

City of Camden Awarded Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant



[NJ] Camden Awarded \$13 Million Grant for Revitalization (NJTV, NJ)

[NJTV](#)

(12/13/2016 8:18 PM, Michael Aron)

[VIDEO](#). Branch Village in the southern part of Camden was opened in 1941. The Camden Housing Authority has tried to keep it up, but it's outlived its time. "Ever since they moved the other buildings over, there's been a lot of termites and things like that, a lot of mold," said Branch Village resident Crystal Medina. At the Branch Village community center this morning, New Jersey's two U.S. senators and Camden's congressman gathered to hear the deputy secretary of HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] bring some good news. "I'm proud to announce today that we are awarding the city of Camden and the Housing Authority of the city of Camden with a \$13 million Choice Neighborhood Implementation Grant. Congratulations to you all," announced Dominique Blom, HUD Deputy Assistant Secretary.

The grant is intended as a catalyst for three sections of South Camden. Mt. Ephraim Avenue, the main corridor, looks shabby and dated. Pick a side street and you walk into some serious blight. Neglect is everywhere. "It's been sort of depressed, alienated from City Hall and the stakeholders, and I think the community, particularly its residents in the last couple of years got together in the last couple of years to say we have to create a bridge of hope for our neighborhood," Camden council member at large Angel Fuentes said. Branch Village will be updated with 176 new town houses and 50 new homes.

[NJ] Camden neighborhoods get \$13 million boost (Courier Post -Camden South Jersey, NJ)

[Courier Post -Camden South Jersey](#)

(12/13/2016 7:37 PM, Phaedra Trethan)

[VIDEO](#). "I don't feel safe here," Maria Torres said. "I don't let my kids play outside; I'm too afraid of shootings and other things that happen here." A \$13.2 million federal grant, meant to revitalize her Camden neighborhood, including the Branch Village housing projects where Torres lives with her four children, means "one of my dreams come true." The Choice Neighborhoods Initiative grant from the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development was announced Tuesday by a phalanx of state, federal and city officials, including U.S. Sens. Cory Booker and Robert Menendez, as well as U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross, who lives in Camden.

The grant will be used to turn some of the city's most distressed neighborhoods — Centerville, Liberty Park and Whitman Park — into safer, more livable places by replacing public housing with mixed-income homes; offering additional educational and support services for residents; and facilitating public and private investment in local schools, public safety initiatives and business

development. Booker joked about how he and Menendez lobbied their Washington counterparts, as well as HUD Secretary Julian Castro, on Camden's behalf. "We were like Starsky & Hutch," he said, then laughed. "Or, some days, like Laverne and Shirley. Or Batman and Robin. I was like a Motown song: I ain't too proud to beg," he added, drawing laughter from the room at the Branch Village Community Center.

[NJ] Camden Community Has Big Plans For Revitalization Funds Coming To Town (KYW-TV CBS 3, PA)

VIDEO - [KYW-TV CBS 3](#)

(12/13/2016 5:41 PM, Cleve Bryan)

The 76ers' new state of the art training complex in Camden is a symbol of new life for a team and a city. Billions of dollars are currently being invested in the waterfront, but this is not the only part of Camden trying to up its game. Shoe Kings is the life work of brothers Darien and Byron Gans. They've got autographed sneakers from NBA legends and specialize in selling vintage kicks. "If you wanted an old pair of shoes Moses wore, we have them here at the store," Darien Gans said.

The location on Mount Ephraim Avenue is not the most vibrant business environment. The owners talked about the empty buildings and vacant store fronts nearby. That call for help from business owners just got a response from Washington. Tuesday, members of congress announced a \$13 million grant for Camden's Mount Ephraim neighborhood through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. "You can change your living conditions, you can change the attitude of the people that live around here," said Damita Holmes, a resident of Branch Village.

The money is to create new educational and job opportunities and replace aging public housing like Branch Village which is 75-years-old. Officials say the motto, "Camden is Rising," should be reflected throughout the city. "This is about restoring what Martin Luther King called the beloved community," said Senator Cory Booker. "If Camden doesn't make it, the American dream is a lie."

[NJ] Camden receives \$13 million for community revitalization (WPVI-TV 6 ABC.com, PA)

VIDEO - [WPVI-TV 6 ABC.com](#)

(12/14/2016 4:41 AM, Annie McCormick)

CAMDEN, N.J. (WPVI) -- Officials in Camden, New Jersey announced the city will be receiving just over \$13 million toward revitalizing the Mt. Ephraim South neighborhood.

It is now deemed a "choice neighborhood" thanks to a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"What the designation does today is help us leverage additional dollars, new schools that are being constructed, the Uncommon Renaissance School which is under construction right now will be a new school K-8 for young people coming from this neighborhood, Whitman Park and Liberty Park," said Mayor Dana Redd.

The funding is a part of a bigger pot from HUD of more than \$130 million that will be divvied up by five cities across the country, including Camden.

Camden wins \$13.2 million for new housing, but falls short of bigger prize

Philadelphia Inquirer Updated: DECEMBER 14, 2016 — 1:07 AM EST

by Steele Allison, Staff Writer

http://www.philly.com/philly/news/new_jersey/20161214_Camden_wins_13_2_million_for_new_housing_but_falls_short_of_bigger_prize.html

Camden will receive more than \$13 million in federal funding to replace the 1940s-era buildings in the Clement T. Branch Village public housing complex with mixed-income town houses and apartments, developments that Mayor Dana L. Redd and other officials said would transform the struggling neighborhood.

The money is coming from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant program. Camden officials had applied for the grant last year without success.

Camden could have lost out again, beaten out by even stronger applicants, but HUD dipped into funds from the prior year to make the grant, a department official said.

As New Jersey elected officials announced the news at a conference at Branch Village in the city's Centerville section Tuesday, the mood was jubilant.

"It's about people's lives that we are changing today," said U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez, who was joined by fellow Democrats Sen. Cory A. Booker and U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross, local officials, and several dozen Branch Village residents.

Losing the grant last year, Menendez said, "didn't stop our dream, and we went at it again, and here we are celebrating our dream."

Officials acknowledged, however, that the funding is less than half of what the city had hoped to receive, and that it will fund only the first piece of a broader goal to remake neighborhoods.

The city had applied for \$30 million to pay for improvements to the Centerville, Whitman Park, and Liberty Park sections, including housing, new parks, and a revitalized Mount Ephraim Avenue business corridor. The four other recipients of the 2016 grant - Boston, St. Louis, Louisville, and Denver - received between \$29.5 million and \$30 million.

Last year, five cities were each awarded about \$30 million in "Choice Neighborhoods" grant money.

Dominique Blom, deputy assistant secretary for public housing investments for HUD, said that this year the agency planned to make only four such awards. Camden was a finalist, but was not selected as one of the four recipients. However, she said, the agency decided to use about \$13 million in carryover funds from the prior year to dedicate to the Branch Village project.

"Camden had a strong application, and the competition was close," she said.

Menendez, who helped steer the application process, said Tuesday that although Camden has been successful in winning grants, it frequently competes against much larger cities.

"Just because you put a grant in doesn't mean you're going to win," he said.

Development plans for Branch Village have been underway for years, and in 2012 a HUD planning grant enabled the community to draft a blueprint for the area that called for new housing, open space, better access to public transportation, and commercial development on Mount Ephraim Avenue. Last year the city was named a federal "Promise Zone," a designation meaning that it receives a competitive edge when applying for federal grants.

The grant will pay for 176 new town houses and 50 apartments for seniors. Redd said those projects will be complemented by other infrastructure work in the area, including two new schools the district is building in the neighborhood. Redd and Menendez also said they would work toward securing federal funds from other sources to fund the remainder of the project.

Redd said her administration had worked hard to submit a competitive application, and that their efforts were commended by representatives of HUD.

"It's not zero," she said. "So, I'm happy for \$13.2 million."

Booker, who has often described Camden as a "great American comeback story," said Tuesday that new housing was a key to moving Camden past its troubled history, and that the nation's public housing projects are remnants of outdated and racist policies that were designed to isolate minority and poor communities by trapping them in substandard living conditions.

"What we're celebrating here is not housing. This is about restoring what Martin Luther King called 'the beloved community,' " he said. "It is the revitalization of the American dream."

\$13 million grant to kick start transformation of Camden neighborhood

By Rebecca Everett | For NJ.com December 12, 2016 at 2:47 PM

http://www.nj.com/camden/index.ssf/2016/12/13_million_grant_to_kick_start_transformation_of_c.html#incart_river_home

CAMDEN -- The city has been discussing plans to redevelop and revitalize the Mount Ephraim South neighborhood for five years, and it appears the first influx of cash to make that possible may have arrived.

Camden will receive a \$13.2 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to help replace existing sub-par public housing with mixed-income housing in the neighborhood.

Camden is one of five cities across the country that will be splitting \$132 million in funding through the Choice Neighborhood Initiative, HUD Secretary Julian Castro announced at a press conference in St. Louis Monday. The initiative aims to improve neighborhoods with public or HUD-supported housing.

The other communities, in addition to Camden and St. Louis, are Boston, Denver and Louisville.

According to a press release from HUD, the five cities will replace a total of 1,853 "severely distressed" public housing units with nearly 3,700 mixed-income, mixed-use housing units.

The grant doesn't come close to covering the cost of the project, however. Each community is expected to secure five times more funding from other public and private sources.

"These game-changing investments will breathe new life into distressed neighborhoods and offer real opportunities for the families who call these communities home," Castro said in St. Louis. "What we do today will leverage private investment and bear fruit for generations of families looking for an opportunity to thrive in neighborhoods that are connected to the economic and social fabric of their communities."

City officials and legislators will speak about what the grant means to Camden at a press conference Tuesday at 10:30 a.m. at the Clement T. Branch Village Housing Authority. Among those attending will be U.S. senators Cory Booker and Bob Menendez, U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross and HUD Deputy Assistant Secretary Dominique Blom.

Five years in the making

Camden has been working on the redevelopment plans for the Mount Ephraim South neighborhood since 2011, when it applied for and later received a planning grant from the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative.

The city's housing authority worked with other city officials and private partners over the next 18 months to create the neighborhood's "Transformation Plan," which was submitted to HUD in 2014.

The city was disappointed, however, when it did not receive any of the grants HUD awarded in 2015. City officials vowed to reapply in the next round of funding.

The Transformation Plan calls for rehabilitating Branch Village, the oldest property run by the housing authority, to be more like a city-street grid with small parks, a senior building and new family housing. The project would replace existing units with 307 mixed-income rental units and 11 owner-occupied units.

In addition, the plan suggests redeveloping the surrounding area to infill with other new housing and open space, rehabilitating the 60-unit Nimmo Court development, and building a "transit-oriented" housing development near the Ferry Avenue PATCO station.

Other goals listed in the plan include supporting the economic redevelopment of commercial corridors, redesigning or revitalizing corridors to better connect people to amenities, improving and creating more green spaces, and encouraging rehabilitation of privately-owned homes and multi-unit buildings.

Calls to the Camden Redevelopment Agency, Mayor Dana Redd and the city's planning offices were not returned Monday.

Camden Receives \$13.2 Million Grant to Help Struggling Neighborhood

SNJ Today Dec 13, 2016 9:50 PM EST

CAMDEN, N.J. -

VIDEO - <http://www.snjtoday.com/story/34044858/camden-receives-132-million-grant-to-help-struggling-neighborhood>

State and local officials gathered in Camden to announce that the city was one of only five in the country to receive a grant funded by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's CHOICE Neighborhood Initiatives.

"Poverty's no sin. But America was intended to be a place, that no matter how you were born, you should find a way, and have an equal opportunity to get out," said New Jersey Senator Cory Booker.

Camden residents are now seeing that opportunity after the city received a grant of \$13.2 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. According to Camden Mayor Dana Redd, the money is targeted to help struggling neighborhoods with high poverty by rebuilding public housing that has fallen into disrepair.

In the middle of the redevelopment sits Branch Village, a housing development built back in 1941. The grant will help this site be replaced with 176 new townhomes and a 50-unit senior facility. Improvements to the front of main street businesses are also in the works. As neighborhoods all around Camden are continuing to transform, this grant will be used specifically for housing in the Mt. Ephraim neighborhood. However, residents and the city are looking at it as a way out of struggle.

"I'm excited. I'm ready. Ready for some new housing, ready for a new community," said Damita Holmes, a Camden resident.

The mayor shared that the residents have been working on the CHOICE application since 2012, and although they were hoping for more grant money, they are looking forward to the fresh look. In addition to a new community, improvements will also go beyond building new homes.

"Education, a good job, and making sure that it's safe, so when you go home at night, it really is a home," said Democratic Congressman Donald Norcross.

While residents wait on construction to begin, officials hope that the news of this grant will begin infusing hope back into an area ready for transformation.

"It's more than brick and mortar, and new housing, it's about people's lives at the end of the day that we're changing today," said New Jersey Senator Bob Menendez.

Camden banks on \$13.2 million federal grant to fix past housing mistakes (South Jersey Times, 12/13/16)

http://www.nj.com/camden/index.ssf/2016/12/christmas_comes_early_for_camden_13m_to_revitalize.html

Camden banks on \$13.2M federal grant to fix past housing mistakes

By Greg Adomaitis | For NJ.com December 13, 2016 at 2:05 PM

http://www.nj.com/camden/index.ssf/2016/12/christmas_comes_early_for_camden_13m_to_revitalize.html

CAMDEN -- Branch Village was built before the United States entered World War II and has seen better days. Tuesday was one of them.

The struggling housing complex will be at the heart of a \$13.2 million federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant to revitalize the Mount Ephraim South neighborhood.

"This is what I live for. This is what I fight for. This is what ultimately gets realized," said U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez. "The people of Camden can know they have not been forgotten. Promises made. Promises kept."

Menendez was joined at Tuesday's grant announcement by Camden Mayor Dana Redd, U.S. Sen. Cory Booker, U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross and a host of city and county officials.

Camden was among five cities to receive HUD's 2016 implementation grants, which are intended to transform federally-supported housing into mixed-income properties with access to transit, schools and jobs.

The federal funding will be supported by approximately \$280 million in additional private and public resources.

Mount Ephraim South, home to about 5,000 residents, lies between I-676 and Haddon Avenue. It's been the topic of redevelopment before -- most recently when Camden City found out last fall that it did not qualify for HUD funding.

"I think we learned from our past mistakes," Redd said after Tuesday's press conference of this successful application, adding that Branch Village had "fallen into disrepair."

In all, the funding will be used to build 176 new town homes and a 50-unit senior mid-rise facility. The announcement is likely to piggyback off recent improvements at the complex, longtime residents Renilda Rochan and Damita Holmes explained.

"It has gotten better with the community policing," said Holmes, adding that open-air drug deals have all but disappeared.

"It will improve attitudes and how they feel about themselves," Rochan said when asked what a reborn Branch Village will do for the neighborhood.

Not only is housing being addressed, but the city school district is planning on spending up to \$50 million on a kindergarten through 8th grade facility as well as a new high school.

Sen. Booker, Newark's former mayor and a long-time friend of Redd's, said Tuesday was a reversal of federal policies from decades ago that resulted in the poverty in places like Branch Village and the Mount Ephraim South neighborhood.

"The greatest American comeback story in 10 years will be Camden," he said. "If Camden doesn't make it, the American Dream is a lie."