

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAYOR-ELECT DANA REDD**

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**Mission:** To produce a 15 - 20 page document describing the challenges and opportunities facing the City in attracting and retaining business and making financially feasible recommendations that can be initiated by Mayor Redd in the following time frames: first 100 days, first nine months, and first two years.

**Overall Findings:** Camden City is at the threshold of economic prosperity and has the potential to be an urban economic center for the State of New Jersey. The city has assets that are very unique for a city of its size: a developed waterfront, major universities, hospitals, transportation infrastructure, and a federal courthouse, among others.

The city has experienced recent growth in its economic development; however the development has been fragmented, lacked structure and was not driven by any comprehensive economic development strategy.

New leadership offers hope and a unique opportunity to change the culture of City government and the way City government conducts business.

Our Committee knows that Mayor Redd will provide this leadership, and has the strength, desire and vision to put Camden on track to be an economically viable city once again.

We believe that the Mayor should articulate to those outside of and within City government that she is committed to economic development and jobs creation in the city; and in fact, is ultimately the individual responsible for ensuring that economic development and jobs creation occur in the City.

The first thing that needs to change is City government’s attitude from “we can’t do it” to “how can we get it done!” A new attitude of responsiveness, accountability and desire to help businesses thrive in the City needs to filter down from the Mayor’s office to every staff person in the City.

**Findings:** Economic development efforts in Camden City are fragmented, in need of structure and accountabilities to improve responsiveness to the business community in Camden City, as well as those businesses interested in locating in the City.

Currently the city's capacity to successfully and consistently recruit and retain businesses is slim to none. Add to this dynamic the overall lack of business friendly processes or resources and the city has a clear challenge facing it. The current state of the city's business development processes is the "City Hall Merry-Go-Round". Efforts along this continuum are fragmented, lack connectivity and are not organized into a structured process with predictable outcomes. There is no one entity, department or individual ultimately responsible to assist businesses entering or existing in the city. Thus there is no accountability structure in place to ensure outcomes tied to a comprehensive economic development strategy.

Four units of government are involved in the business development process; the Camden Redevelopment Agency (CRA); the Department of Planning and Development, the Department Code Enforcement and the Urban Enterprise Zone Program. Each unit has unique responsibilities as they relate to assisting businesses; CRA - land assembly and disposition; Department of Planning and Development - regulatory enforcement of land use ordinances; Department of Code Enforcements - construction inspections and licensing; the Urban Enterprise Zone Program - recruitment of businesses into the program and assisting member businesses in applying for and receiving grants. No one entity is responsible for the process from start to finish. Conspicuously absent from these units is the Mayor's Office. It does not appear that there is any one staff person identified to move business projects along with the authority of the Mayor behind them.

It is imperative for prospective investors and business owners to have a single point of contact to engage the city in pursuing an investment. Be it the identification and lease of a retail store, assistance through the inspection process or the identification of a parcel of land ready for development, there must be an individual or team fully dedicated to "Quarterbacking" the project through to completion.

Consideration should be given to utilizing the resources of the Urban Enterprise Zone program as the basis to build this department. Research of similar models around the State of New Jersey should be conducted to ensure that best practices in this area are identified. Cities like Jersey City, Vineland, Perth Amboy and Red Bank have utilized the UEZ as the basis for the Business Growth and Development efforts.

While individuals within the government are doing what they can to promote business development in the city, there are blurred lines of responsibilities and functions, and a lack of communication between various entities that play a role in economic development which results in lost opportunities for the City.

## **Recommendations:**

### **First 100 days:**

1. Appoint a "Business Ombudsman." The Mayor should designate a number two person with a team of people who are responsible for ensuring that the city is responsive to businesses, both existing and prospective. The Ombudsman should have the "power" of the Mayor behind him/her in dealing with other staff members in City Hall. The Ombudsman would

also serve as the single point of contact for the existing business community and have the authority to direct rapid response efforts.

2. Create the Mayor's Economic Development Team, comprised of Department Heads who have any permitting or other function relative to serving business. The Team will be staffed by the Business Ombudsman, and will meet on a monthly basis to discuss the status of projects and initiatives that serve business, prioritize those projects, and move them through the pipeline to completion in a timely manner.
3. Create the Mayor's Business Advisory Council. The Council will be comprised of business leaders in the City and region, and include representatives from all sizes of business, including small business. The Mayor can utilize the Council to obtain advice, gather information and obtain feedback on the City's economic development efforts. The Council could be utilized to leverage existing resources, including members of the business community and non-profit organizations, to further economic development efforts in the City. These entities have the desire, resources and expertise to assist the Mayor and her team. Further, the private sector can share best business practices that can be adopted by the City in those functions that are analogous to the business community (IT, fleet management, property management, human resources, etc.). For example, Campbell Soup Company's recent efforts to increase quality and productivity through an actively engaged workforce have been a tremendous success and are willing to share with the City the system it utilizes to accomplish this.

### **Two Year Plan:**

1. Create a Department of Business Growth & Development. The committee recommends that the Mayor allocate or realign resources within city government to create the Department of Business Growth and Development. This department shall have a direct report director to the Mayor and be resources with a team of three to four staff.

The primary functions of this department are:

- 1) Serve the function of primary coordinator or "quarterback" of city services and functions required for successful placement of prospective businesses.
- 2) Serve as the city's primary recruiter for prospective businesses in alignment with the city's economic development strategy. Capacity in this area should include recruitment in other states and countries.
- 3) Provide process oriented assistance to prospective investors and business owners interested in making an investment or locating in the City of Camden.
- 4) Serve as primary business community liaison with other entities related to the business development process.

This department will have as its primary outcomes:

- 1) Ensuring the successful recruitment of industries and business categories as outlined in the city's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.
- 2) Increasing the number of businesses in the City of Camden with keen focus on job creation.

- 3) Developing a business friendly process for businesses to engage the city.
  - 4) Ensuring that lead times on inspections and applications are minimized.
2. Develop a comprehensive marketing and public relations campaign to attract new businesses and enhance the city's image in the market place. This effort should not be undertaken until the Department of Business Growth & Development is fully operational.
  - 3.

**Finding:** The City lacks a cohesive, comprehensive Strategic Economic Development Master Plan to guide decision making. To ensure that the City develops a sustainable economy that will support the delivery of its municipal obligations, Mayor Redd should oversee the creation and execution of an economic development action plan. The plan should be a dynamic document that includes an overview of the current economy, and will set forth policy direction and strategies for business attraction and retention, job growth, land use, and other initiatives that will ensure that measurable and lasting change happens in the city's economy.

Such a plan would be available to businesses interested in expanding or locating in the City. It would provide direction to city government and prospective investors and businesses on the City's vision on economic development, both currently and in the future. The Plan would ensure that such development occurs in the appropriate areas conducive to business. It would also identify opportunities for future development desired by the City and to be a tool to help the Administration pursue development opportunities, including channeling investment and resource allocation.

One obstacle to development is the availability of a comprehensive list of available properties in the City, who controls the property, and whether it is suited for development.

### **Recommendations:**

**First 100 days:** Undertake development of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The creation of a CEDS is important for the city for numerous reasons, including that federal regulations require the preparation and periodic updating of a CEDS in order to retain designation as a redevelopment or Title II (Grants for Public Works and Economic Development) area eligible to receive EDA funds. Additionally, the creation of a CEDS will ensure that all development projects are tied to the same plan and can be prioritized for support by the city's administration.

During the subcommittee's fact finding and interviewing period, the subcommittee was informed by the Director of the Camden Redevelopment Agency (CRA) that the CRA has taken the lead and has already set the wheels in motion for the creation of a CEDS. To date, the CRA has submitted a proposal to the Delaware Valley Regional Plan Commission for funding to embark on the initial stages for the creation of a CEDS for Camden City. However, it is the recommendation of the subcommittee that the Mayor or her designee take the lead role in the creation of the CEDS, which will ensure that it is strategically aligned with her overall vision and strategy for the city.

## 9 Month Plan:

1. Continue efforts to develop a Property Asset Management System. Such a system would provide an inventory of all available land and properties, including those that are abandoned (residential or mixed use commercial), owned by the City, controlled by the CRA or the Tax Lien Financing Corporation. Assign one full time staff person to complete the list within the 9 month time frame, and to make it available on line.

## Two Year Plan:

1. Develop a City of Camden Properties Disposal Strategy. This strategy should be derived from a full analysis of the property inventory, including a review of policy as it relates to the disposal of city-held, TLFC and CRA real estate. This strategy should be reconciled against existing and future redevelopment plans to ensure the proper disposal of properties with appropriate uses. Assign a staff member whose responsibility is to work with non-profits and developers to improve and sell these properties.

**Finding:** Workforce Development is an integral ingredient to a successful economic development effort. Combined with a comprehensive economic development strategy, focused workforce development efforts could be the difference between successful job creation efforts targeted to residents or a failure that misses the mark.

There are many organizations in the City of Camden that work with various populations towards the end of workforce development: the Camden County WIB, County College, VOA of Delaware Valley, trade schools, specially funded initiatives, faith-based efforts, charter schools, the School District, etc. Each has its unique target population and who are motivated to achieve their own outcomes.

With little connectivity, a career development path or employment intervention for the average resident is elusive. With so many entry points to the system, organizations tend to try to expand their services beyond their core expertise or suffer from “mission creep” to accommodate as many clients as possible. This results in inefficient allocation of resources and less than effective programming. Aligning the various service providers or “connecting the dots” from the most basic of support services to successful and long term employment is critical to creating this career path. Below is an example of this alignment:

- Life Skills Training
- Remedial Education Training
- Vocational Skills Training – Culinary Arts, Computer Training, Automotive, Medical Technicians
- Job Readiness Training
- Job Sustaining Training and after care
- Advance Life Skills Training

Each step along this path is designed to be along a continuum of upward mobility resulting in an individual’s ability to provide for themselves and their families.

“Skills” training towards current and future jobs is another critical function of a successful workforce development strategy. Again, accompanied with a comprehensive economic development strategy, this function will be integral to the positioning of current residents to be the recipients of current jobs in the city and future jobs that are attracted. A well prepared workforce can be the difference between attracting a new company and losing it to another city.

Workforce Development in the context of a city in the midst of revitalization is critical. The new administration must have a system that complements its economic development strategy while positioning residents for future opportunity.

Workforce Development is a critical cog in the economic development machinery of a city. With limited resources the new administration must be judicious when allocating resources. Creative sourcing of requisite talent and resources should be undertaken by leveraging existing organizational expertise in the non-profit community and the creation of collaborative efforts. This should not be a substitute for, but rather should augment a strong city commitment to this effort. Consideration should be made to allocating city resources to spearhead or to “quarterbacking” the effort, via reassignment of staff or the assignment of additional responsibilities to an appropriate department.

With this in mind it is this committee’s recommendation that the Mayor undertake the following initiatives over the next 100 days to 2 years. These recommendations are structured to be the building blocks/action items to the overall recommendation of a Workforce Development Alignment Strategy as described in the 2 year recommendation.

## **Recommendations:**

**Two years:** Create a **Workforce Development Alignment Strategy** and allocate or realign existing resources within City government to implement the Strategy.

The strategy will have as its primary outcomes:

- 1) The alignment and development of connectivity of services providers in the Workforce development arena; and
- 2) The alignment of skills training programs to current job pools and future pools resulting from the implementation of a comprehensive economic development strategy.

### **100 Days**

- Identify and/or realign a city staff member to serve as **Workforce Development Czar or “Quarterback”** for the City of Camden.
- Compile a listing of current Workforce Development programs and providers
- Establish communications mechanisms for city residents to gain information about programs and how to access them (e.g., website content, hotline, Channel 19).

### **9 Months**

- Complete a comprehensive analysis of the Workforce development system in the City of Camden. Potential resources for this analysis are interns from city institutions of higher learning.
- Establish a Workforce Development Collaborative in conjunction with a similar apparatus called for in the Human Capital Plans approved for Cooper Lanning and Cramer Hill Neighborhoods. This collaborative will be constituted of premier agencies to maximize the impact of the system.
- Identify future and current employment opportunities as they relate to the city’s economic development strategy so that training addresses current and future jobs.
- Develop a Workforce Mentorship Initiative that matches premier agencies with up and coming agencies to assist them in the successful development and implementation of programs with services identified as needed to implement economic development plans.

**Finding:** Inadequate resources and antiquated record keeping techniques result in long delays, duplicated efforts by permit applicants, increased costs of projects, and lost opportunities. Federal and other grant money is available to assist the City in acquiring technology, job training, etc.

**Recommendations:** The City must invest in technology, staff training, and human resource allocation to in order to improve efficiency and to direct City services where they are needed most to meet the needs of residents and businesses alike.

**9 months:**

1. Undertake a review of the “Contact Camden” system to improve efficiency and responsiveness.
2. Identify existing “off the shelf” database program that will serve as the central repository of information on all properties in the City, including block and lot numbers, allowable usage, status of permits, etc. This database should be housed on a shared drive that can be accessed by staff in City Hall and updated regularly.
3. Undertake a review of all City Departments to identify where staff is needed in order to get the biggest return on services to businesses; e.g., inspectors.
4. Undertake a review of the City’s fleet of automobiles that are needed to deliver City services.
5. Dedicate staff whose sole purpose is to identify available grant money, assist in the completion of grant applications, submitting grants and tracking grant money. Priority must be given to acquiring Federal Economic Stimulus money, which is available for a finite period of time. Administration should provide direction on priorities for grant money; e.g., technology acquisition, customer service training for all City Hall employees, etc.