

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Governor Florio  
Distribution

FROM: Sally M. Donnelly  
Governor's Briefing Office

RE: Brief for Wednesday, July 14, 1993

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I. **CAMDEN INITIATIVE ANNOUNCEMENT**  
**CAMDEN....10:45 - 11:15 AM**

Industrial Park  
17th Street and Admiral Wilson Blvd. (Route 30 westbound)  
609-757-7000 (City Hall)

Contact: Bobby Rand, 757-2808 or 472-4391 (car phone)  
Advance: Hal Spence

**NOTE** - The ceremony will be held outside under a tent. Existing and closed factories will serve as the backdrop for the program. A banner will be located above the podium and it will read "State of New Jersey, County of Camden, City of Camden, and the Citizens' Task Force welcome you to the CAMDEN INITIATIVE...government, community and business working together."

**PROGRAM IS AS FOLLOWS:** The guests will arrive between 10:30 and 10:45 am. The program is scheduled to begin at 10:45 am. You and the program participants will stand in the front of the tent, adjacent to the podium. Christiana Foglio, Executive Director, NJ Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, will open with welcoming remarks and recognize the dignitaries.

She will introduce Mayor Aaron Thompson of Camden to speak. **Once he is finished, Ms. Foglio will introduce you to speak. You will deliver your remarks from a podium. Once you are finished, you will introduce Secretary Henry Cisneros of Housing and Urban Development to speak.** At this point, it looks as though we have a commitment from Secretary Cisneros.

Ms. Foglio will return to the podium to introduce Freeholder Jeffrey Nash of Camden County to make remarks, followed by remarks from Rev. John Parker, Chairperson of the Citizens' Initiative Task Force and Pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Camden. During his comments, Rev. Parker will read a letter from Congressman Rob Andrews who is unable to attend. Once he is finished, Ms. Foglio will deliver closing comments.

**FYI** - You will have prepared remarks.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION:** You will participate in the announcement of the Camden Initiative, a comprehensive development strategy to revitalize the City of Camden. Formulated through a collaborative effort among community leaders and public officials at the city, county and state levels, the Initiative represents an integrated, multi-faceted investment strategy for the entire city.

Complementing and expanding upon the impressive waterfront revitalization efforts already underway, the Initiative will encompass integrated action plans in the following areas:

- \*\* Public Safety (you announced this component last week)
- \*\* Industrial Development
- \*\* Neighborhood Small Business Development
- \*\* Housing Partnerships
- \*\* Health Care
- \*\* Education

PLEASE FIND ATTACHED BACKGROUND INFORMATION.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Approximately 100 - 150 people are expected to attend including Senator Rand and Assemblyman Roberts.

Refreshments will be provided for the attendees.

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Information as to the remainder of Wednesday's events will be forthcoming on Tuesday.

## **THE CAMDEN INITIATIVE**

The Camden Initiative is a comprehensive development strategy to revitalize the City of Camden. Formulated through a collaborative effort among community leaders and public officials at the city, county and State levels, the Initiative represents an integrated, multi-faceted investment strategy for the entire city, one which recognizes that a community is a totality of interdependent interests and needs. Jobs, education, housing, health, and personal safety issues are intimately related and must be addressed through comprehensive planning and coordinated action. And it is both the duty and challenge of state government to assist local community leaders in establishing a coherent, disciplined and secure foundation upon which public entities, non-profit organizations and private sector interests can place their building blocks of attention, hope and investment. This foundation will also place Camden in a favorable position to take rapid advantage of any new Federal initiatives for urban economic and social programs.

Complementing and expanding upon the impressive waterfront revitalization efforts already underway, the Initiative will encompass integrated action plans in the following areas:

- Industrial Park Development for Job Creation
- Housing Partnerships
- Neighborhood Small Business Development
- Health Care
- Education
- Public Safety

The Camden Initiative offers the first large-scale application of the guidelines for urban revitalization and economic development expressed in the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. Adopted last year after an intensive seven-year cooperative planning effort among local governments and the State Planning Commission, the State Plan offers a compelling vision and a comprehensive vehicle for a revitalized New Jersey that is both economically strong and environmentally sound. The Plan offers a multitude of strategies by which governments at all levels can promote and utilize economic growth to ensure an improved quality of life for all citizens.

The Plan's organizing principal is to concentrate public investment -- and hence foster private economic expansion -- in existing or new "communities of place". These communities can range from small villages to our largest urban centers. This strategy promises economic efficiency in the use of public funds, a reduction in sprawl, the protection of natural resources and open land, and the promotion of employment opportunities, affordable housing, mass transportation, and vibrant cultural and social community life.

### **Industrial Park Development for Job Creation**

Although the nature of industrial processes has changed dramatically since Camden's days as a major manufacturing center, nonetheless, the city remains strategically poised to reassert itself as a focal point for the light industrial, assembly and warehousing operations that typify our modern economy. Camden offers excellent access to a highly-developed transportation network, including an interstate highway system, a port, rail facilities and the Philadelphia airport; it has a good supply of labor; and it provides a favorable tax climate -- Urban Enterprise Zone benefits, the Fox-Lance property tax abatement program, and the absence of a wage tax.

Camden's competitiveness in attracting new industrial employers can be greatly enhanced through the assembly and development of industrial park sites that are cleared, cleaned, well-planned, secure and outfitted with basic infrastructure elements such as streets, sewers and water mains. Due to the magnitude of the financing necessary to undertake such a project, it best lends itself to a public-private partnership, in which a public entity underwrites the development costs and recovers its investment through the sale or lease of the park's sites or facilities.

The Camden Initiative envisions a phased development of up to three industrial parks sponsored by governmental or quasi-governmental agencies. Potential locations include an 80-acre site at Admiral Wilson Boulevard and Federal Street (Gateway), 65 acres at Atlantic Avenue near I-676 (South Camden Industrial Park), and 60 acres at the intersection of River Road and State Street (Pavonia). Financing will be provided by the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, the Camden County Improvement Authority and the New Jersey Urban Development Corporation. Additional funding will be requested from the Delaware River Port Authority. The CCLA is the lead entity for the development of the Gateway Industrial Park. The development of the South Camden Industrial Park will be implemented by the CCLA; funding will be requested from the DRPA.

The industrial park development strategy will be complemented by an aggressive marketing campaign to attract job-intensive businesses. A third component of this undertaking will be the establishment of a formal process for the recruitment and training of city residents for employment in the industrial parks, such as the integration of the County Private Industrial Council and the County's Reach/JPTA program.

### **Housing Partnerships**

The housing environment in Camden today is bleak. Nearly half of the city's private housing stock has disappeared over the last 40 years, and fire and abandonments continue to take their toll. Four-thousand properties now stand vacant or abandoned.

Safe, decent and affordable housing is a fundamental human need and the fulcrum for the restoration of neighborhoods, the stabilization of the city's declining population and the essential growth in property tax ratables. Camden is fortunate in having many existing nonprofit organizations. The Camden Initiative seeks to build on the work of these grassroots organizations by implementing a comprehensive housing strategy that will leverage available resources and coordinate investment objectives.

One milestone has already been achieved -- \$20 million has been made available for housing through the efforts of the AFL-CIO, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the New Jersey Housing & Mortgage Finance Agency.

The Camden Initiative will build on these efforts through the following elements:

1. **Creation of a nonprofit housing intermediary.** The Camden Redevelopment Agency has contracted for the creation of a non-profit intermediary to be known as the Camden Housing Partnership. The Partnership will work to eliminate obstacles to the development of efficient and cost-effective housing production, coordinate demonstration housing programs, offer technical assistance for government and nonprofit housing organizations. An important goal of the partnership is attraction of new resources for housing development, especially private sector financing.

2. **Model partnership redevelopment project.** Through a variety of agencies, including the new Housing Partnership, nonprofit organizations, the Camden Redevelopment Agency, the Camden County Improvement Authority, and grants from state and federal sources, this partnership will forge a coordinated effort to redevelop a 40-square block residential area extending south from the business district between Broadway and the Coopers Ferry waterfront. The initial phases will encompass construction of 200 to 300 units of market-rate housing for sale to home buyers. Construction of 45 townhomes under the auspices of the Camden Redevelopment Authority is expected to begin this fall, with funding through an existing UDAG grant and private sector sources. Construction of an additional 36 townhomes by the Camden County Improvement Authority also is expected to begin in the fall, with financing provided through DCA, HMFA, a federal Nehemiah grant and federal HOME program

funds. The HMFA will work with the city's various institutions to identify housing needs and opportunities.

3. Funding by the State Department of Community Affairs. Since 1985, DCA's Balanced Housing Program has expended nearly \$13 million in Camden, resulting in the production of 570 new or rehabilitated units. DCA will remain an important source of funding to the city's non-profit community. In June, DCA awarded \$212,000 for administrative costs for six nonprofit housing advocacy and development organizations. It has also committed \$967,000 to three nonprofit agencies for the construction of 25 units for low and moderate income families.

Working independently of state assistance, the city's nonprofit community recently won commitments for \$5.2 million from a consortium of banks that includes Chemical Bank of New Jersey, First Fidelity Urban Investment Corporation, Meridian, PNC Bank, and United Jersey Bank South. The banks have agreed to make the money available through the Delaware Valley Community Reinvestment Fund.

4. Creation of a pool for accessing low-income tax credits. The state-administered low-income tax credit program has not been used extensively in Camden because many projects have been too small to use the program effectively. HMFA will assist in this situation by prioritizing the use of credits so that Camden and other urban areas are well served. HMFA will also seek to establish a tax credit equity fund, which will pool the resources of investors interested in Camden and provide a ready source of investment dollars to be used in conjunction with nonprofit-sponsored housing.

5. Redevelopment of Royal Court. In recent weeks, through organized effort from the housing authority and the state, administrative obstacles that were delaying the project have been resolved. DCA and HMFA will work with the city housing authority, the nonprofits and HUD to complete the rehabilitation of 90 units at Royal Court.

6. Transitional housing. HMFA and UMDNJ Community Mental Health are developing a transitional housing and support services model for the mental health community, consisting of up to 30 beds in scattered site housing units. The facilities will be operated by existing community mental health organizations.

### **Neighborhood Small Business Development**

The heart of many viable urban neighborhoods are the small businesses that provide convenient goods and services and community cohesiveness for local residents. If neighborhood businesses cannot survive, then community vibrancy suffers, local purchasing power shifts to suburban retailers and jobs and ratables are lost.

A major step in neighborhood revitalization is currently underway -- the development of the Gateway North Community Retail Center on Linden Street. This 52,000 square foot shopping center, anchored by a supermarket and pharmacy, will be privately financed, constructed and operated. Its development has been facilitated through the efforts of the Camden Redevelopment Agency, together with land acquisition by the DRPA, and feasibility studies and land development support from the Urban Development Corporation.

To encourage small business investment and recapture local neighborhood identities, the Initiative will target six commercial areas for small business loans and special public service projects such as increased law enforcement resources, additional maintenance and beautification of public areas, and streetscape improvements. The targeted areas are:

Downtown/Broadway  
Federal Street/Westfield Avenue  
Haddon Avenue  
Mt. Ephraim Avenue  
Waterfront  
Yorkship Square.

The commercial sector improvement projects will be supported principally through the city's existing Urban Enterprise Zone program, under which moneys derived from the reduced 3-cents sales tax are specifically dedicated for public improvements. The UEZ fund will be utilized for projects in the outlying neighborhood areas of Federal Street/Westfield Avenue, Haddon Avenue, Mt. Ephraim Avenue and Yorkship Square. The Waterfront and Downtown/Broadway areas will be supported through their own Special Improvement District revenues.

The final component of the Initiative's neighborhood commercial revitalization strategy will be the capitalization of the Camden Business Assistance Corporation, which has proven to be an effective agency for the provision of low-interest loans to small businesses. The CBAC will receive \$2 million over the next two years from county and state sources. This will substantially increase the corporation's loan pool for working capital and real estate loans for small businesses.

## **Health Care**

The City of Camden lacks an effective delivery system for the basic health care needs of its vulnerable and at-risk populations, especially children and the elderly. The health indicators for Camden are unsettling. Many of Camden's children have not received standard immunizations. The infant mortality rate is among the nation's highest. AIDS, venereal disease, substance abuse and tuberculosis are serious problems. Further, Camden's high rates of unemployment, public assistance enrollment, illiteracy, teenage pregnancy, and school dropout create significant health care challenges.

Under the guidance of a city-wide coalition of residents, community agencies, government officials and health care providers, the Camden Initiative will seek to build a health care system that is comprehensive, accessible and affordable for all Camden residents. This effort will build on the recent public-private partnership between Camden County and the CAMcare Health Corporation for primary and preventive health care delivery. In December 1992, the Camden County Board of Freeholders awarded a three-year contract to CAMcare to provide services at three sites, thereby greatly expanding the scope and accessibility of health services to the Camden community. When fully implemented, services will include family medicine, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, dental care, and nutritional and social service counseling. CAMcare anticipates 20,000 patient visits during 1993 and 30,000 in 1994.

The Initiative will also address the urgent need for an integrated immunization program that will combine convenient walk-in service with outreach, assessment and referral efforts. This program will seek to overcome economic, educational and social barriers to immunizations and to track medical histories to ensure that all children receive their full complement of immunizations.

A long-term health care infrastructure project is currently being planned by Our Lady of the Lourdes Medical Center, The Coriell Institute for Medical Research, the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Cooper Hospital/University Medical Center, and the Camden Board of Education. These entities envision the development of a "Medical Mile" of facilities for health care services, health professions education and biomedical research along Haddon Avenue.

## **Education**

One of the more striking demographic characteristics of Camden is that it is a city of children. Almost half of its 87,000 residents are under the age of 21. Camden's youth offer enormous untapped human potential, but are at the same time the most vulnerable victims of the devastating consequences of the city's economic and social ills. In such a dysfunctional environment, new and enlightened models for the delivery of educational services must be developed. Schools must expand their focus from the traditional three Rs to encompass effective programs to deal with the complex and interrelated social issues that affect the daily lives of school children and detract from their ability to learn, to strive, and to hope.

The Camden City School District has recently developed a long-range facilities plan that calls for the construction of additional classroom space and the conversion of some existing facilities for specialized uses such as bilingual classes, adult education, expectant mothers' programs and preschool for the handicapped.

A major vehicle for the delivery of comprehensive educational resources will be a partnership between the Camden campus of Rutgers University and the school district. This partnership will seek to address the poverty-related problems of poor education, inadequate skills, poor health, low self-esteem and inadequate financial resources through the development of a Rutgers University-Camden Demonstration school and the adoption of two existing Camden elementary schools.

The Rutgers University-Camden Demonstration school will comprise grades K through 8 in a setting specifically addressing the needs of families and children in Camden through the delivery of a range of new services. The urban school focus will consist of developing a multicultural curriculum for parents and children working together, implementing a Head Start program, establishing guidelines for cooperative teacher-parent efforts in resolving problems, working with the business community and public officials to create a safer and more conducive learning environment, and provide a center for dropouts to get a second chance through a Youth Opportunity Corps. Children will be matched with college students. The school will work with business, labor and education leaders to develop apprenticeship programs that provide low income single female heads of households and other parents with access to comprehensive maternity and infant care and skills training.

The Molina and Pyne Poynt Elementary Schools will be used as feeder schools to the demonstration school.

## **Public Safety**

### **Community Policing**

Camden is currently implementing a community policing program. The city has opened four police sub-stations and four mini-stations to ensure a continuing police presence in every neighborhood. In addition, other community service workers will be located within the neighborhoods in order to work directly with residents in identifying problems, addressing issues, and maintaining a vigilance against the social conditions that may contribute to criminal activity. The new police facilities and personnel will be supported with funds generated through the Aquarium.

### **Anti-Drug Task Force**

The County Prosecutor's Office has established "Operation Rebound", a multi-jurisdictional drug investigation and elimination effort combining elements of the Prosecutor's Office and the Camden Police Department. Investigators conduct undercover work, disrupt drug operations, and establish a data base of suppliers, dealers and buyers. Operation Rebound is funded by the Camden County Freeholders at an annual level of \$1 million.

# Camden's blossoms beginning to spread

**T**he Camden Initiative is not the only thing moving forward in the city, as a couple of announcements last week re-emphasized.

A private partnership said that its plans for a 25,000-seat amphitheater on the Camden waterfront are proceeding without a hitch, financial or environmental. Sony/PACE will begin construction of the open-air facility this fall, its officials said, and expect to be showcasing the likes of Michael Jackson by next summer.

(And Camden thought its annual Fourth of July fireworks extravaganza was a big draw.)

Meanwhile a neighborhood group in North Camden unveiled a plan of its own last week, a plan to build houses, parks and new businesses, among other things. There is no glitz in this plan, just proposals to improve the quality of life in one of the city's most downtrodden areas. The \$100-million price tag may make this plan sound like pie in the sky. But both public and private organizations have shown interest in it and a key component — a

supermarket — is

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**Where we stand:** Camden Initiative isn't the only show in town. Lots of plans are popping up.

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shopping center — has already drawn commitments from both the Delaware River Port Authority and a private developer.

With its hopes for tackling everything from housing and small business development to recreation and health care, the North Camden Plan is not unlike the Camden Initiative, just smaller and more tightly targeted. Indeed, there is no reason it could not become part of the Initiative.

Proponents of the latter have always emphasized that it is not a street-by-street blueprint, but a framework on which many plans can blossom and grow.

Like perennials, development plans have a way of spreading. The more that take root and rise from the ground, the more that are apt to follow.

The redevelopment of Camden has begun. They key now is to keep the momentum building.

Monday July 12, 1993

# Florio is scheduled to announce Camden Initiative during visit

By Thomas Turcol  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

7/6/93

When Gov. Florio visits Camden this month, a new but uncertain chapter will be opened in the long and mostly unsuccessful effort to pump new life into one of the nation's poorest cities.

The governor is slated to announce the Camden Initiative, a multifaceted plan by the state, Camden County and Camden City governments to build new houses and lure businesses and industry to the city.

From the construction or restoration of an estimated 400 houses in Bergen-Lanning and Lanning Square, to the development of three new industrial parks, the initiative is designed to make Camden a cleaner, safer city while improving its anemic economic base.

"This is more than a shot in the arm for us," said Mayor Aaron A. Thompson. "It will revitalize neighborhoods and put people back to work."

At least that is the hope.

As the Initiative's proponents concede, no private money has been promised as yet. And two government agencies targeted as participants — the Camden County Im-

provement Authority and the Delaware River Port Authority — have not allocated any money.

Moreover, no cost projections have been placed on the project, and critics fear the initiative might be another example of good intentions being eclipsed by the daunting economic realities that have sidetracked previous attempts to redevelop the city.

James Harris, a city activist, said a market does not exist for the kind of middle-income housing construction called for in the latest plan.

Another criticism leveled by Harris and others, including the nonprofit groups that have been heavily involved in restoring housing in the city, is that the plan has been shrouded in secrecy.

They say that government officials have developed the initiative without input from those who will be most directly affected by it.

The initiative's sponsors, however, are confident the plan can succeed and maintain they will give residents a voice in its implementation.

Camden County Freeholder Jeffrey Nash said the initiative represents the first time that various government agencies have agreed on a

See CAMDEN on S5

## Florio will visit to announce the Camden Initiative. Its prospects are uncertain.

### CAMDEN from B1

"comprehensive approach to a lot of the city's problems."

Nash said the city, county and state will "plant the seed" with several million dollars in construction loan guarantees, \$2 million in business loans and several million more in initial costs for the development of new industrial parks.

With that impetus, banks and developers will supply the private investment required to complete the developments, Nash said, adding, "The idea is to entice the private sector to come in."

The initiative encompasses six goals: To build new housing, create jobs, encourage small businesses, make the streets safer, and improve the city's public health and education systems.

The initiative calls for the construction or renovation of roughly 400 homes in two years by a public-private housing partnership. The new housing would be built in the Bergen-Lanning and Lanning Square sections of the city.

To create jobs and improve the city's tax base, the initiative calls for the development of three industrial parks: One in South Camden at a site bordered by Route 676 and Atlantic Avenue near the waterfront; one near the railroad tracks along East Estate Street in East Camden; and the third along Admiral Wilson Boulevard between Federal Street and the Camden-Pennsauken border.

Existing businesses in those areas would be encouraged by county and city officials to upgrade or expand, and vacant or boarded-up properties would be condemned and marketed to new businesses.

Nash said that the industrial parks could create more than 3,000 jobs in Camden over the next several years. Companies would be encouraged to hire workers from the county's Job Training Partnership Act program, which trains unemployed people to take on new jobs and pays half their salaries for several months.

Officials hope to keep those employees from moving into the suburbs by building new housing.

In addition to luring big businesses into Camden, officials plan to promote small-business development by spending an estimated \$2 million a year to help small and minority businesses. They also plan to spend several million dollars to support the creation of new businesses and the expansion of existing businesses.

To make the streets safer, the initiative calls for an estimated \$4 million in state money so that Camden can hire 30 more police officers and establish four police mini-stations in various neighborhoods.

The state police would increase from eight to 40 the number of officers it has patrolling the city. The state also would allocate \$1.5 million over the next two years for four new prosecutors and 12 investigators in the county prosecutor's office.

In the public health area, the initiative calls for the privatizing of three neighborhood clinics in the city with the ultimate goal of operating a network of full-service clinics in every city neighborhood.

Finally, the initiative would bolster education efforts in Camden by opening a "skills center" and other similar facilities to enhance students' learning skills and to prepare them for jobs in the industrial parks or small businesses.

"We want to create opportunities for those who are willing to help themselves," Nash said.

The freeholder added that Camden is "the perfect place for economic growth," partly because of its waterfront location and its access to boat, rail and highway transportation.

Nash added that redeveloping Camden was vital so that the tax burden can be reduced in other Camden County municipalities. He noted, for example, that Cherry Hill, with a population of about 70,000, pays 24 percent of the county's taxes. He said that Camden, with 87,000 people, pays a five-percent share.

Both Nash and Mayor Thompson said that although there has been no private investment to date, banks and developers will show their support once the initiative is announced, and they see the degree of government support.

"They've always said that Camden doesn't seem to have a plan," Thompson said, referring to private corporations. "We now have that plan."

# Camden Initiative unveiling nears

by KEVIN RIORDAN

Courier-Post Staff C-2793

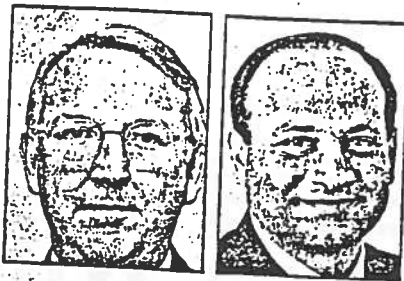
CAMDEN — The Camden Initiative has been described as everything from conceptual to controversial, from nebulous to fabulous. Critics and champions alike have labored to define just what the ambitious, "holistic" citywide renewal proposal is all about.

At least some of the questions may be answered soon: A formal announcement of the public-private plan to transform one of the nation's poorest cities into a place of true urban renewal is expected on July 8.

Numerous government and private sector sources said last week that the proposal's public safety component will be unveiled first, on July 6. The sources anticipate Gov. Jim Florio will come to Camden to announce the entire Initiative two days later, and that the education component will be rolled out in August.

Although Florio's office would not confirm the dates, it is clear that months of not-so-secret planning are about to culminate in the public debut of what boosters describe as a "framework" to coordinate and expand public safety, job creation, housing construction, public health and small business development activities in Camden.

The Initiative calls for the (mostly) privately financed construction or rehabilitation of up to 400 houses in the Bergen-Lan-



BORDEN

NASH

ning and Lanning Square sections in the next two years, as well as the development of three and possibly four new industrial parks. Everything from inter-agency law enforcement sweeps of sidewalk drug markets, to privatized public health care delivery systems, to job training programs and to beautification projects for Farnham Park and Admiral Wilson Boulevard are to be included under the Initiative's umbrella.

Indeed, some existing programs and projects already are under that umbrella, or will be woven into its fabric. Officials cited these as programs that reflect the thinking behind the Initiative: Camden County's innovative free childhood immunization program, the Camden Housing Authority's

application for a \$42 million federal grant to rehabilitate McGuire Gardens, the revived plans to build the long-delayed Mickle Commons and Lanning Square town houses, and even the impending renovation of the troubled Royal Court complex on the downtown waterfront.

For too long, the officials said, Camden has struggled to attract industries while having little marketable industrial space. It has tried to lure businesses to a place where many residents have no jobs and no money, and build new houses in a nearly non-existent real estate market. And while these efforts have for the most part floundered, one of the few things that has flourished is the drug trade and the sickening violence it brings, stifling growth not only in the city but throughout the tri-county area.

Enter the Initiative, eager to treat not just the symptoms but the causes, not just one organ but the entire patient. Given the city's manageable size (nine square miles, 87,000 residents) a cure is eminently feasible, officials insist.

"The Initiative is a process, a mechanism," said Camden County Freeholder Jeff Nash, one of the key players in the effort. He said this mechanism is not a re-invented wheel but a means of meshing state, county and city governments and their programs with those

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in the private sector — and bringing money from banks and private foundations into the city.

"We're only planting the seed," Nash added. "The goal of all of these programs is private investment."

So far little if any new private money has been pledged to the programs outlined by the Initiative. In fact, recent announcements of new financing for housing in Camden — \$20 million from a union pension fund and \$3.2 million from a consortium of banks — came about independently.

As for "public financing," a number of agencies, including the Camden County Improvement Authority and the Delaware River Port Authority, have expressed interest, but have yet to put up any money. And no overall cost projections of the entire Initiative are available, although individual components such as the industrial parks are estimated to require \$30 million alone.

Nevertheless, the prospect of a formal public announcement of the Initiative after months of rumors, leaks and delays is being welcomed by many, even those officials who are concerned about the level of public participation in the process so far.

"The only part I've been critical of is that the (housing) non-profits should have been part of the initial planning," Mayor Aaron Thompson said.

Said another city official, who supports the overall proposal, "I think there's some concern that some of the planning has been done by those outside the city."

To critics, including community activists and representatives of the non-profit groups that have produced most of Camden's renovated housing in recent years, the potential merits of the Initiative pale beside what they see as a telling reluctance of the powers-that-be to let citizens in on the preliminary planning.

"It concerns me that it's shrouded in secrecy," said Freeholder Robert Kennedy, one of two Republicans on the Democrat-controlled freeholder board. Virtually all of the government officials involved in the plan are Democrats.

"It ought to be put in the light of day," Kennedy said. "I wonder why that hasn't been done ... The whole thing may be legitimate and above-board and the greatest thing, since sliced bread, but I just don't know."

To activist Jim Harris, who intends to mount a petition drive to garner public support for a "real" Camden Initiative, the meetings and other activities

involved in the preliminary planning are both legally and philosophically troubling.

"It's an unlawful delegation of governmental authority to an ad hoc task force which was never appointed or created by any lawful act of government," he said. "I'm not an opponent of the Camden Initiative per se, but if it's going to be done it's got to be done right."

Said Betsy Russell, director of the Camden Lutheran Housing Corp. in North Camden, "we have not seen anything in writing. We have not seen a plan. We have not been part of the process."

Russell and others said they fear that as a creation of the power structure that has ruled Camden for 32 (mostly declining) years, the Initiative inevitably will further gum up the works in a city where dueling fiefdoms already make it difficult to get things done. It could soak up scarce public funds and usurp the city's already circumscribed ability to shape its own destiny, they said.

But James Ricks, a private consultant who has guided the preliminary planning, said the last thing the Initiative envisions is "another layer of bureaucracy." The non-profits and others don't understand that the Initiative is not an entity but a philosophy, a new way of making a real dent in

Camden's daunting morass of economic and social problems, he said.

"We don't want to create a housing component that eliminates the non-profits," Ricks added. "If we have an (Initiative) 'czar,' we would need money for operations and all that stuff. We can utilize existing staff to get things done. We're saying that any possible (new) money that comes to the city should go for programs."

"The Initiative is not a funding resource," he said. "It's not a place where you come to apply for grants and loans."

OK. But how will it work? Who will be in charge? Who will decide, for example, what developer gets approved for what project?

Ricks and other officials said existing law enforcement agencies, the recently formed consortium of city health providers, the Initiative's new public-private "Housing Partnership" and a proposed industrial development board could directly supervise their respective components. But a proposal has been made for the creation of a "Camden Today and Tomorrow Agency" to oversee the whole enterprise.

A description of the proposed agency is included in a 30-page booklet about the Initiative produced by Ricks' Camdelphia and

Associates consulting firm. The booklet suggests that the new agency should be "managed" by the company, but does not provide details.

Whether such an agency will be created is not the only unresolved question about how the Initiative will function.

One official said a city planning office would be the "appropriate" place to supervise the overall Initiative. Another said that the office of Florio chief of staff Richard Wright, who has been involved in the Initiative since the beginning, would be another likely overseer.

As for designating developers, officials said the city Redevelopment Agency could do so based on the recommendation of the Housing Partnership. The industrial board could make similar recommendations to independent agencies likely to guide the industrial park projects, such as the Improvement Authority and the Port Authority.

Whatever the ultimate arrangements, officials involved in the Initiative keep promising that the public will have its say.

"All of the components will have to go back to the duly elected officials (or public bodies)" in order to get approvals for projects, noted Phil Rowan, executive director of the Improvement Authority. For example, Rowan

said, before the authority could float an estimated \$2 million to \$4 million in bonds for infrastructure and other work at the proposed industrial park on Admiral Wilson Boulevard, the action would have to be approved by the freeholder board at a public meeting.

"There will be plenty of opportunity for people to participate," he added.

Indeed, all of the officials involved in the Initiative insisted that public support is a key to the Initiative. A task force of citizens, including clergy and businesspeople, has been assembled by city council president James Mathes and others in order to guide the overall proposal. And the Initiative booklet produced by Camdelphia describes citizen advisory panels for everything from housing, to small business development, to youth and senior citizen programs.

"I certainly think that maximum community input into this process is absolutely essential," Camden County prosecutor Edward F. Borden Jr. said. He noted that the public safety component relies heavily on the city police department's ongoing "community policing" program, a strategy aimed at forging a partnership between citizens and cops.

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But even some officials involved in the Initiative said they are uncertain whether Camden's power structure is truly capable of encouraging the community involvement everyone keeps talking about. They noted the preponderance of familiar, often politically "safe" names on the existing advisory panel, and the traditional distrust between the city's leadership and many community activists.

"I'm not sure they know how to do it," one official said, referring not just to the ability of the leadership to truly galvanize public support, but to the potential

for the "ins" to cooperate with the "outs," and vice-versa.

Complicating matters is an ingrained skepticism among many residents, who have seen grandiose plans to remake their community (remember "City Within a City"? The Veterans Administration hospital?) come and go with no impact on Camden's fragile quality of life. And with a mayoral race under way, there already is a partisan dimension to the public debate about the Initiative as well.

City schools Superintendent Arnold Webster, the Democratic candidate in the November election, said he supports the overall thrust of the Initiative. He said

"it's just common sense" to include as much citizen input and participation as possible.

Webster's Republican opponent, Keith Walker, said he is leery of the Initiative because it is a product of the political power structure that has presided over the city's decline. He added that the Initiative has "excluded" citizens, and that his administration "will not honor" a program that doesn't reflect public input.

Some politicians who initially were skeptical of the Initiative said it does appear to be something the public could rally behind.

"My concern when I first heard

about it was that someone was riding in to come save us," city councilwoman Gwendolyn Faison said. "But it's not they, it's we. We are the hope."

Others have pointed out the stunning success of last year's citizen-led campaign against the "Mischief Night" arson as evidence that the community is ready to respond to the challenge of making the Initiative work.

Officials said the impetus for the Initiative is to seize the opportunity of waterfront development, the "Mischief Night" success, and the new federal dollars expected to flow to urban areas under the Clinton administration.

# Camden set to launch its initiative

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**Goal: The aim of the five-part program is to reverse the city's 40-year decline.**

By BILL SHRALOW  
Courier-Post Staff

6/7/93

CAMDEN — The Camden Initiative, touted as the city's last and best chance to turn itself around by the end of the century, is just weeks away from a formal unveiling, said officials involved in the effort.

They expect Gov. Jim Florio to visit the ailing city for an announcement as early as two weeks from now and certainly by early July. The last details of the state's financial commitment — the final ingredient needed before moving ahead — are close to finalized, the officials said.

But since an announcement was first expected before last Christmas, no one is holding his breath.

The Camden Initiative, first revealed by the *Courier-Post* last October, is an ambitious, five-pronged program involving the city, county and state governments. It aims to reverse the city's 40-year decline.

Because of its comprehensive scope and multi-agency approach, it has taken longer than anticipated to iron out details, said Camden County Freeholder Jeffrey Nash, who is spearheading the county's role.

## Five components

"You don't want to throw out empty promises," Nash said. "The city's heard of different plans for years and years and nothing gets done. We wanted to create the proper structure before the announcement."

The Initiative's five components strike at the heart of life in the city. They are housing, industrial development, health care, small business development and public safety.

Despite criticism that the Initiative has been formulated in secret without public participation, orga-

nizers insist residents have had input through a citizens task force. They stress that only the grand design has been discussed — nuts-and-bolts decisions about implementing the effort will be made only after a series of public meetings to be held sometime soon after Florio's announcement.

Described by supporters as the most comprehensive approach yet to revitalizing Camden, the basic concept is this: For government to invest enough to create an attractive living and business environment, then to let private investment do the rest.

One official familiar with the effort said the total government investment will be in the \$20 million range for starters. The money is expected to come mostly from the county, state and federal governments since the city simply can't afford large expenditures.

## A definitive plan

It will be used to prepare sites for commercial and residential development, to establish a fund for small business loans, to train the unemployed for new jobs, to improve health care programs and to beef up public safety.

The goal is to draw hundreds of millions of dollars worth of private investment in housing and businesses.

Mindful of the fate of previous failed efforts to revive Camden, Initiative sponsors consciously avoided calling it a "plan."

"It's not a definitive plan *per se*, it's an initiative," Nash said. "It's putting together the foundation for economic revitalization that will take years to accomplish. If people think this is going to happen tomorrow... it's not going to happen."

The idea is to foster development of up to four industrial parks

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and small businesses that will create jobs for city residents, to attract private development of several thousand homes where people can raise families and to establish a network of health facilities where they can get care. All of those facets hinge on making the crime-plagued city safe and secure and turning around its violent image.

## Programs underway

Some programs are already under way, such as a \$1 million disease immunization program administered by the county health department, that's designed to improve the city's dismal 32 percent child immunization rate. An application for \$1.6 million to bolster community policing efforts will be sent to the state this week. Officials said problems that sunk a previous shot at the money have been addressed and they expect to receive the money within months.

Supporters say the time is right for Camden and the Initiative. The success of the waterfront State Aquarium has spawned hope and plans for other projects, such as a privately funded 20,000-seat amphitheater just to the south. The Initiative aims to capitalize on that momentum by bringing the rebirth already under way on the waterfront to troubled neighborhoods, where poverty, crime, abandoned houses and squalor dominate the landscape.

But the Initiative has its critics. They say officials planning the effort have excluded the people of the city. James Harris, a former city employee who now publishes a grassroots newspaper, believes the whole process is illegal because, he argues, government officials have met secretly to plan the city's future in violation of open public meetings laws.

Discussions about a Camden Initiative started more than a year ago among city, county and state officials. Major players included Nash; City Council President James Mathes; Tom Corcoran, executive director of the Cooper's Ferry Development Association; and then-Associate State Treasurer Richard Wright, who is now Florio's chief of staff.

A Citizens Task Force for the Camden Initiative, chaired by the Rev. John O. Parker of the Antioch Baptist Church, was created and started meeting last fall. Rev. Parker did not return phone messages left at his church office.

## \$196,000 in contracts

Its 50 members were recommended by various city and county officials, said James Ricks, a consultant hired by the city to coordinate task force activities.

Since then, the task force has met to discuss ideas and has taken trips to New York City to observe successful revitalization projects there. The city has let \$196,000 in consulting contracts to lay the foundation for the Initiative. Nash has verbally committed the county to between \$2 million and \$4 million for a Gateway Industrial Park along Admiral Wilson Boulevard.

Harris said he believes all of this is more than a little fishy. The task force, he pointed out, was never

officially created by any government body and met without public notice.

"It's all bound up in secrecy so you can't have a legitimate dialogue on the pros and cons," Harris said. "This thing violates the Sunshine Law (which requires that government business be conducted at public meetings) all over the place."

Harris said he'll call on Florio to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate the Initiative's origin and evolution. And he wants the "tainted process" scrapped and a new Camden Initiative begun as part of the official public business of City Council.

Harris has gotten all eight mayoral candidates to support starting over and all but Dr. Arnold Webster have supported his call for a special prosecutor.

## Most support plan

Nash said most Camdenites support the Initiative and critics are "a very small group of people."

"Some people are suspicious of any governmental operation and I understand that," Nash said. "People are extremely frustrated in the city. They've heard promises from government before."

Nash said the Initiative is different because it's "carefully thought out" and "backed by real (government) dollars."

One group that has serious reservations about the Initiative is comprised of the non-profit organizations that have done housing rehabilitation in the city for years. They fear they'll be squeezed out by the push for private and public investment in the Initiative. They weren't included in early discussions and that's made them suspicious.

"We've been good stewards of the public's (housing rehab grant) money," said Raymond Scull, executive director of the St.

Joseph's Carpenter Society in East Camden. "It makes sense if you want to put together a housing plan, you'd want to include a group like that and models we've used to succeed."

## Room for everyone

"They keep saying, 'We want you to support the Initiative.' But why should we if we don't even know what it's about," or how it will affect them, Scull said.

Initiative organizers have said their efforts will benefit, not hurt, the non-profits by drawing more investment to the city.

Ricks, whose Camdelphia Associates consulting firm has been paid \$135,000 to help coordinate the Initiative, said there is room for everyone who wants to play a positive role.

"Who should do this? Everybody's got to do it," Ricks said. "Everybody who's in a position to put something on the table."

## Major Components of the Camden Initiative



### HOUSING

Up to 5,000 new or rehabilitated units would be developed through a public-private "partnership" that would disburse public funds and leverage private dollars. The partnership would work with private, for-profit developers and with private, non-profit groups.



### HEALTH

New delivery systems for public health services would be established by the county health department, working in conjunction with private non-profit agencies such as Camcare and the Area Health Education Center (AHEC). The emphasis would be on primary, or preventive, care and on prenatal and early childhood services.



### INDUSTRY

Up to four new industrial parks, including one that has been discussed for decades, would be developed. Agencies such as the N.J. Economic Development Authority and the Delaware River Port Authority could be involved in financing construction.



### PUBLIC SAFETY

The city police department would get up to 18 new officers using an anticipated \$1.6 million state grant for community policing at the McGuire Gardens housing project. The police department would be augmented by help from the Camden County Prosecutor's Office, which would hire additional investigators and prosecutors in a program called Operation Rebound, a multifaceted anti-crime plan for the city and county.



### SMALL BUSINESS

A revolving fund would be established to provide loans for working capital, real estate, facade improvements and other purposes, for small businesses in the city's neighborhood commercial strips and in other areas.

# Camden Initiative brightens the horizon

WHIAR. POST 7-2-93

**S**hortly after the Fourth of July, a group of city, county and state officials will unveil the long-awaited, much-discussed, occasionally criticized and highly promising Camden Initiative.

The Initiative, which has obtained single-name status, like Cher or Madonna, is the latest in a long series of grand plans to revitalize the city of Camden. The failure of the earlier plans, each of which was announced with fanfare but faded into obscurity, has left many people skeptical about the Initiative's chances of success.

The fact that the plan was developed largely in private by people outside the city has left others doubtful about motives. Is the Initiative, they wonder, just one more chance for politicians and their friends outside the city to cash in on the misery within? If not, they ask, why weren't city residents brought into the planning process earlier? If not, why do some local activists, particularly those involved in housing rehabilitation, still feel left out in the cold?

The questions are good, the doubts reasonable, and the people promoting the Initiative would be wise to address them at every opportunity — by breaking the planning process wide open from this point forward and by doing everything in their power to assure that the benefits of the Initiative accrue to Camden residents, not lawyers, architects, bond underwriters and other assorted professionals and campaign contributors from outside the city.

**Where we stand:** The plan has been carefully prepared and well targeted. It looks like the best thing to hit Camden since canned soup.

That said, let us also say that the Initiative appears to be the best thing to hit Camden since canned soup.

The plan has been carefully prepared and well targeted. It sets out to answer the critics of the Aquarium and the rest of the waterfront development by extending the rehabilitation effort out into the city as a whole. For years, the "neighborhoods" have been asking for help. The Initiative, for all the criticism it has taken from residents, is an attempt to do just that. It is an attempt to create jobs, build decent housing, curb crime and provide better health care.

It is an attempt to do those things for the people who live in Camden, not some outsiders. Gentrification, as one planner pointed out, is the least of Camden's worries at this point. Stopping people from leaving the city as soon as they are financially able is one of the biggest challenges. The white flight from the city that took place in the 50s and 60s has been replaced by the flight of black and Hispanic residents as soon as they obtain the means to do so. Giving these working and middle-class residents a reason to stay is the Initiative's first goal.

It is an elusive one, as many an old industrial city in the Northeast and Midwest can attest. The problems are many and interconnected. Efforts to

tackle one without tackling the others have tended to be futile, with programs and the money used to support them sinking like water into sand.

The Initiative, with its plans for industrial parks to provide jobs, enough new housing in an area to create a new neighborhood, and enough new police to protect that neighborhood, recognizes the links between the problems and the necessity to tackle them simultaneously — or close to it — to make progress.

The money to carry out that the Initiative, which also involves more health clinics, more job training and more help for small business, is not all in place nor are the details of the plan worked out. It is more of a philosophy — an approach to rebuilding the city — than a step-by-step blueprint, its creators say.

The kind of money the county, state and private sector are talking about is encouraging, however. The success of the Aquarium and the development that is proceeding on the waterfront have created a certain optimism about the city that wasn't present five years ago. The Initiative has picked up some momentum of its own even before its unveiling.

It has great promise. It's "evolving," as one of its supporters said recently. We hope it will continue to evolve until it outlives its reason for being and Camden becomes a real city again.