

Andy Baglivo



DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Andy (Angelo) Baglivo (RC'49), was born in Newark, New Jersey. [4] For about 20 years of his career, he covered politics for the *Newark Evening News*. [4] When the newspaper closed down in the early 1970s, Baglivo took a position as the state director of public information for then Governor William T. Cahill (1970–1974), where he helped write speeches, manage public information agencies, and work on strategy. [5] After Governor Cahill left

office, Baglivo started a public relations firm. He received a phone call from Lawrence Foster, the corporate vice president of public relations at Johnson & Johnson— and former colleague at the *Newark News*—asking if his firm would be interested in working with Johnson & Johnson in New Brunswick redevelopment efforts. [6] Baglivo was a likely candidate in this regard because of his familiarity with Rutgers and New Jersey politics. [7] Johnson & Johnson hired Baglivo as a “resource” valuable to New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT), the New Brunswick Development Corporation (Devco), and the Cultural Center. [18]

Becoming involved with Johnson & Johnson, Baglivo observed that the corporation felt a “responsibility to the community in which it lived,” which helped explain why it decided to rebuild its headquarters in New Brunswick rather than on land available in Somerset County. [10] Baglivo seemed surprised—“I went in as a very cynical guy”—that Johnson & Johnson followed the tenets of its corporate Credo: “That’s something you run on, and then you run away from it afterward,” he said. “But,” he added, “they didn’t want to stay here if they became an oasis in the middle of decay,” a comment that addresses the involvement of Johnson & Johnson in the New Brunswick redevelopment process. [10]

An important dynamic in the redevelopment process was the relationship between Johnson & Johnson and the City government. Baglivo recalled “a good relationship” with “very competent, smart guys.” [11] Mayor John A. Lynch, Jr. (1979–1991) also represented the 19th district in the state senate (1981–2001) and served as senate president (1990–1992). Baglivo reflected on how this benefited Johnson & Johnson: “So not only did we have a good relationship [with Lynch] on a City level, but now we have a guy for probably the first time in New Brunswick’s history who could do things for us and advocate for New Brunswick.” [12] The Middlesex County government was less

involved, “until they began to see things happening.” Baglivo added, “One of the things about revitalization is that success attracts success.” [13]

Baglivo commented on how the Rutgers faculty was not supportive of the redevelopment efforts. [14] University administration was not very involved either, he said. This changed when Edward J. Bloustein became president of Rutgers. [15] Bloustein actively participated in board meetings and, if he did not attend, “would usually send a pretty high-level representative,” Baglivo said. “In other words, he didn’t just blow us off.” [15-16] Baglivo disclosed his feelings about Francis Lawrence, the successor to Edward Bloustein: “I felt that we lost them—that was a dead period as far as Rutgers’ involvement—really top-level involvement. Lawrence didn’t seem to be interested; he came to a couple of meetings and then we never saw him again.” [16]

When Johnson & Johnson was deliberating its future in New Brunswick, Baglivo suggested that a poll be conducted to measure public receptiveness. He recommended that the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers conduct the poll to ensure impartiality. [19] The poll revealed that “all of the people in New Brunswick were not anti-renewal” and that “the people felt good” about Johnson & Johnson. [21] Baglivo continued: “It suddenly made the opinion makers and the money providers at Johnson & Johnson aware that this was not a lost cause.” [21]

Baglivo mentioned that “the stage was set by [Richard] Sellars, who was then chairman of the board of Johnson & Johnson. He made a speech before a group of business people called ‘New Brunswick at the Crossroads.’” [24] Sellars also “led the way in bringing in the American Cities Corporation,” which determined that New Brunswick could be turned around. At this point, Baglivo told an anecdote about different perceptions regarding New Brunswick: “When I first came here, they said they were going to drive me around the city and show me all of these terrible things that are happening. So they drove me around some neighborhoods that they thought were terrible. And I’m looking at them and I said, ‘You know, in Newark this would be a pretty good residential neighborhood.’” [24-25]

Baglivo discussed the ideas of Leo Molinaro, CEO of the American Cities Corporation, the consulting firm that issued the baseline report on how to deal with the future of New Brunswick. [25] Molinaro advocated a public-private partnership with the involvement of the local government. This led to the creation of such a public-private organization: New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT), which in the beginning dealt with economic development, planning, and social issues. (Later, the New Brunswick Development Corporation—Devco—would take on the primary role in economic development.) Baglivo thought that a “fundamental turning point in planning New Brunswick’s future” was the decision to focus on more than just physical redevelopment. [26]

As the redevelopment process began, Baglivo said, expectations were suddenly raised. [30] To create some change visible to the public, Johnson & Johnson built a small park on

the corner of Albany Street and George Street. [30] Another project in the same vein—visible change—was to paint “New Brunswick, the Healthcare City” on the rusting railroad trestle. The first significant construction project was Plaza II, a building designed by I. M. Pei to fill a vacant lot on the main commercial avenue. Baglivo recalled that Plaza II “was the first real commercial building built in New Brunswick in the memory of anybody.” [31] Baglivo explained that Pei was engaged after American Cities had set the stage. [33] He later explained how the patterns of investment changed over time: “Nobody was going to invest their own money here. But as they began to see that things were happening, little by little, now they killed each other to get the contracts to build. The developers were all fighting with each other.” [38]

The development of the Cultural Center and theatre district “made New Brunswick a destination,” Baglivo said. [36] He mentioned that Richard Sellars “put down a deposit and held [the State Theatre] and saved that building for us.” At the time, the theatre was being used as a “porno house.” [36]

Baglivo expressed his frustration with historic preservationists in the dispute over the future of the Hiram Market neighborhood. “Historic preservationists held us up for a while and cost us a lot of money,” he said. About why they were pursuing preservation status: “I think they said something about they might find some privies down there . . . and the privies would tell them what they were eating at the time.” [37]

He also explained how funding made its way to New Brunswick: lobbying by Mayor Lynch and Johnson & Johnson; successful initial projects; “we had not had any scandal in this city”; strong leadership and competent board members serving Devco, NBT, and the Cultural Center. [39-41] From the public relations side, New Brunswick Tomorrow published an annual report, sent to every household, listing “all of the accomplishments of the past year.” [41] Later, as demographics shifted, the report was published in both English and Spanish.

Baglivo said that the media would focus “on the most pitiful situations” but not follow up on the story. [42] In one instance there were brothers living in the Hiram Market area without running water and heat who attracted the attention of the press because they did not want to move. They were eventually relocated and provided “better housing than they’d ever seen in their lives,” a point that the media failed to cover, Baglivo said. [43]

About regrets, Baglivo expressed a desire to have addressed problems in local neighborhoods. He explained why this was difficult: “We knew that before we even addressed the neighborhoods we had to rebuild the economic heart of the city, because that’s where the money comes from.” [46] He was also bothered by the lack of “young blood” involved in the civic process. [47] “What happens when something happens to John Heldrich?” Baglivo asked. [48]

Commenting on the transferability of the revitalization process in New Brunswick, Baglivo responded that it would be “very difficult, for a number of reasons.” [51] He cited the size of the city and the presence of J&J and Rutgers, which could not be replicated.

KEY QUOTATIONS

[Quotations have been edited for grammar and alphabetized by topic]

American Cities Corporation (Baseline Report on Future of New Brunswick)

Leo Molinaro said, “It’s not that far gone, you’re catching it.” When Richard Sellars coined a phrase “at the crossroads,” he was right. We could go down; the trend was definitely down as business and residents left. And then he said, “What you have to do is have a true partnership.” He said, “Everybody talks about public-private partnerships; you really need one in this city with the community, the corporate interests, and the professionals. You need that kind of a thing, but mostly public-private—and you certainly need the City government with you. Because no matter what you do, City government has the final say. If they are not going to give you a building permit to do something, you want to build right here.” [25]

And Molinaro said, “None of these things can work by themselves, you can’t do it privately only, you can’t do it publicly only, you can’t do it community only. If you don’t do it together. . . .” I think that was a fundamental turning point in planning New Brunswick’s future: the decision that you can’t just do bricks and mortar. [25-26]

Collaboration with New Brunswick City Government

Not only was there a good relationship, they were very competent, smart guys. [11]

Community Involvement

When they brought me in, we had a lot of militant people in the city who claimed that this would all be an effort at gentrification—get rid of the minorities—that Johnson & Johnson was going to make a bundle of money—that kind of stuff. And they were very strong militants; I don’t know where they all went. We did not get much help, I have to be honest with you, from the faculty at Rutgers. [14]

Consultants to the Revitalization Efforts

Johnson & Johnson said, “You know, we are deeply involved in what’s happening. We need certain skills and resources which they either don’t have or can’t afford, and you have the kind of background that could be helpful in giving advice and counsel on everything from political matters to tactical policy. So we would like you to be a resource that we contribute to NBT.” [17-18]

I have to say this: The quality of the consultants that we engaged very early was superb. American Cities, Rouse, I. M. Pei. . . . [32]

Eagleton Poll (1976) of New Brunswick Residents

It showed us right off the bat that all of the people in New Brunswick were not anti-renewal. It showed the people at J&J who were going to be putting up the money that the people felt good about them. It also showed that the people felt pretty good about Rutgers. You always heard about “town and gown” and how they fight with each other—well, it didn’t show that. It showed phenomenal positive ratings of J&J, phenomenal positive ratings of Rutgers, which have continued to today—80 percent, or whatever it is. [21]

Financial Viability of the City of New Brunswick (Historical Context)

In 1943, the central business district in New Brunswick was collecting \$1.8 million in taxes. In the early 1970s, that figure had dropped to \$300,000 in taxes. Now that’s a startling figure. [27]

Hiram Market

There weren’t a lot of residents in the Hiram area. There weren’t a lot of residents where J&J built its complex—very few. [44] We knew that before we even addressed the neighborhoods, we had to rebuild the economic heart of the city, because that’s where the money comes from. [46] We addressed that as well as we could. I’m sure some people disagreed with us. But this firm came in and said, “Look, this building is historic, but it’s falling down. You can’t preserve it.” [49-50]

James M. Cahill

Jim Cahill came along, and he was a very competent guy—well-positioned within the organization—and we’ve gotten along well with him. Different personalities, very different [Lynch and Cahill]—but in their own ways and foresight and thought, said they really should get involved—the City should be part of this process. [13]

John A. Lynch, Jr.

Johnny Lynch was one of the smartest guys I ever. . . . His father was the state senator, and the son far outshone the father, let me put it that way. [11-12] He’s smart and he knew politics; then he became a member of the Legislature, and he was in a leadership position. So not only did we have a good relationship with him on a City level, but now we had a guy probably for the first time in New Brunswick’s history (because his father was not that effective) who could do things for us and advocate for New Brunswick. [12] And [later as a state senator] in Trenton, we wound up with a very powerful guy, much more powerful than strictly a state senator; he ran one of the most important Middlesex County machines. [13]

Johnson & Johnson (J&J)—Decision to Stay in New Brunswick

J&J concluded that they were outgrowing where they were, so they had a decision to make. And the decision was to go to this beautiful acreage they had out in Somerset County or to stay in the city. They have a corporate Credo, which, believe it or not, they actually follow. I went in as a very cynical guy. I covered party platforms, you know. And I said, "That's something you run on and then you run away from it afterward." But they really believed it, and one of their planks is a responsibility to the communities in which they live. But they didn't want to stay here if they became an oasis in the middle of decay. [10]

You had top corporate leaders like J&J, Jim Burke, Dave Claire, and guys like that who were interested in revitalization, who decided to go ahead and build here, a fundamental decision. J&J leaves the city?—None of this happens, or very little happens. So that decision itself was based on their [J&J's] confidence that something good was going to happen in New Brunswick, that they would not be left here—something positive was under way. [28]

New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT)

At first, New Brunswick Tomorrow did it all, looking for potential economic development as well as social issues. Then they realized a couple of things which I think made us successful where others have failed, in addition to the obvious assets like Rutgers and J&J, and County seat and all

that kind of thing. They realized that if you have a true partnership there, if you know where you are working together, it could work.

Press and Public Perception

One of the things I had to try to do, which wasn't easy, was deal with the press, which focuses on the most pitiful situations—but they don't follow up. We had a pair of brothers who lived in the Hiram Market area, and they didn't have running water, they had no heat, but they didn't want to move—and the press loved them. We finally got them out of there and gave them better housing than they'd ever seen in their lives. I'm still basically a journalist, and they know me. I said, "You know, one of your faults is you highlight the hardship part of it when they get thrown out, but did you ever follow up to see where they wound up?" Our relocation has been excellent. [43-44]

Roy Epps

Roy Epps was a founding member of the board of directors of New Brunswick Tomorrow. So they did not pick only safe things, but they picked a guy who was independent and who would challenge certain things. So he was there and is still there and very active. [42]

Success of the Revitalization Efforts

One of the things about revitalization is that success attracts success. Nobody wants to invest money in what looks like a corporation or a business or a government or a city that's got problems ahead and no apparent plans or initiatives to address it—which we had. [13]

We had some advantages starting out, and I think one of the things that very early penetrated these different turfdoms is that we were all going to be regarded by the public as together. If we flopped, nobody was going to say, "It was New Brunswick Tomorrow's fault or Devco's fault or the Cultural Center." As far as the public was concerned, we were all doing the same thing, and they didn't differentiate. Problems are problems for them, and if you guys are in charge, it's your problem. [14]

With all of the success that we've had, we don't sit back and say, "Okay, that's it." We're always looking for what still needs to be done, and there is a lot that needs to be done. Because it is a changing city and will always be that way. [57]

Transferability

Very difficult, for a number of reasons—size, the lack of a J&J, the lack of a state university, the lack of a natural asset like the river—those kinds of things—and maybe the leadership we had here. [51]