



Camden Strong: People Empowered Our Focus During the First 100 Days and Beyond



We are committed to neighborhoods and improving the quality of life of our residents. The progress Camden has made over the past decade should be celebrated; we also recognize that a lot of work remains. Our goal is to ensure our residents feel included and part of the city's renaissance. The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on Camden. The time is now for government to play a vital role in helping our residents address the needs in our community. We will continue to listen to residents as we govern.

During the first one-hundred days and beyond, along with my colleagues on the city council, our other elected officials, residents, faith leaders, businesses, and non-profits, we will focus on:

- **Increasing Vaccination Access:** More than ten thousand residents in Camden have been infected with the COVID-19 virus, double that of any other municipality in Camden County. We have also lost 172 residents to this virus. While 48% of residents have received at least one dose of the vaccine, we must do better. We will focus on increasing the number of people who receive vaccinations because it will help us come out of this pandemic faster and keep our residents safe from exposure to variants.
- **Improving our Roads:** A recent survey listed the poor condition of Camden streets as one of the highest priorities for our residents. While fixing 182 miles of streets that exist in the city will take time, we will charge our public works and engineering departments to develop a short-term, medium-term and long-term capital plan to do just that. Underground utilities in Camden are ageing rapidly and, in some cases, failing and cause flooding. We will also work with our federal, state, and local representatives and private sector partners to leverage funds to advance both above ground and below ground infrastructure projects.
- **Strengthening Our Community Policing Practices:** We have had the opportunity to work with Police Chief Gabriel Rodriguez. As someone who was born and raised in Camden, he understands how important it is for officers to view themselves as guardians of the city and its residents, and not warriors. As other cities in the region are witnessing increasing crime rates, Camden is still the safest it has been in nearly fifty years. The city will work closely with the Chief to ensure that we continue to build strong bonds of trust with the community.



- **Expanding Quality Housing Options for Residents:** Increasing the availability of diverse housing stock is one of the most important means of protecting and building a vibrant and economically sustainable city. We will ensure that investment in housing brings positive change and does not displace or isolate residents who have called our city home for decades. We will do this by working in concert with residents, council members, and community development partners to design a workable housing plan. We will also continue to improve our public housing; the Camden Housing Authority has modernized upwards of 85% of the city’s public housing inventory under its purview. We will implement a plan that continues to ensure all public housing developments provide quality affordable housing for Camden residents.
- **Beautifying Neighborhoods and Developing Neighborhood Parks:** Over the last few years, we have worked with our state and county partners to improve our parks. Last December, the city completed its first comprehensive parks plan. The plan was a culmination of a collaborative effort that engaged over 500 community members to develop a vision for the future of the city’s neighborhood parks. We will work with the County and State to start construction as the recommended neighborhood park projects are designed.
- **Tackling Blight & Illegal Dumping:** We will work aggressively and expeditiously to rid the city of blighted properties. This June, we started Phase I of a \$15 million demolition program aimed at eliminating structures in imminent danger of collapse. We will also work with residents and community development organizations to determine if any blighted structures can be preserved and rehabilitated. The city spends approximately \$4.5 million annually to clean up illegal dumping; we will immediately work with our law enforcement, legislative and state agencies to monitor, stop, and penalize those who illegally dump trash in our city.
- **Safely Returning Our Children to School:** Our children have demonstrated remarkable perseverance this year. In the coming months, we must ensure a safe and well-coordinated citywide return to schools so that our young people can be reunited with their teachers, peers, and mentors. We will work with the school district to ensure robust academic and socioemotional supports are in place for our students and communicate regularly with parents during the transition.
- **Preparing Students for College and Career:** Student proficiency and graduation rates have risen steadily over the last several years, thanks to the hard work of our students and teachers. Now is the time to double down on investments in our schools. For our graduating students, we will ensure that strong post-secondary supports are in place, so that all students feel prepared for success after high school.
- **Providing Rental Assistance:** With the upcoming expiration of the eviction protections that currently exist, we will work to assist and support anyone who is facing housing instability. We will launch a new rental assistance program that will make a direct payment to a landlord for any missed payments due to a direct or indirect loss of COVID related income for our residents.
- **Rebuilding the Arts Economy:** Camden has a rich cultural and arts history. We recognize that nurturing our arts economy is important to preserving our history and also building a prosperous and stable community. We will work with local artists and stakeholders to develop a plan to integrate arts into our long-term growth plan.



- **Growing Job Prospects:** Before the pandemic, Camden had the lowest unemployment rate in thirty years. However, the pandemic erased most of those employment gains. As a city, we are committed to working with our partners to refocus our energies and to sustain some of the gains we have made even in the middle of this health and economic crisis.
- **Supporting and Prioritizing Small Businesses:** We know that a thriving small business community will create a successful local economy. The impact of the pandemic on our small businesses has been devastating. We will determine how best to provide financial support to our small businesses and immediately implement systems to ensure that the “Buy Camden” ordinance is effective.
- **Attracting New Businesses:** Creating an environment to attract new businesses to our city is critical to rebuilding our economy and putting us on a pathway to long-term success. Camden’s location and access to human capital make it ideal to attract small, medium, and large businesses; we will work with state and local partners to market the city.
- **Investing in Senior Centers:** We know how important senior centers are for our residents. However, during COVID, many of these centers were closed to reduce the risk of transmission. In addition, several of our community centers are in need of significant renovation. We will immediately assess the structural condition of these facilities to ensure they can safely open to our seniors so that our residents have a safe place to congregate.
- **Creating Athletic & Recreational Opportunities for Our Youth:** Camden is one of the youngest cities in the nation on a per capita basis. We know the importance of ensuring our youth have access to new opportunities that will positively shape their futures. We need to enhance our existing summer youth employment program by encouraging partnerships between Human Services, law enforcement and other agencies in order to expand mentoring initiatives that will build lasting bonds for kids and supportive adults.
- **Addressing Homelessness:** Homelessness continues to be an intractable challenge facing the city. The crisis has worsened during the pandemic. Unfortunately, many of the homeless people living on Camden streets are not native to the city, but we must contend with the issue nonetheless. We will develop a stronger partnership with the state and county to develop and fund more effective ways to mitigate this challenging and deeply complex social issue, understanding that this crisis will require many consecutive years of effort to address.
- **Ensuring Food Access:** We support corner stores and small neighborhood supermarkets, as they have been the lifeline for our residents. However, our residents should also have access to a full-scale supermarket. We will work tirelessly to bring a supermarket to Camden. Alongside this work, we will examine ways to take advantage of new innovations in distribution and logistics to provide fresh food directly to our residents’ doorsteps.

The issues we have highlighted above are not meant to be exhaustive, but a starting point in our governance approach. We understand that residents may want to highlight different issues that are specific to their neighborhoods or the city as a whole. We welcome an opportunity to discuss those issues and address them as well.