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Saturday, January 4, 2003

## **Cahill touts city's link to Rutgers**

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New Brunswick: While mapping future plans for the city, Mayor Jim Cahill spoke yesterday about limitless possibilities to collaborate with Rutgers University during his annual state-of-the-city address at the George Street Playhouse.

Cahill noted the 236-year history between Rutgers and the city while publicly welcoming new Rutgers President Richard McCormick.

"Dr. McCormick and I share a common sentiment that our best days are ahead of us. The dynamic potential of enhanced collaboration between the university and the city is without limit," said Cahill.

The mayor's comments were notable because most development discussions during the era of past university President Francis L. Lawrence usually occurred at lower staff levels rather than directly between Lawrence and Cahill, officials have said.

City development leaders have wanted for two decades to develop lower George Street and link the city's downtown to Rutgers' Douglass College campus, but the vision needed the university's cooperation. Lawrence rarely, if ever, publicly promoted the city's redevelopment. When asked during a 2001 interview if Lawrence supported the George Street redevelopment, a Rutgers senior vice president simply nodded.

McCormick, on the other hand, met with Cahill soon after becoming president and said last month he was "thrilled" to learn about future opportunities for Rutgers to play a role in planned redevelopment efforts in New Brunswick.

About 175 people, mostly family members and city employees, attended yesterday's ceremony where Cahill and City Council members Joseph V. Egan and Blanquita Valenti, all Democrats, were sworn in to fourth terms. City Housing Authority Commissioner and Republican Municipal Chairman Frank Bright sat in the fifth row holding two signs critical of Cahill.

At a reorganization meeting following the inauguration, Councilman Jimmie L. Cook Jr. was chosen to be council president.

In his annual address, Cahill applauded Gov. James E. McGreevey's proposal to merge Rutgers, the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and the New Jersey Institute of Technology. The mayor said much of the city's CORE Vision plan,

which would in part create a biotechnology, medical and commercial area on four downtown blocks, “is ideally suited for the implementation” of the proposed merger.

“With an emphasis on research, medical schools and health sciences, New Brunswick is poised and well equipped to take advantage of any economic development opportunities that may result from the collaboration among research universities, state government and the private sector,” said Cahill.

The mayor noted the number of beds added at Rutgers’ New Brunswick campuses have not kept pace with the increased enrollment since 1960, leaving about 17,000 more students to “fend for themselves” seeking off-campus housing. Cahill said the housing stock in the Fifth and Sixth wards, where many students live off-campus, is “ill –designed and ill-equipped” for today’s students and the city’s neighborhoods can’t handle the student influx.

“We must look for ways of creating mid – to high-density housing, both on and near campus, better suited and designed to provide the amenities so important for a quality education and suitable student lifestyle while returning some of the city’s existing housing stock to home ownership opportunities for our residents,” Cahill said.

The mayor highlighted other proposed projects with Rutgers like moving the university bookstore and its public safety building to lower George Street and building housing for nearly 1,000 students at George and New Streets.

Cahill also noted ongoing projects in the downtown being developed by the New Brunswick Development Corp. and outside developers. City officials will also develop a new master plan in 2003 and build several new schools in upcoming years, Cahill said.

After being sworn in, Egan said serving as a councilman after 12 years was “not old hat” and he looked forward to continuing to make progress in the city. Valenti said she was still excited to be on the council after three terms and that she didn’t take the city or its citizens for granted.