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# Acknowledgements

This report was written by **Katie Hammer**, Regional Plan Association, with assistance by **Robert Freudenberg**, New Jersey Director and **Corey Piasecki**, Associate Planner, New Jersey, RPA.

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## Stakeholders

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RPA would like to thank the following stakeholders for taking the time to speak with us about redevelopment in Camden:

**Susan Bass Levin**, President and CEO, Cooper Foundation  
**Brian Bauerle**, Director of Community Development, Cooper Foundation  
**Lou Bezich**, Vice President, Camden County College  
**Randy Churkis**, Developer, Grapevine Development  
**Tom Corcoran**, President, Delaware River Waterfront Corporation  
**Manuel Delgado**, Executive Director, Cramer Hill Community Development Corporation  
**Marge DellaVecchia**, Deputy County Administrator, Camden County  
**David Foster**, President, Coopers Ferry Development Association  
**Greg Gamble**, Director, Economic Development, Rutgers University— Camden  
**Pilar Hogan Closkey**, Executive Director, St. Joseph's Carpenter Society  
**Andrew Johnson**, Program Officer, William Penn Foundation  
**Sandi Kelly**, Economic Development Director, Camden County  
**Jason Konek**, Vice President for Housing and Community Services, Lutheran Social Ministries  
**Raymond Lamboy**, Executive Director, Latin American Economic Development Association, Inc. (LAEDA)  
**Andrew Levecchia**, Senior Planner, Camden County Improvement Authority  
**Karen Morris**, Senior Regional Planner, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission  
**Liza Nolan**, Executive Director, Camden Community Development Association  
**Anthony Perno**, CEO, Cooper's Ferry Development Association  
**Meishka Mitchell**, Vice President of Neighborhood Initiatives, Cooper's Ferry Development Association  
**Rod Sadler**, Executive Director, Save Our Waterfront (SOW)  
**Kevin Walsh**, Associate Director, Fair Share Housing  
**Ed Williams**, Director, City of Camden Department of Development and Planning

# Executive Summary

Regional Plan Association (RPA) is America's oldest and most distinguished independent urban research and advocacy group. RPA prepares long range plans and policies to guide the growth and development of the New York- New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan region. While RPA's traditional boundaries include the 31 counties of the tri-state metropolitan region, the organization seeks to share its experience with metropolitan regions throughout the three states. This study in Camden is the first step of a long-term initiative to collaborate with municipalities and stakeholders in South Jersey.

With this project, RPA has evaluated Camden's capacity to implement land use and redevelopment plans based on previous experiences. From this evaluation, the report makes recommendations to the public, private, non-profit, and philanthropic sectors to improve urban planning outcomes over the next decade. These recommendations are organized in the following four strategies:

- **Support the City's prioritization of redevelopment areas.**

By directing redevelopment dollars toward neighborhoods that have a proven capacity to plan and implement projects, Camden can prevent wasteful spending and capitalize on past investments in the educational and medical facilities and the waterfront. In addition, the recommendations propose building capacity for community groups in emerging neighborhoods.

- **Reduce the costs of development in priority areas.**

Because redevelopment in Camden is expensive and risky, this strategy proposes specific recommendations to reduce the costs of acquiring land, updating costly infrastructure, and obtaining permits. This section also proposes reforms to the PILOTs paid by private companies to reduce the property tax rate.

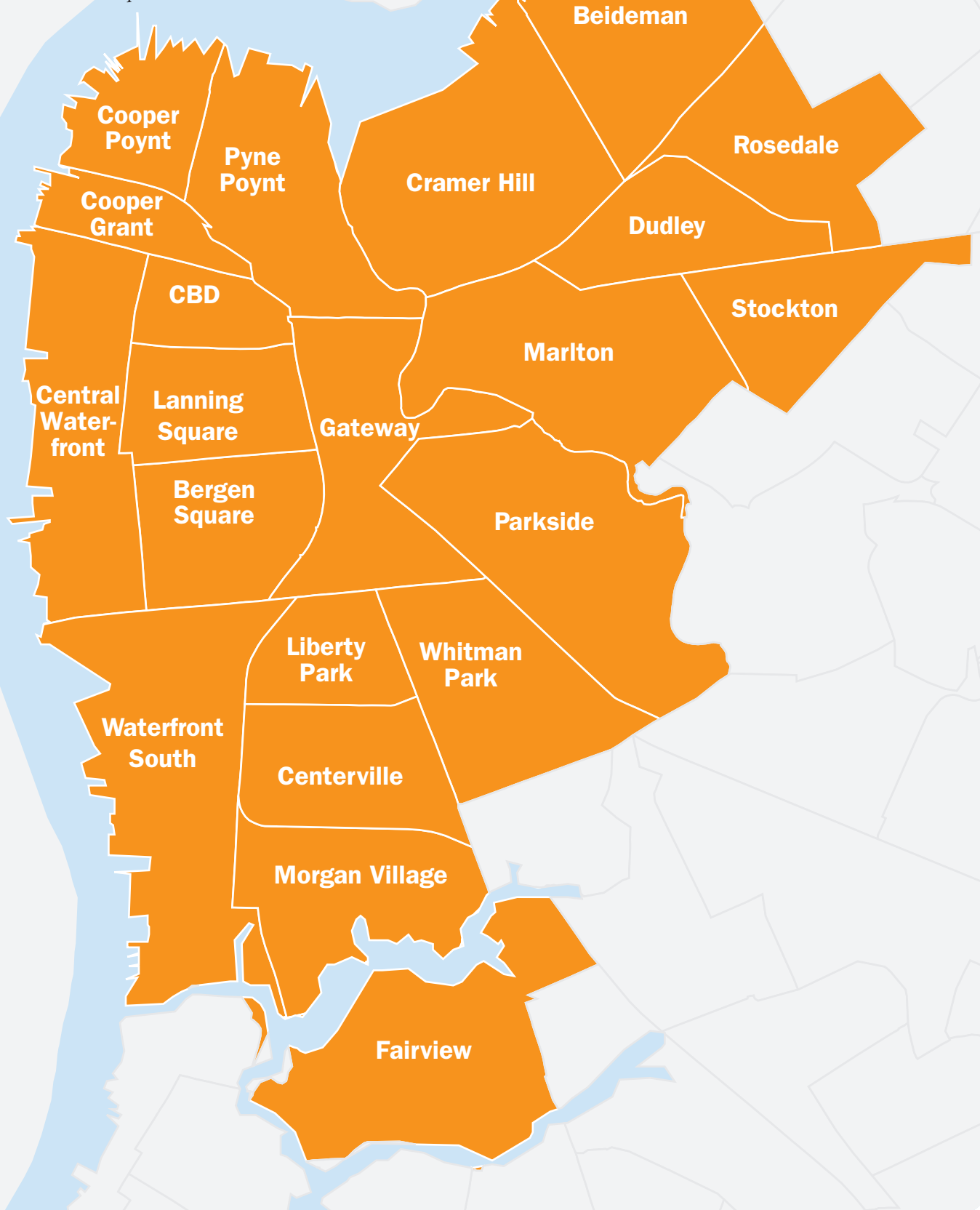
- **Revitalize commercial corridors.** To bring life back to the priority neighborhoods of Camden, decaying commercial corridors need to be rehabilitated. The recommendations in this section specifically address unattractive facades, vacant storefronts, vacant land, and blighted buildings.

- **Engage the region for support.** Camden is well located to gain resources from Philadelphia and the New Jersey suburbs. This section provides opportunities for the surrounding communities to assist Camden through smart growth, transit, affordable housing, and shared services.

To inform this research, RPA spoke with stakeholders in Camden, reviewed previous plans, visited redevelopment sites, and referenced best-practices in cities that face similar barriers to success. While Camden faces a unique set of obstacles, it also boasts many resources which can attract and guide redevelopment.

## Camden Neighborhood Map

8.94 Square Miles



# Camden City Context

The great potential that lies within the City of Camden has been limited by a variety of challenges - both historically and in recent years. Beginning with the shift away from manufacturing-based industries in the post-war decades through to the city's most recent struggle with its budget, Camden has not been able to offer its residents a consistent, safe and high quality of life. Additionally, past political challenges and poorly managed investments in Camden have further exacerbated these challenges and have led to the isolation of the city from the surrounding region. Over the years, numerous redevelopment plans have been developed, with a variety of approaches, but have offered only limited success. In the face of these extraordinary challenges and in the wake of the mixed success of these initiatives, it is important to consider how redevelopment can be a part of a larger strategy to address these challenges while laying the groundwork for a more successful city.

When speaking to stakeholders, RPA heard a wide variety of perspectives, but a number of themes came through. In general, the stakeholders believe that Camden's potential lies in its connectivity and proximity to Philadelphia, its higher education and medical facilities ("eds and meds"), and its waterfront location. Although there has been disagreement about how the Municipal Rehabilitation and Recovery Act (MRRA) funding of \$175 million was spent between 2002 and 2009, many stakeholders would like to direct future development dollars towards the areas surrounding these educational and medical facilities that could attract jobs and middle income families.

In addition to its location and the eds and meds, RPA found that Camden has a rich nonprofit sector with several strong community development corporations, engaged foundations, and the very effective Cooper's Ferry Development Association (CFDA)<sup>1</sup>. Many of these CDCs have succeeded at bringing the residents of their community to the table for planning discussions, which all stakeholders agree has improved the planning outcomes in Camden. In addition, foundations such as the William Penn Foundation, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and several others have actively funded planning and capacity building activities. Chris Daggett, President and CEO of the Dodge Foundation, has also indicated that there is a consortium of New Jersey foundations that would be interested in increasing their investment in Camden if they were convinced their investments would make a difference. CFDA is a unique entity with the mission of facilitating the revival of the city, but who has also provided capacity and assistance to CDCs that ask for their help.

While the City of Camden's new Mayor and staff are committed to addressing these issues, they have had to address a structural budget deficit that has left the office understaffed. This budget deficit has meant mass layoffs for the police and fire force, not to mention the already strapped redevelopment offices. The County of Camden has greater resources, although it is also grappling with budget issues. Although several companies in the private sector do provide community support, we have found that most have not been active in the redevelopment arena. Finally, most of the educational and medical facilities are engaged with how their investments can improve the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier this year, CFDA and GCP merged and have maintained the name Cooper's Ferry Development Association, taking on the mission and programs of both organizations.



# Recommended Strategies

RPA acknowledges that there are several impediments to redevelopment that are beyond the scope of this study such as crime and the perception of crime, K-12 education, and politics of the region. Instead, this report attempts to use the strengths of Camden to overcome some of its most immediate challenges. By nature of the organization, RPA is interested in a regional approach to redevelopment, but the impediments in Camden demand a micro approach in the near term which can pave the way for a more regional approach in the long term. Given the city's strengths and challenges, this report offers the following specific strategies to all stakeholders to prioritize the use of limited funds, lower the costs of redevelopment, improve the commercial corridors, and explore regional solutions.

## Support the City's Prioritization of Redevelopment Areas

Under previous administrations, the city tried to spread redevelopment dollars evenly between census tracts. Dollars were inefficiently spent on plans that did not have the capacity or investment to succeed. The city has since identified neighborhoods that are ripe for redevelopment investment and those who have the potential to become ripe for redevelopment.

### Investment Communities

The city now prioritizes redevelopment dollars in communities that it has deemed to have a proven capacity to implement projects and that have been able to develop ratables. These areas include: Downtown, Cooper Plaza-Lanning Square, Cooper Grant, Fairview, North Camden, Cramer Hill, and Parkside. Each of these neighborhoods have strong CDCs, approved neighborhood plans and/or redevelopment plans, and potential for new ratables.

#### → Recommendations

- **City of Camden:** Continue to prioritize redevelopment dollars in neighborhoods with proven capacity, especially focusing on development around the assets that have already received the most investment: the waterfront and the educational and medical facilities. Most of the previous successes have involved investment by public or non-profit entities, which does not greatly assist the city's tax base. While these projects are valuable, RPA suggests leveraging these public investments to entice private development. This report also includes methods of attracting more private developers.
- **City of Camden and Nonprofits:** Develop a bigger picture view about how these plans fit together. For example, RPA anecdotally heard that several neighborhood plans include new grocery stores. While Camden residents surely need greater access to food, the city does not have the consumer base to support a grocery store in every neighborhood. Instead, the city should give neighborhoods direction about how their plans relate to their neighbors. This type of planning has been done around the waterfront, where CFDA is working with North Camden and Cramer Hill to develop plans that work together with the bigger picture.

### Emerging Communities

In other neighborhoods, the city is trying to identify leaders that can organize CDCs or community organizations to eventually put together redevelopment plans. Neighborhoods like Morgan Village, Whitman Park, and Bergen Square could be investment communities down the road. It is important for the city to remain engaged in these neighborhoods and to work with non-profits and foundations to nurture the next generation of "investment communities."

#### → Recommendation

- **Non-Profit Organizations:** Multiple organizations such as the CFDA and the Camden Community Development Association currently provide capacity support for burgeoning organizations. These groups should specifically apply for funding to help build productive community development organizations in emerging communities, in coordination with the city.
- **Foundations:** Foundations could support an "emerging communities" fund which could provide seed money to new organizations. Because there is no guarantee that these organizations will last, the seed money should start small and build over time as organizations prove capacity. The emerging communities fund could also provide loans for minor beautification improvements that could give these organizations experience in completing projects.

## Reduce the Cost of Development in Priority Areas

The cost to develop in Camden is quite high due to the investment of time and resources that developers must put into land acquisition, site cleanup, infrastructure upgrades, permitting, and property taxes. Often these costs can eclipse the initial value of the land. Because the risks to developing in Camden are high, Camden needs to lower the cost of development to attract companies that can create valuable projects.

### Land Acquisition

Within the City of Camden, many abandoned properties have questionable title histories which are expensive and time consuming to resolve. There are also instances of land owners sitting on vacant property and waiting for a developer to pay them to buy it. In 2006, the Tax Lien Financing Corporation (TLFC), a state government backed organization, was set up to help the city collect tax liens. If the TLFC cannot negotiate a payment plan with the property owner, it sells the liens at a reduced rate to companies and organizations that can foreclose on the properties. The sale of the liens can take two years due to the bureaucratic process, which can be an impediment to redevelopment. If an organization is given a property by the previous owner, the new occupants are responsible for the fees and penalties, which can far exceed the value of the property. In addition, although some cities will sell parcels to developers for \$1 if the mission is in keeping with the city plans, the City of Camden uses sale of city-owned land to raise revenue.

## → Recommendation

- **Camden Redevelopment Agency (CRA):** The CRA should move forward with its plans to create a land bank for foreclosed or abandoned land and to investigate and help to remediate contaminated sites to support future development and streamline the land acquisition process.<sup>2</sup>
- **City of Camden:** The city should identify vacant properties in priority neighborhoods and determine which properties have clear ownership and which lack a clear title.
- **Foundation and Nonprofit:** Once the city has identified which properties lack clear title, foundation support can fund an effort to perform title searches on the properties.
- **City of Camden:** If the city identifies property owners who are making no effort to redevelop blighted buildings or vacant land, they should create a vacant property registration fee program. The City of Wilmington, Delaware, requires yearly registration fees ranging from \$500 to \$5,000 for properties that are left vacant.<sup>3</sup> This fee could entice property owners who have no intention of improving the property to sell the property to another organization or into the CRA's land bank.
- **Tax Lien Finance Corporation:** The CRA's NSP2 application indicated that the Tax Lien Finance Corporation had earmarked property in Cooper Plaza-Lanning Square to be purchased by the CRA for the cost of the tax liens.<sup>4</sup> The remaining liens in redevelopment areas should be sold to the CRA at a reduced price as well. The CRA must then act quickly to assemble some properties to be marketed to developers while also rehabilitating others to be resold to community members. We also suggest that the CRA give a discount or priority to developers or community organizations that plan to reinvest in the property in a way that is in keeping with the neighborhood plans.



## Construction Costs/Infrastructure

The costs of development in Camden are quite high due to the poor state of the water and sewer infrastructure, abandoned properties that can cause infrastructure issues to attached units, and environmental remediation necessary in almost any project.

Several city plans have acknowledged the deteriorating water and sewer system which is from the late 1800s and early 1900s, and the 2003 Camden Capital Improvement and Infrastructure Plan proposed specific updates and funding sources.<sup>5</sup> Yet today, most redevelopment projects demand private investment to update the water and sewer systems. The city has decided that they can no longer afford to take on debt to upgrade the water and sewer systems, and instead charge developers with paying for their own infrastructure updates. However, if a redevelopment project falls along a county road, the county pays to update the system.

While most of the city has poor infrastructure, CFDA has renewed the infrastructure on specific parcels as part of its site preparation. For example, as it recruits a hotel to the waterfront, it secured funding for and oversaw the installation of the necessary road access and infrastructure updates to make the site more desirable to developers.

Abandoned buildings in Camden can lead to infrastructure problems and create an eye sore which would prevent future development. The CRA received \$26 million in Neighborhood Stabilization Program 2 funding in 2010, part of which is being used to rehabilitate over 240 abandoned or foreclosed homes, take down over 100 blighted structures, and redevelop 70 vacant properties.<sup>6</sup> Because the CRA operates only in areas with approved redevelopment plans, this rehabilitation is targeting investment neighborhoods including North Camden, Cooper Lanning, and now Cramer Hill.<sup>7</sup> The CRA has partnered with several neighborhood organizations and a private developer to carry out this project including The Heart of Camden, Camden Lutheran Housing, St. Joseph's Carpenter Society, Volunteers of America and for-profit partners Michaels Development and Pennrose Properties.

## → Recommendation

- **City of Camden:** Rather than requiring developers to foot the entire cost of the infrastructure updates, the City should collect fees from the developers for a portion of the cost of the development. This will allow the city to apply for matching funds from federal and state sources. By setting up a system of impact fees, city can have more control over the project and can spend some resources updating the system beyond the development area. This technique of piggybacking was proposed in the North Camden Plan.<sup>8</sup> By using fees to access outside funding for the some of the upgrades itself, Camden can lower the cost of developing in Camden and attract more private developers.

5 North Camden Neighborhood and Waterfront Park Plan Save Our Waterfront. March 2008. <<http://www.coopersferry.com/cfiles/sow/files/NorthCamdenNeighborhoodAndWaterfront-ParkPlan-2008.pdf>>. Camden Improvement and Infrastructure Master Plan. The Economic Recovery Board for Camden. July 2003.

6 <[http://www.camdenrb.com/CI\\_IMP\\_FINAL/Camden\\_CI\\_IMP\\_July03.pdf](http://www.camdenrb.com/CI_IMP_FINAL/Camden_CI_IMP_July03.pdf)>

7 "Camden receives more than \$26 million in HUD money." Gloucester County Times. 15 Jan. 2010. <[http://www.nj.com/camden/index.ssf/2010/01/camden\\_receives\\_more\\_than\\_26\\_m.html](http://www.nj.com/camden/index.ssf/2010/01/camden_receives_more_than_26_m.html)>

8 "NSP 2 Application, #451376784." Camden Redevelopment Agency. <[http://www.ci.camden.nj.us/economic/NSP\\_proposal.pdf](http://www.ci.camden.nj.us/economic/NSP_proposal.pdf)>

9 North Camden Neighborhood and Waterfront Park Plan Save Our Waterfront. March 2008. <<http://www.coopersferry.com/cfiles/sow/files/NorthCamdenNeighborhoodAndWaterfront-ParkPlan-2008.pdf>>.

2 "NSP 2 Application, #451376784." Camden Redevelopment Agency. <[http://www.ci.camden.nj.us/economic/NSP\\_proposal.pdf](http://www.ci.camden.nj.us/economic/NSP_proposal.pdf)>

3 "City of Wilmington Property Registration Fee Program." City of Wilmington Department of Licenses & Inspections. <<http://www.wilmingtonde.gov/VacantProperties/index.htm>>.

4 "NSP 2 Application, #451376784." Camden Redevelopment Agency. <[http://www.ci.camden.nj.us/economic/NSP\\_proposal.pdf](http://www.ci.camden.nj.us/economic/NSP_proposal.pdf)>

- **Camden Redevelopment Agency (CRA):** The use of the NSP2 funding for the purpose of rehabilitating abandoned homes and taking down blighted structures extremely promising. We recommend that the CRA continue to work with non-profits and developers to access outside funding and address the issues of blighted properties.

## Permitting

According to interviews with stakeholders, inspection and permitting often take 6-12 months for a simple permitting review. While city employees are working to get through the proposals quickly with limited staff, a different approach to permitting such as Fast Tracking small projects could help the whole system move faster.

### → Recommendation

- **City of Camden:** Develop a Fast Track permitting system for residential or commercial properties that seek minimal changes. Other municipalities have included a variety of project types in their Fast Track program such as interior updates that do not increase the building footprint, addition of a porch or deck, and minor updates to the electric or plumbing. The city could prioritize Fast Track permits to projects in “Investment Neighborhoods” to assist in lowering the cost of development in those areas.
- **City of Camden:** Because many of permitting requests come from the CDCs in Camden who are rehabilitating a number of buildings, the city could create a process to pre-approve a group of projects by a certain CDC and allow that CDC to get a Fast Track permit for each property. For example, for the recent NSP2 projects, the CDCs could get a blanket pre-approval permit for the type of work they plan to do; then, as they buy and rehabilitate a property, they could get a fast track permit for that individual project.

## Property Tax Rate

The city has a high property tax rate for new development,<sup>9</sup> and PILOTs are negotiated with the city for almost every project. While these PILOTs make development more attractive, the PILOTs have reduced the amount of taxable land which increases the rate for those residents actually paying taxes. In addition, while the city receives the same or more than estimated tax amount through PILOTs, they do not provide any money for the school system or the county. Private companies such as Campbell’s Soup, L-3 Communication, and the Adventure Aquarium are paying PILOTs at a fraction of their estimated property tax, and these PILOTs are negotiated for lengths of 25 years or greater.<sup>10</sup> This system of negotiating a PILOT with private developers is a never ending cycle, because no private company will want to pay property taxes if it is shouldering a disproportionate part of the burden, and few developers will act without a PILOT.



### → Recommendation

- **City of Camden:** The city should set a non-negotiable future date to end private development PILOTs. Once a date has been selected, the city should renegotiate PILOT agreements with existing private companies to end on the selected date. In addition, any new development would be able to negotiate a PILOT only up to the set date. For example, the city could agree to end the PILOTs on January 1, 2020, after which the city tax rate would be lowered and all private land owners would pay property taxes. Passing city legislation based on this agreement could hold future city leaders to this agreement.

## Revitalize Commercial Corridors

During the time of the state takeover, much of the MRRA dollars went to support the education and medical facilities and to projects on the waterfront.<sup>11</sup> While these projects helped to make these neighborhoods more appealing, many of the commercial corridors in the city have remained languid. The commercial corridors on Cooper Street and Market Street have benefited from the proximity to these projects, and similar investments are needed on streets like Broadway and Haddon Avenue, which have seen smaller benefits from the investment in the eds and meds. In addition to a high rate of vacancies along commercial corridors, the length of the commercial corridors has been shortened dramatically due to expansive vacancies and permissive land use.

There are a number of resources for rebuilding commercial corridors that are currently in existence. Coopers Ferry Development Association (CFDA) runs the Camden Special Services District which pays workers to pick up trash and clean graffiti in the downtown and along Broadway, Haddon Avenue, Federal Street, Mt. Ephraim Avenue, River Avenue, Kaighn Avenue, and Yorkship Square. CFDA also has a Broadway Main Streets Program in which it has focused on beautification, providing technical assistance to businesses, and acting as an intermediary between the businesses and the city.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The City of Camden increased the tax rate and reassessed properties in February of 2011. The Philadelphia Inquirer put the tax rate at between \$4.60 and \$2.40 per \$100 of assessed value. Vargas, Claudia “Camden property owners bracing for tax hike” Vargas, Claudia. “Camden property owners bracing for tax hike.” Philadelphia Inquirer 8 Feb. 2011. <[http://articles.philly.com/2011-02-08/news/27107223\\_1\\_property-value-assessments-property-taxes](http://articles.philly.com/2011-02-08/news/27107223_1_property-value-assessments-property-taxes)>

<sup>10</sup> “Budget and Taxes: Camden Reports 2005.” CAMConnect. June 2005.

<sup>11</sup> In addition, under the MRRA, the Economic Recovery Board of Camden had \$20.8 million to make grants, matching grants or loans to support streetscape improvements, facade restoration, street signage improvements, street resurfacing, demolition and restoration of commercial structures, property acquisition, and redevelopment projects in downtown Camden.

<sup>12</sup> “2011 Annual Report - Greater Camden Partnership.” Greater Camden Partnership. 1 Mar. 2011. <<http://issuu.com/gpc Camden/docs/gcp-2011-annual-report-web-2>>



In addition, the Camden County Improvement Authority and CFDA, funded by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), is planning an overlay district for Broadway aimed at addressing the lack of cohesive zoning for the corridor in the Lanning Square and Cooper Plaza redevelopment plans. The proposal cites the large amount of vacancies, uncooperative landlords, and physical blight as barriers to redevelopment of this corridor.<sup>13</sup> Finally, a developer is in the early stages of bringing mixed-use, transit oriented development to Haddon Avenue at the Ferry Avenue Station.

To improve the city's existing commercial corridors, stakeholders need to address three types of conditions: unattractive façades, vacant storefronts, vacant land.

## Unattractive Façades

### → Recommendation

- **Greater Camden Partnership and Cooper's Ferry Development Association and Foundations:** CFDA, with financial assistance from a foundation, can offer forgivable loans to building owners and commercial tenants to invest in façade update projects that are in line with the redevelopment plans. The organizations should determine the maximum amount for the loan and the percentage that is required as a down payment. The loan can include money for design and architectural assistance, and the organizations should only approve the loan if the improvements are in line with the agreed upon character of the district. If the façades are maintained over the life of the loan, the loan should be forgiven. This will give businesses an incentive to improve their façades and maintain them as well. As they often do with developers, CFDA should assist the businesses and landlords in getting their permits approved with the city.

## Vacant Store Fronts

### → Recommendation

**Greater Camden Partnership and Foundation:** CFDA has successfully built capacity to beautify and connect the businesses on the commercial corridor. CFDA should apply for additional funding to begin marketing empty storefronts to new businesses. In 2005, the Bay Area Economics conducted a study on the types of stores that are in demand in Camden. Although some of this demand has been met, such as the Barnes and Noble, CFDA should recruit businesses to fill some of the other opportunities, such as the demand for high quality restaurants or a specialty grocery store.<sup>14</sup>

- **Greater Camden Partnership:** Continue the Art Gallery Series in which CFDA showcases local artistic talent in vacant buildings. This can be a great opportunity to bring life to the commercial corridor while CFDA recruits new businesses. New businesses will want to see that they are surrounded by other activity and attractions.

## Vacant Lots and Blighted Buildings

### → Recommendation

- **Greater Camden Partnership:** Continue beautifying vacant lots in their special services district and keeping these lots clear of trash until the overlay district for Broadway is finished and these lots can be redeveloped.
- **Greater Camden Partnership:** Blighted buildings along a commercial corridor can bring down the value of the all of the stores on the street. The previous section gave suggestions for dealing with vacant properties and absent landlords, and those policies should be targeted on these commercial streets.



- **City and Nonprofits:** The city and nonprofits should explore short term opportunities for vacant land on commercial corridors. Although some may be tempted to try a community garden or pocket park, these uses must be strategic so that they do not impede future development. The city should make sure that they are able to maintain continuity of the commercial corridor in the future. Another option is to keep vacant lots well maintained and even build a picket fence to give impression of ownership.

## Engage the Region for Support

The need for a regional approach in Camden can be seen in many different policy arenas including transit-oriented smart growth, housing and shared services. Many have argued that one of the failures of the state takeover was the lack of a regional approach.<sup>15</sup> Although MRRA required the creation of a regional board, the board quickly subsided and the regional approach was left out of the implementation.

<sup>13</sup> "Request for proposals for planning consultant for the Broadway District Overlay Camden County Improvement Authority." Camden County Improvement Authority. 2011.

<sup>14</sup> "Camden Downtown Market Study." Bay Area Economics (BAE) and City of Camden. March 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Katz, Matt. "Camden Rebirth: A promise still unfulfilled." Philadelphia Inquirer. 8 Nov. 2009. <[http://www.philly.com/philly/news/special\\_packages/inquirer/20091108\\_Camden\\_Rebirth\\_\\_A.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/news/special_packages/inquirer/20091108_Camden_Rebirth__A.html)>.

## Transit Oriented Smart Growth

Camden is connected to the region through public transportation lines including the River Line and PATCO. The River Line is a light rail line run by New Jersey Transit that connects Trenton to Camden and has four stops in downtown Camden. PATCO, run by the Port Authority Transit Corporation, has a line that connects Camden and outlying suburbs to Philadelphia which has three stations in Camden. In addition, PATCO has proposed a new line extending from the Broadway station down into Glassboro. In the current proposal, this would give Camden another transit stop in the southern part of town.<sup>16</sup>

With the designation as a core city, the DVRPC long term smart growth plan “Connections: The Regional Plan for the Future” recommends greater density in Camden.<sup>17</sup> The DVRPC has the Transportation and Community Development Initiative which supports projects to encourage development and redevelopment efforts in the core cities, developed communities and mature suburbs. Through this grant program, they are funding the Broadway overlay project to improve the commercial corridor.

With the use of the urban transit hub tax credit and the new market tax credit, a developer is in the predevelopment phase of the Haddon Avenue transit oriented development at the PATCO Ferry Avenue Station, which will include a grocery store, mixed use development, and connection to the Lady of Lords hospital. In order to move this project forward a number of stakeholders are working with the developer to overcome some of the challenges. CFDA is helping the developer get the necessary permits, Camden County has agreed to update the water and sewer infrastructure because it is a county road, and the city is negotiating a PILOT with the developer and grocery store.

### → Recommendation

- **Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC):** The grant program is an excellent way to support Camden’s efforts to revitalize and promote density. DVRPC should take this one step further to not only fund proposals, but also work with community stakeholders to steer them towards the types of projects that would accompany these goals. Particular emphasis should be placed on projects built around transit stops. DVRPC should also consider funding some infrastructure upgrades in Camden in order to lower the costs of development.
- **PATCO:** Secure a funding stream for the Glassboro-Camden line. This line will provide more connections between Camden and the suburbs and possibly open up suburban job opportunities to Camden residents.
- **Stakeholders:** Continue to support projects like the Haddon Avenue transit oriented development project which encourage density and revitalization around the transportation centers. If the proposed PATCO extension is funded, Camden should begin planning transit oriented development around the new station so that it can be implemented along with the extension.

<sup>16</sup> “Glassboro-Camden Line.” PATCO. 11 June 2010. <<http://www.glassborocamdenline.com/>>.

<sup>17</sup> “Connections: The Regional Plan for the Future.” Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. 23 July 2009. <<http://www.dvrpc.org/reports/09047.pdf>>.

## Housing

One of the major regional challenges in Camden is affordable housing. Many of the suburbs neighboring Camden have been reluctant to build affordable housing which has continued to concentrate people with low incomes in Camden. Before the 2008 law closing the affordable housing loophole, many were able to unload their affordable housing responsibilities onto Camden. In addition, the MRRA funding was supposed to go towards building market rate housing in Camden, yet the majority of the housing money was spent on low income housing, except for a few notable exceptions.

### → Recommendation

- **Cooper’s Ferry Development Association:** With the Victor Lofts and the Cooper Grant Homes, Camden proved that there was a market for middle income homes in Camden. These successes need to be marketed to developers to continue to bring market rate housing to Camden. This is being done to some extent along the waterfront in North Camden.
- **Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and Camden County:** The “Connections” plan proposes encouraging all suburbs to take on some affordable housing. DVRPC and Camden County should put money behind this proposal by supporting affordable housing planning exercises with suburban communities to encourage them to better integrate affordable housing into their development plans. Currently many developers and suburbs look for ways to get around affordable housing requirements, but through planning meetings and charrettes, community members can have a greater say in how affordable housing will fit into their community.

## Shared Services and Resources

Due to the City of Camden’s extremely difficult budget crisis, the county has created some opportunities for shared services such as incorporating the Camden library in the county library system. Given the City of Camden will not be able to easily raise new revenue with the current state of rates, more should be done to share services.

Philadelphia and Camden share the river front, yet RPA found little evidence of collaboration between the two cities over how the two banks of the riverfront should work together. That said, Tom Corcoran the former CEO of CFDA is now the CEO of the Delaware River Waterfront Corporation which is dedicated to improving the Philadelphia side of the waterfront.

### → Recommendation

- **Camden County:** There are a number of neighboring towns that share Camden’s tight budget constraints, such as Pennsauken. Camden County should explore if services such as fire protection or permitting can efficiently be shared among multiple cities.
- **Cooper’s Ferry Development Association and Delaware River Waterfront Corporation:** Given their personal relationship, these two organizations can work together with their respective municipal leadership to conduct greater intercity planning. This can improve Camden’s connection to the Philadelphia waterfront and perhaps create a working

relationship between the two cities over redevelopment issues. Possibilities for collaboration could include early steps such as planning joint waterfront events, to longer term actions such as providing better connections between the waterfronts via ferry or even pursuing joint redevelopment projects.

## Conclusion

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As many stakeholders conveyed, RPA believes that Camden has the potential to reach its redevelopment goals. Our recommendations strive to help Camden meet those goals by prioritizing areas of investment, lowering the costs of redevelopment, reviving commercial corridors, and accessing regional strengths. Although there are many impediments to redevelopment in Camden, we also found a strong community of stakeholders who are committed to bringing revitalization to the city. We hope that our recommendations can be of assistance to those stakeholders and look forward to engaging with the community on these issues moving forward.



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**Regional Plan Association** is America's oldest and most distinguished independent urban research and advocacy group. RPA prepares long range plans and policies to guide the growth and development of the New York- New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan region. RPA also provides leadership on national infrastructure, sustainability, and competitiveness concerns. RPA enjoys broad support from the region's and nation's business, philanthropic, civic, and planning communities.

**RPA's current work** is aimed largely at implementing the ideas put forth in the Third Regional Plan, with efforts focused in five project areas: community design, open space, transportation, workforce and the economy, and housing.

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