



ANNEX B: Interviewee Bios and Transcripts

ANNEX B-1: Interviewee Bios, listed in order of appearance in case study

ANNEX B-2: Interview Transcripts

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Gordon Davis, *former New York City Parks Commissioner* – Davis served as Parks Commissioner under Mayor Edward Koch. His efforts in this position contributed to the establishment of the Central Park Conservancy.

Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *founder of the Central Park Conservancy* – In addition to collaborating with the Parks Department and the City of New York to found the Central Park Conservancy, she was the first Central Park Administration. Today she is the president of the Foundation for Landscape Studies.

John Alschuler, *Emeritus Chair of Friends of the Highline* – Alschuler has dedicated his work to the revitalization and development of urban communities. In addition to serving as Board Chair at Friends of the Highline, he is chairman of HR&A Advisors, Inc. and is a member on the Board of Directors for the Center for an Urban Future.

Doug Blonsky, *CEO of Central Park Conservancy* Blonsky has been with the Central Park Conservancy since 1985. Since 2004, he has been President & CEO of Central Park Conservancy. He is also Central Park Administrator, appointed by the City in 1998 when the Conservancy formalized its partnership with the City of New York by signing the historic management contract.

Steven Cohen, *Executive Director of Columbia University's Earth Institute* Dr. Cohen has taught courses in public management, policy analysis, environmental policy, management innovation, and sustainability management. In 1982 Cohen developed, and until 2001, directed Columbia's Workshops in Applied Public Management and Applied Policy Analysis; bringing practical professional education into the center of Columbia's Public Administration curriculum.

Robert Garafola, *New York City Parks Commissioner* oversees more than 15 of the agency's central administrative divisions, including Budget, Personnel, Marketing and Special Events, Operations & Management Planning, and Revenue, which brings in over \$100 million yearly. Additionally, he directs the administration of the Parks Opportunity Program (POP)—one of the largest paid transitional employment programs in the country.

Lisa Switkin, *Associate Partner and Managing Director at James Corner Field Operations* As lead project designer and project manager of many of the practice's complex public realm projects, Lisa works in close tandem with James Corner and others in the office to ensure a high level of personal attention to detail and design quality. Lisa is currently overseeing the planning and design for a number of high profile New York City projects including Section 3 of the High Line; the South Street Seaport redevelopment and the Domino Sugar Waterfront with SHoP architects; and the Greenpoint Landing waterfront site with Handel Architects.

ANNEX B-2: Interview Transcripts**Interview with Gordon Davis on February 12, 2014 in New York City****Interviewers: Adam Stepan and Ted Bowen**

GORDON DAVIS: My name is Gordon Davis. And from 1978 to 1983, roughly five and a quarter years, I was the parks commissioner of New York City. And I was one of the people who helped create the Central Park Conservancy.

STEPAN: I just want to talk about, what was the state of Central Park in the late '70s? If you went there, what did you see. What was handed to you when you took over that job?

DAVIS: Well the city was just emerging from what in effect was bankruptcy. It wasn't called bankruptcy. It was called a fiscal crisis. And all city services had been slashed dramatically, and none more than parks. And the reason was in part because for every dollar you cut in funding in parks, you saved a dollar of city tax levy money. Whereas you cut a dollar in the welfare program, you only save maybe thirty cents. So the parks maintenance structure and operating structure was pretty badly savaged, was sort of, like, Napoleon's army coming back from Russia, you know, that's sort of the mental and physical state they were in. Central Park was not in good shape. It varied from place to place. But basically it had very low levels of staffing, almost no capital budget to speak of at all or improvements. It had, you know, most people forget that Central Park is manmade. And like any piece of manmade infrastructure, it requires constant maintenance and constant capital improvements and restorations, and so on, so forth. And none of that had been going on for maybe basically a decade. And together with that, before I was commissioner, there'd been five commissioners in five years going back to the last Lindsay commissioner and the four [Beame?] commissioners, Beame having been the mayor before Ed Koch. And in the course of that turnover, in the midst of this financial crisis where the city was bankrupt and the Parks Department was really bankrupt, the policies of running Central Park contributed to its condition. So how many concerts there were and where they were, enforcement of any rules, on and on and on, this came home to me in a very telling way because I live across the street from the Park at 84th Street. And so before I was the commissioner, I spent lots of time in Central Park. And in the summer of 1977, in the middle of the mayoral election before Ed Koch became mayor, there was an event on the literary walk, which is at the southern end and one of the most dramatic pieces of design in Central Park where the literary walk terminates in the, in effect, in Bethesda Fountain, most architectural centerpiece of the Park. So a long literary walk. The city had given a permit for a perfectly well meaning group called the Taste of the Big Apple to hold a food fair on a Saturday and Sunday in the late spring on literary walk. So literary walk from, was lined on both sides with restaurant booths and food booths. And it was a total disaster in terms of the Park. It was packed with people and garbage was everywhere. And there was no lawn on either side of the literary walk at that time. And so there was garbage. There was dust. And I was particularly appalled because I was there with my daughter who was about three. And she was coughing and it was an awful experience. But it was typical of what had happened in terms of managing Central Park, which is, any real sense of management had stopped. So when I got to the Parks Department, I couldn't wait. Here I am the parks commissioner and I couldn't wait for the big apple, the Taste of the Big Apple people to come back to renew the permit for 1978. And they did and I told them no. And they said, well, that's an outrage. You must renew it. You know? We've got all this investment and blah, blah, blah. I said, I'm not renewing it. I went to that event. It was a disaster. They said, well, we're going to go to the

mayor. And I said, good, here's his number. You go to the mayor. That was the last I heard. Well, the New York Times got the story and put it on their front page, major change in park policy and blah, blah, blah. And I happened to be in City Hall the day the Times story appeared on the front page. And the mayor walked by and said, oh, nice story. Next time, maybe you ought to ask me first before you do that. What made Ed Koch a great mayor to work for was that he gave you a lot of latitude and a lot of independence and a lot of rope. And you could either hang yourself or do good things, or a little bit of both, which I did. Anyway. The Park was not in great shape. You know, there's some stories about it that exaggerate how bad it was. I remember I was at a dinner party with some well to do people on Sutton Place in my first year in the Parks, when I was in the Parks Department. And I was sitting next to the lady. She's, oh, you're the Parks [UNINTELLIGIBLE PHRASE]. Oh, she said, Central Park is horrible, isn't it? And I said, well, I said, when was the last time you were there? She said, ten years ago. So there was a mythology about how bad it was. It was in bad shape. Mythology made it worse, Johnny Carson every night telling jokes about crime in Central Park and people, this woman thought it was rampant with crime and so on and so forth. But as a physical piece of infrastructure, as a managed piece of public space, it was pretty much, it was a mess.

STEPAN: And when the idea, let's talk a little bit, how the idea of the Conservancy came together. In a way, it was a radical, it turned out to be, as a group... At the time, did you imagine growing to that? Did it seem like a radical idea at the time? Or did it seem like just a solution to a problem?

DAVIS: Radical, yeah. We, let me make clear who we is, because I don't want to sound like it's a royal we.

DAVIS: There are a lot of people who were involved in creating the Central Park Conservancy, the first board meeting of which was in December of 1980. I got to the Parks Department in 1978. In my mind was this experience of something like the big apple, the big, Taste of the Big Apple, so on and so forth. And one of the things that became apparent to me very quickly, because the parks commissioner's office is in Central Park. It's the Arsenal Building in front of the Central Park Zoo. I could spend my entire time doing nothing but worrying about Central Park, trying to make it better, trying to correct problems. And I had parks in all five boroughs that I had to worry about. They were all in bad shape. And I had to find some way to balance my time... So two people came to see me, George Soros and Richard Gilder. And later on, I learned that George Soros was the richest man in the world. I didn't know at the time. Maybe he wasn't the richest man in the world. He's one of the richest men in the world. And they had created something called the Central Park Community Fund, which they basically were funding out of their own pockets, which was an organization dedicated to sort of maintenance, better maintenance in Central Park. And they had commissioned a study by a guy named Savas at Columbia, E.E. [sic] Savas at Columbia. It was a Columbia professor. He was a Columbia professor. And one of the conclusions of the study was that Central Park was being managed by 12 foremen in 12 different districts. Nobody was in charge. And somebody should be in charge. One person should be in charge, meaning one administrative structure. So I, they were two of the first people came to see me. I didn't know them from Adam. And I read the report. It had some data in it that was interesting. It was an interesting idea. I'm trying to figure out how the hell I'm going to deal with Central Park and the other 2,000, 3,000 parks in the city system. And I said, well, if I try to do something like that, will you help fund creating the office to do it? And they said they would. So my first instinct about all this was just a sort of survival instinct. I've got to find a way to deal with Central Park. These two very well to do guys come in. They got a proposal. It sounds, it makes a lot of sense. There's a lot of detail in the study that was done. So I decide maybe we should try this administrator idea, creating one person in charge of the Park. Well, they pretty much knew who they

wanted that person to be. But I had a different idea in mind, because by then, I had met somebody named Betsy Barlow. And Betsy was head of the Central Park taskforce. And she brought to, which was essentially an educational organization in the Park. But she brought a certain intimacy with the ecology of the Park, with sort of a broader understanding of public spaces that I appreciated. And I decided to create a Central Park administrator's office. And I decided to make Betsy the head of it. She said at the time, me, the head of Central Park? She said, well, where's my office? I said, I have no idea. She said, well, how big is the budget? I said, there isn't any budget. You're going to have to help raise the budget. She said, well, what are my responsibilities? I said, we have to figure that out, too. So it was totally ad hoc, which is to say, I had a study that said you should do this and there's a structure that ran the park or didn't run it. And I picked Betsy Barlow to be the first Central Park administrator. I got the mayor to come up to Central Park. We announced her appointment. We did a photo op around the sea lion pool. The next day, I said, well, go figure out what the job is. She said, oh, go figure out what the job is? Said, yeah, go. Well, what that really meant was then a, maybe a battle is the wrong word. But the two of us trying to impose on a structure that had been created by Robert Moses of how parks, the park system worked, not just Central Park, with sort of a military structure that went from, up through foremen to supervisors. So we're going to try to impose on that structure in Central Park a new kind of structure that we had not defined beforehand. But I decided, having been in the Parks Department now a year, and realizing that you don't get anything done unless you just, if you wait to study it more, you'll never get, so I just said, let's do it. And Betsy was appointed. And we began together in this very ad hoc way, trying to figure out what it meant to run Central Park and to have an administrator of Central Park in terms of resources, in terms of chain, lines of command, in terms of authority. Well, we made a lot of mistakes. She made a doozy. She almost got fired as a result of it, but she didn't. She went in the Rambles and started thinning the underbrush and the overgrowth in the Rambles. Well to her, as a horticultural expert, it was overgrown and needed pruning. To the birdwatchers, it was a feast for birds to come and they were attracted by all that. So when they found out that Betsy was pruning all the stuff, they went berserk. And it ended up being a front page story in the New York Times, Betsy Barlow destroyed the Rambles, the birdwatcher. Well, it was those kind of eggshells we began to crack and step on, not the least of which was the Park's own internal structure. So that was the beginning. That was sort of the first step. And by the way, what happened in Central Park for me then became a model for other parks. This is before we got to the public/private partnership thing, because what I began to learn in an institution that was battered like the Parks Department, a government institution with a, had a history of a bureaucracy created by a guy, by Robert Moses, I learned that there was something not quite magical but very dramatic that began to happen when you decentralized authority. Instead of everything having to come to the commissioner, you start pushing it down and creating people in charge of pieces of it who have a sense of their own, the breadth of authority you're willing [to give them?], how much you're willing to delegate to them. You begin to have more efficient things begin to happen, more innovation. So Central Park for me was a test case for that. Eventually I did the same thing in Prospect Park. I did the same thing by setting up a borough commissioner structure for Manhattan, Queens, the Bronx, Staten, so it became, Bryant Park was another example. So this little administrator's office and what we were trying to do in Central Park, for me became a test of how better to run the Parks Department. I put all the golf courses which has been run, 13 golf courses in the New York City park system, all of which had been run by the Parks Department. By the time I left, they'd all been bid out to concessionaires to operate. The Central Park Zoo, the Parks Department ran three zoos. By the time I left, the running of the three zoos had been turned over to what was then the New York Zoological Society, people who ran the Bronx Zoo. So Central Park, before you got to the private/public partnership thing, for me was an experiment in how to delegate and decentralize the administration of this battered city institution.

STEPAN: Wonderful. The fact that you were creating a model that later on has been seen by others as a model obviously

DAVIS: I didn't know it was a model. I was just trying to run, keep ahead of the wolves chomping at my feet. I was trying to find a way not to spend every waking minute worrying about Central Park. But as it began to evolve, and it happened, began to happen very quickly, it became clear to me that there was something about delegation and creating different structure, the Parks Department that was a better way to run an institution that, a bureaucracy that had less money than it ever had before. See, I was trying to figure out how you do innovative things with less money. I mean, that was the, Ed Koch's direction to his new commissioners was, do more with less. Give me a break. I mean, this place was a battered, the workforce was battered. But I began to find out, working with Betsy, that this had that, in any event. So that was step one, unleashing Betsy on Central Park, which there were good days. There were bad days. In the course of that, we were very aware that Central Park had the ability to attract private support. It had attracted in the past the Bow Bridge. One of the first people I ever met with when I [came?] commissioner was Brooke Astor who came in to my office to see me. I couldn't say no. I wanted to meet Brooke Astor. And her first words to me were, my god have you seen the gorillas? I didn't know what she was talking about. She was talking about the dingy conditions of Central Park Zoo. She had given money in the past to Central Park. Others had given money to Central Park. The Bow Bridge was an example of philanthropy. The rebuilding of the Bow Bridge was an example of philanthropy that had taken place in fairly dark days of, so we knew, Betsy and I knew. And Betsy was probably more attuned to it than I was, that there was the possibility of harnessing the kind of financial support, private financial support that things like the Metropolitan Museum had. Now doing it for a public park was, nobody had ever done that before in New York. How do you do that? Well, there'd been these dribs and drabs. So we began to think very self consciously about what that meant. And the idea of a board that would allow you to bring private individuals who were civic leaders and people of some means, bring them to, into a structure where they would be dedicated to helping Central Park, it began to slowly germinate. Very deeply concerned about the impression that you're turning the Park over to a bunch of rich people, very concerned about how much power the structure might have. So no, you talk about the agreements that the Conservancy assigned in more recent years specifically did not want to do that, did not want to go too far. It was like making Betsy the administrator without either one of us knowing what the job was. The idea of the Conservancy was to create the idea of private resources being matched with public issues, but not to go too fast, too far, because you knew there would be a counter. So we didn't have some big, elaborate document. We didn't try, we, somebody drafted one, and we quickly got rid of it. After some debate about the viability of, you know, it just, I was very uncomfortable with trying to look like [we're turning?] Central Park. So we went about trying to create the structure, beginning with a board. And to begin with a board, we had to have a chairman. This is, again, part of who was involved in it. So we went around and decided we wanted a chairman who was a business leader. And the first person we went to see was Andrew Heiskell who was then head of Time Life, subsequently became chairman of the Library. And Andrew Heiskell was bigger than life. He was married to the Sulzberger. And he said, no, he had other things he was going to do, would be announced later that month. And what was announced was he was coming chair of the Public Library. He was retiring. He was going to become chairman of the Public [Library?], which was its own renovation job, to say the least. But I never [gotten?]. He said to, he yelled out to his assistant, I never heard this before, said, Dorothy, whatever her name was, bring me in my A and B list. I don't know what an A and B. He had everybody he knew categorized, list, A, B, C, D, you know? So he got out his A list. And he started saying, well, let's see who's on the A list who might be a good candidate to talk. He started giving us ideas of who to talk to from his A list. And I said, hmm, maybe I should get an A list. I don't have one to this day. So we saw him. He said no. We then saw, what was his name, Solomon. Billy Solomon? I can't remember his name, major investment banking type, was

retiring. We asked. No. We met with him at the Four Seasons. [I remember?] oh, the Four Seasons, I was feeling really important, right? He said, no, he didn't want to take it on. We met with a guy was head of, we asked Howard Clark who was the retiring CEO of American Express. He has a son later on, another Howard Clark, Jr. No, I don't think. We went through all these CEO and Wall Street guys. And they, because I knew and Betsy understood that if you're going to create a board that works, you've got to find somebody who comes from that world who makes a commitment, had to be a little bit crazy and adventuresome, make that kind of commitment. So we couldn't find anybody. And it was particularly funny because Betsy went off in her fashion and organized the first fundraiser for the Conservancy. Well, the Conservancy didn't exist. She had invitations printed. It was a little fundraiser at Hirschl & Adler Gallery, where there was a show, pictures of Central Park. And she had all these invitations printed that said, Central Park Conservancy, blah, blah, blah. I said, Betsy, it doesn't exist yet. There's no board. There's no chairman. She said, well, can't I use the invitations anyway? I said, no, you can't use the invitations. We can't send invitations for an organization that doesn't exist. So we had a struggle. We could not find the chair. And the chair clearly was the key to the board. And then one day Betsy walked to my office in early 1980, spring of 1980 and said, I want you to meet somebody. Bunch of people came to my office. I said, she said, this is Elizabeth and William Beinecke. I said, Elizabeth and William Beinecke. I said, you have anything to do with the rare books library at Yale, which was the Beinecke Library. He said, oh, yes. I said, oh, well, come in. I didn't know him from Adam. And so here was the story. Bill Beinecke, who was one of the great heroes of Central Park, and one of the most modest of great heroes was walking through the Park with his family. He had just retired as chairman and CEO of S&H Green Stamps, I guess it was. They were moving back to New York. They're walking through the Park. They're so thrilled by some of the modest improvements we had made pre Conservancy. We'd redone the sheet metal. And I wanted to do the sheet metal, and want, people thought I was crazy. I wanted to do all 16 acres at once. I said, we need a symbol. We need something to show people we are not dead here, that we're alive, that we're moving forward. So we did it all at once. I crossed my fingers it wouldn't turn brown. In fact, three weeks later, after it was done, it did turn brown. I was going to slit my wrists, but the guy, the horticultural guy said, no, no, it'll come back. It'll come back. And a week later, it came back, it was green again. In any event, so there had been some of the [Derry?], the beginning of the work on the Belvedere Castle, the complete re sodding the sheet metal. So the Beineckes were walking through Central Park and seeing some evidence that something was changing. By then, I had started somebody called the Ranger Program, the first New York City Rangers. And they had walked into Betsy's office. They came to the Arsenal Building and said, who's in charge of Central Park? Well now there was somebody in charge, in theory. So they walk into Betsy's office to say, what can we do to help? And she said the same thing I said: did you say your name was Beinecke? He said, yes, Beinecke. Oh wow, let's go meet the commissioner. So Bill Beinecke came in and we immediately knew what we wanted him to do. We didn't spring it on him right away, but we said, oh, there's lots you can do. And within a couple of weeks, maybe it was a month, it was like proposing, you know, same way I asked Betsy [to be?], it was sort of like you had the feeling we're proposing them. Well Bill, there's something we'd really like you to do. We want to create this thing called the Central Park Conservancy. It needs a board. [We found out?], the board needs a chairman. And if you don't have a chairman, you can't get the board, particularly if you're trying to attract people from the business world for example, people who are philanthropic in a very, with the large institutions. Little Betsy and little Gordon didn't have that kind of reputation in New York. And damn if he didn't bite. I was stunned. He said, wow. And he's a gruff kind of guy. He's a, he said, well, that's a very interesting idea. I might be interested in doing that. I mean, I could not believe it. I could not believe it. We had exactly what we were looking for, a CEO who just retired who had moved, was living right across the street from Central Park whose reputation and family reputation ranged from the Beinecke Rare Books Library to other projects the Beineckes had done. And so we explained to him where we were and the kind of structure we're talking about. And he said, is the

mayor involved? I said, the mayor is involved. I kept him briefed all the way through. He appointed Betsy, had the mayor appoint Betsy the administrator. Somebody said, why didn't you appoint? I said, no, I want the mayor involved. He said, well, I want to go talk to the mayor [about it?]. I said, well, good. So he went off to see the mayor. And the mayor both wooed him and gave him comfort that for every, if money, if he helped raise money for Central Park, the city wouldn't withdraw money, wouldn't reduce its contribution to the Park. He was very, very concerned that he'd raise private money, help to raise private money, and then the city would just take away some of the public money. So the mayor assured him of that. And there was a letter. I don't have the copy of the letter. But there was a letter in which that was said to Bill Beinecke. So he came back from meeting with the mayor. And neither or I were in the meeting. He [wanted to alone?]. And he said, I'll do it. Well, I, and one of the first things that happened [to me?], all those people we went to see, he started calling them up. And they all agreed to join the board, people who wouldn't give us the time of day. All of a sudden, Howard Clark joined the board and it went, we went right down the list of people we'd gone to see. And one after another, they all, these, so we had to create a board. Beinecke was bringing the businesspeople, what we couldn't get near. There were the people who were already on Central Park community [board?], Central Park, what was it, the fund, the one that Gilder and Soros ran. We had to get rid of some institutions and merge them in. There was a lot of infighting in Central Park. So the Conservancy had to somehow end the infighting and create one institution that everybody was committed to. And so the Central Park Community Fund board had to be merged with the taskforce board that the, and had to be merged with people, the kind of people Bill Beinecke was bringing to the table. Also you had to have public representation. And to this day, I think there are five people appointed by the mayor. You had to have a lot of diversity, very, very important. So we, the three of us, working with the mayor's office, put together this board. And it had its first meeting in December of 1980. And we were off and running.

DAVIS: Before we go on the next topic--

STEPAN: Yes?

DAVIS: I want to stop a moment, repeat the names of some of these people who were involved...because I want to make clear that what created the Central Park Conservancy was not any one person.

DAVIS: It was a variety of people from different backgrounds. I'm African American, grew up on the south side of Chicago. I had no experience with wealth. My family was an academic.

STEPAN: Tell me, in terms of, it wasn't just one person.

DAVIS: It wasn't just one person. It was, I was the parks commissioner. Sort of surprise to me that I was, appointed by Ed Koch who didn't have high regard for people of great wealth. He gained regard for them later on. I'm an African American from the south side of Chicago. Betsy came from some, I guess prominent [family?] in Texas. I don't know. Soros was from Hungary. I didn't know where Soros was from. I didn't quite get along. It was a big mistake, because he had more money than I ever understood, and I've been trying to make up for it ever since. Bill Beinecke. So it was quite a collection of people. And those are just some of the people that were involved. We put together this board. The first meeting was December of '80. And we were off and running, and running is maybe not quite, it felt like that we were moving very quickly. We were trying to establish some visible projects. We're trying to create a credibility. We're trying to, and I resigned in April of 1983. The first Central Park Conservancy lunch had been under the [Derry?], the rebuilt Derry. And maybe it was 120 people. And maybe that was 1981. The

Central Park Conservancy lunch in 1983, a month after I resigned, was at Tavern on the Green. And every room was full of people. There were 800 people. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe they gave me the worst table in that place either, but that's another story. You know, [they did?]. I said, what am I doing sitting here? Eight hundred people, place was, and I said, this is working. I knew then. I knew before it was working, but then I really knew, because you could see it was the right crowd to raise money. But more importantly, the substance was working. There was a sense of the Park. It wasn't just about picking up the garbage. It wasn't just about fixing the historic feature. It was about systematically rebuilding Central Park. And that's a hell of a thing to sort of imagine you're going to do with a brand new organization working arm in arm with the Parks Department. But in 1981, I brought a copy with me. And I won't read it directly. I turned down Christo, who wanted to do The Gates project in Central Park. I love The Gates project, but it was the wrong time, because the Park, we didn't need something diverting attention from the job of rebuilding Central Park. So I wrote a big long report about saying, wrong time, wrong place, so on and so forth. When it came back under Bloomberg, I endorsed it. That was great. And in that report, I said something just like that. I said, we're not just about fixing a fountain here and picking up some paper. We are about systematically rebuilding Central Park over the next decade. And then I resigned. A year later I said, now somebody else can fulfill that promise. But I knew by '81, '82, almost from the beginning, I knew it was going to work. And I knew that it would have the capacity and the stamina, the willpower to literally rebuild Central Park. And that was all intuitive. One of the things, one of the key things about the Central Park Conservancy was to make sure you set up a structure where every time there was a new mayor, you didn't have a change in who was running. It had a continuity about it. Had a stability about it. You know, I used to say that, when I was at the Parks Department, if I ever die, just stuff me, put me in the chair. Don't tell people I'm dead. I don't have to do anything. I'd just be there, a dead body, because the thing the Parks Department most missed during those years of disaster was a sense of continuity and leadership. Central Park Conservancy began to provide that continuity and leadership. And with Betsy and Bill Beinecke and the board, and the others who were recruited to the effort, there was this sense that this is about rebuilding Central Park. And so it was.

STEPAN: This is all great. I think we have time for two last questions. I think we've really done a great job of capturing this special moment. One is, you are there at the beginning. And now you're currently a member of the board.

DAVIS: I am.

STEPAN: When you look at the Conservancy now, when you look at it being visited from people all around the world, and when you look at the fact that you're setting up an institute to help replicate this model, and when you look at, say, the '97 or whenever, when it was formalized in the contract, do you ever imagine what you started back then would, are you surprised? When you look at it now

DAVIS: It's exactly what I imagined.

STEPAN: Want to rephrase in your response, my question. When I look at it now--

DAVIS: It's exactly what I hoped it would be. It's exactly what I envisioned. There's some pieces that are not exactly the way I'd like them. But to create an institution with continuity, that could bring resources to bear on one of the greatest public spaces in America that would, and that would meld a private/public, and where the private was always subject to the public, it wasn't, sort of we could put a fence up around the Park or something like that. But, yes. When I wrote the [Christo?] report and said, we're going to

rebuild the Park, people said, what are you talking about? What are you smoking? Well. But I knew that this institution, the baby institution could be that. And that's exactly what I had hoped it would be. Now I bet a lot of marbles on this because what I had learned, I mentioned earlier, which is this same structure, some involving private/public, but some just public, of decentralizing the administration and the care and feeding of New York City parks was a strategy that became clear to me was, would work throughout the park system. So within a year and a half, I had appointed Tupper Thomas to be head of Prospect Park. And she went off and created the Prospect Park Alliance. I had decentralized the administration of each of the boroughs in the Parks Department. I was in negotiation to, in effect, turn over the Central Park Zoo to Zoological Society. I was working with the new leadership at the Library about Bryant Park. I knew this was the right way to do it. And Central Park was the model.

STEPAN: So I guess one last question I want [to do?]. There's been a recent obviously change administration. There's a recent, people looking at how the model... People are also looking at some of the West Side, what's it? The West Side

BOWEN: Hudson River Park.

STEPAN: Hudson River Park which people say, well here's an example why this model sometimes doesn't work. They run out of money. So I guess what I would say, what question would be, there's also a question of equity. People are also saying, well, that's all very well for wealthy people in the southern part of the Park. Now I know that from the get go, there was a real decision on your part to involve people from the community in Harlem and to

DAVIS: One of the great achievements of the Central Park Conservancy is the north end of the Park. When I was there, it was winos. It was drug addicts. It was not a nice place to go. You go there today, in the spring, it's unbelievable. Anyway. It's like Bryant Park. But I'm sorry. Interrupted.

STEPAN: No, no. I guess I want to talk a little bit about

DAVIS: All the things you're talking about, look, every institution that's conscious of what it's trying to do, particularly public institutions...that constantly have to go through a course correction analysis, constantly have to think about their mission, think about their goals in a very self-conscious way to make sure they're true to their original purposes, that they don't, you know, everybody has an ego. Everybody wants to be the king. Everybody, you know, when you do something well, and, whether it's being a lawyer or being, you know, begins to go to your head a little bit. So you constantly have to, you have to be self-conscious about what you're doing and how you're doing it. I think, so the fact that there's a new mayor whose, one of his principle themes has been the lack of equity in our society. You're goddamned right it's, it is the issue of our time. It didn't take Bill de Blasio to teach the lesson; Barack Obama has been trying to teach that lesson. Every study done about American society, the last 10, 15 years has been documenting the increasing gap in income and income disparity in our society. Well, what is more important? There are no places more important in a society like New York City than its public space to have to be responsive to that concern. By definition, a park well run and well maintained and open to all is responsive to that concern. Some of the paraphernalia can mislead people. But you take a Central Park and you look who uses the Park, first take out the tourists which overwhelm everything in New York now. But if you take out the tourists, just the people who live in New York, one of the great achievements of Central Park, or Prospect Park, of all great parks is people of different backgrounds, different economic levels, different ethnic levels, ethnic backgrounds, different interests, they come to the Park and the

Park's run well, they, as they say, all get along. They band together as roller skaters or as picnickers or as horticulturalists, or whatever. But something magical going to happen in a well run park that addresses the issue, if you will, of disparity in resources among our citizens in a very positive way when it's run well. Now that doesn't mean that sometimes people can make mistakes and send the wrong signals or whatever. But ultimately, the test of Prospect Park, and I was just at Prospect Park two weeks ago. The new skating rink there is astounding. And the diversity, knock your socks off, I mean, with any tension, no tension, just, that's the way the Central Park works. If you want to know, you can say all kinds of things about things that have gone wrong in certain way [and all that?]. But if you go to the Highline on the weekend, if you go to Central Park or Prospect Park or River Side Park or Coney Island, it goes on and on and on. If it's done well, you'll see a diversity in terms of ethnicity and income that is critical to the sense of democracy in our society. It's the great achievement of Central Park. Doesn't mean you have to be, you don't have to be careful about perception. You always have to be attentive to the public perception because it is a public space. This is not a museum you can lock the doors on, although you're not supposed to go in after 1:00. But it's not that kind of venue. It's a venue that is open to all, all the time.

[END]

Interview with Elizabeth Barlow Rogers on February 12, 2014 in New York City

Interviewers: Adam Stepan and Ted Bowen

ROGERS: Yes, I'm Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, and I am one of the founders of the Central Park Conservancy.

STEPAN: And what was, coming to New York in the '60s and seeing perhaps what happened to the Central Park, what happened from the time you arrived in '64 to the mid 70s?

ROGERS: The '60s were a really interesting time. Maybe you don't remember the Beatles, and there was a wonderful spirit in the air. And the '60s, though, were not kind to Central Park. The happenings, the be ins, the love ins, all the activities completely destroyed the grass. The management was demoralized. There was very little work being done by the park department, even though there were 200 employees in Central Park. It was just completely a mess, and also, so it's two things, mismanagement, management, we'll talk about that later, and also the fact that the culture simply was a celebratory in which anything goes.

STEPAN: And so just to follow up on that, what sort of things happened in Central Park. Central Park had a big role in the '60s and the be ins. What sort of, can you give some concrete examples that you remember?

ROGERS: Oh, gosh. Well, there was the Hari Krishnas, remember the Hari Krishnas? I remember there was something at the band shell. And there was a lot of stuff going on. And Vietnam was going on. Don't forget that. And the Wolman Rink, there was an entrepreneur named Ron Delsner, and he was given a permit to come into the park, and again, very little supervision of this, the Wolman concerts, the Wolman Rink became the site of summer concerts. These were rock concerts. And it attracted a lot of people. And so there was a lot of beer drinking on the slopes. I think it was supported by Rheingold Beer, but it was a beer company that supported. It was Rheingold, I think. And so the slopes were completely eroded. There was just no grass. And so those were the kinds of events that were going on, unregulated events, permitted but unregulated.

STEPAN: And I also know that there was fiscal, a huge fiscal crisis in the '70s in New York City that also had a big impact. What kind of state was Central Park in by the last '70s? What would you see walking around Central Park?

ROGERS: By '75, when I became the director of a small organization called the Central Park Task Force, and there was another organization with my friend Dick Gilder and George Soros, who were talking about the management, and hired a Columbia professor named Ed Savos. And the Savos report shows how mismanaged the park is. And so '75, I have the Central Park Task Force. And we are talking about the physical condition of the park and the need for, let's get the term straight, management and restoration plan. Don't call it a master plan. Put the word management plan. It's more of a mouthful. People always say master plan. We wanted to have a management and restoration plan that considered the whole of the park. But then there was very little money back in the '70s. So I would call the Central Park Task Force holding a candle in the darkness, and I had friends who were citizens. I had Richard Gilder and the Central Park Community Fund. But this would not have gone very far if Ed Koch had not

been elected mayor, and if he had not appointed Gordon Davis as his first park commissioner. So it was really Gordon seeing what Pollyanna was doing there in the basement of the arsenal. Previous commissioners had tried to get rid of this and tried to take the money, which was being given by the Astor Foundation, Mrs. Brooke Astor, and take the grant away. Mrs. Astor came into the park, this is the Beam Administration, with her pearls and gloves, and set down at the conference table, and I still remember the commissioner then was someone named Marty Len. You only had superannuated civil servants at that time who were going in and accepting the sort of revolving door commissionership. No one wanted it in the fiscal crisis. Everything was so bad. And Mrs. Astor said, he said, you mean you want her to control the money. So small amount that it was, less than \$100,000, I was able to hire an environmentalist as an educator, and a horticulturist to help with our summer intern program. We had summer interns who were horticulturally trained young people. Most of them were horticulturally trained. Some were just kids. But we were able to begin to do some restoration projects.

STEPAN: That would be the beginnings of things. And I know that there was also, people always cite, I guess it was an op ed piece, and I'm sorry, I'm a little foggy on the dates, but I know that you wrote a piece that was a call to arms that was very famous that motivated a lot. What motivated you to write that piece, and what was the impact when it came out?

ROGERS: Well, I'm a writer. I mean, I write. And I had written books, and so the motivation, if you go back to motivation, I'd written my first book is called the Forests and Wetlands of New York City, and I wrote that out of my experience with the civic group, the park association, which got me around to Jamaica Bay, Pelham Bay and Wood Hill, all these perimeter natural areas of the city. And then I wrote a book on Olmstead. So that's when I'd realize the genius of the park design. I don't think I answered the rest of your questions.

STEPAN: Well, can you talk a bit about Gordon Davis and his, how important was it, when you, when the idea of the Conservancy, as a conservancy, was put forth, I'm sure there was some people in City Hall who were very resistant to that idea. How was he initially seen by people in the government?

ROGERS: Remember, no, Gordon had been elected, no Gordon had been appointed by Ed Koch. So there was a sea change going on at City Hall prior to that. Parks was a traditional dumping ground for political hacks, because patronage, you could just send somebody to Park, and somebody was a mistress of somebody down in City Hall, send her to Parks and give her a job. This was the way in which the park was managed. When Gordon came, he began to ship out some of the dead wood and began slowly to build up an administration. And here is the really important point. This is important. That Gordon understood that unless you could decentralize the administration, and have people responsible for certain parts of the, as Henry Stern called it, the Emerald Empire, the park system, that the centralized management was what was really broken. And so by appointing the administrator on the first part of the decentralized management, where there's somebody accountable for the park, and then within the park, and this had to come later, establishing accountability for all the different sections of the park. Then he went on to create the Prospect Park administrator, and then to have borough commissioners, and this was important. Diana Chapin, the borough commissioner of Queens. They had a borough commissioner of the Bronx, a borough commissioner of Staten Island. So all the parts of the city had commissioners. Still there was no money, and all the parks were broken, and you really have to realize that. Central Park was the park where the model could start best, because it is the jewel in the so called Emerald Empire. And the jewel in the crown.

STEPAN: Betsy, just to go back about the question about when this idea of actually formalizing the Conservancy and the handing off some of the, I'd love to repeat some of what you talked before the interview, you talked about how people in the government, bodies, a foreign body, how was it seen, what were some of the controversy? Can you explain how it seemed to people in government? Most of the people thought it was very bad.

ROGERS: Well, what people thought was, and this was within the private sector, this idea of a model, public/private. Remember, I came out of the advocacy part of the city. And some of my fellow advocacy people said, oh, the private should always be private. You can't criticize the city if you are connected somehow, if you are part of city government. You can't have the distance to be critical. And I said, I don't want to be critical. I want to work with the city and the appointment of Central Park administrator, by Gordon, gave me the opportunity, not the salary, I still had to raise money, but it gave me the opportunity to have a seat at the table of city government.

STEPAN: I remember also in the early years, you led the outreach...to connect people to different constituencies... Talk a little bit about the outreach to different members of the community.

ROGERS: Well, when we formed the first board, remember our first meeting of the Conservancy was November of 1980, and as we were forming the board in 1979, I was very lucky, because I was able to get a philanthropist and corporate executives on the board. We were also, particularly because Gordon was commissioner, we were reaching out, and we were saying that we could have a Hispanic or two on the board. We had African American representation on the board, but also it was very important to have people who had money and could get money. And you really can't play that down. And you really, really cannot say that the rich people are trying to take over the park. And that was something else that was in the air, and the rich people were not trying to take over the park. Philanthropists want to give because they want to help the poor. And that's very important. And the people who use the park, who represent a broad, broad demographic, they were the ones who were the beneficiaries of that philanthropy.

STEPAN: You also became the park's first, the Conservancy's administrator. Let's talk a little bit more on the personal level your movement from being an advocate outside government to a manager of an increasingly large organization. What were some of the challenges?

ROGERS: Well, the first challenge, you have to realize, let's talk about what it really takes. OK? It takes, first of all, it takes a vision. But then it takes a plan, a management and restoration plan that is in the service of that vision. The vision then was to make Central Park clean, safe and beautiful once again. OK? Very simple mission. But how are you going to perform that mission? And so, first of all, you have to remember all the drug dealing that was going on. There was mugging. The police would patrol the drives. Nobody was on foot patrol. It was really very unsafe. Hotels told visitors, don't go into Central Park. It's very dangerous. OK? So getting our arms around that was important. You couldn't do it without a plan. So between 1982 and 1985, I directed a team of four landscape architects, and then we reached out. We had social scientists to do user study. We had soil scientists. We had hydrologists. We had, very important, somebody that really studied all of the circulation, how people move through the park, how the park unfolds as an experience as you move through the park. And all of that we put together in our management and restoration plan, which we published in '85, and which you can see now in the '87 version that was published with MIT Press. So that plan really to this day, not chapter and verse, but it governs the vision embodied in the plan or restoring all of the park. So we'd get the plan,

parkwide recommendations, and then we broke the park into its constituent pieces, the zones. We needed to have the management, the accountable management of employees in each zone. But remember in the beginning, with the park department, they weren't managing that way. Those days it took three men to prune a tree. You had the climber. You had the groundsman to hand up the tools, and you have the MVO. You know what the MVO is? The motor vehicle operator that sits in the truck. And they were protected by the union. And they couldn't do anything that was out of title work. So starting this new group, in the beginning, it grew out of the summer intern program. They became year round, we called the interns, so it wouldn't rattle anybody, and they just, oh, it's only us. And then we couldn't occupy the same building as the park workforce. They had to camp out in the little building in the Ramble where they stored the pesticides. But little by little, the them and us, we tried to break it down. And the refrain, don't work so hard. You'll make us look bad. And as the Conservancy grew, eventually we were able to occupy the same building. But it was only in 1997 that the management contract with the city was signed. That could not have been signed if the Conservancy hadn't grown and been successful in fundraising. So there were are, finally in the Arsenal, and our, working to make restoration and management come together, so any gift that we got needed to have some endowment that would support the future management. Our first zone gardener was in the Conservancy garden, where my friend Linda Miller helped restore the garden in '82, and we got a million and a half dollar endowment for that garden, and that supports the care of the garden today. Yoko Ono is the first person who gave a million dollars that we put into our zone gardener program, along with the endowment for the Conservancy garden. And Yoko had her lawyer come to my office and say, here is what we're going to do. We're putting an ad in the New York Times, and it reads like this. Nations of the world, send us your stones. Send us your plants. We are building a garden of peace. And so we had a fountain from France and other stuff come, and we, no, we are doing a plan, and it's based on Olmstead, and this is what we're planning. So Bruce Kelly, landscape architect, that was part of that four landscape architect team, went with me, and we sat with Yoko, and she went in the other room, and there were some sort of occult inquiry on her part, and she came back, and she said, I understand Olmstead. Japanese like things simple. We want beautiful landscape. And so she went with our plan, and a million dollar gift. 600,000 went into the ground and restored Strawberry Fields as you see it today, and 400 went into the endowment for the zone gardener. And that's the beginning of the zone garden gardener, zone management program, and Doug has now carried that Doug Blonsky, who you'll be speaking with. Doug has carried that and made it parkwide. So we had maybe three or four zone gardeners when I stepped down beginning of 1996, and now Doug will give you the number. It's probably 53, because all of, when we did the plan, the constituent pieces of the park, it fit together like a jigsaw puzzle, they, then capital projects, broken down within those pieces, all of those zones are now under zone management. So those projects are being cared for.

STEPAN: It seems one of the things you needed to do...the theory behind public/private partnerships. And one of the things he showed us is that it's an ability to give a lot of local control, people who live locally who see that park, sort of the decisions that were made, give this little control. It seems you're that from a management perspective, you're breaking it down even more. You're able to put a lot of creativity and energy into something that's a very local issue. Is that part of the vision?

ROGERS: Well, there are two kinds of local that you're speaking of. One are the local neighbors. And of course you have the community boards, and you want everyone to be satisfied and happy, and there's a dialogue that's continually going on with the, I think there are five community boards around the park. So projects that are contiguous to various community boards, they get a lot of review. And community boards, our power rests on being able to say no, because they can't create projects, but they can stop projects. And so the diplomacy, the skill, the time that goes into getting approval from your community

planning board, in addition, now because the park is a scenic landmark, declared a scenic landmark I believe back in the '70s, even as we were getting started, all projects are reviewed by the Landmark Commission, and then by the, what is it called, the Public Design Commission. It used to be the Art Commission. And so the neighbors of the park, that's one kind of local. When you're talking local within the park, you're talking about management of the zones. So each zone, I mean, the person who manages it may not be local. It may be one of the Cambodians who came over during the Khmer Rouge that we hired. It may be any person that is on the staff is managing a zone within the park. That's a little different from local.

STEPAN: One of the things you talked about, people saw your work in Central Park and the Central Park Conservancy as a real model to be followed. And I know you used people from Highline... Tell that story to me. What was, how did that come about? How did that connection, how does the Central Park connect to other projects like that?

ROGERS: Well, we didn't go out and proselytize. We simply tried to get better and better within Central Park. But I want to go back to first of all the ingredients for, because this is important, and you asked what was important, to start a conservancy. First of all, you have to have a strong board. And Gordon helped create the board, and Bill Beinecke, our first chairman, was very instrumental in creating the board. And then you had to have the vision, and you had to have the plan. Of course you had to have fundraising in the service of that plan.

STEPAN: What are the four ingredients for creating the Conservancy gardens?

ROGERS: The ingredients are as follows. First of all you must have a clear vision, and you just have a plan that supports the vision. How are you going to do it? Fundraising people will not give money unless they know specifically what their money will go to. We had that with the plan. That was absolutely critical. The board, building the board was key. And then there's the factor that I call the zealous nut. And the zealous nut is the person that just won't let go. You have people that are hired to head organizations, and they may be superb managers. I wasn't the superb manager. I had the entrepreneurial gene, and I really was the zealous nut who just loved this mission of making the park clean, safe and beautiful. And why did I love it? Because it was a great masterwork of landscape design, one of the great achievements, democratic achievements of the American people. And that seemed to me to be something that was really worth defending, and the park restoration and renewed management was born out of that commitment. I'm not sure, was that four things? Was that four? Can you break it down into four? It will work out. OK.

STEPAN: So those are some of the elements. And let's make the connection again to some other things, like the Highline...

ROGERS: Well, Robert came later. But people started to come, interestingly enough, from other cities. St. Louis has Forest Park. We had somebody from Atlanta. What is the name of the park there? Piedmont Park. Anyway, they got the idea, they heard. People began to hear in other cities, and they started to come. Remember you already had, in addition to the conservancy, Prospect Park, which is early on with the appointment of Tupper Thomas by Gordon a year later, after me as administrator. She formed the Prospect Park Alliance. So that's a sister group. But little by little other cities see, Louisville, with its Olmstead Park system, they see how citizens are stepping up and helping New York. So much of the mission, much of the elements that I've just spoken about, ingredients of success, this is something that I've spoken about a lot to other people, what do you need? You need to build your board. You need

obviously to have the plan. You need to fundraise against the plan, and you really need to have the commitment of an executive that is passionate. That passionate executive is really very important to go out and represent the plan.

STEPAN: One of the things that I noticed in some of the material that Mark shared with me is that it seemed to be very important that you had some very, some people who came from the private sector who brought not only their funds, but also their, some of their experience in managing things, and also demanding that certain types of results got achieved. Was having the private sector, beyond funding, were there other things that you gained?

ROGERS: Well, I had the most extraordinary advice and help, went way beyond fundraising, because I told you that Mr. Beinecke went out and was recruiting corporate executives to be on the board. And he came home, not came home, he came back from seeing the corporate executive, the brand new corporate executive of a company called NL Industries. And he said, I think we have somebody. There's a young man who's just come to New York. He's still in his 40s, and he would make a great board member. His name is Ted Rogers. So that's how I met my husband, Ted. And Ted became a board member, and later when we decided to get married, he stepped off the board, but I had all those years somebody who had managed industrial plants. He's the son of industrial America, and he knows plant management. He's not a finance guy. He's a manager. OK? And so he understands how to run an organization. He understands organizational growth, how you go from your infancy, through your adolescence, into a more mature state, which is where the Conservancy is today. There are problems that you're going to encounter on the way. You need to put in systems that you don't have, personnel systems. If you can't measure, you can't manage. How do you review the performance of employees, on and on? So that was very helpful. Getting out in the field, the zone management, it was an idea that I had anyway, but it's an idea that matured with conversations at the dinner table.

STEPAN: I also want to, I heard some interesting stories in terms of some of the early days... and I know, I think you, along with another trustee or board member, went up to, I take it, with Ebenezer Church in Harlem?

ROGERS: The Abyssinian Baptist Church. STEPAN: Can you tell that story?

ROGERS: Oh, Reverend Butts is really, Calvin Butts, he's a very important political figure, but he's charismatic, and he's a very important leader. And later he developed something called the, oh gosh, well, anyway, it's a corporation to redevelop Harlem. So he's very much on board with the north end of the park, particularly, so he's a great ally, because when people said to me, the conventional wisdom was, you can't go north of 96th Street. They will just destroy the park. Remember where the Harlem Near is, the Boathouse was completely destroyed, burned out, vandalized. You had drug dealing going on. I said, we are restoring all of the park. It goes up to 110th Street. Reverend Butts was a great ally in terms of fundraising for the north end of Central Park.

STEPAN: Can you tell that story?

ROGERS: Well, I just went to the church, because I think that worshiping with Reverend Butts is just kind of a wonderful experience in itself and hearing the Abyssinian Baptist Choir is wonderful. And then he

gave his sermon, which is stirring, to say the least, and then I didn't know he'd seen me, but he looked up, and he mentioned the Conservancy and my presence there. That made me feel good.

STEPAN: In terms of the Highline, how do you see the Highline? Can you just talk a bit about the Highline? Do you see a connection between the Conservancy and the Highline?

ROGERS: Oh, sure. Well, first of all, you have to realize something that Robert Hammond is also from San Antonio. We are the two, well, there's a third one, Maury Price, who is doing the Battery Conservancy now. We're all from San Antonio. So I knew Robert's father when I was a child. Robert knew who I was. So it was very natural for Robert to come to me. But what's remarkable, really remarkable about the Highline, again, you had all those ingredients that I just gave you, the vision, first of all. The fact that these two guys, Robert and Josh David, who met at a community board hearing, remember I told you community board hearings. This was in the Giuliani Administration, and the hearing was, the Highline was going to be torn down, and it was going to be, developers were going to buy the property there in Chelsea. And Robert and Josh looked at each other, and they said, this strange hulking thing that we've been looking at from down here, it's sort of interesting. And they managed to get up on the Highline. You've seen the photographs. Robert got Joel Sternfeld, which was brilliant, to photograph what I call the industrial poetics of the Highline. So the story of Robert and Josh is just remarkable. Now, what they did in the beginning is, they raised money to hire lawyers, and they really got the development stopped. And then they got City Hall. Now, this again is the result, as I had Ed Koch, who was in support of starting the Conservancy, they had Michael Bloomberg. This would not have happened without Michael Bloomberg and Patty Harris, and also Amanda Burden, who was the head of city planning. So they little by little got the support of the city, and then they got funding. Robert's roommate from Princeton was the head of the City Council, Gilford Miller. That was I think 35 million. Bloomberg put in 65. But then they were fabulously successful at getting some of the, well, they were the darlings of the art world down there in Chelsea, but that wouldn't do it all. They got the fashionistas. They got people like Diane von Furstenberg, but really importantly, and this is critical, and that is, while Robert was just fabulous in seeing that it needed a great design, again, remember I told you you have to fundraise against a plan. You have to have a real product that you're going to achieve, Josh, he's got a big heart, and Josh went into the community, and Josh, he said, he papered the lampposts. They had meetings in the projects. Remember, you have multiple constituencies. You have the Chelsea Historic District, but you also have the housing projects. And they even had their office in one of the projects for a while. So there was this sense that they had to have, you mentioned community support, that was really an effort to get all the community support. And then Robert had the brilliant idea of doing something called an ideas competition. Josh wasn't so much in favor, but they had an ideas competition, and an ideas competition was the best public relations thing that they could have done, because they got like a hundred zany entries, you know, a linear swimming pool two miles long or a mile and a half long, however long the Highline is. They got things that were bizarre. But they had an exhibition in Grand Central Station. And so people saw, oh, there's something going on. And that led, of course, to the real design competition, which was won by James Corner, of field operations. And I think it's important, if you really want to investigate the design of the Highline, to talk to Jim. Diller [UNINTELLIGIBLE] is part of his design team, the architectural part, and Pete Audoff, who is a garden designer from the Netherlands, did the remarkable plantings that you see there today. So they had a very strong vision, the Highline did, and they had the sections, section one, section two. They weren't certain they were going to get the funding for section three, but they have. So over a period of, what is it now, well, since they started it's been 15 years or something like that. But in the building phase, I don't know, you'll have to ask them. Do ask them, because they have created, in probably about ten years, the most remarkable

addition to New York City's parkscape that could be imagined. Now, you talk about replication in other cities. There's no way to replicate the Highline, but people look at any kind of elevated railroad track now, or anything that resembles this kind of aerial park, and they get excited. They say, well, they go now to Robert and Josh to learn how they did it.

STEPAN: So it would be useful for people who are currently in government or...into the planning and contemplating these types of collaborations to talk about the bridges between the advocates and the City Hall. You mentioned a lot of the connections early on. But I wonder if you can sort of break that down a little bit and discuss whether that was really particular to these circumstances in this park, or if there is something to be acquired from that approach and that kind of liaising with the City Hall.

ROGERS: Well, the liaising with City Hall is important, never more so than now, with a new administration coming in. We don't even know who the park commissioner is. The fact is, is that there is no park in the world that has the charisma of Central Park. There is no park in the world, you mentioned locals earlier, that has the centrality of Central Park, and the fact that it has now 35 million visitors a year. So how many parks can claim that? That's an issue. Because there are other just wonderful parks, and people are supporting them, and they're making a difference. But making a difference to the same level that Central Park has, that it enjoys, it's very, very hard. But that doesn't mean you can't make a difference. And that doesn't mean that these other organizations aren't being very successful in raising money, and it's just a matter of scale.

STEPAN: And so looking back on it, it was the fortuitous timing of Ed Koch taking office and appointing Davis to the parks commissioner.

ROGERS: That's right.

STEPAN: That really made that happen. Giving that people aren't able to control circumstances like that as planners and as managers, what should they be alert to in looking at how you might collaborate? Imagine a situation of starting from scratch. There really is no connection between the municipal government and the private sector and residents who may be interested in initiating something like this. You said earlier before the camera that if there is locality to locality, country to country, but what are some of those key ingredients to getting past culture clashes, getting past those entrenched institutional interests?

ROGERS: In every city it always starts with the mayor. I've mentioned two mayors, Mayor Bloomberg and Ed Koch. But it really takes a mayor who understands that, because everything else will fall in place if the most powerful elected official says, this is a great idea. And Louisville has done very, very well. Louisville has that, and Louisville is a wonderful model for you, and you really should talk to Dan Jones about the new park in Louisville where they're building an outer ring. They have their wonderful Olmstead park system, but the city has grown, and now they're having like a green outer ring, and a stream called Floyd's Fork runs through it, so it had continuity. But you should talk to Dan Jones, very important, how they're doing it.

STEPAN: I'm really interested in that process of moving gradually from advocates, residents, into your administrative and management role, and highlighting the management it was imposing...and all of those connotations. But you seemed very uniquely qualified to step into that role, bridging a number of

different skill sets. But for the case it would be useful just to see how you dealt with those changes as your staff grew, and you were running into and working with more and more people. How did you get from here to here?

ROGERS: Well, as my Texas mother would say, by gosh and by golly. I mean, you just get there as the challenges present themselves. And don't think I didn't make mistakes. But it was a, it wasn't always easy. It wasn't always easy.

STEPAN: What were some of the hurdles, for instance? I mean, what mistakes did you learn from early on? Kind of that

ROGERS: Oh, I learned, actually, the importance of community relations. That was really important. I thought that the vision would speak for itself. Well, no, it doesn't speak for itself. And a lot of people really aren't that visual, either. I mean, and this is, let's face it, I have a background in art and planning and landscape, and so I see it I a way that, you know, a lot of people don't see it, a lot of public officials don't see it. So getting the buy in from the local community boards, and the newspapers. This was incredibly important, the public relations. And learning the ropes about how to do that was, that was pretty important. Let's see, other challenges, really they get back to the management challenge and how to run something. And remember, I'd never run anything. So think of me as an entrepreneur. Now you have, in Doug, you have the best park manager in America, truly, and I hired Doug about 30 years ago, and he headed the restoration crew, and then he headed the capital projects. By that time we had gotten authority over the capital projects, because we had the plan. The Department of Parks has a design and construction division, but they have a list. So you'd have a landscape architect on this, and landscape architect on that. You had to take them off the list. We had our own firm of landscape architects. And Doug was head of the construction division, because we got the authority to supervise the projects. Some were still city funded, and that's important. You don't want to let the city off the hook. So where we had city capital money, the controller, by the way, told us, don't take that plan around and try to leverage capital money. You're leveraging too much money. Well, we didn't pay attention to that, because the plan did help leverage city capital, as well as be the blueprint for private fundraising. So Doug, then, is the head of the reconstruction of the park, and then he became the head of design and construction, the overall, I had another woman, and she left, and Doug was the head of the whole, which was like a firm of landscape architects, 12, I think it was 12, well, I don't know how many you have now. Ask Doug.

STEPAN: This is by when?

ROGERS: By, gosh, in the '90s we were able to, I guess, yeah, about early '90s, we had our firm in place up in 104th Street. Again, I was pretty aggressive about getting space, free space, always free space, and adjacent buildings, and so we had what was essentially a firm. Doug led that. And then later, unfortunately the Conservancy, after I stepped down, I had no more authority after 1996. And I had to be very careful, and I'm always very careful not to get in there and meddle, but the board made a mistake, I think, and the separated the presidency from the administrator. The first successor, the park commissioner just, and she didn't want to darken the door of the Arsenal, where the commissioner was, and he didn't want her. So that became the president, and Doug got the title, administrator, which is the city title. And eventually the board did the right thing after she left, and her successor was a lovely woman, but again, two offices, not connected with the field. OK? When they reunified the title, because remember I had the dual title, and this is important from a managerial point of view, Doug was then, the

administrator title had landed on him, and rightly so. Then the Conservancy made him the president. And he is truly the best thing that has ever happened to Central Park. So that early vision that he was part of from way back when, 30 years ago, what we see still unfolding in the park, I go in the park, and there is the lake is being dredged. OK, that's back in the plan, way back. But as I say, it may not be followed chapter and verse, but it has been the vision has guided the restoration all these years, and I really give the credit, not only to Doug, but to Neil Calvinese, who's also given all of his professional life to this, to Sarah Cedar Miller, who I hired as the park photographer and historian. Sarah's written her own books now, but she has documented all of this, very important. You may want to put some of the before and afters into your film, and Sarah will provide those. But many other people, I mean, the staff is really good, and the fact that it's run by Doug, who shows up in the 79th Street Yard at 7:30 in the morning before you goes to the office, so you have reunited the leadership of the Conservancy and the fundraising with the operations, the daily operations of the park.

STEPAN: There's a fascinating story of working in parallel on the fringes, physically, with the main park administration, and then over the years increasing your own staff and then finally getting the formal contracts to then move into the Arsenal. Is it Armory or Arsenal?

ROGERS: Arsenal.

STEPAN: I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that experience. There was some friction or excitement, a little culture clash with the sort of patronage type of workers in the park to begin with. Over time it seems that there were opportunities through attrition and budget situations to both grow organically on your own, and then take advantage of the voids that were opening up there. That seems like

ROGERS: Oh, critical. Critical.

STEPAN: How did you have the wherewithal or the plan to do that?

ROGERS: Well, the plan, you know, I keep talking about the plan, the plan, the plan. You're talking about the strategic plan as well as the plan. And yeah, it isn't that you start out saying, oh, we're going to manage the park. It's all about money. It's about, you know, raising the money and then showing that you have the product. The reason Doug has been so successful is the park looks so good. So you know now, if you give, a million is hardly a big gift anymore, but it was a huge gift in the beginning. But you know about 100 million, which is not happening and probably won't happen again for a while, but nevertheless, ten million for a project, that is coming in on a fairly regular basis, because they have a product to show for it. Finish the rest of your question.

STEPAN: Right, so on the sort of the very savvy reactions to opportunities when something crops up there, I'm curious where that was coming from. Obviously you were very much on top of everything. You had some pretty good advice, I imagine, as well. I was wondering if you could zero in a little bit on how you knew to do that and were able to do it.

ROGERS: OK, well, Doug is the one who really has his hands around all of it now in terms of, and that's because of the management contract. And the contract didn't come until '97. Remember, I said I left in '96. OK, now how did the contract come? My third chairman, Ira Millstein, Ira is a lawyer, and Ira is, well,

I don't even know how to describe Ira. Ira is unique. And it was like, you mean you're in bed with the city? It's like my mother saying, you know, without benefit of clergy. Mean, this is terrible. And so I was just, we had to just make it work. And so a lot of it was patience and diplomacy and going to meetings. But money always, we can pay for it. So that began to, that gave the Conservancy a certain gravitas. It still didn't have the true authority until the management contract. The management contract has made a huge difference, and you want to get Doug to talk about that. Because he was a party to it. Henry Stern, the fact that he knew corp counsel, and he was, again, the commissioner helped facilitate, which was wonderful. And that happened. And that is now, I think, Highline has that. It's hard to get it until you're able to show that you have the wherewithal and the leadership to do that. And the right circumstances to get the city support.

STEPAN: And so a lot is made of the leeway that the Conservancy has in interpreting city policy. Since its policy, the Conservancy administers and makes it happen. Was that leeway informal in its origins? Or was this written into

ROGERS: No, highly informal. It was just me. I'd mentioned the zones. I mean, you know, you just keep, don't take no for an answer, and you just keep going back to the table. And that's really the story of it. But it did need the management contract, and that was important.

STEPAN: Great, well, I assume we're off just about to your time. So I won't keep you any longer, but thanks very much.

ROGERS: You're very welcome. It was a pleasure.

[END]

Interview with John Alschuler on March 20, 2014 in New York City

Interviewer: Adam Stepan

ALSCHULER: My name is John Alschuler. I'm the Chairman of HRNA Advisors. We're a global real estate advisory company dedicated to the rejuvenation of urban life in America and abroad.

STEPAN: John, I know that you began your career, actually, working on the city, on the government side, city manager of Santa Monica and helped develop the Third Street promenade, which I know. I worked in LA for a number of years. If you wouldn't mind giving your personal background, how did you, did your background as a city manager inform you? Has it played a big part in your success?

STEPAN: Everybody's professional career is a series of layers. Like the lacquer on a table, each layer builds and created the human being you are. My practice is engaged in the interface between financial feasibility, policy and political outcomes, and great urban design. The projects I love to work on have this sweet spot, this inflection point where you have a great design and you need to sort out, how do you get the government to move forward with it and how do you make it financially viable, because that's how you get chance and that's how great cities are built.

ALSCHULER: The idea of public, private partnership, government role, not necessarily building projects, but helping create the structures where various players can act, is it a new one? How would you trace it here in the States? Where would you trace its history?

ALSCHULER: I think it's been inherent in city building since we started building cities.

STEPAN: The public, private partnerships.

ALSCHULER: The idea of a public, private partnership, the notion of private investment working with the government to lay out the tracks of a great city, it's what we've done since the beginning of our country and since all great cities were founded. The New York City subway system was originally built with private capital. The railroads that service this region, originally built with private capital. The notion that government plays a role, working in collaboration with a private investment is as old as the republic and inherent in the pattern of city building.

ALSCHULER: Let's talk a little bit about the High Line. Can you explain a little bit, the history of your organization's connection with that project?

ALSCHULER: To answer your question of how you operate a business, I started out as an advisor to the High Line. We worked on the financial structure of it. We worked on its relationship to the economy of New York. We worked on how you would actually deliver the project. I worked as an advisor to the organization for seven years. At some point, I think they got tired of paying me. So, they asked me to come on the board.

I began to do, for free, that which was my business and then, ultimately, they asked me to Chair the board, which I did for five years. I started out as a professional advisor. Parks and open space are part of the core passion of my life and part of the core values of this firm. I believe it's our parks and our open

space which are some of the purest expressions of the great democratic function of cities. It's where everybody comes together in the public realm.

ALSCHULER: In our discussions with people involved in the Central Park Conservancy... We see the work they did in developing their model, showing that it worked, getting the city to support and finally formalize it in 1998.

ALSCHULER: Yeah, but let's go back to the founding of Central Park. It's important for everybody to understand the audacity and courage. Central Park is built in the wilderness. We think of Central Park today as this great green space surrounded by these dense, vibrant, complex neighborhoods. Central Park was built in farmland. It was built in brooks and streams and valleys and farms. It was an affirmation about the future of the city and the parallel of the High Line to Central Park begins with that vision... 21st century version of Central Park, beginning with the audacity and the vision.

Far West Chelsea was, in 1990 and 2000, an industrial zone left behind by the departure of the [cargo and maritime manufacturing?] industry of the city. The impetus of the High Line is, how do you use open space, how do you use civic intervention, how do you use park land to create the heart of a new neighborhood. We looked, not first and foremost, to the organizational model of the conservancy, which is a response to changing governmental roles, but to the original vision of Central Park, the role that open space creates in defining a new community.

ALSCHULER: That's very interesting, a lot of [interesting parallels?]. In terms of the organizational structure, in our conversations with Doug Blonsky and other people, they also did some financial models in the early '90s

ALSCHULER: There are enormous parallels between us and Central Park. I think friends of the High Line would literally be unimaginable without the courage and imagination of Betsy Barlow Rogers, one of the great heroines of our city and of parks and open space, and of Gordon Davis, who was her partner in the government, but we had a fundamentally similar organizational form with a radically different mission. The Central Park Conservancy was created to restore and preserve the greatest public open space in America and it had to partner with the government to preserve the precious 800 acres.

The High Line is the other side of that coin. We had to partner with the government to create a whole new park, to manage a space that had been a railroad. Central Park used this form to preserve and protect a century and a half old asset. We used that organizational form to create a new asset, a new part of our city, a new part of our open space system.

STEPAN: Those connections are very interesting. In terms of financial feasibility study, one of the things that came out of our conversation with Doug Blonsky and others was that, as they, Betsy Rogers, she was an urban planner, they were enthusiasts. They were advocates who became administrators. As they did this, they had the support of a lot of wealthy patrons who lived very close to Central Park and they realized that improving Central Park would bring an enormous economic benefit to the neighborhood. That wasn't necessarily the front line of their rationale. They didn't need to because people were already there, but in the case of the High Line, it was, like you say, it was a similar thing but different. Explain a bit of your group's work to study and try to measure the potential economic impact.

ALSCHULER: The potential economic impact of the High Line was front and center because this is 2002. Our city has just suffered one of the great tragedies of its history which, in addition to the loss of 3,000 lives, was an enormous economic blow to our city. The Bloomberg administration rightly said, what's the rationale for investment here, of course a park is a good thing, of course the High Line is a wonderful thing, but what's the economic rationale here.

Our firm did a very rigorous, very careful study and we argued, absolutely correctly, as it turned out, to the government, that an investment in park and open space will return more cash value back to the government in terms of increased property tax revenue, increased sales tax revenue, increased income tax revenue, that would pay three, four times what the cost of the park was.

Now, we made one major mistake. We radically underestimated it. We estimated the potential economic gain to the city at being something below \$200 million. The last study the city did had it close to a billion dollars. The creation of the High Line has fostered an enormous explosion of economic activity there and proven to be one of the most prudent financial investments the government has made in the last generation.

STEPAN: In terms of the economic, maybe if you just describe a little bit about the technical side of this particular public, private partnership. What did the city do? What were the roles of the private sector? What was the engineering involved?

ALSCHULER: I think the role of the public sector was critical. First, they own the High Line. It's a public park and always should be. The High Line should be forever a free piece of public land owned by the citizens of New York, managed on behalf of their future. The city's parks department was the custodian of that mission. They oversee and manage the whole process, with the mayor's office and the economic development corporation. The city also was the principle investor in the first phase.

There's \$120 million, out of the initial 150, that comes from the capital budget of the city of New York. Friends of the High Line, in turn, we've taken the responsibility for operating and managing the park. Today, there's not a dime of city money that goes into maintaining this park. We raise \$6 million a year from private sources, generous people. One of the great contributions of the Central

Park Conservancy is that, if you look at 1980, New York has always been an incredibly generous community. What did people give money to, if they had money to give away? They gave it to schools. They gave it to hospitals. They gave it to art museums. They gave it to culture. They gave it to their church or their synagogue.

Nobody in 1971 or 1970 said, let's give money to a park. Betsy Rogers invented a whole new classification of philanthropy. We've followed in her remarkable footsteps. We raise the money to operate it, but I think the more important thing we did is, we brought the energy and activism of citizen participation. The great founders of Friends of the High Line, Robert Hammond and Joshua David, were citizen activists. They brought the perspective of the community and citizens to, what should it look like, what should it feel like, how should it engage in the neighborhood.

The most important public, private partnership here is, I think, not the financial part. It's the more obvious, the money is obviously fundamentally necessary, but the most important partnership here is

between engaged and passionate citizens and their government. It's very much like Brooklyn Bridge Park, another project I was fortunate enough to spend five years working on. The design, the character, the look, the feel of Brooklyn Bridge Park is an expression of three years of incredibly intense engaged citizen leadership that built on the 17 years that went before it. These partnerships are economic. They're legal. They're civic. They are ways for the passion of citizens to be engaged in the democracy that reflects their values.

STEPAN: That's great. In terms of, going back to the connections, again, between the High Line and Central Park Conservancy, people have said that Central Park Conservancy was...creating a public, private partnership and it was a way of restoring this 19th century original vision. The fact that it worked, could you say that it helped inspire this whole, very new type of, would the public sector, on its own, ever have created the High Line?

ALSCHULER: Absolutely not. The public sector, left to its devices, would have torn it down. The government of the city of New York signed an order to demolish it. It was only the persistence and energy and activism of Robert and Joshua and others to prevent the government from tearing it down. It goes back to what I was saying to you earlier.

The true public, private partnership here is creating the vehicle for the passion of citizens to create the kind of park and open space that reflects who they are. It's one of, again, the important differences between us and Central Park. Central Park is the quintessential 19th century park. It's [built/billed?] as a pastoral respite from the density and character and force of urban life. The High Line is an entirely different ethos.

It's a park designed to interact with the city. It's a park that's designed to be urban, to be part of the built environment, to be an anti pastoral park. It's built in the fabric of the city and reflects a very different set of values than Central Park. We share enormous values with Central Park. We are both parks. We are both public open spaces, but the perspective on the relationship between landscape and urbanism is radically different between the two structures.

STEPAN: We also, as part of this interview, interviewed, the project interviewed people who were deputy, I don't know if you know the Deputy Commissioner for Parks. It was very interesting because one of the things that's happened since Gordon Davis first decentralized the parks and created the Central Park Conservancy is the role of government has been more to manage, in some places, outside contractors, civic groups...as you say, be this custodian of this trust, but do you see that? When you guys came along and proposed this, it didn't seem so crazy. It didn't seem such a different thing. A lot of people in other countries, especially, often say, wow, I can't imagine my government opening up, giving away so much power or letting, how do you see it from a manager's perspective? What were some of the challenges in selling this, as it were, to people in government here?

ALSCHULER: One of the great joys of Michael Bloomberg as mayor and the team he put together is they've understood, long before we came around, the power of these partnerships and the value of citizen engagement. It took no selling whatsoever. They got it. They got it from day one. We negotiated about who had the right to make what decisions and what the right way we should work together, but the basic idea of a partnership is one that, due to the great work of Betsy, the great work of Gordon, it was in the DNA of the Bloomberg administration.

STEPAN: Obviously that helped hugely. In terms of the technical. I'd love to, this [is a?] case for managers. Could you describe, more technically, I know that there was a question of transferrable development rights and I know that there was a question of rezoning...

ALSCHULER: Part of the partnership was a partnership between Friends of the High Line and Amanda Burton and her staff, the remarkable staff of the Department of City Planning. The High Line moves forward in conjunction with the rezoning of Far West Chelsea. That underlying need to rezone had been present for a sustained amount of time, but the crafting of the rezoning was integral to the future of the High Line and its success in two ways.

Frist, the High Line, technically, is a box easement that flows through the sky. The High Line itself involves no ownership of land. There are 27 underlying property owners, all of whom had to agree. They, for reasons I wholly respect, wanted to tear the High Line down because it was in the way of their ability to build a building. The transfer of development rights scheme was a very creative way to allow the preservation of the High Line without economically damaging the underlying property owners by allowing them to take the buildable mass, FAR in New York City, zoning jargon, that they could have built with the High Line and transfer it to either a 10th Avenue or 11th Avenue.

So, the property owner kept their economic value and it was moved to a different place. It...allowed for the preservation of the High Line. The second most powerful thing in the zoning is that it creates a set of rules about how the built form can interact with the High Line, so the High Line can always live and breathe and be this park that moves through the city without unnecessary commercial intrusion on it. Commissioner Burton, her colleagues, the Manhattan office, were just essential partners to us.

ALSCHULER: I know that the selling and the concept, I understand through the chronology, one of the first steps was legally stopping the demolition. Were you guys engaged to do your study before or after they had the crazy idea, the crazy idea of a contest. If you could, just talk about the sequencing of those steps in terms of their planning.

ALSCHULER: The lawsuit was filed against former Mayor Giuliani and his administration. My engagement begins, literally, at the dawn of the Bloomberg administration, in early 2002. It was before the design competition, which I, at the time, thought was a very stupid idea, and it was stupid on my part to oppose it. It turned out to have been a brilliant idea because, what it did, none of the ideas were buildable.

They were, the winning entry was a 1.7 mile long lap pool and then the second winning entry was a roller coaster, but what I missed is what ultimately happened. It brought the High Line into people's consciousness. It helped citizens begin to imagine, what could happen here. This is this amazing resource. What should we do with it? The ideas competition was one of many great strokes of genius of Robert and Joshua's.

STEPAN: In terms of the moving forward and engaging people, once they had, it was out there, it seemed viable, how did you go about doing your financial feasibility study? Technically, how did you

ALSCHULER: Technically, there are two parts to it. One is, you have to say, OK, why does the High Line add value? What would it do? We said, it will add value for three reasons. One, it's a permanent access to

light and air. Just an apartment house that looks over a park is worth more than one that doesn't because you have access to light and air. Secondly, it's an open space. You get to play in it. It's a park. That adds value. The third thing, which turned out to be the most powerful, is it created a brand. It created an aesthetic. It created a way to define the neighborhood.

The neighborhood, as you see what's been built, this remarkable explosion of architecture with Frank [Garrity?] and Annabelle, Jean [Nouvelle?]. It's created a definition of architecture and tone which has created massive amounts of new value. Step one was to say, OK, just at a very, very technical level, what would this intervention into the urban economy do that would make a piece of real estate more valuable after it was there than before.

It's those three things, light and air, public open space, brand value. That was step one. Step two was to say, OK, how much is that worth? The traditional development pattern was that, as you moved away from the subway, properties declined in value. Very much a New York pattern, people value access to transit. As you moved away from 8th Avenue towards 9th Avenue, 10th and 11th Avenue, properties declined in value. The pattern now is reversed. As you move away from the transit system and you move closer to the High Line, properties rise in value.

It was a question of quantifying, how much would those three things actually add to the value, because we didn't want to claim economic benefit for those things that were there already. That's double counting. So, it was a technical process of defining and isolating out the increment of value over a baseline that the intervention of the High Line created.

STEPAN: Can you go back and describe your firm a bit more and the types of employees you have and how many people you have working here and what mix of, because it seems, I talked briefly to your assistant. You have a mix of people who have more of a finance background, also people who were city planning. It's an unusual mix you bring to the table, isn't it?

ALSCHULER: Everybody here is united by a common set of values around the creativity and the future of American urban life. We work very well together because we operate from a common value set. People's training, things they bring to that vision and that passion, are different. We have MBAs. We have lawyers. We have people who come out of real estate programs, people who have come out of design and planning, and then some of our most valuable and special employees are people who have just come to us and we've trained them ourselves. It's a mixture of technical training, united by a common set of values about the future of the city.

STEPAN: Just describe a little bit, the space that you, because, you know, for example, in Brazil, they're starting all these public, private partnerships. People in India and China and a lot of places where we're trying to understand the role of a group, like yourself. Are you people who play this connected role to, because, why would people in government need a firm like yourself and what's your value add?

ALSCHULER: I think our value add is threefold. One, we bring a deep reservoir of technical skills. There's financial expertise. There's design expertise. There's expertise about commercial office buildings, about parks, about residential development. We have a deep set of commercial expertise that is very hard to assemble. Secondly, we have a very, very strong ethos of project management. We can deliver a

project. We can organize it and get it done. Thirdly, we can help facilitate the alignment of values that's necessary for accomplishment.

One of the great things about cities is there's this vast array of opinions. People have different perspectives. They have different interests. That's fabulous. That's, wholly, as it should be. It's what makes New York and London and Rio and Chicago, it makes them so exciting. To take all that divergence and manage it and organize it and bring it together, so it will align around a common objective, takes time and energy and effort. We have technical expertise. We have the ability to manage a project. We can bring multiple interests together to accomplish something important.

STEPAN: In terms of, you worked with many cities, many governments. Your client list has a lot of public sector clients. Do you see

ALSCHULER: A lot of private developers as well.

STEPAN: As well. Do you see the sorts of people, do you see the managers, the types of people, their perspectives, is it different now than it was 20 years ago? Is it more, are you more likely to, describe

ALSCHULER: What's different today than 20 years ago is the audacity and reach of urban form. The power of the city as an economy, the power of the city as an idea about where people want to live, is so different today. 20 years ago, we were swimming upstream. We were still battling the sterility and the [acuity?] of the suburb as a dominant form in America. Everybody, I think, understands today, the future of America is the future of its urban spaces. The future of the economy in our country is the future of what gets produced in urban spaces. The most creative talent in our country is aggregated in our urban forms. It allows us to dream bigger, be more forceful, and intervene more affirmatively to create the core and essence of urban life.

STEPAN: The Promenade Plantée in Paris was, I guess, the High Line has a precedent in Central Park and other public, private partnerships in terms of management model, but building something in that physical space was very new.

ALSCHULER: The Promenade Plantée was a terrific exemplar. They had taken an abandoned rail line and turned it into a very beloved park. We were able to say, gee, it's been done somewhere else before. Are there questions about the urban form and the design vocabulary of the Promenade Plantée? Everybody has their opinions, but it was an enormously valuable educational tool for us.

STEPAN: The model of public, private partnership recently has come under new scrutiny, criticism, people, especially, in the Central Park Conservancy case, the big donation, 100 million dollars, many people saying, this is all well and good for places where you have Central Park...people around. What about poor neighborhoods? What about the equity issue? What would you say to those critics who say, this can't be a model, this is only nice parks for rich people? What would you say to those people?

ALSCHULER: The issue of inequity in parks funding in New York is profound, serious, and warrants all of our

ALSCHULER: The challenge of the inequity in parks funding in New York City and, frankly, in many other cities is very deep, very serious, and has to be addressed. The conservancies are a very creative, very constructive, important way of addressing the needs of parks in wealthier areas. It helps the government because the government doesn't have to spend money at the rate it used to for Central Park, for the High Line, for Bryant Park, for Madison Square Park, for Historic Battery Park. We make it easier for the government to address the needs of lower income neighborhoods, but in and of itself, that's not sufficient.

The lack of investment in these parks, the lack of operating funds, is unacceptable. We have to work in a way, as a community, to address that. We need to do it in a way that promotes the conservancy model because, to eliminate it, would only compound the problem and we don't want to make things more equitable by leveling down. We want to figure out how to create more resources for communities. There will be a solution. I think the conservancies, the board of the High Line, we look forward to working collaboratively with the de Blasio administration, with park advocates, to find a solution to a very real problem.

STEPAN: Talk a little bit about the generational differences between, again, Central Park Conservancy and the High Line. Central Park Conservancy, a lot of its biggest supporters were people..., I guess, New York high society, to a certain degree, people on Park Avenue, people near that part of the city, in supporting Central Park, had a certain style. It was often Taverns on the Green, women with big hats. This was a very different group of people.

It was after the dotcom explosion. It was a very grittier, they were also in a very sophisticated group who would have these examples before and understood the value of media and understood. Did those cultural differences mean that they could be much more upfront about the economic argument, the viability study? Talk a little bit about, I guess, who were the people who put this together, how was this a different world?

ALSCHULER: It's an overlapping world and we have many people on our board who could, would look perfectly at home with the Conservancy and that's a tribute to both of them, but this is a different neighborhood. This is a neighborhood that was grittier. It was the home of fashion. It's not random that one of our great, earliest supporters, and to date, still our most generous supporter, is Diane von Fürstenberg and Barry Diller, who came out of fashion and media.

We're much less dependent on the traditional finance and corporate and law firm world, though we have very good friends in there, than we are on media, fashion, hedge fund, private equity, investment banking. We came out of a different culture. We came out of a different part of the city. Our connection to West Chelsea was very profound and still is. We're a neighborhood organization and we reflect our neighborhood.

STEPAN: In terms of the neighborhood, it's a diverse neighborhood. There's also public housing here. I know that the funds were very, made a big effort to include diverse constituents in the planning. How has the High Line affected the demographics? They're saying that people can't stay here anymore. How do you balance that?

ALSCHULER: They're two different questions. In terms of our relationship to Chelsea houses, we have a very robust, ongoing, active, if you had been in our headquarters two or three weeks ago, you would have seen, literally hundreds of young people who had come to our summer job fair so they could get jobs on the High Line, working in our horticultural department this summer. We keep a very close, very active, very vibrant partnership with the whole panoply of our neighborhood.

Has West Chelsea gotten wealthier? Yes. Has the role of the High Line been to exacerbate those trends? No doubt, but this is New York. One of the great things about New York is, we'll all coexist as part of a diverse neighborhood. It's one of the reasons why public housing is so essential, that when neighborhoods as West Chelsea do transition, there are important blocks of housing that will be perpetually devoted to low and moderate income people and their futures in a diverse neighborhood.

STEPAN: What's the example of the High Line, the example of this model, done to cities around the world? I know that you guys are doing a lot of different waterfront development properties again... Last year and they were looking at the High Line and they were trying to think of, what's happening, what's this done to people thinking about cities around the world?

ALSCHULER: I think the particular force of the High Line around the world has been driven by two very singular things. One is the force and creativity and relentless passion of the design. It has reinvented the design vocabulary for urban parks and brought it into the 21st century. It is more urban. It's more engaged. It's more civic. It's a park which is much more European piazza than a meadow. That design vocabulary just speaks to people with incredible power. The other thing which I think speaks to people with power is the role of citizens. It is the public, private partnership. It's the idea that citizens can come together and become leaders and custodians of their own park lands. You put the two together, you get the force of the High Line.

STEPAN: In terms of just follow up on the design, one of the things that struck me about the design, we're wrapping up here, is you talk about rethinking cities. Does the fact that it's physically higher and it gives you a different perspective on the city? That's one thing that struck me as well

ALSCHULER: For sure. It's amazing. You go up there and, look, I've lived in New York for 40 years. You get up there, you see the city in a wholly different way. I had never seen, I'd never stood in the center of 14th street, 35 feet in the air, and looked down it before. You have this, literally, this vantage point on the theater of city that is part of the special. Part of the unique alchemy of the place is this relationship between the great harbor, the Hudson River, the industrial buildings, the street. The elevation allows you to see all that in a way that, if you were at grade, you never could.

STEPAN: I think we've covered it wonderfully. Is there anything else we didn't cover that you want to share?

ALSCHULER: No.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much, sir.

[END]

Interview with Doug Blonsky on February 12, 2014 in New York City**Interviewers: Adam Stepan and Ted Bowen**

STEPAN: So you were working with a very large legacy or existing city staff there [Central Park Conservancy]. How did you coordinate early on? I understand you guys were not in the same facility as the Parks Department until you had the first contract. So can you describe those conditions and the extent that there were interactions with the city staff, how that all played out?

BLONSKY: Well, you know, it was very tricky. I do think the city staff felt, who was this group coming from the outside. They felt a little threatened. And we did work in different offices. So it was a real challenge in the very beginning, so you really had to build their trust and get them to want to work with you. So that was difficult, those first few years. I mean, clearly the conservancy was embraced by the commissioner and the mayor, so on a very high level everybody was working together. But out in the field and out in the trenches, it was a real strain for awhile. But over the time, building trust and working with people, you know, we really started getting things accomplished.

STEPAN: Can you describe one or two examples from those early projects and how that coordination worked or didn't work?

BLONSKY: Well, you know, it was interesting. On the capital projects, which I were recompile for in the very beginning, we really didn't have a lot of interplay with the Parks Department. The parks, outside of Central Park, who, the people that were responsible for construction and supervision would obviously come in and visit with us, but they gave us a lot of leeway to do what we were doing in the park, because it was very unique what we were creating, because we were actually blending private dollars and city dollars, which is, was, people weren't used to that. And so it was kind of a very new concept in the city, but it was also a very good way of us getting city money in the park. Now one of the things that we took advantage of the fact was at that time money came to the Parks Department via really the, it was a different way than it is today. And it was, what, let me just stop for a second. What the hell was that called? Board of Estimate, yes. And so, you know, back then the money really came to the city through the Board of Estimate. So what were very good at doing is having projects truly shovel ready and prepared. So we would do the designs, have the plans complete, and then really at the end of the fiscal year, city hall would go to the Parks Department and say, you know, we have this pot of money, do you have any projects ready to go. And so we would have those projects ready to go, so it was a great way for us to get city money into the park as well as a way of leveraging private dollars, because we'd pay for those designs with private dollars.

STEPAN: And early on how did that break down, the private fundraising you were able to raise and the city dollars?

BLONSKY: No, in the very early days it was really a lot more city money. You know, the first four or five years of the Conservancy we really, from 80 to 85 before I came on, we were really focusing on developing the master plan that would really guide us for the next 25 or 30 years. And Betsy Rogers was obviously instrumental behind that. But Betsy also was brilliant in the fact that she needed to show some quick successes, let people know that this group, what, you know, what can they do. And you saw, in 1980, the Sheep Meadow being restored. And it was interesting because the Sheep Meadow was restored

with actually state money, and then it was going to be the city that was going to maintain it. But within weeks the grass was already ten, twelve inches tall and no one was maintaining it, and that's where Betsy kind of said, OK, Conservancy, we need to take this on. And so they, we went out and bought the equipment that we needed to mow the lawn and then take care of it. And then there was the dairy, which was the visitor center in the south end of the park, which was completely boarded up, covered with graffiti. That was another very early project to really show that we can do things. And then it was the castle. And the castle was one of my first experiences with the park, actually as a student. I came on a class trip from the University of Delaware with a group and we had to do in the park and, you know, sketch and do some design work and kind of write up what we saw. And it was, I'll never forget getting off the bus at, you know, 90th and 5th and walking down the bridle trail and, you know, seeing more rats than people. And, you know, coming by the bridge at the southeast corner of the reservoir, seeing how derelict it was, covered with graffiti, totally broken up. Obviously you see the bones of a beautiful park, but a park that was in total disrepair. And then walking down to the great lawn, which was referred to as the great dust ball, and going by Turtle Pond, up to the castle, and Turtle Pond was filled with dead fish and it literally stunk. And then the castle, just covered with graffiti, wrapped in razor wire, and completely closed off to the public. It was amazing.

STEPAN: When was that student trip?

BLONSKY: That was 1980, that trip was. And I never got the assignment done, but little did I know I'd be banned to the park for the rest of my life in five short years.

STEPAN: Right. And on those early projects, those early successes, was there coordination between the parks staff and city parks staff and Conservancy folks, or were you commissioning the designs and actually getting out there yourselves and doing it?

BLONSKY: We were actually commissioning the designs and actually supervising the projects. You know, one of the things that we realized very quickly on in the Conservancy's life is that we would have to get more involved with operations pretty quickly. We were kind of hoping that we'd be able to do some of these projects and somewhat turn them over to the Parks Department, and that really quite didn't work out, and we were very concerned about losing our investment. And clearly we wanted to make sure our donors knew that we were up to the task. So on some of the early projects we actually failed and actually the projects kind of reverted back very quickly. And we really didn't have the operational staff and the professional staff in place to maintain them. So we learned very on that if you're going to want to do this, you'd better think about taking on the whole thing and not just going half way.

STEPAN: Can you talk about the early challenges, working with existing staff in the Parks Department?

BLONSKY: Part of the challenge was really there was, you know, there was just not a lot of professionalized technical staff. You didn't have people that went to school to learn how to grow turf. Growing turf in an urban environment is not easy. Back then it was 12 million people walking through the park every year, and basically they walked anywhere they wanted to. And so you really have to bring in that kind of professional staff. I mean, you know, refers back to Frederick Law Olmsted in the 1870s, after Central Park was pretty well developed, there's, you know, a great quote by Olmsted that went something like, you know, "The park has literally gone to the dogs." And people just don't know what it takes to manage this place. And then I think that's ultimately what really happened in the park in the 60s

and 70s. People completely lost the art of landscape management and what that meant, and that's something that we realized that we would have to bring back to the park.

STEPAN: OK, and so there are these sort of parallel staffs. Were there bridges, were there peacemakers, or was this pretty quickly kind of, you go your way, we'll go our way, between the Conservancy and the city staff?

BLONSKY: Well, what kind of happened was, over those first few years, building relationships, you know, some people really accepted it and got into it and said, this could be great, you know, we want to be involved with this. And so it was very important for us, when we were getting new equipment or even getting uniforms that we would want to share them with our counterparts with the Parks Department. There was clearly some staff that wanted no part of this, and so, you know, our goal was, over the years, Parks Department staff starting going down and we never got rid of anybody, it was strictly for people retiring or transferring. And the Conservancy staff, every year got a little bigger and bigger. It was around 1995 when the two teams were almost the same size, and one of the things that we were doing, we were going some really wonderful projects in the park, but you'd still come in and you'd see graffiti and you'd still see litter on the ground for several days. And it was back in that time when Betsy really wanted me to take a look at the operational side of things and she really was interested if I would kind of move from the capital side and design side to the operations side of things, and really take on that kind of total restructuring of the management, day to day management of the park. And I said –

STEPAN: So when was that?

BLONSKY: That was 1995.

STEPAN: OK. And by then your title was?

BLONSKY: In '95 I became the chief of operations for the park, which the person overseeing all day to day operations. And that was actually the first time a Conservancy person was doing that. So I had Parks staff under me and Conservancy staff.

STEPAN: And how did that go down with personnel?

BLONSKY: It was a real culture shock for people, I mean, because we quickly came out with really a new way of managing the park. One of the things that I always felt was important when you're going around the park, that somebody has to be responsible for everything in the park. You know, if that garbage can is overflowing, why is it overflowing, and who's supposed to be emptying it? Down to the littlest detail. And so it was my goal to figure out how to come out with an accountable system. And, you know, one of the things that would always watch over the years, because it's, I've been there ten years now at this point, and I would see people drive around in trucks, five or six people in the trucks, and they would just drive around and drive around, drive around. And there's nobody really responsible for what's going on. And I was always a big believer that you have more than two or three people together and basically all they're doing is talking all day. And so, you know, Betsy Rogers becomes the first accountable person for the park. I said, why can't we take that model and just bring it down to the lowest level of geographic parts of the park. And so what we very quietly did is we developed a zone management plan where we broke the park down into 49 geographic areas, you know, not geographic areas by size, but geographic

areas by areas that we think a person could be able to manage. So one might be very highly horticultural or one might just be a big turf area. And so we really just kind of quietly came out with this zone management system one day and said, you know, basically instead of you in that group with those four or five people, you're in this zone, you're this zone, you're in this zone, you're in this zone. So, you know, now you're in your own area of the park that you're responsible for. And as management it was very important for us to make sure that these folks had the proper equipment, they had the proper training, the proper uniforms, and really the support. Because now you're asking people that were working in a group to now be independent, which is a very big culture shock. And it was really challenging for the first few years.

STEPAN: And maybe you can walk me through how you got your arms around the personnel across both staffs to know who's there, who can do what, who should do what, to handle your assignments a little more cleanly, and to set up the sort of, either cleaner lines of authority or accountability there. I imagine there's a real HR exercise in just sort of getting a good overview, to know who you're working with.

BLONSKY: You know, well, it was very important for me to basically understand everybody's job in the park and what they do. So it's very easy for people to tell you how to do something or how something should be done, but if you really know how it should be done, it makes that exercise much, much easier. You know, the bottom line is, you have to treat the Parks staff with the same respect that you treat the Conservancy staff, and vice versa. You really you can't take sides in this game if you're really going to try to make this succeed. You know, this is a challenge from both sides now. You had Conservancy staff over the last ten or fifteen years that really didn't get involved with doing garbage or litter, you know, they got to do the fancy stuff. And so then you had a Parks staff that basically all they did was litter pickup, and so they didn't get to do much of the horticulture or the design or the construction management. And so now you're telling Conservancy staff, in your zone, you're picking up garbage for the first couple hours every day, and then you'll get to do your horticulture. And then with the Parks staff, you're basically saying, you know, we got to do the litter, but then we're going to start trying to teach you, we're going to work with you and teaching you how to prune trees and how to plant shrubs and how to do turf management. So it was very, very tricky, but it's just a matter of, you know, the first couple of years, absolutely were extremely stressful and difficult. But just kept telling people, promise you that next year the litter is going to be a little less and the next year is the litter is going to be a little less and, you know, now your look at the park and the park is basically litter free every day. And the gardeners don't have to come in the park and do three or four hours of litter pickup. They might come in and do it for a half an hour of just a quick kind of run through their zone to check it out. So, you know, you really, probably by 1998, 1999, 2000, you really turn the tide where litter wasn't what you were completely involved in all day. Now you could actually go in the park and do some fun things, you can do some horticulture, you can do some restoration, you can take care of some benches, you can do some of the stuff that you really like doing.

STEPAN: And who would say were the key people to making that happen?

BLONSKY: You know, I have the same group of guys that I've been working with for 25, 30 years we've been together. Neil Calvanese is my chief of operations now as I moved up, and Neil really runs the day to day operations of the park. And Neil has been crucial to our success over 18 acres of beautiful grass to maintain. We could not lose it. We brought in Russell Fredericks, another graduate of Rutgers, from their turf program. And Russell is now the chief of operations in the park and so Neil is actually his boss. So

those two, park wide, have been instrumental. Chris Nolan, who I brought in in the late 80s, is actually now running our design department. And I hired Chris in like 89, and now he's taking care of the capital side of things. You got Russell and Neil taking care of the operational side of things. And so I think that's one of the real successes of what we do compared to other parks departments, is our capital people and our operations people, they talk to each other. Every day.

STEPAN: And now they're both under the Conservancy.

BLONSKY: They're both under the Conservancy, and they both report directly to me as vice presidents.

STEPAN: Real quickly detour into that ramping up of the design team, which was really key to get in your master plan hashed out and some of those early projects done.

BLONSKY: The master plan for Central Park, which, you know, Betsy rightly called it a management and restoration plan, with management being first, really was put together by Betsy and four or five landscape architects, several of them that were actually consultants and several of them actually worked in the park. And they worked collectively with each other over a four year period of time, really pulling in data. And it was in 85, actually, just when I started is when that master plan was put out to the public.

STEPAN: And so how did the Conservancy and its city counterparts and collaborators approach outreach?

BLONSKY: Well, you know, I can tell you a great example of where we failed with outreach, and it was one of those very early projects where we did fail, and we got very concerned about proving to the public that we could do this. It was the East 79th Street landscape, which people refer to as Cedar Hill or Dog Hill or Sled Hill, and that's where everybody sleigh rides. We did a major restoration there. We did this, this was probably the late 80s, and, you know, gorgeous, beautiful lawn area, everything is wonderful and, what do you know, within a couple of weeks the dogs are back out there, winter comes, the sleds are back out there, and by the next spring, the place is basically eroded and dirt again, and losing most of the lawn. And what we realized is, you know, we didn't bring in that dog constituency and talk to them about what we want to do here. We didn't bring in the schools in the neighborhood and say, hey listen, wouldn't you rather be playing on grass as opposed to dirt? We didn't do that kind of outreach. And it was before we had the zone management system. And so, you know, so what we had to quickly do was go back and really talk to all those user groups that use that area, get a zone gardener responsible for that area, so the public is now going to be able to relate to a face every day when they come in the park. It actually implements some innovative management strategies. You know, one of the things that we implemented there that we now do park wide is a red flag system. So when people come in the park, and if it's because we just did an application of fertilizer or because it rained the whole day before and the grass is sensitive, the red flag tells people very quickly that, hey, this lawn over here is closed today. And the zone gardener will say, listen, but you can play over here. So it's really developing that communication.

STEPAN: Was there a template or precedent you guys looked to for developing the zone management scheme?

BLONSKY: No, not really, it was really just looking about, you know, kind of really instilling in us this whole accountability issue, the, you know, we have [sava?] study that was done in the mid 70s that really talked about accountability and that there was nobody accountable for the park. And then, you know, Betsy comes in as that first accountable individual, as the administrator of the park, and then a year later the president of the Conservancy. And it was just really thinking about ownership and accountability and kind of drilling that down, and that's how we really developed that.

STEPAN: And from what Betsy was saying, it sounds like culturally and, just in terms of work rules, those sorts of things would either be slower in coming or not at all through the previous city only system. Is that your sense?

BLONSKY: You know, I think part of it was work rules were challenging. But more so, it's just a whole different, you know, when you work an environment for 20 years and you're not really asked to do a lot, you're not going to all of a sudden change. And so I think it's really a cultural change as much as it is as work rule change. Not everybody grabbed on to it whatsoever. A lot of people didn't want anything to do with this. And when I became chief of operations, in some respects I said to myself, you know, first off, I'm going to devoting an incredibly amount of time doing this. Secondly, how am I going to succeed, because I've looked at a lot of this workforce over the years. But I kind of stepped back for a second, I said, listen, there's a lot of people here that work and hour a day. If I can get it up to two, I just did 100% improvement. And so, and that was kind of the start. And then a little bit more and a little bit more, and I knew this wasn't going to be an overnight turnaround and that it was clearly going to take some time, and clearly there were people that were not going to want to be involved whatsoever.

STEPAN: So it sounds like it might not have been possible to simply sit down in a room somewhere and in a few hours hash out that progression, that was seeing what worked, a little trial and error, a little experimenting as you went along and evolving it. But I wonder if you're advising somebody who's looking to do this sort of collaboration, how to achieve something like that without the long ramp up.

BLONSKY: You know, it's difficult. Sometimes you just have to go do it and take your beating later. And if you want to get consensus on some things, you're never going to get anything done, and so you have to pick and choose when you want to get consensus and when you want to accomplish something, and you just have to go do it. I think a lot of people wait around for kind of that, you know, being allowed to do this. And if you wait around for somebody giving you the authority to do this, you're never going to get it done.

STEPAN: And sounds like there was quite a lot of leeway on the part of the conservancy in implementing and interpreting the policy set by the city. I wonder if you can talk a little bit about how you earned, achieved, or took the initiative to have that latitude, and how that worked out in the early stages.

BLONSKY: Well, you know, we were kind of the new kids on the block, and we kind of could pretend that there wasn't any rules or regulations here, because, you know, the park was in such horrible condition that nobody could really question us about what we wanted to do. And Betsy was terrific about just saying, I want this done. And, you know, back then it didn't really matter how you did it, you got it done. And we were able to do that, and because she was the only real accountable person. So there was not a lot of people looking over your shoulder saying, you know, you can't do that, you shouldn't do that. There were a lot of people that not necessarily wanted you to do that, but they weren't going to really get in your way, they just kind of wanted to be left alone.

STEPAN: OK, and you mentioned a lot of Conservancy folks who pretty low on tenure, on stability, and within the organization, one of the issues that comes up in discussions of public/private partnerships are either union protections or work rules, public versus private sector, kind of thing, I know there's a huge variety on both ends. But I wonder, since you were there through quite a long transition, you were able to see the old system, the hybrid system, the new personnel arrangement that you've got, how would you compare training, job prospects, job growth within the organizations. It sounds like an interesting evolution through this partnership.

BLONSKY: I think that's one of the reasons why we were so successful, because we really could develop the Conservancy staff in house, train, and move up. I mean, you know, I always really want to hire for people that want to work in the park, people that want to come to work and have a great attitude and love the mission of what we're doing, and want to be on a great team. But you don't need the skills. And quite frankly, in those early days, you were not going to hire too many people with degrees in horticulture to come work in Central Park, I mean, this was not working at an arboretum or a botanical garden. This was urban horticulture at its lowest point. And so just getting people to want to work in the park, and we will train you on the horticulture side, we'll train you on rustic maintenance and how to take care of rustic structures, we'll teach you that stuff. So it was just getting good people into the park, that wanted to work, and then we would actually sit back and give them the skills to do that. Now over the years as we've improved, now we're starting to get, probably over the last five, seven years, we're really starting to get people that have degrees in horticulture, as well. So it's a really nice blend that we're putting together now.

BOWEN: As far as recruiting, was there more initiative and activity on the Conservancy side than on the city side? Was there any effort through the city bureaucracy to start to attract a different profile of a person coming into the park?

BLONSKY: No, you know, there's, mostly the new ideas and new blood were coming in on the Conservancy side, but there was absolutely a wonderful core of Parks Department staff that really liked what we were doing. And they realized, wow, this is pretty cool. We're getting really nice equipment, we're getting really nice uniforms, because I would never deny our partners from the Parks Department, you know, access to that stuff. So our training was open to everybody. So there was definitely a great group of folks from the Parks Department that bought into this. And so, you know, we partnered with several of the operations folks that really wanted to be part of this. And they work with their staff out there. They were instrumental to what we did as well.

BOWEN: And in terms of that outreach and training, I understand from the early days you were going to the community and going to other parks and offering some training and advice. Can you describe that effort and the timeline?

BLONSKY: Yes, I mean, probably it was in the mid 90s that we really started looking at people. When I started in 85, we were looking to every other park in the world and nationally, and, you know, how can we be like them. And then slowly by the mid to late 90s, we now people coming to look at Central Park and say, what are you guys doing in there, how are you doing it. And so we really started, very early on, exporting that. And a lot of it was with actually training within the park. We had a lot of Parks Department staff come in the late 90s spend couple weeks with us. And we would put together programs on how to deal with the public, you know, about horticulture, about ball field maintenance, about mowing the lawns and growing grass. So it's always been part of our core, is sharing our best practices.

And there's no question that by sharing best practices, you're learning an awful lot from those folks that you're sharing with.

BOWEN: Yes, so how, from the early days, did the Conservancy approach handling issues of private uses, private events, whether it's part of fundraising of community related issues of if, want of a better term, it's probably not the greatest one, but like temporarily privatizing a section for exclusive use, for no public access. Was there a lot of discussion early on on how that might be handled, or did it just sort of evolve?

BLONSKY: Well, there's really, unless we're doing a restoration of a project, we really never close anything down and close it off to the public. Very few, we only do three major fundraising events in the park, and they're really in areas that don't affect anybody. And even working with the Parks Department, because the Parks Department really still handles the permitting process for events in the park, and very rarely is a private event done in Central Park, unless it's probably one of ours. And if there are occasionally, you know, if you look at our big concerts on the Great Lawn, you know, 60,000, 70,000 people, but they're all free, open to the public events. They might be ticketed, just so it's organized and you know how many people are going to show up, but they're free and open to the public. So Central Park is, everything is free, everything is open. There's really no areas that are closed off from people that they can't use it.

BOWEN: How would you characterize the split of those parts of the decision process that are open and participatory and those that are not, and what's your experience been with them?

BLONSKY: I think anything that has to do with policy or projects in the park is absolutely open to the public. I mean, anytime we do a capital project in the park, or anything significantly operationally, we go to all five community boards that sit on Central Park for approval. And we go for a preliminary approval and we go for a final. We also go to the public design commission and the art commission. And we don't start anything unless we have the blessing and the sign off of the parks commissioner. So our work in the park is completely open and transparent. Any time we have a private board meeting, of the board of directors, which is really about governance and about my performance and about, you know the performance of the senior management, and really a discussion of what's going on in the park, those are private board meetings. But we have the minutes of them, and but, so there's two different things [UNINTELLIGIBLE] when you're really thinking about what's going on in the park, that's always open and for the public to see and nothing's closed off on that, there's no secrets in decisionmaking late in the evening, right [OVERLAPPING VOICES].

BOWEN: So obviously there's been some discussion recently about, at the state level, mandating that Conservancy's trusts with the budgets of [UNINTELLIGIBLE] assets over \$5 million, allocating, what was it, 20% of the operational resources to a fund to more broadly, a pool for other less well served parks. I don't know what the status is of that, but I wonder what you can say about that at this point.

BLONSKY: Well, you know, I think what's interesting about it, if you read that legislation, you know, the end goal is something that we completely believe in, and that we've been doing for years. The bottom line is we want to make every New York City park a wonderful park. And we actually work in 12 different park, outside of Central Park right now. And that's something that we've been doing for probably about ten years. And in fact we just signed a new management agreement with the city in June, and those properties are now included in our management agreement. So there actually is a way of doing this, and

the way we do it is the Parks Department said to you, you know, you're going to take care of these 12 public spaces for the next ten years. So I think we agree on the end result, without a doubt, and Senator Squadron is who put this bill forward, and I've met with him and we've talked. And it's how you get there. There's no question that if we had to give 20% of our funding, private funding, that people would stop giving to the park. And I've had a lot of responses for that so I'm very, very concerned about that aspect of it. But I completely agree on the concept of how do we get every park in New York City to be terrific. But I think it's also important to know that, over the last 20, 25 years, New York City parks in general have improved dramatically. And I think people lose that message. It's important to know that, maybe we're not there yet and it's not perfect and there's always improvement to do, but, boy, they've come a long way under the past commissioners and past mayors.

STEPAN: I want to paint the picture here a little bit. I know that Gordon Davis was an important person, obviously Betsy. When she wrote that article it was kind of a call to arms. She was obviously an activist what was the impact of that? Did things kind of have to get to a really dramatically bad moment for people to say, we got to do something?

BLONSKY: Yes, I mean, I think, you know, Dick Guilder, who's one of our founding trustees, and actually started the Central Park community fund, which was actually a different group than Betsy's, you know, he's wonderful in saying that the park was in such disrepair that something had to be done. And I think that's what was so important. It was so miserable, so horrible that, you know, it, people had to galvanize around it. And that really caused a Betsy Rogers and a George Soros and a Dick Guilder and an Arthur Ross, you know, and a Gordon Davis to say, we've got to figure out a way to do this. And so it was interesting because it was really a merging back in the late 70s of two not for profits. That's Betsy Rogers's Central Park Task [UNINTELLIGIBLE] Dick Guilder's and George Soros's Central Park Community Fund, coming together to form the Conservancy. And it was Gordon really that was the person that really, you know, kind of pushed that merger to make it happen. Because Gordon knew that you're going to have to use the private sector to do this, you're not going to ever take Central Park back with just public dollars.

STEPAN: And when he started to articulate that, when that first sort of went public was it controversial? Was there push back? Were people saying, what happened?

BLONSKY: I think back then the park was so bad and, you know, who's this woman, what's she going to be able to do. I don't think people were that nervous about it, you know. And Gordon didn't just do this in Central Park, he went and created the position of the borough commissioner for parks as well. So there was more accountability even in the borough level. So, you know, I, really it was interesting. It wasn't probably until we were getting to the point in the mid 90s, up to 98, when we were going to sign an actual official management agreement with the city, when I think people started getting very nervous. That was kind of when people started thinking privatization. I don't think before the real management agreement people were thinking about it as any form of privatization, they were thinking it more as kind of volunteer organizations helping out the park. And I don't think Betsy was all that feared from the bigger community. I think there were some community groups in the park that were nervous about some of the things that we were doing, such as the birders and the naturalist, the work that we were doing in the Ramble, had some challenges in the early years, because we cut some trees down that people kind of went crazy about. But in general I think people just kind of, you know, is this really going to work? OK, give it a shot. Place is so bad, what's the big deal? But I think it was a little bit later on when we were quite a sizeable entity and the city was about to turn over a management agreement to this private group

for a pretty significant period of time that people that was privatization, even though it really wasn't privatization, it was a management agreement.

STEPAN: And that was a real watershed, wasn't it? Were you part of structuring that agreement?

BLONSKY: Yes, it took several years to come up with this agreement and it was really Ira Milstein, who was our chairman during that period of time, who's a senior partner at [Wyle Gotchel?] and he was really the gentleman that was pushing that. And Ira had a partner that worked with him who was on board also, Ken Heitner, and I got to work very closely with them on structuring what that agreement was going to look on. And so, you know, what was happening was, it was very interesting that the Conservancy was getting bigger and bigger every year, the city was getting a little big smaller and smaller every year. And we felt it was important to make sure that the city was a real partner I this park. And we were concerned that if didn't have a management agreement, that at some point it would be just the Conservancy standing there. And then the city, on the other side of it, I think, was getting concerned as well, that seeing that the Conservancy is getting bigger and bigger, you know, we better do something to control this entity. And so it was like a perfect time for a management agreement to take place. And so it was really, now the city was paying us a fee for service to do the work in the park, and we knew that there would be a certain assured funding from the city because, you know, our donors want to know that this is a partnership, it's not privatization, and that the city and the Conservancy are doing this together.

STEPAN: Is there something about giving local control and giving space for people to take care of things locally that's magical, that really makes all this work?

BLONSKY: Yes, and I think that's what it is. I mean, we started it, you know, Betsy was a small volunteer organization. It's taken us 33 years to get where we are today. A lot of people look at us as this big fundraising machine and think that we've always been like this. You know, the early years that, when I started, we were mostly leveraging with small private dollars. We were leveraging big city dollars. So there's interesting ways of doing things. And we were a huge volunteer organization, using volunteer resources, and we still are today. We couldn't manage the park the way we do today without the 350 regular volunteers that we use. But I look at other parks groups, and if you have a constituency in that neighborhood that wants to go out and help, you really need to take advantage of that, I mean, that is so powerful. And it might be painting benches, it might be picking up litter, but you got to get them involved. But you have to have oversight over it, too, you know, I've seen some of these models where there is no oversight and they're kind of, the volunteer group is running the show, and it can go a little weird. And so you need to make sure that somebody that understands the concept of how that park should look and be managed is giving it the oversight, but also let the volunteers blossom and do their thing.

BOWEN: How does the Conservancy approach this question of sharing with others? Is it a model that you can export?

BLONSKY: Yes, I mean, you know, we've always been looking at, you know, we've always been looking at, you know, we've always been meeting people from around the country, around the world, around New York City, to share practices. It's actually kind of interesting because it's such a demand on us that we, and it's so important for us, that we actually are developing and implementing what we're calling is the Central Park Institute for Urban Parks. And this is really a division of our organization that's just as powerful and as strong as, you have the operational side of things, you have the capital design side of

things, and now we have the institute that really deals with this park to park relationship on sharing best practices. Maura Lout, who runs the park to park side of the institute, and then Terry Cardit is actually the associate VP of the institute. So there's real people connected to running this institute, and their job is to actually leverage the staff in the park for their expertise, to bring it to the table, when we're either holding a seminar or when a group comes from South America or Japan or from Russia to meet with us. She goes out and gets the right people to sit down at that table. And I'll tell you, it's great for our staff because it's really great for staff development. They love to meet with people and to share what they have learned here. Part of the institute is also training programs. We just put together a wonderful turf care training program that we had about 50 Parks Department staff from all five boroughs coming here, having a half a day in the classroom, half a day out in the field to really learn about turf management. So we're going to really keep developing the institute and really it's a place where people can learn about everything from running a conservancy to managing a park to picking up the litter to putting together a recycling and trash management program.

STEPAN: Could you just kind of run over for us the basic numbers? What's your annual budget, how many people do you currently staff, how many acres do you manage?

BLONSKY: Sure, I mean, we've had, you know, it's interesting. The park has grown from 12 million visitors a year in the early 80s to 40 million visitors a year now. So we're definitely one of the most visited public spaces in the world. We have 843 acres. We do 2000 tons of garbage every year. We recycle everything we possibly can in the park, from litter to trees. We have a staff of about 325 Conservancy employees. We still have about 20 city employees that work for us. Our annual budget right now is \$58 million a year. Out of the \$58 million about 16 of it is capital dollars, the rest is really operating dollars. Seventy five percent of that is privately raised, 25% of that comes from the city. And, you know, when you look at that 75%, 70 of that 75% is individuals that live around the park, within a ten minute walk. So that's our donor base audience. But the people that use the park really represent everybody, from, in New York City and from around the world. Out of that 40 million visitors, you know, the people from all five boroughs are several million of those folks, and then we have about nine million tourists that come in the park every year, and then we have about six million locals that come in the park, but the locals obviously use the park many, many, many times.

STEPAN: Following up some of the outreach issues, what about the north side of the park?

BLONSKY: And Ira, yes. It was one of the things that I thought, I was always very impressed about Central Park and, you know, my first, when I first started, I had two projects that I was supervising. One was the East 67th Street playground, which is in the southeast corner of the park, and then the other one was the Great Hill, up at the north end of the park, at 106th Street. So right from the beginning we were always saying to ourselves, we have to restore the park equally. We can't be focusing on where the money might be. And I have to say, donors have been wonderful over the years about saying the same thing. And so, you know, Betsy and Ira went up very early on. Calvin Butts became one of our board members for many years, and Calvin Butts said to Ira at a major church breakfast, you know, these are the people that are going to save Central Park. I remember very clearly when we were doing the work around the Harlem Meer. And the Harlem Meer was absolutely one of the worst locations in the park. The water body was filled with garbage, there was a whole series of burnout bathouses up there. Derelict area that you wouldn't go to. And, you know, it was in the late 80s, early 90s, that we restored that whole area, investing millions of millions of dollars. And then in 98, when we had to get our management agreement

and get it approved by the city council, it was the folks from Harlem that came down there and spoke up and said, listen, this is the first group that's ever come in to Harlem and fixed up a major area of the park. And not just fix it up, but they stayed there, they programmed it, and they're out there every day doing maintenance. And so they've been our greatest advocate. So it's been a project of doing the whole park and not exclusively doing any area for the people that are donating money.

STEPAN: Two quick questions to wrap up. One of the questions, capital expenditure versus maintenance. Mayors, politicians, generally they find capital expenditures more attractive. Maintenance is something that's sometimes harder, and but it's fundamental. Do you see that as another place where the private side of the public/private partnership comes to play in keeping that balance right?

BLONSKY: Yes, we do. But, you know, we don't even look at it anymore as capital and maintenance, because when I saw our budget is \$58 million a year, we don't even separate the two. Because we don't own anything at the end of the day anyway, so we don't have a real capital project. It's all maintenance. We can still have a great ribbon cutting, we can still have a great groundbreaking, which people like to see. But when we look at the budget, we look at it as one large budget. So we look at it differently than the city does it. And when we go to a donor and we want to restore a playground and the playground might be \$2 million, we'll go to the donor and, right from the bat, and say, you know, we're asking for three, because two is going to the playground and one is going to either long term maintenance dollars or it will go into an endowment, depending on how the donor might want to know give us that money. So we're always looking at maintenance equally, or more important, quite frankly, than the capital dollars.

STEPAN: Finally, you know the High Line was a very high profile project that a lot of people see as being something that's applying the model to a new, different area. Did the High Line organizers come and reach out to people at the Conservancy at an early stage? Did you, do you see connections between these two endeavors?

BLONSKY: Oh, absolutely. When the High Line, even when, you know, Robert and Josh were just thinking about the High Line, they spent a lot of time with me just talking about what we have gone over. They spent a lot of time with Betsy. We've kept a really great relationships. We're constantly communicating on issues of general of parks now, you know, we've talked a bunch about the legislation that we've talked about before and how we feel about it. But they reached out to us very early on to talk about the issues about operations and maintenance and that you're going to restore this thing, you're going to have to maintain it. And they realized very quickly that, you know, they run the whole maintenance and operations side of things there, too, that they weren't just going to go raise private dollars and get city dollars and build the High Line, but they need to be there on the ground, taking care of it every day. So they did a fabulous job down there, and I'm just so thrilled that they used us as a model, and that they're still there doing the work.

STEPAN: Would you say that the model can be applied everywhere, or it has to be adapted? How applicable is the model? Where does it work, where doesn't it work?

BLONSKY: Well, you know, every major urban city in the country that has a major urban park has some form of a conservancy or friends group that is somewhat modeled off of ours. They're always different, you know, the resources are always different. You might be using more city money in your model, you might be using more volunteers in your model. And you might not nearly have obviously the incredible wealth that we have around Central Park. But a lot of these others are really bringing in huge amounts of

private dollars. So I think they're, none of them are the exact same, but they all have that kind of core of where it starts as a volunteer group of people that want to come in and really take back their park. How do we do it? And there's just different avenues on how you can accomplish that.

BOWEN: Has the park effects proven recession resilient in any special way? I wonder also if there was any sense of how to portray that. Obviously it works for fundraising and for a certain sector of interests. But it also, to some, may smack of serving a vested interest of a smaller segment of the populations. So what's the situation with fact and how have you dealt with that?

BLONSKY: We did hire Appleseed, which is a company that does kind of economic studies. And we did in 2007, to look at really what the park generates every year. And what was amazing that came out of it is, overall the park generates over, well over about \$1.2 billion of economic activity. A lot of that is directly from taxes going to the city, a lot of that is just from people spending money. But it also has what we call the Central Park lift, which the buildings within about a ten minute walk of the park has about a \$17 billion incremental on their real estate values because of the park. And, you know, but you look around Central Park and it's, you have the greatest hotels in the world, you have the greatest museums in the world, you have some of the most incredible, Madison Avenue, you know. And so, but it helps the entire city, because you're bringing in 40 million people every year to Central Park. But, you know, fundraising for Central Park is a very personal thing. We do it through membership and we have 30,000 members. But most of the time with fundraising, it's me going to someone's house, having lunch with them, and reminding them that the apartment that we're sitting in right now is worth what it is because of Central Park. And, quite frankly, if you go back to the 70s and look at it, most people wanted to live on Park Avenue and most people were moving over to Broadway, because living next to Central Park, you were living next to crime. And crime in Central Park now is really unheard of and it's one of the safest place you can be in New York City. So people realize how important Central Park is. The people living around the park know how important it is, not just to them personally, as an investment, but it's their health and well being by using the park, and it's so important to the city in general, because tourism is what keeps New York City going, and Central Park is what keeps tourists coming here

[END]

Interview with Steven Cohen on February 12, 2014 in New York City

Interviewers: Adam Stepan and Ted Bowen

STEPAN: So let's start off by you giving your name and your title, please.

COHEN: Stephen Cohen, I am a Professor of Practice at the School of International Public Affairs and Executive Director of the Earth Institute.

STEPAN: Let's talk a little bit about the history of public private policy for green spaces. Was this a new idea? What are the origins for what happened here?

COHEN: In many respects, parks preserving green space is something that's been public private since the very beginning. I mean, Teddy Roosevelt, when he was going out West and hunting and trying to turn some of the great lands out in the West into national parks, looked for any allies he could find. In fact, he couldn't get the Grand Canyon at first declared a national park so he made it a national monument, which he had executive authority to do. But there has been a big move, particularly, for a very long time, people thinking about the future have been thinking about, how do we preserve green space. That, I think has been a long tradition, for urban parks, I think a little bit different. Those have been basically seen as municipal projects that are government responsibility. Central Park is an amazing example of long term thinking.

STEPAN: What's some of the theory behind it? When there are budget problems you can't cut the police, you can't cut the fire department, but somehow parks seem like not a necessary, essential service. Is that part of the theory behind why?

COHEN: I think the way a public official looks at things when times are tough is, what can go wrong? So if you don't have police, people die, if you don't have a fire department, people die. If you don't have schools, the political reaction is intense. If poor people go hungry and cold, that can result in irreversible change. If the parks are a little bit dirty, a little bit messed up, you know, you can always clean them up later and New York City's parks have gone through these periods before. It happened during the 20s, it happened during the 60s where the parks really fell apart. Central Park, when I was growing up in New York in the late 60s and early 70s, there were incredible amounts of drugs and it was a mess. Parks, even during the day, were dangerous places.

STEPAN: Let's talk a little more about that, the connection between the fiscal crisis in the '70s, what happened there?

COHEN: New York City overextended itself and started to spend money they didn't have, we also, in the era before inexpensive information and communications, the City basically had no financial control system. We didn't know how much money was coming in, we didn't know how much money was going out, and eventually, the deck of cards collapsed. The State had to come in and an incredible alliance of union, government and the private sector came together and saved New York City, and the federal government in the end, came together and saved New York City.

In that environment, lots of things disintegrated in terms of city services. Also, many City services started to get taken over by the State, including the subways and the City University. A lot of these functions that had been New York City functions, unique to New York City, New York City is sort of a socialist enclave in a capitalist country, many of those services started to be taken over the State and the parks fell into intense disrepair.

Again, when I was growing up in New York, a park was not just a physical facility, it was a recreational facility. You would go to a park and there would be a building and there would be a person there called a parkee, and the parkee would hand out basketballs and also keep their eye on the property, so there would be no graffiti, there would be no violence or if there was violence, the parkee would call the cops. The first thing that happened in the Parks Department was that they cut those guys. Once they cut out the recreation staff, the parks became open targets for the drug dealers and for anybody else who wanted access to it, so many of the parks became dangerous places to be.

STEPAN: Just to follow up a little bit on that, do you have any personal recollections of how bad it was?

COHEN: Sure. First, if you wanted to buy drugs, and when I was a teenager in the late 60s, you would go to parks. There were drug dealers all over the parks, and the parks were a mess, physically a mess. There was garbage, if you go to one of the places in parks where people don't frequent, in other words, most of the traffic in New York City's parks, most of the people don't go to most of the acreage. About 90 percent of the traffic inside parks are in ten percent of the space, so if you go to the spaces where people don't congregate, then all sorts of things were going on, you would see abandoned cars, it was pretty disgusting. The system was really in a state of disrepair. Now it did obviously make a magnificent comeback, but during that period of time, you thought about parks differently. I mean, I was a teenager, so I didn't care about the fact that it was a little bit funky, in fact, that may have attracted me to the park, but as an adult and certainly as a father with children, that would not have worked for me.

STEPAN: When the people later on created the organization that later became Central Park Conservancy, they started to organize and went to City Hall. I know that Gordon Davis had a big role. How was this idea initially received from the perspective of City Hall?

COHEN: I think there was a little bit of confusion, there was some resistance to the idea of private parties coming in and participating in that way. Everybody was happy to take their money, but people were a little bit reluctant to figure out how to let the thing work. One of the good things about New York, even during the worst of times, is that Fifth Avenue and Central Park West were always, and of course, Central Park South, were always high rent districts. Those people saw Central Park as their back and front yard, and to them, this was sort of like rich people paying the gardener. They expected to see something nice outside of their windows and certainly not something dangerous.

I think the motivation for the Conservancy was from people who lived in places where they had views of the park. I think that part of what you start to see there is the creation of a new form of organization in the Central Park Conservancy. What you see in public private partnerships in New York, and we're not the only place that did it, but things like the Conservancy or business improvement districts, which were places where, in New York, there's a law that if a number of merchants in one neighborhood agree, they essentially can tax themselves and create a nonprofit, that nonprofit delivers extra service to them such as security and garbage removal and in the case of the Times Square business improvement district, they did drug counseling to get the junkies out of Times Square. In the case of Central Park, what you saw was

the creation of a parks management organization that was pretty unique in its time. Even today, I think it is seen as a world leader in basic management techniques. It's a very impressive organization.

STEPAN: Following up with the theory behind it, is it really true that there are some issues that really need this kind of local citizen or local government, the connection between a local park, a local business district, is there a solid theory behind this?

COHEN: I think one of the issues for contracting is what in management we call the make or buy decision, do we do it ourselves or should we purchase it from somebody else. In the case of parks, the City certainly knows how to run parks, the issue for the Parks Department at the time that the Central Park Conservancy was created and certainly since then, is really an issue of resources, which is how do we mobilize additional resources for this park system. In the competition for resources, parks doesn't do well competing against what are considered essential city services.

If you live in New York City, the park is an essential city service. Most of the land in New York City sits underneath single family homes, but most of the people in New York City live in apartments. When I was raising my daughters, the parks were where I would bring them to go outside. That was an essential city service. If you want to have a middle and an upper class and for that matter, a working class living in the City, there have to be places for their kids to go and play. The parks are that kind of service but on the other hand, the resources were simply not available to run them. I think the City thought, OK, so how do we mobilize those resources and the Conservancy model for both Central Park and Prospect Park in particular, but other parts of New York City as well, that model was to try and bring in a nonprofit organization to help.

In the case of the Conservancy, it went even further. The City actually contracts with the Conservancy to manage the park. When we say manage the park, that doesn't mean the Conservancy can do anything they want, the City contract with the Conservancy requires that the City make policy and still be in charge, but it also gives the Conservancy very wide latitude to implement that policy.

I'll give you an example, the area in Central Park that is south of 72nd Street, between 59th and 72nd Streets, is one of the most congregated areas in the world in terms of people. It's a very dense area, particularly when the weather is nice. One of the operational problems the Parks Department had was, how do we get the garbage out? At first, they would have their own garbage trucks that would go in and take the garbage. Eventually, they realized they couldn't fit the garbage trucks into the park. They had a very nice system where they had automatic pickup of the garbage. So what they did was, they ended up with smaller garbage cans and golf carts that could get in and pick up the garbage, because you have to pick up the garbage all day long.

When Bill Eimicke and I were doing our work with the Parks Department, then Commissioner Betsy Gotbaum told us a story. She said 80 percent of the labor in the Parks Department goes to two functions, mowing the lawn and picking up garbage, so these are very important functions in New York City parks. Here, you have all these people, how do we get in to get out the garbage? The Central Park Conservancy came up with first a container system and then eventually, they abandoned that for a system where they used smaller vehicles to get smaller garbage bags out of the park. That kind of creativity would take decades for a City government in a highly unionized, rule focused environment to innovate. In fact, in New York City, when we went from a three person to a two person garbage truck, it was a major

innovation, it took almost a decade before we were allowed to do that. Imagine the same thing happening in Central Park. So the park, under the Conservancy, has a lot more flexibility to do a lot more things.

STEPAN: What was Gordon Davis' role? Was it important to have a champion within City government who said listen, this can work, we can co manage this?

COHEN: Davis certainly played a very creative role at the creation of this, but I think all of the Parks Commissioners have had to deal with this. One of the interesting things is that the Parks headquarters is located in the Armory that is in Central Park, so they are basically operating their headquarters in a park that they don't day to day manage, which is a kind of interesting feature of this. I think at the same time, they recognized the need to mobilize resources and also, if you develop a good contract, in other words, if the contract vehicle provides you with accountability and points of control, then there is no reason to be afraid of it. If I contract with somebody to come and clean up my house, and I tell them I want them to be there from 10AM to 12PM because I am going to have a party at 1:00, if they come at 1:00, they don't get paid. The same thing is true in any contract vehicle, the person who is negotiating and letting the contract has operational control over the activities of the contractor. That has been the case with the City government and Central Park.

Some of the larger political issues are, here we have a park in the middle of the City surrounded by high priced real estate, what about the park out in Brooklyn or in the far reaches of Queens that doesn't have that kind of resource, what do they do? Do we have a two tier system where we have beautiful parks like Central Park and then lesser parks out in the outer boroughs? That issue has been a political issue that has been faced ever since the creation of the Central Park Conservancy. And the Conservancy, to their credit, actually has provided assistance to parks outside of Central Park, in part to remedy some of that, but it is still a major issue. The City would argue, because we don't have to spend money on Central Park, we can spend it on other parks, on the other hand, because the Parks Department budget has not been keeping pace with inflation, it's a hard argument to make.

STEPAN: Let's talk a little bit about that. I think people look to the Conservancy as a model that could be copied and applied elsewhere. In all the world, Central Park is amazing, how do you do this? The High Line is often seen as an example of replicating this model. Let's just talk a little bit about that, the movement to copy this and is it really something that can be transferred and applied in other places, or is it unique?

COHEN: I think it's very applicable in many situations. Obviously, the local political system, the culture of the people, it all has an impact. I mean, in New York, this issue of privatization is sometimes considered something to be avoided, that somehow you are abandoning influence and control, and there is a danger of that. You can have a bad contract, you could set up a public private partnership where the private sector has the upper hand, and that's really the responsibility of government, because even though you contract out, you are still accountable, the public official is still accountable. Rudy Giuliani, when he was Mayor, contracted out for some foster care services and when a young child died, he tried to blame it on the nonprofit. Nobody bought that, they said you let that contract, you are the government official, we voted for you, not the contractor. The public official is always accountable and responsible. I would say that is true in any system.

I think that this is applicable, but obviously would be different in different situations. One of the points that I often make about Central Park is that it's a citywide park, I grew up in Brooklyn but I went to

Central Park, I went to Prospect Park, there were large parks like that, Cortland, Prospect and Central Park, and now to some degree, Flushing Meadow Park in Queens, these are really citywide parks. People come from other places to go to them, so they are a little bit different than the other parks. In some respect, this kind of model may work better for centralized parks or for parks that are citywide versus neighborhood parks. On the other hand, if a neighborhood really takes it on, you could have a real partnership. We do have in New York, if you go to a place like Gramercy Park, you actually have a gated park that is totally private, you can't even get into the park without a key if you live nearby. There are examples of those kinds of parks.

What I like about the Conservancy model is that it's everybody's park. Central Park doesn't belong to the rich people on Fifth Avenue, it belongs to the whole city and that's an important part of this whole contracting relationship, that the city has to maintain control for its citizens. There are times when the city has said to the Conservancy, no, you can't do that, we are not going to permit that, we want this other activity to happen in the park. Sometimes the Conservancy, for example, at times it is against some recreational activity or some other activities that are going on in the park, and the city says no, we want those activities to take place. This issue of control is very important. A public private partnership is not a partnership of equals, because the resource that is being partnered on, which is public land, is a public trust to the public official. They have a responsibility to the whole population, not just to the people living around the park or to the private sector.

STEPAN: Following on that a little bit, from a management perspective, I think one of the issues of course is that now, the Central Park Conservancy, I think 80 percent of the staffing actually aren't city employees, which is done through attrition. Obviously, those sort of issues must be very tricky. How do you handle working with your unions? People say you are outsourcing. What are some of the tools or suggestions that people on those levels need?

COHEN: Well, if you enter into a public private partnership and you lay off unionized city workers and replace them with non unionized private sector workers, be prepared for a political buzz saw. One way to handle that, of course, is to take on the staff that were in the existing organization and then gradually, through attrition over time, replace them with new people. I think that is relatively invisible in a large government over time. It doesn't mean that the unions are going to like it, it doesn't mean there won't be a political reaction against it, but I don't think that's a deep concern. I think it has to, it's a delicate issue. If a privatization effort or a public private partnership starts with mass layoffs of workers, you are just asking for it. You have to figure out a way to avoid that if possible and many of the most successful examples of contracting out have included hiring of the public workers into the new relationship.

STEPAN: In terms of capital expenditure and operating expenses, under Bloomberg, there was a big move to create new jobs, but some people are saying there is a natural tendency for politicians to invest in public works and not maintenance people. That was also a criticism, what is this relationship between capital expenditure and operating?

COHEN: Sure. Every politician loves a ribbon cutting and loves to say, I built this and has in concrete, the blah blah blah park built by Mayor Blah Blah Blah, that's human nature. Operation and maintenance often is more of a problem. Remember, at least in the United States, capital expenditures are funded with debt, you borrow over a 10, 20 or 30 year period of time to build the capital. Debt service is not assigned to a department, it's assigned to the whole city so in a way, capital expenditures are politically very attractive to public officials. They get the benefit of it while they are in office and it gets paid for by the

next mayor, what could be better. Operation maintenance has to be done out of the annual expenditure budget, and that is often a function that can be starved. One of the unfortunate things is that if you don't maintain something, it will eventually fall apart, and then you have to re invest in new capital.

One of the good things that came out of New York City's fiscal crisis is in fact more of an emphasis on operational maintenance. We now have paid a lot of attention to our infrastructure over the last 40 years, so a lot of the older structures, bridges and things of that sort, have gone through significant renovations over this period of time.

STEPAN: In terms of some of the criticisms of the model, the issue of equity has come up as controversial. The recent 100 million dollar donation from Paulson came under a lot of criticism in the press. How would you describe this controversy and what do you see as some of the potential solutions?

COHEN: I think there is very little question that wealthy people, particularly in the United States where income distribution has become more and more favoring the wealthy, there is a lot of resentment of the funds that are allocated to this particular purpose or any purpose that wealthy people make donations. Taxing is not a solution, because that is simply a disincentive for people to provide those resources. One of the things that the City has done is that in addition to having a Central Park Conservancy, there is a Parks Foundation and the Parks Foundation also works at trying to raise money for all of the parks and has been reasonably successful in doing that. But there is an equity issue, and there's an equity issue in the whole society, parks is so different than anything else. Wealthy people invest in the things that they are going to benefit from, whether it is a great university like Columbia, where I work, or whether it is the park that is outside their window, that is going to get their first attention.

At the same time, there is lots of charitable giving for lots of other types of things. I am on the board of an organization called Homes for the Homeless and they benefit from wealthy donating to provide services for homeless families. There is a very deep philanthropic tradition in New York City, this is not something you see all over the world but it's an important cultural aspect that I hope we encourage in other parts of the world. The way I would put it is that there is an equity issue, but there's an equity issue in the whole society, it is not exclusive to this. The question is, and I think, let me just add, I think in the United States, people are undertaxed. The wealthy in America pay much less tax than they did in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. One way to address that is to encourage private philanthropy where in a sense, people are self taxing and they are saying, I will put in some of my wealth, but I want it for a specific purpose. I think it's in the society's interest to encourage that, not to discourage it. You want as much of that as possible.

Warren Buffet is recruiting all of these billionaires to give away half of their money and he was talking once on TV about how he is on the phone with some billionaires and they are saying, I can't give up that, I can't live on only half a billion. He said I am thinking of writing a book, how to live on half a billion dollars, he said it's a struggle, but I'm sure people can do it. I think the idea of philanthropy is something that's good for society and should be encouraged. The down side of that is what you just mentioned, which is equity. What does that mean? It means we have to pay attention to the parks and the other resources that poor people have access to. Frankly, if you go around New York City today, you will see that parks all over the City have benefitted from capital expenditure and from more community involvement, a more competent Parks Department. In fact, most of the parks in the City look pretty good, not all of them, but most of them.

STEPAN: People talk more and more now in terms of open government and citizen involvement. Is there a connection between philanthropy and mechanisms like public private partnerships that allow local people to get involved and have a say?

COHEN: Absolutely. If you go to the parks in New York City in the spring, there are many community groups, civic groups that come and do planting and clean ups, students from high schools and colleges, civic organizations, neighborhood clubs go in and they spend a day painting and cleaning up the parks. That kind of participation, that kind of sweat equity is absolutely essential. If your brother just painted a fence, it makes you less likely to graffiti that fence when you get the chance, you are going to feel a sense of ownership. Part of what you are trying to do with philanthropy and public participation is create a sense that this is our park, this is our turf, our property, it's our shared resource. Anything you can do to encourage that is helpful. So the idea that this is the Parks Department delivering a service, yeah, that is part of it, but the other part is it's the community both giving of their time or, if they are wealthy enough, their money, sometimes both. I think that a healthy society should encourage all of that.

INTERVIEWER: The Hudson River Park has been seen as an example of the wrong kind of public private partnership. Is that a management problem? Was it designed with feasibility? Were financial models done incorrectly, from a management perspective? What went wrong there and what are the lessons?

COHEN: The Hudson River Park is an example of a public private partnership that didn't work so well, and they've had financial problems. On the other hand, up here where I live in Morningside Heights, in the northern part of Manhattan, I can get on a bicycle now and ride along the park and go all the way down to the Battery, which is the lower part of Manhattan. That is a totally new experience. Part of what I think happened in Hudson has to do with how the City is transforming itself. New York City, again, when I was growing up here, this was an industrial city, on the West side of Manhattan were docks, you had stevedores, you had people that would carry boxes and put them onto trucks from ships. That all got thrown out with containerized shipping, all the docks went to New Jersey and to parts of Brooklyn, so the industry, the light industry we had in Manhattan has been replaced by the Googles and the other kinds of service based industries that we have now in New York.

What that meant was that the waterfront now had some possibilities that it didn't have before and by the way, the other thing that happened was that we built a sewage treatment plant in 1984. Before 1984, we dumped raw sewage from Manhattan directly into the Hudson River, so you wouldn't want to get too close to that river in the summer, in fact, there is a reason why Riverside Drive is a quarter mile away from the river, because when the weather was hot in the 1970s, you could see and smell that river and it wasn't a pretty thing. By this century, you start to see along the waterfront, people would be trying to get there, so part of what was happening with the Hudson Park, part of it were management issues and part of it was, they were caught in the middle of an evolution of a new use of that land that wasn't there 20 or 30 years ago.

Now, in the case of Central Park, it was a design park, it was part of the master plan for New York City, you have the grid and you have this magnificent park right in the middle that had been planned well in advance of its construction. The riverfront was, in a sense, a conversion of a commercial area into a recreation area and into a residential area, which it wasn't when it started. They had a much tougher job to do and one of the problems that sometimes happens in the public sector is that people consider management issues to be, they'll compare one place to another saying, they are both public private partnerships, but the Hudson River group had a tougher assignment.

BOWEN: How do you think the Conservancy and the City might have improved their outreach efforts to other constituencies?

COHEN: I think that in fact, the Conservancy has done an excellent job of communicating what it was doing and in fact, was very responsive to criticism. One of the reasons why they devoted time and resources to helping other parks was that they saw the equity issue, they saw that they not only had to communicate their expertise throughout the City, but they had to actually put some resources into other places. I think that was a pretty intelligent strategy. Now, there have been tensions between the Parks Department and the Conservancy, any relationship between a contractor, between a principal and an agent, you are going to always see those kinds of difficulties from time to time. I would say that historically, it's been one of the most effective and smooth running partnerships I have ever seen. Now, I think it's really a fully institutionalized part of New York City, it's almost unimaginable to think of Central Park without the Conservancy.

BOWEN: Along those lines, I know there has been a little friction with renewal, about the biggest contract, is it realistic to think that there could be a competitor in that case, for that particular contract?

COHEN: I think it would, there is always a possibility that somebody else will throw in a bid. I think that the City would find itself in great difficulty with the stakeholders of the Conservancy. Remember, the donors to the Conservancy are many of the wealthiest people in New York City, wealth and political influence are not disconnected concepts, so I think that it is unlikely. I also think it would be completely idiotic. The Park's Conservancy has taken those resources and developed one of the most competent, probably the most competent parks organizations in the world. These guys know how to run an urban park. You go into Central Park and you look at the upkeep, you look at the services and the safety and everything else, it's magnificent, it's an incredible accomplishment.

BOWEN: In terms of the private uses, whether for fundraising purposes or commercial events, are there practices and policies that other public private partnerships might benefit from, and where have the problems arisen in cordoning off sections?

COHEN: One of the issues with parks in general is that you start to see the capacity for generating revenue, whether it is putting a restaurant like the Boathouse in, those kinds of places, or another hot dog stand, these are all potential revenue generators. On the other hand, people go into parks to get out of the commercial experience, you take your children into a park because it's the only place you can go where every 30 seconds, you aren't being asked to buy something. So you want an experience that is commercial free to some extent, that's one issue.

In terms of special events, there you have to balance the needs of the many against the needs of the few. It's not just revenue generation, it's also many, many nonprofits run fundraisers, whether it's this walk or that walk. I know on the weekends, before I get on my bicycle in the fall, I check out to see where is the walk, the run, the bike, something is going on somewhere in the City and I don't want to get trampled by a thousand people participating in it. The Department and the Conservancy and the other people involved in managing these resources have to pay attention to that, and I think, on the other hand, they want to make the parks a resource, particularly for these good causes.

Many of the things that happen in the Park are not weddings and bar mitzvahs, they are in fact fundraisers for very important causes or they are major civic events like the New York Marathon. Yes, there is a public private partnership but it's also a major outpouring of millions of New Yorkers to come and watch and participate in that. I don't think it's a black and white situation. I think it's one of those situations that requires political judgment, management and a little bit of thinking. One of the criticisms after Hurricane Sandy was, they wanted to run the Marathon the next week and people went a little crazy, this is a ridiculous idea. You need to be sensitive to those kinds of issues.

BOWEN: There seems to be a delicate issue around setting a percentage of revenue, say from concessions. How does a public official managing this relationship navigate that question?

COHEN: I think part of it is that you want to make sure the park is well run, you want to make sure the system is incentivized, you don't want to have the nonprofit say, we are not going to bother with that concession because we get nothing out of it. It's a question of making sure that the system works for you. I think that the issues of revenue generation in parks really need to be thought of very carefully, again, because the basic function of the park is not to generate revenues. It is to be a resource for people without charge.

BOWEN: A budgeting question, so much is contingent on donations and it certainly depends on the business cycle, what are some best practice around smoothing out the year to year?

COHEN: I think part of it is that if you are doing large scale projects, you really need to make sure that those are timed well in terms of the business cycle. If you are going to redo the great lawn, make sure it is done, that you don't try to do that right after the crash of Wall Street, which they did not try to do. You need to make sure your operations and maintenance budget is maintained, that in fact, deferring capital expenditures and then deferring debt service is a better idea than deferring maintenance and operation costs. And then, I think the other issue is to continue to work on management efficiency so that you can reduce the cost of operation and maintenance.

BOWEN: How about the free speech issue, would you say that the park is like any other public space in that regard, or is it in some ways like a mall?

COHEN: I think that public space for free speech and for demonstrations needs to be accessible to people. The specific spot and location, I think that is a matter of public policy, so you don't want to disrupt the lives of other people trying to go about their day. You want people to be able to express themselves in a place where they are visible and can be heard, but that doesn't mean they can lay down in Times Square. I think the City has a responsibility to balance the legitimate needs of people to express themselves, which they certainly are allowed to do and should be encouraged to do, but also, other people want to go about their business. If I am trying to use Central Park to ride my bicycle, I don't necessarily want to see a demonstration blocking the park drive, let them do the demonstration off the park drive. I think that is part of what the government has to do.

BOWEN: Is that any different in the case of a public private partnership?

COHEN: It can get more complicated, because you have another party involved in the negotiation, but again, it's the public responsibility to guarantee free speech, that's the government's job. You will notice

that in the Park, even though there are private employees that contribute to a more secure environment, the City police department is in there enforcing the law. There is no rent a cop, it's the NYPD that goes in there and patrols and that's considered part of the City's responsibility in the management of the Park.

STEPAN: I think we have one last thing on High Line. Maybe just give us your quick take on the High Line and how does it compare to Central Park Conservancy, what does it mean for other people in other places?

COHEN: The High Line is really a fascinating example of public private partnership. First of all, you had a couple of people who were really advocates for it, and it wasn't as if Central Park was going to be paved over, but the High Line, its preservation was the first issue, keeping it from being knocked down. It was an artifact of the commercial era in New York City. It was a way to avoid traffic and get delivery of raw material and goods to the docks from the factories that were on the West side of Manhattan, which was an industrial district. The vision and imagination to preserve that as a park is an amazing thing. Then, of course, you have a really interesting combination, a nonprofit group of advocates that were very effective and you had a Mayor, frankly, who has an eye for this kind of thing and saw the potential. The most interesting part, I think, was what it did to transform the real estate in that part of town. I think it was going to happen anyway, but it happened much faster because now there is a park amenity.

One of the problem with the parts of Manhattan that are below the grid, this part's not below the grid but it's basically lower Manhattan, it does not have the same amount of park land that upper Manhattan does, so their neighborhoods, the West side was all industrial, it wasn't residential, it's underserved for parks. Here, you see this incredible example of creativity and imagination and then, I think what was really the last piece, it was putting world class designers to work at creating the resources itself. The High Line, there's a part of the High Line I was on a few weeks ago where looking south, you see the Statue of Liberty. Whoever thought, let's make sure that view stays in place, it was a very intelligent decision. There you see that, but the other thing you also see is some of the same financial mechanisms you see in Central Park, which is wealthy people nearby and real estate interests say, OK, we build this thing, we extend it, this resource becomes something for the City.

I think of the High Line a little bit like the Gates exhibition that happened in Central Park, really interesting idea, it's February, nobody is coming into the City, the Christmas period is over, New Year's is over, let's figure out a way to do something that is high art but also attracts people. Everybody criticized Bloomberg for doing it, and what happens, it generates over 200 million extra dollars of revenue to the businesses around the City because of those extra visitors. The High Line has done some of the same things. If you go up there, you will notice that English is not the majority language, people from all over the world are up there, tourists go there, it's a great destination. It's a very different kind of park, but it works really well.

It's not the kind of thing you could have ever found a public investment in, it was too out of the ordinary, and now of course we've got, in Queens there's a Conservancy starting up to try and create a High Line type park on some of the abandoned tracks they have there. All over urban areas, you see abandoned pieces of land that people are looking at saying, could this become a new kind of park and recreation facility, it's a way to re purpose land that was used a couple hundred years ago or a hundred years ago for something else and is more amenable to the modern lifestyle that people live.

[END]

Interview with Robert Garafola on February 28, 2014 in New York City

Interviewers: Adam Stepan and Ted Bowen

STEPAN: New York in general wasn't safe in the 70's. What was the relationship between parks and crime at that time?

GARAFOLA: I think there was always an issue that you had to be careful where you walked or when you walked, what the times were there. I think it was a general thing in New York City. It wasn't just Central Park. Though, Central Park I think really got the brunt of it mainly because also, I think there's a lot of Johnny Carson whose jokes were on at night, those kind of things. I think people saw that. I think Middle America saw it and they would hear those things. That would be reinforced. I never really thought of it in those terms. I didn't feel personally threatened in those terms. But, it clearly, I think New York City in general has changed dramatically in the last 20, 25 years in that way.

STEPAN: In terms of Central Park conservancy and Gordon Davis, when Gordon Davis came up with this idea, did people think it would work or was it just another crazy idea? What was the general, initial reaction among New Yorkers to this announcement that this was going to take place?

GARAFOLA: I came in '83. So, up to that point I really wasn't, when I came in '83 it was kind of established that this was going somewhere, that there was traction here. Betsy Boiler Rogers had a presence about her. I believe she was a city planner. To me, it looked like it was going to work. I never doubted that it wasn't going to work and she wasn't going to do something there. Fundamentally, she started out as a fund raiser and some planning things that she was involved in. But I think those were the key things, raise money.

STEPAN: Were you able to look at other examples, other models out there when you started to look at who was going to do what and how the money was going to flow? Did you see this as something totally new? Or, did you see you're falling in the tradition of other previous experiments?

GARAFOLA: I don't think there was any other experiments like it. I think this was just something that we'll see what happens. The one thing that Gordon Davis was involved was start pilots. He started a few things, major initiatives in the parks department at the time and the time he was here. Included, that was one of them. It was really something that, let's see what happens with it. I think when he started it, I heard stories that he basically said, Betsy, go do it. He didn't really give her very much direction except, go raise money and do something in the park and make it look good. That was kind of like her marching orders. I think she took that and ran with it.

STEPAN: Talk about the early years I guess. Because, over the years the relationship between the Central Park Conservancy and the Parks Department changed. Initially, they were a smaller group. Most of the people actually maintaining the parks were park employees. Was there some initial friction between these two groups or how did that evolve over time?

GARAFOLA: Primarily it was pretty much the funds that were being used was mostly city funds and some Central Park Conservancy money that was in the operation budget. Over the years that switched. That percentage switched. There's more funding that's come from the Central Park Conservancy in terms

of both the operating budget and clearly the capital budget as well. But it is a mix. There's city money in there and there's and capital money that comes from the city as well.

STEPAN: Do people feel a distinction between people who work for the Parks Department and people who work for the conservancy? And how have those two groups gotten along?

GARAFOLA: Amazingly, it's worked pretty well. They've managed to work out a working relationship. We've always wondered about it, whether it would work. It seems to have worked over the years. I think they've been pretty satisfied with it. We haven't really had really very many complaints about it as all. So, it's worked out fairly well.

STEPAN: Under Commissioner Davis, another initiative and more decentralized man of structure, was this something that helped public/private partnerships happen?

GARAFOLA: I don't know if it helped public/private partnerships so much. When you talk about the decentralization, primarily is the bureau of commissioners. The big thing that he did is he developed a bureau of commissioners for each bureau. Part of that, it was basically almost like a superintendent who is almost like a Chief of Operations who is a maintenance guy who had been basically promoted up. He was the top maintenance guy in each bureau. They really didn't have political affiliations. They didn't work with the City Council, the bureau presidents, with the press, with the community boards. Or, if they did, it was on a much more I would say, on an operational basis. What he had done is he brought in people who were managers, who were public policy people, who were business management type people. Some of them he brought in from OMD, the mayor's office of operations. He brought them into the fold and he had them. They were basically executives. They were executives in each bureau and that was the concept that he started. They were still responsible to the commissioner, the Deputy Commissioner of Operations. They worked with me very closely. They were clearly, they had an authority to operate on a day to day basis in the field. That made a big difference in the sense that there was a real, people felt there was a responsiveness and there was someone to go to. If councilmen had issues or bureau presidents had issues, they knew where to go to and they could get response very good. As a result, I think some of the relationships we've had at bureau levels have been very strong.

STEPAN: In terms of the budget crunch in the 80's and 90's, did that inevitably lead to a further expansion of the public privatization, the public/private partnerships? Were there other alternatives? What's the connection there?

GARAFOLA: There were some other partnerships. But, I don't think it was really a major increase during that period of time. Clearly there was a reduction in funding during that period. The parks budget was going up for a while. Then in the early 90's it went down. We had some layoffs in the early 90's. Subsequently, we started building back up in terms of resources and also in terms of connections, different partnerships, public/private partnerships.

STEPAN: Once you had the first public/private partnership here at Central Park, did that become a model that people started to say, actually this does work and maybe we should look at doing this in other places. Do you feel, at what point did people start looking at this as a model?

GARAFOLA: I think clearly in the 90's, people started looking at this as a model. They're looking at it right now as a model. People are always asking questions about it. They want to know how it works. They've looked at it very closely. I think the partnership, I sort of have a little bit different view on the partnerships at parks because, I just see there's so many different levels of partnerships that goes on in parks now that there's conservancies. There's BID's. There's associations. There's organizations. There's friends of groups. We're dealing with private entities, private companies, foundations. We're dealing with organizations giving us money for public programs. There's this leveraging of funding that goes on in the parks department constantly that I think is even something that, then we've learned off of maybe using the partnership models, the conservancy models that parks has to come up with. We want to come up with other ways of doing business. Also, the volunteer organizations are tremendous. We had Park Wardens for a number of years. We have a number of groups, our gardens are out there and they're very affiliated. They're very into the community gardens. That whole thing is out there. A partnership for parks is really big. That really fosters a lot of organizations, groups, volunteers, community service days, working with private companies to have people go out to different areas and do things. Plus, there's concessions that we work with private companies that are doing basically, they are running facilities for us that we feel it's not value added for us to do it. So, we have gotten through that of the business. That was one thing actually Gordon Davis started I believe in the early 80's where he basically concessioned the golf courses which had been run by parks, not very well and concessioned it. Had private companies come in and run the golf courses and also do the capital improvements in the golf course. That was also part of the deal. That was the model that sort of worked in a lot of the facilities that we have as well.

STEPAN: As a manager, someone who has been in government for more than 30 years, do you see that the outsourcing of some of this day to day operational stuff frees you and your team up to manage things better?

GARAFOLA: I wouldn't necessarily say its outsourcing. What I would say, looking at value and looking where we're not doing. For instance, I'll give you an example. If you look outside the window here, there's the Central Park Zoo. We have a number of zoos throughout the city and the Wildlife Conservation Society runs the zoo. The city used to run the zoo and Gordon Davis again, another thing that he did was, at some point he decided that parks should probably not be running the zoos. The Central Park Prospect Park, Flushing Meadows Zoo, we shouldn't be running those zoos. As a result of that, we made an arrangement with them. We have a management contract with them and they are basically running those zoos for us. We think they're doing a terrific job.

STEPAN: Do you think that it's normal for managers to want to essentially give away some of your power? Was there ever a pushback where people say, you're crazy? This is our stuff. Especially from the unions, there's always a question of losing jobs. Do you feel that it's an unusual position to say this is good?

GARAFOLA: In terms of the Wildlife Conservation, their union jobs are DC37 jobs that they have. So, they're represented by DC37. It hasn't been something that they've really lost representation. They do have representation there. Clearly in some cases, you might say, wait a second. You don't want to lose control. I think that's an important thing that you don't want to lose control of the facility if you are doing. For instance, if we have a concession that we're doing and we have somebody doing that, we will regulate that. There's contracts. There's compliance issues. There's auditing issues. We have representation on that. We monitor the prices. We control the prices and we do all of those kind of things.

Also, we make sure they're doing a capital investment in those particular parks. Ultimately, the complaint comes to us because it's our facility.

STEPAN: Ultimately the buck stops with you guys. In terms of, I see a lot of this as being very democratic and interesting in ways that people get involved in government in a way. I think maybe it might be that through the park that a lot of people have a lot of their connection to government or to the collective area. Do these little organizations allow people to be involved in a very participatory, democratic?

GARAFOLA: It's sort of interesting that the parks department is probably less than one half of 1% of the city budget. I think people feel very connected to the service that's provided. I think they take a real ownership in terms of their local park, their neighborhood park. Whichever it is, whether it's a small park or a large park. They feel that not only are they connected, they have an interest. They want to be part of it. Many of them participate in it. Some of them do things like volunteer the million tree program where people came out and planted trees and do that a number of times a year, to cleaning parks or getting involved in improvement projects. We see that all the time. It's something that makes us feel good in a sense that we think we're doing something that people want and it's a service that they want and they feel it's important. I think as you see New York in the last 20, 25 years, you're seeing there's more and more people will see this amenity that in order to come to New York and live in New York and people are coming. Young people are coming to New York and they're discovering, there's amenities there. There's amenities. There's parks. There's facilities. There's bike paths. There's open to the waterfront now. There's something that is an added advantage. When I got out of school, people were running to California. Now, people are coming back here. I think it's something as a result of the quality of life in New York has changed pretty dramatically. I think we're a park of that equation.

STEPAN: Let's talk a little bit about the 1998 management agreement That was kind of a turning point in a way. You've been dividing the task of managing between parks and the conservancy. In '98, this was formalized into an actual agreement, which did a lot, perhaps more than people initially thought when they started this in 1980. Were you part of negotiating that? Was that controversial at the time? What were the elements that were put in there to make sure the city maintained control?

GARAFOLA: I wasn't part of the negotiation of it. The 1998 management agreement the city worked out with the parks department and the Central Park Conservancy really gave the Central Park Conservancy a lot more operating and management authority in terms of the park. It worked out a number of what the responsibilities were. The responsibilities went a lot more than just fundraising and maybe planning in the park. But, they're involved in day to day operations in the park. That had to change. That was a change that they were involved in. It was a management agreement. Some people had questions about it. How it was going to work. But we think it's worked out really well. I think one of the key things is it reports to the parks department. So they're ultimately responsible to the parks department and that's a key thing.

STEPAN: Has the city been able to keep true to its 1980 promise to not pull money out of the parks because the private sector is putting in money? That was a promise they were going to do. It raised money initially. It said well, if I raise \$10, \$20, \$30 million, is that actually the total amount of resources that are going to parks or is this just going to be compensating other budget holes? Has the city been able to hold true to the promise?

GARAFOLA: I think in terms of the city holding true to its promise of keeping their maintenance in effort in terms of providing, keeping the resources that the city put into the park at the same level, based on what the Central Park Conservancy was putting in. I think the city has pretty much lived up to that promise.

BOWEN: In terms of one of the things that people often talk about in public/private partnerships or other sorts of maybe outsourcing services, repetitive bidding, is that it's a way for managers to improve quality of services in terms of adding competition or adding benchmarking. I know that also the parks services after comp staff in the police department did its own version of comp staff. How do you say the relationship is between the fact that you have this public/private partnership and the overall drive to improve efficiency and quality of services in the parks as a whole?

GARAFOLA: I think one of the things in terms of having a quality of service in the parks. I think one of the things that we developed over the years, we developed a park inspection program at parks. That has developed over the years. It's very, very simple kind of program that was out of, I don't know if it was out comp staff but it was really out of the department of sanitation that we were doing where they're rating the streets conditions. We started rating the conditions of parks and doing that. What's happened over the years, because of the ability to do these reports and do them very quickly, get information out very fast, have pictures, digital pictures out that we get out to managers that we can turn around. Basically, what we do it we rate 250 parks every two weeks. It's sort of a survey. We go out and we do this. We have 17 conditions or features that we look at. As a result of that, we can get out to our managers very quickly, a snapshot of what's going on in the parks and what the conditions are in the parks. In a sense, we can baseline what our conditions are. What are some of the areas of improvement that we need? And then, come up with a strategy in terms of whether its private money or capital money that has to go in. Whether its personnel. Whether its management issues. Where our weaknesses are in those particular things. That's something we sort of developed over the course of the last few years in terms of doing. That's been very helpful to us. Along with a project that we're doing called Lapse 21 and that's really a data driven project that we're doing. Which really is taking on and it's an asset management project that we're doing and really looking at our operations and using data in order to evaluate some of the operations, what we're doing. Looking at routing. Looking at the systems that we're doing and really trying to come up with analytics and metrics on that. That I think is also very helpful in terms of the design of how parks performance is on an ongoing basis?

BOWEN: Do you think that the fact that you had not just one monolithic entity but now various conservancies working side by side with parks? Did that give you a benchmark? Some parks, you guys are run by partners, others are run directly. Does that benchmarking add some, help you maintain quality?

GARAFOLA: I think clearly in terms of our inspection program, the playgrounds in Central Park and all our large parks, we actually inspect those as well. They're part of the inspection program. Clearly, in terms of some of the conditions that they have, some of the types of solutions that come up with it. We clearly talk to them and discuss what those solutions are. They're also involved in some of doing other projects outside of the park which I think is really helpful as well.

BOWEN: In terms of there are people who criticize recently, there's been around a huge donation to Central Park Conservancy, \$100 million and that this is not fair? It's going to lead to a two tiered system of parks where's parks in wealthy neighborhoods are well looked after and other parts in outer bureaus

that don't have wealthy neighbors are not going to get the attention. What would you say to those critics? What would you say to that? Is there something to that? Is that the role of the city? What's your feeling on that issue?

GARAFOLA: I think there is an issue. In terms of developing a strategy where we can get organizations that are looking. We have it to some extent with the City Park Foundation where they basically are interested in parks outside of Central Parks in terms of raising funds. I think a lot of the funds that they're raising are primarily programmatic funds and for cultural programs and so forth. I think that would be one of the things that we're getting something where we get a fund, a capital fund or something. Or, we're doing it and raising that for funds outside for other parks. I think that would be important. I think also in terms of a number of the infrastructure improvements in the parks that have been done through Plan NYC which is in parks outside of Central Park and it's throughout the city. It's in Washington Heights. It's in the Rockaways. In the Bronx. Also, there's other really renovations and restorations going on in the parks system. In the Bronx with the [UNINTELLIGIBLE] and filtration money that we got which was over \$100 million. That improved a number of parks throughout the bureau to basically like a renaissance in terms of park development in the city. In some sense, that's my answer to that. I think a lot of the facilities, I was recently at the Lolly Playground and Babe Ruth Playground up in the Bronx and I grew up in the parks. I used to play baseball in all the parks in the Bronx, Upper Manhattan. Recently, we had a flag football tournament up there. The park that they were using was fantastic. It was beautiful. It was a field of dreams. In a sense, I'm pretty proud of that. That's in the middle of the Bronx. It's a facility that we all can be proud of.

BOWEN: The High Line is kind of an unusual beast. It came along at a moment when the movement, you already created the Prospect Park Conservancy. There was already a number of quote unquote, copycat conservancies coming up. Suddenly, this was another public/private partnership to create a new park with private funds but it was in a very different physical space and raised within I imagine, a lot of new challenges for administrators to think about. When the idea first came up to do the High Line, how did the people in the parks department view them?

GARAFOLA: I don't know. I'm sure people had different positions on it. My personal view on it was the Hudson River Park was right there on the Hudson River. They had all the piers there and it was being developed and there was a lot of money going into it and the High Line was pretty close by. I was sort of saying, why are we putting another park there when we have this park there and a lot of money is going and the city and state were putting money into it. It was a very nice park and there was a bike path and piers and all this other stuff. I was sort of wondering why that was going on. Subsequently, that has taken off. To be up there, it's really an incredible, unusual, iconic experience that for me to see that is really something eye opening to me in a sense that that has taken off to such a level. It's sort of, I don't know the number of people that visit it but when people come into New York City, that's one I say you should go. You should take a look at it. You might now like it. You might but it's definitely different. We really [UNINTELLIGIBLE PHRASE]. And also from an economic development point of view on that part of the West Side, clearly that has hit a cord. I know the museum, the Whitney Museum is developing down there. There has been hotel development down there. That has sort of triggered a whole engine of development down there which the park is doing.

BOWEN: Talk and mention it by name, the High Line. Let's just talk what the High Line from a financial point of view, economic point of view. What's the engineering there? What was the deal that was made?

What's the public/private? How much city money and how much private money goes into it? Do you know?

GARAFOLA: I don't know the numbers off hand. But, the city invests a lot of capital money in it. In the High Line, the city invests a capital money in the High Line. They've done two phases of it. They're going to be doing another. They're in the process of doing the last phase of it. The High Line is raising a lot of money for the operational purposes of it as well. That would be for the most part being run. They're going to have that money in there as well.

BOWEN: Talk a little bit about Bloomberg Administration and its role in expanding public/private partnerships in parks and was the fact that he came from the private sector a factor in that? How do you feel to talk a little bit about the Bloomberg years? What innovations did that administration bring to the whole issue?

GARAFOLA: Well I think more than anything, I think the Bloomberg Administration was very positive about parks. They had an affinity for parks. I think they were invested in the capital budget in the parks departments and the infrastructure in the parks department. We saw money coming in during that period of time and they seemed pretty supportive of what was going on at parks. Plus, they obviously in the private sector, they had been, obviously he was in the private sector. These alliances and these various types of activity seem encouraged.

BOWEN: In your experience, have the parks and recs departments views on the best or most appropriate use of park space necessarily have lined up with those of the Central Park Conservancy or other alliances or conservancies? For example, playgrounds, ball fields versus historical landscape and passive enjoyment. There's a lot in the user surveys over the years that breaks down a percentage and seems to argue for a certain allocation of resources and shaping literally of those landscapes. I'm wondering in your experience, how those priorities have meshed and when it crossed purposes, how that gets resolved.

GARAFOLA: In terms of the meshing of those opinions or in terms of surveys that have come out, in terms of the uses of the parks, I think those are something that people really thought about in terms of, do we use Central Park? There's so many different ways of using the park. I think they've, it's been a compromise. As all our public entities scenarios are, it's really kind of something that we have to look at and we look at who our users are and we look at the facilities we have and we really try to break it out and have areas in which we can do different events. We try to limit certain things. For example, on the weekends, there's races in the parks. There's marches in the parks. There's walks in the park. We do it at certain times. We've tried to keep the level, not expand the level of those kind of activities. There's a lot of physical activities like that including the marathon coming and the New York Triathlon. There's also areas in the parks that are quiet areas. So, we try to really balance those off as best we can. I think if there's an issue that comes up, we address the issue. There's a discussion. If it was a situation where the conservancy felt they wanted to change something or there's a policy they felt were given, they would come to the commissioner, the deputy commissioners and they would discuss it with them. Generally, those have been worked out. It's been, I don't know of any problem that has happened. They've been able to compromise those issues. I think we worked it out very well.

BOWEN: That raises the question of community input into those sorts of decisions and whether under the public/private partnership model versus a theoretical, purely public model, there may be more public

input or if that would be worked out differently. I know that's one of the criticisms of Central Park Conservancy in particular recently. How do you address that?

GARAFOLA: We have community boards. We have bureau presidents. We have people who come to us all the time. In the day of email, sending an email out is like three seconds. With a letter it would have taken a little bit more time. People had to think about it a little bit more. We constantly get complaints. We get issues. We deal with that all the time. That could be whether it's Central Park or any other park in New York City. We're constantly getting things that come in. Whether it's a service or it's the way the usage of the park or how it's being used or rec center. We have constantly, you're doing rec centers too much, basketball one night and you didn't have out fitness class and you cut it back by 15 minutes so we got to compromise that. We take the public input into account. I think one of the things that we've tried to do in terms of and maybe we overreact to it but if it's a conservancy or something like that and we hear a complaint, we try to address it immediately and try to work very closely with the conservancy, with the public entity or with the private citizen and try to deal with those issues. If we think it has, it's responsible, it makes sense, we'll try to do something about it.

BOWEN: Speaking of recreation facilities. I know you've done a lot with that. How many are under private management now? How many public, roughly? And, do you expect that balance to shift? Should it?

GARAFOLA: Currently, in terms of the breakdown of our recreation center facilities, recreation center centers throughout, we have 35 rec centers that are currently managed by the parks department. There is one that is managed by a private entity. We inherited back in early 2000, Decast the department of city wide administrator services gave it to us and said it's on park land. It's yours. You guys have it. It's all the way out in Brooklyn. It's a concession for us. We run it as a concession agreement. We have a contract with them. They run that.

That's the only private one that we have in the city. The only other entities that we have are run by non profits, community based organizations, CBO's. I believe there's six of those. We have agreements with them as well. There's minimal charging on those things, very small.

GARAFOLA: I might add one other thing. Our 35 rec centers, we have 144 thousand members, approximately 60% are youth, 40% are adults and seniors. Everything, all types of programming, all types of activities, and physical equipment that we've put in, cardio equipment, weight equipment, pretty much all new, 1% out of service rate. We try to keep it at that level. We had complaints about that. We also have computer resource centers in about 32 of those rec centers. For instance, in terms of people who want to use computers, technology, we have technology classes for them. We also have video classes for both teenagers and also for adults as well. So we do that also in the rec centers.

BOWEN: I saw a couple of references that I wanted quick clarification on. Trust for public land figures, ranking New York City 12th nationally in park spending for the resident and citing a lowish to them number of park employees per 10 thousand residents. I'm just curious if you are familiar with those figures and whether those include your private partners?

GARAFOLA: I do not believe it includes the private partners. I think it just includes the public.

INTERVIEWER: So, in fact, numbers like that don't really tell the whole story? GARAFOLA: No.

BOWEN: On sustainability within Plan NYC and other initiatives, do you work from the same play book as your private partners or are there two different approaches?

GARAFOLA: I think we work pretty closely together. In terms of what we do, we work closely with the conservancies. We want them to follow what our policies are. In some cases, they go beyond our policies in terms of what we do and they almost set the goals pretty high and we try to follow that in essence. We've worked our pretty closely together with them on those kind of issues.

BOWEN: Is there anything about Plan NYC that offers for more private sector participation?

GARAFOLA: I think in terms of Plan NYC right now, in terms of the money that we've received and we've received a lot of money probably in the last 10 years for that. A lot of those projects are coming to fruition. Whether those projects can continue in terms of that, we'll have to wait and see on that kind of thing whether we're going to have any major projects like that. But, we do have a capital budget. We do have a lot of money that's in the capital budget. In a sense, that's going to be for us, the future in terms of infrastructure for this agency. Also, in terms of any projects that we're doing now, in terms of any kind of building that we're doing, any kind of improvements that we're doing, we're taking all sustainability, factors, criteria into account. So, if we're rebuilding a building, if we're putting in a boiler, we're thinking about where we're putting it. Can we put it in the basement anymore? Do we got to move it up? Is it an indation area? All of these kind of things are going into it. Obviously, we just have the restoration of the board walk in the Rockaways and rebuilding the Rockaways in Staten Island and Coney Island which is still ongoing.

BOWEN: Considering that Hurricane Sandy was such a big factor in a lot of the budgeting city wide and also for parks facilities, I'm wondering how you plan for perhaps more climate related, extreme weather events and their effects on your infrastructure and at the same time, maintain and upgrade with what you've got. Is there much discussion around that?

GARAFOLA: I think we're, everybody is looking at that very closely. I think any kind of capital improvements that we're doing at parks, we're taking those things into account. No one ever really thought about, not that they didn't think about it but it wasn't on the top of the list. Now, anytime we're doing anything, we're thinking in terms of sustainability. What are the future issues in terms of impacts whether it a weather impact, storm impacts or those kind of things. Does it add in cost into our developments on what we're doing? Yes, it does but it's a necessary thing that we have to do.

BOWEN: Does that expertise necessarily have to come from the private sector?

GARAFOLA: I think we are developing that expertise internally. Also, in terms of capital, we're constantly using architects and engineers both inside and outside the agency. We bring in consultants sometimes. It really is a mix in terms of who's coming in and doing those kind of consultation for us. Obviously, we're also using the university research and those kind of things involved as well. Also, we have a natural resource group which is really involved in terms of any kind of mitigation areas. One of the key things that we're really working on with the national parks services in Jamaica Bay restoration.

We're involved very heavily with them and working with different projects out there. That's one of the things we've been trying to target.

BOWEN: Can you give us the rundown of the extent of the parks system? Number of parks, acreage?

GARAFOLA: I don't have it right now, approximately 29 thousand acres in the parks department. In terms of, I think there's about one thousand playgrounds, two thousand parks. Our ratings are somewhat different of how we look at it in terms of rating our individual parks. We look at a large park, we break it up into zones, 17 to 20 acre zones. That's how we do our inspections. In terms of our staffing, the numbers, I just don't have them with me right now off hand. But, I would say, one of the things that we do have and I really didn't mention it is we have a very large workforce that is driven by our park opportunity program. That's a transitional job training program that's done in parks. It's happened for a number of years now. We have anywhere from approximately 800 people in the agency to about 27 hundred people. We've been as high as 35 hundred people at various times. That's just basically coming through this program. They work for us for six months. We have an infrastructure in place where we basically have people coming through. They work with the agency and then we basically try to find them a private sector job. Many of them have continued to work at the parks department which is nice. That's an involvement. That's another thing on top, another tier or hierarchy that is involved in the parks department in terms of our planning, in terms of our development, in terms of maintenance of our infrastructure.

BOWEN: As you see it, what went wrong along the Hudson River Park in the planning or business sense and how can that be fixed?

GARAFOLA: When you say wrong, define that for me.

BOWEN: The deficit. The difficulty around pier 40 I believe it was, project and some of the controversy around the heir rights, various interesting parties.

STEPAN: Some people look at that and say it's an example of people are saying that public/private partnerships are a solution but guess what? They can also backfire at the end of, the public sector ultimately has to pay for it.

GARAFOLA: I really have not been involved in the Hudson River Park financing. It's really more state oriented in terms of, it's really not the parks. The city is part in financing it but really the state is running that park. However, I would just, my own personal opinion on this is that the park has been built. As a New Yorker, thousands and thousands of people enjoy it. Maybe not in 12 degrees but most of the time. I use it constantly. It's a great facility. Somehow it got built. Sometimes things are built and people put out funding formulas and it gets built. Somehow they get it built. Sometimes whether the formula works on a long term basis is sometimes questionable and they've got to rethink how they're going to do that. The hardest thing sometimes is to build it. Maybe some people have put something out there. It might be a contingency way of funding it or say they're going to do it. If they waited, if somebody waited to get the perfect solution to fund this particular park, it might never have gotten built. From a New Yorker perspective and I would just take that from a New Yorker perspective here, maybe my taxes will go up at some point. Maybe my state taxes or city taxes go up because I'm going to have to pay for that somehow, some way or we may all have to do that. But the fact is, we have an amenity there that being a New

Yorker, seeing what the Hudson River was like, how it was built. There was no infrastructure there or public infrastructure there and to see that happen, I must say in my wildest dreams, I never thought that would happen. I think its attraction to New Yorkers that people come in here and they work here, young people are coming in and working here and they're seeing that and I think that's an attraction to them.

[END]

Interview with Lisa Switkin on February 28, 2014 in New York City

Interviewers: Adam Stepan and Ted Bowen

STEPAN: So, Lisa, we'll just start off by introducing yourself.

SWITKIN: Sure. Lisa Switkin. I'm a principal at James Corner Field Operations and we are the project lead and the landscape architect for the High Line Project from 2004 to 2014. So, I've been working on it for the past 10 years.

INTERVIEWER: Lisa, prior to getting involved in the High Line Project, did you work with public spaces, and if so, were they purely public spaces or were they also public private entities?

SWITKIN: Well, here at the firm we have a range of clients, some of which are public entities, some of which are private, some of which are shared. Fresh Kills landfill was something I had worked on before the High Line, which at the time that I worked on it, the master planning was all through a kind of public entity, but since then there's been a Friends of Fresh Kills and other groups that have come up to try and help bolster and advocate for the park. In addition, I've been working as a landscape architect before that as a planning sort of person, really more at the community based level. I worked on Hudson River Park before I even came to James Corner Field Operations, so I've had a wide range of experience with public space. That's my training. Hudson River Park was another public private partnership in the city of New York.

STEPAN: It came about at the time when public parks were just in a dire situation in New York City. Was the Central Park Conservancy a reference for a whole generation of people who worked on public space?

SWITKIN: Sure. Central Park was a reference, both while I was studying in school and even in my early days as a professional. It was something that, you know, public space in general, sometimes if you're lucky you get capital funding, but in terms of maintenance and operation budgets, those are the things that are always the first to be cut and they can't fulfill the overall vision for what these spaces are going to be, which of course a beautiful place, but in the end, how they're programmed, their sort of daily upkeep and how they're cared for is what makes them great.

STEPAN: So what was, when you look at, what were the big take aways from the Central Park Conservancy?

SWITKIN: Well I think one was just this idea that there could be sort of a basic set of services or things that can be taken care of that are sort of status quo and if there were amenities or maintenance or things that were kind of above and beyond what was a very, you know, fairly low level of those things, that private groups could actually come in and help that and take the pressure off of the City to maintain parks that were used and beloved by a huge range of people.

STEPAN: Has there been a feeling that taking back the parks was important to people in New York City?

SWITKIN: Yeah, I think, you know, when people see that a place is cared for, literally cared for and taken care of, it sends a message that, it sends a message of value. So, the idea that it's valued, changes your perception of it. You know, I do think public space is a place where people come together.

You know public space is a place where people come together and it means that they'll come together to gather and celebrate, but it also means that they come together to rally and protest and all these other things, so there are places that are part of your civic experience, especially in a city, as a resident. When those places started to become unsafe or uncared for, again it's like a self-perpetuating thing, where the more it was sort of unloved, the more people would abuse it. I think when you go to a place that has been cared for; you tend to change your behavior in that place.

STEPAN: Did the Central Park Conservancy's success spur a series of other people saying this might work in other parks?

SWITKIN: It was definitely a model and once there was a model that could be quantifiable as successful, other places started to use it as a precedent. I mean it's very similar to even High Line. Before we started working on the project, the only other precedent was one in Paris, the Promenade Plantee and everyone was like you can't do that, you can't do that. Now, there's cities, I can't even keep track of the number of places that have been inspired by it, not as a kind of copy/paste thing, but just inspired to re look at underutilized spaces in the city. I think, with that model, it kind of opened up the opportunity to look at places that might have been overlooked because there wasn't enough funding, support, advocacy, whatever it was to get those things to happen. So, it allowed for a whole other group that could really advocate for those places.

STEPAN: Did people think initially that the promoters of the High Line were crazy?

SWITKIN: they thought they were crazy. There was a whole joke when they first pitched the project, that it was going to go on the shelf of like things that will never happen, and you know, the history of the project in the 10 years when I was working on it, and since 1999, when the friends of the High Line formed.

They thought that it would never happen in the City, especially when there's so much red tape and regulations and you know, a kind of process that you have to go through to get anything done.

STEPAN: Tell me about the Ideas competition.

SWITKIN: The Ideas Competition was a great sort of brief that basically challenged people to come up with an idea for the High Line that was as unique as the structure itself. It was kind of the only brief. It was a one board type of a thing and you had a range of different responses from roller coasters on the High Line to housing on the High Line to the winner, which was a mile and a half long lap pool. The idea was really to just get people's imaginations going and make them think out of the box about what the potential of this could be in the City, and the exhibition was done in Grand Central. So, the idea was to try and just really get it out there to as many people as possible.

STEPAN: Was that, from a marketing perspective, was that an important decision. Did that get a lot of people energized and thinking about it?

SWITKIN: I think, you know, I think it was a really savvy way to think about the project. The Friends of the High Line came in as kind of communicate advocates with this kind of edgy thing. The tag line was like this is our generation's Central Park. I mean it was trying to reach a whole other range of people and to think about these kind of overlooked and underutilized spaces in the city. So, I think it really did, was successful at reaching out to that group that has huge numbers of volunteers of people under 30 and you know, it started to build this kind of really underground group that were really interested in it, as a possibility.

STEPAN: Can you talk about the kind of people who were behind and supporting the High Line project?

SWITKIN: Yep. It was the artists, it was the sort of West Chelsea and restaurateurs and there was a huge scene down there. There was of course the historic meat packing district, but there was new fashion, new, all of these kind of younger, entrepreneurial types of businesses and artists and this group that was kind of supporting the High Line, whereas the sort of standard what you think of when you think of Central Park, it was kind of the upper crust or people in the garden clubs, or you know, this type of a thing that was a totally different society in some ways.

BOWEN: In terms of the process. So, the Friends of High Line had a model that worked, in terms of that they knew that you could do a partnership like this, in Central Park and in other places. In High Line, did the model actually allow for something very different to happen? Could government have created something as unusual and innovative and crazy as the High Line?

SWITKIN: The thing is that they really needed each other. I mean the two were sort of very intertwined. It's not that it could have happened totally private, and it couldn't have happened totally public. That's what sort of fascinating about it. There were a whole slew of regulations and just even the transfer as a kind of rails to trails thing, with CSX giving it to the City and the City buying it for one dollar. There was the easements issues, you know, it ran right through kind of over streets, all of these things, so the actual, the two groups had to work together. It never would have passed if Friends had to do it themselves. They couldn't have gone through the kind of legal process that they had to go through, and vice versa. So, it did open up a kind of expedited and exciting possibilities for the project, both in terms of the design and what could be done and funded as well as, you know, it's, ten years seems like a long time, but when it was slated to be demolished to being now an icon in the city, that's nothing.

BOWEN: In terms of just an idea, it seems to me to be the sort of thing that I can't imagine a politician coming out, maybe now, now that it's been successful.

SWITKIN: Right.

BOWEN: But in 2002, 2003, it seems to me it would have been a death kiss to any politician saying I'm going to build a park in the sky. What do you think about, is this something that the public sector itself ever could innovate this way or do you have to have private?

SWITKIN: I don't know. I mean it's, I think it was dependent on that sort of private passion. It was someone's like passion; you know it was these guys' passion and idea that sort of made that project happen. What convinced the city actually, was an economic argument. They went to a private consultant to sort of prove that the revenue generation of property taxes adjacent to the High Line would actually be

more than the cost of doing the High Line and that argument was what kind of helped the city come on board as well as that they were re zoning West Chelsea to allow for commercial, residential, etc. So, it was a much larger district that really spawned the city and the Friends of the High Line's partnership.

BOWEN: Let's talk about the HRN Associates study. What did they look at, what did they find?

SWITKIN: So, HRNA is a, I think they really started as a real estate kind of investment firm. They have now become public space consultants, specializing in this type of work, and they looked at what they thought the costs were to sort of upgrade the structure and prepare the structure, which is a huge part of the design. Just re painting, you know, steel and concrete work, demolitions, etc., as well as a design. I believe at the time they estimated that work to be about 100 thousand dollars. It turned out, it was about 150, so it was a little bit more. But, then they looked at what the revenue generation possibilities were and I think that they were somewhere at about 300 thousand dollars and that turned out to be over 900 thousand dollars. So, both were sort of a little bit, you know, off and Mayor Bloomberg went on record saying that there was two billion dollars of private investment around the High Line, since it started working, so, or since it was opened. So, that economic argument well sort of went well beyond expectations. The visitation of the High Line has gone well beyond well beyond expectations. There were four and a half million people who visited the High Line in 2012. That's more than the Statue of Liberty, that's more than MOMA. But the base of that argument, that it could create value in an underutilized place in the city, was what got everybody on board.

STEPAN: The next step after the study, after the crazy idea competition, was actually inviting several people to actually submit several plans.

SWITKIN: Right. So then there was a professional design competition, for professionals. It wasn't just open to anyone and that was in 2004.

STEPAN: At that point, the Friends of High Line had already raised enough money to actually organize this. Explain how this worked out.

SWITKIN: So, in 2004, there was a professional, this time a professional design competition and Friends of the High Line and the city were part of that; part of the selection committee and the jury. We submitted for the competition. They narrowed it down to four, it was kind of a staged competition; they narrowed it down to four different teams. Interestingly enough, two were led by landscape architects, two were led by architects, but all were multi disciplinary teams with a huge range of important partners and consultants and then we were selected as the winner in 2004 and started work soon thereafter.

STEPAN: Can you talk about how the the Promenade Plantee in Paris was an inspiration for the High Line?

SWITKIN: So, one of the things we did, once we were commissioned was we actually all went to Paris to meet with the operators, maintainers and advocates for the Promenade Plantee and that was members of the client team and the design team. We went there together to learn from them and basically learn from their experience. It was a little bit different, of course. At the High Line, everything under the High Line is privately owned, except for the block at Gansevoort. Here they actually had components of it that were actually owned by the city, so they started doing different types of shops and things that happened

underneath the structure. It was a vaulted structure, so they had more soil depth. It was very formal in terms of its design, but as just a successful project, it was a huge, you know, everyone, whenever you start or embark on something in design [UNINTELLIGIBLE], everyone's first question is where has it been done before? So, it's kind of sad for innovation, because sometimes you're like, it hasn't been done before, that's what's great about it. But here was something that we could look to and say, look, it actually has been done before. We're thinking about it differently, but there is an example in the world of where they've been able to do this.

STEPAN: What would be the main things that you guys tried to achieve from a design perspective?

SWITKIN: So, from a design perspective, our very early mantra in the project was, keep it wild, keep it slow, keep it quiet. The idea behind this was to somehow, I mean we sort of joked internally that our job was not to mess it up. I mean it was such an incredible thing in the city. It had this magic to it as this informal, illicit space and thinking about how to make that formal, to kind of turn it into something that could be publicly accessible, etc., but still keep the kind of wildness and magic of a secret garden. That was something we very much, throughout the whole process, were trying to balance this idea of what's too much, what's not enough, as well as the overlying principle which was really this innovative system we developed; the paving and planting system, which allowed us to think about it as a whole site from end to end and not as a normative condition where you just have a pathway and planting.

INTERVIEWER: Set that up a bit. What was the High Line before it was turned into a park?

SWITKIN: So, if you go all the way back, what was interesting to us is that in the history, there is a kind of equal time frame of when it was a working freight line as when it was an abandoned landscape. We were both drawn to it's kind of the linearity of the kind of idea that as a working freight line and how it brought goods to the city and its kind of movement, as well as this sort of idea of nature coming up through the cracks and creating something that was very different in the city. So, both of those sort of influenced the design, both sort of parts of its history and in addition, there was a kind of a long history in terms of just how it was working, parts of it that were torn down, parts of it that were then abandoned. People in the architectural world sort of being fascinated with it. I had it as a studio site when I was studying. Then this kind of mix of having the arts district happening in West Chelsea in like '87 and Dia Center locating there and developing all of these things along the way. So, it has its own kind of unique story, but for many people when I started, it was either everyone knew it. It was either like, they were like, oh yeah, that's the place that I snuck up to, or they did this, or they had no idea it was there. It was like one or the other. Some people were like, I live in that neighborhood, I don't know what you're talking about. So, it either had this very specific impression for people or it disappeared.

STEPAN: I can see it. Just describe this so people who, was it abandoned? Just help me out a little, kind of narrate it. So, from 1980 to 2011, it was abandoned.

SWITKIN: So, the story goes that the last working train that went on the High Line in 1980 was carrying like frozen turkeys or something to the meatpacking district. After that it became an abandoned freight line in the middle of the city. It cuts mid block, primarily, so it was meant to recede and disappear in the city, so it kind of has this slice of like the backside of the city. You know, blank walls facing it, etc. So, when we went up there the first time, one, you're sort of in awe of the wildflower meadow that had grown up there, based on both invasive species, things that just were tough and opportunistic and took over, in addition to some rare and exotic species like a pear tree that was kind of seeded through trains

that came from wherever they came from. So, you had this mix of this kind of planting that was up there that Joel Sternfeld captured in his book as well. Then there was you know, people's kind of private, they were makeshift, like people would pull out planks that would allow them to come over from their adjacent apartment on to the High Line. Someone had a Christmas tree up there with lights and an irrigation system. Other people had graffiti or sculptures that were being done with metal, and you know, it was also a very forgotten space. I mean you had a lot of things that were, you know, condoms and this, that and the other scattered everywhere, so who knows how people would sort of do up there.

There was one way that you could get up, which was coming up on 34th Street, where the High Line goes down to grade, there was a big fence there, and there was a tiny little crack that people would sort of pull through and wedge their way. People would trespass up there to kind of just experience this forgotten relic in the city.

BOWEN: I think one reason it attracts people is, cities are being re thought for many reasons. Economies are very different. When you look at Central Park, I see a public/private partnership realizing a 19th Century dream. Central Park now is kind of what was originally envisioned. But the High Line is something totally new. Is that very much the 21st century idea of what public space can be?

SWITKIN: Yeah. If Central Park, and the Central Park Conservancy is realizing a 19th Century dream, then I think the High Line is an example of a new typology of park that is a 21st Century idea and vision. A lot of that has to do with looking at post industrial sites, whether it's de commissioned waterfronts, or elevated rail lines or land fills, people are sort of looking at these places and thinking about how they can transform them from what is seen as a blight or what is seen as something that has a negative connotation and developing them into something that's positive and that's ecologically smart and viable and gives back to the city.

BOWEN: Was this a project with many clients?

SWITKIN: This was a project with a multi headed client. We actually had five different clients. Lucky for us everyone was incredibly passionate about the project, but what that meant was that everyone had very different priorities in terms of where they were coming from. So, our actual client was Friends of the High Line on the private side, and then it was four different entities from the city. It was the Economic Development Corporation, who we actually held our contract with. It was the Department of City Planning. It was the Parks Department and it was the Mayor's office. So, all of those groups formed what they called a development team and they had representatives from each of those groups who you would meet with on a regular basis. On the one hand it helped expedite certain things through the city process, but on the other hand, it meant that you had to work with five different agencies that had very different priorities.

BOWEN: Did you have some push back from some of the bureaucracy?

SWITKIN: Yeah. I think that thinking about this as a different place was hard for people. So, even down to very specific design elements. For example, when we were designing the bench on the High Line, it's a little bit narrower and a little bit longer than the typical bench. Everything on the High Line was scaled to be a little bit longer and a little bit thinner because if not, you started to eat up the whole space. The first thing was like no, 18 inches is our standard for benches, that's all it can be. It's 12 inches. We must have

had every commissioner in the city like sit and like on the bench to figure out if it was comfortable. So, you had many different types of situations like that where people, they were used to one thing, but yet, in the end you had to sort of bring them along, but they were actually very supportive.

BOWEN: Are you getting a lot of other people from around the world coming to look to do similar projects?

SWITKIN: Definitely. We're getting a lot of calls from people who are interested in doing something similar to the High Line and sometimes for us to actually design those spaces; sometimes to consult on those spaces, based on our experience here, and that's happening all over the United States. You have Philadelphia and the Redding Viaduct; you have Atlanta and the Belt Line. You have all of these different places in addition to places overseas, where Singapore; there are so many different people who are looking at the High Line as a model and a precedent for many reasons, whether it's literally converting transportation methods to something green or to look at the model as the public/private partnership.

BOWEN: Can you give me the basic numbers? How many people, how many visitors?

SWITKIN: Sure. So, the High Line is a mile and a half from Gansevoort Street to 34th Street. It runs through three distinct neighborhoods; we sort of call it like the past, the present and the future, because it's like the historic meatpacking district, West Chelsea, and then now what will be the Hudson Yards development, which are the final section of the rail yards. The first two are completed; that's a mile, which goes from Gansevoort to 20th Street and the last section, from 30th Street to 34th Street, at the rail yards, is currently under construction.

BOWEN: What does your firm do relative to the High Line?

SWITKIN: We have been the lead, the project lead for the High Line since 2004, for the last 10 years. I started out as one of the lead designers on the project, and now oversee the work as I've grown in the firm over the last 10 years, and still overseeing the final section at the rail yards.

BOWEN: What can you give as some concrete examples of the economic impact of the High Line.

SWITKIN: The economic impact is highly quantifiable, and it actually changes almost weekly. I mean it's hard to keep up with all of the different developments that have happened. There are new restaurants; I mean the whole West Chelsea area with a lot of the sort of Iron Chefs of Morimoto and Colicchio and Sons, etc. have all happened there. Diane Von Furstenburg was one of the first sort of major fashion people who invested in the meatpacking district and now that entire area has new fashion and kind of high end places for retail. In addition there's been a new school; there's been new residential towers. There's been the Whitney Museum as an anchor that's happening, that's in construction that will be opening soon at Gansevoort Street. There's the whole Hudson Yards development at the Northern part including Culture Shed and all of these other types of things. So, it's hard to even name all of the different projects that have happened, I think, in tandem with the High Line. You know one couldn't have really happened without the other.

STEPAN: Any final thoughts?

SWITKIN: Yeah. I mean, the interesting thing about people now coming to us and asking us about projects that they have that are similar to the High Line is that every place is radically different. One of the biggest sort of design principles about the High Line was that it was very specific to that particular place in the City and that it isn't necessarily repeatable as an exact copy. But, at the same time, whether or not you want to have bikes, or you want to have light rail or if it's just pedestrian, etc., but at the same time there is a lot to share in terms of our experience, both in terms of the process and the sort of federal, state, city type of work that we had to do, in terms of the actual design work that we had to do, in terms of the actual design work, in terms of preparing the structure and then how to plant and pave and do all of these things on top of an elevated structure. So, sort of technical know how. But each place has its own set of peculiarities and priorities and interests, and so, even though we offer a lot as a consultant, there isn't a kind of rulebook for how to do a High Line.

BOWEN: When you look really long term, given the vagaries of the economy, and all these unknowns, do you have any sense of the fragility or the strength of the public/private model for a long term maintenance plan?

SWITKIN: For long term goals for the High Line and other projects like it, I think it is essential to have another partner, other than the public, because part of the thing that makes the High Line so great today is, of course, there is a design there, but it's the programming. It's the art program. It's the way that, and these are public events, not private things, but they'll have movie screenings, teen nights. There is a temporary art program that, when people come to that space as an attraction, as a place, as a destination, they are surprised each time, because it continues to change and evolve. We had always wanted the High Line to not be static; we always wanted it to be dynamic and to continue to evolve and change according to the needs of its surrounding residents, and it is doing that. I think that is one of the things that it gives back the most to the city, so having alternate funding streams and supports to allow that stuff to happen is really important.

BOWEN: One last question. Looking at the huge gift recently given to the Central Park Conservancy, 100 million, people say that this is elitist. This is creating a two tier park system where areas near fancy places. What would you say to those gifts?

SWITKIN: Well, I mean, the private money is on top of that. They're not going to give it; I mean people aren't going to just give it to some playground in the middle of the Bronx. I mean it's unfortunately that's not the way that it works. So, if the public money is being distributed the same, this is an opportunity, and it's also an opportunity for other groups to develop their own friends of and their own ways to kind of bolster their community parks and ideally, the thing that is the most important about it is that it remains a public space and it actually is a space that everyone can come to and enjoy. People like to say that the High Line is now this elitist West Chelsea place, but it also has two of the largest public housing units that are right near it; the Chelsea Elliot Housing, etc. and it has a wide range of users that use it. So, I think it's peoples; it's now one of their first impressions of New York when they come, because it's a great way to experience the city and a very unusual way to experience the city. So, the idea is that it is public and it always remains public. It's not fee, there's no charge. You can go at any time and Central Park is the same way. They become the sort of jewels of the city. I am all for supporting parks in other places and I do my part to do that as well, but I do think that one of the great things about it is that it's not taking from the already strapped budgets; it's adding to it.

[END]