

Pei's architecture is blend of forms, diplomacy



BEFORE AND AFTER — Top photo shows a street in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. The bottom photo shows a similar street,

Prospect Place, after it was redesigned by architect I.M. Pei.

By JANET BODNAR
Home News staff writer

An associate with I.M. Pei & Partners, architects, said this week it is "premature" to discuss specifics of the firm's redevelopment scheme for downtown New Brunswick, but he reassured city residents, "It is not our intention to sweep things clean and start all over again."

"There is great value in many of New Brunswick's existing structures," said H. Alan Høglund, an associate planner with Pei's New York firm. "In New Brunswick, as in our previous projects in Philadelphia and Boston, the challenge is to preserve the best of what is already there while adding vitality and new growth to the urban core."

Pei, a highly esteemed architect with a reputation for quality, has been selected by New Brunswick Tomorrow to develop a plan for revitalizing the city's central business district. The board of directors of New Brunswick Tomorrow will be asked to approve a contract with the Pei firm at its Feb. 11 meeting.

In Pei's previous urban development projects, "We've utilized retail galleries, outdoor cafes, open spaces and plazas — and urban housing is one of our pet projects," Høglund said. "We'll be considering all these land uses for New Brunswick."

Pei is away on a business trip to the Middle East.

In I.M. Pei & Partners, New Brunswick will be getting the services of an architectural firm which noted architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable three years ago described as probably the best in the country.

Pei has been hailed as a gifted artist, and is admired for his rational approach and all-round professionalism. His firm is recognized as an efficient organization with an impressive array of talent.

Pei's philosophy of urban development holds individual building projects must be conceived within the framework of their larger urban settings. In the February 1973 issue of *Architecture Plus* magazine, writer Peter Blake called I.M. Pei & Partners "probably the outstanding example of a firm whose consistent concern is with the broader context."

Blake continued, "Pei's clients know they are certain to get much more than just a very good building — they may, in fact, end up by generating the spontaneous self-renewal of the entire urban fabric."

Pei's work has been criticized as being too "monotonous." The architect has defended his style:

"As artist-architects the temptation is to give self-expression to every building we design," Pei said in "Architects on Architecture," a book by Paul Heyer. "We tend to forget our greater responsibility to the whole — which is the street, the square, or the city itself."

"A city of prima donna buildings is a chaotic city aesthetically. In the Middle Ages, the focus was the cathedral; 100 years ago, the city hall; today, anything and everything."

In his design of Place Ville Marie, completed in 1961 in Montreal, Canada, Pei created a new focus for the city

which helped rejuvenate the central area and established his reputation in the field of urban design.

Place Ville Marie features a pedestrian plaza at ground level with a 40-story office building rising above it and an enclosed shopping promenade below. There are sunken courtyards and underground parking facilities, and the whole complex is connected with Montreal's mass transit system.

Pei is not concerned only with office buildings and plazas; in the 1950s and 1960s, he pioneered new techniques for building urban housing that is less expensive and more attractive.

In many of his projects — notably, the Society Hill development in Philadelphia — Pei also has stressed preservation of existing housing.

In redesigning Society Hill, once a deteriorating neighborhood, Pei called for preservation and renewal of many old townhouses, coupled with construction of new townhouses in quadrangle patterns between the older homes and three new apartment towers.

Pei's firm rehabilitated two blocks in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant district as part of an experimental project to demonstrate how a ghetto area could be revitalized.

Speaking of the need for urban housing, Pei has said, "Housing comes before the agora market or church. We can have all the beautiful museums in the world and we are still poor as a people if we do not have decent housing."

The Pei firm is involved in developing a plan for the rejuvenation of the central business district in Augusta, Ga., a city comparable in size to New Brunswick.

Augusta boasts one of the widest main streets in America — Broad Street there is 168 feet wide. The Pei architects have recommended the street be redesigned to provide new space for shops, parks, fountains, restaurants, plazas and other community attractions.

Pei is not only an architect and planner; he also is generally recognized as a deft diplomat. Wrote Blake: "He has learned how to identify all the self-interests involved in a given project, and how to try to persuade those interests to join forces so as to achieve a common objective."

Besides urban development and housing, Pei, whose projects have won numerous awards, is involved in the design of institutional buildings and corporate headquarters.

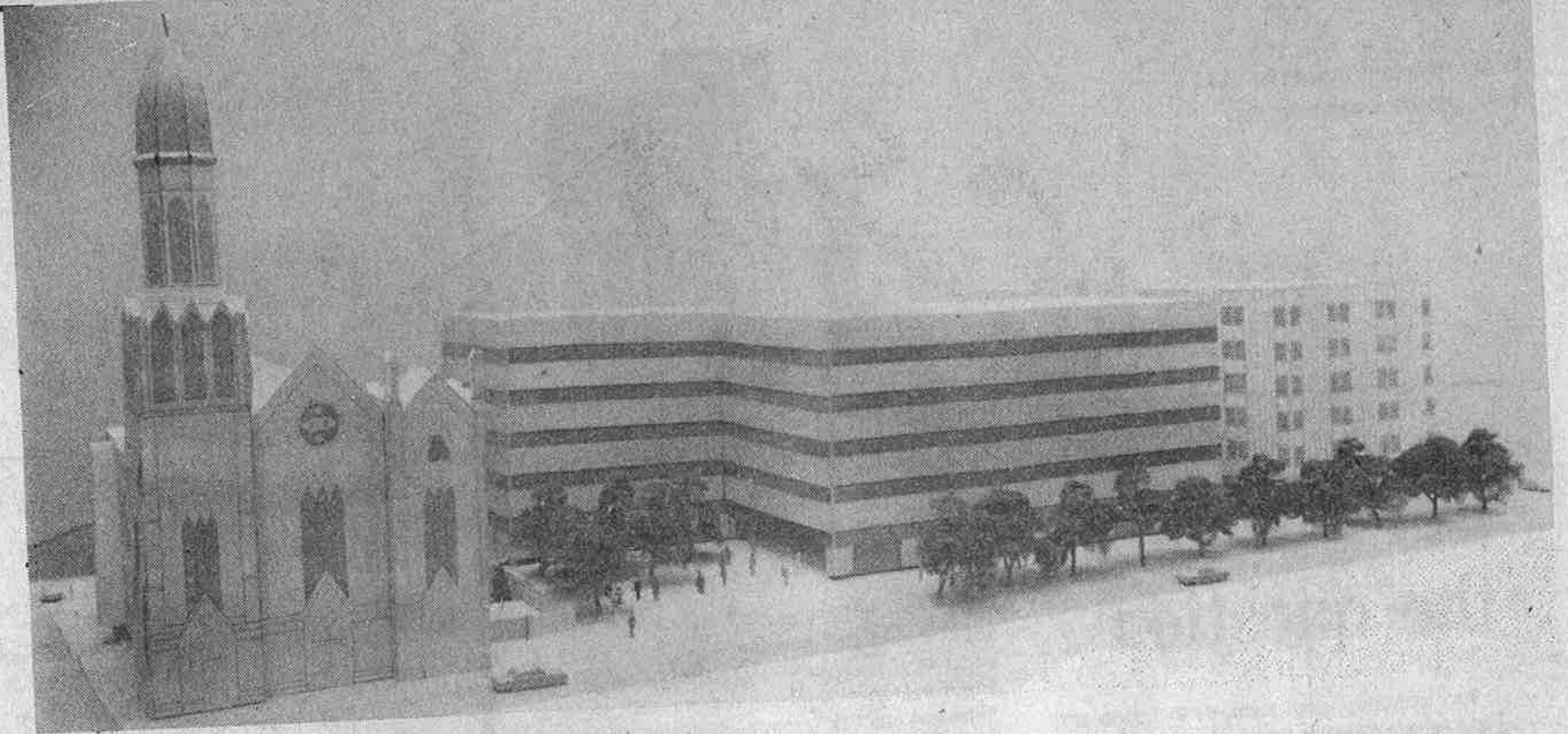
Noted for his use of poured concrete and glass-and-metal curtain walls, Pei sometimes is criticized for creating massive, monumental structures. Paul Goldberger, who reports on architecture for *The New York Times* said Pei's approach to design has drawn criticism from both extremes in the field.

"The more artsy, avant garde architects sometimes think of him as too much of a businessman, and the hack outfits think he is too artsy," Goldberger said.

"But you'll never hear anybody calling his work junk," he added. "His is one of the only design firms involved with major construction projects that still puts an emphasis on quality design."

Office building

Construction of proposed five-story building, middle structure in artist's model above, would be first stage of Commercial Plaza development in downtown New Brunswick. The structure, flanked by existing United Methodist Church at left, Plaza Office Building at right, would add 125,000-square-feet of office space on George Street. The model was prepared by I.M. Pei & Partners, architects and urban planners.



NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J., THURSDAY, MAY 27, 1976 29

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The Home News

\$150-million proposal would revamp downtown

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million in properties over the past year and a half.

However, Pei said the "transformation" of Albany Street, including widening of the right of way on the north side of the street, can "set the stage for a host of downtown revitalization projects."

The widened sidewalks of Albany Street, together with a landscaped median to separate lanes of traffic, is a prerequisite for future regeneration of the area north of Albany Street, according to the architect.

The "greening" of Albany Street, he said, would enhance the Railroad Plaza as a gateway to New Brunswick. His plan calls for rehabilitation of the Penn Central Railroad Station.

An "intimate pedestrian environment" would be opened on the 1,500-foot section of George Street, between Albany and New streets. Specialty shops and pedestrian

A "low" alternative would provide 375 living units in clusters of town houses and five-story row houses. Terraces, interior courtyards and landscaped plazas would be built.

Should economics require higher density, up to 650 units could be provided by combining town houses with "other unique architectural concepts" located around a town plaza. Two parking levels would be built underneath.

Before New Brunswick Tomorrow was created, a special city task force proposed more than two years ago that the Hiram area be developed as a shopping mall.

A heavily landscaped green buffer would be needed between the Hiram residential community and Memorial Parkway, said Pei.

To "reunite" the downtown with the Raritan River, a pedestrian crossing of the parkway is proposed.





This is how a 1,500-foot section of George Street would look.

streets, specialty shops and pedestrian walkways would be encouraged, and the street would be narrowed. New trees, benches and fountains would be provided. Existing buildings would be maintained.

The goal of utilizing this retail thoroughfare for pedestrians and shoppers is not possible, Pei emphasized, until Route 18 is extended up the Raritan River and across to an interchange in Piscataway.

A downtown traffic-loop system proposed as part of the plan is also needed to relieve traffic congestion before the George Street plans can be carried out, he said.

The plan for the 10-acre, 4-block Hiram Street area bounded by Neilson, Church, Richmond streets and Memorial Parkway strikes a balance between environmental concerns and economic feasibility, according to Pei.

Raritan river, a pedestrian crossing of the parkway is proposed.

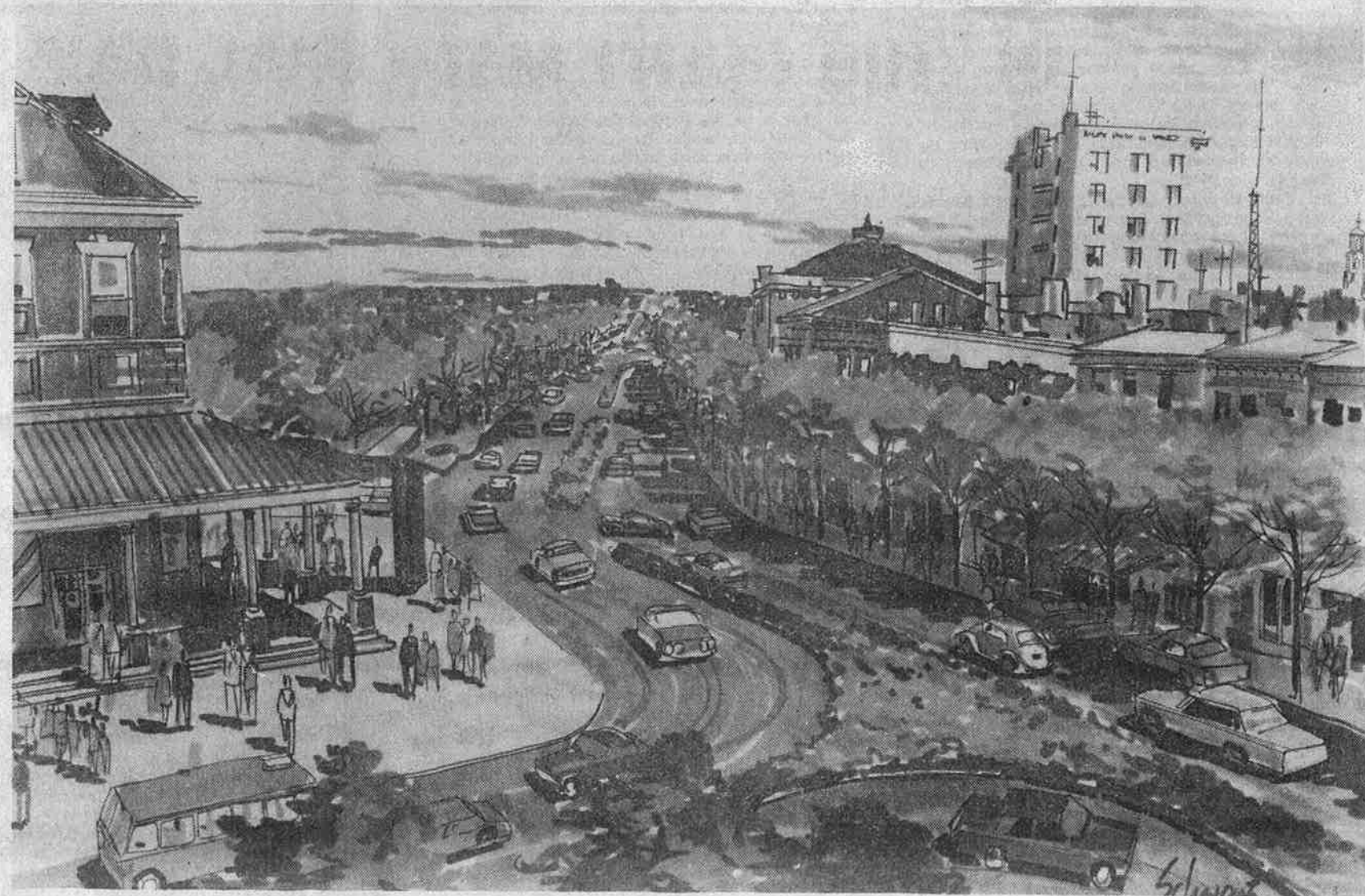
The undeveloped portion of Boyd Park, just south of the Albany Street Bridge, including the location of the existing police headquarters, would be developed as a riverfront park. A public boat marina and an amphitheater are planned.

New Brunswick Tomorrow's construction arm, the New Brunswick Development Corp., would sponsor or carry out many of the plans, if approved by the NBT board of directors.

The Pei plan was presented to the directors yesterday. Before the board votes on a final plan, it will be aired at a series of public forums so that adjustments can be made in response to public suggestions.

Railroad Plaza

According to the architect, the widened sidewalks of Albany Street together with a landscaped median to separate lanes of traffic, are a prerequisite for future regeneration of the area north of Albany Street. The plan also calls for the rehabilitation of the Penn Central Railroad station.



The Home News

What to do Memorial Day weekend

Parades, picnics and tributes to American war dead will highlight the Memorial Day weekend in the Raritan Valley.

Many of the events will commemorate the centennial observation.

With throngs of New Jerseyans expected to be on the roads this holiday weekend, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority has urged drivers to observe "a little extra caution behind the wheel."

The authority expects more than 1.5-million motorists to travel the turnpike, starting tomorrow. State troopers and toll collectors have been instructed to especially be on the lookout for fatigued and drinking drivers.

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Middlesex County:

New Brunswick and Highland Park will hold a joint parade Monday, sponsored by the Veterans Alliance of both towns.

Assembly time is 10:30 a.m. at Redmond Street and Livingston Avenue in New Brunswick and the parade will step off at 11 a.m. At about 11:15 a.m. a wreath will be placed at the monument at Livingston and George streets and taps will be played. At about 11:45 a.m., when the parade arrives at the Albany Street bridge, from which a wreath will be tossed to commemorate war dead, taps will be played. Marching into Highland Park, the parade will turn right on South Fifth Avenue and go to Donaldson's Park, where a bicentennial town picnic is planned.

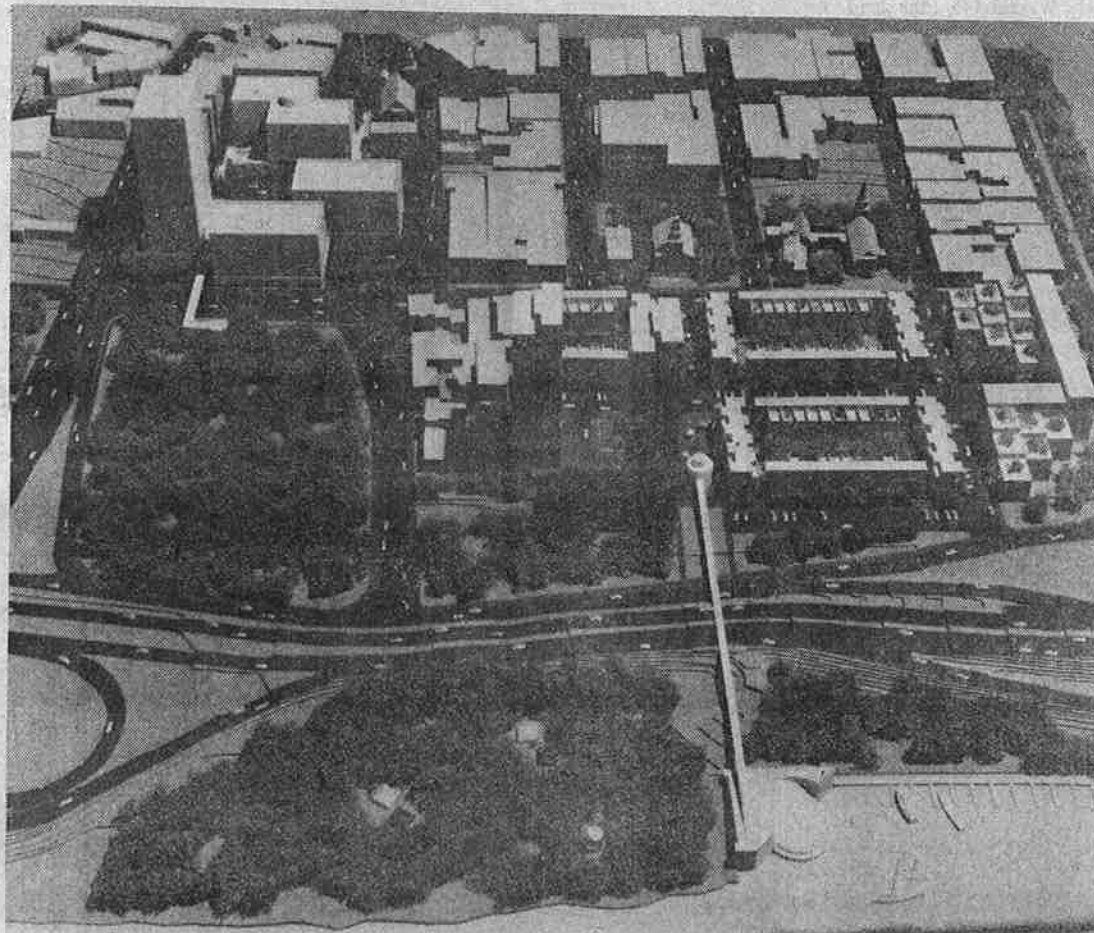
Cranbury — The parade begins at 1 p.m. Monday at the corner of Main Street and Cranbury Neck Road. The sponsor is the Lions Club.

Dunellen — The parade begins at 10 a.m. Monday at Columbia Park, with the VFW as sponsor.

East Brunswick — A 1 p.m. Sunday start is planned for the parade at Brunswick Square Mall.

The sponsors are the township recreation department

Face-lift: \$150-million plan



NEW BRUNSWICK TOMORROW — Artist's model depicts a revitalized downtown New Brunswick, as seen through the eyes of I.M. Pei & Partners, architects and

urban planners. Memorial Parkway (Route 18) and the Raritan River are at the bottom of the model; New Street is at left and Albany Street at right.

By TED SERRILL
Home News staff writer

NEW BRUNSWICK — A \$150-million initial development plan that could create as many as 5,000 jobs in downtown New Brunswick was made public this morning by I. M. Pei, New York architect and urban planner.

As much as \$25-million in additional retail sales could be expected in the central business district, Pei said at a news conference in the Holiday Inn, North Brunswick.

His firm was retained by New Brunswick Tomorrow, the private revitalization agency, to plan the renewal of the business district.

As part of the first stage, Pei envisions four new office buildings, comprising 525,-

Other views of plan page 29

000 square feet, on the upper part of the downtown commercial plaza.

A ground-breaking already has been set this summer for a 125,000-square-foot building adjacent to the six-year-old existing office building at 303 George St.

Other elements include construction of new housing in the Hiram Street area, rehabilitation of the George Street retail district and Railroad Plaza and the transformation of Albany Street into a tree-lined boulevard.

A 200-room hotel with conference facilities is proposed for the south side of Albany Street, between Neilson Street and Memorial Parkway.

No plans have been made for the area north of Albany Street, bounded by George, Somerset and Water streets, where Johnson & Johnson has purchased more than \$2

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