

Interview with James Cahill

Berkhout: Recording, we just have a back-up here.

Listokin: Think of a way how you know we could bring New Brunswick more into what the planning students are thinking about and doing when they are here.

Cahill: I have suggested that. . .

Listokin: It just seems such an obvious. . .

Cahill: I have suggested that for many, many, many years that New Brunswick would be a wonderful laboratory for. . .

Listokin: Years ago, I was teaching a studio. . . Actually I think we got a little money from Devco, just seed money to do a little studio and some projects on a New Brunswick studio on that. But we had to get the students interested.

Cahill: Uh hum.

Listokin: I mean there are endless subjects.

Cahill: And it could go a lot of different directions, too.

Berkhout: Maybe I'll go on this side – okay.

Listokin: I'm going to have to apologize because I'm going to have to leave early, just on a prior, on that.

Berkhout: And one small item here is that we, if we have it here, we have just a little form because we're recording this.

Cahill: Sure, if you need me to sign.

Berkhout: And it is for Rutgers purposes. We don't yet know what we're going to do with all of these interviews. We've interviewed John Heldrich, Ralph Voorhees, Eric Krebs, yesterday Andy Baglivo, and we have a list of lots of people. But whether we get additional

funding or not will influence what we do with these, whether we actually do a publication, so we'll let you know when that time comes.

Cahill: So you, among all of the people you're interviewing David Harris?

Berkhout: Yes.

Cahill: Okay. I thought that was an interesting choice.

Berkhout: (Laughs) At some point. And there are some community groups and everybody we speak to, we – one of the questions we ask is who else we should be interviewing, so. . .

Listokin: Maybe we'll be both sit on the same; we both sit on the same sofa?

Cahill: If you are both going to talk to me, it probably would work better. . .

Berkhout: Well let me, no you stay there because I have this set up.

Listokin: I just thought this way would be. . .

Cahill: Tennis match aspect of things, do you want this Thea?

Listokin: Yeah, that would be good.

Berkhout: Yeah. That's okay, yeah.

Cahill: And look, I know we're rolling already but. . .

Berkhout: That's okay.

Cahill: Here's some info that you can take for background information.

Listokin: Very good.

Cahill: This is not by any means an official list, but it is a list of projects of some note.

Berkhout: Oh, okay, right.

Cahill: That have taken place since '91 when I first came into office. This is a

little map depicting. . .

Listokin: Okay, great.

Cahill: Where some of those projects are, because I saw that that was a focus.

Berkhout: That's helpful.

Cahill: And you know, as again, you know it's not intended to be all-inclusive, it includes things that have direct city involvement and some that are minimal city involvement.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: But nevertheless, it's all part of projects of some significance.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: And is defined subjectively.

Berkhout: Great.

Listokin: So let me begin by thanking you, I know you are busy and we. . .

Cahill: It gives me something to do today.

Listokin: We appreciate it.

Berkhout: (Laughs)

Listokin: This is very informal; you know we're having a conversation.

Cahill: Sure.

Listokin: And we sent you I guess an e-mail just with some elements of information we're looking for. But if we could just start, tell me a little bit about yourself and before we. . .

Cahill: That's the boring part, right?

Berkhout: (Laughs)

Listokin: Because we find that's important where people are coming from and how they got involved in the city.

Cahill: Well, it gives you a perspective.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: Well, I spent my entire life in New Brunswick; I was born in 1952 and lived in the Schwartz Homes section of New Brunswick for the first couple of years of my life. I moved to Handy Street near the corner, at the time it was Codwise Avenue, now Joyce Kilmer Avenue.

Berkhout: Hum.

Cahill: We stayed there for twenty-some years until I got through college and lived for a short period of time on Juliet Street and then Raritan Gardens, an apartment complex off Route 18 until my wife and I bought our home in the Rutgers Village section of New Brunswick in 1978, and that's where we are today.

I grew up in the city. I have a, background-wise, elementary school and high school were both at St. Peters here in New Brunswick.

Berkhout: Uh hum.

Cahill: Higher education, two years at Middle County College and two years at then Glassboro, now Rowan University. I got a master's degree in criminal justice from Rutgers University and have my juris doctorate from Seton Hall.

Work-wise, I clerked for the then presiding, once I . . . Well, actually, my graduate work was all done at night, so in '74 when I graduated from Glassboro, I worked in the Middlesex County Court administrators' office. Responsibilities included oversight of the court system, etc, a smaller role, I mean I didn't have the actual principle oversight responsibilities, but I was a part of the team. I clerked for Judge Morris who was the then presiding judge of the criminal courts here in Middlesex County. I became an assistant city attorney in 1980.

Listokin: In New Brunswick?

Cahill: New Brunswick, appointed by Mayor Lynch at the time. And went into the private sector practice of law with Bill Hamilton, which may be a name that's familiar with his firm.

Berkhout: Uh hum.

Cahill: I worked with Bill for five years in the private sector while maintaining a role as an assistant city attorney. Then I went out onto my own practice for a year and then formed a partnership with a fellow by the name of Robert Doshio and then formed basically the beginnings of my current firm. We've gone through one or two different partners, but in '90 was a part of Cahill and Branciforte now Cahill, Branciforte and Hoeblich.

That's it in a nutshell. Married two kids, two adult kids.

Berkhout: And you ran for mayor in. . ?

Cahill: I ran for mayor in 1991 or '90 and took office in '91.

Berkhout: Had you been on the town council, the city council?

Cahill: No prior in-service elected office.

Listokin: You know, from that history, I can imagine when you started becoming involved or have some connection to the city's redevelopment, but maybe if you could kind of tell us?

Cahill: Well it probably would have really started in, when I became an assistant city attorney. Prior to that in 1977 when I got married, my wife and I bought our home, as I said in '78. So we made a commitment to New Brunswick, this is where we were going to. . . Where I was going to keep my roots and my wife was going to join me and New Brunswick was going to be our home. And as a result of that, I looked to get involved now, just having passed the

New Jersey Bar, and so I was given an opportunity by Mayor Lynch to be directly involved as an assistant city attorney. Through that process and the ten years that I served in that capacity was not only very much involved in the day-to-day operations of the city from a legal perspective and working in all of the different departments, etc., but was very much engaged in the revitalization component of it.

Berkhout: Uh hum.

Cahill: And got to see first hand how government can make things happen if it has the will.

Listokin: What were some of those, like, early projects? And if you can take us forward that you were. . ?

Cahill: Well the earliest of them include, like, the Ferren Deck where there was actually – to show you the struggles that a municipality might be going through – and the whole idea at that point in time was to get people to park here next to the train station and hopefully buy a cup of coffee and we'd catch them on their way to someplace else. Now the theory behind it is, you know, we are the destination.

While we certainly understand the commuter mentality and people you know who might be working in New York or Philadelphia like being close to the being close to the train station so they could hop on and by the same token, people are taking the train here.

Listokin: Was that a UDAG?

Cahill: I don't recall. I don't recall. You know J&J obviously was a part of the initial revitalization. The Golden Triangle, that was across – that was adjacent to the train station, 120 Albany Street, Kilmer Square, and those were all the projects that the Lynch administration had shepherded through and I think did a remarkable job.

Listokin: Now I can imagine why these redevelopment projects were being implemented, but if you care to give us your perspective, I mean. . ?

Cahill: Well, a city has, I guess, a couple of choices. You can choose to be what you are and do nothing about it, or you can choose to become something different. And if you do nothing, one thing you'll definitely guarantee is that you'll slide in the wrong direction. The city is ever-changing, particularly a city like New Brunswick, and so growth becomes critically important. And it doesn't necessarily mean growth in numbers of people or growth in size or structures, but growth in a sense of energy, enthusiasm, and a sense of a place to be, you know a place that people are proud to be and comfortable to be and either to live or to work or to have leisure time activities.

Listokin: How much was public finance a . . . you know, communities in New Jersey are just so reliant on local resources, was that. . ?

Cahill: Well, I think it's a combination, it depends upon . . . I mean, a lot of, as you know from your research, New Brunswick was among the leaders in taking advantage of the Urban Development Action Grants, a great program. You first get money from the federal government, it's a loan. The developer actually gets it, the developer is then required to repay the loan to the municipality and then, in turn, the municipality is required to reinvest that money into other items that help the economic wherewithal in the development of the city, so you get to recycle the dollars twice. I mean it quite frankly doesn't get much better than that.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: So you know those, the advantage of those UDAG funds that benefitted the city for a number of years. Now, obviously, programs have gone by the wayside and we no longer have the advantage of that, but they helped us maintain a momentum in difficult times, so

those types of subsidies – it is more difficult to develop in urban centers. There is not virgin land, there are costs of demolition. There is a greater likelihood, although not always, of environmental concerns, so those things in and of itself take more energy, more time and more money to complete something. So any time there is alternate sources of income that's going to entice a developer to spend their money here and help them, it's helpful.

Now it doesn't matter whether it's a business proposition or a residential or somebody's even building a home. You know, whatever it is, alternate sources of revenues are always helpful.

Listokin: A number of people have mentioned that one of the themes of the redevelopment was the public/private partnership.

Berkhout: Uh hum.

Listokin: Can you speak a little about your sense of that?

Cahill: Well it's . . .

Listokin: How it came about and how it developed?

Cahill: Well, it actually started well before my time, it was really the vision of those first involved in the revitalization mode that recognized that private sector could not do it alone, that the government sector couldn't do it alone and the civic area couldn't do it alone. So the pooling of energies and resources creating as best you can a commonality of vision and thought and establishment of goals of where we need to get to was critically important to the city then and quite frankly is critically important to us today. And I think that's one of the reasons why we perhaps have been more successful than most in getting things done.

Listokin: And your perspective on the role of New Brunswick Tomorrow and Devco in this partnership?

Cahill: Well it was a great idea then and it continues to be a great idea now. As you know, the two not-for-profit entities have a very different focus. The NBT on the social service side of the revitalization efforts and New Brunswick Development a.k.a. Devco on the bricks and mortar side. And while the Devco side gets a lot more of the headlines and attention because of the large-scale development that people see, equally important is the revitalization side from a social service perspective. Because really at that is done from the bricks and mortar side is intended to revitalize the people, the quality of life of the people in the City of New Brunswick, so they go hand-in-hand and it's why we do what we do.

Listokin: And I guess if I could better understand the partnership up close, the city. . . Clearly the city is doing many things on the social side and then we have New Brunswick Tomorrow and I guess the same thing is really true on the Devco end. Maybe a little. . .

Cahill: The NBT and Devco purpose is to provide for the gap that exists between what the government can and is doing and what the private sector can and is doing. So, for example, on a development project, if there is a demand for an office building, whatever the size, and the private sector seems to be not quite willing to pull the trigger because the cost of the investment, the return on their investment, the cost of the construction, the process of developing, it's too much for them to really want to pull the trigger and say "let's go ahead."

Add to that a Devco equation where you eliminate the profit margin, they work to cover their costs, they are familiar with the system and they are familiar with the ordinances of the City of New Brunswick. They can serve in any capacity that helps to move the project down the field and across the goal line. They can be consultants, they can actually serve as the developer and they understand the financing mechanisms that are available to a municipality either through private sector and/or funds that might be available through the State of New Jersey. So they are

able to package projects and programs that make it more attractive to private sector investment and as a result of that, more projects happen because of that gap, which quite frankly government wouldn't be able to do in and of itself and private sector. . .

Listokin: And government couldn't do because they are strapped or they just can't be as flexible or move as fast?

Listokin: Well, I mean, think about it for a second, it's the old commercial, you know you have seen it on TV going back a number of years? Knock on the door, "Hi, we're the government and we're here to help." Oftentimes, because the private sector and the government side are not necessarily always on the same page, you know, because the private sector is "I want to build this building but I want to pay the least amount of taxes." But the government side says, "But you have to pay the most amount of taxes because that's beneficial to us. We want the building to look like this."

The private sector, "Well we think the building should look like that." And so, you're at a lot of . . . well, it doesn't have to be adversarial; there are different perspectives that necessarily have to come into play as a project unfolds. By having somebody who is familiar with both sides of the equation, but who has the mission that it has to be in the best interests of the City of New Brunswick, you eliminate a lot of that back and forth that takes place while they are not necessarily in negotiations, but in effect they become that, just because there are different points of view.

And on the NBT side, you know the city does provide an awful lot of the social services. And one of the reasons why is that we're a progressive city; we understand that as an urban center, people are going to migrate here. The more services we provide, the more we attract. Some of our suburban counterparts in the outlying area are not equipped nor have the political

will or capital to provide the type of services that we provide, so we recognize that's one of the roles we have to play as an urban center.

But notwithstanding all that we do, this is government, we're not necessarily experts in these things. You know, we need to reach out, to talk to others, to have people guide us in how we can better deliver our services to try and get a handle on – it's not only the government providers, there are a lot of not-for-profit entities, social service entities in New Brunswick that deliver services – to try to eliminate the duplicity of service, you know that the same agencies are not providing – you know, that two agencies are not providing the exact same services, particularly in times like now.

But in the not-for-profit side, there is never enough money, no matter how good the economy is, to be sure that we are using the dollars that are available to us as a whole, not just government, but all of us that are in the delivery of service business. That we're using our dollars as effectively and efficiently as we possibly can. NBT serves that role, they analyze what it is we do, they communicate with the service providers and the residents to find out where there are gaps.

Listokin: And I guess like doing something like the annual survey?

Cahill: Yes, and then work with the government side and the private sector side to make sure that those gaps are filled as best we possibly can.

Listokin: Alright, so we have spoken some about the public-private partnership concept.

Cahill: Yep.

Listokin: Maybe if you can speak briefly about some of the entities, maybe J&J, like where? I mean like your perspective on J&J and redevelopment.

Cahill: J&J obviously was the grandfather of revitalization in New Brunswick, you know they were a key component not only in their decision to build and maintain their corporate headquarters here, but also the commitment that they provided through human resources to serve on a variety of different boards that were available, the NBTs, Devcos, but also the cultural center, the different regional theaters that we have in town, that they were involved in the very fabric of what was going on in the city. That continues today, although they are not building new buildings, but there is a regular dialog that happens with NBT and with J&J, and they are obviously a critically important corporate resident to the city of New Brunswick.

Their presence also, I think, adds to a lot of the dynamic that we have in town and the development of our health care industry. You know, the hospitals' presence here in town is magnificent for us. The presence of UMDNJ and its expansion into the Cancer Institute, the Child Health Institute, etc., all of that bodes extremely well for the city. And I think that it was more comfortable for the health care industry to get involved knowing there was a private sector corporate partner who shared some of the interests that would provide . . . not staff support, but a board of directors, a board of trustees' support, and had been through the process.

Listokin: And I guess not just any corporation, but a health. . .

Listokin: Well, that's what I mean, through J&J because of its reputation in the health care industry.

Listokin: How about the university? Where are they?

Cahill: The University is – you know, President McCormick and I share many, many conversations – and I think the one vision that is critically important to both of us that we share is the recognition that you can't have a world-class university without a world-class city

and you can't have a world-class city without having a world-class university, so we both know that the success of our respective entities are tied together. So with that in mind, I enjoy working with President McCormick.

The city is dotted with joint ventures with the university. The most exciting one to me in some time is the new bookstore that's going to be at the corner of Somerset Street and Easton Avenue as a gateway to the Old Queens/College Avenue Campus and tied into our transit village perspective. So it's that type of synergy that is vital to New Brunswick. I'd like to say that it's vital to the university and we need to do more of.

It's difficult times, you know, at the university, you know, with the reduction in funds available, etc. The city itself, while we are holding our own financially, it's more and more difficult to continue to proceed as quickly as we normally do. But I think like most times when there is a will, there is a way, and we'll get it done.

Listokin: The city, I assume, makes a payment in lieu of taxes, is that ever an issue?

Berkhout: You mean the university?

Listokin: The university.

Cahill: Sometimes yes and sometimes no. And I don't mean to be evasive and I won't be. But unlike perhaps a lot of other municipalities . . . I'll use the health care industry first as a take-off on it. A lot of urban centers and municipalities didn't foster an environment that the health care industries or hospitals particularly would find to be receptive. The reason being that, okay, the hospital is expanding, it's taking up land that was otherwise a ratable and thus the revenues coming into the city are reduced.

I understand that mindset, but hospitals are such generators of so many other types of things. In our case, they create thousands of jobs and we saw it as an opportunity to attack the

unemployment that we had in the early nineties, which in '93 or so, shortly after I came to office, was in excess of 13%. We say the health care industry as a way of creating jobs and not just some jobs, but jobs for all income levels, for all skill levels. So, from people who are responsible to sweep the floors to people who use the computers to x-ray technicians, top lab technicians to administrators to literally brain surgeons. There are job opportunities and that's the kind of diversity we have in New Brunswick, so it was ideally matched for us. We were able to reduce our unemployment rate just a year or so down to. . .

Listokin: And the university is less so that?

Cahill: Well, to some extent. The university tends to be a little bit more engaged in its own academic world. Unlike a hospital which has to do a lot of outreach and a lot of people come in and a lot of people leave; the university is a little bit more self-contained. As a result of that, it becomes . . . the jobs don't necessarily generate from within a particular municipality, they tend to be more regional.

But having said that, to be specific to your pilot question, in some instances, depending upon what other benefits there are going to be to the city, we think it's going to be a high job creator, we either forego a pilot or we negotiate a minimal one. Where there's one where we think it's going to be high on the service side for the city, the delivery of a lot of police protection, fire protection, services, public works protection, new roadways, etc., an increase in traffic volume to the city, which has an intangible cost, you know then you will see a pilot will be negotiated and it will be on the higher side.

Berkhout: Now does Rockoff, I am unaware of this, does Rockoff Hall for instance, is that a Rutgers building that is non-taxable or is it owned by Devco?

Cahill: Rutgers building is owned by New Brunswick Development Corporation,

which in and of itself can be tax exempt.

Berkhout: I see.

Cahill: If it is put to a, if it is put to a tax-exempt use. But in this instance, they do pay a pilot.

Berkhout: Will that be true for the Gateway Building? Is that going to be a Devco?

Cahill: The Gateway component will have for the Rutgers piece of it, because there is a profit sector in there, with the Barnes and Noble Bookstore, there will be a pilot that's tied to that.

Berkhout: Okay.

Cahill: To the actual Rutgers offices that are in there, the university, of course, will not be.

Berkhout: I had one other facilities question, we're talking about Rutgers. What about some discussion that's gone on about a downtown arena?

Cahill: Uh hum.

Berkhout: Is that something that you think would be helpful to the city or. . ?

Cahill: You can't look at it in a vacuum. Saying an arena is good or bad, in and of itself, has no meaning.

Berkhout: Uh hum.

Cahill: There has been discussion since the day I became mayor, of a downtown arena.

Berkhout: Somebody actually said, Jim Hughes, in fact said the site where the Hyatt is at one time was discussed as an arena site, but that was rejected by J&J early on.

Cahill: They decided the Hyatt, at one point in time, the former site of not

Memorial Homes, but actually. . .

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: Going over, building over Route 18 and creating. . .

Berkhout: I have drawings in my office from Peter Eisenman from that, right.

Cahill: And so but for close to twenty years, I have been looking at arena proposals.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: And since the first day, there was always a funding gap.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: And as a funding gap, you know how is it going to get filled? I can tell you it's not going to be filled by the City of New Brunswick.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: So unless and until there is a willing partner in the process. . .

Berkhout: I see.

Cahill: To fill that gap, financially it doesn't make sense.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: Now the second element of it is arenas are terrific, they generate people. They can be a boon to the economy. But in order for them to be successful, you've got to guarantee that you're going to have 200 nights or days of activities.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: So even if you have 200 days or nights of activities, those activities usually last several hours. So from, pick a time, you know, it's a 7:00 game, say it's a sporting event.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: So from 5:30 until 11:00, there is a lot of activity, etc. But what happens around that arena the rest of the time?

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: So there becomes, you know, 165 days a year that there is nothing going on and there are, you know, 10 to 20 hours a day of zero activity, even on the days that things are going on.

Berkhout: The building actually that Peter designed, I don't know if you remember this, combined all of the student services. So like the registrar and admissions and everybody was going to be in this building together, it took up like three or four blocks or something.

Cahill: They are . . .

Berkhout: So that it would be something that would be always in use with retail and all of that in it.

Cahill: There is a lot that can be done to make that happen, but once you start to – you can't forget that the area itself takes up a lot.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: So now if you build all of those ancillary uses around it to create more constant activity, the site now has to get bigger.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: And looking around New Brunswick, you can see the amount of available land, that becomes smaller. And then number two, is the arena the best use for what might remain? So I don't really have an answer to that because the arena, as I said in the abstract. . .

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: It depends what else is tied to it and where the financing is.

Berkhout: Sure.

Cahill: And how are we really going to use it and the immediately surrounding properties that are tied to it? How are you going to deal with the infrastructure? How are you going to deal with what kind of jobs are we going to create, etc.?

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: So all of those need to be examined on a case-by-case basis. And in the five to ten cases we reviewed so far, it hasn't made sense.

Listokin: If I can get back to the role of the different partners. . ?

Cahill: Sure.

Listokin: You mentioned about the shared vision with the city and President McCormick. Was that true with prior university administrations?

Cahill: No.

Berkhout: Well, Bloustein I guess was there.

Cahill: Well, Bloustein was before my time, I heard nothing but great things about him. Dr. Lawrence was . . .

Listokin: President Lawrence. . ?

Cahill: Dr. Lawrence did not seem to have a desire to have much interaction with the city.

Listokin: Looking to other partners, so we spoke about J&J and we spoke about the university, where was the county in all of this?

Cahill: The county is a great support player. Big investors in our cultural center, I mean the State Theater is what the State Theater is today because of the investment in it made by

our county freeholders. Their willingness to support us in many of our regional – not regional, our recreational programs – you know, infrastructure improvements to our parks, our ball fields, our playgrounds, etc. Extremely helpful in our roadway development, improvement of our traffic in and around the city. Now working with us on green initiatives, development of bikeways, etc in the city. So they are a critically important partner to us.

Not the least of which is the development of a new marina, a floating dock system at Boyd Park. A contribution from them to help us create positive activity in the river and canal area that is going to be critically important to us as Route 18 reconstruction unwinds.

Listokin: And if I can continue with the government, state and federal.

Cahill: Sure.

Listokin: State and federal.

Cahill: Again the state has been there for us throughout my administration. You know sometimes more than others when there is more money available, etc.

Listokin: In what ways?

Cahill: But I'd like to think that both from a state and a federal perspective that those that make the decisions understand that New Brunswick has the ability to get things done and does get things done. So that, I mean, we don't stand with out hand out, we come with particular projects, we provide the pro-formas that demonstrate what it is we can accomplish, what it is that we are investing of our own, because we're not going to ask somebody to invest in our projects if we're not going to invest our own money.

And then we demonstrate the gap that needs to be filled, either from a programmatic perspective or a financial perspective or a partner perspective that's somebody they may know that's out there looking for something that we can – that we have the need for. And through that,

we've had a great working relationship with the state in getting these types of things done. And it's critically important to have that kind of outreach and connection.

The federal government, again you know our legislative leaders have been phenomenal throughout my tenure as mayor.

Listokin: And I guess that varied over time, too?

Cahill: Well, not from a legislative perspective, it may have from . . . you know, depending upon who is the President at the time and using, for example, under the Bush years, you know the reduction in HUD funds and the critical need for affordable housing, you know throughout the state and the city's great desire to build affordable housing. We love to build affordable housing because it houses a lot of our people. You know, so during the Bush administration those monies were becoming less and less and less. But nevertheless when you are assertive and there are limited amounts of money, you can still access them and you can only access them if you have good legislative representatives in the House of Representatives and in the Senate and we've had those.

Listokin: It's hard to say who the neighborhoods are, but with the "community" but where are they in the redevelopment process?

Cahill: They are all over. They are all over it, they are in it. It is why we do what we do. And so you'll see from the list that I gave you, there are a number of neighborhood revitalization projects that are in, that are specifically referred to. There is a development of new housing; there is the rehabilitation or existing housing stock. There is creation of warehouses in our industrial section to create jobs.

You know, even the stuff that's downtown, well that's downtown redevelopment. As I said before that's really creating a place for everybody to come to and feel more comfortable. So

you come down to shop, you come down to eat, you come down to work. Or, it provides tens of millions of dollars of revenue to the city on an annual basis; it helps to reduce the cost of living in the City of New Brunswick by providing revenues that otherwise our taxpayers would have to pay.

So every redevelopment project or revitalization in the City of New Brunswick benefits our neighborhoods directly or indirectly regardless of where it is. I mentioned before about our unemployment rate and I indicated to you it was 13.4% in the early nineties. Well up until this economic malaise, we were able to reduce our unemployment rate to 4.3%, when the state was at 4.4% and the country was higher and the country was significantly higher. And for an urban center to have an unemployment rate that's lower than its suburban counterparts is virtually unheard of. So the redevelopment process, it's not just creating jobs for somebody else, its proof-positive it's creating jobs for New Brunswick residents.

Listokin: And I ask this respectfully, maybe reflecting some of my academic colleagues, I guess.

Cahill: Sure.

Listokin: The neighborhoods have an influence, much influence in terms of what decisions were made with respect to the redevelopment?

Cahill. You know, it's not uncommon to attack a revitalization project by saying that the neighborhood doesn't have any say or the neighborhood doesn't have any interest. Every redevelopment project has multiple public hearings. And it has multiple public hearings at virtually every level, so you know, it first goes to the planning board at a public hearing, at which the planning board recommends to the city council that it consider declaring an area in need of redevelopment or rehabilitation.

The city council then holds public hearings as to whether or not it ought to authorize the planning board to study that issue. The planning board then goes back, assuming that the council does authorize it. The planning board then conducts a public hearing as to whether or not the area is in fact in need of rehabilitation or redevelopment and the public gets to weigh in on it. And the planning board discusses what a redevelopment plan is, what a revitalization plan is, what a rehabilitation plan is, etc. And what the declaration of that area as in need of redevelopment or rehabilitation means.

Then after they make a recommendation, it goes back to the city council to accept, modify or reject the planning board's decision. And the council does that at a public hearing. Then if they do accept the area as in need of redevelopment or rehabilitation, then there is the creation of a redevelopment plan. The council then sends it back to the planning board to devise the plan, again at a public meeting.

And the recommendation is again made by the planning board, referred back to the city council for acceptance of the redevelopment plan or modification, which again is done at public hearings. So the public has all the time, not less than six to ten opportunities to weigh in at all of these different intervals.

In addition to that, notice is given to property owners and tenants within the area to encourage the public input. So not only do we look to solicit public input, we are required by law to do it. And I really think it helps us to address, to make the best plan possible.

Now there are some people in a neighborhood who may be, for all the right reasons, opposed to a particular redevelopment. And that opinion is to be respected and incorporated into at least the thought process. But it is not uncommon for people to use it as a negotiating ploy either. Oh you're going to take my property, etc., with the idea that in some point in time the

squeaky wheel gets the grease. And so that they are going to try to us that a negotiating tool that, should their property need to be acquired, that they will negotiate a better deal. And I can't tell people that that's not the way to do it, that's the way they think it works.

But we have done redevelopment projects where through the process people have said, "We don't think it's a good idea for this to be incorporated into it." We've thought about it and we have carved sections out where we thought it would be detrimental to the project as a whole or quite frankly, unnecessary for the success of the project and that the community thought that it was going to be a disservice to them.

Listokin: Your perspective on the arts and redevelopment in New Brunswick?

Cahill: Critically important. I mean first and foremost, it creates the heart and the soul of the city. You know, it creates a vibrant city, it creates a forum of expression, it's a place for people to gather and socialize. It just adds to what a city is all about. So from that perspective, it's critically important.

But economically, it's also a practical business sense. You know, most people who go to the theater are going to spend some time in the city. They are going to go to a restaurant, they are going to go shop or they are going to go do something in addition to go to the theater. They are going to create an activity in the immediate area that . . . people say, "Wow, there are things happening there. We need to go there and see what's going on." It creates a vibrant hub for activity and business. And, of course, the theaters employ people, the restaurants that people go to employ people and they are job-creators.

The number that for every ticket price or dollar that somebody spends for a ticket, the compounding factor of that in investment elsewhere in the community is several-fold. So investment in the arts is a good investment.

Listokin: I guess you indirectly alluded to the restaurants, can you speak about that and its role in terms of the revitalization in the city, the restaurant industry?

Cahill: We are fortunate that we have got a lot of really terrific restaurants. So that in and of itself puts New Brunswick on the map in the state of New Jersey and beyond. But it's also, it's not just the upscale restaurants, it's the different variety and types of restaurants that we have, not only in the immediate downtown area, but in some of the neighborhoods a lot of the ethnic eateries and restaurants that we have that create a certain atmosphere in the city that quite frankly isn't easily duplicated, if at all, elsewhere.

So again, gathering places where people can get together. That's what cities are all about. Somebody who doesn't want to get together with somebody, they can stay home and they can watch television or do whatever it is they do by themselves. But if you want to get out and meet people, the restaurants, the taverns, the pubs, the theaters, they are all terrific gathering places for people to share ideas and good fellowship and can't be beat.

Listokin: How transferable do you think what has happened in New Brunswick can be applied to other urban areas or is it a set of unique people and factors?

Cahill: Well . . .

Listokin: Or is it a model?

Cahill: It's both. And you could set the people who started the revitalization process or had the vision and the foresight that they had some thirty years ago, plus. Set up these entities and understood the role of the private sector and the government sector, etc. But if the right people aren't in place in any of these entities or quite frankly in all of the entities, then all of the systematic or programmatic changes that are put into place to try and duplicate the New Brunswick model are not going to be worth anything.

It really requires the individual attention and a recognition of one's own individual responsibility to get things done. So, if the conversation – if I'm talking, not withstanding how good or bad or – let's assume for discussion's sake, I'm asking you to go out on a limb here, that I'm a good mayor. No matter how good I am, if I'm trying to get a healthcare initiative done and I'm trying to work with either of the two hospitals and the leadership of the two hospitals couldn't care less what I have to say, where am I going? It doesn't matter how good my ideas are. If I can't get somebody to come along, then it's doomed to failure.

By the same token using the same principles, if the hospital has a great initiative but they have no response from the governmental side, that says, "Oh, I don't care what you guys want to do. You're off on your own and you guys go do what you have to do and we'll worry about what we have, my plate is full." It's not going to happen.

It's the idea of putting people around a table who share a common vision, not necessarily on individual subject matters, but as an overall goal and a willingness to try and play a role in any project that they can that advances it, so long as it serves a purpose for their prospective constituencies, that has been the success of New Brunswick. So the model of the NBTs, the Devcos, etc., I think are helpful, but I don't know that they are absolutely necessary if you have the right people involved. I have been very fortunate. You know every one of the entities that are critically important to the continued success of the revitalization efforts, we've had people who have common interests and goals and a willingness to work together and get it done.

Listokin: Do you think the city size has contributed some to the progress that has been made?

Cahill: Sure.

Listokin: You know, you have 40,000 and not 400,000.

Cahill: We're 50,000, we're proud of that extra 10,000. We've been 40,000 for decades and decades and decades and in the last census, a little over 48,000, which makes us the fastest urban center in the state and that number now exceeds 50,000, but of course the 2010 census will determine that. Yeah, we're more manageable, 50,000 is. . .

Listokin: I guess . . ?

Cahill: We're more manageable, but we also have all of the issues confronting us that the 200,000 to 400,000 and one million population cities have. So because we're kind of eclectic like that, but we can as a mid-size city or a smaller city, depending upon what your definition is, I think that we're more manageable as a result of that.

Listokin: And I would think also the fortuitous location of the county seat, Rutgers and that . . ?

Cahill: Well, that makes it easier. But by the same token, all of the things that we have today were things we had or that we were in the sixties and the early seventies when we were at the bottom of the barrel. So it's not a question of what you have, it's a question of can you take advantage of what you have?

You can look at urban centers throughout the State of New Jersey who have, who are on the beach, on the Atlantic Ocean, who are on the Hudson River, who are directly across from New York City, you know and they are struggling.

Listokin: So what I'm hearing is this importance of the people around the table cooperating and being very, very key and the other factors maybe contributing, but not singularly important?

Cahill: Right, and having a community that's invested in the process. No redevelopment or revitalization happens easily. You know from a citizenry perspective. You

know there is the fear of the unknown, the lack of trust or credibility that the governing body may have in trying to move something forward, etc.

But I think and I would suggest it was more difficult in the years before me because it was new, but I think we've established a credibility that we do what we say. We are not a gentrification type of program, we're not kicking people out, we're not looking to move people or businesses out of the city and that we're all in this together. And as a result of that, I think the citizenry of New Brunswick becomes more supportive and actually look forward to the advancement of new projects, new ideas, new housing, etc., and sometimes demand it.

Listokin: The benefit of hindsight, I'm going to have to leave in just a minute.

Cahill: Sure.

Listokin: But the benefit of hindsight, we always have 20/20 hindsight, things that you know if you had your druthers could have been done differently or should have?

Cahill: Nothing. And I don't say that. . .

Listokin: No, I . . .

Cahill: I don't say that because everything is perfect. But one thing I make sure of we do as an administration is we gather all of the best information we possibly can. We weigh all the options and based upon the information and the options we have, we make a decision. Nothing is rash; nothing is forged ahead just because we need to do something. So as a result of that, the projects that we've done were the best that they could possibly be, given the circumstances we've had.

The idea is to continue to build upon each of those, use the Ferren Deck as an example. I mentioned it before as one of the early ones that was done before my time. You know, would I have done that differently today than I did then or than it was done then or than it was done then?

Yeah, the answer is yes and we look to redevelop that site today.

But at the time, that was progress. That was the best the city could hope for to get that glimmer of hope of that one person coming by to have a sandwich at the corner store or grab a cup of coffee as they were getting on the train. But now, that site is really underutilized and it is because of our designation as a transit hub, a village center, and all of these other types of things, it has become the destination. So that project, if done today, I would do differently, but then, it was the best anybody could hope for. And I think that's the way you've got to look at urban development.

Berkhout: What about the fact that you lived here since. . .

Cahill: David, good seeing you.

Listokin: Pleasure.

Cahill: Stay well, good luck with this.

Berkhout: Yeah, I'll just be a few more minutes. The fact that you grew up here, do you have any fond memories of historic buildings that are now gone? Because there was that issue down in the Hiram District.

Cahill: Most of the properties I remember in the Hiram District were junk as a kid growing up and was an area that quite frankly, I wouldn't be anxious to visit on a frequent basis all the time, particularly is it became into the late sixties and early seventies. You know historical buildings are critically important but by the same token, those historical buildings have to be maintained.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: And unfortunately I think for decades and decades and perhaps centuries, depending upon the particular building, people allowed – and when I say “people” that means all

of us – allowed buildings to deteriorate so much that the historical significance of it becomes somewhat remote.

Berkhout: Uh hum.

Cahill: Either because somebody renovated the building and destroyed the historical character of the building or the place was in such danger of collapse and disrepair that it no longer has any semblance to what it once was. So while I don't have any great first-hand knowledge of the Hiram Market area, using that as an example, I don't have any really great, fond memories of a particular structure, that "Oh boy, I wish that was here today. It would be so much better." But having kept some of the buildings in the Hiram Square area, like Christ Church.

Berkhout: Right, where the restaurants. . ?

Cahill: Like the First Reformed Church and the Polyzitic Synagogue and the investment of government dollars into the restoration and maintenance of those buildings, by incorporating into Kilmer Square some of the older buildings, etc., that were into there. Those that were salvageable and worth saving, were. And I think that's what it's about; you've got to come up with the perfect blend. And quite frankly if the private sector is so desirous of maintaining, again using the Hiram Square area, if it was that important, efforts should have been taken over the decades before that to do something about it. And if we only become concerned about historical buildings when somebody is going to take it away, then how really interested are we in those? And that's why with our now historical building restorations and maintaining, we designate buildings in the city or we identify those that are of interest and worth concern. We have invested money, city dollars, in the restoration of these types of things to preserve them and that's in large part because people have expressed interest in maintaining

them.

Berkhout: I wanted to go back to what we have heard from people, I guess John Heldrich was the one who first made me aware of this, that I guess you could say some of the redevelopment really dated back to a meeting that LBJ held with CEOs of major firms in cities where he was worried about unemployment causing riots.

Cahill: Okay.

Berkhout: So back in 1968, it must have been Jim Burke, maybe or it was Richard Sellers?

Cahill: Dick Sellars was before Jim Burke and it would have. . . I won't say it's him at '67, but it wouldn't have been Burke.

Berkhout: Or his predecessor, maybe, who went to this meeting that LBJ held and came back and then – I guess it was Richard Sellers because he was the one who then put John Heldrich in charge of dealing with underemployment. What can we do to generate more jobs in the city, which was sort of the beginning of his thinking of what else can we do in the city and going to Hartford and getting interested in the Rouse Corporation coming in and American Cities doing this plan.

Cahill: Yep.

Berkhout: So you know looking back on that and thinking about John Heldrich's own leadership that he provided here, do you feel that if LBJ were here today, he would actually say that what happened was something that he maybe envisioned with the need to do something in cities to bring up employment and to keep people . . .

Cahill: I don't know what LBJ would say because I wasn't part of that conversation.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: But whoever were the people behind the thought process and development of the New Brunswick model, I think could only take a look at where we are today and say, “It worked and what are we going to do to make it better? And you know New Brunswick has done stuff that nobody else has done and it’s not easy. It continues to be hard, but so long as there are committed people like John Heldrich, like Dick Sellers, like John Lynch, like all of those people who were involved in the initial days, and like Chris Paladino and Glen Patterson today, you know New Brunswick will continue to get better. It will never be done.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: You know, the canvas always needs something else to be placed on it. But there is always room for progress and as long as we have people who are willing and able to do it, you know, we’ll continue to get there.

Berkhout: Were there elements to the original first plan that haven’t yet been completed?

Cahill: I don’t know. I don’t think there were specific pieces of it, you know do this here.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: But I think it was more generic in what the ultimate goals were, identification of development in downtown and development in the corridor.

Berkhout: Right.

Cahill: But without specifics and I would dare say that the generic goals that were established have been met.

Berkhout: Okay. Thank you.

Cahill: Thank you.

Berkhout: I'll also turn off all of these recording devices.

Cahill: Okay.

Berkhout: I guess the only other thing I didn't ask was were there other people you would suggest are vital – for us to interview ?

[end of recording]