

Interviewee: Mayor Donald Wernik
Interviewer: Ruth Terwilliger
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Transcriber: Janena Benjamin

R. Terwilliger: The date is April 18, 1978 and we are interviewing the mayor of Metuchen, Donald Wernik, at Metuchen Public Library.

Donald, I first off want to say that I really do appreciate your taking this time tonight to come in and do this interview with me. I know it's going to be a valuable asset to our collection of local history. Your family goes back a long way in Metuchen. I remember as a young person myself seeing your grandfather walk from your home on Highland Avenue up to the pharmacy on Main Street. And I think it would be interesting to start off by asking how your parents came to settle – or your grandparents – excuse me - came to settle here in Metuchen.

Mayor Wernik: I guess in order to explain that to you Ruth I'll have to go back just a little further than how they got to Metuchen. Maybe it would be interesting for you to know how they got to this country.

R. Terwilliger: Very good.

Mayor Wernik: Because actually my grandfather, my father and my grandmother lived in White Russia together and in the late 1800's my grandfather determined that he really was not happy there any longer, that it wasn't really very pleasant for Jews in that area of the world, and he decided he wanted to make a new place for his family to live and to grow.

So right after my dad was born, which was in 1900, just three years after that my grandfather left his wife and my father and he went to the United States to try to find a new home for them. And he came to the United States in the early 1900's, as I said, and although he was a pharmacist in Europe when he came to this country he had to seek any job that he could that would earn him enough dollars so that he might be able to bring his family over. And he found a job in a wholesale drug company that used to repackage crude drug material and he worked there for three years and was able to accumulate enough money to bring my father and my grandmother to this country to join him.

They came into this country in about 1909 and lived with my grandfather in Brooklyn, New York. They lived in Brooklyn actually all the time that my father grew and went to school.

He went to schools in Brooklyn, he went to Brooklyn College of Pharmacy and graduated there and opened up a pharmacy in Brooklyn. He met my mother in New Brunswick, New Jersey. They had a mutual friend and he courted her and married her and took her back to Brooklyn where they lived together and I was born. I was born in 1925 and it was just about six months later that I told them that it was about time that we got out of that town. I didn't see a future for Brooklyn; certainly not nearly compared to what would be in Metuchen. And so we did move to Metuchen in 1926 where my father was able to purchase a pharmacy, the pharmacy that was owned by Mr. George Hahn.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, yes, that's an old name. Now did he bring your grandfather and grandmother along with him here when he moved to Metuchen?

Mayor Wernik: Actually when my parents came to Metuchen my grandfather and grandmother did not come immediately. As I indicated, my grandfather had a fine position in that company in New York where he was working in early 1900's. He stayed with this company for a number of years, in the drug packaging business. As a matter of fact he never became a licensed pharmacist in this country. He could have been up until 1909 by just showing his credentials but he wasn't aware of that. And then after 1909 in order to become licensed in this country, one had to go to a pharmacy school and graduate. So although he practiced pharmacy in this country, he never was really licensed.

R. Terwilliger: But then eventually your mother and dad, was it because they were becoming older people and they felt it would be better to have them closer to them; did he retire from that company and come to Metuchen?

Mayor Wernik: Not really. My grandfather was a very vital type person as I think you remember. He had a lot of enthusiasm and he had a lot of energy. And when he first came to Metuchen after my father and mother had lived here – of course I lived here with them from 1926 - my grandfather came here in about 1928 or 1929 and went into the stationery business. He owned the store that ultimately became Seldow's for a while.

R. Terwilliger: Oh I never realized that.

Mayor Wernik: And he had a very prospering business and then he opened another store down the south end of Metuchen, a luncheonette. But he had two or three businesses before he came back to the pharmacy business and became associated with my father, which was really in about the middle 30's.

R. Terwilliger: It sounds like your enterprising background goes back quite far. I remember, as I said, your grandfather not shuffling along Main Street, but very briskly walking along Main Street. I know you've mentioned to me that there was not a synagogue at the time when you came here. Wasn't your grandfather instrumental in starting the first synagogue?

Mayor Wernik: **Actually when we first came to Metuchen of course there were very few Jewish people in Metuchen and it took all the people in the whole area really; to accumulate all these people was the only way we could get enough for a service so it wasn't really just Metuchen, it was Metuchen and area. And in the beginning, they used to rent a room in the Royal Arcanum Hall, which was over what used to be the National Bank, which was over what is now the place that has replaced L&S, The Village Variety Store. So they rented that room for holidays and for special occasions and then after that they were able to, with the help of a Mr. Kramer who used to own a department store in Metuchen, were able to obtain a building on Highland Avenue, 17 Highland Avenue. It was an old house and they got it at a very reasonable price. And they were in there in the late 1930's and from that they moved down into what is now the Berg Building on Center Street. That was built as our first synagogue in Metuchen. And then of course after that ultimately the one that we know now on Grove Avenue was built. But my father and my grandfather were both very much involved. My grandfather served as the cantor and rabbi and took care of turning the lights on and off and swept the floor and did everything.**

R. Terwilliger: You mentioned that there were very few Jewish people in this town when you mother and dad first came here. I also thought of the fact that they settled on Metuchen. Did this have anything to do with your mother being familiar with this area? You said she was from New Brunswick. Did this influence his choice of moving to Metuchen?

Mayor Wernik: **Actually my grandfather, my mother's father, lived in New Brunswick and before going into the concrete block business he used to be a peddler. He used to sell vegetables and fruits and although he was based in New Brunswick, he many times would come to Metuchen. And he liked the town, he thought it was a nice town and he had heard of a pharmacy being available. So it was through his knowledge that my father learned of the store in Metuchen and that was how we actually came to Metuchen. I think at the time when we came into Metuchen, as I indicated, there were not only not a lot of Jewish people here but I don't think that there were any organized Jewish activities of any kind, other than perhaps a service for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur where people in the area would gather together.**

It's often asked did we experience any anti-Semitism in Metuchen when we moved to town. Well, Jews were kind of a curiosity in Metuchen when we came here so there was no organized anti-Semitism. I think that people were friendly but in a distant kind of a way for a while.

R. Terwilliger: Reluctant perhaps.

Mayor Wernik: That's correct but my father [*break*] was an outgoing kind of a person as I think you remember Ruth, and he was the type that would get involved. And the thing that was the most heartwarming for him was that after really a short period of time he was accepted into this community and he became a member of Masonic Lodge for instance; he became a member of the Delphic Organization in town.

R. Terwilliger: The Masonic Lodge! I have to stop you. That's true? He was a member of the Metuchen Masonic Lodge?

Mayor Wernik: That's right he was. And of course in those days there was a lot of talk around about the fact that a Jewish person couldn't even be accepted into a Masonic Lodge. Well that was the first organized group that really accepted him into the community and he was always very grateful for that and as a matter of fact, always very loyal to the Masonic Lodge and Masonry. I think that's how Malcolm [Donald's brother] and I became interested in Masonry although I never was that active. Although I am of course still a member in good standing, my brother not only became active but went on to become the Grand Master of Masons in the State of New Jersey. I think all of this really was an end result of how well Dad had been received.

R. Terwilliger: Do you remember as a young boy your father ever talking about this? Was there ever any talk at home about the fact that you were Jewish and this was a predominantly Protestant town? Did he ever say to you that there were certain conducts of behavior that you must maintain?

Mayor Wernik: I don't think we actually ever discussed anything like this directly in our home but I think what you're implying is true to this extent. I was always kind of an outgoing person I guess and I was also very much involved so I didn't experience a feeling of anti-Semitism personally that much, in fact very little at all. However there were certain social functions that I knew I wasn't going to be invited to and there were certain occasions where I knew I was going to be absent and certain things happened that I just never planned to be part of and I guess you could say this might be an example of what your question was trying to bring out. I do know that some of my

younger friends – and there were only a half a dozen Jewish children in the community at that time – had a little tougher time, mainly because they weren't as much involved. And so they didn't have as many things to keep them busy and to do and perhaps didn't develop as many friends. I think maybe they felt it a little more. I don't think it was anti-Semitism, I think it was a lack of organized activities for minority groups.

R. Terwilliger: Well I can back you up on that statement. We came here as a very young family back in the early 40's as a Catholic Italian family, which was the other swing of the spectrum. And although again we were being actually shut out or made it known that you couldn't play with certain children or you weren't welcome at the Y or these areas, there was a division that you knew. But again it was because of family enthusiasm and family wanting to take a part in the community that we survived this also. But I must say I've always been thankful for that period in my life because some of my best friends were Jewish because these were the ones that were feeling the same vibrations I was feeling as a young person. And I think it was almost this unity between Catholics and Jews way back then that had a great influence on this town. They began to stand back and take notice of us as people.

Mayor Wernik: My first involvement in sports was at the CYO where I played on their ball team. Then ultimately I became a member of the YMCA and was a member all the time that I was in school in the community. They were always very tolerant with me and very nice to me and I had no problems at all along those lines.

R. Terwilliger: I have interviewed black people and Catholic people and Jewish people and I don't know whether you agree with me or not, but I think the end results depended very much on the individual involved.

Mayor Wernik: Oh I agree.

R. Terwilliger: And if I could ask – this is for history you know – and if I could ask any advice on future generations and ending this kind of nonsense, I'm sure you would back me up in the statement that it's the kind of people involved and the persons. Maybe you have some thoughts on that yourself. We've never had a real problem in our town in this direction I think because of persons involved.

Mayor Wernik: I think we've generally talked about things in Metuchen which I think has set us apart from other communities. And not only in the early 30's like we're talking about now, and the 40's, but if you remember in the late 60's we had some racial problems in the area and there were a number of riots. I think the reason Metuchen was spared was we organized our Borough Advisory Coalition, it was an open-ended group,

everyone was invited, we had 70 or 80 people down and we talked things out and when there was a problem we went directly to the problem. I think that's the only way that we can ever hope to resolve the grief that is brought upon our minorities or people who are not quite as educated or don't have the advantages of others.

R. Terwilliger: Well we don't want to jump ahead on our tape and so I do want to get back to our outline. You were raised in Metuchen and went all through the school system here and probably many of your friends you started school with you ended up with in high school. Can you remember or can you mention any of the names of some of the gals or guys that you went to school with?

Mayor Wernik: Oh sure. Dorothy Hollander who is now Dorothy Acken. And Louise Reisler who is now Louise Reisler Zenith who has since moved out of the area. And there was Ruth Kramer who is now Ruth Hume.

R. Terwilliger: As I understand it you were very active in sports in high school. Was it any particular area; was it basketball or football, or both?

Mayor Wernik: I did like to take part in sports. In fact I'll say immodestly I was involved in four sports in high school.

R. Terwilliger: You were a four-letter man?

Mayor Wernik: What can I tell you! I played football and basketball and tennis and I was on the track team my last year as well. But I enjoyed it and I have always had to keep busy, this has been my therapy for my whole lifetime. And in high school it was the same way so I was involved in sports, I was involved a Thespian, I was in most of the plays when I could be. In fact they used to laugh when I would come to play practice in my football uniform. But I always liked to be involved and people have been tolerant of me and I think that has helped me a lot.

R. Terwilliger: So this is nothing new then, your involvement in politics? You've been a person who has always really enjoyed being committed to being involved in anything that you had the time for probably.

Mayor Wernik: You just mentioned something that brought me back to another point and I never thought about until now. I never really ran for elected office when I was in high school.

R. Terwilliger: Oh really?

Mayor Wernik: I was always the campaign manager and I always ran campaigns but I never ran myself. I never thought about it until this minute but I'm wondering whether that goes back to the question of whether or not I could have been elected with

my ethnic background. I never really thought too much about it at the time. But subsequent to getting out of high school (I'm leading myself as I talk to you) and after I was discharged from the service, and then I went into pharmacy school, from then on until now I seem to be running from one elective office to another.

R. Terwilliger: Maybe you feel much safer doing it. That's an interesting observation about whether your ethnic background would have had anything to do with it, although four years behind you in high school we had Donald Kohn who was vice president of my class, so I really doubt that. I think on your personality and your enthusiasm they would have put you in even then.

Can you talk just a little bit about your school years? Do you think they have changed a great deal from what you can see your children have gone through in the same school system as you went through some twenty years, twenty-five years earlier?

Mayor Wernik: Thirty years earlier? You're very kind to give me four or five extra years, I appreciate that. I think that the difference really is the age that we're living in. We didn't have television, we didn't have mother and dad both working, and we were more closely knit because we didn't have that many places to go. So the family ties were there almost because there wasn't that much of a choice. I think it was great in many ways although I think this age is a great age as well. But as far as strong family ties are concerned I think they were much stronger then because there wasn't as much diversion. Everybody didn't have a car and everybody wasn't out until 2 or 3 in the morning. And everybody wasn't as exposed to some many different things.

R. Terwilliger: How about in the area of respect? Do you think that as a young person with teachers in school or just parents or adults in general that there was a greater respect on your part than you see in our young people today?

Mayor Wernik: I think our age and in our whole growing up period, in other words the time in which we developed, the feeling was different about elders. I think today a lot of the young people feel that each person has to prove themselves whether they are an elder or not, whether they even are a parent or not. I don't know if that means there is a total lack of respect. I think it might be just a new yard marker that is being used in this world today. When I was young if Dad said something that was the way it was, whether anybody liked it or not, there wasn't that much question about it. I know that if the rabbi said something that was the law, no one questioned that. But we didn't question many things in those days anyhow. And I think now everything is questioned. I don't think that is

necessarily unhealthy. I do dislike a lack of respect on the part of anybody to anybody because I think that that's wrong. But the fact that I happen to be a father I don't think gives me any special privileges or rights over the fact that I might be a son. So I can appreciate that. But if you're talking about respect, I don't think that has to be disappearing. I think everybody has to respect everybody else in this world and I hope that the time will come when maybe more will agree with me.

R. Terwilliger: Well I think you're absolutely right. And even though as you said, it isn't maybe a lack of respect; some people call it a more open communication with one another, maybe we feel much safer as human beings to deal with each other on certain levels and I guess whether it's better or worse or good or bad only time will tell.

Mayor Wernik: I think there is one other thing that I might mention here. I think that we have encouraged in our children the idea of questioning things. And I think that we have encouraged their looking for a better way to do things and a better life for themselves. I think this is all part of that. We've told them that they've got to test the waters and we've told them that they have to be always aware. So I think this really all ties in together. We weren't that way when we were young. It was, "This is the way it's been and this is the way it ought to be." I don't think we've taught our children that and therefore we have to expect that they are going to be a little different than we were.

R. Terwilliger: So you finished at Metuchen High School and you probably had to take an entrance exam to Rutgers College of Pharmacy, am I correct?

Mayor Wernik: No, not actually, because when I graduated from high school I joined the Marine Corps.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, right. We had a war that was going on. Thank you.

Mayor Wernik: I graduated in June and I left for Paris Island at the end of July in 1943. And I was at Camp LeJeune after graduating from Paris Island where I had my boot training and then I went out to Camp Pendleton on the West Coast, from which we shipped out and then ultimately to Okinawa.

R. Terwilliger: Now Paris Island as I remember, having a brother who was in the Marine Corps, was really supposed to be – excuse the expression – the hellhole of training. When you came out of there you were really a man prepared for war. Did you find it tough?

Mayor Wernik: I think it was tough but I think it was also stimulating. I was happy to be discharged, don't misunderstand, but I think after finishing my nine week training at Paris Island, I felt that I was better equipped for the job that I was going to have to do. I have to say I was also brainwashed because I was sure that a Marine was the greatest thing in the world by the time I'd finished. It might be because after going through the training, if you made it through, you figured you were pretty good. I'm not sure if that was the psychology or not. But I've never regretted that part of my life although I never frankly would have intended to be a service career man.

R. Terwilliger: Do you feel it really had some profound effect on your development of character as an adult man?

Mayor Wernik: Oh I'm certain that it did. We have recently known of a war where we wondered if we even should have even been in it – the Viet Nam War. And this has probably been a great part of the problem with our younger people in the late 60's and early 70's. How can we explain something to them that we didn't understand ourselves? With World War II there was no question because either we were going to win that war or we weren't going to have to worry about anything. So there wasn't the question of should we fight or do we have any right to be in this. We were forced into it and we had no choice and as a result I think the dedication was different and the motivation was different. Although most of the people couldn't wait for the war to end so we could get out and get back to a normal way of life, very few people would deny the fact that they had to be where they were and had to do a job or else there wouldn't be anywhere to come back to.

R. Terwilliger: It was a total commitment. It was not only the man in uniform; it was the people back home. Everyone, it probably sounds like a poor phase, took pride in the fact that this was a total commitment on our part. We were the families behind the men up front and I hope we never have to see that again.

Mayor Wernik: I know my parents used to – you're too young, you wouldn't recall this – but my parents used to send me a package every week from three or four different places. And there would be a mail call and I could get four or five packages. And then when we would ship overseas and I wouldn't get mail for maybe three or four months sometimes, when I finally got a mail call I could get thirty packages. So the whole battalion used to eat when my mail order arrived. But you're right – it was the people back home; it was the food and the letters. It was very important.

R. Terwilliger: It was a period of time that had a profound effect on our growing up. So you came home from the service and then you went to school?

Mayor Wernik: Right, I came home from the service and as a matter of fact when I went into the service I wasn't planning to be a pharmacist. I was planning to go into research chemistry. And when I got out of the service I came back to Metuchen and Dad already wasn't really feeling too well – as you know he developed multiple sclerosis - and he and my mother and Grandpa and my grandmother were all working in the store and I just kind of joined them and decided right then and there I was going to go to pharmacy school – that was in 1946 – and I did. I met Joyce in '47 and we were married in '49.

R. Terwilliger: Was she at college then?

Mayor Wernik: Joyce went to Trenton State Teacher's College and I met her because she and Charlotte went to school together and were in the same class. And one day she was coming down to go back to school from Metuchen to Trenton and I met her. I told my mother that night that I was going to marry her.

R. Terwilliger: You were always a man who knew what he was going to do.

Mayor Wernik: But people have often asked me, "Are you sorry you're a pharmacist, would you like to be something else"? Not at all, I'm very happy.

R. Terwilliger: I always wondered about that. I've had this feeling for some reason I always thought perhaps you might have wanted to be a doctor in medicine; more than you are now, you're into medicine.

Mayor Wernik: I think everyone can be fulfilled in their own station if they really enjoy what they are doing and if they feel that they are accomplishing something. Being a pharmacist you meet with people all day long, you help resolve problems, you kind of work between the physician and the patient and that's becoming a more and more important thing these days with the advent of the newer and more effective drugs. And you become a consultant both to the physician and the patient, and you monitor medication and I find it extremely interesting and I'm very satisfied with my station in life.

R. Terwilliger: Well it seems as a layman, and strictly as a layman, to satisfy what I can see in both sides of your personality, this wonderful warm person who has a real commitment to communicate with people and to help people. Plus it is just one tremendous responsibility when you are dispensing drugs all day long. It depends on complete concentration and accuracy all the time. So

it is not a lighthearted kind of a profession to be in and you've upheld the family name to date and will go on from there.

Pharmacy school involves how many years?

Mayor Wernik: I went to pharmacy school in Newark. Rutgers College was up in Newark at that time and as a matter of fact at that time it was also a four-year course, now it is five years. I used to commute every day and, as I told you, we were married when I was in my junior year. So my senior year I lived out of Metuchen for the only time in my whole lifetime, when I wasn't in the service. For a year and a half we lived in Roselle. In the morning I would drive Joyce to school where she was teaching, she was a teacher in Elizabeth, and then I would go to Rutgers Pharmacy School and then I would drive to Metuchen to work and then I would go home. And that was my swing everyday for the last year of my college life.

I enjoyed the pharmacy school although it was really more of a factory building than what we understand to be a college facility today.

R. Terwilliger: Do you remember exactly where this was located?

Mayor Wernik: It was on Lincoln Avenue toward Bloomfield, between Arlington and Lincoln. As a matter of fact it was kind of separated from even Newark Rutgers so it was really by itself. It originally had been a factory building and had been converted to the pharmacy school. I think that is one of the reasons that we fought so long to get the pharmacy school brought down to the Rutgers campus where it is now, right next to the medical school on the first campus across from the golf course. The idea being that with the students being on the campus in New Brunswick they can have a fulfillment of a true college life. The best example I can give you is when I got out of high school and started at pharmacy school, one of the coaches of the Rutgers football team had been my coach in high school. And he wanted me to play ball with the university. I tried and for two weeks I hopped in my car after school which would be about 4 o'clock and I drove down to the Rutgers campus and I got suited into my uniform just in time for the practice to end. And I just had to give up. Well my son went to pharmacy school at Rutgers after the move just a few years ago.

R. Terwilliger: So you didn't play any sports then in college?

Mayor Wernik: We had an intercollegiate college basketball team. There were eight different pharmacy schools that had basketball teams. So we had a league with St. John's, Brooklyn, Temple, Philadelphia and we also played schools like Newark

College, Montclair Teachers' and Trenton Teachers', in fact the school that Joyce went to, and so we had a small college league and we had a good team basically.

R. Terwilliger:

I guess I tend to be more philosophical than practical and even though your road improvement and your new garage and many of the other practical things you've done in this town impress me a great deal, I still think it took a lot more than that to run the kind of town you've run over these years. We've come through some very trying times where we've had, as you said earlier in the tape, racial riots in surrounding towns and you've managed to maintain status quo in our own town. I think it's more than that, I think it's a kind of leadership that I don't think comes along too often and when I said to you what are future generations going to think when they read or listen to you as mayor of this town, has there been an underlying philosophy for dealing with people and problems that you've tried to maintain.

Mayor Wernik:

I think the philosophy that I have is that everyone is entitled to be heard and that we have to listen very carefully and do what we can in the best interest of the community at all times. Many times we become short in patience and we don't listen like we should and I think this is a great disservice when it takes place. I've always tried to allow everyone to have their day and to listen to what they have to say and then, if possible, try either to fulfill a request that anyone would make, or let them know why it couldn't be done. I think that a borough business is a service operation. We are here to serve to people in the community. And that if we don't feel that way, very bluntly, we shouldn't even be involved in borough government. We do something for a resident in our community I think we ought to be involved in accomplishing things in their best interest. It isn't a favor; it's the right thing. So if you're asking me what would I like people to say about me someday, I would like them to say that I did care about the town and that I was willing to listen to people and that I was able to work with people. But I was talking to you before about certain things that happen and you were talking about this being a posterity item. We have a library here that I am so proud of that has actually been improved and added on to in the last few years. And I think that's important. We have our municipal pool as I indicated pool before; it is an accomplished fact. I mentioned we were trying to do it before. We have our new borough hall and police department, all these things have happened. We have senior citizen housing now actually being constructed. Although it took us eight years it is actually being constructed. We have the new rail renovation, the railroad station renovation which we are going to be signing the contract for in the next couple of months. These are the things that I think that even though they are tangible are the things that make me feel that, gosh

you've got a lot of disappointments when you're involved in the politics, you get disappointments when you're involved with State and federal government. And a lot of times you are almost ready to give up and then just about that time you find out you're going to get your senior citizen housing or the railroad, you're going to get the railroad. This is what it's all about. You just can't really ever quit and you have to, I guess, retain your faith, if Mr. Marcy will forgive me, and ultimately, hopefully you will prevail.

R. Terwilliger: They are very tangible accomplishments that you've mentioned right along the way and I'm sure these are the things that you'll look upon and look back upon as an older gentleman perhaps someday as the things that were accomplished.

Mayor Wernik: There is one thing that I would like to add that I think is most important. Of all these accomplishments we've had take place I think the primary motivation has been to retain the character of the town and to not have it change. Now when I say not to change, it's foolish to say there will be no change because certainly time doesn't stand still and as it moves changes take place. And I don't even think that's bad. We've done all we've been able to do to preserve the character in this transition period even though we've had many improvements. We've tried to have them blend in. We've tried to keep the size of our buildings at a level that would be reasonable yet provide for the needs of our residents. I've been told for instance by people, that we have a planning board that is very conservative and that isn't ready to move on, and you know, I was very pleased about this. They are protective of our community. They are interested in everyone that comes before them and they do all they can in their best interest but they won't compromise the best interest of the community of Metuchen. And not only our planning board but our zoning board and our officials who are employed in the borough have been the same

R. Terwilliger: Even as the mayor, if I understand correctly, the structure of a mayor council, actually a mayor is a weak position, it is the councilmen who decide the policy and do the voting. Has this ever been difficult or frustrating for you, as a mayor, to see things that you felt very sincerely should be voted on differently than they were. Is it hard to restrain oneself from being too influential?

Mayor Wernik: Well, I've been accused of being too influential, as you know from time to time. I think that when you understand the weak mayor and council concept though you realize there is no reason for anyone to feel that they are either inferior or superior, it isn't so. The vote is the council's and that's where it should be. But the responsibility of the mayor is very clear and that is to bring to the council enough

information for it to make a decision, to help prepare for the meetings and the agendas and to represent the borough in activities of state or federal government or in social functions. The mayor has to be willing to lead and has to be willing to take part and has to be able to share, very bluntly. The person who is mayor, and it doesn't have to be Don Wernik, probably is someone who has been around long enough to know a little about the town. And so that I think whatever information he does have ought to be interesting to whatever council is sitting in office. And I think it is the mayor's responsibility to make sure they are aware of everything that he knows and then of course they'll make their decision.

R. Terwilliger: Do you think that most councilmen that you've worked with over the years take this position seriously and do their homework as they say and really dedicate themselves to this elected office?

Mayor Wernik: In the years that I've been involved in borough government I can say this: Metuchen can be very proud of all the elected officials that they have. In other words, the people of Metuchen have made careful choices, not that they've made good choices. But Democrats and Republicans, alike and I've served with almost an equal of both until the last few years, are completely dedicated and their primary concern is the community and not the salary involved. There is no self-benefit and gain but it's what they can contribute. And I think this attitude is present not only among the elected officials in Metuchen but most importantly it's present among so many of the residents of our community. I have boards and commissions that I've appointed and as you know I've been appointing for ten years or so for the council and this includes maybe two hundred or more people. And they are involved in our various boards and commissions and they give of themselves selflessly. And they contribute in a way that is unbelievable. And the type of people and the stature of people in Metuchen make almost all of our board of such a high level that anyone of those people could probably be serving as a council in any community. And it's very gratifying.

R. Terwilliger: But as a lay person who has watched this structure grow, this political structure, with all the commissions and boards it is, to use a quote, a very "tight run ship" and not to the extent where there is a lot of pressure. There is this selection of qualified people who have a sincere interest in this town, maintaining its character and work very hard for that cause.

Mayor Wernik: We really couldn't ever have the type of community that we have if we didn't have the people in Metuchen that live here. For example, we have a Planning Board and a Zoning Board.

Every town has that but not every town has a Cultural Arts Commission, not every town has a Cable TV Commission or has an Environmental Commission or a Borough Advisory Coalition or even a Civil Rights Commission

R. Terwilliger: You'd better say Historical Commission because that's what's making all this possible!

Mayor Wernik: A Historical Commission – and we are very grateful for that group as well. But I think what I was saying is we have a lot of extra boards and commissions that make our town different, our Pool Commission, that make our town desirable. And that make our town the really nice place to live in that it is.

R. Terwilliger: Can I ask you a question? In all these years of political involvement and commitment to what you set out to do, was there ever a time when you thought beyond local government? Have you thought of running for something on a state or county level?

Mayor Wernik: I can't say that I never thought of it.

R. Terwilliger: Were you approached?

Mayor Wernik: And I've been approached, I have to be honest, at both county and state level. But I've always been pleased with local level. I find local level government very tangible. That's where it's at.

R. Terwilliger: That's the grassroots.

Mayor Wernik: Like I said to you before, your people are right there, when you have a problem you can face the problem and resolve it or not resolve it in your lifetime rather than in three or four other lifetimes because its right there before you. And I find that also at local government, there is still no question as to the difference between compromise and principle. And I realize at other levels you have to be willing to have a much larger gray area that I don't know that I'm ready or would ever be ready to handle. I don't know that I'd last too long probably at other levels of the government.