

City on the Brink

Economic and Community Development in Camden, NJ

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Today people know Camden, NJ as one of the poorest and most dangerous cities in America. It has a population of 80,000 people with an unemployment rate of 10.1% and for those over the age of 25 only 50% graduated from high school.¹ Of those who work their median income is \$23,421, which puts 36% of Camden residents and 45% of Camden children in poverty.² But how did Camden reach this state? How did decades of disinvestment go unnoticed until “on November 21, 2005, Camden was deemed the most dangerous city in America for the second consecutive year,” with a murder rate “over 10 times the national rate” and a “rate of robbery in 2004 [that] was 30% higher than the #2 city.”³ Old Camden’s industrial and commercial sectors survived two World Wars, the Great Depression, and it was not until the 1970s that Camden’s steady decline became a rapid dive. Why then did Camden fall harder than other industrial cities? Disinvestment affected most cities across America, as did white-flight, but why did Camden never resurface?

The Beginning

The city began in the mid-1800s with the industrial revolution, and by “1920 Camden’s population exceeded 100,000 for the first time, ranking the city fifty-eighth nationally, just behind New Bedford, Trenton, and Nashville and ahead of Lowell, Wilmington, and Fort Worth.”⁴ Camden continued to grow into a stable city community that supported a diverse mix of immigrants during the years following World War II. Like

¹ CamConnect, “An Introduction to Camden,” *Camconnect.org*, www.camconnect.org

² *Ibid.*

³ CamConnect, “Most Dangerous City Rankings: Camden Reports 2005,” *Camconnect.org*, www.camconnect.org, p. 2.

⁴ Gillette Jr., Howard, *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, p. 19.

most cities, Camden struggled with racial as well as gender lines that eventually played a part in Camden's decline. In the 1950s, the wide variety of ethnic backgrounds contributed to assorted entrepreneurial commercial corridors. While there were separate neighborhoods for the Polish, Italians, Jewish, African-Americans, and Irish Catholics, the center of each of these ethnic groups brought different traditions, food, and business to the city. Each of these ethnic groups drew strength from its particular community centers, usually in the form of a place of worship and what Howard Gillette, Professor of History at Rutgers University and author of *Camden After The Fall*, calls an "ethnic parish."⁵

Religious and Ethnic Enclaves

Within ethnic groups, there remained divisions and "although parishioners quickly formed at least ten regional organizations, the church made a point of melding the whole community by recognizing all the special feast days of Italy's different regions."⁶ These parades united the Italian neighborhood as a "public display of their solidarity to church, neighborhood, and ethnicity."⁷ Churches in general promote this type of community activity, but William Simon, Saunders Professor of Law at Stanford University, argues the Roman Catholic Church and certain Black Protestant churches impact their communities more effectively. He points out that "For decades, [the Catholic Church] has supported community organizing and development efforts in low-income areas across the countries," and "urban black Protestant churches have undertaken major housing, commercial, and

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 27.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 26.

⁷ *Ibid*.

health care projects.”⁸ These religious and cultural roots grounded the communities in Camden during the Great Depression and a Second World War. Unfortunately, this sense of community would not last.

Camden’s industrial and commercial centers survived the war, and yet the ethnic neighborhoods “remained primarily parochial and isolated from other communities. Each unit of the larger urban fabric thus held strongly unto itself, recognizing other units but keeping a distance.”⁹ This division between ethnic communities did not seem damaging at the time because it gave each group a support group particular to its interests. However, these divisions, especially those based on race, prevented the neighborhoods from uniting as the entity – Camden. The voluntary (and in some cases involuntary) separation made Camden a city of enclaves, “a voluntarily developed spatial concentration of a group for purposes of promoting the welfare of its members.”¹⁰ While an involuntary isolation, such as those seen with racial minorities such as African-Americans are considered ghettos, this initial separation was universal and based more on ethnic background than socioeconomic or racial status.

While the city government ran the city as a whole, these enclaves relied on their local “churches [which] are often the strongest nongovernmental institutions in poor neighborhoods. They are invariably involved in the production of relations of trust and cooperation.”¹¹ For ethnic minorities in particular, these churches took the place of City institutions. This lack of political agency for isolated ethnic and racial communities

⁸ Simon, William H, *The Community Economic Development Movement*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, p. 138.

⁹ Gillette, p. 29.

¹⁰ Marcuse, Peter, “The Enclave, The Citadel, and the Ghetto: What has Changed in the Post-Fordist U.S. City,” *Urban Affairs Review*, 33.2 (1997): p. 228.

¹¹ Simon, p. 138.

contributes to the development of the Community Economic Development Movement. Despite the developments in the 1970s, such as Community Action Programs and Empowerment Zones, “municipalities were often too centralized and bureaucratic” or “dominated by white political coalitions insensitive to racial minorities,” which prevented them from “deliver[ing] services effectively to poor neighborhoods.”¹² From the time of Camden’s founding through the 1960s African-Americans were considered second-class citizens, and thus did not receive equal treatment from city institutions. As a city of immigrants, African-Americans were not the only group discriminated against, and ultimately the city was comprised of ethnic neighborhoods that rarely overlapped.

The ethnic communities formed such strong ties amongst themselves that as each ethnic enclave made a decision to leave or stay in Camden, the majority of the ethnic parish followed. For instance, in 1951 the Federation (Jewish community leaders) wanted to build a new community center outside the city on a suburban site, which caused Jewish community members to be “appalled at the prospect of getting their children to Hebrew School or attending other functions far from their homes.”¹³ But the Federation could not resist the cheaper larger lot for the community center and the Jewish community soon followed the community center into suburbia during the 1950s marking “the first wave of change that dramatically altered Camden’s social landscape,” leaving only three hundred Jews in Camden by 1972.¹⁴

The Competition

¹² *Ibid*, p. 14.

¹³ Gillette, p. 46.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 47.

Moving into the second half of the twentieth century, America's economy surged and with efficient modes of production communities accumulating wealth moved into suburbia, drawn by the new commercial economic centers, in particular, malls. For Camden, "a central factor in the area's conversion from country to suburb was the opening of the Cherry Hill Mall in October 1961."¹⁵ Camden fell to the suburbanization of one of Southern New Jersey's more expensive neighborhoods, Cherry Hill. The city's commercial corridors could not keep pace with the new Cherry Hill mall, and the neat row houses and city apartments lost their charm in comparison with the new single-family homes spreading farther and farther outside the city. Cities across the nation lost their appeal to the typical American family.

The mall was so successful that the then Delaware Township changed its name, which is to this day – Cherry Hill. Cherry Hill Mall's tremendous economic success "came at Camden's expense, as businesses shut down or changed hands during the 1960s along the city's historically dominant commercial corridors."¹⁶ This economic shift drew out the middle class families not already living in suburbia. Camden never had a major upper class, and without the middle class commercial corridors, and lack of industrial work, the lower classes were left to fill the void. As the working middle class moved up and out of the city, they left behind those that could not afford to move, primarily African-Americans and Latin Americans. Both of these minorities suffered discrimination during Camden's best days and because of the class and racial lines there was not a strong enough economic base within these two groups to keep the city afloat. Cities across the nation saw their "severe problems beg[i]n to mount only later, when its physical, fiscal, and political growth was

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 48.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 49.

choked off by the suburbs, which from then on were able to capture relative prosperity for themselves.”¹⁷ This lack of economic power intensified with the disinvestment of the city as public and private investors saw the benefit of moving commercial and even industrial sectors into suburban neighborhoods. Without the middle class investors did not look to Camden as a place to set up shops, but went to Cherry Hill where they were guaranteed a customer base. Thus, Camden took a turn for the worse and riots sprang up throughout the city in the 1970s pushing the remaining middle class families out of the city, leaving behind a “neighborhood of transients.”¹⁸

Redevelopment: Part One

While most Old Camden residents moved to suburbia and never looked back, Al Pierce returned to Camden after World War II to fight for the preservation of the Camden he knew and loved. In the same year as the construction of Cherry Hill Mall, Al Pierce was elected mayor of Camden. His policies included a “comprehensive plan released in 1962 laid out the vision of a revitalized city in the heart of a growing region.”¹⁹ Pierce recognized the stiff competition with suburban areas and made efforts to create an urban version of the Cherry Hill Mall by starting over in downtown Camden. While Pierce desired redevelopment in Camden, he ignored protests from local businessmen who saw their businesses displaced by his plan. It is this lack of political representation that gives rise to the Community Economic Development Movement, because “bureaucrats have poor

¹⁷ Goldsmith, William W. “Is There a Point in the Cycle of Cities at Which Economic Development Is No Longer a Viable Strategy? Or, When Is the Neighborhood Too Far Gone?” *Dilemmas of Urban Economic Development: Issues in Theory and Practice*. Ed. Richard D. Bingham and Robert Mier. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997, p. 307.

¹⁸ Gillette, p. 55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 69.

incentives and poor information.”²⁰ Mayor Pierce pushed forward with a plan that focused only on the economic benefits for private investors, not on providing the necessary resources for the survival of the local population.

Resistance and Racial Tension

The 1960s housed the civil rights movement in cities across the nation, and white politicians ran into minority activism, which called for increased equity in city policy. Most redevelopment policies proposed during this time ignored the problems affecting minority populations. Pierce’s plans for redevelopment benefited the white population, and damned the minority population as “three thousand city buildings had been demolished in the previous six years with no low-cost housing to replace them.”²¹ By not including a comprehensive low, or even mixed, income housing plan to make up for this loss, Mayor Pierce began a trend of vacant lots that continues to plague Camden. The Mayor’s plans also included a “Hi-Speed rail line, bypassing Camden’s blighted inner-city neighborhoods, which were becoming more black and Latino.”²² The racial tensions continued as the black community developed militant groups that eventually incited “Mayor Pierce and Police Chief Harold Melleby [to file] a civil suit against the Friends of the Black People’s Unity Movement [BPUM] charging it with inciting others to violence and conducting unlawful assemblies.”²³ Eventually riots ensued during which a white police officer and innocent

²⁰ Simon, p. 42.

²¹ Gillette, p. 75.

²² Catlin, Robert A. “Camden, New Jersey: Urban Decay and the Absence of Public-Private Partnerships,” *Rebuilding Urban Neighborhoods: Achievements, Opportunities, and Limits*, Thousand Oaks, California: 1999, p. 55.

²³ Gillette, p. 81.

black female bystander were shot and killed. This incident solidified the line between the African-American activist movements and law enforcement officials.

Alternating between riots and raids, faults were committed on both sides as activists were found with drugs, and officers took advantage of their positions of power to discriminate against African-American citizens. Ultimately, the redevelopment attempts by Pierce's government failed because they did not recognize "the requirement of community participation" and instead intended "to remove the minority groups from the city through demolition of housing and ultimately to bring back the suburban white population to live in luxury housing."²⁴ Activists continued to protest against Pierce's redevelopment programs and "the Black People's Unity Movement, assailed the redevelopment plans as 'Negro removal.' In 1970, the Camden County Regional Legal Services aided the BPUM in filing suit against all urban renewal and highway construction projects."²⁵ The activists won the suit and the U.S. District Court ruled "to halt redevelopment in its tracks" until city planners produced "an official plan of action for effectively dealing with Camden's problems of urban slums and blight."²⁶ Thus, Mayor Pierce's economic redevelopment plan produced vacant lots, insufficient housing, closed businesses, and a public sentiment that no longer trusted government officials to act in the best interests of the local community. Redevelopment programs like Mayor Pierce's failed to revitalize cities nation-wide because they focused on bringing the upper class back into the city, and ignored the initial residents within the city limits.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Catlin, p. 55.

²⁶ Gillette, p. 84.

As civil unrest continued, the police force became more and more belligerent, especially when dealing with minorities. Despite calls for justice when citizens experienced police brutality, the government refused a public hearing, and defended their police force. On August 19, 1971 Mayor Mario Rodriguez's inability to communicate and negotiate with the public led to "three nights [of] fires, looting, and destruction of property [that] paralyzed the city."²⁷ The 1970s rolled by and Camden's government funneled money in from the state to try and save Camden, but without outside investment there was no jolt to the economic system to push it into any kind of growth pattern. Despite the prevalence of vacant lots in Camden during this time, no city programs focused on externalities. This is surprising considering that "the value of your house depends more on what your neighbors do with their property, how they behave, and who they are than on any decision you make."²⁸ By 1980, the suburbanites who left Camden in the sixties no longer felt an obligation to give because the redevelopment they thought they were investing in for the past ten years was nowhere to be found. This opinion predominated in suburban areas surrounding most major cities, but it is unfounded considering the failure of redevelopment programs before the 1980s had more to do with a lack of coordination than any wastefulness on the part of urban residents.

The Importance of Community Involvement

While the government recognized the need for development, it focused on appealing to a group of people no longer invested in the city. Mayor Pierce's plans for a mall and new commercial district aimed at bringing white suburbanites back into the city – "the plan

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 86.

²⁸ Simon, p. 43.

ignored the realities of economic decline, suburban white flight, and the prevailing disinvestment on the part of banks and other lending institutions.”²⁹ The inability of the government in the 1960s to effectively integrate the remaining communities, and adhere to their needs destroyed the relationship between the public and the government for the next thirty years. The politicians of the 1980s did not learn from Mayor Pierce’s mistake and continued to focus their development attention on outside investors rather than their citizens and constituents. Minority populations across the nation felt the strain of racism in politics. Despite BPUM’s success at halting Mayor Pierce’s redevelopment plan, there was no action to replace it with a more equitable plan. Those involved in the community activist quarter were sequestered from local politics, and thus decades went by with continual flawed redevelopment.

Camden’s political leaders found that no private investors wanted to invest in a city with so much civil unrest, and no local business center (Mayor Pierce’s redevelopment plan drove local businesses away and failed to bring other investments in). As Camden’s economic situation continued to decline politicians looked to the state’s coffers to pay their debt, and “embraced an offer of \$3.4 million in state funds in return for giving up valuable land on the North Camden waterfront for a new state prison.”³⁰ This was the first of many detrimental projects that took up prime real estate property on Camden’s prime waterfront and residential properties. The sewage treatment plant built in 1987 “replaced 46 local treatment plants shut down when suburban residents articulated concerns about the degraded environmental quality in their own communities.”³¹ The solid waste facility

²⁹ Catlin, p. 55.

³⁰ Gillette, p. 103.

³¹ Catlin, p. 58.

accompanied the sewage treatment plant in 1989, jeopardizing the health and overall quality of life in Camden. Camden's poor minority population suffered at the hands of "environmental racism ... that those at the bottom end of the social scale, living in the poorest and especially the darkest skinned neighborhoods and rural zones, share space with dirt and disease at the bottom end of the environment scale."³² Not only were the suburban powers unconcerned with Camden's development, they valued the lives of Camden citizens less than their own.

Camden suffers because the suburban powers view the city as "a local failure of physical and human resources"³³ rather than as a victim of inequality. The plants forced on Camden "can be construed as largely suburban-generated problems insofar as suburbanites consume more, demand more and more spread-out facilities ... Indeed, such problems are frequently viewed a products of dense urbanization, as if the green and apparently clean suburbs somehow lived on their own."³⁴ While the state's *investments* kept Camden from disintegrating, the cost did not fall on Camden's politicians but on its citizens in the form of ever declining public health and a permanent blight on the small amount of land investors *might* be interested in. During this period, the community's voices were not organized and could not be heard over Camden's political machine. The surrounding wealthy counties' residents dictated what happened to Camden. This trend continued across the United States due to the inequalities in the "distributive effects of postwar urban development."³⁵ The federal policy changed as of "January, 1973, [when] President Nixon suspended all federal housing and redevelopment assistance programs.

³² Goldsmith, p. 309.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 298.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 308.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 294.

This action virtually killed all new assisted housing projects.”³⁶ With a lack of federal support for assistance programs, Camden’s attempts at redevelopment failed, and the community lacked the organization to change the political leadership.

The Community Economic Development Movement

The Community Economic Development (CED) Movement came about in response to cities such as Camden going through failed redevelopment programs like the ones implemented by Mayor Pierce. The CED “movement has been fueled by trends toward decentralizing public administration, ... channeling the development of local markets along socially desirable paths, ... [and] by changes in the contours of urban politics, especially new strategies by neighborhood activists.”³⁷ The goals of the CED movement are three-

fold: to develop housing, work and business opportunities; to establish non-profit leadership within the community; and to ensure that community leadership are

accountable to the community’s residents.³⁸ On all three of these factors, Camden’s initial redevelopment programs failed because they focused on business investment from external private businesses and developers; ignored the non-profit leadership within the community; and agreed to development projects that put the community in harms way.

The CED movement addresses the failures of previous redevelopment programs, and works to build institutions geared towards community action apart from government and privatized institutions. By making the community an independent agent, it redistributes political and economic power more equitably.

³⁶ Catlin, p. 55.

³⁷ Simon, p. 2.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 3.

Ensuring Benefits for the Community

The CED movement produces better redevelopment plans because it remedies the coordination failures with real estate development and financial investments. Previous redevelopment plans, such as Mayor Pierce's, "come at the expense of the initial residents of the community being developed ... [and] citizen-participation goals were never realized."³⁹ The racial segregation and inequalities influenced the first attempts at redevelopment so that "municipalities were dominated by white political coalitions insensitive to racial minorities."⁴⁰ One of the CED movement's primary goals is to ensure the initial community is the beneficiary of economic development. The movement benefits the community in four primary ways: through residents, synergy with local institutions, mitigating "negative environmental externalities," and "reinforces ... a stable, independent community structure."⁴¹

CED Institutions

In addition to ensuring the community is the beneficiary of economic development, the CED movement provides guidelines for developing effective, community-friendly institutions. The two most common forms of CED Institutions are Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Community Development Corporations (CDCs). Both types must adhere to the three characteristics of CED Institutions: relational density and synergy, maintain a geographic focus, and ensure face-to-face encounters with the local

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 9, 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 69, 70, 71, 72.

community.⁴² Relational density and synergy implies internalizing community activism and ensuring community agency and strengthening political and economic relationships within the geographic focus. CDCs and CBOs are essentially “forms and structures to facilitate the kinds of collective activities [the CED movement] promotes.”⁴³

Community Based Organizations

Community Based Organizations wield six tools to help with local development. These tools include: financial assistance, technical assistance, and tax concessions, provision of public goods, procurement preference, and land-use permission.⁴⁴ CBOs have access to resources not normally available to the average community member or small business. As an intermediary institution these organizations can provide “financing [for] housing, job, and business development in low-income areas through community-based organizations. Assistance to CBOs and by CBOs to others can take the forms of grants, equity investments, loans, and loan guarantees.”⁴⁵ Financial assistance can also be in the form of certain tangible property, the most common one being land. City land redevelopment can be the gateway into combining public and private interests. Most “urban municipalities often have title to a good deal of land in low-income neighborhoods that has reverted to them because of defaulted tax payments or was acquired for public facilities that are no longer in use.”⁴⁶ CBOs help connect the municipality with private investors and community leaders to ensure they develop the land with community interest

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 41-42.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 113.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 114, 115, 116, 117, 118.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 114.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

in mind. In addition to private investment, city owned land, as well as charitable donations; prove useful for housing and public facility projects.

Community Based Organizations also provide technical assistance in the form of training to help reinforce community businesses by providing training for local entrepreneurs, job-readiness preparation, as well as various forms of community planning and organizing. Technical assistance provides the CED movement its primary tool by forging opportunities for extensive human capital development. Most resident-leaders in these communities are inexperienced and “they, as well as active rank-and-file members, should be trained in the fundamentals of an organization’s structure, procedures, and finance and in the nature of its projects.”⁴⁷ The resources covered in financial and technical assistance provided by CBOs help community leaders navigate the tax concessions granted to Empowerment Zone programs, incentivizing donations from private investors with subsidies as well as procurement preference. The final tool, land-use permission “is the most extensive power of economic regulation that local government has.”⁴⁸ With effective training and guidance CBOs can partner with local government in order to pursue the redevelopment programs most beneficial to the local residents.

Community Development Corporations

Community Based Organizations help lay the foundations for the emergence of Community Development Corporations (CDCs). CDCs are formalized institutions with a “standard legal form,” which ensures the CDC demonstrate “development [of] some geographically bounded community of disproportionately low-income people ... it must be

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 115.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 118.

charitable ... have a governing board that includes representatives of the beneficiary community; and its membership must be open to the beneficiary community.”⁴⁹ These CDCs are classified as 501(c)(3)s and maintain that status only by fulfilling the above mentioned requirements. The legal structuring of CDCs helps protect community interest by requiring direct community interaction with the governing board of these corporations. Private investors will fill the void if local community members do not take charge of what happens to their own neighborhoods. The institutions emerging from the CED movement are not perfect but they do help diminish the political and economic inequalities of lower-income urban communities. For the initial local communities to benefit from redevelopment programs, the public-private partnerships provided through the development of CDCs must take root.

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Redevelopment: Part Two

The 1990s brought on another attempt at redevelopment, but once again political machinations got in the way of the public benefit. Mayor Pierce set the tone for redevelopment programs under future administrations, resulting in the state takeover of the parking authority, the housing authority, “a 300-page audit that accused city government of mishandling its finances,” and “as of the summer of 1997, urban redevelopment in Camden was at a standstill both within and outside the Empowerment Zone.”⁵⁰ Camden’s political organization lacked leadership and the initiative necessary to bring back a city. The few redevelopment programs such as Empowerment Zones and Community Action Programs that emerged in the time after Mayor Pierce were the result of

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 119.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 61.

Federal programs in addition to initiatives from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. While the past fifty years demonstrates failed attempts at redevelopment on the part of politicians it does not mean they are not necessary for effective development. The role of government should be to balance the three branches necessary for effective redevelopment: public, private, and community participation.

Community Organizing—Camden Churches Organized for People

Camden Churches Organized for People (CCOP) is a non-profit that focuses on training local residents to be effective community organizers and leaders. While not associated with any particular faith, CCOP works with churches in pursuit of “a fundamental orientation that social change, as compared to social services, is necessary to address the causes of problems faced by individuals and families.”⁵¹ Working close within the community CCOP aims to make Camden’s communities agents of their own economic development. In order to increase the community’s intentional exercise of power it is necessary “that citizens come together collectively through formal organizations; this perspective views voluntary, non-economic organizations successful only to the degree that they develop relationships among members within a community.”⁵² On behalf of the community, the CCOP focused on demonstrating an exercise of power in Camden.

Using the resources available to them as a non-profit, as well as partnering with public and private powers within the city, CCOP proved a linkage between vacant lots and violent crime. This connection “proved remarkably effective for discussion and policy change ... [and] what developed from this process became formally known as the Camden

⁵¹ Speer, Paul, et al. “The Intentional Exercise of Power: Community Organizing in Camden, New Jersey,” *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 13.5 (2003), p. 399.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Community Housing Campaign.”⁵³ The collective political action resulted from “hundreds of one-on-one conversations held, in the collaboration conducted with the university-based research centre and in the dozens of research meetings arranged with public officials and experts.”⁵⁴ The key part in CCOPs success lies in their ability to include the community in every step of the process.

Cooper’s Ferry Development Association

In 1985, Camden saw the emergence of its first public-private partnership in the form of Cooper’s Ferry Development Association (CFDA). Cooper’s Ferry managed \$55 million to develop and revitalize Camden’s waterfront property, which it did and continues to do today. Unfortunately, the driving force behind CFDA was the same as Mayor Pierce’s from 1965. The target audience of the development projects reached beyond Camden’s borders, and despite “qualified success ... its economic impact on Camden has been slight.”⁵⁵ In this situation the political leaders got two parts of the equation right – there was public and private participation in the project, but a major piece was still missing—community input. Without a community-based direction, projects such as the Aquarium, Campbell’s Field (Minor League Baseball Stadium), and Susquehanna Bank Convention Center lose their impact. The community ends up resenting these new developments because they do not impact their lives.

While the CFDA’s initial projects did not receive the desired community acceptance, the benefits should not be overlooked. First, the Waterfront Development plan took the place of a 65-acre landfill that required extensive environmental treatments that the

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 405.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 406.

⁵⁵ Catlin, p. 58.

government would not have been able to provide. Thus, the institutional hybridization of CFDA (public and private investors) enables it to achieve much more than the government alone. Second, CFDA has taken on citywide redevelopment efforts that extend to neighborhoods such as Cramer Hill and Waterfront South. This diversification of development projects will hopefully improve the relationship with the community. Something the CFDA lacks in its projects is a face-to-face encounter with community members, but this is on the mend. A group of their interns in the summer of 2010 went door to door in Cramer Hill passing out flyers for events, and making the non-profit's presence known in the community. For so long residents of Camden lacked advocacy in redevelopment programs, that they lack trust, and no longer participate in community movements. For example, in the 2009 elections "only 20.7% of eligible voters cast a ballot, representing 23.5% of the registered voting population."⁵⁶ Part of redevelopment is not only the roles of these public-private institutions, and the government, but on the community to participate when opportunities exist. As the trend of community agency and representation in municipal governance changes, hopefully voter participation will increase and there will be more community involvement.

Camden possessed the pieces for redevelopment for almost twenty years, and yet progresses slowly. Previous projects aimed at revitalization, but "this focus on projects has produced endless conflict as proponents for various developments fight for their piece of the action, with no one, including city government, coordinating the process with a comprehensive plan to fit all the pieces together."⁵⁷ The lack of political leadership and of

⁵⁶ CamConnect, "Camden Voter Participation in 2009," *Municipal Governance*, www.camconnect.org.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 64.

an efficient and effective plan to replenish the foundation of Camden's local community has hurt Camden more than the economic shift to suburbia. Other industrial cities succeeded because they developed an economic sector or middle to upper class residential area that offsets the poorer areas. Because of Camden's size and socioeconomic homogeneity the development process requires cooperation between the government, public, private, non-profit, and community sectors.

Greater Camden Partnership

In 2001 a non-profit organization called the Greater Camden Partnership took on the role of coordinator in the process of Camden's redevelopment. The governing board of the Greater Camden Partnership (GCP) consists of representatives from almost every major anchor institution in Camden. These institutions include the colleges and universities, law enforcement, hospitals, the Salvation Army, and other non-profit leaders, just to name a few. While such a large board of directors can be daunting to an organization, it enables the GCP to serve the city as the coordinating body to connect the dots between the various project proposals throughout Camden. This role as coordinator is essential to effective redevelopment projects. Simon argues that the failure of past redevelopment efforts were the result of coordination failures. In 2010 GCP finished its first year under the leadership of its new CEO, Davie Foster. Under his leadership the GCP "focused on a single goal—revitalizing Camden by leveraging the economic development potential of the city's anchor

institutions.”⁵⁸ While the GCP does not execute the majority of the development projects in Camden, it helps pave the way to ensure the projects are completed.

Camden Special Services District

The GCP also plays an important role as a voice to the community in the development process. While certain projects focus on development projects to attract private investors, the GCP primarily pursues development projects aimed at benefiting Camden residents. The GCP started the Camden Special Services District (CSSD) in 2005, which employs Camden residents to keep the business corridors clean and safe. In addition to providing an increased sense of safety, the CSSD “are supported by voluntary contributions, fees for services, and grants from nearly thirty sources, including the major institutional anchors in the city, local government and private businesses.”⁵⁹ CSSD was so well received among businesses and community members that it was expanded in 2008 to create the Neighborhood Improvement Program. This expansion included a program for removing graffiti citywide. The CSSD now has a website where community members can upload photos of graffiti with its address and CSSD workers will track what tags belong to various gangs, and remove the graffiti within forty-eight hours. This development program demonstrates the CED goals of benefiting the community and using community members as agents for change.

Vacant Lot Stabilization Program

⁵⁸ Dave Foster quote in Paul Laskow, “Downtown & Beyond 2010,” *Annual Report on the State of Economic Development in the Camden Special Services District*, Camden: Greater Camden Partnership, 2010, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Laskow, p. 22.

The Camden Community Green-Up campaign was the brainchild of the Greater Camden Partnership. The initiative's goal was to clean and 'green' the vacant lots throughout Camden and "deliver to the city and citizens of Camden the benefits of superb vacant lot stabilization."⁶⁰ Given that 13% of the land in Camden lies vacant, this project was unable to green *every* lot, but the lots they completed made a sustainable difference in the community.⁶¹ The Green Up campaign began in September 2009 and lasted for six weeks during which "about 70 lots in the Cooper Plaza/Lanning Square neighborhoods [were] landscaped."⁶² The project's goal was not only to change the landscape of Camden's vacant lots but also to inspire community work amongst local residents. The CEO of GCP was quoted as saying, "if you create a place that looks like it is respected, people will respect it."⁶³ The Green-Up campaign was not a permanent redevelopment fix, but it did temporarily revive the surrounding area by removing some of the blighted areas in Camden.

Ray & Joan Kroc Community Center in Cramer Hill

This project represents mass cooperation amongst the major development organizations, anchor institutions, and local government. The primary partner with the Ray and Joan Kroc Foundation is the Salvation Army. This community center "is one of the most ambitious projects in the city's history," and "will be built on 24 reclaimed acres of the Harrison Avenue Landfill in the Cramer Hill neighborhood and is slated to open in

⁶⁰ Camden Community GreenUp, "A Green Initiative from Greater Camden Partnership," www.camdengreenup.org, <http://www.camdengreenup.org/#main>, p. 1.

⁶¹ CamConnect, "Vacancy in Camden," *CamConnect.org*, www.camconnect.org, p. 7.

⁶² Aleardi, Marianne, "The Superstar Rocks Camden: Jon Bon Jovi," *SJ Magazine*, 9.10 (2009), p. 5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

December 2011.”⁶⁴ This center represents the epitome of a CED project because it is all about providing resources for local residents. The only drawback is its location – Cramer Hill is in the northern tip of Camden City and thus neighborhoods such as Waterfront South, Morgan Village, and Fairview will not have the same access to Salvation Army resources. However, this should not detract from the impact this community center can make. It is designed to have a small grocery store, basketball courts, a place of worship, job training programs, youth programs, and baby-sitting and daycare services. Not only did Camden beat out cities across the nation, it is “one of only eight centers in the Northeast region ... [and] is made possible by a \$54 million grant from the estate of Mrs. Joan Kroc.”⁶⁵ Acquiring the additional \$34 million in funds has been a joint effort between the NJ Department of Environmental Protection, the Camden Redevelopment Agency, the Camden Economic Recovery Board, and the local Camden Salvation Army. While this project is not technically one of GCP’s projects, many of the participants sit on GCP’s board of directors, and thus GCP resources are used to help promote and support the Community Centers’ efforts.

The Urban Land Institute – Technical Assistance Program

The Urban Land Institute is an international non-profit organization whose mission is “to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities.”⁶⁶ One of ULI’s tools is their Technical Assistance Panels (TAP) that provides advisory assistance to cities who apply and qualify for ULI assistance. Typically

⁶⁴ Laskow, p. 17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Urban Land Institute Foundation, “ULI Mission & Principles,” *Urban Land Institute*, 12 April 2011, Accessed: Web, 12 April 2011, <<http://www.uli.org/LearnAboutULI/WhatWeDo/MissionandPrinciples.aspx>>.

only 2-3 of these panels convenes each year and Camden's plan for the development of a University District was selected. This means that a team of experts and seasoned professionals in the field of developing University Districts in environments like Camden's will provide "project analysis sessions, fellows advisory panels, on-site analysis sessions, five-day panels, technical assistance programs, advisory workshops, and special services."⁶⁷ This TAP is a great tool for putting together a comprehensive redevelopment plan for a University commercial corridor, but does it meet the requirements of the CED movement? While a University District is definitely necessary considering the number of Universities located in Camden, how many permanent residents will this commercial corridor impact? Given that half of the adult population does not graduate high school, it is unlikely many Camden residents will be attending these Universities, but that does not mean the development will not positively impact the lives of Camden residents.

It all depends on the direction this redevelopment initiative takes. If this commercial corridor recruits small businesses from within Camden, and encourages vendors and other opportunities for local business owners to either expand their restaurants to this area or start anew, it could be a great opportunity for Camden residents. On the other hand, if the development project focuses on bringing a mall to Camden with brand name labels it could be detrimental to Camden residents because it would make it nearly impossible for mom-and-pop shops to compete with brand name commercial corridors. Most University Districts do have a more local focus, and the ULI's goals is to

⁶⁷ Urban Land Institute Foundation, "Technical Assistance Panels," *Urban Land Institute*, 12 April 2011, Web, Accessed: 12 April 2011, <<http://www.uli.org/CommunityBuilding/AdvisoryService/TechnicalAssistancePanels.aspx>>.

create sustainable communities, lead one to believe this development will be more beneficial to Camden residents, as well as local University students.

Grocery Store & Haddon Avenue Transit Village

There is currently no grocery store within Camden's city limits, which contributes greatly to the diabetes crisis within the city. Families who cannot drive to Wal-Mart (cheapest and closest shopping center) in Cherry Hill are restricted to shopping at corner stores and bodegas, which are overpriced and lack products with nutritional value. In partnership with "Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center, the Delaware River Port Authority and Grapevine Development, GCP is working to develop a 15-acre mixed-use transit village on a former industrial strip situated between the Lourdes camps and the Ferry Avenue PATCO station."⁶⁸ The location of this transit village and grocery store will service primarily the Downtown and Central Business District area. It will also provide the "first new grocery store in more than a generation and will also include 400 units of market rate housing, a new parking garage and both office and retail space."⁶⁹

Not to detract from the benefit of a transit village and new grocery store, but the location of this development project services only a small proportion of Camden residents, and is geared toward bringing outside investment into the city. Camden's transportation hub in the Downtown area services over 13 million riders in a given year, the majority of which ride straight through Camden into Philadelphia or Southern New Jersey. Based on the contents and location of this transit village its primary purpose is to coax those 13

⁶⁸ Greater Camden Partnership, "The Changing Face of Camden," *Greater Camden Partnership*, Web, Accessed: 12 April 2011,

<<http://www.greatercamden.org/projects#urban>>.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

million passengers into Camden's downtown to boost economic growth. While this is great for Camden's business district, it does not serve residents in neighborhoods South and East of Downtown. If those living in the more residential areas are not included in major redevelopment projects, and if they do not benefit from serious economic investment soon, the redevelopment movement in Camden likely fail due to a lack of support and resistance from those excluded from benefits.

Cooper Medical School of Rowan University

The construction of the new Cooper Medical School of Rowan University will make a great impact in the development of Camden. It may not meet the requirements of the CED movement, but it demonstrates exorbitant faith and investment from major anchor institutions (Cooper University Hospital and Rowan University). Scheduled to open in fall 2012 this development project should benefit the community by increasing medical facilities and medical personnel in the area. Students and Faculty will be encouraged to live in the City, and the Haddon Avenue Transit Station, as well as other luxury housing development projects will appeal to these new Camden residents. Despite the obvious benefits of building a new Medical School, this project does not meet the requirements of the CED movement because it does not serve the initial Camden community. It also focuses development in the most successful areas in Camden rather than some of the more blighted areas.

Conclusions

The redevelopment programs and corporations discussed here represent only a snap shot of the institutions emerging in Camden, NJ. Despite the number of programs and

non-profits located in Camden, the level of community resident participation must be higher. For example, the CSSD program sponsored by the GCP benefits business corridors but does not provide services to neighborhoods. The Cooper's Ferry Development Association pursues a more privatized redevelopment process, and as of March 14, 2011, it merged with the Greater Camden Partnership into one entity. Over the past decade the two organizations partnered on multiple development projects, but most of these projects have focused on bringing outside investment into the city rather than addressing the problems of current residents. While the merger between CFDA and GCP should enable more streamlined development, it leads community members to speculate on who will benefit more from this partnership, private investors or the initial residents of Camden?

In addition to the projects discussed earlier, the fused CFDA and GCP are also sponsoring a Campbell's Soup international headquarters expansion, a new dorm for Rutgers University, and a Market Street façade renovation and commercial revitalization project. These projects will certainly change the face of Camden, but only the Kroc Community Center and the grocery store provide a direct service to the local community. While these other development projects are certainly beneficial to the city's reputation, it is important to remember that the ultimate goal should be to elevate the standing of current residents in order to truly be part of the Community Economic Development movement. The Camden Green-Up and the CSSD program, which received universal community support, cost a fraction of these other redevelopment programs. For each dollar spent on projects such as the Medical School, University commercial corridors, and Waterfront Development, some portion should go to continuing vacant lot stabilization programs.

The Camden of the 1950s was segregated into neighborhoods based on race, ethnicity and socio-economic standing, and it has not changed. There are multiple localized community non-profits doing amazing things in their respective neighborhoods, and yet they are unaware of counterparts on the other side of the city. Culinary training programs in North Camden and Parkside should be included in the University development program, because a partnership from graduates of each of these programs could open a bakery or café. In each of these neighborhoods programs are in place to provide financial support, job training, and soft skills development. With proper coordination an over-arching Camden community could finally emerge. The isolation of neighborhoods contributes not only to the difficulty of economic development but to the racial tension and violence that plagues Camden's streets. If the GCP and CFDA focus only on developing the business districts, this coordination effort falls on community leaders to reach out to one another and cross racial and ethnic lines to keep up with the development of the Downtown commercial corridors.

The past ten years have been instrumental in Camden's progression, and the next ten are vital to the success of Camden's redevelopment efforts. One of the major improvements Camden must make is the level of local resident involvement in developing community agency opportunities. This includes going to the polls, attending city council meetings, and pressuring non-profits such as the new CFDA/GCP to include local residents on their Executive Board. Community agents must hold non-profits and CDCs accountable for the distribution of their redevelopment projects' benefits. It is also the duty of CDCs to work toward furthering coordination efforts within the community. The community accepted the GCP more readily than CFDA because there were more face-to-face encounters with

members of GCP. The jury is still out on whether the merger between these two organizations will benefit the Community Economic Development Movement in Camden, but given the financial instability of the GCP it was a necessary business move. Either way, both organizations must know that if this merger pulls development projects further into the Central Business District, without providing comparable development projects in other high-need neighborhoods, it will lessen the chance of Camden's successful redevelopment.

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