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INTERVIEWEE: RON HINE

INTERVIEWERS: RUTH CHARNES, CAROLINE CARLSON

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SIDE ONE

RUTH CHARNES: This is an interview conducted on November 18th, 2009, with Ron Hine. The interview is being conducted by Ruth Charnes and Caroline Carlson. We'll start Ron, if we might, with your very earliest years, before you came to Hoboken, with a little bit of information on where you were born, when (if you'd like to reveal that), and your earlier years.

RON HINE: I was born in Urbana, Illinois. I spent the first eighteen years of my life there, at the same address-- 711 Pennsylvania Avenue. The date of my birth was February 20, 1946. So, yes, I had a Midwestern upbringing. My father was a Presbyterian minister. He had a church on the campus of the University of Illinois, so I had a good deal of exposure to the campus life, growing up. Also, I had a very nice opportunity, in

my early years, going to school with a lot of people associated-
-students I went to school with were sons and daughters of
professors at the University of Illinois. So it really enhanced
the educational system that I was part of there.

RC: And your mom?

RH: My mother was a housewife. Both she and my
father came from Indiana. They were Hoosiers.

RC: Far away. Did you have any early thoughts
about following in an academic or religious track?

RH: Well, of course, my father wanted me to
follow in his footsteps, which I failed to do. But it certainly
provided me very much with a social conscience, and I think
throughout my lifetime, beginning in high school, throughout my
lifetime, I've always pursued issues that I felt were in the
public interest.

CAROLINE CARLSON: Did you go to college at
Champaign, Illinois?

RH: I went to a small college in Wooster, Ohio-- the College of Wooster. Then I spent a year in graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh.

CC: What were you studying?

RH: Urban affairs.

CC: So what brought you to Hoboken?

RH: Hoboken is where I was offered my first job out of school. It was an opportunity to do my alternative service for my draft board, because I got a classification as a conscientious objector. This was during the Vietnam War era, so I needed a place to do my alternative service. There was an Episcopal priest in town who had a community of volunteers--that was Walter Thompson, if you remember him --

CC: Slightly. Just down the street. St. Matthew's?

RH: No. He didn't have a church. He was right down the block, here.

CC: Right. At Sixth and--

RH: Yes. So that's how I got my start.

RC: Just to clarify--"right down the block" means Sixth and Washington?

CC: Sixth and Hudson.

RC: Okay. I'd like to talk more about him, but let's go back to your path.

I'm very interested--before we go on--about your early steps working on social justice, from your parents, from other factors. Because not everyone chooses that path, and, clearly, by the time you were drafted, you knew where you were going.

RH: Well, there were a lot of very interesting people who were connected to the church at the University of Illinois, where my father was the pastor. He had associate pastors who went down South, during the civil-rights era, so I got to know them, and learned first-hand what their experience was. There were always people coming to talk at church functions about different things, like the civil-rights struggle, and other things of social concern. That was very big when I was

growing up--hearing about those things and meeting the people involved.

Also, meeting people from around the world. My father actually went around the world for the Board of Foreign Missions in 1954, for the Presbyterian church, so he got to visit all these countries--in the Middle East, in Pakistan, India, Thailand, Japan, and Korea. And there were students from a lot of these countries who were part of the church at the University of Illinois, and I got to meet them, as well. So I was exposed to a very broad array of different kinds of people, socially conscious people, from a very early age.

CC: Lucky you.

RC: Getting back to your first--[laughs]

RH: Let me just tell one other story, because I think it's interesting.

When I was in high school, there was a woman by the name of Felice Perlmutter, who was running a program. It was called the Champaign Youth Council, but what she actually did was she got a grant--I believe it was from the Federal Department of Health or something like that--and its whole purpose was to bring together high-school-age kids from different backgrounds--different religious groups, different

racial groups, different socio-economic groups--and have them work together on local issues. They would give us a survey at different times during our participation in this Champaign Youth Council, and they would measure--because we were being exposed to people from different backgrounds--they were trying to measure whether or not our prejudices were being broken down, as a result. I think they found that they, in fact, were, and that was a very good experience for me. That was the first time that I did something that I felt was truly meaningful, by participating in this group. I became the president of it. So it was my start, in a way, of being involved in these kinds of things.

RC: So going back to your first coming to Hoboken, which was in....

RH: -- 1969, in September.

RC:--1969. Would you talk a little bit about that time, and what you did?

RH: Yes. Actually, when I was in graduate school, in the latter part of college, I developed an interest in community organizing. I was particularly interested in Saul Alinsky, who had done a lot of organizing work in Chicago, and came out of the Industrial Areas Foundation. I read everything I

could about him, so I was very interested in that concept. I didn't really think I was necessarily qualified to do it, but that was my area of interest.

Then when I came here, in Hoboken, I became part of a community of volunteers. I met some people very early on. One was Nick Borg, who was a social worker in Newark, who grew up here in Hoboken. Another person is Margaret Wedlake, who was formerly a Catholic nun. Also, Mary Campbell, who was a welfare client. We got together and we formed a group called Self-Help, and we specialized in two areas. One was organizing tenants, which we did through the New Jersey Tenants Organization, and the other was assisting welfare clients, helping organize them. Nick brought his expertise as a social worker, working in Newark. He understood all the welfare regulations, so he was able to teach us to counsel the clients. So we got our start through that organization. In fact, that's essentially what we were doing--community organizing.

RC: Just for the record, and for those whose memories of Hoboken don't go back quite that far, it was a very different time here. Could you just talk a little bit about that aspect of your work?

RH: Yes. Hoboken, back in 1969 and the early '70s, was dramatically different than it is today. There were a

lot of very poor families. We went around and visited a lot of people, and you would find very large families living in railroad flats--ten, thirteen kids--and a lot of these people were on welfare. Some of the tenant groups we worked with were a little more affluent. They were more working class or middle class. But yes. Hoboken was a very, very different kind of place. There was a very large Hispanic population at that time.

Yes, it's amazing how it's changed over the years. I can't say I necessarily like it better. Because back then, when I first came to town--it was very exciting, what we did. Of course, we felt it was very meaningful, and we were doing our very best to help people, in the way we felt would be most effective.

CC: How long were you involved with Self-Help, and doing that community service through your commitment to alternative service?

RH: Well, it actually turned out that I didn't have to do my alternative service. I got put in the lottery. I got a very high number, and I never got called up. Nevertheless, it was what I wanted to do so I stayed, and continued to work through this organization. We were very active in 1970-'71-'72. Those three years, we were a very active group.

CC: Was your focus primarily--for example, for the tenants--tenants' rights, negotiating with landlords? How did your part play itself out?

RH: We wanted to help organize people, so if there was a group of tenants that had a problem they would invite us to come in, and we would talk about how important it was for them to form an organization, to protect their rights. So we were, in effect, helping to organize them. We had attorneys who worked with the New Jersey Tenants Organization, who were able to teach us what the law said; what rights they had to stand on. For instance, if they were going to have a rent strike, how you would conduct that.

So that's what we were doing with tenants, at that time. With the welfare clients, it was a little different. We had people constantly coming into our office, asking for help because they weren't being treated fairly; they weren't getting what was due to them, from the Hudson County Welfare Department. So we did a lot of individual counseling, and we also helped form that organization, so they could work as a group, to get what was due them.

RC: Did you have success? Much success, I probably should say?

RH: Well, that's not an easy thing to measure. We were certainly very active. We did everything we could. I think we probably had a series of small victories, helping individual people or individual tenant organizations. We did everything we could. I think, looking back on it, it's sort of an intangible thing to measure. It's very different from today, where you can physically see the results of what we've done on the waterfront. Like I say, it's hard to measure exactly how successful that was.

CC: I just remember your work with people when there were those riots on Washington Street. I don't know if you want to talk about that, but that was an incredible time in Hoboken, and you were one of the people who was there when people were getting arrested.

RH: Yes. It turned out that I ended up being arrested, as well. What happened--I think this was 1972--

CC: Seventy-one, I think.

RH: Seventy-one?

CC: I was living at the church then, and I remember that. Yes.

RH: There were, I think, two brothers, who were Puerto Rican, who had a television repossessed by a local businessman. They had gone down to protest that this business owner had come and repossessed this television, there was a dispute, the police came, and then, from what I recall, there was some kind of altercation. So a lot of the young Hispanics--a number of whom we were working pretty closely with--decided they would have a protest, because they felt that the police had treated these people unfairly.

So there was a march that went up Washington Street and back down, and then when they got in front of City Hall there was a car that the police allowed to come through, and the people tried to block it. This was the beginning of the Hoboken riots, back at that time. There was a tremendous amount of anger, especially between the young Hispanic population and the police. One of the things I wanted to do was be a witness to what was going on, and one of the ironies was that when you were on the street, watching, observing what was transpiring, there actually wasn't very much. You weren't really unsafe, being on the street. But when a crowd of people gathered, and the police arrived on the scene, there would be kids on the rooftops, and they would be throwing bottles at the police cars. There was just this eruption of violence and confrontation.

So I saw that, and it went on until late in the evening. I was there, watching what was going on, and at one point a police car came up and swept a group of us up. We weren't doing anything at the time. Somebody asked me about this recently, and I explained. I don't have a violent bone in my body. I would not participate in something that was violent. I was actually arrested for assaulting a police officer.

Anyway, the charges got reduced to a misdemeanor. It was originally a felony, and it got reduced to a misdemeanor. But that was a very dramatic time, and it was certainly a very different era in Hoboken's history.

RC: And your next steps, after working with that group?

RH: I got offered a job organizing tenants at the Jersey City Housing Authority. This was something that was offered to me by someone I knew, who was a friend of mine. They wanted to develop a unique program, where they would get some state money to rehabilitate the public-housing projects in Jersey City. They wanted the community to be safer and more stable, so they were organizing tenant patrols. I was hired to do that. When I got offered the job--or, actually, before I got offered the job--I was given a tour of the Duncan Avenue Projects in Jersey City. I had seen a lot of bad neighborhoods

in my life, but I had never seen anything like that. The Housing Authority quit replacing the windows--because they'd been vandalized and broken--so they took these metal plates, and they welded them over the windows. Then there were these dimly-lit bulbs in the hallways, so when you would go there it was very dark. All the tiles on the floors had been torn up and hadn't been replaced. Then you'd go down the stairwell, and it was completely full of garbage. It reeked of urine. It was squalor. I'd never seen anything like it before, and I'd seen plenty of slums.

CC: And people were still living there.

RH: Yes.

I'd seen plenty of slums. I'd seen them in Cleveland and a number of different areas, but I'd never seen anything quite like this.

So I was assigned the task of organizing Curries Woods, on the Bayonne-Jersey City border, and I worked there for about two years.

CC: That was in Jersey City, or Bayonne?

RH: Jersey City.

It was a great program. The people were really great to work with. Clearly, there were a lot of problems in public housing, but the people who lived there--they were very good people, and they really cared about the community. It was very easy to organize them. They really wanted to come together, and work on the problems that existed. They ran their tenant patrols on a regular basis, and it was a great program. Because the Jersey City Housing Authority was doing that, first they got state money, to start making improvements; then they got federal money. The federal Housing Administration was very interested in this project, so where I worked, Curries Woods, became one of four sites across the country to be designated for the tenant management program.

So that was a very exciting thing to be part of. Bob Rigby, who was the executive--at that time he was a staff member of the Jersey City Housing Authority. Eventually, he became the executive director, and he was there his whole working career. He was an exceptional person, and he was great to work for. He had the vision to create this program.

CC: Just parenthetically--does that area still exist?

RH: Yes.

CC: It hasn't been torn down?

RH: There were like seven towers--you know, high-rise, public-housing towers, and they took three or four of them down. They left some standing, they took three or four down, and they built these kind of townhouse type of structures.

So it's still there, but in a somewhat different configuration.

RC: And your next step?

RH: From there I went to work for the New York City Fire Department. My friend Nick Borg gave me a job there. He was Director of Planning at the Fire Department, and they had a program to get money from the federal government for their division of Fire Investigation. So I wrote proposals for them, monitored the program, and gave evaluations to the funding source.

Again, during the time when New York City was literally burning, they were getting tens of thousands of vacant building fires a year. All of those were arsons. The Bronx was burning; parts of Brooklyn; parts of Manhattan. It was an extraordinary time.

CC: What year was that?

RH: This was 1976-'77. Around that time.

So, yes. I would ride around with the fire investigators, and as they were conducting investigations I would listen to them interviewing people. Then they would go in, look at the fire scene, and they would describe--if it was an arson, they could tell you exactly how the fire started from the way it burned.

So after doing this for a couple of years, I did develop an expertise in arson and the different kinds of arson that exist. From there I got offered a job at the Flatbush Development Corporation of Brooklyn, conducting a neighborhood arson prevention program. We actually had a computerized system for tracking arson. We would collect data on building violations, previous fires, I think vacancy rates. There were a couple of other factors; they're not all coming to me.

Anyway, we'd plug those into a computer model, and we were able to rank buildings in the neighborhood that were at the greatest risk for arson. Then I had a tenant organizer on my staff, and we would send him in to work on these buildings. We would ask the Department of Housing for the City of New York to do some code enforcement with these buildings. We asked the Division of Fire Investigation of the New York City Fire Department, that I formally worked with, to come in and pay special attention to the buildings that we identified as arson-

prone. We also worked very closely with insurance companies. There were a couple that were interested in what we were doing, so we developed and fostered a working relationship with them. After I had been there a short time, we discovered that the Ford Foundation was interested in this issue; as a result, we became the first community organization to get a Ford Foundation grant to do this. So I continued to hone some of my grant-writing skills at that time, and that was quite a coup, to be able to do that.

RC: Congratulations on being able to do that. This must be just about the time that Hoboken's fires started happening.

RH: Yes.

RC: Were you at all involved in that?

RH: I was.

RC: Would you talk about it--and with a little background, for people who didn't go through it?

CC: And an idea of that time--the chronology and year that that started happening in Hoboken.

RH: My memory for dates is not great. Is this the late 1970s, I would say? Or early '80s?

CC: Early '80s.

RH: Yes. There was a wave of arson in Hoboken, as well. What I had learned through the program in Brooklyn, and what had been done by some other groups around the country (we were following what they were doing, as well), was that you needed to do your homework. If there's a fire in a building, then the next step is to do a title search--look at the deeds, look at the mortgages, see who has a financial interest in the building--and then see if there has been a history of previous fires, as well. So you want to go through all the fire records.

Anyway, you have to do your research. Once you start to do that, you want to see if there's a pattern; if there are particular property owners. For instance, whose name comes up more than once? And we did find some of that. When we were researching a fire that occurred at the American Hotel, we found that there was a contract-of-sale for the property, before the fire occurred, and the contract stated that the building had to be delivered vacant. The fire occurred shortly before that delivery date, so that was a story we fed to the press, and that was written up.

RC: Just to stop you--when you say "we"--were you working informally, with a group? With officials? Could you talk a little about that?

RH: Yes. At one point there was an arson task force set up by the mayor's office, but the research I had done was just through a group of volunteers who were interested in working on this. We got permission from the Fire Department to come in and look through the fire records--which is the same thing I did in Brooklyn. We would, on a regular basis, go in. So I knew how to do all that, and I knew what to look for. So I had a group of volunteers, and we all worked together to put all this information into an organized fashion, to see if we could make some sense of it. Eventually, Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms, the federal agency, did come in to investigate in Hoboken, and they were here for some time. But no arrests or convictions were ever made.

But that was during a time when the development of Hoboken was picking up steam, and there were still a lot of poor families living in Hoboken. There was a big incentive to remove them, so the buildings could be rehabilitated and become more lucrative for the owner. That's not to say that wherever there was a fire that that was the cause of the fire, but, in some instances, it was.

RC: Were you living in Hoboken at that point?

RH: Yes. I've lived in Hoboken since 1969. I never moved out.

RC: Even though you were working in Brooklyn.

RH: That's right.

CC: You bought property in Hoboken, didn't you?

RH: Yes, in 1979. I was living at 113 Willow, as you remember, and there was a building right around the corner where the owner was moving to a new location; I noticed that, and went to speak to the owner. He said, "Yes, I'm going to sell that building. Do you want to come take a look?"

So he gave us a little tour. It was a two-story brick building between Park and Willow, and it runs from First Street to Newark. He brought us in through the First Street side; then when he brought us through the middle section of the building, I had no idea it existed. It was the old Eureka Theatre. It looked like the ruins of Pompeii. There was all this peeling paint, and the tin ceiling was rusty now. The roof was leaking. It was this derelict building, and I was completely

fascinated by it. I didn't have any money at the time, so I asked some friends if they would be interested in going in and buying the property with me.

RC: Dare we ask the asking price?

RH: Well, the initial price was \$25,000. Then when I came back with someone else, to take another look, I said, "You want \$25,000, is that correct?" And he said, "\$20,000." I wasn't even trying to bargain. He thought it was worthless. I would say we got in right under the wire, because in 1979 it just started to take off, after that. If I hadn't done that, if I hadn't bought that building, I probably couldn't have afforded to stay in Hoboken. It really allowed me to stay here. I still live there.

RC: Not to jump ahead--but what happened to the theatre portion? Is it still there?

RH: Well, I became a potter. It was sort of an avocation of mine. At times I thought I would try to make a go of it and do it full-time. That became my studio, and I built a big gas kiln. The middle part, where the studio was, had twenty-one-foot ceilings. It was eighty feet long, just this huge

space. So I built a big kiln there, and had a huge studio. It was there for many years, until recently.

CC: Where did you study pottery? You had studied before you bought that building, then.

RH: Yes. Just in New York. I'd take classes in New York.

CC: So you just started spontaneously.

RH: Yes. I didn't really have any art background. But when I came to Hoboken I met a number of artists. I guess I was influenced by that, and felt I should be doing something creative.

CC: So you had quite a nice pottery business, for quite a while, didn't you?

RH: Well, yes, I did work at it for quite a while. I don't know if you'd call it a nice business. I never made much money. I worked on the wheel, and I made stoneware and tiles. I did a lot of tile jobs, I kept charging more and more money, and never really seemed

to--any job I took on, I just never seemed to make much money. It's very labor intensive, and a lot of things can go wrong at every step of the way--if there's a problem with your clay; if there's a problem with your glaze; if there's a problem with your firing. So I was kind of learning the hard way. If I'd gone to school, I probably would have learned a lot of things not to do. But, instead, I had to discover it on my own.

So yes, only recently did I move. I moved my studio up to a little farm that I purchased a few years ago. So all the bricks from the kiln are just sitting in the shed behind the barn, right now. Eventually, I'll set up a new studio there, but that hasn't happened yet.

CC: So you have all that space empty, in Hoboken.

RH: Well, that's another story. [Laughter]

RC: Is that one you want to share? Or shall we--?

RH: We can save it for the end.

RC: Okay. Well, let's go back to your non-potting time. We left you in the fires of Hoboken, as it were. If you'll pick up your story there.

RH: In the mid-1980s, as we just mentioned, development was just starting to take off in Hoboken. There were some proposals for high-rise development, and I think, for many of us who lived in Hoboken, we felt that this was not quite right. The thing that was really attractive about living here was that it's a very walkable town; you can walk everywhere in Hoboken. The buildings are three, four, five stories high, so it's built on a very human scale. And I think those of us who have fallen in love with this town really--that old, neighborhood character is what we love so much about it. So when developers came in and started proposing to build buildings that were twenty, twenty-five, thirty stories high, we thought, "Well, this is not appropriate."

The first project I was involved with was called the Presidential Towers. It was between Adams and Jefferson, First and Newark, and it was a project that was being built--the "law director" for the City of Hoboken at that time, Sal D'Amelio--his family owned the property--he made an attempt to put this project on the fast track. He had teamed up with Francis Schiller, a priest in Jersey City, along with Father Squeo. They represented the developers, trying to get this project through the Hoboken zoning board. We had an attorney representing us before the zoning board, and we fought against it. We made all the arguments why it was not appropriate to give

all the variances required to build this; nevertheless, the zoning board granted all the variances they requested.

We didn't have much money, but, again, there was a group that formed in opposition to this project, and we decided, "Okay. We'll challenge this in court, but we're not going to do it with an attorney, because we don't really have the funds to pay an attorney." So they said, "Okay, Ron, you go ahead and do this." [Laughter] But I had a couple of attorneys advising me. Dave White was one, and Ira Karasick was the other. I worked on the facts of the case, and I wrote up the facts, which have to go into the brief. Then Dave White helped me with all the legal arguments, and helped draft that part of the brief. Then we felt that Sal D'Amelio had a conflict of interest--because of being "law director," and being involved in getting this project through at the same time--he helped with the conflict-of-interest portion of the brief.

We went before Judge Gallipoli, and we won. I was actually the pro se litigant. Because I wasn't a lawyer, I couldn't represent any of the other parties who were opposing this, I had to represent myself. But in the end, we won, and it was a very dramatic victory.

RC: Was there much astonishment on the other side?

RH: Yes. [Laughter] Absolutely. They were pretty stunned.

RC: That was one of the first turnarounds like that, in the history of Hoboken.

RH: Well, it was really one of the first high-rise projects that was proposed in town.

CC: When you went against it, did you have a name for your group, or was it just a group of people who casually--?

RH: We didn't have a name. It was done informally.

CC: And then--

RC: Good news. Good news.

RH: Well, later on we formed a group in my neighborhood, at the southern end of town, called Downtown Residents for Sane Development. We opposed a series of high-rise projects that were being proposed by Joe Barry, who was at that time the biggest developer in Hoboken. He had developed all the Applied Housing, so he was the biggest landlord, as well. He

wanted to build three seventeen-story towers on Observer Highway. So we organized the neighborhood; we raised funds; we hired an attorney, and we fought it.

It's kind of a long story, but in the end, after wrangling in court over this project for some time, the proposals for Observer Highway, between Garden and Park and Park and Willow, were dropped. Those were dropped. So he only proposed to build the one building, and he dropped it from seventeen to eleven stories. So, in the end, it ended up not being as many buildings, and the one building that did end up being built wasn't as tall as originally proposed.

But that was the next experience I had, in terms of dealing with development issues. So that led to the next big battle.

CC: What was that?

RH: In 1979, Dan Tumpson, Steve Bush, and Sada Fretz, Annette Illing and Tom Illing, they were involved in several groups--there was a group called Save Hoboken from Over-Development. I think that was their group at that time--and they wanted to challenge the Port Authority proposal for the south waterfront. It was Dan Tumpson's idea to put it on the ballot, and subject it to a referendum. Because I was involved in these other development projects, they asked me to be part of it. I

was rather amazed that there was no one else--no other groups, no other people--in town who thought this was an objectionable project, because it clearly was. It was huge--a huge proposal, half of which would have been built out on Pier A and Pier C, and involved a thirty-story office tower on Pier A; half a million square feet of development on Pier C, residential--

CC: The Environment Committee wasn't coming out against that?

RH: Not early on.

So I joined up with them, and we created the Coalition for a Better Waterfront. We got it put on the ballot, we collected the necessary signatures and we put it on the ballot, and in July of 1990 we defeated the proposal. We actually defeated the agreement between the Port Authority and the City of Hoboken by twelve votes. The reason it was a close election was that the elected officials in Hoboken were telling people, "If you vote in favor of this project, it will lower your taxes." That's a very powerful argument to make, so they got a lot of support for that. But the number of people who came out to vote, in the middle of the summer, in a special election (no one was on the ballot, only a single issue) --we ended up getting as many people as typically voted in a mayoral race. We

were like, you know--a considerable effort in money and everything else was spent, to get people to turn out to vote.

Well, this really captured the imagination of people who lived in Hoboken. The reason we were successful was that we said it was out of scale with Hoboken; it would wall us off from our own waterfront--which should belong to us. So we won, and that set us off into wanting to create a positive vision for what could happen on Hoboken's waterfront. None of us really had an idea of what it should look like, despite the fact that I went to graduate school, and a lot of people were getting planning degrees. I still had no idea what to do.

So we started interviewing some planners, and some people who had volunteered to help were architects. They knew a New York City architect and planner by the name of Craig Whitaker, so they brought him over and we took a walk up Hoboken's waterfront.

At that time, nothing had been built on Hoboken's waterfront. This was still 1990. The piers were falling into the river; all the infrastructure on the water's edge was derelict and falling apart; you had all these bulkheads that were deteriorating. I just remember, in taking this tour, I was thinking, "How are you ever going to fix this? It just seems impossible." But the architects and this planner, Craig Whitaker, didn't seem to be fazed by any of that.

I remember it was late at night, and we stopped by Lady Jane's afterward, to talk about what could be done, and the proposal that had been put forth by the Port Authority of the city--I remember the conversation we had with Mr. Whitaker--we said, "Well, they plan to build this office building down on Pier A, then the residential development on Pier C, but they were going to build a public walkway, going around the building." He said, "Well, that will be private." We said, "No, no. It's going to be a public walk, going around the building. It's required by the state that it be public." He said, "No, that will be private." So we kept going back and forth.

Finally, he said, "Let me come over and do a presentation." He came back, and we invited people from the community to come and listen. He gave a slide lecture, and he talks about what makes for successful waterfronts. His definition of a successful waterfront is a public waterfront that is unquestionably public. He also gave a number of examples of failed waterfronts, and the failed waterfronts are what we've seen built along much of the Hudson River waterfront, on the Jersey side, where you have the public walkway, abutting public development, with no clear separation. Because there's no street between the two, you end up with the back doors of these buildings abutting the public walkway. So that's a built-in conflict.

He says, "The appropriate way to do it is to extend Hoboken's public street grid down to the waterfront; then that last street, at the waterfront-- you want it to be a narrow, pedestrian-friendly street." (We have the south waterfront, but we're still fighting for it up here, around Castle Point.) "The way you do it is you put that last street right at the water's edge. This way you're creating new, Hoboken-size blocks. So Newark, First, Second, Third and Fourth--they all come right down to the waterfront, then they connect with Sinatra Drive there, and you create a Hoboken-size block for new development."

The plan we ended up coming up with had a number of lots per block, so you'd end up with a series of buildings, similar to what you have in Hoboken. Obviously, the lots aren't going to be twenty-five feet wide--they'll be much wider--but, still, the idea was many buildings rather than one. That was the concept in our plan. But then, once you cross Sinatra Drive, everything on the river side of Sinatra Drive becomes a continuous waterfront park. That was the unifying theme of the plan that we came up with. We ended up hiring Craig Whitaker, and we got a small grant from the Fund for New Jersey, to pay him to do this. He worked with a whole team of volunteers. They were architects and engineers, mostly professional people, and they all worked together to come up with a plan for the Hoboken waterfront.

It started out as a two-dimensional plan, then it became a book that we published, called *The Plan for the Hoboken Waterfront*. Then we built an architectural model, which was twelve feet by four feet. If you take a look at the individual blocks--they went into great detail, replicating each church, even the gazebo in Church Square Park, so it was a very detailed model (which we still have, and we still show to people). It was a very effective tool, because there are a lot of people who can't understand a two-dimensional plan. When they see the model they understand it, and they understand the whole concept of a continuous park at water's edge--new Hoboken blocks at the waterfront, doing something on a scale that was appropriate for Hoboken. Our proposal was eight stories or less. Of course, those buildings kept growing. That was a harder thing to influence--the architecture and the height--and instead of mini-buildings, we ended up with single buildings filling up blocks. So you ended up with these big, monolithic structures.

So there's a lot left to be desired in terms of the quality of the development, but the concept of a continuous waterfront park has held up over these many years (it's almost twenty years now). So the opportunity to make that park continuous, for the entire mile and a half of Hoboken's waterfront, still exists. Much of it is already done. You've got Pier A Park; you've got the promenade, going up to Fourth

Street; Sinatra Park; Castle Point Park; and the park at Maxwell House (that's another story). Do you want to go into that?

RC: A little bit.

RH: Then you have the promenade at the shipyard, going all the way around, and eventually there will be a park along the Weehawken Cove. They're supposed to start building the walkway before too long, right there.

SIDE TWO

RC: Would you talk a little bit more about what makes a successful waterfront, and how that plays out in Hoboken? To date.

RH: Well, one of the key things is that when you extend the public street grid down to the waterfront--a typical Hoboken street really is a pedestrian-friendly street. It's narrow; usually there are cars parked on both sides; it's typically one-way. And because it's narrow, it forces traffic to slow down. Then, if you had some stop signs, people crossing the streets, and people on bicycles, all that stuff forces traffic to slow down. So you want to replicate that for your new streets on the waterfront.

Actually, we just walked along the waterfront with the new Director of Parking and Transportation, Ian Sacs. He's a transportation planner, and he understands all these issues. He understands what the dimensions of the lanes should be, and how you make a street at the waterfront that is friendly to pedestrians, cyclists and all. He believes very strongly in all that.

Anyway, when we did our plan twenty years ago, that was certainly part of it. We had a lot of arguments with people in the group early on who thought that streets were a bad idea. But we had a professional planner, and he's devoted his whole life to issues of urban design and what makes cities work--what makes waterfronts work. So he brought this intimate knowledge to us, and we took what he said very seriously. We followed his lead, and the interesting thing was--back in 1990 is when all the Jersey side of the Hudson River waterfront was being developed, in Jersey City, West New York, Edgewater; Weehawken came a little later. But, nevertheless, you had all these projects being built on the waterfront. The things that our planner had described to us, in a slide lecture, ended up being prophetic--the conflict between backdoor public walkway; putting the front door facing the waterfront; putting your good face on the waterfront--all these things came true, and that was because he has studied this, he understands it, and he brought

that intimate knowledge to the planning process that we underwent here in Hoboken.

So we did have a second referendum in 1992. What that was was an attempt by the city to reverse the results of the first referendum. What they did was they cut the project in half. They went from First to Third Street, I believe, and then they kept saying, "Well, it's a smaller project." Well, no, it's not a smaller project. You're only doing part of it. You're phasing it in.

So this time they were--they thought that in the first referendum we caught them off-guard, because the political establishment--their specialty has always been getting out the vote. They were absolutely stunned that we beat them in this referendum, in 1990, so their idea was, "Okay, we'll do another referendum. But this time we're going to spend some money, we're going to run a real campaign," and they thought they would beat us. But what we had going for us at that time was we had our book out, *A Plan for the Hoboken Waterfront*, we had our model, we had the plan itself. So we had something we could point to, we could show to people, as "This is a better way to do the waterfront. This is a real vision for Hoboken's waterfront."

So we campaigned on that. They outspent us ten to one. They spent about \$90,000 and we spent about \$10,000. (I know the numbers for elections. What they're spending now doesn't compare, but anyway, back then it seemed like a lot of

money.) And we won. We won by 350 votes or so. At that point they agreed, "Okay. We'll sit down. We'll work this out. We'll come up with a new plan for the south waterfront." They didn't want to do the whole waterfront. "We'll come out with a new plan for the south waterfront, and we'll get this thing settled, so we can get moving."

Now one interesting story is, when we had the first referendum--no, actually--the second referendum --in the first referendum we didn't have any political support. Essentially none. The entire city council, the mayor--they were all pretty much in favor of this project. Come the second referendum, we developed one ally, and that was a city council person by the name of Anthony Russo. So when we were campaigning, we would invite him to speak at our rallies; and, I must say, he had extraordinary political instincts. Even though the people we drew to our rallies were a very different type of person than is typically part of his political support, what he said was right-on. He knew exactly what to say, and he picked up a theme that was very effective in Hoboken--which was, he was against the Port Authority deal. The Port Authority, of course, was resented in town very deeply, because a lot of families had family members who had lost their jobs because the Port Authority had moved out of Hoboken and went to Port Newark and elsewhere.

So he tapped into a very good issue, and because we prevailed, that catapulted him into the mayor's race. He was running against our lawyer, Ira Karasick.

Now let me just back up a second. Before the first referendum, they challenged our right to have a referendum on this issue. Ira Karasick, again, was our attorney, and he argued the case in lower court and we lost. So we appealed to the appellate level, we won, and then that was appealed in the New Jersey Supreme Court, and we won. We got a dramatic decision. Ira was representing us, and did a fabulous job. This is an area of the law where he really excels, and we did really well.

After that time, he wanted to run for mayor, but he decided not to side with us during the second referendum; he sat on the fence. So it was a very interesting political--he might dispute my description of this, but this is my recollection of it. So you had Ira Karasick running against Anthony Russo, and we know what the outcome of that was. A big factor in that was that Russo picked the right side in the second referendum.

CC: And did that referendum change the state law?

RH: Yes. Afterwards, they got the state legislature to revise the initiative and referendum statute, so that it would not pertain to any kind of land-use issues.

CC: So that wouldn't happen again.

RH: That's correct.

RC: Interesting.

And the next step. It seems to be an ongoing one, of--

RH: Well, the Coalition for a Better Waterfront created a 501(c)(3) called the Fund for a Better Waterfront, and we have gotten funding from most of the major foundations in New Jersey. It's been a whole series of battles over the years. We've challenged the Shipyard Project, that originally wanted to put a supermarket at the north end of town. We thought that was not an appropriate use. So that was a long, drawn-out battle. There have been a series of other things proposed. There was a hockey arena for the train station.

RC: That was to be over the train station. That was something bizarre.

RH: There was a baseball museum on Pier C, I think, or Pier B. I forget which. They wanted to put the light rail along the waterfront. So there were a whole series of battles that ensued, and we, of course, wherever we felt our plan for the Hoboken waterfront, our concept for the Hoboken waterfront, was being challenged, and was going to be subverted in some way, we went to war over it. For instance, for the Shipyard Project, when they proposed a townhouse development on the Fifteenth Street pier, I believe it was--yes, Fifteenth or Sixteenth Street pier--we went, again, before the zoning board. We had our attorney with us, and we, I think, again, developed a very effective legal strategy. This time Ira Karasick was representing the developer, [laughs] and ultimately the developer ended up withdrawing the proposal. Of course, we were making the argument, "If you build this project on the pier, it will privatize the pier. And it will privatize that part of the waterfront, and that goes against the concept for a continuous public park at the water's edge."

In 2001 we got involved with the Maxwell House project, and their proposal for that site--the developers, Danny Gans and George Vallone, had a proposal that essentially sprawled over the entire site, including building out on the "earthen" peninsula and on the pier to the north. We objected to their original proposal, and they said, "Okay, we're willing to talk about it." So we did. We had a series of discussions with

them. Then at some point we brought over our planner (we worked with the same planner, Craig Whitaker, for these many years now, so we brought him over), and he started talking to them. There was a whole series of discussions about [how} their development plan could be reworked so it could be essentially the same number of units, but you continued the public waterfront park at that site. So you'd extend the public street grid, and everything on the river side of Sinatra Drive would be--an extended Sinatra Drive-- would be public park, and there would be a project that they could build, in accordance with the zoning, that was essentially the same number of units.

Then we brought in a land conservation specialist by the name of Andy Strauss. He talked to the developers about making a donation of the land for a public park, and in return being able to write this off as a 501(c)(3) charitable contribution. Land conservation deals are typically done this way.

So we brought him in. He used to work for [the]Trust for Public Land. Both Andy Strauss and Mr. Whitaker were superb negotiators, so we had ongoing talks for a number of months. The developers agreed to put a pot of money in escrow to pay for our experts, so that paid for our planner, our land conservation specialist, landscape architect, marine engineer, attorney, and we came up with a plan for that site. But at that time we had a new mayor coming into office--Dave Roberts, in July 2001--and at

the same time Steven Institute wanted to build a project at that site. They were getting quite a bit of cooperation from the mayor on that idea, of doing kind of a joint residential/public school/Stevens project for the Maxwell House site. Of course, they didn't own the property, so we never took that proposal very seriously.

But, politically, the developers were in a difficult situation. Of course, the bottom line, for them, was to get the project approved, so we actually ended up getting cut out of the deal. So we're no longer going to be a party to--we could no longer act as a land conservation organization, to accept the donation--which is what we wanted to do, originally. Instead, they decided to donate the land to the City of Hoboken--which they're supposed to do shortly. I guess it hasn't happened yet, but it's going to happen. It will be a public park--so we are getting the public park--but, as you know, from the way it looks now, it falls way short of the kind of standard that we had set in terms of the landscaping, the amount of green space. We would have built it to a standard equal to or better than what we have at the south waterfront.

So that didn't happen. It was a very difficult time for us, politically, because the new mayor, Mr. Roberts--although we'd always had a friendly relationship with him--he just refused to work with us, and I think that was typical for most groups, their experience. He just had a very insular

administration, not willing to engage with civic organizations or with the population at large. So we didn't have much success during those eight years, in terms of furthering progress on the waterfront.

But eventually Maxwell House Park opened up, and it is open space, which we're happy about. The other thing we had done--which has been going on now for eight years--is the Stevens property. That's been a big battle.

RC: Can you talk a little bit about that?

RH: I'm trying to think of how to summarize this [laughter] neatly.

RC: In four days or less.

RH: Eight years. It's been somewhat bitter. We were very critical of their plans. They had plans for Maxwell House. They had plans for Union Dry Dock. They wanted to put a big soccer field out there. They were going to put the Center for Maritime Systems, a 400-foot-long building, out on the river side of Sinatra Drive. So we objected to all of those plans, and also the parking garage. They had proposed to build a parking garage across the street from Sinatra Park, where the soccer field is. We said, "Well, the appropriate way to put a parking

garage on the waterfront is to build it so that it's wrapped in either residential, academic classroom--some kind of use--that will put a good face on the waterfront." If you look at the buildings on the south waterfront, between First and Second, Second and Third, and Third and Fourth, there's a huge parking garage on each of those blocks, but you hardly notice it from the street. You notice it, but it's not--when you're walking along the waterfront you really don't see it. What you see is ground-floor retail--which is what you want, because that provides life and activity at the waterfront--so what you want to do is replicate that same feel at the Stevens property.

The thing that that particular parcel, between Fifth Street and Sixth and Sinatra, is one of the most valuable parcels of land left on Hoboken's waterfront. Stevens' proposal there is under-utilizing that space. They're not capturing the value of that property in the way that they should. The other thing we've been trying to convince them to do is, on the other side of the street, where they have their parking and maintenance building, to create more open space there, in exchange for more development on the upland side of Sinatra Drive, on that parcel between Fifth and Sixth.

So we've actually engaged with them over a number of months, trying to convince them that this would be the best approach. They've been very resistant. A number of years ago it degenerated to the point where they hit us with a lawsuit, and

we spent five years in court. I'm not going to go into all the gory details, but it's what you call a SLAPP suit--strategic litigation against public participation. In other words, the purpose of the suit was to shut us down, and to prevent us from speaking out. Our legal team was Ira Karasick--this time representing us, because he actually had argued the landmark decision in the State of New Jersey, *LoBiondo v. Schwartz*; he represented Schwartz, and they won on the appellate level--Renée Steinhagen and Ed Lloyd--Renée is with the New Jersey Appleseed Public Interest Law Center, and Ed Lloyd is with the Columbia University Environmental Law Clinic.

So we had like a dream team representing us in court. We did pretty well in lower court; then it got appealed, and we spent a long time up in front of the Appellate Division. We got sent back down, and eventually we ended up settling rather than going to trial. It was a major disappointment that the court, in the end, did not decide in our favor. But, anyway, it ended up being settled in the end, so we finally managed to get rid of it. But that went on for like five years, in and out of court. If you were to look at the briefs, it would be like four feet high from the ground. Maybe more. [Laughs] I don't know. It just seemed like volumes and volumes of briefs and appendices. The amount of work that went into that case was just absolutely extraordinary.

So we're hoping that, at this point in time, with a new administration that we believe is going to be more receptive to the kind of ideas we've been espousing, that a lot of these things are now going to be possible, and that we can finally finish some of the key missing links in the waterfront park, and maybe go back and revisit some of the other parks of the waterfront park, where the landscaping is inadequate. There are a lot of things, in terms of design and landscaping, that can be greatly improved upon.

So we're hoping that now there will be an opportunity to do that, and I think, over time, we're going to see a tremendous realization of what Hoboken's waterfront could be.

CC: Are you involved with the Hoboken Cove development, or the park up there?

RH: To a degree. We're very interested-- not at 1600, but there's a piece of park that will go behind the walkway, between the bridge and the walkway, and we're very interested in that. We have been involved in some discussions over it. But the two parcels we're most focused on are the Stevens property and the Union Dry Dock property. Now you know, the Union Dry Dock--

CC: What's going on with Union Dry Dock?

RH: Well, Larry Bijou had a proposal for three twelve-story towers there. A couple weeks ago, he announced that he was withdrawing his proposal, because there was a lot of criticism of what he was planning to do there, and he was very sensitive to that.

CC: But he is legally bound to put some kind of walkway there.

RH: Yes, but he's backed out of the contract, so he's not going to do anything there.

RC: How do you maintain your energy to keep fighting, when so much is one battle after another?

RH: Well, the waterfront issue has been pretty easy to stay involved in because, as I mentioned before, you see the results of your work. You go down to the south waterfront, and it's so dramatically different than what we have in Jersey City, and Edgewater, and West New York. It's like night and day. So you have something to strive for, you see that it's possible, and you see that this is something that's going to benefit generations to come. I could be long gone, but the people who

come after will enjoy it and will benefit from it. In terms of being involved in public issues, issues that benefit the public - the park is designed in such a way that it is open to people from all walks of life. You go down there, and you, in fact, see the diverse set of people, from the guys who fish down there, to families who come and have parties on Pier A. It's just amazing to see that happen. It really has benefits even beyond Hoboken. People come to the skateboard park from suburban New Jersey, because they don't have anything like that there. They come to Hoboken because it's available down here.

So it's really a wonderful thing to work on, and you don't want to back away from that until it's done.

CC: Are there any other issues in Hoboken that grab you, besides what you still have to do on the waterfront?

RH: Well, I guess I was very concerned about having a city that's more responsive to the issues of the day. I think that's happening now. It's changed dramatically, politically, in a way I never imagined. It just seemed to happen so quickly. Of course, that's something I've followed very closely.

I tend to stay pretty focused on the issues where I feel I can be effective. You can very easily spread yourself too thin, and then you end up not doing much.

RC: Do you have any opinion on the New Jersey Transit proposal for the south of Hoboken?

RH: Well, again, it's terribly out-of-scale. Yes, they need to come up with a plan that makes sense for Hoboken. That clearly doesn't.

Let me just tell one other interesting little story. [Laughs] When we were working on the plan for the Hoboken waterfront, back in 1990, one of the people who volunteered was a landscape architect by the name of Cassandra Wilday. It turned out she was interested in doing the landscape plans for some of the parks when they came out for bid, but she never got the jobs. Two years after Anthony Russo got elected mayor, he was out campaigning for his people running for the ward council races, and his candidate in the sixth ward was Dave Roberts. So they were knocking on doors in the sixth ward, and they happened to knock on her door. At the time, she lived on Sixth and Bloomfield. She invited them in, they had a little chat, and toward the end Mayor Russo said, "If there's anything I can do for you, let me know." And she said, "Yes, by the way, I'm the lowest bidder on every park job in Hoboken. How come I never get the job?" He said, "Don't worry. The next job is yours."

So, the next job was Pier A Park. She teams up with Henry Arnold, who wrote the book on urban trees--an

outstanding landscape architect from Princeton, New Jersey--and they assembled a team of people together, and they designed Pier A Park. That's one of the reasons we have such an extraordinary design. It's not just a matter of making it a park. It's also a matter of--there aren't a lot of bells and whistles. It's a fairly simple design. But they used quality materials, like granite. They did the plantings right--lots of trees, lots of grass. You know, trees that are actually planted in the walkway. They come right out of the paving stones, the trees come out. They opened up the park around 1998 or 1999, I think, and you can see how quickly the trees have grown.

So it's really quite extraordinary. It's just very interesting that there's a political aspect to that, as well, that happened to work out very nicely.

CC: Did you have anything to do with the new park that's nearly open, that's out over the water?

RH: Pier C. No. Again, during that whole time of the Roberts administration, we really weren't included in the decision making for any of that. It will be one of the most expensive parks built anywhere, and the cost, of course, is building out over the river. Ninety-five percent of the cost is in the pilings and platform. If it were up to me, I would much rather have taken that \$20 million and used it to extend the

park further up the waterfront, if that would have been possible.

CC: Who paid for that?

RH: The Port Authority. Now, of course, the Port Authority did all the infra-structure investment at the south waterfront. They built the park, they built the streets, they did the sewer and electric. All that infra-structure, they provided for it. But there's a revenue stream off the development project that pays them back for that investment, so that's how it works. And there are some people in town who feel that it wasn't a good deal, but that's not my area of expertise. But that was the arrangement; that the Port Authority paid for that structure, and they get a revenue stream off the development, to reimburse them for that cost.

RC: Now who owns Pier A and the waterfront walkway? The city or the Port Authority?

RH: I don't know, precisely. There was some kind of a--

CC: Ninety-nine years?

RH: Yes, some sort of lease. I'm not exactly sure what the arrangement is. Is it a lease with the Port Authority? I don't know, but it's a public park. It's a public park.

RC: And a much-used one.

RH: That's right.

CC: Definitely.

RC: Before we close, are there any other stories that you'd like to share with us [laughter], providing insight into the way things work in town? Or, anything else you'd like to share?

RH: Well, in order to be involved in this kind of thing, inevitably, it involves conflict. From time to time you end up getting beat up, over taking a stand on something. That just comes with the territory. That's the way it works. I guess, in a sense, it's like being involved in politics; it can be a very bloody sport. It's the same thing if you're an advocate of one sort or another. You're going to bump heads with the powers that be, and it can get tough. So you've got to stick it out if you want to prevail, and I've certainly been willing to do that. But there are also a lot of really good people in Hoboken who

make this possible. They [the Hoboken Quality of Life Coalition] had the awards ceremony last week, and I managed to get, I think, the first award I've ever gotten since I was in camp, at the age of ten--or something like that.

Anyway, my response to that was that, in a way, it's unfair that individuals are given these awards, because none of this stuff happens without organization, without a board of directors who provide the kind of support you need. Without funders to provide money, to make it possible, foundations, individual contributions, it really is an effort that involves lots of people working together. In Hoboken, there is this tremendous interest in the good of the community. Particularly, I think, on the waterfront--we're close enough to the waterfront here that people think they have a vested interest in it. In Weehawken, people are up on top of the cliffs, so there's a certain separation there. Although they were very interested in what was going to happen on the waterfront, it wasn't the same as Hoboken, where, come referendum time, we had this massive outpouring of people.

So we're very fortunate in that respect, that people are very involved. It's very easy to get people to pay attention to these issues, and to support them; to make them successful.

RC: I'd like to thank you, not only for coming today and sharing your experiences with us, but even more

significantly, for *all* that you have done to make so much of Hoboken what it is today, especially the green parts. I think all of us are very, very grateful that you've fought the good fight for so long. Thank you.

CC: Thanks so much.