

The Bloustein School
Audio Kafka

- Kafka: The question is, the audio and the video will be available to students to look at or the transcripts of it is what's going to be available?
- Berkhout: Well both I guess. We downloaded all of them. We have it stored on a server here. We haven't yet made them public because we're working on this book, and the director of the Rutgers Press wants us to wait until the book is out, so the book is not in competition with our website.
- Listokin: It's also, as we speak we're expanding these discussions. I mean just in the last three weeks we spoke to Jaqui Rubel; had a wonderful conversation, you know, about her involvement with the Performing Arts. And Ricardo Khan, we went up to and visited him in Hoboken. So I mean it just have been these very...
- Berkhout: So the video tapes, I'm not sure we're ever going to use the video tapes per se. We have them just in case somebody wants to see them. But we've had them transcribed; we've had the audio transcribed, so we have the transcriptions. We've reduced them to summaries and quotations, and we're using a few of them in the book.
- Listokin: See, I don't see why someone would want to...once it's transcribed why they need to see the audio.
- Berkhout: The original.
- Kafka: I have no problem with it being shared...my alma mater.
- (Laughing)
- Kafka: You know, it's part of how come I'm involved in this.
- Berkhout: Okay. So all I need from you then is that you understand we're using it for educational purposes and I need your name and date, and that's about it.
- Kafka: And the promotion and advertising of the purposes that support the initiative.
- Berkhout: No, none of that.
- Kafka: Well that's what it says here. It doesn't say just education.

Listokin: While you're doing that, this is, you know, a draft copy of some write up of things that you know about, probably, you know, can react to. It's Memorial Homes, the UDAG, you know, the hotel, the Hiram Market and New Brunswick Cultural Center. And then we have little takes on some other things.

Berkhout: I'm sitting over here so I don't interfere with that.

Listokin: And then actually, um, since I suspect we're going to talk some on Gateway, um, these were, you know, you've seen this.

Kafka: Long since graduated, if you wanted my actual program of study which was Art History

Listokin: No, no, no. We do. We've started all these conversations with sort of like a little background.

Kafka: On that form there...

Berkhout: Oh, here I know. That's because we have students who fill this out.

Listokin: So I just want you to know, you know, we know all is there. The artist rendering those, you know, when things were being proposed.

Kafka: It's just showing the lower half. [of the tower. This is in reference to being shown the artist's rendering of The Vue building at Easton and Somerset]

Listokin: No, no, no. I guess I've tried to get a Google, you know, I was trying to get...well now the thing is built. And then this was...I guess was this an artist rendering?

Kafka: Usually they don't put all the electric wires in their renderings. [to point out one way of helping to distinguish a rendering from an unretouched photo]

Listokin: Yeah, it's Google. So with that let me thank you. And I've looked forward to this conversation. We've already have started this conversation. So maybe if we could just start with a little background about yourself and how you came to the city and became interested in cities and New Brunswick, that would be terrific.

Kafka: First I want to say that I hope it records clearly. I have allergies now and maybe it would appear that I don't have full enunciation of all the stuff though.

Berkhout: That's okay.

Kafka: My grandparents actually lived in the city. My grandfather was a member of the Builder's and Carpenter's Hall and lived there as a single man. My grandmother worked for New Jersey Bell and was actually on-duty during [the original radio broadcast of the] 'War of the Worlds'. We have some great old family history. I went to Moriah Yeshiva Academy on the corner of Liberty and Nelson Street as a boy when that neighborhood was all Greek and Orthodox. So ... a long history here. I became a homeowner in 1984 on Suydam Street near the corner of Livingston when I was an undergraduate student in Art History, and Dr. Marder [note this is the correct spelling] helped me to organize an Independent Study Program which is on architectural history of New Brunswick. And I published in the University Library Journal a study of the Bishop House and a study of transportation and the train station's architectural history while I was a student.

Listokin: Is that available?

Kafka: Those are available. The one on Bishop House is online. I don't know if the one on transportation is. It's the Rutgers University Library Journal and they are in their archives. There's the original papers for those which are much longer are also in the University Archives. I was in the New Jersey Room constantly as a student. And when I wasn't doing active research, just for my own curiosity, I was looking through the photo files of historical photos in New Brunswick.

Listokin: If I can also mention as part of what we're doing, we've been collecting a lot of photos. We share interests here. So please go on.

Kafka: I purchased a house from the 1860's with the intention of preserving it. And I subsequently purchased with various partners six more buildings in the Second Ward and just on the border of the Second Ward.

Berkhout: Where is the Second Ward?

Kafka: The Second Ward is bounded by Welton Street, Livingston Avenue and roughly Douglas College, and it goes out to North Brunswick. But the lower Second Ward is now called Unity Square, so that's the area near where the School for the Blind is. And eventually in 1988, I purchased the house on the corner of Livingston Avenue and Suydam Street from its second owner. That is called the "crown jewel" of historic district by George Dawson who's the official city historian. So I've lived there and been preserving that for twenty-six years, and that's opened periodically to the public for tours. I was President of the Second Ward Neighbor Club for eighteen years and we were concerned with neighborhood preservation which was about the quality of life and making sure people had good

house to live in. We were also concerned with the history. There was a New Brunswick Historical Society, that for many years the last president was Andrew Farkas, and that folded sometime in the eighties. And then in the eighties it started up again and I was a charter member of that one. That group was more or less social. And then a little bit later, I want to say in the very early nineties, an historical society was reformed which still exists with Dr. Belvin as the president which I'm a charter member of.

During this whole time I was actively interested in preservation. And I found in the city codes from the 1970's this regulation: it says, "The Historical Association has hereby established an Historical Association consisting of fifteen members to serve staggered terms", and it goes on, "The Historical Association shall preserve and record the heritage, traditions and landmarks of the city. The chairman shall serve as historian of the city and so receive an honorarium for maintaining and developing the written historical documents of the city." So this goes back at least 'til 1972. Starting in the mid-eighties I began...

Listokin: And you became aware of this when?

Kafka: About 1984-85 I found this. And there was no Historical Association. When we say Historical Association we're talking about a city board that is in the city's administrative code. That had never been appointed as far as I was aware of. And I began conversations with other people interested in history and with Mayor Lynch to get it appointed. And here we have a letter from May 20, 1986, that I wrote with a little drawing of my first house on the bottom, because that's the way I was doing it then, saying, "I'm so glad that we got to meet and that we're considering appointing this board. I look forward to working with you, and please keep me informed."

Listokin: And Mayor Lynch was supportive. You said you had conversation with him.

Kafka: Well he met with us and listened to us. And I can't say that he took action that was supportive because the follow-up meetings did not occur that there were several requests for them. And we've got an article here from just before the School for the Blind was built showing the demolition of two historic houses on Livingston Avenue. And the headline is, "Key buildings may be monitored. Architectural historian proposes panel after two city homes demolished." This was Peter Primavera. So we had another attempt to start a preservation panel.

Berkhout: I'm sorry, what was Peter Primavera?

Kafka: He was the historian whose quote is in here. I had been in conversation with him, um, so there was another attempt... So we could see in the eighties there's these attempts to reach out. I went to town meetings and there was a concern that the Agnew House, for example, where Route 18 is near Route 1 was going to be compromised by an eventual outbuilding of Route 18. And I spoke up at the meeting and asked Mayor Lynch what was his plan for that building or other buildings at risk and he said in front of the crowd that his concern was making sure everyone had good, safe housing and that this was not a priority. So that's pretty much where that ended with Lynch. Um, and I continued to try to write letters and keep the openings. It was very frustrating. As is well-known, the Hiram Market was designated an historic district in 1980 by the Historical Society and other historically-minded citizens. And we have some wonderful articles and clippings. There's even a walking tour that was printed at that time. Some of those people are still around. Peg Byrne lives in the Livingston Manor, and she was active in the Tri-Centennial Commission. So a lot of work was done to get that listed.

Listokin: Going back to what you found in the ordinance about the Historical Association, was that ever then officially appointed or no? There was just...

Kafka: Not until 2004. I was summarizing chronologically.

Listokin: Okay. No, no, no. I just wanted to clarify that.

Kafka: There were a number of overtures made. Each time there was a preservation issue that became a touchstone in the community of some concern, there was an attempt to activate that group. So what happened with the Hiram Market Historic District - and it's notorious - is that it was listed and it made it onto the Register. It qualified. It had some very significant buildings. And the nicest way I can put it is that there was demolition by neglect. The city began to, um, condemn, acquire or otherwise vacate the buildings. And during the winters of the years in the early 1980's through the mid 1980's, suddenly we would see large holes appearing in the roofs of some of these buildings and windows would be missing from these buildings, and the elements would begin to come into the structures. I don't know how that happened, but they were not necessarily acts of nature. The buildings were being, um, compromised causing accelerating deterioration. Who knows how that happened, but the photos of that area will show the problems.

Berkhout: This was in the Hiram area?

Kafka: Yes, In the Hiram area; in the buildings that were listed. And it was happening quite systematically. Here we have a Livingston Medium

article on the Hiram Market showing a section of the Hiram Market that was demolished, it says last month, and this is, um, this is February 8, 1984 when this historical...area was torn down.

Listokin: And the Livingston Medium is that from Livingston College?

Berkhout: Yeah. It became a real awful...

Kafka: In the eighties it was different than it was later. There was some good journalism going on, and they were reporting on issues in the town. So you've got quite a long, extensive article on the Hiram Market and the concerns there. If you'd like to look at that.

Now what we have in 1985 is a proposal from Michael P. Gupko, the construction official for the City of New Brunswick to de-register Hiram Market after these demolitions occurred. And he lists eight buildings here that have been demolished or collapsed since designation. Now if you look at the photos from 1980, and there's a whole copious number of photos, nothing looks near collapsed. They're all occupied; they're in use. I was actively shopping and eating in, you know, the different establishments in the Market...

Listokin: These photos are from where?

Kafka: These photos are from the listing in 1980. This is particularly more because this is the King Block...

Berkhout: The King Block where the Crossroads was.

Kafka: Where the Crossroads was. And they promised to save this. And it was demolished by accident at off hours during, I believe, a weekend.

Berkhout: But Crossroads knew they had to move.

Kafka: The Crossroads was being relocated, but the promise was that this was going to rehabilitate it as a landmark building.

Berkhout: I see, okay.

Kafka: There are newspaper clippings from that era that discuss that. It was designated as important. Here we have one of the synagogues that was down there.

Berkhout: That was the one on Liberty or New Street?

Kafka: Richardson is this or is this...Liberty turns into Richardson where it does a little jog and that's where that was. So that one also had a fire in it.

Listokin: Yes.

Kafka: Which was quite alarming. We don't know what that...

Listokin: On Rosh Hashanah.

Kafka: That's right in the high holidays.

Berkhout: Did you know Tony Nelessen? Tony Nelessen is a faculty member of ours who lived in the King Block Building upstairs in the Crossroads.

Listokin: He, I think, was in the top floor.

Berkhout: And he prepared an alternative version that would have preserved that Hiram Market and presented it to Dick Sellars at a meeting which we understand Dick Sellars said to him, "I only have enough money for one plan and that plan is going to be my plan." It was one of the big meetings, I guess, where the community confronted J&J about...

Kafka: I have some kind of dim, dusty recollection of that issue, but I don't really know. They were beautiful apartments up in here.

Listokin: If I wanted to see the original of these photos today, this was in the Designation Report and where is that report?

Kafka: You can see what it says here...location. This is the initial...I believe it's a report for the application for historic designation that was done in the late seventies or 1980. I have a copy of that. You can keep these copies.

Listokin: I see. Maybe if we can scan...maybe at a later time. Could we borrow that copy...we could go to lunch and we can get them maybe scanned while we're...

Berkhout: We have a page by page description of every item in the Hiram District. I don't know whether that was the report on each building that had been applied for it to become designated or whether it was before it was demolished.

Kafka: I know Connie Greiff also did an architectural survey of New Brunswick that included a descriptive report on buildings. This is November 24, 1980 and it is Richmond Street.

Berkhout: Okay, which one?

Kafka: It says...this was the Hiram Market Preservation Association. But I can lend you my copy of the report. You can have this. I just took a few quick copies.

Listokin: No, no, no, we appreciate it. Also, there were...there was that Master's Thesis that we found on the Hiram Market. So what we did was to extract from that sort of the history of that. So this was from Anthony Maso. I don't know if you...

Kafka: I didn't know him.

Listokin: I will share that study with you. In other words, he did a master's thesis and then...had photos in it by the way. And also from that we extracted this chronology of what was going on. But you're adding to that, so we appreciate that.

Kafka: You know, I watched what happened with the acquisition of the buildings, and it was basically mostly they were just buying them. Some people did not want to sell, and most notably you'll see that the Frog and the Peach and what's now Delta's, but was J. August, they did not sell, and they survived. They managed to hold out. And their buildings are nicely maintained and indicative of someone who was there and have some significance.

Listokin: So most of the buildings were just purchased rather than taking Eminent Domain?

Kafka: That was my understanding that they were able to be purchased. So once they were purchased, they were vacated which is the first step towards complete decay. So the easiest way to get rid of historic building without outright demolition is to vacate it and neglect it. So I'm going to suggest that in many cases this is the way that people who don't want to deal with the burden of historic building, it's where they want to do something new, tend to react. They just let it fall apart. If no one's in the building or they don't allow anyone to make repairs, they don't give permits, they make it hard for people. They know that time is on their side. So this is Mike Gupko asking for the district to be deregistered. Mike Gupko had quite a history in town over the years with a lot of controversy involving construction and a lot of friction with historical groups and other people.

You know, the Hiram Market was happening while I was in high school and college. And I was just beginning to get my sea legs in preservation. And so it was people who were half a generation older than me for the most part as I was studying and beginning to understand. But it was quite

a dramatic backdrop to starting my own business in New Brunswick where I was hands-on preserving some of these 19th Century houses.

Berkhout: What was your business?

Kafka: I worked buying and restoring these old homes.

Berkhout: I see, okay.

Kafka: They were mostly low to moderate income rentals. And the goal was to have houses that we preserved the facades in the major architectural elements, but up to date inside so they would meet code and people could live in an historic environment. I did not remodel them in a 1980's fashion, you know, when everyone in those eras were doing things that were very post modern. We hew to the historic things. We took off aluminum siding. We found wooden shutters like what was in the old photos for houses, and we tried to put them back together based on those photos. My home on Livingston Avenue, if you look at historic photos of it from the middle of the 20th Century, it's been denuded of all ornament and landscaping and painted in a monochrome. And when they came to register it, they said it's the most intact resource with all the historic shutters and landscaping and so forth. That had all been recreated. It's not all original, but it was done true to form well enough that they didn't know when they looked at it that I had restored it.

Listokin: Anyone come to mind who was a little bit older than you when Hiram Market was going, you know, was happening, the controversy that you suggest we speak to?

Kafka: Definitely. Both Andrew Farkas and Peg Byrne. They will know all the players. And of course George Dawson is the city historian.

Listokin: So there's Andrew Farkas.

Berkhout: And Peg Byrne. Burn?

Kafka: B-y-r-n-e. They both still live in town which is why they come to mind. Peg Byrne has been having some health problems, so it would be good to see if she would speak in the near future.

Listokin: So now you're, now as an adult now, you know, involved with these seven, eight houses in the Second Ward. So talk about that.

Kafka: The work on my houses was a real lesson in local construction and architectural history, and my buildings are similar in origin and style to many others in town. And that was my business, and I think there was

some level of understanding that this is a property owner in town who's taking good care of his property which gave me a little clout when I went to speak to the city. And I was not interested in especially being confrontational. After about 1990 I stopped with the confrontational-type anger that was typical of the way we were trained in the seventies and eighties to do things. Because I realized I wanted to try to see what could be done to negotiate together. My tack was that redevelopment can be exciting and beneficial to the city, but what makes a city special is its soul which is its history and where it's been. Not everything old is important, but not everything new is an improvement. Can we save the best of what's old and capture the best possible new design within reason to have harmony, a synergy here? People like to hear that, but putting that into practice has not been easy or effective. There have been a few examples where there has been preservation mostly because the owner of a property found it economically advantageous, but not because of any city policy changes.

Listokin: Let's talk about those, some of those examples where preservation...

Kafka: Well you mentioned earlier the Penrose Property at 116 Livingston Avenue.

Listokin: Livingston Arms.

Kafka: The Manor. Actually, the Brunswick Arms is at 119 and I think the Livingston Manor, maybe called Livingston Arms at one point...now it's just the Livingston. But that building became vacant after the investor/owner apparently couldn't keep up with it. It was a very solid building. And Penrose knew that within the historic district they could get tax rehab credits on it, so it was advantageous for them to restore it. [Penrose worked to have the district registered though the idea had been proposed earlier]. Penrose also did the restoration work at the old cigar factory. I believe that's their model. They have an understanding of how to do that. So it's a private, for-profit company doing it on a private building. Another good example of preservation is the State Theater where funds from the Green Acres somehow were able to be used for interior and exterior architectural restoration of a building that had suffered, but still had some significance in the community. It's a Lamb designed theater. It had much of its original décor and architecture intact. And I think when you go in there now you get a real sense of it as a special destination. And it's viable; it's a real draw for the town. It hasn't been replicated elsewhere very often. Sadly, there's very few public, um, projects I can point to. Our own City Hall is crumbling; the Council Chambers has constant decay to the plaster. They can't figure out the source of the leakage. It has modern windows that are ill-advised in it. And the post office next door which is a WPA Project had the back wing

eviscerated after government monies had been spent to restore all the beautiful iron fencing, and that was just hauled off. So we have some things...

Berkhout: Why did it get pulled off?

Kafka: Well the...

Berkhout: When they built the other building.

Kafka: They built the Municipal Court and Police Headquarters, and previously the iron [and stone] fencing continued all the way down the side street, having completely restored and just disappeared. I mean, you know, there was...as far as I know, no attempt to incorporate it into the design or save it to [reuse to] restore what was in front. But it's an example of tax dollars being spent to preserve a building that was listed, but then later got compromised, and we'll see a pattern in that for the city.

One of the other old stories that you may have heard was the Lockkeeper's House.

Berkhout: By J&J?

Kafka: There was one historic Lockkeeper's House down at Commercial Street and Route 18 approximately, that when the DOT was extending Route 18 they agreed to preserve. And it was moved into a grassy area between the river and Route 18. It was up on jacks.

Berkhout: It was near on the J&J property. Is that correct?

Kafka: I don't remember where it came from initially, but it may have well have been on their new headquarters. That's actually lost to my memory which is sad. It will probably come into my mind later. But it had been carefully moved by the DOT and secured so that it could be restored as a Visitor's and Information Center in Boyd Park. The city was tired of being an eyesore and ordered it demolished, again, you know, at off hours. And so even the DOT had saved it, it was going to be preserved, executive decision caused it to disappear which was disturbing. It was the only intact Lockkeeper's House there.

Listokin: Roughly about when just for the record.

Kafka: That was in the mid 1980's during a prior reconstruction of Route 18. They had changed the intersections there. It's been constantly widened and upgrades. And that's, again, where there's been some government

money involved, and yet somehow, poof, something that's planned on the slate for restoration is gone.

Going back even earlier, I can remember watching the Indian Queen Tavern being hauled over Route 27 when the earlier renovation...I guess 1972... of Route 18 was done when they put the overpass instead of the circle in. That's now part of East Jersey Olde Towne. But that was one of our oldest buildings and we just said, "Bye, bye." It's gone.

Berkhout: Did it used to be on the other side of 27 and moved when J&J took the...and the eventually went to Olde Towne?

Kafka: The Indian Queen Tavern was prior to J&J's 1980 building. If I recall properly It was on the same side where Nova Terra is now. It was where the Hyatt is.

Berkhout: I didn't know that.

Kafka: It was approximately where the Hyatt is. When they put that overpass in, the Route 18 flyover, it was in the trajectory of what they were doing.

Berkhout: I see. And then they moved it to the other side, and that became J&J property.

Kafka: No. There's two different things. I finished with the Lockkeepers House. And the Indian Queen Tavern was given to the proprietors of East Jersey Olde Towne and moved into Piscataway, into that fake Colonial village. I don't believe it had anything to do with J&J.

Listokin: And your thoughts on that?

Berkhout: Okay, so I didn't realize it was on that side of the street. It was on the site where the, um, currently the Hyatt is. So it was moved when the Hyatt was built to Olde Towne?

Kafka: No, the Hyatt was built later. I was about seven when this occurred. So I remember them lifting it up and bringing it over the bridge, and it's my memory that it was on the east side of the street, approximately where the Hyatt is. But the Hyatt wasn't started until some years later. The Hyatt's, I think, 1980 if I'm correct.

Berkhout: Yes.

Listokin: And as you were young and it was moved. But your thoughts...you're saying what, it should have remained in the city?

Kafka: I just was remembering that another historic was removed and that was arguably quite important to the history of this city. That whatever planning was done was not done to incorporate it. It's just an illustration that someone knew it was historic; took it away to save it. But our own city didn't keep the historic asset of import. It may have been where some important historical things occurred. I don't know if it was the tavern where they had Rutgers classes in early days. I can't remember the specific details, but it's well-documented.

Berkhout: Well there was that one and then there was the Sunrise over where the football stadium was. They also had Rutgers classes there.

Kafka: All the old buildings had...by dint of being in the core of historic New Brunswick there's some historical connection. And, of course, that block of Albany Street is where either the second or the third reading of the Declaration of Independence was. There's a debate as to the second or third. And there were historic plaques there. The 1930's version of the Historical Society aimed to save some of those buildings did not succeed. The townspeople interestingly enough, you talk about J&J...that reminds me that the utility building that Public Service had which had a trompe l'oeil mural put on it as a temporary decoration, was something that people became very attached to emotionally in the town, and were very upset when it was removed. That was where I wouldn't necessarily...that the Historical Board wouldn't necessarily have found that to be a uniquely historical building nor the Historical Society, but the people loved it. There was an uproar in the press; people saying...

Berkhout: Did they love it prior to the Haas mural?

Kafka: That's a good question. I can't tell you.

Berkhout: Because the Haas mural was put on because they knew they had to get rid of it, but they wanted to prettify it or something for the period of time.

Kafka: Well I have a hunch that the mural endeared a lot of people to it, and that there may have been some interest in the actual architecture. It was a pretty building with sort of a monolithic, neoclassical building. It had presence and it had been prominent for many years on that corner. So there's a long history of individual buildings getting threatened. People going to town meetings, people writing letters to the editor, the town listening politely in most cases, not in all cases. Sometimes it's a confrontation and there's an outright indication of the importance, and then whatever the plan was goes ahead. I cannot remember a single situation anytime where there was any public outcry about any historic building that the city or the developers ever changed their plans. And this

is a thirty-five year memory, from my own memory. I cannot think of a single instance, and that's quite alarming.

Berkhout: I don't know about the public meetings. One of the people we've interviewed was Kenneth Wheeler who was the Provost in New Brunswick who persuaded John Heldrich to not take down the building that's now where Old Bay is. Cause that whole Kilmer Square development was down; they took down that whole block, but they did keep that old section down there. But originally that was slated. Now that wasn't a big public meeting; it was Kenneth Wheeler telling his friend, John Heldrich, you've got to preserve that.

Kafka: Well, of course, behind the scenes actions have always have been famously...Jacqueline Kennedy wrote letters to the people in charge of the historic mall to save the original Smithsonian Building when it was slated for removal. So these methods sometimes work and you'll see...if you have enough time I would [focus in on] a couple of those efforts behind the scenes. Church Street is its own interesting situation because there had been a Church Street revitalization that was organic where shopkeepers and building owners had fixed up their buildings. The original Catalyst Café which was [later] J. August's [bar and restaurant] started on Church Street. It was a happening hip little seventies Bohemian block all fixed up, and then was in the viewfinder [of large range,] sweeping demolition. I've always thought that this city has a urban renewal motif in its master planning from the post World War II era which we also call "urban removal" in certain circles; where anything that's there just plow it down, make it all new. New is better; new is better. We've already seen new become old. The new projects were supposed to be an improvement. New was better; only better for a little while and now [once it is no longer new it has lost its luster]. The new Ferren Mall was supposed to be a solution. Now the Ferren Mall; which lacked any kind of maintenance of its architectural components, had whatever décor [or sense of style] it [once had has been] eviscerated [including] whatever landscaping was there [which is now gone]. It is now unattractive and ready to be demolished, and not for another twenty years will anyone realize that, "Oh, that was an example of 1980s architecture." Whether we like [that style] or not now, that era will no longer exist in New Brunswick because it was all built maybe just as placeholders or as speculative investments to hold what was known as valuable real estate for the next step.

Listokin: You may talk about these things later, but just to make sure we get your perspective on the J&J Headquarters Building.

Kafka: Architecturally, it's interesting. I think it's iconic. It's a great showplace for Johnson & Johnson. And I think their landscaping is exquisite. The I.M. Pei Atelier, you know, clearly made a building that looks modern and

elegant, and actually sanitary. There's something that represents J&J. And they have beautiful artwork there. It's an exquisite campus. My concern is that the idea of an office campus surrounded by a lawn does not belong in the center of downtown. And Johnson & Johnson was probably trying to help the city by making sure that their workers were downtown and would spend their lunch hour in the city, be part of the city, and I think that makes sense. I do feel that, again, what was there before was discounted, and there were six blocks of old buildings in the city, some of them were distinctive. We had Art Deco International Theater. There's any number of interesting older buildings that just were cleared away, and what was public property has now become private enough that if you sit on their wall or stroll on their grounds their security will come and tell you to leave unless you've asked for permission for a tour or something. So it creates a friction or a tension between what was sort of democratic public space for use by the residents and visitors the city and what's a very elite institution. After more than thirty years most people become used to it, forgotten what's there. But I found that our downtown streets where we had all the Mom and Pop stores and all the little restaurants and places to go and all the inexpensive apartments have slowly be eroded away, and that was essential to the matrix of New Brunswick. And what's replaced them has been geared for very specific clientele. Quite logically, a developer wants the most expensive rental or condo units in their building. They're not going to be putting in units made for the people who work as the custodians in the restaurants or the wait staff or whatever. And all those people that used to be down there causing those little businesses to hum can't easily find housing anywhere nearby. It has had a negative effect on long term ability for us to have a Main Street.

Listokin: And you alluded to earlier, I guess, Memorial Homes. Some of your thoughts on what happened there.

Kafka: Well I think housing high rise projects were generally a misguided idea, and I think with the Pruitt-Igoe projects [in St Louis] it was proven. They were already considered a failure and going to be knocked down before these were even built. They already knew that they were devastatingly problematic. They built [the Memorial Homes] projects with exterior corridors in an area known for ice and snow. I don't know if you were ever in there, but they weren't suited to safe, dignified housing. They did not make people feel comfortable at home; they felt like institutional concrete places. There weren't even originally showers in the bathrooms; they were just bathtubs. You know, maintenance was lacking and the elevators didn't function properly for years and years. The community spaces were limited. Um, there was no comfortable foyer to come into. It was not designed with any thought for the psychology of having a private place. That's not just New Brunswick; that's endemic to many of those projects. So we took away a whole bunch of little row houses where

formerly working class people may have had their own address, and they the ability to have some kind of private place, plant some flowers, an identity, and then we moved them into essentially filing cabinets, and then realized they were outmoded. The biggest disappointment there is that many of the people who lived in those buildings were people that had been from longstanding families in the City of New Brunswick, and many of them were relocated as far away as Perth Amboy. That's a policy problem.

Listokin: So that was your thoughts on the Hope VI Replacement.

Kafka: Those units seemed to have been somewhat successful, but they did not house everyone that came out. They were not able to assure that everyone housed in the projects got new housing in the community they were used to living in. That's not an historic preservation thing, but that's a community preservation issue. Let me tie it together. We also... I think in hindsight, most people in urban planning would say that putting all the poor people together in one set of towers is not a good idea. So there are few people that are going to miss the Memorial Homes. I find it's interesting that the one building where the seniors were in that had a distinctive design did survive that sort of, um, rounded building, had more personality and a little bit better quality of residential housing. And that building continues to survive which is a lesson. Sometimes some extra money in planning going into these buildings makes a difference. Hope VI seems to be built in a manner that won't last a long time. You know, they're pretty much basic, vinyl-sided frame houses, and I'm concerned about the long term maintenance of those. Whether those, again, might be placeholder houses that in a generation will be said, "Oh, they're deteriorated. We're going to knock them down again." This whole mentality of "just build it for now with tax dollars" doesn't rest well with me. I'm not expecting marble monuments, but there are ways to build things that are hospitable and well-designed and durable. And that's the best way to use our money. We're seeing more and more flimsy, um, structures put up. I don't think much of the new architecture is going to be looked at as textbook examples of either cutting edge design or classic design here in the city. And I hope that we'd try for that; that we'd strive for some of that.

Listokin: And the Hyatt, you...

Kafka: You know, J&J built the Hyatt for their need, and indeed it seems to be full. I mean it's useful. Having a major hotel in town is a benefit. I can understand all their business decisions, and I think they were all smart moves for their needs. There's also going to be competing interests. Again, it looks like a hotel that belongs out on the highway. And when I drive down Route 1 by where Sears is, I imagine, this is really where a

new corporate office park or a big hotel with a big parking lot belongs. That's the location where you put it. Not that I'm advocating sprawl, but why would you demolish tax ratables that are in use viably that can be economically rehabbed without a tremendous waste of resources when you can save those and also have something new? You know, they just discount whatever was there before, um, and obviously their location is convenient. I think they wanted to make the Gateway into New Brunswick on Route 27... with impressive new buildings. They succeeded at that. You come in by Route 27 and you go, "Wow, this is a prosperous, bustling city." It's nothing to be ashamed of and things looked a little shabby before, so they've accomplished that. But there could have been a better solution. I say we can have it all.

Listokin: You want to spell that out?

Kafka: Yes. As I said, there is a way to build new development that fills the need and save the best of the old. It has not been the policy on any of the master plans so far as I can tell or any of the redevelopment plans to do a survey, block by block, and say, "We've looked at six blocks. This block has the least usable material on it. That's why we're going to use it." Or, "On this block are two magnificent historic buildings. We're going to integrate them into the new construction." It's always, "This is the block that we want because it's in the location that's geographically important or economically viable." Whatever here is getting swept away. That systematically has been the approach.

We can talk a little bit about The Vue high rise. The Historical Board was formed in 2004, finally after many, many attempts. Here's a picture of one of our first meetings at the Elks Lodge. And it was serendipitous in that at that time [2004] a citizen of New Brunswick challenged the city on having several boards [on the books] that have not been active. And basically you have to, apparently by law, either have the boards active or remove them from your ordinance. And we had...

Berkhout: Reese Jenkins is in there.

Kafka: Yes, amazing, amazing person, and his scholarship has been greatly useful to the Historical Society. Good guy. Anyway, we had been putting in lists of suggested members of the Historic Board to the mayor. This was a diplomacy effort. We like to suggest A, B, and C individuals for the Historic Board, should you see that's it is a fit time to nominate them. And so when he was critiqued for not having these active boards he had this suggested list to consider already on his desk and was able to say, "Oh, we're in the process of nominating the Historical Board right now." So that happened finally.

Berkhout: That was in 2004?

Kafka: 2004.

Listokin: And that's Mayor Cahill, right?

Kafka: Cahill, yes. And we had been constantly courting him [and Mayor Lynch, the prior Mayor] to do that for almost a decade and a half at that point with numerous meetings. He did make time for meetings with some of the core people in this group who were known to be interested in history from time to time. So this was a tangent of what I was talking about. Now I've lost the thread of where...

Berkhout: We were talking the nice Gateway into New Brunswick with the Hyatt, but that it could have been done differently.

Kafka: And then I moved over to The Vue because I was giving an example of how things weren't integrated.

Listokin: Yes.

Berkhout: Yes.

Listokin: Would you like to speak about The Vue?

Kafka: Sure. Now as everyone who's in New Brunswick knows; visually The Hennessey building on the corner of Easton and Somerset was distinctive. It had cast iron ornament. It was structurally intact. And that row of buildings from that corner all the way down Somerset Street over to St. Peter's were buildings that at least went back to the early 19th Century. And as soon as the plan was announced, the Historical Society and the Historical Board both expressed concerns to the Mayor's Office and asked DevCo to meet with them. One meeting was scheduled with DevCo. It was catered; it was very pleasant. At that meeting they seemed to be interested in finding out everything the Historical Society was interested in doing to try to preserve the block, and promised to follow-up meeting. Many requests for follow-up meetings were made without success. Chris Paladino was quoted in the New York Times as saying, "Façade preservation has begun on the corner." There is no façade preservation. They had said that they would work to preserve this corner building. When we met with the Planning Board, the Historical Board went in. George Dawson has been in the city many years, the city historian. We went to the Planning Board...we were told we had to wait until the end of the Planning Board meeting to speak as private citizens. This is a city board going to another city board. We were verbally treated in the most brusque manner. We were discounted. We were negated. We were

treated rudely. And they said, "Why don't you choose another block to preserve." One of the people on the Board said, "I know the buildings are attractive in front, but they're yucky in back." This was their level of interest in preservation. I said to the city, "These buildings date back to the early days of Rutgers. I believe enough time should be given for them to be studied to find out what historical background they have, how they're connected to Rutgers, because we're sure that there are some historical connections. This is the last intact 19th Century row of commercial buildings in this entire area, and it fronts on Old Queens which is arguably one of the most important sites in the county if not the state. It's part of the identity of the city, even the state ... Old Queens in some way. I mean this is our most prominent institution of higher education at the public level. I said, "I assure you that Princeton would not build a high rise across from the core of their historic campus. The town would not want that." All of the pictures they were looking at of The Vue were only showing a truncated version of the bottom half of the view. I said, "It's more than twice the height of the university building across the street. Do you realize how big this is?" We also were interviewed by Channel 9 News in front of these buildings expressing our concern. We wrote to the State Office of Historic Preservation. The response was that the transit village is just a great project and it's worth it. They were basically not even interested in talking about it even though these buildings have been identified as historic resources worthy of listing.

Listokin: Had been identified by whom?

Kafka: By the Constance Greiff survey that was done in 1979-80. Every historical survey of New Brunswick mentions these buildings. There's no question. And this building had been the subject of at least one research paper before that time. So the Planning Board, the City Council, DevCo, all were asked to consider these buildings from the very get go, and DevCo said that they would do work on façade preservation, at least at this corner building.

Listokin: By façade preservation they would put up the new building but keep the façade from the old building.

Kafka: Well they had suggested that they would keep the first twenty feet of the building or so forth. It's not uncommon. It's not ideal. But they said, "Well how would feel about that?" I said, "That's certainly better than demolition, but I believe you could build your tower behind this row of buildings and use them as your store fronts." Certainly, there is a cost to planning things differently. They always say it's more expensive to save historic buildings. Studies have shown it's not. It's less profitable to the people who make commissions. It's less profitable to the demolition people, so that's probably people that get a commission from the

demolition people. You see what I'm saying. So it's not that it actually costs more per square foot especially when a building is intact, but the architect wants their grandiose new building; it's easier to sweep it clean. There's no concern for anything about the environment, historical or otherwise. And this is typical.

Again, with DevCo and this is much more recent, the so-called Grease Truck lot which is the Robert Wood Johnson House Site.

Berkhout: They prefer to calling it the Robert Wood Johnson House Site, not the Grease Truck lot.

Kafka: That's why I said so-called.

Berkhout: Yes.

Kafka: That block had, by some miracle the original fencing from Robert Wood Johnson's house including some really good stonework; some of it was carved in a Romanesque manner. DevCo promised to save that fence; it disappeared overnight.

Berkhout: And the wall, is the wall still there?

Kafka: It's all gone.

Berkhout: That's gone too?

Kafka: I mean the fence and the wall are part of the same structure. This is rather typical.

Listokin: Actually, if we can talk about The Vue and Gateway Transit Village. There was some, I think, mentioned in that New York Times article or maybe elsewhere, but the building was set back...a big building was set back from, I guess, the church immediately there, and there was some effort to have some content sensitivity at the street-level. Again, I'm just repeating what has been mentioned. Your thoughts on that.

Kafka: They certainly could have done something more monolithic. I studied architecture at NJIT before I was at Rutgers. I would suggest that what they did at the street level is a modest or rudimentary attempt at integration. They have a plan or façade that goes up two levels right at the sidewalk line which is closer than the church buildings are at the sidewalk line. Well yeah, the top is set back. But the density that's here and the scale, especially that large clock, doesn't sympathize with the church. It doesn't over power as badly as it might have, but it still is overpowering. Now I also mention there was the Lyceum Building next to the church.

And the church was given a million dollars or the Lyceum was sold for a million dollars.

Berkhout: That's the building between the church and the Gateway?
No, the Parish House is still there. There was another building that the church owned called their Lyceum where they had meetings and a Day Care Center.

Berkhout: Where was that? Yeah, I remember that.

Kafka: That was to the right, and there was a firehouse behind that that was also historic.

Berkhout: Right.

Kafka: And the church was paid a million dollars for that. And parishioners of the church told me that when they brought up issues of scale and preservation, they were told that the church didn't want to jeopardize the sale of the Lyceum. You know, it was very delicate in negotiation apparently. So they didn't want to say anything. So there was within that congregation quite a bit of concern that was had. And Peg Byrne may be able to speak more about that because she's a lifelong member of that congregation.

Listokin: So I guess your thoughts would have been: try to preserve some of the buildings on the block. If you can't preserve the buildings on the block at least try to preserve some of the facades instituted more into the building.

Kafka: It goes beyond that.

Listokin: Have a lower scale. I mean I'm just trying to...

Kafka: The city?

Listokin: If you were in charge of this...

Kafka: Okay. We also wrote in the Rutgers Board of Directors and they said, "Oh, we don't have any say in this." And I wrote back and said, "Excuse me. You're the major tenant. Certainly, if you said that you're not going to rent something that overshadows Old Queens they would listen." And I know some of the people who I was writing there, but they did not continue to correspond. I said it more diplomatically. The city has a...

Listokin: So they just never responded to you.

Kafka: Well here's the thing. I read the ordinance for the Historic Board. It's our job to record and preserve the landmarks of New Brunswick. The city does not even give us a chance to research the vulnerable landmarks to prove their history or to consider them. We are not given the voice. We're charged with preservation, and then we're denied any resources, and we're minimized, and sort of ignored in the official proceedings, and in the planning process given the slightest courtesies to make maybe a window dressing of diplomacy. You know, they'll say, "Oh, well we met with them." Nothing of substance happens.

Listokin: In New Brunswick, if the Historical Board...if something is designated as a local landmark.

Kafka: We don't have the power to do that. We have no powers.

Listokin: So you don't have the power of other communities in New Jersey.

Kafka: No. We have been attempting to get some power. We're not interested in telling people what color to paint their house or what kind of door knocker to hang like in Nantucket. But we'd like to be able to say if there is a permit for demolition for a building that might be historic that we can review it and get a stay so that we can discuss the plans. If the city is making a master plan that they should consider the impact on historical resources and Historical Board, all of the normal things. The sad thing is...

Listokin: That's power you'd like to have or you do have?

Kafka: We don't have; we have no powers. Advisory only.

Listokin: Advisory only.

Kafka: And even as advisory when we go to a Planning Board meeting we should be seated up on the dais with them. We're told to sit in the back of the room, wait 'til everyone is done, speak, and then someone who's in the Office of Economic Development is belligerent with us when we try to speak including the city historian who is eighty years old and a scholar. So those meetings are well-recorded. You can hear them. Sometimes they're polite, but any promise at follow-up meetings or further planning is not followed through on. It's extremely frustrating. So the New Brunswick you see today may be something that's been preserved by luck or was preserved by a back room deal. Maybe it was preserved because it was economically viable. Nothing has been preserved by public request or by recommendation of the Historical Board...nothing...although attempts are made in every year to have something preserved. And they say, "Why not pick another block." Well guess what, every time we pick something,

you know, developments rolling ahead. The sad thing is we're all the losers. This is the tragedy. This is not an esoteric group of obscure artifacts. This is concern for the holistic health of the city. The city will become an anonymous anyplace when everything of history is gone. You know this lack of concern for scale, for the historical perspective of city for the way it was and is used, for what makes a healthy, viable city is going to cause problems in an ongoing way. We're also in a disposable culture. Development is an engine that eats itself. Development only succeeds when it keeps developing. They make their money from developing. They will redevelop the same sites over and over. I am sure that you will start to see this within a few years. Their sights are set on the Ferren Mall which is already redevelopment. I wouldn't be surprised if Kilmer Square [another redevelopment project from the 1980s] gets targeted for redevelopment because it's relatively low density. I'm sure they're very sad that they built those little three-story townhouses in the Hiram Market because now they're finding that they can sell much denser properties at a bigger profit. So there will be constant boom and bust cycles. Things will be built to make money on and sell and then rebuilt. DevCo is after the River Dorms which were built with taxpayer dollars. There's a big difference between dorms and student housing. [The recent] Rockoff Hall was done for profit. It's not a dormitory. The River Dorms actually have some architectural dignity to them. There's nothing wrong with them. They're beautifully sited in terms of the amount of space between them. They've got marble on them. They've got big picture windows. They're not in a style that people love right now, but when you step back from it and look at it, it's just good modernistic, decent college architecture of that era. Whatever replace them will never be built that well, and it will be for profit and left to crumble after the profits are gone from it. If you go into Rockoff Hall and look at the size of the apartments in there and the rooms, it's an abysmal. Three hundred dollars for a parking spot; eight hundred dollars for a closet-size bedroom. Rooms that possibly wouldn't get Certificates of Occupancy if they were in private houses elsewhere in the town. So this is the kind of thing that development leads to. It's make the most profit and not really be concerned with the long term health of the city. That's what businesses do. They don't even have that in their perspective. Sometimes their literature says they do... but we don't see them doing anything that's especially energy efficient. You get a little bit of solar here and there from the city which we're lucky about. We don't see them doing anything that says this is being done because there's been a clamor for it from the community. And we don't see anything being done that skirts [the new development] around something that might be historic. And there's been a constant belittlement of the quality or historical importance of any item in New Brunswick that's in their way. It just has been non stop.

Berkhout: So what do you think of the Easton Avenue area; it's near the campus that hasn't really been developed. There are a few developers coming and doing a few apartment buildings?

Kafka: Well if you stand in front of Thomas Sweet and look across the street you will see the most overpowering, huge housing high rise going up.

Berkhout: Yes.

Kafka: Shocking and scary.

Berkhout: The Boraie Development.

Kafka: Yeah. This is a Manhattan-scale building.

Berkhout: Right.

Kafka: This is built on a narrow city street where the sewer systems from the 19th Century and the water infrastructure is a hundred years old. I don't [know of] any funds from that project being given to the city for capital improvements. I don't see any acknowledgement of people who live in residential houses back-to-back with that. They're going to have shade all day. Um, Easton Avenue is going to fall. It's inevitable. There could be an economic downturn that will slow it down, but the next time there's money for development, anything between Easton Avenue and that high rise is going to be redeveloped. Where the fire was where Teresa had put her new restaurant has sat empty. Those aren't by accident. That's got to be...

Berkhout: We're talking about Evelyn's.

Kafka: Yeah, that's got to be a plan there. Well Evelyn's knows, you know, what's coming. I mean business people aren't foolish. They'll hold until they get their price. But the new development is not going to be like the cute old Victorian coffee house that was there. You know, they don't do that. They don't say, "Here's our Main Street for the students. Let's keep it cute." You know, even New Jersey Books which is a private building...I mean there's a whole politics behind that...that's of a scale that's pushing it, but it's still sort of looks like it belongs there. I don't expect it to survive. You know, the fraternity that was on the corner of Hamilton and Somerset was actually an historic building, and that's gone for an anonymous looking building.

Berkhout: Hamilton and Somerset?

Kafka: The Southwest corner.

Listokin: If I could go back to Gateway wherein and whatever...

Kafka: Sure.

Listokin: Some planning and development argument. One is we want to encourage Transit Oriented Development. You have this incredible transit resource, the New Brunswick Train Station, so we want to maximize density near transit which is what Transit Oriented Development is all about. I'm just sort of throwing what would be...and given the acquisition cost of acquiring this park, we need x amount of new space to amortize this cost.

Kafka: You're making a business argument.

Listokin: In a conversation, like what would be some of your thoughts of why not?

Kafka: The primary purpose of a city government is to protect the welfare of its citizens. That includes balancing the interests of for profit business with the health and welfare of the city long term. A builder should be encouraged to develop things that are beneficial. Notice they call it Transit Village. That is not village scale. What architect worthy of the name would create a dead zone on Easton Avenue where you have to walk two hundred feet past a parking deck and blank walls? That's not a village. That has now become dangerous. There were formerly stores and houses on that side. Even the Rutgers building [across the street] got it right; they have little stores all along the sidewalk on Easton Avenue. There's nothing except at the very corners of this new project. It's not designed to be pedestrian-friendly. It's essentially the same quality architecture as the housing projects that were knocked down, but set on top of a parking deck. We already know that buildings on top of parking decks are dangerous. If there's a fire you're doomed. Why they even allow that I don't understand.

Berkhout: What housing is on top of a...?

Kafka: The Vue sits on top of a multi-level parking deck.

Berkhout: Oh, okay. Part of that does, yeah.

Kafka: And there have been high rises where there's fires in the parking deck, and the fatalities are tremendous. It's not the ideal situation. I mean there's things they can do to mitigate it, but they've built something that is profitable if they sell it all. But still there's a difference between making it convenient to use the train and putting a burden on the infrastructure without giving back to the community. The bookstore is the obvious attempt to say this is a community function. If you're not a Rutgers

student but you're someone who goes downtown what do they offer you here? And it connects to only side of the train. I mean you still have to go around. I mean this big connect is such a fuss, but there's really...it's not a complete link. If you're going northbound to Manhattan, you still have to go under this dismal tunnel that hasn't been cleaned up in decades, and, you know, the station is open or it's not. It's not perfect. It could have been done a lot better. Basically, I see the city following rather than leading. The City Planning Board accepts the designs and experts of the developers with the red carpet and they tailor the city's master plans to the needs of these developers. It doesn't go the other way around. This is the major flaw. The city is letting the fate of the city be decided by individuals who have not been elected by the residents nor appointed by the mayor, nor have to answer to the citizens. So the nearest to democracy is these town meetings that they have. If you go to any of them, nothing that the public says... none of their suggestions are generally incorporated. There was a huge meeting in the Rutgers College Avenue Gym, 'the Barn,' with the then president of the university and DevCo when they were interested in the Gateway Project. I had the honor of being the first citizen to be able to speak, and I had a prepared statement from the Historical Board expressing concern about exactly this project overshadowing Old Queens. I was given a big round of applause, and several architects in the audience came up to me afterwards [who were in agreement], and [the presenters] assured us that they would integrate that concern. The way they integrated it, it looks to me like their architects came up with the largest, most massive fantasy they could at this extreme edge of what could possibly be built. And then said, "This is what we're going to present so that we can say we've whittled it down to compromise." And that's the way a good business person does it. It's not fooling me. If you want two hundred units, you ask for three hundred units. I am a businessman. I am a landlord. I understand that side of it.

Listokin: So you propose higher...

Kafka: They proposed the maximum thing that they can, and then they can say, "Oh, we made it smaller." Doesn't mean that it's the optimal size for the neighborhood. I'm still asserting it's too tall, it's too close to the street, it doesn't offer enough services to the community. Easton Avenue should be a prime retail location. There should be some store, restaurant or service opening onto Easton Avenue. There's very little use of that façade. These are basic planning concepts. New Urbanism has been spouting them for thirty years now, and we see them in the University Tower building which is a much cheaper, lower, you know, less exciting building in many ways, but they actually put things in that people can use. So it's a major shortcoming [of the Vue]. We see this also with the hospital of course. If you go up Route 27, French Street, the backside of the hospital has become a dead zone. If you walk there at night, you're at

risk of being mugged because there's nothing anymore for blocks where there used to be all sorts of businesses and stores. Now the hospital's exempt from city zoning, so that's an issue that is beyond the scope of what we're talking about. Except that, if the city had a really good planning department and a really good master plan and really good diplomacy, they could say to the hospital, "Please, we're encouraging you, put your cafeteria facing the street here because it's open to the public." Or "Put another entrance here for your visitors to come in. Anything to create interaction with the street or make some stores that you can lease out. We'll help you." You know, "our city market will integrate something." That kind of communication isn't going on adequately. I don't think there's enough foresight, and as I said, the biggest thing is that the process is backwards from the optimal situation. The concept for planning should come from dedicated citizens; experts that the city has chosen, and then the developers should come in and integrate their plans to that.

To wit, I have their draft for the New Redmond Redevelopment Plan from 2008. This plan...

Listokin: I'm not familiar with that.

Kafka: Um, this is New Redmond Redevelopment Plan from 2008 which basically is Joyce Kilmer Avenue. This plan includes the vicinity of the Joyce Kilmer House which is National Landmark, and one our most important historic resources. In this plan they talk all about relocating people from rental apartments. They don't discuss historic preservation or mention the Joyce Kilmer House. I mean this is 2008, and we're looking at city officials, the city generating something that hasn't even asked the Historical Board or the Joyce Kilmer Foundation of anyone for any input or even told us about it. I mean we find this out because it's public record. This is how many disconnects there are. Is it intentional? Is it not intentional? But no one's going to argue that Joyce Kilmer's birthplace isn't worth preserving. It isn't going to be impacted by a complete redevelopment of the neighborhood in which it sits? So 2008 isn't much different than 1984. Even with all the dialogue that we're trying to start, half the municipalities in New Jersey have Historical Boards and they have some oversight [powers]. We're willing, ready and able. We have our historians. We have people that have a long term vision for the city in here. We have people who own real estate in here. And we're not getting adequate interface. We're not getting enough meeting time. We're not getting enough clout. We have no teeth in the ordinance. We have no say. And this continues. It's very frustrating.

The big concern I have that I've talked about is that I'm afraid that my upset, my frustration from three decades of trying to make this city better

by integrating the best of historic fabric is continuing to fall on deaf ears when it comes to the people who have any power. The citizens who've been here long term are concerned. I get emails like this all the time. This comes from someone in New Brunswick. This is referring to a house knocked down on Livingston Avenue.

“The finest block in New Brunswick’s Livingston Avenue Historic District was ruined last month by the razing, by city permit, of the great house on the corner of Power Street and Livingston Avenue for a parking lot. If the city does not slap teeth into the often lovely Livingston Avenue Historic District by listing it on state and federal registers it becomes a gap tooth tag.”

Now it is on the Register, but we have no local power which is why this happened. And this citizen is obviously mad. This is not someone on the Historical Board; this is just someone who comes to me screaming at me as an Historical Board member that we should be doing something.

Listokin: I can imagine some of the things you would say. But let's go back to mid to late 1960's and the downtown retail was fallen significantly from its historic, very dynamic level. Fortune 500 companies are fleeing cities...I remember all the headlines. Alright, let's redo history. You're put in charge. So we have a J&J that maybe has one foot outside of New Brunswick. They have a lot of sites throughout New Jersey. Um, the perception of an old factory loft building is not this widespread perception that's where we want to be. You know, Robert Moses proposing highways and Soho and Greenwich Village, etc.. So to suggest...I can imagine some of the things you've said. You're now in charge. It's now 19...whatever...67. We now have the near riot in New Brunswick. So tell me, you're in charge.

Kafka: Of course, hindsight is an unfair equivalency, so this is just hypothetical.

Listokin: 20/20.

Kafka: Well let's say this, we've also got...in Manhattan we've got Penn Station being knocked down. This huge galvanization of things like the Victorian Society in America. Again, Jacqueline Kennedy protesting over historic preservation issues in the city. They're high profile concept. And we've got the beginnings of people starting to adaptively reuse these loft buildings in a very glamorous way. There have always been people using them. We also have in New Brunswick a university celebrating its 200th Anniversary in 1966. And we've got already an Historical Society that knows what's valuable. We have [written] inventories going back to 1930. We have plaques on buildings. And we've got some pretty odd ordinances. Even as the stores are leaving, we're enforcing meter parking

and ticketing people, harassing them so it makes it hard for them to shop downtown. We're telling people they can't occupy apartments on the second or third floor of buildings if they've been vacated and [that they cannot get but] need Certificates of Occupancies because they don't have enough parking for them. And so it's encouraging disinvestment. We are, um, not thinking long term about how we're going to get people to live downtown. We're not really harmonizing downtown relations the way we might. And I think [then Mayor] Patricia Sheehan's legendary for how she helped stave off the worst of the racial tension at that time. And maybe we have a golden opportunity. And instead of focusing on urban renewal, what if we had said, "You know, we have a lot of solid brick buildings down here, and what if we offer tax incentives to people who wanted to buy these and fix them up or to businesses that wanted to rent here. What if we made free parking for people coming to shop in these buildings? What if instead of copying motifs that aren't working elsewhere like wholesale demolition and trying to build strip malls downtown, we go the other direction. There's a few Main Streets that are still intact. What do we have here that's good? Oh, we've got movie theaters. What if we encourage restaurants near the theaters? What if we have a full patrol of policemen who are friendly but visible so that people aren't afraid to come downtown after dark." My parents would go to the theater. My father kept a knife in his pocket in the late 1960's when they went to International Theater. My mother loved to go into the candy store. We went into the Majestic Bakery. I mean I have memories of the sixties being sort of this juxtaposition of great old dusty buildings with old businesses in them, and some decay, but it was all still there. And those that were on the cutting edge knew it was still there. We have the genesis of things like the George Street Playhouse and the Crossroads Theater just around the corner. We also have what happened on Church Street in the late sixties and seventies. The Pottery International, the Catalyst [plant shop], J. August, is going on. How did we encourage those people? We look back and we see there seems to have been a long term major adoption of inappropriate, boilerplate ordinances written for the suburbs in terms of zoning of what kind of parking you need, whether you can have occupancy above storefronts, how you let Mom and Pop businesses arise... and what if we re-tailor that for city? What if we start a bunch of festivals, like October Fest and different kinds of food-tasting and things? What if we're on the cutting edge like Rouse's Marketplace was. You know, instead of waiting to do copycat things too late...I think that's where I would go. And I think it would include neighborhood preservation. I don't know if we'd be looking at the building saying, "Ooh, these buildings are so important they need to be preserved. These Nineteen fifties-styles are important." We might be saying, "How about we just spruce up what we have and encourage everyone to keep it clean, to try to find decent tenants, and to get the students into downtown, and get people living upstairs from the storefronts that will work in these

stores, and shop in these stores. You know, Woolworth was here until the company closed down and went bankrupt. C.H. Martin somehow survived. There were some businesses that, "We're here through the thick and thin." We had very old companies like Jersey Typewriter and Mueller and New jewelry that survived into the Nineteen eighties. I mean through "thick and thin" they were nice good, solid companies. So they did it against all odds. And they weren't given any thanks. It wasn't easy. I'd say, you know, make it easy for business owners. Make it easy for investments. Make it easy for landowners. Find ways to bring revenue in and work with J&J. But when J&J is proposing their big, new campus think ahead of time. How's that going to affect town? Is that for the better or the worse? How do we deal with the merchants and residents over there so that they can stay? Let's include everybody. Let's include Rutgers. Let's ask the students what they want and they need.

Listokin: How would you involve the minority in there?

Kafka: Let's ask everyone. I mean I think...you know, what happened was there's always disenfranchisement of the poorest people or the people who work long hours. They're too tired to come to meetings or they're too busy working or taking care of their children. But let's do what we can. Let's listen when the public comes in. Let's make meetings at times that are convenient for them. Let's go to the pulpit and the churches and say, "Hey, here's what we're working on. Can someone from your organization come and sit with us because we want to make sure that your community and your neighborhood cares." There were five synagogues in New Brunswick. You think any of them were invited to the table? How many churches were down there? I mean I don't even know. Um, but there wasn't as much communication as there could be, and when people tried to come to a City Council talk, City Council often acted like it was burdensome to listen to the public. I know it's tedious. I've sat on the Rent Board twenty-seven years, and you have to sit there, and person after person comes up with their issues. But we're public servants; we're supposed to listen and integrate what the people are saying. And our highest calling is to do the best for the city for our citizens. I'm not sure that's always been the case.

Listokin: Was Historic Preservation the radar of the minority community do you think?

Kafka: I think in terms of certain important buildings to the minority community like their own houses of worship, they were aware that they were historic. And I would say this is true for the general public that historic preservation wasn't on our radar except for buildings where we saw plaques that said, "Washington was Here, Franklin was Here" or "This Church was founded in 1840" or "The University started here." You

know, things like that. We didn't have a holistic idea of preservation of neighborhoods so well in the 1960's. We understood landmarks, and that was a good place to start from. What constitutes a landmark? A landmark isn't just the mansion of the wealthy. But look here over on Welton Street, here was a carpenter that lived in this special house that he built. It was a middle class house, but he did it himself, and now that house has been listed as a landmark by the private owner. Those kind of things could be brought into focus and people could understand them. And there was this giddiness over urban renewal. Even at that time, you could read the famous book, "Brown Girl, Brownstone." I don't know if you ever read that. It's about urban renewal in New York City in the fifties where the woman, the protagonist, is talking about these old brownstones and what's in them and how these plows are endlessly grinding, pushing down here block after block [and taking a culture and identity with them]. Clearly, there was a dialogue going on in that era, and that's a minority dialogue speaking for preservation even in the fifties. And we could have done something. The neighborhoods where the minorities lived historically haven't been given good attention. The old Nathan Hale School was trashed basically; though it's still there. The churches that they still own they take care of. There's a few important houses we know of. There's very little. And it is a good question, but they're not just the minorities that are here now.

I mean what speaks to the Irish American community that built the canal? The Lockkeepers House maybe did and that's gone. What speaks to the Greek community that was downtown in Hiram Market. To the huge Jewish community that was here. So many different waves of immigrants coming through for opportunity. I think it's the neighborhoods. Like the whole of Louis Street was where the Hungarians came. You know, all those look-a-like houses from 1920's...not a single one hasn't been [aluminum or vinyl] sided over [the original wood]. That actually is historic because that's where Johnson & Johnson housed all those Hungarian immigrants when they came over. I mean that's a huge piece of our history. We do have the Hungarian Museum which is a great endeavor. We have little things that were starting and just fading. We could have done better. But those pieces of advice still hold for now; we're not doing them now.

Listokin: Any other thoughts, concluding thoughts?

Kafka: [said in humor] Actually, I can go off on any kind of tangent or subject.

Listokin: No, no, no.

Kafka: I think our biggest challenge now is holistic. There are very few people who have occupied a residence in the city long enough to see the changes

over time, to recognize patterns or issues and speak to them in a cogent way to give good advice for the future. And those that are here need to be listened to. A number of people that are actively participating in the city in giving their input is small but vocal, and they're often discounted. They need to be listened to, the master plan needs to be written separate from groups like DevCo or Penrose or any other developer who works in city, but by a committee chosen consisting of actual stakeholders in the existing city that may include developers, but is not dictated by developers. The mayor, who's a part-time mayor but a full-time real estate attorney clearly has his own perspective which does not necessarily embrace historic preservation because there's a general view of preservation by a developer is it's literally that's not going to sell our house; it's keeping you from building your building. That's not where we're at in New Brunswick. But there's sort of this stereotype of the [preservation minded] being pain in the neck gadflies that are interested in preserving crumbling things that mean nothing. And that's the way we're portrayed. Like we're little elitist wealthy people sipping tea and discussing arcane things. We're not. We're concerned with the holistic fabric of the city into the future, and that message is not being respected. That's the biggest challenge. The passion is there, the interest is there, the talent is there, and the developers in the city could retool for the benefit of everyone, getting them motivated and inspired to doing that is where the question lies. I have no doubt that most people involved want what's best for the city. They want to make a profit when they're a developer, but they don't want a building that's not going to be desirable. They want people to love it and buy there and they want it to be a success. They could make their buildings more successful by including our concerns such as don't have a blank wall facing a major commercial street. The city administration could see that by restoring more of our historic jewels like the State Theater they can keep the soul of the city and give it such a distinctive flare that tourism is benefitted from it. We know full well of that. As you pointed out in your studies, the tax base increases in historic districts. Those buildings become more desirable. There's a cache. We are not doing anything to promote or advertise our historic district. We're not even paying attention when a building has a small fire and then it's basically completely remodeled in a very unsympathetic way by an innocent homeowner or business person that just calls in a contractor. "I didn't know that stained glass window was by the main competitor to Tiffany and was worth ten thousand dollars. I wouldn't have thrown it in the dumpster." Literally, a quote from someone in our neighborhood. So we're not getting the message out. The Historical Board hasn't been given any stipend. An honorarium is supposed to come to it. We haven't been given a place at the table. We haven't gotten any teeth in the ordinance. We're still working on that. Every year [I hope] we'll be presenting an ordinance until something is adjusted that makes the city happy, but it's going to be a long, slow haul. I think having this information available for the public, having them here,

these back stories is going to be informative. I hate to say it, but perhaps it's a case study in how something goes horribly wrong. We are the only city in the nation that's had an historic district removed from the Register. We are the laughing stock of historic preservation around the nation. We may be the way other people can learn. Can we save ourselves? I don't think if we continue on this current trajectory. I don't think there's a single historic structure in this city aside from National Landmark buildings that are owned by people that aren't going to give them up that's safe.

Berkhout: What do you think of...I'm trying to situate myself now. When you go down George Street there are a few places that keep turning over retail. They're short buildings. They're old buildings. They're buildings that can't take certain new retail establishments because it requires any elevators or whatever. You know, it's near where the Payless Shoes are...I forget. It's between that corner and where Tumulty's is. They're an eyesore. So apparently there's an owner who had that, and then it was handled by a Trustee who turned eighty-something and died, and now there's still somebody hanging on to it who refuses to sell that. Now in a case like that, and in their case they don't really care if the retail is successful or not because they're just hanging on to it I guess. So would you consider that something worth preserving, the way those buildings are. Because they go back, I think...there's something on the side of one that goes back to really 1920's or something like that.

Kafka: You've got a situation where private ownership has a certain amount of sanctity to it. And the city can enforce the building codes for maintenance and cleanliness. But when a property is privately held and that person is paying their taxes and maintaining their building it's their business. If the building is very important historically that's when I'd hope the Historic Board would come in. Now I know that someone in DevCo did try to encourage them to do some façade improvement and there was some grant was apparently available through a Main Street Program or something. If the owner doesn't want to... I mean I can't speak to the specific architecture of the buildings you're talking about because I'm not visualizing them in all their details. If I saw them I might be able to know more. But, again, until a building has been researched for what its significance is, and then analyzed for what of that matrix remains or could be restored and enhanced, you really can't give a concise answer. I would say if there's a historic façade behind those blank walls that might be intact or if something important occurred...if Joyce Kilmer's father [an important player in the early development of Johnson and Johnson] had his pharmacy in one of those buildings, for example, then we might want to look at, "Gee, can we possibly bring it back so that a new business could be in here, but that something that's under this hideous stucco or siding that's original might be intact enough to save, then I'd be

enthusiastic about that. But those are sort of micro scale; I look at this as a macro scale. When you step down the block and you can look at the different buildings, for example, we have the People's Bank Building which was recently a Qdoba restaurant, an exquisite building, and in a good state of preservation. Um, that's at risk because it's a prominent corner and there's nothing to say you can't shear that façade off of it or knock it down. It's arguably one of the best buildings downtown in its architecture, and it's quite intact.

Now directly across the street is another Mexican place...I can't remember the name of it.

Berkhout: Chipotle.

KAFKA: That building had been Mandell's Pharmacy, and it had been a bank before that. It had a bland, stucco façade on it. Actually, it was an old building underneath. You look at it, they renovated it, but whoever did it was aware they were in a 19th Century Main Street. They put a cornice on it and windows and window lintels that are new, not [necessarily] expensive, but thoughtful so that it blends in. That's my idea of an holistic approach to a neighborhood. That building now has a nice business in it, and it has a two-story dining room. They're using the space well. They've renovated it in a harmonious way, and there was nothing [historic or old left] there that could be saved prior to that moment. And so I think that's sort of what we had hoped for with downtown. I don't have a problem with a non-descript building being torn down if it's not got something really important. Now the bagel building where Mueller and New jeweler was, that's an important building, and that's got a high degree of integrity. I would be very...

Berkhout: The Bagel Nosh?

Kafka: Yeah, if you look at that building, that's...

Berkhout: And it's the buildings to the right of that if you're looking at the front that become non descript with poor facades.

Kafka: Yeah, some of those may have been what they call "Taxpayers." They were just built on a vacant lot to garner some income. And I think we're all aware of the city re-developing. What they call smart growth now is figuring out what the best use for the spot it and planning it well. So do you want a huge high rise on George Street? I don't think we need any more high rises. That stretch of George Street from Albany Street up to basically the Heldrich, yes, is the historic stretch where the scale is still intact. It will be devastated by an inappropriate high rise. We already have one high rise there. It's historic that has a neoclassical façade that

it's its own history. But it will be great to see anything that's removed there [where the low bland buildings are] replaced with something that relates to the street that doesn't have a feeling of formidable exclusivity to it. Too many new buildings aren't pedestrian-friendly or dynamic. We're talking new urbanism here; it's not rocket science. I hope that answered your question. It's really, um, I don't want to say...it's emotional talking about these things. It's extremely frustrating. It's impossible to explain the many, many hours of meetings, letter writing, negotiating, and the feeling of disappointment or even betrayal from the attempts to work with people who we hope will make things work out. And I'm sure if some of those people watched [the video of] what I've had to say...they will be indignant or even contradict me or decide they won't work with me anymore. But I will continue to try to work with anyone who tries to work with us. But we're not being respected is how I feel. The Historical Board was appointed by the mayor; it's needs to be given equal clout to Planning Board or any other boards. And being told that a building looks "icky" in the back, um, isn't the viable reason for allowing a whole block to be knocked down. So I hope they'll be more people you interview, and you'll be able to take this and make your book out of it. I hope this offers you another perspective. And I'm just scratching at the surface of things that you've talked about...some backroom negotiations and there's a lot of players, and hopefully you can catch them while they're still able to be interviewed.

Berkhout: Sure. Thank you so much.

Listokin: Well thank you.

Kafka: It was my pleasure.

[End of Audio – 91:11 minutes]