

Interview with Kenneth Wheeler

Wheeler: Well, I got . . .

Berkhout: You did? Okay, let me make sure this is . . .

Listokin: This is not a script; it's just kind of some of the things that we want . . .

Berkhout: Yeah, I actually sent Wheeler – I don't know if you've received it.

Wheeler: I didn't bring it with me.

Listokin: Okay. That's okay.

Listokin: All right. It's going to be a lot more free-flowing.

Wheeler: All right. I'll do what I'm told.

Listokin: So I guess – why don't we just wait a minute.

Listokin: It's been a long time since our paths . . .

Wheeler: It has been. And a lot of changes.

Listokin: I remember when you were trying to get the different units of Rutgers to have more, you know, conversations and collaborations.

Isenberg: They've tried that before, have they?

Berkhout: Well, Wheeler had to implement the whole reorganization when the five history departments became one.

Isenberg: Uh-huh.

Wheeler: It took us ten years of education, of the faculty, to be able to get them . . . in fact, I think we had a clear majority. We had a majority of the leadership. One summer, how many was that that John organized? John Salapatras? Wasn't it 670 faculty offices . . .

Berkhout: Yeah, something like that.

Wheeler: Were moved in one summer.

(Laughing)

Wheeler: But before that, Douglass' history was going to national meetings and competing with Rutgers College and Livingston was completing . . .

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: And University College was competing with those three for recruiting new faculty.

Berkhout: Apparently, there was one flight and three different history departments or three different English departments, all had people on the same flight going to interview the same faculty member.

Isenberg: Oh my God.

Listokin: That's not very efficient.

Wheeler: But it was a lot of fun.

Listokin: Well, we give you credit. We know how hard it is to change . . .

Isenberg: And now we have the benefit of that work having been done.

Listokin: First, let me thank you for your time. This is an effort that's just beginning, you know, looking at the redevelopment of New Brunswick with an emphasis on speaking to the principals, recording oral histories, and parallel, we're doing archival research in the Rutgers library, New Brunswick library, and etc., etc. What will come of all this, besides these recordings, will be some type of product that's to be defined, probably some type of presentation wherever and there may be some articles and further discussions on them. You've seen our outline and it's just that; it's just – actually what we want to talk about, which is something that I haven't been able to find in doing so far in the archival research, is Rutgers in all of this. So I guess if we could maybe start with that.

Wheeler: Rutgers in all of this?

Listokin: Right.

Wheeler: Could I make a statement first?

Listokin: Please. This is your discussion.

Wheeler: Just a very brief statement, I'd like to say that I never have been quite as enthusiastic, unqualified – enthusiastic about oral history as a lot of our colleagues. I just, you know, you distrust the written record, but I distrust – and that's just a preference for me. It's been, what, 25 years since I served on New Brunswick Tomorrow and was involved in the revitalization and so my memory has huge gaps and as areas filled in that really are not based on fact, probably.

Berkhout: But I know you have great anecdotes.

(Laughing)

Isenberg: So we've got disclaimer.

Listokin: So noted. So noted. Offset by your insights, however.

(Laughing)

Wheeler: Rutgers. Let me say before Rutgers that the revitalization of New Brunswick, I feel very strongly, was a Johnson and Johnson enterprise and Johnson and Johnson was not like the university. It was not a democracy; it was from top down and the committees operated pretty much that way, too. Maybe we can talk a little later about how New Brunswick Tomorrow operated, but the agenda was not a collegial agenda. You know, we presented I think . . . well, let me talk about that a little bit later.

Listokin: Sure.

Wheeler: As far as the university was concerned, it was a hard row and my

background was urban history and so I felt very strongly about it. I also felt very fearful for the university because of the scattered campuses and the fact that the downtown separated Cook/Douglass and College Avenue. And, I first came in 1969 and ten or 15 years earlier, New Brunswick had been thriving, two big department stores downtown, a lot of activity and the decline was sudden. And when I came, people simply would not come who didn't live here, would not come to New Brunswick at night. Well, there was no reason to come; you know, the State Theatre was a pornographic theater and there weren't any restaurants. There weren't even ethnic groups here other than African Americans at that time; the Mexicans hadn't come. So I saw disaster ahead for the university, or enormous expense in somehow or another acquiring the land and moving. It was my training as an urban historian, it wasn't that I was particularly prescient about anything, but I really had a very hard time with the administration; the faculty really wasn't involved. They didn't ask much of the faculty at that time. Bloustein was good – I had his ear, but the director of budget, Marvin Greenberg, resisted every move in that direction. His job was, you know, protecting the finances of the university and he saw it as risky. So you know, he was doing his job, but it was still an obstacle. But in any case, I was on the New Brunswick Tomorrow committee from its . . .

Participant: And actually just to expand out some, there was an urban planning faculty. Were they at all on this radar?

Wheeler: I talked with them from time to time, Salah particularly.

Listokin: Salah was chair then.

Wheeler: Salah was chair then and I would talk with Salah. I taught history of planning before it became involved with social issues; before planning was, planning was physical planning. I taught at Ohio State and it was changing, particularly here, Harvard and

here and Penn and so I talked a lot with Salah but New Brunswick Tomorrow didn't do physical planning.

Listokin: Right.

Wheeler: It was program planning and so I just remember talking with him frequently and occasionally others about the problems that we were having.

Listokin: And the students, the planning students.

Wheeler: And the planning students. It was a New Brunswick Tomorrow operation. I have to emphasize, I spent my life in academia, and we talked about reorganization of the university. That's the kind of process I was used to, so being thrust into a hierarchal environment, and since Johnson and Johnson was footing the bill, they were listening, but they were running the show. And John was running the show. And he should have been given free reign, as he was, because they would not have done it without John; I'm convinced. John is the only vice president in probably 20 years who hadn't moved out to Bernardsville or someplace; he stayed in Highland Park and he still won't move across the street, to the place his name is on. His wife has an apartment there, but he won't . . .

Berkhout: I know.

Wheeler: But she goes home on weekends. So it really was John and you talked with him yesterday.

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: So you know his personality. I think he's a fascinating man; he's very complex. He's very modest in many ways, but he's also very forceful.

Berkhout: Mm-hmm.

Wheeler: And it was their operation and their resource was the American Cities

Corporation.

Berkhout: Right

Wheeler: And if you could get Leo Molinaro. Is he still alive?

Berkhout: I think he is.

Wheeler: If you could, somehow or another get him, go to him or get him to come here . . .

Berkhout: Right.

Isenberg: Their archives exist, too.

Listokin: Right.

Wheeler: Of course, he had . . . one of the questions had to do with transferability and all, with other cities that were doing things . . .

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: He's the one to answer that because that, of course . . .

Listokin: And we've been able, in the archives, to go back to the original American Cities report, which then led to Mayors and Shiff and Raymond, Parish, and Pine.

Wheeler: Good.

Listokin: But if I could go back, and again, if I'm interrupting at a bad time . . .

Wheeler: Could I just ask one question, but don't forget yours?

Listokin: Sure. Please. Please.

Wheeler: Do you have unlimited access to the J&J archives relative to New Brunswick Tomorrow and Devco?

Berkhout: Not yet.

Listokin: We haven't requested them yet.

Wheeler: Okay.

Listokin: What we want to do is to exhaust what's publically available . . .

Wheeler: Okay. Yeah, good. Surround it.

Listokin: And then start saying . . .

Wheeler: Make him give them up because it'll make him look better.

(Laughing)

Wheeler: Okay, sorry.

Listokin: I guess, flashing back, and I was at Rutgers at about that time.

Wheeler: Sure. Sure.

Listokin: I guess other American universities that were in urban areas, I guess the University of Chicago with the neighborhoods around there and Yale with the neighborhoods around there, there seemed to be more awareness of we're in the city and the immediate neighborhoods are not stabilized; we have an issue. In fact, University of Chicago and then helping foster some of the urban renewal efforts in those sited neighborhoods to stabilize. From what I'm hearing from you, it was somewhat off the radar at Rutgers.

Wheeler: Yes.

Listokin: You know that we're in an urban . . .

Wheeler: I was at Boston University before coming here in 1969 and I was the acting director of what they called the Metro Center and it was trying to coordinate the university to respond to Roxbury; Roxbury was burning at the time. And yes, there was a lot of awareness there and a lot of talk; not too much action. But don't you think the size had a lot to do with New Brunswick?

Listokin: The size?

Wheeler: We weren't a city, really, and certainly, the inner city had virtually disappeared as far as a functioning center of this metropolitan New Brunswick. But it was only 50,000 and you go to Chicago and Boston and other places. You know of other cities this size.

Listokin: Which actually was a plus and a minus.

Wheeler: Yes.

Listokin: You could wrap your arms around a New Brunswick; it was harder to wrap your arms around . . .

Berkhout: John mentioned going to Cincinnati, but he said that they did things wrong, they just did a whole bunch of housing without involving any of the community.

Wheeler: Yeah, but Cincinnati is a real city.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Wheeler: Not to diminish . . .

Berkhout: No, no, no. I understand.

Wheeler: New Brunswick, but New York always has and always will hover; that's the city. That's my impression, is the difference, and we were sort of out of the loop of that and again, I always felt that my strong suit was the divided campuses. If Rutgers had been exclusively on College Avenue, they could say we've got plenty of land across the river if we ever have to move, which is what most universities have done, is move away. And most corporations. You really have to give J&J enormous credit because they took a risk with their stock holders; . . .

Listokin: Before I lost the thought on dividing campuses, the fact that it was divided, it's the first one – there wasn't this critical mass right in the middle of the urban . . .

Wheeler: Right.

Listokin: And two, they were at that time expanding into other campuses, so the immediate urban/downtown New Brunswick was less important.

Wheeler: Yes.

Listokin: Is that some of the thinking that I'm hearing?

Wheeler: Well, and it was risky. No one knew it was going to succeed like it did.

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: And most people were actually, at the university, they were skeptical that it would happen.

Listokin: For good reason.

Wheeler: They just didn't wanna look at the fusion of it because it was all dark for them.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Wheeler: So I think those are the reasons. I don't mean to denigrate Rutgers, but honestly, you know how a university operates; we all do. People have their disciplines and their focus and their concerns, but they have primary responsibilities.

Isenberg: I think also, land ownership plays a role because universities like Penn, Harvard, Yale, they owned downtown land and they were capable of purchasing it . . .

Wheeler: Yeah. Yes.

Isenberg: Even today, we see that difference between Rutgers' engages in development; we don't own the land, but we often have to entice partnerships, so it's a different kind of investment in the city.

Wheeler: Why couldn't we own land?

Isenberg: Pardon me?

Wheeler: Why couldn't we have owned land?

Isenberg: Well, I guess then we have to open up . . .

Wheeler: One of my efforts is a wonderful building next to the New Brunswick National Bank that has three stories; it has six apartments, one-bedroom apartments and each with a wood burning fireplace. And storage space downstairs. Just off – walking distance, with the busses and so forth; the most beautiful place we could've had for visiting faculty members, you know, short term visiting faculty members. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, on the market for three months and I thought my God, it'll ruin me but I'll sell my house and buy it myself. The university wouldn't touch it.

Isenberg: I see.

Wheeler: They wouldn't touch it. Now that's not a big investment and that's prime downtown.

Isenberg: Right. Right.

Wheeler: Come on. And it was that caution that prevailed. I had another little thing with Marvin about summer school and Ed Bloustein said to me, he said, "Wheeler, be a little more merciful with him." He said, "You know, he keeps the place running." Well, that was our attitude, you know, don't wanna mess with the budget and so forth, Marvin doesn't – so, there were missed opportunities. It wasn't just that we didn't historically own the land.

Isenberg: I see.

Wheeler: We didn't do anything to protect our interest.

Isenberg: At that time. Okay.

Wheeler: And I still grieve over that. Wouldn't you like to be a visiting faculty member with a fireplace in your one-bedroom apartment?

Isenberg: Sure.

Wheeler: In downtown New Brunswick today?

(Laughing)

Listokin: So, if you can just take us through so we get the historical flow.

Wheeler: Yes, okay.

Listokin: So, we have J&J kind of saying we need to do something and then American Cities comes in and they form New Brunswick Tomorrow. But again, if you could just take us through Rutgers in all this, and yourself.

Wheeler: There wasn't any Rutgers in all of this.

Berkhout: It was Wheeler.

Wheeler: Hmm?

Berkhout: It was you.

Wheeler: Yeah. I was able to get the bookstore downtown. I insisted that Mason Gross be downtown. We got the Arnold Constable building. And you know, there were a few ventures like that, but in terms of any concerted Board of Governors' policy about making the commitment, it simply wasn't in the works then. They just were not aware. And J&J, everybody in American industry seemed to be fleeing the cities and moving to rural campuses.

Berkhout: Mm-hmm.

Wheeler: And that would've been the logical place for Johnson and Johnson to go. It would've been a lot less expensive, and again, I credit John with persuading that . . . I don't remember his exact title, but he was very powerful within that group and he had the ear of Dick Sellers; he was president during much of that time.

Berkhout: Right.

Berkhout: He had a very bland title; it didn't really reflect anything about him, like vice president in charge of administration or something.

Wheeler: Yes.

Berkhout: I thought he was vice president of corporate affairs or something.

Wheeler: Remember, I don't wanna ramble on this, but one time, right before John's retiring, they published the highest paid corporate executives in New Jersey and they listed John as having \$14 million the year before in salary and perks.

Berkhout: Wow.

Wheeler: And he was humiliated. You saw him yesterday.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Wheeler: You could imagine how he would – it took him years to live that down.

(Laughing)

Listokin: So what I'm hearing is it really wasn't on Rutgers' radar; it was kind of you because of your personal interests and professional interests, Ed Bloustein being somewhat supportive.

Wheeler: He was not unsympathetic, but he had many challenges during the time. You know, you can only have so many balls in the air and whatnot. We had reorganization . . .

Listokin: So it wasn't very high on his radar.

Wheeler: We had huge budget problems during some of those years. Another example was the State Theatre. I thought the State Theatre would be wonderful as it is, as it's become. And it was a porno movie, and so I would talk with Marvin and Marvin would say "Well, it's not acoustically sound; it's just a shoe box." And I said "Marvin, Symphony Hall in Boston is just a shoe box, and it's the best acoustic environment in the country, probably. And

besides, it's not a shoe box;" it's kind of – so I called the fellow, the acoustical architect at Columbia who redesigned Avery Fisher and they gutted it according to his plan. And I called him and told him our problem and I said you know, really, I think they were converting a lot. I think in Cincinnati already a number of old vaudeville houses or movie houses were being converted. I said what can we do? How can we find out if it's at all acoustically feasible? If it's not feasible, let's forget it, but how can we find that out? He said well, you can't afford me, but I will give you three formulae and if they all fit, forget it; if they don't, then you have a chance. Then, I'll give you some names of some people to call. So I got in touch with the plant manager, Bob Totten, who is a devout Baptist and I said "Bob, we have to go to the State Theatre," and he said "that's a porno theater." I said we have to go and he said "Well, can't we make an appointment?" I said "Bob, you know better than that. We make an appointment as Rutgers people and think what's going to happen to the price if we decide we're interested." I said "I'll buy the tickets and you back in; you don't have to face the screen. And then we can do these measurements."

(Laughing)

Wheeler: So he did and they didn't fit. So now, ultimately, it took John Heldrich persuading Dick Sellars, out of his own pocket, to buy the State Theatre, buy the porno Theatre, and hold it until Devco had the resources to turn it into a concert hall.

Listokin: Now you mentioned some of the things Rutgers did because of your impetus.

Wheeler: Well that sounds like I'm on a vanity trip.

Listokin: Okay. Okay.

Wheeler: I'm embarrassing myself.

Listokin: The bookstore.

Wheeler: Yes.

Listokin: All right, and if I recall, the bookstore used to be by the library.

Wheeler: It was in a shack by the library.

Listokin: In a shack by the library.

Berkhout: Right.

Listokin: So clearly, you needed a new facility.

Wheeler: Yes.

Listokin: Were different places considered?

Wheeler: Yes.

Listokin: And then maybe talk a little bit about the bookstore. I know where it ended up and it was precisely in the Ferren deck.

Wheeler: Well, it was because the Ferren deck was being built, I said, and the bookstore, they were talking about expanding the bookstore and I said the bookstore is really basically hopeless where it is. There's no way to make a permanent addition to that building. Put it downtown and they said okay, let's do that. You know, that was feasible. It was relatively safe and easily accessible to students.

Berkhout: So you had to negotiate that with Devco, I guess, right? Because Ferren deck was a Devco project?

Wheeler: Devco did the Ferren deck.

Berkhout: Right.

Listokin: And you mentioned Mason Gross, which clearly was a statement to be downtown.

Wheeler: I said you're going to be downtown and Jack Bettenbender didn't like the idea but I said sorry.

Berkhout: Jack was the dean.

Listokin: So other locations were considered, other than downtown?

Wheeler: They may have.

Listokin: Right. Okay.

(Laughing)

Wheeler: Well, what I said, we had to get into – somehow or another we had to show some sign of, you know participation.

Listokin: Now with that pressure, so to speak, to show, was that in part accentuated because Rutgers was on NBT and people were saying this is what we're doing? Or was that more your . . .

Wheeler: No, I don't remember. There was certainly no internal pressure from Rutgers, as I've said, to be involved, and J&J was – maybe we can talk about that a little later.

Listokin: Sure.

Wheeler: But again, it was their show. And I was very concerned at times about it being their show and I was very concerned of the fact that it seemed to be focused on downtown, commercial activity. And, even though they were trying to help with a variety of projects, trying to help the lower income citizenry, I always believed that we ought to try very hard early on to to gentrify. There had to be an educated, reasonably well-educated professional class of people who were involved to make a balanced community. And so I was interested in the housing for visiting professors and for that and that was not their timetable. And I was confused by it. And now in hindsight, I understand it a little better.

Listokin: When you say confused by it . . .

Wheeler: I was confused by the fact that they seemed to be totally involved with . . .

I said you know, if you don't have a population to support those commercial establishments you're trying to bring in, then that's a mistake.

Isenberg: Mm-hmm.

Listokin: So this residential housing just wasn't on the J&J radar?

Wheeler: It was what?

Listokin: It was not on the J&J radar?

Wheeler: Not, not middle class. Yeah.

Berkhout: Except on the . . .

Wheeler: But not middle or upper-middle class.

Berkhout: Except on the Hiram district? But maybe that was a bit later.

Wheeler: That was later. That was much later. That was several years later because I wanted to live there. I wanted to be one of the first ones down there and I went to Washington to see Alan Voorhees.

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: Who owned that land at that time and was going to develop it and it was ten or 12 years later that they actually built it.

Berkhout: I see.

Wheeler: The first places in Hiram.

Berkhout: Hmm. So was Alan involved at all, because it was on his land, in getting that approved?

Wheeler: No. It was just that he and Ralph and John Heldrich were very close.

They had all grown up in Highland Park and they all were very sentimental about the New Brunswick/Greater New Brunswick area and wanted to help. And I've forgotten other things he did, but he worked with Devco and bought up all that land.

Berkhout: I see.

Wheeler: For the original – around The Frog and The Peach.

Berkhout: Right.

Listokin: All right, so again, you know, you mentioned the bookstore, the Mason Gross; do you care to speculate about what an alternative history could've been with Rutgers saying urban New Brunswick is very important to us and we're going to put Livingston not on Livingston, but in the down – just what might've been an alternative course of action and what consequences do you think it might've had?

Wheeler: (Laughing) It would've been very difficult. I was dead wrong. Just certain enterprises just have to be – I'm very sympathetic with Hausman and his problems. I think that if we hadn't of had a Hausman, we wouldn't want to visit Paris today. You may disagree.

Isenberg: No, no. I understand.

Wheeler: So I think it sometimes takes a very focused effort by a relatively small group, and particularly if you're coming out of a hierarchal organization, as most corporations are, and maybe I can jump into that now and that'll sort of answer your question. The meetings that we had were run by John and a staff of three or four people and American Cities and their work was done behind the scenes. And they brought to the committee, which was a representative – Roy Epps was on the committee. The votes were always unanimous for everything that was presented. Roy Epps, one time in the 12 years or so that I was on the board,

voted to abstain. But that wasn't really – our purpose was to help – but not to influence and to change course unless they were clearly going in the wrong direction. And so we were – I really hesitate to use the term, but we were a rubber stamp committee and we were intended to be. And can you imagine having a lot of people from Rutgers on a rubber stamp committee?

Berkhout: (Laughing) Yeah.

Wheeler: It sounds condescending about faculty. I don't mean it that way, but I just think universities are very different kinds of organizations, very necessary, and corporations are another kind of organization. To really have an impact during those times, we weren't making sacrifices; J&J was. So, J&J, I felt, should have the say. They were the ones who were running risks; we weren't running risks with our constituency.

Listokin: So as an urban historian, how would you evaluate the denouement of New Brunswick Tomorrow and Devco?

Wheeler: Today?

Listokin: Yeah.

Wheeler: I don't know of another city in America that's had as great a success. I'm not terribly well – you know, I've been retired for ten years, but no, I don't know of another city that has been as successful. They made mistakes. And I think the timing was good. You know, they had to get some kind of income base and then you know, the timing was right for the housing, even though I was deprived of it when I lived here.

(Laughing)

Listokin: And when you say successful, just how much has happened?

Wheeler: Yes. And the fact that people are much better off here and I think displacement, particularly of neighborhoods, is a very traumatic business. You know, some

people live down where the J&J tower is now, lived down there for generations.

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: And they were scattered throughout New Brunswick and that was difficult. But I think that you can say that across the board, the population is much, much better off.

Listokin: Because the city is economically that much stronger.

Wheeler: Because the city – and they ended up building a lot of low income housing. Good low income housing. You know, it was very dangerous to come to New Brunswick. People just didn't wanna come over here. People of Highland Park were afraid to come here. So again, I think every effort like this makes mistakes, but I think overall, it's very impressive and I think the community owes a huge debt of gratitude to J&J and the others who did it. I've been emphasizing J&J, but I mean to. I really believe that that was the single driving force.

Isenberg: Do you feel that the city administration, the different levels . . . how would you assess the mayor, the representatives? They weren't quite rubber stamp; but were they?

Wheeler: Pat . . .

Berkhout: Pat Sheehan?

Wheeler: Pat Sheehan. Pat Sheehan worked for Johnson and Johnson and she was a middle-of-the-roader, middle-of-the-roader Democrat and I think most of the officers at J&J are Republican. But she worked well within that organization and, actually, John Lynch worked pretty well with them. He probably should've gone to jail then as well as later.

(Laughing)

Listokin: We hope to talk with him.

Wheeler: Is he out?

Listokin: He's coming out.

Berkhout: This month.

Wheeler: Just for you?

(Laughing)

Wheeler: Congratulations.

(Laughing)

Listokin: I guess they'll release him early, but he has to talk to us. There's very little literature written on New Brunswick but this very small body of literature plus things discussed in terms of some of the critiques; you know, you've acknowledged how much has been accomplished in the city economically, it's that much better off and the Cultural Center has become a regional draw, etc., etc. I guess some of the critique is that there was only a patina of neighborhood involvement. Roy Epps was on the board and they had some people representing the churches on the board but you weren't getting a bottom up input into this redevelopment process. Is that a fair statement?

Wheeler: No. No. Nobody intended – I mean, it was not stated, but hey, you're representatives on the board; look at these ministers and Roy Epps and so forth. You have a voice there, but no. It would've been a waste of time. I'm shocked that I say that now; I never would've said that 30 years ago.

Listokin: Can you talk a little bit about that? And again, I've been around a lot of years, and you know, as a student, I would've reacted differently.

Wheeler: At the risk of repeating myself, I just think that they – they came out of an organization that was hierarchical. They came out of an organization that had a history of trying

to deal with the world with integrity. I think that was about the time that the Tylenol scare came; I don't know if you remember that or not.

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: But they found – somebody put arsenic in the Tylenol bottles in a couple of pharmacies in Chicago and they moved right in and they recalled everything and they made public announcements and they handled it as well as any capitalistic concern that I know of has handled a problem and that's been their history. But they are hierarchical. And so you do what you're accustomed to doing. And they probably were advised by American Cities – this is why I think Leo Molinaro is so important to talk with; he's very candid and he's a very decent man but I suspect that he also recommended, you know, you want to share information, you wanna have broad, factual input, but you want to keep focused.

Listokin: But I'm also hearing from your perspective, it's not just that that's the way it happened but it almost needed to happen that way . . .

Wheeler: Yes.

Listokin: To have realized what was realized.

Wheeler: What I would make the comparison with is two totally different kinds of institutions; the corporate structure of J&J and the university. It took us ten – it really took us closer to 15 years of educational process. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system, how can you keep the strengths and eliminate the weaknesses, 15 years. That was pretty good for a university, I think. Don't you?

Listokin: When you say 15, that's related to the reorganization . . .

Wheeler: To the reorganization of New Brunswick, of the disciplines. In contrast, J&J is hierarchical, they get the information they feel they need and the leadership makes the

decision.

Isenberg: Mm-hmm. Carries it out.

Berkhout: John has talked about Richard Sellars and how it took . . . I think John feels it took him a few years to get Richard Sellars to buy in to the idea of doing that.

Wheeler: Yes. Yes.

Berkhout: But then apparently . . .

Wheeler: But when he did, when John finally convinced him, he was there all the way.

Berkhout: And then he became the head of Devco? He retired from J&J?

Wheeler: He retired and I never kept up too closely with Devco; I did a bit. They overlapped somewhat.

Berkhout: Okay.

Wheeler: But, yeah. That doesn't surprise me. It was John. It was John.

Berkhout: Right. And Sellars was the one who then bought the State Berkhoutter, so he became heavily involved in it after having not really . . .

Wheeler: Yes. Yes. Yeah. Well, not as heavily involved but as I recall, it was several hundred thousand dollars and it was out of his own pocket.

Isenberg: Do you have a sense of what might have changed Dick Sellars' mind? It sounds like there was something that opened him up to it; we didn't quite get that . . .

Wheeler: What did John say?

Berkhout: He told us that Leo Molinaro had said to him he's not ready yet.

Wheeler: Yeah.

Berkhout: And so I don't know what happened between the he's not ready yet and

then he called in John and said I'm ready to do it.

Wheeler: John wouldn't answer that question?

Isenberg: I don't think we quite realize . . .

Berkhout: I guess we didn't pursue it.

Isenberg: We didn't quite realize that we had that gap, to ask him.

Listokin: I mean, one could speculate. You know, things started to happen and you saw some progress.

Listokin: But if I can go back to . . .

Wheeler: Yeah.

Listokin: All right. I'm going to wear now my urban planning hat.

Wheeler: Okay. Yes.

Listokin: Again, good contrast between university, kind of democratic committees and what have you and hierarchical . . .

Wheeler: Yes.

Listokin: And in fact, let's acknowledge that, you know, that you needed sort of a hierarchical corporate structure to get things done. But, might have there been more balance in terms of what was done had there been more – so you're saying this model worked. I'm saying, looking back, with the benefit of some hindsight, had there been more community participation, it may have slowed the process and it may have made it messier, but you may have had more of a balance of what we look out the window now and see. Housing a little earlier. Affordable housing more than there is. Because I mean basically, it took 15-20 years before you saw housing and basically you don't see affordable housing in the downtown and the affordable housing that was here, Memorial Homes, got moved.

Wheeler: Mm-hmm.

Listokin: And there are good reasons; that was a failed model, the public housing, etc., etc.

Wheeler: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yes. Yes.

Participant: But I'm now on my urban planning platform.

Wheeler: Okay. Sure. Sure.

Listokin: Pretty much, most of the consensus is saying in order to get a plan that makes a city wholistic and work, you have to reflect the different interests; one of those interests are less advantaged, you know, minorities, etc. I'm just trying to hear a little – on the other hand. I hear what you're saying. You know, the corporate structure made it work, made it more efficient, etc. But even looking back with the benefit of history and hindsight, I'm not really hearing . . .

Wheeler: I think you're trying to put words in my mouth.

Berkhout: No, he's not.

(Laughing)

Listokin: I don't do oral history for a living.

Wheeler: I'm teasing you.

(Laughing)

Listokin: I will zip it. I will zip it.

Wheeler: No, no, no. I have given a lot of thought to that and I'm very surprised at the change in myself, in my view and myself because those are exactly the questions I would've asked at the beginning. And maybe I'm kind of jaded because 15 years at the university wore me out. I don't think there's any of that; who knows what goes on in the minds of men? That's

such a complicated question because a lot of it deals with money. Where are you going to get the money for the low income housing if you don't have some kind of tax or commercial base for the income to build that housing? And how are you going to persuade very nervous people from the sixties and seventies, upper middle class professionals, even at Rutgers – where did Rutgers people live? How many of them lived in New Brunswick? Three, I think.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Wheeler: That's fine, but we don't want our kids, etc., etc., on dangerous streets and I think that when you balance it out, you have to deal with the art of what is possible and also, I think with an enterprise like that, you have to have momentum. And I think that if we had taken ??a side trip to Millsen, frankly it would've had to have been token and I think it's better not to do it than to have – I really do, think it's better to do that than not have it, then there will be pressure that will be like so you haven't done anything for lower income people. And that voice began to be raised along the way and I think that provided some – am I skirting the question, Listokin?

Listokin: No. No. Having reached on the cusp of turning 60 at the end of the month, there's a lot of – I'm not the young urban planning student and seeing everything in black and white.

Wheeler: Yeah. Yeah.

Listokin: Another side of the redevelopment, clearly, new construction was embraced as opposed to trying to preserve some of the stock.

Wheeler: Okay.

Listokin: You know, Hiram Market, various controversies, etc. Your thoughts on that? Was that the way to go?

Wheeler: Okay. Yeah. Yeah. Yes, now there I did differ and I differed strongly. I said you can't tear down the city and rebuild it and have it viable in 20 years or 50 years. You've gotta have a sense of continuity. And they did that with the churches, but I think it wasn't because of continuity; I think it was just they didn't want to stir up the congregations, which were pretty powerful. But, for example, on Church Street, when they tore down that whole block, and I don't think the design was good; I think it's proven not to be good on . . .

Berkhout: You mean the Kilmer Square area?

Wheeler: Yes. Yes. It's commercially not worked.

Right: Right.

Wheeler: It's poorly designed. It's wrong. And I thought it was wrong in the beginning, but when they did it, I protested because there were some – there's no great architecture, but there were some interesting buildings and the three buildings that are the first on Church Street, across from the Episcopal church, I said those make a unit and I said it's not going to cost you much to preserve those three . . .

Berkhout: That's where Old Bay is.

Wheeler: And they'll be across from the church.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Wheeler: So you'll have a sense of historical continuity . . .

Isenberg: A context . . .

Wheeler: With those. So they said okay; I made a lot of noise about it. Okay. And John agreed to it. Well, I found out indirectly from some of their henchmen, the director of New Brunswick Tomorrow, the paid – the hired gun, I found out that they had gone back on that commitment and so I was really annoyed that I hadn't been informed and so I got in a shouting

match, I guess, with him and John was in the room and he said now wait a minute, wait a minute. What's going on here? And I said you know, you made a commitment and I said I thought it was very important. It was important to make an issue of. You made a commitment and now you're backing out on it. And so – I forget . . .

Berkhout: Was it Ted Hargrove?

Wheeler: No, it was his predecessor.

Berkhout: Okay.

Wheeler: Abdalla.

Berkhout: Abdalla?

Wheeler: So he said the contractor can't afford it. And I said he shouldn't have signed the con – he should've done his figures before he signed the contract, then. And so John said okay, we'll take care of it. We'll take care of it. But I felt very strongly about a lot of that and I felt that more was torn down than needed to be. Marvin Greenberg said oh we were destitute at the time. He said we'll put a concert hall in the budget. He said we can do a nice concert hall for \$10-15 million. You know, we were scrambling to not lay off faculty and I think that's much better to have those older facilities there.

Berkhout: The State Theatre.

Wheeler: Again, to give historic diversity. So yes, obviously, that was one of the things that I felt . . . faculty housing, if they had – Church Street could have been an interesting kind of . . . it was a 19th century street.

Berkhout: What about the Hiram area? Where the boulder buildings with lofts, where there are now those townhouses?

Wheeler: A lot of those really were not re-habitable. It was . . .

Berkhout: Okay.

Wheeler: It'd been in serious slum condition for a long time.

Participant: That's where I took the cooking class with David Willems.

Wheeler: That's what?

Berkhout: David Willems had a loft; he was a sociology student and did catering stuff.

Wheeler: Yes.

Berkhout: And I took a cooking class in one of those lofts shortly before it got torn down.

Wheeler: Yes.

Berkhout: The insides of some, I guess, were fine. Others, I guess, were dilapidated. But they did preserve the buildings where The Frog and The Peach is.

Wheeler: They preserved what?

Berkhout: The block where The Frog and The Peach is.

Wheeler: Yes.

Berkhout: Those buildings.

Wheeler: Yeah.

Listokin: What about the design of the J&J headquarters building?

Wheeler: It's ugly.

(Laughing)

Wheeler: You know, people disagree on aesthetic tastes.

Listokin: Because it was touted as a tower in a park and a park in the city, and of course, it's very non-urban now.

Wheeler: Yeah, you're right. That's an important point. And the walls around it.

Listokin: Walls.

Wheeler: Are not sit-able. And that's part of what causes the difficulty across the street. A large part of across the street is just simply design but it's just at a thoroughfare and there's nobody there.

Isenberg: Well, to go with that for a second, John described the impact of the small Kilmer Park on the corner; he felt that the community responded to it symbolically. Do you have any thoughts on how open spaces were . . .

Wheeler: Unlock it. Unlock it then.

Isenberg: Well yes. I was . . . yeah.

Wheeler: I mean, you know, you can peer through the bars and see it but it seems to be locked . . .

Isenberg: All the time.

Wheeler: And you never know when it's going to be locked and when not, so if you wanna say I'd like to go down and sit in the park, you don't know whether you can get in or not and then across the street, the walls are deliberately high to keep loiterers I guess, away.

Isenberg: Do you have a sense that at the time that this was unfolding, that the headquarters were built, that the park was opened, I guess in the other order, that people either at the university or in the city were aware of these kind of public space questions and saw . . .

Wheeler: They didn't live here.

Isenberg: Pardon me?

Wheeler: They didn't live here.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Wheeler: They were interested in Highland Park, where we lived. No. I mean, it was enough to have your discipline and then your kids and then your local home community. You just didn't have time.

Isenberg: Right. So there really was no kind of watchdog group . . .

Wheeler: Nobody told me about it.

Isenberg: For questions of open space or, you know, public life that you see in other cities.

Wheeler: No. No. No. No.

Isenberg: At that time, there were groups that were advocates for accessibility, you know, in the sixties. Accessibility, gathering places, that didn't exist?

Listokin: I mean, you have very few Rutgers professors like Tony Nelessen . . .

Wheeler: Yeah.

Listokin: Who lived in a loft right in a

Wheeler: None like Tony Nelson.

(Laughing)

Wheeler: Wasn't he wonderful?

Berkhout: He's still here.

Wheeler: Is he?

Berkhout: Oh yeah.

Wheeler: He must be . . .

Listokin: Actually now lives in the suburbs, which I just find really . . .

Berkhout: Yeah, but in a converted greenhouse.

(Laughing)

Berkhout: On a river.

Listokin: But again, it was very . . . because he was very urban.

Wheeler: Yes.

Listokin: It's always hard to figure out why – you had these few Rutgers professors but basically, Rutgers professors didn't really relate to New Brunswick.

Wheeler: Even in your department, where was Salah? He was in Cairo. Or Princeton.

Berkhout: Princeton.

Listokin: Or Princeton. I mean that – the planning faculty . . .

Wheeler: There really wasn't a sense of hope and again, J&J could have, I suppose . . . you know, you've got lots of money and lots of PR people, we could have said we really want you involved and so they could've had some kind of public relations campaign with Rutgers faculty.

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: And invited them – they're always happy to go for drinks and so forth and they didn't want that. That was not their role.

Listokin: But as to why . . .

Wheeler: And I think that was true, most of the planning people have their special . . . as we all do, in universities, have our special niche and we needed to spend our time there, and then in our own hometowns.

Listokin: This is a general observation, the very limited connection between the planning program and New Brunswick pretty much continued. Forget on affordable housing displacement, whatever you wanna talk about; if you wanna talk about technology, downtown

redevelopment, arts revitalization, which is going on in front of your nose here, is not picked up by the planning program. I think I'm one of the few people who would run a New Brunswick studio and it's not like it was particularly demanded. And after awhile I stopped because I wasn't getting grass roots support.

Wheeler: Yeah.

Berkhout: Well, Briavel did some things; she wrote some articles on . . .

Wheeler: Who did?

Berkhout: Briavel Holcomb.

Wheeler: Oh, yes.

Participant: A related question is when you observed your objections to the demolition, what kind of allies did you have with that position? Did you feel like you a lone voice . . .

Wheeler: John.

Berkhout: Oh, John.

Wheeler: John.

Isenberg: So John was . . . okay.

Wheeler: If John hadn't -- the rest of that board would've -- would not have understood. They wouldn't have responded.

Isenberg: Mm-hmm.

Listokin: And in fact, I'm just trying . . .

Wheeler: So it's John. John made a commitment and I made such a argument for it ahead of time that he knew that it was, you know, that I felt very strongly about it. They were very good about how they -- they knew how to keep the peace with carrots and sticks.

Listokin: Any other examples of where some things got preserved? I mean, I can't think immediately of . . .

Wheeler: No . . .

Isenberg: Small victories.

Wheeler: And I don't know what happened along George, you know, there are a lot of those buildings there but I don't know – I didn't feel strongly – if they had threatened to tear down People's National Bank, I always thought there was a certain charm about it on that corner of Church.

Berkhout: Right. Right.

Wheeler: But it never came up.

Listokin: I think in part George got preserved because there wasn't demand to build there and in fact when there was demand, when – what was it, that UMDNJ or whatever unit, when they wanted to come in and in fact it was demolished. But I mean, it was more preservation because there wasn't demand.

Wheeler: No, that was not an issue with anybody but me.

Listokin. Not preservation as a policy.

Isenberg: Wow.

Wheeler: Because of history.

Berkhout: There is now, though.

Wheeler: We were trained, weren't we?

Berkhout: There is now with the Gateway building. There was a group who tried to preserve – this is on the corner of Easton and Somerset; there was that Rafferty's restaurant at that corner and New Jersey Bookstore and all that; that's all coming down for a large, high rise

building.

Wheeler: And that's where?

Berkhout: By the train station. North of the – it's up Easton Avenue.

Wheeler: On Somerset?

Berkhout: Across from the Easton Avenue dormitory.

Wheeler: Yeah, I really regret that. My son, when he was at Rutgers, lived in the third floor. I was always concerned about fire, but delighted that he was living in there.

(Laughing)

Wheeler: There are about four or five houses . . .

Isenberg: That's right. The small streetscape, right?

Wheeler: And then the corner building and then all of them had their own kind of . .

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: You know, they were not great architecture, but they were a sense of the history of Rutgers.

Isenberg: That's right, the streetscape.

Berkhout: Those are coming down.

Wheeler: Just every bit as much as Old Queens.

Berkhout: Right. But there was a group to protest that.

Wheeler: From the university?

Berkhout: No. I think it's Historic Society or something like that.

Listokin: It's a small group that I'm sure would have almost no practical effect.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Wheeler: Why didn't you join them?

(Laughing)

Listokin: Your perspective on some of the other major players – like the hospital?
Where were they?

Wheeler: You know, they tried to develop grants and I think that helped the hospital a lot in that way for special programs and that obviously was a two-pronged effort because of the tradition of the company and Robert Wood and so forth. I was not involved in any of that. I'd like to just make one point that occurred to me. Relations between J&J and the university were not great when I came here. As a matter of fact, Mason Gross had quarreled with whomever was president of J&J and they weren't even speaking and Mason Gross didn't give a damn. He was a wonderful president, but he was thoroughly, thoroughly academic, and we don't need him. But, right before Mason was president, J&J had promised us the building on George and Hamilton. The big building.

Isenberg: Right. Their older building.

Wheeler: Yeah, the older building.

Isenberg: The older headquarters.

Wheeler: They said we're going to be building within the next 15 or 20 years; we're going to be building a new headquarters somewhere and when we do, we'll give that to you. That never happened. Part of it was I don't think it was . . . I don't know why they didn't give it to us but I would say that everybody was under great financial stress during that time that the building went up. Our budget was awful. It really at the time was not as bad as this but we thought they were.

Listokin: How about the university and the city, you know, town-town relations?

Berkhout: With Lynch?

Wheeler: There wasn't anybody here.

Berkhout: Lynch.

Wheeler: There wasn't anybody here for most faculty members to talk . . .

Berkhout: Oh, okay.

Wheeler: It just wasn't. They didn't come to . . . first of all, a lot of people were really afraid of New Brunswick. Even in the daytime, they didn't wanna come here and they did have . . . you know another person maybe to talk to would be Eric Krebs.

Berkhout: Oh, yeah.

Wheeler: Eric Krebs had a little . . . it was on Albany Street, a little Berkhoutter and about – I came here in '69 and it'd been going on for several years.

Berkhout: Yeah, I vaguely remember that there was one there.

Wheeler: It's what?

Berkhout: There was one in the downtown because then it later became the George Street Playhouse.

Wheeler: Yes. That was Brecht West.

Berkhout: Okay.

Wheeler: And there was another name for it, even before that. But I think Eric started probably in 1965 or 66.

Berkhout: Okay.

Wheeler: He was downtown and there wasn't anything else downtown other than Brecht West. Then there was a supermarket on the other side of George Street by the railroad tracks and he took that over and that's when it became the George Street.

Berkhout: Oh, okay.

Wheeler: And I was on the board then, about 1962 or 63 and he drew people downtown. His productions were interesting and drew a lot of university people down and they were on the board, Voorhees were all on the board at one time or another and he gave a lot of money to them and John. And so it was one viable, cultural effort downtown. Crossroads was much later. But I think Eric would be interesting to talk with.

Berkhout: Right. He would be.

Wheeler: Because he was a survivor. He had a faculty position at Livingston and I think he's still around.

Berkhout: He is.

Wheeler: He has an apartment in New York, I know.

Berkhout: And he has a house in Highland Park.

Wheeler: He still has the house in Highland Park?

Berkhout: Yeah. I think so, yeah.

Wheeler: Oh, by all means, talk to him.

Berkhout: Okay. Another person who did become involved was Bill Wright.

Wheeler: Yes.

Berkhout: Now Bill worked at Rutgers in facilities . . .

Wheeler: Yes. But he also became the first director of the Cultural Center.

Berkhout: Right. So how did that happen? I mean, since no one else seemed to be involved from Rutgers, at what point did he . . .

Wheeler: They hired him.

Berkhout: But had he been involved in NBT or Devco or anything else?

Wheeler: No. No. No. I don't think so. I don't know anything.

Berkhout: Okay.

Wheeler: I think he was an excellent planner and had a nice aesthetic taste.

Berkhout: Mm-hmm.

Wheeler: And was interested in cultural activities. Now last time I heard, he went from here to Michigan State to head up their cultural activities there. I think he comes to New York from time to time.

Participant: Oh yeah?

Wheeler: I'll tell you who can . . . do you know Virginia Record?

Wheeler: Virginia keeps contact with him and she's moved to Virginia but you could call Albert and find out where Bill is.

Berkhout: Okay.

Wheeler: Because they were close friends and I know kept in contact and keep in contact. But I think that would be – he's very candid.

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: And it was tough times.

Berkhout: Right.

Listokin: Can we talk some on transferability?

Wheeler: No.

(Laughing)

Wheeler: Where, Listokin? It's an interesting question. I didn't mean to be glib. I think any place that wants to take a look at possible reorganization, has some hope of doing it, ought to look at New Brunswick Tomorrow. I always said that. I said this is going to be a great model for people to look at. But in terms of transferability, I think – you know, to have John

Heldrich in a corporation like J&J, both of them I think are kind of unusual and you know, to have exactly the pieces in place . . .

Listokin: And the hospital and the university.

Wheeler: And the hospital and ultimately the university. I hope we're doing a lot better now.

Listokin: And the county seat. I mean, if you want to say what were some of the . . .

Wheeler: Exactly. And size.

Listokin: And size.

Wheeler: And size. It's a manageable size and when you think about Boston or Chicago, you have to think in neighborhoods and even then, it's kind of overwhelming.

Berkhout: Well, according to John, Ed Bloustein was the last Rutgers president who took any interest in New Brunswick.

Wheeler: I think that's true. And I didn't mean that he didn't, but he just had . . . that was my job. It wasn't his.

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: I was on that committee.

Berkhout: Right. But certainly, Fran took no interest.

Wheeler: No.

Participant: And does it seem that Dick is?

Wheeler: And I tried hard with him [Fran] because after I was provost, I went over there as academic vice president for five years and he asked me to stay on for a year or two and I tried to work at it and it just wasn't – that was not where it was – so, that's not a very good answer.

Listokin: You've been very good in identifying some people, others, where do we go further and some other people to talk to, perhaps, and where we go in terms of documents and I've mentioned some of the things . . .

Wheeler: Have you thought about talking with Tony Nelessen?

Listokin: Yeah, I think – absolutely.

Berkhout: We certainly could.

Listokin: I mean, that would be . . .

Wheeler: He has a perspective, for sure.

Berkhout: That's for sure.

Wheeler: And he would give you – he would share that with you and I think it would be different. The fellow who had . . . what was the place next to The Frog and The Peach? Oh, he died, didn't he?

Berkhout: J. August Café?

Wheeler: Yes. He died.

Berkhout: Did he?

Wheeler: He was a graduate of the university. What was his name?

Berkhout: I don't remember.

Wheeler: But he had two or three restaurants downtown.

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: He was another survivor.

Listokin: I think he was my student.

Berkhout: He was your student?

Listokin: Yeah.

Wheeler: Well, you trained him well. He was very bright.

Listokin: Glenn Paterson was a former . . .

Wheeler: Hmm?

Listokin: Glenn Paterson, who was head of the city's planning and economic development for like 20, 25 years, he also came out of the program.

Wheeler: Ah.

Listokin: But again, not to interrupt your chain of thought; just some people to . . .

Isenberg: Did you keep any files?

Wheeler: Excuse me?

Isenberg: Did you keep any files from these early years?

Wheeler: They took all of our files to Alexander. I don't know what would be in there, but what I think a major key is to somehow or other persuade J&J to open up their archives to you.

Berkhout: Mm-hmm.

Wheeler: And it's been long enough. And you could get John maybe to help with that. If John says it's fine for you to – if he told whomever is responsible for this at J&J that he would like to see them opened . . .

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: I think they'd do it.

Isenberg: He has his own archive, basically, it seems. John does.

Wheeler: As in he's letting you have that?

Isenberg: Well, no; he didn't say no. He did not say no to the idea.

Berkhout: He wanted to clean it up a little and then Isenberg said don't throw out too

much.

Isenberg: He didn't say no to the idea.

Wheeler: We all know, we historians know . . .

Isenberg: What cleaning out means.

Wheeler: What cleaning out means.

(Laughing)

Isenberg: It's like "No, stop." He didn't say no to the idea of, for example, one of the library of sciences graduate students helping him organize and catalogue his archive. He didn't say yes – but he didn't say no. So there is an opening.

Wheeler: Well, John's not going to rush into anything.

Listokin: And then I think there are – I think he said we could look at New Brunswick Tomorrow annual reports from year one.

Berkhout: Right.

Listokin: Well, that's one level, but that's sanitized as opposed to more internal memos . . .

Wheeler: Yeah.

Participant: And deliberations.

Participant: He also mentioned . . .

Wheeler: Yes. Exactly. And that's why John's might be – but he may have sanitized it, not conscientiously, just to be prudent. He's not an historian.

Berkhout: There's also Andy Baglivo, he mentioned. Andy Baglivo files.

Wheeler: Yes. You ought to talk to everybody you can. He has a perspective – he was a hired gun; that really was his role when I knew him . . .

Berkhout: PR. Yeah.

Wheeler: And he was John's hit man.

Listokin: Your thoughts on – did you work much with John Lynch?

Wheeler: Not a lot. We mentioned his predecessor.

Berkhout: Sheehan. Pat Sheehan.

Wheeler: Pat Sheehan, I think, was much more attentive. I think they got John Lynch to do a lot of things simply because they were who they were but he had a lot of other things going on. And so did she, but I think she genuinely – I can't say what his motives were. I just never had a sense of his priority – it wasn't secondary, but it was equal to other involvements.

Berkhout: Now Betsy Garlatti is Pat Sheehan's daughter, right?

Wheeler: Who?

Berkhout: Betsy Garlatti.

Wheeler: And I don't know her.

Berkhout: Betsy Garlatti worked with Carl Van Horn for awhile, she worked for Florio. She's now either head of or is on the city council in New Brunswick.

Wheeler: Is Pat alive?

Berkhout: I met her a few years ago, through Betsy.

Wheeler: Because she would be very good.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Wheeler: And it might be an interesting contrast with John; it might now.

Berkhout: We could find that out from Betsy.

Isenberg: Could you describe a little bit, your sense of the New Brunswick

Tomorrow meetings? What some of the kinds of social topics and issues and priorities . . .

Wheeler: I think those should come from the agendas because that's what it was all about.

Isenberg: Okay.

Wheeler: If you saw that agenda, that's what we saw back in materials and we said yes.

(Laughing)

Isenberg: Okay. Because it's interesting how the so-called social was separated from the physical planning.

Wheeler: Well, it overlapped. It overlapped a lot.

Isenberg: Yeah.

Wheeler: We were, in effect, consulted about a lot of the physical – consulted in quotes, but there was discussion. I don't mean to say that we just sat mute around the table. And I think probably I was the only one who felt a little strange because it was hard to walk away from the university, where I lived, to shift gears.

Isenberg: Right.

Wheeler: It wasn't heavy-handed. It was very subtle. Very clever. But controlled.

Listokin: What would be your thoughts on what should be an outcome of what we're doing? What do you think would be some end products here?

Wheeler: Well, as I said, I would hope that it would result in some kind of – are you well funded? May I ask at this point?

Berkhout: We're starting to be. No. We've got funding through the university as sort of a seed grant and then Chris Foglio has her own redevelopment company and she's giving

money to us and Michael Farewell, the architect, is giving some funding and we've now approached J&J and Devco for some funding but we haven't heard from them yet. But there are a bunch of other people . . .

Wheeler: I would think that there might be foundations interested in say supporting a publication because it's – in our current climate, people are interested in trying to simulate development.

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: I'm sorry, I've forgotten the question.

Berkhout: What would be an outcome?

Listokin: You know, some outcomes.

Wheeler: Oh, the outcomes. Oh, yes. I would very much hope that some kind of publication would result because again – well, it's not an exact model for any other place but I think it could be very valuable for a lot of efforts. And another person you should get, Leo Molinaro, I think that's an important question for him.

Berkhout: Mm-hmm.

Wheeler: You know, what do communities look at when they're trying to feel their way into some kind of effort.

Berkhout: Right.

Isenberg: Do you recall that at the time that this was underway, there were particular cities that came up as comparisons with New Brunswick?

Wheeler: No. There weren't any.

Isenberg: There really weren't?

Wheeler: Because of the size, again. The size and the fact that we really are a

suburb of Manhattan.

Berkhout: Was Hartford bigger?

Listokin: John had mentioned this greater Hartford process.

Isenberg: Hartford is significantly bigger.

Wheeler: The what?

Listokin: Something referred to as the greater Hartford process.

Wheeler: Yes.

Listokin: Which brought in the Hartford insurance and other executives . . .

Wheeler: Yes. Yes.

Listokin: So I think they were comfortable with that but there wasn't anything all that unique about it; this was going on in 50 different cities.

Wheeler: Right. Yeah.

Listokin: You know, you bring some of the corporate and the usual suspects to try to do something.

Wheeler: But did anything happen? Did anything happen?

Listokin: Hartford is pretty much a basket case, so I guess that tells you something.

Isenberg: John said he was inspired by the rhetoric.

Wheeler: Exactly. That's why I said – there were other efforts, but I don't know any other effort that was successful to the degree that New Brunswick Tomorrow was.

Berkhout: You mentioned briefly that you thought that it was a very successful effort but there were some mistakes.

Wheeler: Yes.

Berkhout: What do you think the mistakes were?

Wheeler: Well, I think, again, I think the lack of sense of – the architecture. I think that too much was torn down.

Berkhout: Okay.

Wheeler: I would have liked for them to have had more low income housing and housing for professionals . . .

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: Earlier, but I put a caution on that; I don't know whether that was financially feasible or, you know – and I think that something ultimately has to be done about Kilmer Square, facing Albany. It's a dead zone.

Berkhout: What do you think could be done with it?

Wheeler: Get a decent architect. Look at Lincoln Center. I live right by Lincoln Center and it's going to be glorious and it was really pretty miserable, particularly 65th Street.

Berkhout: Mm-hmm.

Wheeler: The entranceway and that ramp and the cars and everything. I was there just yesterday afternoon and it's just going to be lovely. It's just opened whole new vistas. You think of a huge European square now.

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: And just coming from them, it cost a billion and some odd dollars.

Berkhout: Right.

Wheeler: Well, that was mostly for Alice Tully Hall, but still, it's wonderful.

Participant: Actually, it could've been worse. The original plan for Kilmer Square was a mall. In other words, an interior mall.

Wheeler: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Listokin: But then opened up retail stores.

Wheeler: Yeah, that would have been . . .

Isenberg: That's interesting.

Wheeler: Maybe some day still, because they just . . .

Listokin: But that was done – you know, if you look at the downtown, Atlanta redevelopment with the big hotels, it's just a concrete dead space.

Wheeler: Yes.

Listokin: You know, if you look at the hospital redevelopment here, it's really dead space.

Berkhout: Right.

Listokin: When you're driving down that main street, there is nothing there.

Wheeler: Yeah.

Listokin: I know Devco has commented on that but they can't get the hospital to do other than exactly what they want to do. And this is Devco trying to be a little sensitive to street-scape.

Isenberg: Do you recall a presence of any architects or landscape architects as outside consultants? Any individuals who . . .

Wheeler: I.M. Pei designed that awful headquarters building.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Wheeler: I'm sorry. Some people like that, I guess.

Isenberg: We heard a little bit from John about Pei also being kind of an informal master planner, being taken up in a helicopter, saying this should go here in New Brunswick that should go there. I will say, based on what I know about other cities at this time, it strikes me that

the absence of an active kind of local or regional or even just a strong outside consultant architect or a landscape architect jumps out right away. So the fact that people only remember Pei is fascinating.

Wheeler: Well, he was a household name.

Listokin: Why would – I think you're thinking more of larger cities. You know, New Brunswick was plain vanilla master plans done by very plain vanilla; take the last master plan you did and then just put New Brunswick on it.

(Laughing)

Wheeler: You're talking about American cities.

Listokin: That was Feller and Feist; there were a number of firms that you went to that were just . . .

Wheeler: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And I doubt if I. M. had much to do with the final design. I think it may have been a disappointment to everybody. Johnson and Johnson's intentions were good; he was expensive.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Wheeler: You know, and they wanted to make a contribution, and so . . .

Listokin: And they stayed.

Wheeler: Right.

Berkhout: There still isn't a vibrant retail life on George Street.

Wheeler: Who lives on Livingston Avenue now?

Berkhout: Livingston? Who lives – well, there are still professional offices along there. But, when I drive in, because I come down Livingston, I would say it's largely a Hispanic population on Livingston.

Wheeler: My accountant is down past the high school; I still come out here for him. And, I often walk to the train station after I've finished there. And so she said where are you going? I said to the train station. She said we'll drive you and I said no, I'll walk. And she said oh, you can't walk along Livingston Avenue. It was broad daylight for heaven's sakes and she was very upset. She said oh, it's very dangerous. No, you can't do that. And another secretary in the office piped up and said the same thing.

Berkhout: Really? And I'm sorry, where is it?

Wheeler: It's about three or four blocks past the high school.

Berkhout: You mean the school up two or three blocks here? There's a middle school or something. High school is way up at the end of Livingston.

Wheeler: Well, whatever; maybe it's a middle school.

Berkhout: Yeah, I think so.

Listokin: By the public library, across from the . . .

Wheeler: No, no. It's way, way up Livingston, maybe 20 blocks from here.

Berkhout: Oh, okay.

Wheeler: So then, it could be the high school.

Berkhout: Yeah. Yeah.

Wheeler: Yeah.

Berkhout: I think it's largely a Hispanic population, from what I see when I drive . . .

Wheeler: But is there a lot of violence? And what are the crime statistics?

Listokin: Well, Livingston Avenue, which was threatened, has a lot of interesting buildings basically became stabilized by professional use.

Wheeler: Yes. But there aren't middle class residents . . .

Berkhout: There are some.

Wheeler: Are the Hispanics low income, all of them? What is . . .

Berkhout: I don't know.

Wheeler: What's our problem?

Berkhout: I think it's low and lower middle.

Wheeler: Well, have middle class professionals move back to New Brunswick in the last 10-15 years? How many faculty members live in New Brunswick? What percentage of them, ten?

Listokin: I'm sure very few. And from what I understood talking to the developers, like one reason why the townhouses in Hiram Square didn't immediately sell is people weren't willing to buy in New Brunswick. When they built, Steve O'Connor was involved, a student of mine, with the first rental building that was built on Rt. 18. The rental building rented because people weren't making a commitment. They were leasing for a year. And after they had that, then it became more acceptable for more housing and ultimately some ownership housing.

Wheeler: Now what about a place like the Heldrich? Is that sold?

Listokin: I don't get a sense that Rutgers people are . . .

Berkhout: The person at the top of it, in the penthouse, is a restaurateur down along Route 1 and Tre Piani, down closer to the Forrestal Village. There was a big piece on them in the Route 1 magazine. So it's not even somebody who works in New Brunswick.

Wheeler: Yeah.

Participant: But he liked a more urban setting instead of living in Princeton.

Wheeler: Is it full?

Listokin: I don't think so.

Berkhout: I don't think so. Don Krueckeberg, who passed away a few years ago, bought one of those Hiram buildings.

Wheeler: Oh, did he?

Berkhout: Yes. So he lived there and walked to and from work.

Listokin: But also, in part, you couldn't get past the educational system in New Brunswick.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Listokin: You know, Rutgers people with children – it would never be on the radar because of the public school system.

Isenberg: I'd say maybe five or six of the faculty members, in the history department for example, have homes . . .

Wheeler: What?

Isenberg: Five or six in the history department have homes in New Brunswick.

Wheeler: Oh, do they?

Isenberg: Yes. They'll often also have an apartment . . .

Wheeler: It's how big now? About 40?

Isenberg: Probably a little higher. A little higher. And some with small kids. I mean, the charter schools – it's got a toe hold. It sounds like it's a little better than it was.

Wheeler: Well, that's five or six more. It was Warren Sussman who was the only one.

Berkhout: Oh, yeah.

Wheeler: And he finally moved out. He finally gave up. In the late seventies. Every little bit counts.

Participant: I heard an interesting story from Omar Boraie, the realtor . . .

Wheeler: Yes. Yeah.

Berkhout: Who has a realty office on Livingston Avenue. He said when Ed Bloustein first came, I don't know how he got to know him, but Ed wanted to purchase a house on the block, right off Livingston; it's one of those blocks that has the big, round concrete balls, sort of an entranceway. And Omar said "Well, as president, don't you get housing?" And he said Ed hadn't even been aware that the university had housing for him and that he had a house somewhere when he first came for interviews or was hired. So he was going to buy a house right off Livingston Avenue and then realized well, I don't need to buy a house; I'm going to get a house from the university. It seemed like an odd story to me.

Wheeler: That is a very odd story. Particularly because his father-in-law was . . . or her father-in-law, Ruth Ellen's father-in-law was on the faculty at Douglass.

Berkhout: Oh, is that right?

Wheeler: Yes. And her mother lived in Metuchen, so they were very much . . . she was a physician.

Berkhout: Yeah. That sounded odd to me.

Wheeler: That sounds very odd to me. And he was president at Bennington. It wasn't that he was inexperienced and . . .

Berkhout: I know. But apparently he almost . . .

Wheeler: He would know that ordinarily a president's house was a social gathering place at the university.

Berkhout: Right. Well, this was a large house off of Livingston Avenue.

(Laughing)

Listokin: Any further thoughts or people?

Wheeler: No, not at the moment, but I will keep that in mind, if I might – and I'll call Berkhout or send you a note if I think of other people.

Listokin: Well, thank you. This is really – you bring important perspective wearing multiple hats.

Wheeler: It's one point of view. You might think about Ralph.

Berkhout: We are. We're going to talk with Ralph.

Wheeler: Are you? Okay.

Berkhout: Yeah. I talked with Alan, his son, yesterday about setting up something so maybe next week we'll get together with him.

Wheeler: His long term memory is very good. And that's what we're most concerned about.

Listokin: Right. Right. Great.

Wheeler: All right. Well, thank you.

Listokin: Okay. Thank you. Thanks for the time.

Wheeler: This has been interesting to me.

[end of recording]