it may be, but so what. You should be doing it anyway. In the day-to-day, you're gonna seek out what's most comfortable for you. But like you said, being in the situation where you are continuously reminded that there are those who need help really changes your dynamic. You have to go back into the neighborhood and see it. And if it doesn't impact you, maybe it's not your calling. But more people have to go in or find a way around it. It's out there. You can read about it. If you want to seek it out, you'll find it, and then hopefully you'll become passionate. I think that's where you are now, and that's where I am now. And that's why we can connect on so many things. We have to continue to help others discover that and empower them to say, "The little change is still a change." A lot of times, people see it and say, "That's too big" or "I don't have the connections you do" or "I don't know what you know." I'm like, "Yeah, but I don't know what you know either." I can say the same thing back.

OK: You just get up and go do it. Figure it out along the way.

EH: Right. We have to get people motivated for whatever reason. The motivation is the action, to take action. It doesn't have to be a certain kind of action. It should be strategic, it should be calculated, and it should be forward thinking. It should be forward thinking.

OK: I am so glad to have met you.

EH: Oh yeah. This was fun.

OK: And to get to interview you. We got to do this more...

EH: Oh we're gonna do it more.

OK: ...and get more people together that we can make this change with. I'm hoping you in it 'cause I'm definitely in it for the long run.

EH: Oh yeah. I'm not going anywhere.

EC: A big thank you to Odessa and Ed for spending time with us and for their honesty, as well as to Mevalyn and D'Andre for giving us a tour of Napier Rec Center and sharing about how Odessa has touched their lives.

If you're a fan of WeHome then be sure to check out Nashville Public Radio's newest podcast, The Promise. They've spent the last year reporting across the river from the city's largest public housing complex—getting to know the people who live there, the officers who police the neighborhood, and the city officials who want to give it the overhaul of a lifetime with Envision Cayce. It's a dramatic story, told in six parts, and dives deep into some of the issues we've been teasing out here on WeHome. Listen to "The Promise" for free on Apple Podcasts or at [wpln \[dot\] org](http://wpln[dot]org).

WeHome is produced in collaboration with Nashville Metro Planning Department and Seed Space and is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts' Our Town granting program. Tony Youngblood composed our theme and original score. Micheala Intveld-Sutherin designed our logo and built our website. Joseph Bazelais is our community coordinator. Courtney Adair Johnson is our social practice consultant. Carolyn and Brian Jobe are co-directors of Seed Space and our project coordinators. We record our interviews at Nashville Public Television.

BURNAWAY is an awesome contemporary art magazine, and they're helping us spread the word about South Nashville. Read their reviews, news, and interviews at [burnaway.org](http://burnaway.org). Lauren Cierzan illustrates every episode at [www.wehomepodcast.org](http://www.wehomepodcast.org). If you like us, please show some love with a review on Apple Podcasts. We're also on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram at [@WeHomePodcast](https://www.instagram.com/WeHomePodcast).

I wish everyone in the city would listen to Odessa and Ed's conversation. Please help us get it out there by sharing. Next time, we'll hear from a pair of entrepreneurs who are immersed in Wedgewood-Houston. Thanks for listening. I'm Erica Ciccarone. See you next time.

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