

Chapter 9 An Integrated Strategy

Real Estate Development and Human Capital Planning in Camden

Because a high level of social need could be found throughout Camden, nearly every government-financed plan for real estate development had to be examined not only in terms of how the plan might change the physical environment but also in terms of how the plan might affect the lives of current and future community members. During my thirteen-month assignment in Camden, I had many opportunities to observe this interplay between the evaluation of real estate development ventures and the consideration of related social issues (such as education, public safety, and workforce development), and, with others, to try to advance the former while addressing the latter. During this time, I participated in the organization of a reinvestment strategy for Lanning Square, a downtown-area neighborhood just south of Camden's central business district, that was designed to address both development goals and social needs simultaneously and comprehensively. This strategy is worth examination, both as a reinvestment model that combines place-based development with people-oriented resource building and as an illustration of the obstacles that threaten the prospects for moving such a model to successful implementation.

Thirteenth-Floor View

My first full-time work day in Camden City Hall began very early one morning during the week after New Year's. I drove across the Ben Franklin Bridge, took the downtown exit a hundred yards away from the toll plaza, parked at the MRERA-financed Camden County College garage, and walked two blocks to City Hall, an early twentieth-century building, topped by a clock tower, that housed many city and county offices. The streets were quiet. I had arrived before the beginning of the school-day rush hour and before the start of the government employee work day. A blast of wind from the Delaware River, a few hundred yards away, swept frozen air across the steps that led up to the west entrance of City Hall from a paved parking area.

Just inside the glass entrance door was an airport-style security checkpoint. Metal objects were placed on a conveyor belt for screening, and visitors walked through an electronic threshold with a metal detector. If it beeped, a security guard

would approach you and conduct a quick once-over with an electronic wand to ensure that the detected object was a belt buckle or a necklace rather than a weapon. Concern about security was not inappropriate in a place like Camden, where the actions of government officials had drawn anger on many occasions. A City Council member had been shot and killed a few years earlier in New York City; it was not difficult to imagine the possibility of a similar act of violence occurring here, in this building.

Three of the six elevators in the lobby were out of order, and one of the elevators that remained in operation went no higher than the fourth floor. I took one of the two available elevators to the thirteenth-floor offices of the Camden Redevelopment Agency and discovered that I had arrived too early; the entrance door was locked. In the elevator lobby, a big window provided a panoramic eastward view. Looking out to the far left, you could see the Delaware River, bending around the city to the northeast. There was Cramer Hill; there was the Campbell Soup Company headquarters, where more than a thousand administrative and research and development employees worked within a cluster of buildings on a small campus. There was Route 30, the highway that extended eastward, from the toll plaza out to the suburbs, dividing the city on an east-west axis. There was 1-676, the highway that branched away from Route 30 and headed southward, dividing the city on a north-south axis. There on the horizon were the smudgy shapes of the modern mid-rise buildings in the office campuses of suburban Cherry Hill.

I supervised about eighty employees of two agencies: the Camden Redevelopment Agency and the City Department of Development and Planning. All of the staff of the CRA, a state-chartered redevelopment authority, had been recruited during Arijit De's tenure; none of them had been employed at the agency for more than four and a half years. None of the CRA staff positions had been integrated into the civil service system (an issue that had been a bone of contention between De and the state's Personnel Department). Many of the CRA staff did not live in Camden. In contrast, many staff of the Department of Development and Planning, a municipal government agency, had worked in City Hall for a much longer time. Most of the Development and Planning job titles were civil service titles, and many of the employees were members of the municipal workers' union. Although Primas and De had consolidated the leadership of CRA and Development and Planning into one directorship-held first by De, then by me-the staffing of the agencies was spatially dispersed. CRA staff occupied the thirteenth floor and part of the fourth floor of City Hall. Development and Planning staff occupied part of the fourth floor, an office on the second floor, and-in the case of the Capital Improvements Division staff responsible for public-works projects-an office in the old armory building, nearly a

mile away. As part of a City Hall renovation and space reallocation plan begun during Judge Davis' tenure as COO, I asked that all of the staff be consolidated on the third floor of the building. The renovation project was a long-term endeavor, with courtroom expansion and improvement plans being given highest priority. As a result, the consolidation of planning and development agency staff that I had requested did not begin during my thirteen months in Camden, and, during those months, much time was spent waiting for an elevator to arrive or trudging up and down fire stairs.

Although I did not become well acquainted with every one of the staff members whom I supervised, I got to know many of them through frequent week-to-week interactions. Most of the staff members whom I got to know were not bureaucrats or political deadwood; most of them were responsible and committed to their work. They were mindful of the political dynamic that ran through the affairs of municipal government like an electrical current, and they interacted with elected officials as needed; but most of their activities were completed under the political radar and independent of political influence. Many of the staff had chosen to take on tasks that were not set forth in their job descriptions, without additional compensation, because they felt responsible for doing so-responsible to the city and its residents. Some of the staff worked evenings, weekends, or holidays without additional pay because they wanted to get past a particularly time-consuming assignment and move a project or program closer to implementation. I had already gained a sense of the character of some of these staff during my previous experience in Camden as a consultant, when I had contacted a dozen or more of them at different times seeking information or requesting a meeting to discuss a particular issue in depth. They were responsive and helpful, even though no one had ordered them to cooperate with me; at the time, I was nobody special. They cared about Camden and about the integrity of their work in the city.

The positive qualities that some staff possessed were of great value, but these qualities were not enough to produce a harmonious work environment in which everyone was collaborative, cooperative, and respectful of one another. Development and Planning staff resented CRA staff, feeling that the latter had been given preferential treatment by Primas and De and had, to some extent, been hired to circumvent city process (views for which there was more than a little substantiating evidence). Staff who worked on the fourth floor felt that they had second-class status compared with staff on the thirteenth floor, where the COO and the senior CRA administrators had their desks. The term "thirteenth floor" was used as a synonym for "the people in charge," as in: "We're waiting for the thirteenth floor to make a decision" or: "The thirteenth floor vetoed our suggestion." There were

intradepartmental problems as well. One senior administrator had the radio turned up during confidential meetings so that staff in the next room, separated by a hollow-core door, would have difficulty hearing what was going on. In an introductory meeting with me, a city department head prefaced his criticisms of a past policy by saying: “I don’t care who hears about this,” as though he expected that I would try to make trouble for him by reporting his statements to higher authorities. The tensions that were running high outside City Hall, in neighborhoods such as Cramer Hill, contributed to under-the-surface and outright acrimony among staff and made internal disagreements more difficult to resolve.

I tried to address these problems by using my position to bring staff together frequently and to institute a more inclusive process for decision about redevelopment plans, real estate acquisition, and the financing of development ventures. I scheduled regular joint meetings with the key management staff of both agencies (they had not previously met together on a regular basis), with smaller groups of staff who performed specialized tasks (such as the staff responsible for promoting community participation in redevelopment planning), and with our counterparts in the State of New Jersey housing and economic development agencies whose signoff was needed for all activities proposed for MRERA funding.

These and other efforts on my part to strengthen working relationships within City Hall brought some improvement, but they were not enough. My authority was respected by nearly everyone, but my presence in Camden was not necessarily welcomed by all. The view of those who were less than enthusiastic about me was understandable. I had been recruited by the state, and the state government had made a commitment to engage me without requiring me to be interviewed by the Mayor, the City’s Business Administrator, or the CRA board of directors (I had been interviewed by Judge Davis prior to my January start date, but, by that time, it was clear that the Corzine Administration wanted him to support my appointment). Everyone knew that I had agreed to send state officials a memorandum after the completion of my anticipated three-to four-month tenure that would contain an assessment of the two agencies I supervised, along with any recommendations for changes that I felt were appropriate. Viewed from the perspective of the staff who reported to me, I was an agent of the state, who, in a short time, would be delivering judgments that could make their jobs harder to do. These staff members’ views were influenced by the experience of the first four MRERA-implementation years, during which disagreements between Primas, De, and the state’s Department of Community Affairs increased and intensified. A prevalent City Hall view was that the state was too heavy-handed and controlling; my presence could make it worse. In addition, I

reported to Judge Davis, a state appointee with no prior municipal government experience, whose views about CRA and Development and Planning were yet to be learned.

Judge Davis had grown up in foster care. He told me that, as a child, he had gathered driftwood along the Delaware River shore and carried it home for use as firewood. “We were poor as churchmice,” he said. He worked as summer help in vacation lodging places at the Jersey shore. He obtained his law degree from Temple Law School and overcame 1960s-era racial barriers to earn the right to practice law in New Jersey. In 1969, he was offered an appointment as Municipal Court judge. “They needed a black,” he once said to me, “with the riots and all,” without a trace of irony or rancor in his voice (Philadelphia’s most serious riot of this period took place in 1964, Camden’s in 1971). He was appointed to Superior Court in 1981, where he served for nearly a quarter-century. At the time when the Corzine Administration contacted him regarding the COO appointment, he was working as counsel at the Cherry Hill offices of the Cozen and O’Connor law firm.

Judge Davis described the advice given to him years ago by a mentor, whose voice he imitated in a Churchillian timbre: “Ted, you must be *resolute*.” And he was resolute. Meetings began and ended on time. Proposed CRA board actions were scrutinized in detail a week before each board meeting and revised as needed. Not long after his appointment, he issued several directives: no hirings, no promotions, no overtime for any city employee without his written approval. The City budget will be presented to City Council on time (for some years, the budget presentation had taken place months after the start of the fiscal year). All City employees will punch in and out of work on newly-installed time clocks. Every city employee will complete ethics training. The no-overtime order sparked a strong reaction. The Fire Commissioner announced the closing of a fire station; City Council scheduled a special hearing; the Council chamber filled up with city workers. Judge Davis appeared at the session, described the executive order in detail, answered questions, and left. The order remained in place. Then he contacted the Fire Commissioner; the fire station closing was rescinded.

During my first few months at City Hall, Judge Davis and I met almost every day, sometimes to confer together, at other times to meet with people from outside, almost always to discuss one of three subjects: organization, land, or money. The courtroom management style that the Judge brought to City Hall meetings was in many respects a welcome change from that of the less well-organized prior administration. A meeting was convened, and participants were introduced; Judge

Davis succinctly described the purpose of the meeting; issues were presented, and the presenters were questioned; decisions were made, and assignments were given; the meeting adjourned.

Outside City Hall, Judge Davis brought a sense of decorum to city government interaction with community residents. He scheduled a town-hall meeting at each of three community centers during the warm weather months. He brought with him all of the city department heads (who were seated in short rows of folding chairs at the front of the room, stage left of the podium at which he stood) and all of the City Council members, as well as the Mayor (seated in a single row, stage right). The sight of all of the responsible elected and appointed officials in city government participating in a public meeting together, and seated on either side of Judge Davis at a meeting over which he presided, conveyed a memorable message about the Judge's authority and the seriousness of his intent to use it.

At the same time, Judge Davis could not be regarded simply as a conservative, old-school stereotype. He could backslap and wisecrack with politicians at a reception or banquet. He could break up the monotony of a CRA board meeting with an unexpected joke. He was a careful observer and listener. He could speak informally with community members and put them at ease. But anyone who had the experience of working closely with Judge Davis recognized that he possessed an underlying seriousness of purpose that remained present just below the surface, no matter how informal or relaxed the circumstances.

With a few notable exceptions, Judge Davis was consistently supportive of my plans and of the way that I pursued them. Our working relationship was cordial, but it was not a friendship-it was a business relationship with a sole focus: improving Camden through strategies that he authorized and we both worked to implement.

Judge Davis was not uncomfortable with the bricks-and-mortar emphasis of the MRERA legislation (which provided no substantial funding for activities other than real estate development), but his personal priorities were community-building and the improvement of the civic environment. "I'm a human capital guy," he said that he had told Governor Corzine at their first meeting. "I want to achieve some benefit for the people of Camden." Consistent with this orientation, he devoted time to the issues of public safety and public education. He expressed concern about the future prospects for school-age children growing up in Camden. Once, in a van transporting city and state officials on a drive-by tour of neighborhood development sites, he gestured at a crowd of children pouring out of a middle-school building into the afternoon sunlight. "Their moms are all working or on drugs," he said to the state

official seated next to him, a person who, like him, had grown up in Camden. “And you can guess where the men are” (in prison).

Judge Davis also expressed dismay about the low level of civic engagement that prevailed in Camden. Because the quality of schools and public services in the city was so poor, he observed, the pool of well-educated, community-minded residents who could be recruited to serve in important appointed positions—to positions on the Planning Board, for example, which played a make-or-break role with respect to the review of redevelopment plans and developer proposals—was meager. As a result, it was more likely that those people who ended up being recruited to serve on public bodies such as the Planning Board would make bad decisions due to ignorance or poor judgment. The number of people who would take the initiative to participate in civic activities such as attending a neighborhood meeting or testifying before City Council was equally meager.

Judge Davis commented on an occurrence that supported his view of the paucity of civic engagement. At meetings of City Council, the CRA Board, the Planning Board, and other Camden governing bodies, the same three individuals would often appear to testify during the time set aside on the agenda for public comment. They were frequently the only ones who showed up for this purpose. All three were men of middle age or older, and each presented comments or raised questions that related to his own area of concern. One of them consistently commented on or brought forward questions about specific development ventures and about the wisdom and legality—or absence thereof—of government actions undertaken in support of certain of these policies (this person had been a plaintiff in a number of legal actions brought in opposition to City-supported development proposals). Another often called attention to government actions that, in his view, evidenced discrimination against nonwhites or lower-income people. The third frequently brought forward criticisms of actions that he viewed as instances of municipal government waste and mismanagement, and he raised questions about the eligibility of certain government-sponsored activities for the public funding they received—or about the appropriateness of funding these activities in the first place. These three men were well-informed and civic-minded; but, to me, they were also strangely reminiscent of Job’s three friends, who witness his torment, then chastise him. Judge Davis was not critical of these three men’s consistent attendance at public meetings; he praised them on several occasions. His concern was that they were so frequently the only ones who participated.

During the first months of 2007, a number of decisions were made that set our administration apart from that of Primas and De. The CRA would no longer strive to be a real estate developer; the agency would focus on development financing and real estate transactions in support of other developers. Developers would no longer be invited to present proposals prior to the approval of redevelopment plans. The redevelopment planning for Cramer Hill that had been restarted after Primas and De had abandoned the Cherokee proposal would focus on housing preservation; no residential relocation was proposed. And priority attention in redevelopment planning would be devoted to the Lanning Square neighborhood.

New Communication

Lanning Square is a mostly residential neighborhood located just south of the downtown business district, bordered on the west by the Delaware River waterfront and on the east by Broadway, Camden's major north-south artery. Lanning Square is separated from the downtown business district by Martin Luther King Boulevard, a multi-lane street that carries a high volume of traffic to and from Cooper Hospital and nearby highway entrance and exit ramps. As a residential community that is close to the aquarium, City Hall, Cooper Hospital, and a centrally-located light-rail stop, Lanning Square is well positioned for development.

The importance of Cooper Hospital as an anchor for development in Lanning Square would be hard to overestimate. Before the turn of the century, the hospital had been nearing bankruptcy. Now Cooper was well on the way to implementing plans for the development of a \$500 million Health Sciences Campus. The centerpiece of the hospital's expansion was the \$220 million Pavilion, under construction in 2007 and completed in December 2008. The Pavilion was a ten-story complex with state of the art facilities and "Four Seasons-like amenities and service"¹ designed to attract patients from surrounding suburban areas. A parking garage on the east side of Broadway just south of Martin Luther King Boulevard was already completed, with ground-floor space available for lease. By the end of 2008, 90 percent of the street-level square footage had been leased, to a Veterans Administration clinic and to a physical and occupational therapy center operated by NovaCare Services. Streetscape improvements-the reconstruction of paving, the installation of lighting, and the planting of trees-were under way on the Boulevard and on nearby blocks. Homebuying opportunities in the adjacent neighborhood were being promoted to hospital employees. Hospital administrators were working in coordination with City and CRA staff to ensure that institutional expansion and planned neighborhood improvements complemented each other.

In planning for expansion, Cooper's leadership was mindful of Penn's experience in West Philadelphia, including the attention that the University had devoted to consultation with community members. "I'd be very proud to be in the same sentence as the University of Pennsylvania," George Norcross told a reporter. "They have done an unbelievable job of redeveloping a community."² Senior administrators held a series of meetings with neighborhood residents. The hospital hired a consultant to manage a civic engagement process designed to present the plans and give community members the opportunity to learn about and influence them before they were finalized. At a well-attended meeting, residents reviewed and commented on building design options, expressed their views about current neighborhood conditions, and about their priorities for development, about what should be changed and what should remain. The community members wanted to see more green space in the area, which had been originally built up as a densely-settled row house community. In response, Cooper made a commitment to finance the makeover of a centrally located small park that was in an extreme state of disrepair and to maintain the completed park for twenty years, after which this responsibility would be turned over to the City (and by which time, it was anticipated, the surrounding blocks would be populated by new residents who would look after the park). The Cooper expansion plan advanced without significant community opposition.

The City's Department of Development and Planning had already drafted and gained approval of a redevelopment plan for Cooper Plaza. Authorized by City Council in 2005, the plan called for the rehabilitation of vacant housing and infill new construction on vacant lots, with no displacement of neighborhood residents. On a single block of Broadway frontage located between the parking garage and the Boulevard, the plan called for the relocation of ten small stores. This block had originally been proposed for the development of a new school. By 2007, however, it was expected that the block would instead be developed for a higher-density mix of retail and residential uses that would draw on the block's proximity to the hospital complex a hundred yards away. In its redeveloped state, the block would include higher-quality stores at street level, with apartments for medical students and interns above. The redevelopment plan, like the hospital expansion plan, did not generate major controversy; no attempt was made to derail the plan through litigation.

Cooper Plaza has many residential blocks that are mostly occupied but broken up by vacant buildings and lots. In contrast, some Lanning Square blocks are almost entirely cleared of buildings. Much of the vacant land that remains is publicly owned and zoned for residential use. The neighborhood also includes some well-maintained

row house blocks, a small park, day care facilities, churches, and the Walt Whitman House, a National Historic Landmark, where Whitman spent the final years of his life.

Because Lanning Square was a neighborhood in which miscommunication and confusion about the City's plans had been recurrent problems, the first step in planning for residential development was the organization of a communications strategy.★ During Primas and De's tenure, two redevelopment-plan concepts had been drafted, aired in public meetings, then withdrawn without explanation, as goals, priorities, and alliances inexplicably shifted in City Hall.³ Based on these experiences and in light of the awareness of the City's initial urban renewal-style approach to Cramer Hill redevelopment, concern over the prospect of major property-taking and displacement in Lanning Square was widespread.

In case studies that describe neighborhood-change success stories-those instances in which strategies are successfully adopted to sustain economic, racial, and ethnic diversity and counter the threat of displacement in communities experiencing a rapid rise in property values-a recurring theme is the central importance of communication and information sharing. Attention to communication and information sharing had been a key element of Cooper Hospital's planning in Cooper Plaza, but had not been a highlight of Primas and De's administration of the city's redevelopment programs. Arijit De didn't even show up at City Council meetings, ignoring the established protocol that called for municipal department heads to be seated at tables facing the Council members so that they could be asked to deliver reports or answer questions. Primas and De did not have an ongoing working relationship with Camden's association of community development corporations, and CRA staff was reluctant to participate in dialogue with community members outside the confines of City Hall. During the time when the Cherokee proposal was under review, I attended a big town-hall meeting that a civic coalition had organized to promote dialogue about, among other matters, the issue of relocation and replacement housing. Senior CRA staff members were in attendance, but they were gathered at the back of the room, conversing among themselves and with others while the meeting was going on.

My influence in Camden was limited, but it was clear that communication and information sharing was one area in which I could make a difference with respect to redevelopment planning in Lanning Square. As plans for this area took shape during

★For the sake of brevity, I have used the term "the City" rather than "the City and the CRA" in statements about development-related activity in which both agencies under my supervision were involved.

2007, I attended numerous community meetings held in churches and recreation centers. I asked for and received an opportunity to speak at the church with the predominately African-American congregation and at the church with the predominately Latino congregation; at the latter, John Fuentes of CRA delivered rapid-fire translations of my statements. Fuentes also took me to the two local radio stations that reached Camden's Latino population for interviews with talk-show hosts.

Most of the focus of this communication was the future of Lanning Square's residential community, with the possibility of displacement the concern most often raised by residents. During each of the meetings that were held in the early months of the year, at least one person would approach me and ask, "Is my house going to be taken?" In my presentations at these meetings, I tried to address the issue of displacement in the context of a redevelopment planning process:

- The City and CRA will not require that a redevelopment plan be adopted for Lanning Square. Our position is that a redevelopment plan will be beneficial to the Lanning Square community, and we want a plan that makes sense for everyone. If these meetings produce conflicts that cannot be resolved or that divide the community, the plan will not be pursued (City Council, mindful of the Cherokee experience, would not vote to adopt a divisive plan in any case).
- Although the City and CRA will not force the adoption of a redevelopment plan, we support redevelopment planning, and we believe that Lanning Square will be better off with a redevelopment plan than without one. A redevelopment plan will document our agreement on the goals for this area and on strategies to improve this community. Without a redevelopment plan, our ability to acquire property, particularly vacant and abandoned buildings and lots, will be very limited. These properties will remain vacant or will be acquired by others, in some cases, by investor-owners who will be able to develop them as they see fit (within the limitations of the building and zoning codes), with or without the support of the community.
- At this time, the City and CRA have no plans to acquire occupied properties and displace people. The City will not rule out the use of eminent domain powers to acquire occupied properties as part of a redevelopment plan, but we will only do so as a last resort, if we believe that there is no worthwhile alternative. Prior to proposing any use of eminent domain to acquire occupied properties, we will present the case

for this action to you, describe the reasons why we recommend it, and describe the options to be offered to residents and businesses that are proposed to be displaced. If this issue generates a conflict between the community and the City that cannot be resolved, the proposed redevelopment plan will not be presented to the Planning Board and City Council.

These presentations did not produce a dramatic change in the relationship between community members and the City. At best, the message they conveyed was that I was not Arijit De. I would show up at meetings, return phone calls, and meet with civic leaders unaccompanied by an entourage of CRA staff. Like Arijit De, I was not a resident of Camden. Like him, I could leave precipitously, and the person who showed up to take my place might have an entirely different presentation from mine, as mine had differed from De's. The instability and uncertainty that pervaded Camden made it impossible to do more than create this mixed first impression.

People who were preparing to oppose the redevelopment plan-any redevelopment plan that involved any residential displacement-were taking advantage of this instability and uncertainty. "Plaintiff recruitment" was already under way: legal-services staff were encouraging residents to prepare to sign on to future litigation against the redevelopment plan-even though no plan had yet been proposed. At the CRA-sponsored meetings held during this time, some of the individuals who spoke out most strongly against redevelopment planning were not community residents. Some of them were paid organizers who were circulating anti-redevelopment leaflets and flyers. One advocacy group distributed a flyer that included the organization's address at the bottom of the page: a post office box in suburban Cherry Hill. Another flyer with a save-our-community theme was circulated just before the spring primary election in which candidates were running for City Council seats. The flyer featured a blurry photograph of George Norcross at the top of the page, with spider-web-like lines radiating from him to images of Democratic Party-supported incumbent Council members and cartoon drawings of Primas and De in the center of the page, below Norcross (at the time, Primas and De had been gone for weeks; but I was too new and little-known to be a useful addition to such a flyer). Meeting disruption tactics were tested. The activists who attempted to break up the meetings created problems, but they were far less effective than their counterparts in Philadelphia, whose meeting disruption tactics I had painfully experienced during my initial tour of duty as a middle-management employee in the public sector.

In this uncertain environment, a renewed effort to complete a Lanning Square redevelopment plan was launched.

Three Challenges

To make effective use of Lanning Square's locational advantages, a redevelopment plan had to address three key issues: strengthening the community's predominately residential base; creating an effective linkage between institutional and non-institutional development; and building out a transition zone (consisting of properties on blocks just outside the redevelopment area boundaries) between the community's northern edge and the southern margin of the downtown area.

The Residential Base

As a consultant under contract with CRA in 2005, I had worked with CRA staff to produce a relocation and replacement housing plan for Lanning Square and the adjacent Cooper Plaza neighborhood that was designed to demonstrate how a sufficient number of affordable housing units would be developed within these communities to accommodate households that, at the time, were expected to be displaced from future development sites. The plan anticipated that the first major displacement would involve the relocation of twenty-six households from the southern tier of the redevelopment area, where several blocks were proposed to be cleared to create a site for the construction of seventy-five subsidized rental housing units. Prior to any displacement, up to fifty-nine housing units were to be developed by two nonprofit organizations (St. Joseph's Carpenter Society and Habitat for Humanity), and enough of these homes would be completed in time to be offered as replacement housing for the twenty-six displaced families. A second seventy-five-unit rental development venture (requiring no further displacement) would follow.

The housing plan had been published in concept-paper form in November 2005. When I arrived at City Hall fourteen months later, replacement housing development activity had not proceeded as rapidly as planned, although some SJCS housing development was beginning in Cooper Plaza. Because a Lanning Square redevelopment plan had not been drafted, presented to Planning Board and City Council, and approved, no eminent domain acquisition or residential relocation had taken place, or could take place. This inactivity and the lack of decision-making gave me an opportunity to take a fresh look at Lanning Square.

The two seventy-five-unit rental development ventures were located in a section of Lanning Square where crime and drug sales had been long-standing

problems. The other major early-stage development activity that had been contemplated was the construction of twenty-eight market-rate sales townhouses on cleared land in Lanning Square's northern tier, on the same block where the Walt Whitman House was located (known as the "Walt Whitman block"). Building subsidized rental housing in an area known for crime and drug problems did not seem to be the best way to introduce major development activity to Lanning Square-and this activity would displace twenty-six households. In addition, new townhouses on the Walt Whitman block would not be likely to sell unless the mostly-vacant parcels near that block were developed as well. However, the 2005 concept plan did not project construction activity to begin on these blocks until two years after the Whitman-block homes were completed.

I drove through the neighborhood many times. I got out of the car and walked down every street. After a time, I began to look carefully at the northwest quadrant of Lanning Square, the double row of square blocks, eight in all, that extended southward from Martin Luther King Boulevard along the neighborhood's western boundary. The predominant existing condition on these blocks was vacant land, with some scattered vacant houses and clusters of occupied houses. In 2005, CRA staff had anticipated that all of the houses would be demolished in order to assemble large tracts of land for new market-rate housing construction that would take place during later stages of redevelopment activity. However, closer examination of these houses suggested that another alternative might be feasible. The majority of the remaining occupied houses in this section of Lanning Square appeared to be structurally sound, with few or no signs of significant deterioration. In many cases, evidence of exterior improvements such as the installation of new doors and windows and the painting of wood trim, could be found. Many of the houses were owner-occupied, and none of the houses appeared to be linked to community problems such as graffiti, loitering, excessive noise, or trash accumulation.

Based on these observations and subsequent discussions at City Hall and in community meetings, I proposed a new approach to stabilizing and strengthening Lanning Square's residential base. The two previously-proposed seventy-five-unit rental development ventures would be withdrawn from consideration, and the associated displacement would not occur. Instead, the first phase of development would be the build-out of vacant land in the northwest quadrant with new sales and rental housing, both affordable and market-rate. Following redevelopment plan approval, the City would issue a Request for Proposals, inviting prospective developers to submit plans for producing a well-designed, diverse mix of housing types on the available cleared land. To support the selected developer, the City would

acquire all the vacant property on the northwest quadrant blocks, demolish vacant buildings that were infeasible for rehabilitation, convey the cleared sites to the developer, and provide grant and loan funding to help current homeowner-occupants repair and improve their properties. No one would be displaced. The City would work with the selected developer to secure the public financing and public-agency approvals needed to support the northwest quadrant build-out, which was anticipated to produce several hundred units of new housing.

The idea of building new construction around existing occupied housing and businesses in order to avoid displacement was not a new concept; the position of some housing advocates was that no other approach should be considered. Most of the for-profit developers who had previously done business exclusively in suburban or exurban areas and were beginning to explore urban development opportunities would not consider such an approach. An executive from one of these firms had told me that the firm's threshold requirement for embarking on a new venture was a cleared site large enough to support the development of at least 300 single-family homes. However, not all developers held steadfastly to this insistence on cleared blocks. Across the Delaware River, the Philadelphia Housing Authority had achieved success in developing the Martin Luther King HOPE VI venture through an approach that integrated new sales and rental housing, including market-rate units, with existing housing in a row house neighborhood. Examples of other housing development ventures that combined new construction with the preservation of existing occupied housing were not hard to find. In Camden, a City commitment to make available most of the acreage on eight contiguous city blocks and to make the northwest quadrant a priority for development funding would, in my view, be more than enough to compensate for the build-around requirement. Some developers would be unwilling to accommodate such an approach. But those developers that were most likely to deliver the best performance for Camden would consider it—they told me so. At the time, many urban neighborhood housing markets had been growing stronger, and few other cities in the region were in a position to offer a comparable opportunity for large-scale, mixed housing development.

The northwest quadrant approach was reviewed with Judge Davis, discussed in community meetings, presented in churches and at radio stations, and reviewed with those City Council members who were most interested in Lanning Square. No major objections were raised, and the northwest quadrant was identified as the City's top housing priority in Lanning Square during the continuation of my tenure in Camden.

The northwest quadrant blocks occupied nearly a third of Lanning Square's total acreage. Given the Cramer Hill experience and our recognition of post-*Kelo* realities, the goal of city staff with respect to the remaining area was to avoid or minimize displacement. One element of the redevelopment plan would be the designation of a portion of Lanning Square as a "conservation area" in which no displacement would take place. By the end of 2007, nearly every block in Lanning Square had been proposed for conservation area designation. In order to address the other two challenges associated with redevelopment planning in Lanning Square, the City would propose to displace a small number of residents and businesses on the remaining blocks and to make the case that there was no reasonable alternative to doing so.

Broadway/Boulevard Blocks

The place that provided the greatest opportunity to create a strong connection between institutional and non-institutional development in the core of Lanning Square was a two-block section of Broadway that extended south from the southwest corner of Broadway and Martin Luther King Boulevard. Based on communication with Cooper University Hospital, the CRA supported the acquisition of these blocks as part of an area designated in the plan as a "University and Support Zone." The blocks included a dozen storefronts on Broadway and a small number of apartments on upstairs floors. These properties appeared to be maintained in compliance with health and safety codes, although some were deteriorated and some of the ground-floor retail space in these buildings had been vacant for an extended period.

In 2007-2008, Cooper had a student intern and medical resident population of more than three hundred, anticipated to grow significantly as the new institutional facilities were completed. At the time when redevelopment planning was under way, only about 3 percent of this population, a group with demanding schedules that included long hours of work and frequent overnight shifts, lived in Camden. According to Cooper administrators, no comparable institution anywhere had such a low percentage of medical students and residents living in the city where the institution was based. After the Cooper expansion and the nearby UMDNJ medical school development had been completed, the lack of such housing would be a significant competitive disadvantage that would limit the ability of these institutions to attract medical students and health care professionals.

Proponents of eminent domain acquisition, and the associated displacement of residents and businesses on the west side of Broadway south of the Boulevard, argued that these actions were necessary because Camden needed housing for the

institutional workforce. The Broadway/Boulevard blocks were the locations with the best prospects for attracting these desired residents and creating a new identity for the city's core. The centrally located intersection of Broadway and Martin Luther King Boulevard was the most active crossroads in the city, with heavy auto traffic east and west and transit riders entering and departing buses and light rail cars at the Rand Transportation Center on the two northern corners of the intersection. The Broadway/Boulevard blocks were the sites that had the best potential to attract a private developer capable of producing high-quality housing with attractive ground-floor retail uses. Arguably, you could build rental housing on vacant land elsewhere in Lanning Square that would attract medical students and interns; but such a development would be several blocks away, reducing the benefits of creating a critical mass of activity-hospital, medical school, housing, and stores, in a concentrated area. If the Broadway/Boulevard blocks were left alone, the area would be largely a dead space at night; a fried chicken joint that was reported to be considering leasing vacant space at the vacant corner property would be the only sign of life after 6pm. Critical mass was essential to economic success, particularly in the fragmented city of Camden. The argument in support of eminent domain and displacement was economic development; but, in this instance, the rationale for eminent domain was strategic investment. It was totally unlike using eminent domain to acquire and pave a lake to please a Wal-Mart in Colorado. Should the opportunity to invest strategically for the benefit of Camden be constrained simply to honor a pre-existing use? Should the past dictate the future?

Opponents of the taking of the Broadway/Boulevard blocks argued that this situation was exactly like the attempted taking of the lake in Arvada. If the synergy between the hospital, the medical school, and housing and retail services for medical students and interns represented such a compelling opportunity for strategic investment, wouldn't private developers respond to this opportunity by acquiring available nearby property through negotiation and developing it for these uses? The very deteriorated Diamond Street corridor in Philadelphia west of Broad Street had become a strong student rental market half a dozen blocks west of the Temple University main campus. The shortage of on-campus housing and a year-by-year increase in student enrollment had stimulated a demand for rental apartments off-campus, and small entrepreneurs had rehabilitated row houses to accommodate this demand. Lanning Square's northwest quadrant, the area that was to be built out for high-quality mixed rental and sales housing, was much closer to Cooper Hospital than most of the student-tenanted West Diamond Street blocks were to the Temple campus. Marketable rental housing could be developed on available space in the mostly vacant northwest quadrant without displacing anyone, and this development

would contribute to the diversity of housing types that the City had identified as a goal for this subarea. By the time this housing was developed, owners on the Broadway/Boulevard blocks might realize the wisdom of upgrading their properties in order to attract more profitable Cooper-related housing and retail uses-or of selling their properties to developers who were ready to do so. This sequence of activity was consistent with the dynamics of the private real estate market. Eminent domain acquisition of the Broadway/Boulevard blocks was not a strategic investment-it was an accommodation to Cooper Hospital, just as the attempted Arvada lake-taking had been an accommodation to Wal-Mart. If the pre-existing uses on this block were not to be respected, what other pre-existing uses might also be sacrificed in the future, in the name of economic development and strategic investment?

My experience led me to side with those who supported the use of eminent domain to acquire the Broadway/Boulevard blocks. Unfortunately, the private real estate market did not function as smoothly as described in the preceding paragraph; what is more, the private real estate market in Camden was broken. Nothing less than a kick-start would achieve the level of investment and growth that the city desperately needed. In many instances, in Philadelphia and other cities, owners of deteriorated properties that were adjacent to or across the street from completed development ventures did not see the wisdom of upgrading or selling. Many of them retained ownership indefinitely, with the unrealistic expectation that a future buyer would make them rich. The properties remained unimproved; the blocks they occupied remained dead zones.

My thirteen months in Camden ended before I had the opportunity to pursue a related issue: the possibility of offering business owners and residents on the Broadway Boulevard blocks replacement retail space and housing at or near their current locations, in places that would have left them better off after relocation, consistent with the practices of organizations such as APM in Eastern North Philadelphia and EBDI in Baltimore. Could subsidized rental housing and subsidized retail space have been lined up for displaced residents and businesses in advance? The subsidy expense would have been substantial, but it would have been lower than the cost of defending against litigation comparable to that which had been brought against the proposed Cramer Hill development plan. I am not aware of whether this approach was attempted after I left, or whether it would have been feasible to do so.

Boulevard Transition Zone

One of the quietest places in the entire city of Camden was a rectangular-shaped area three blocks long and half a block wide that extended along the north side of Martin

Luther King Boulevard, just northwest of Lanning Square's Walt Whitman block. The area was maintained as a series of surface parking lots, with most of the spaces occupied by daytime parkers, many of whom worked at the adjacent Waterfront Technology Center. Most of this real estate was publicly-owned. If these parcels could be assembled and developed together, the lifeless transition zone between Lanning Square and downtown could be built out with well-designed retail stores, offices, apartments or condominiums, and structured parking. This site, if aggregated, would be a potentially strong prospect for a new supermarket; the location was easily walkable from Lanning Square and reasonably walkable from the more upscale Cooper Grant neighborhood two and a half blocks to the north.

No one was actively considering plans of this type for this section of the Boulevard. Because the area was located just across the street and to the west of the Lanning Square redevelopment area boundaries, the consideration of development opportunities for these parcels was outside the scope of the planning for Lanning Square. However, if this area were to become a higher priority (and, as a starting point, made the subject of a land-use plan and feasibility study), the resulting development would create a positive indentify for this lifeless stretch of the Boulevard and produce a zone of improvement extending from the Whitman block to the waterfront.

My assignment in Camden ended before I had time to advocate forcefully for this concept. The week before I left the CRA, I drove Judge Davis to this site and four others that I recommended he consider pursuing as future development opportunities. I discussed the idea briefly with state development agency staff, a few of the administrators in nearby institutions, and some of the private developers that had been active in the area; but my time ran out before I could organize, present, and advocate for my position. After decisions are made about the manner in which this area will be developed, the results will illustrate how to build out a transition zone to achieve the greatest potential value-or how to miss out on a potential opportunity.

Social Fabric

In 2001, when I began work at the Fels Institute of Government, Robert D. Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, was causing a stir among social scientists at Penn and elsewhere.⁴ The book stimulated classroom discussions and debates over Putnam's "dominant theme":

For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their

communities, but a few decades ago-silently, without warning-that tide reversed... Without at first noticing, we have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities over the last third of the century.⁵

Despite the attention that *Bowling Alone* generated on campus, I never heard the book mentioned by otherwise well-read people who, in government agencies and community-based organizations, were most active in neighborhood planning and development initiatives in Philadelphia and nearly a dozen other cities that I visited in connection with consulting projects during that time. One possible explanation: *Bowling Alone* had almost nothing to say about the fundamental ways in which the nation's economy had changed during the period with which Putnam is concerned and about the relationship between this economic change-the advances in technology, transportation, and communications that led to the steady erosion of the country's once-robust manufacturing sector-and associated changes in the structure of families and neighborhoods. It was not only that Putnam and his researchers had missed the forest for the trees; they were devoting nearly all their time to the study of one type of tree-say, paper birches-while overlooking or barely recognizing all the others.

One illustration of the relationship between the manufacturing economy and social interaction is provided in this description by the historian Sam Bass Warner, Jr. of Northeast Philadelphia industry during the 1930s:

Complementary habits characterized the life of the skilled factory workers of the northeast. The mill taught group work and discipline; unions, benefit associations, ethnic clubs, building and loan associations, and fraternal orders, continued these habits. The abundance of cheap housing in the district, the necessity to cope with the irregular hours of slack and busy seasons, and the job benefits of being close to shop gossip combined to give the social habits of the skilled worker a spatial concentration.⁶

Fifty years later, most of the textile mills and other factories to which this passage makes reference had been closed, dispersed, or downsized because the products they had manufactured were being made at lower cost in other countries and transported quickly and cost-effectively from these places to consumers in the United States. The resulting job loss caused an unprecedented depopulation of the "spatially concentrated" neighborhoods that had grown up around manufacturing industries. The construction of the Interstate highway system and post-World War Two federal mortgage financing programs facilitated spatial deconcentration on a regional basis.

Lanning Square was an extreme example of spatial deconcentration-the neighborhood was half vacant. A residential community in which groups of houses are separated by large tracts of vacant land is, to say the least, not a favorable environment for nurturing social capital, the focus of Putnam's book, which he characterizes as "civic virtue... embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations." Putnam adds, "A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital."⁷

Lanning Square's dearth of social capital-of a network of mutually supportive relationships-was accompanied by a high level of social need. In Lanning Square and Cooper Plaza, two adjacent redevelopment areas which were combined for the purposes of the human capital planning project that took place in 2007 and 2008, more than half the residents (56 percent) had incomes below poverty level, the unemployment rate was 16 percent, and fewer than half of the residents over twenty-five had received high school degrees. Neighborhood residents who participated in the numerous community meetings that took place during 2007 made it clear that they cared about Lanning Square and wanted to create a future for their families in the community. But the odds were against them in the existing environment. The need to nurture social capital and simultaneously create and expand resources to support the growth of human capital-the economic value that an individual creates for him-or herself through access to education, training, and supportive services-would be too great a barrier for many, if any, community members to overcome.

Judge Davis had recognized the need to address both social capital and human capital issues from the start, and he had emphasized the latter in his initial meeting with Governor Corzine. In Lanning Square, we had an opportunity to try to address both these issues. With funding support provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Ford Foundation, a nonprofit organization, Urban Strategies, Inc., worked in coordination with the Judge to design a human capital plan that would accompany the Lanning Square redevelopment plan.

Urban Strategies' approach was consistent with Judge Davis' views:

Healthy communities that nurture healthy families need safe housing, good schools, and a wide range of supportive services. These amenities are tied to a specific geographic area and therefore must be developed as part of a comprehensive, integrated planning and management approach, specific to that geographic area. Central to sustained implementation of a dynamic plan is resident participation and effective resident leadership.⁸

Prior to agreeing to an engagement in Camden, the St. Louis-based Urban Strategies had worked almost exclusively with McCormack Baron Salazar, a real estate development firm (also headquartered in St. Louis) that was nationally recognized for its success in completing well-designed mixed income housing ventures in locations that could be described as socially and economically challenged. Sandra Moore, the President of Urban Strategies, often introduced the organization by describing what Urban Strategies was not: not a developer, not a funding source, not a service provider. Urban Strategies' role was to work closely with community members to create a human capital plan—a framework for identifying and organizing the resources needed to ensure future success—that would subsequently be managed, financed, and implemented by others.

Moore had a law degree and a degree in Urban Planning, along with a wealth of experience in the nonprofit service sector and in government. Among other credentials, she had served as Director of the Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations and had been a member of the Governor's cabinet. Her state-government background was an excellent match for Camden, where state government buy-in was essential, in light of the state's central role in MRERA oversight and implementation.

Judge Davis responded positively to the opportunity to work with Urban Strategies. He and Moore established a good working relationship in no time. The Judge was a conservative member of the South Jersey establishment, but he understood that an activist approach was necessary in order to address the severe social problems that beset Camden. Moore was an activist, but her activism was informed by the conviction that nothing less than a genuine alliance of government, business, and neighborhood interests would produce a successful outcome in a place like Camden.

Urban Strategies' staff reviewed all of the important background information: the census data, the MRERA legislation, the redevelopment plans, the consultants' reports. With Judge Davis, Sandra Moore went to Trenton and met with state officials, joined on some occasions by representatives of the Casey and Ford foundations. Moore met with the leaders whose support was needed in order to make a human capital plan credible. She met with state and local elected officials, with Campbell's Soup executives, with business leaders, and with academic and health care institution administrators. She met with George Norcross—twice, I was told.

Moore also arranged for an Urban Strategies staff member, Tinesar Forrest, to come to Camden from St. Louis, live in an apartment a few blocks away from

Lanning Square for six months, and work full-time on organizing the human capital plan. In this instance, “organizing” meant creating a communications structure within a community that was almost entirely lacking in the kinds of social networks described in Putnam’s book. This challenge was made somewhat easier to address by the decision to make the combined Lanning Square and Cooper Plaza redevelopment areas the geography of the human capital plan. Many residents did not view these two areas as two separate neighborhoods and felt strongly that they had a stake in the future of Lanning Square, regardless of which side of Broadway they lived on. As a practical matter, this approach would make it possible for Lanning Square to benefit from the civic engagement structure that had taken shape in Cooper Plaza—the relationships between community residents, Cooper Hospital, and city government that had guided the organization and implementation of both institution- and government-sponsored development plans.

In support of the creation of a human capital plan, Urban Strategies completed a neighborhood-wide survey (with a response rate of 13 percent), conducted a total of sixty-eight one-on-one and group meetings with neighborhood residents and other community members; and held focus-group sessions with community members who represented critical areas of interest: senior citizens, male residents, small business owners, young adults, parents, youth, Cooper Hospital employees, and Spanish speakers.⁹

The community meetings, promoted through direct mailings and leafleting, were held in several locations around the neighborhood. Attendance at some heavily-promoted meetings was dismal; I once addressed an audience of six. As the spring and summer months passed, however, participation grew. By that time, it was possible to identify a core group of individuals who might not agree with everything the City proposed, but who wanted a redevelopment plan for the area to be approved and who were opposed to litigation that would block the implementation of redevelopment activities. Typically, the meetings focused on three topics: identifying problems and solutions, assigning a value to each solution relative to the others, and discussing the most practical way to move forward.

Tinesar Forrest of Urban Strategies managed most of the meetings, working in coordination with Donna Helmes of the CRA, who eventually devoted full-time attention to human capital planning. Sandra Moore flew in from St. Louis to participate in key meetings, at which she restated the goals of the planning process, described accomplishments to date, engaged community members in discussion and, when the discussion was over, worked out an agreement on the next steps to be taken.

Urban Strategies' approach was similar in some respects to that employed in community planning sessions in other cities. In one meeting, for example, participants "voted" to identify the most valued existing community facilities and service providers and to rank the most important community improvement priorities to be addressed. However, this approach differed from many others in two important respects. Moore and Forrest emphasized the need for community members to think pragmatically about how the priorities they identified would be funded and implemented. After a point, any agenda time devoted to "visioning" about the ideal future community would end and the discussion of realistic next steps would begin. In addition, while the community process was under way, Moore was communicating with government, business, institution, and foundation executives about the progress of the human capital planning initiative and discussing how available resources might be used to support implementation of the activities that would be named as priorities in the final plan.

Moore's approach was not a shakedown or a plea for charity; in the meetings in which I participated, her approach more closely resembled the presentation of a business proposition. The city and state are preparing to make an unprecedented investment in the revitalization of Lanning Square. This investment, if successful, will improve the physical environment, but will not have a transformative effect unless human capital needs are addressed as well. In seeking commitments of funding or service support, Moore tailored her presentation to focus on the kinds of program activities with which her audience was most familiar. For example, she spoke with Campbell Soup Company executives about the possibility of providing additional funding, through the company-affiliated charitable foundation, to support programs in Lanning Square that were similar to activities that the foundation was already funding. Moore also took care to avoid creating a zero-sum situation, in which a government, corporate, or foundation commitment to the human capital plan would reduce the level of funding or service support available to others. Urban Strategies' mission was to accumulate added value, not to deplete the existing resource base.

The draft human capital plan appended to the proposed Lanning Square redevelopment plan identified four priorities:

1. Rebuild and reopen Lanning Square Elementary School [a school that had been demolished several years earlier, after which plans for a new school had been delayed by state funding shortfalls] and establish an integrated community services center to serve the CPLS [Cooper Plaza Lanning Square] community.

2. Increase employment and educational opportunities for adults in the CPLS neighborhoods.
3. Improve community stability [through measures such as cleaning and greening vacant lots and providing home improvement financing to homeowner-occupants].
4. Increase real and perceived safety and security in the CPLS neighborhood.¹⁰

The plan included an itemized five-year implementation schedule and budget, with a first-year budget of \$2.6 million, to be funded through government, institutional, and foundation sources. If the human capital plan were to be fully implemented, current community residents would begin to benefit from the proposed activities before the first bricks-and-mortar development began. In addition, the publication of the plan represented a successful collaboration between the City and community, mediated by Urban Strategies. At the conclusion of the planning process, Sheila Roberts, a community member who had worked closely with Cooper Hospital in addressing Cooper Plaza redevelopment issues and had subsequently participated in the design of the Cooper Plaza Lanning Square human capital plan, said, “The city has heard the residents’ broad and deep concerns ... I am strongly convinced this has been a true collaboration.”¹¹

Outcomes

In June, the Planning Board passed a resolution declaring the Lanning Square area to be in need of redevelopment and approving the redevelopment plan that the Department of Development and Planning had drafted, with the draft human capital plan appended to the redevelopment plan document. The redevelopment plan was approved by City Council in July. In its final form, the redevelopment plan called for the taking of twelve properties on the Broadway/Boulevard blocks, as well as five other occupied properties elsewhere in the area.

Opponents of these measures testified at both hearings. Some were opposed to the taking of occupied properties, and others were opposed to the redevelopment-area designation as a whole, arguing that, if the redevelopment plan were to be approved, the City could choose at a later date to expand the list of “to be acquired” addresses as it saw fit, and take any properties located within the area. “We do not live in a blighted neighborhood,” the *Courier-Post* reported one resident as saying, “Why do we have to live in fear that we may be asked to move at any time in the next 25

years?”¹² “They can change their mind at any time,” a participant in the Planning Board meeting stated. A plan supporter, twenty-five-year old Sean Brown, accused the anti-redevelopment group of using “scare tactics” and said, “By the time I’m 50, I want to see a neighborhood that’s not filled with prostitutes, crumbling buildings and people shooting at night.”¹³

In July, Governor Corzine signed a school construction bill that provided \$42.4 million for the development of a new Lanning Square Elementary School, the top priority item in the human capital plan.

In August, two lawsuits were filed against the Lanning Square redevelopment plan, one by South Jersey Legal Services, on behalf of a group of residents and an organization called Lanning Square West Residents in Action, and the other by a regional retail chain that owned “to be acquired” properties on one of the Broadway/Boulevard blocks. The latter was described by the plaintiff as a “vibrant commercial district.”

Judge Davis expressed disappointment to a reporter. “Here we go again,” he said. “More litigation which will delay us. I have no idea how long, but litigation is astronomically expensive and it could bankrupt us. Financially, the city is in terrible shape.”¹⁴

The litigation would not delay the development of the UMDNJ medical school on the Broadway site; all of the properties on that block were already publicly owned, and no use of eminent domain was needed. The litigation had no effect on the Cooper Hospital expansion plans either; all Cooper-related development was taking place across the street on the east side of Broadway, in the Cooper Plaza redevelopment area, for which a redevelopment plan had been approved three years earlier.

I have no ability to assess the prospects for a successful defense against this litigation. However, I feel certain that the outcome of these actions will be based not on *Kelo*, but on technicalities—on the question of whether or not the court decides that the plan should be nullified based on perceived procedural flaws such as those that caused the defeat of the Cramer Hill, Bergen Square, and Waterfront South plans. Based on the City’s experience with prior litigation, the outcome of the Lanning Square actions could be based on nothing more than the personal perspective of the judge or judges who rule on this litigation. As described in the preceding chapter, the judge presiding over the Cramer Hill case determined that without a swearing-in of expert witnesses prior to their testimony before the Planning Board, the

redevelopment plan was initially flawed and that this flaw could not be remedied by swearing in these individuals after the fact; in a comparable Haddon Township case, however, another judge made the opposite determination. Because the minutiae of redevelopment planning procedure had, for the most part, not been scrutinized by courts pre-*Kelo*, precedents had not been set with regard to determinations about the significance of procedural actions, such as swearings-in, and rulings were being made on a case-by-case basis, sometimes without consistency.

In the meantime, the parties who had brought action against the City would be filing discovery motions seeking documentation that they would maintain was essential to presenting their case. The preparation of this documentation would be an extremely time-consuming activity for City and CRA staff members, who would need to extract material, dating back several years, from files in several departments. The documents would fill a stack of cardboard boxes. Management staff who would otherwise be working to advance revitalization activities in neighborhoods would be devoting a substantial amount of time to this and other litigation-related tasks and would continue to do so until the litigation had been resolved.

What To Make of Camden

In 2006, his first year as Governor, Jon Corzine had inherited a Camden recovery program that his administration had not designed and that he might not have supported had he been given the choice. The risks associated with MRERA had already become apparent and many of the MRERA financed activities with the biggest political payoff—the high-profile aquarium expansion and the institutional development ventures—had been started or completed during the McGreevey Administration.

Corzine's primary political frame of reference was the North Jersey region, and Camden was a South Jersey city. "He doesn't care about anything south of Montclair," I was told by a person with an insider perspective on New Jersey politics. That characterization may or may not have been accurate with respect to Corzine's personal views; what was more important was the political calculus. Even if Corzine cared passionately about Camden, the recovery plan provided him with meager political capital at best. The city was not going to be demonstrably more self-sufficient and less dependent on state aid by 2007, the end of the COO's five-year "rehabilitation term" (Corzine and the state legislature approved a five-year extension of the rehabilitation term in mid-2007 and made Judge Davis' appointment as COO permanent). The failure of the Cherokee proposal had been widely publicized during the months before he took office, and, with the exception of Baldwin's Run and other

HOPE VI projects, no successful large-scale neighborhood ventures had been completed or were in the works. In addition, Corzine's first year in office had been difficult enough. He had raised the sales tax to balance the state budget and was struggling to finance a property tax relief plan for New Jersey, where property taxes were the nation's highest. Little political capital remained available for use in Camden.

Corzine did not ignore Camden. I saw more than a little evidence of his administration's support for Judge Davis, for the Lanning Square proposal, and for other current and proposed revitalization activities. But from a purely political perspective—the perspective that one must employ, apart from personal feelings, if one is to be elected and re-elected—there is little value that Camden could have offered him, and the pitfalls associated with maintaining a strong state presence in the high-risk Camden political environment were potentially career-threatening.

I respected the leadership of Randy Primas and Arijit De to a greater degree than many others who had lived or worked in Camden during their tenure. They had to make their way in a politically charged environment, but their activities amounted to far more than serving as enablers of the political powers that be. Primas had leadership and management credentials that were relevant to Camden. Primas and De had tried in their own ways to make sense of the imperfect MRERA structure, which they did not have a hand in designing; and, to a significant degree, they had been successful. The aquarium and most of the institutional development ventures were completed or under way by the time they left. Most of the city's neighborhoods had City Council-approved redevelopment plans, and most of these plans called for no displacement. In Cramer Hill, it appeared that they had hoped to work out a sensible relocation and replacement housing plan—one that would include an offer of replacement housing within the community for any displaced resident who wanted to stay there—at the same time that the redevelopment plan design, review, and approval process was going on. They had apparently hoped that the participation of community representatives in the Request for Proposal process that had led to the selection of Cherokee, followed by the initial community review that had taken place before the press conference at which Governor McGreevey endorsed the Cherokee plan would serve as a sufficient base for a broader civic engagement process that would follow.

Even if this generous view of Primas and De's record were to be accepted, the reality was that the two of them had violated Rule Number One in the community development playbook: you must communicate with the community before taking

action. In a place such as Camden, the interaction that had taken place prior to the Cherokee announcement had been, to say the least, inadequate.

MRERA worked reasonably well as a \$175 million, bond-financed investment strategy. MRERA failed as a municipal reform plan, and this failure adversely affected the prospects for successful neighborhood revitalization. The core of this failure was a limitation that former Mayor Primas and Judge Davis had in common. In their own ways, each was well qualified to serve in a role comparable to that of a chairman of the board. Each knew how to deliver a presentation-in a board room or a church basement-how to articulate a policy, mediate a disagreement, and issue directives. But neither was qualified to be an operations manager, a person who could supervise the day-to-day functioning of municipal government, establish and monitor performance goals, recruit capable managers, and dismiss underachievers. That is to say, neither was qualified to be a chief operating officer in the literal sense of the term: the senior executive in charge of municipal operations.

The state aid that had been made available to Primas and Davis did not include funding for such a person, for an individual who, acting in accord with broad municipal reform goals, would overhaul city government. This person would demand reliable performance on a day-to-day and hour-to-hour basis, and, if performance standards were not met, this person would make heads roll. “You have to build up a body count,” of dismissed bureaucratic and political deadweight, I had been told years earlier by a consultant who had managed the reform of a number of failing public housing authorities during the 1980s. No one had been funded, recruited, and appointed to perform this task in Camden. ★

Months after leaving Camden City Hall, I was told a revealing anecdote by Alan Mallach, a New Jersey-based educator and consultant. In a conversation with a person he described as a “Trenton insider” in 2002, Mallach had expressed his hope that approval of the MRERA legislation would be followed by a national search to recruit the best-qualified municipal turnaround expert available. The insider looked at him in surprise, as if to say, “How could you be so hopelessly naive?” To those in the know, MRERA apparently had nothing to do with municipal reform.

Camden was a political hotbed, but the pervasiveness of politics was not the major impediment to progress in the city. There was no question that, at and after the turn of the century, no one could successfully make their way in the Camden political

★ Sean Closkey, then Executive Director of the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, had commented to me on this deficiency during an early stage of MRERA implementation.

sphere without the blessing of George Norcross, but Norcross was not the central problem. Norcross was viewed by many as autocratic, heavy-handed, and unethical, with a history of self-dealing and conflicts of interest-but he was not corrupt. Norcross backed candidates for elective office whose qualifications ranged from highly competent to lackluster, and the control he exerted over these politicians, informed by his personal worldview, kept them in check and stabilized a political environment that could otherwise have become chaotic. Under these circumstances, Norcross was a boon to the city; without him, Camden would likely have been in a far worse condition. Was a far worse condition imaginable? I could imagine it; consider the political condition of Detroit in 2008, the year of Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's decline and fall.

The real barrier to Camden's future success was the absence of a new generation of civic leadership: a critical mass of people who would participate in community affairs, serve on the School Board, the Planning Board, and other government bodies, advocate for sensible and progressive city and county government policies, and support qualified elected officials or run for election themselves. This generation of civic leadership is not going to grow and be nurtured in City Hall, or within most of the city's neighborhood organizations or religious congregations. The places with the greatest potential to contribute to the growth of civic leadership in Camden are the city's academic and health care institutions, based on their special characteristics described previously. These institutions are the city's largest workplaces, employing many Camden residents at all income levels. They are located at strategically important downtown and neighborhood sites, and they are the city's largest service providers. They know how to collaborate with businesses in the city and region and their wellbeing is less dependent on municipal government than is the case with most other businesses in Camden.

Despite the severe problems described in these two chapters about Camden, I feel optimistic about the city's prospects for future success, based in large part on the stronger role that institutional leaders are beginning to play in neighborhood revitalization. In 2007 and 2008, with grant support provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Greater Camden Partnership, the city's business leadership organization, worked in coordination with institutional administrators to determine the best ways to support the implementation of the Cooper Plaza Lanning Square human capital plan. The administrators' task force formed a closer working relationship with the Camden School District (for which a new superintendent was recruited from Philadelphia in 2007), and a special focus of planning during this period was the siting of institution-administered service programs at the Lanning

Square Elementary School. For example, Camden County College proposed that space in the school be made available as a site for the College's successful Community Gateway program, which provides adults with reading, writing, language, and math skills. A continuing integration of institution-sponsored support programs of this kind into the city's public school system could have a powerful positive impact on the city during the coming years.

To be genuinely successful in influencing positive change in Camden, however, the city's institutional leadership will have to become more assertive in their relationships with city, county, and state government. Because most institutional administrators are reluctant to become actively involved in the political realm on an individual level, they will have to determine how to work together most effectively to pursue their collective self-interest in other ways. Two of the most promising opportunities for doing so—improving public education and supporting the development of housing for students and employees at all income levels—are already being pursued as priorities. Camden's future depends in large part on the extent to which the city's institutions are able to play a stronger role in addressing these and other priorities, to create a healthy civic environment that will produce and sustain competent and reliable municipal governance.

¹ George Norcross, III, “Eds & Meds: How Educational and Medical Institutions are Revitalizing Their Communities,” Presentation to Urban Land Institute Philadelphia Region, June 19, 2008.

² Matt Katz, “What the Doc Ordered for Camden? New Cooper Wing Aims to Turn the City Around,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 11, 2008, National News section.

³ Redevelopment planning in Lanning Square and Cramer Hill during Primas and Dew’s tenure is described and assessed in Robert Lake et. al., “Civic Engagement in Camden, New Jersey: A Baseline Portrait” (New York: MDRC, September 2007).

⁴ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

⁵ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, p.27.

⁶ Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), 180-181.

⁷ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, p. 19.

⁸ Urban Strategies, Inc., “Our Approach,” at www.urbanstrategiesinc.org/approach.html.

⁹ Urban Strategies, Inc., “Cooper Lanning Human Capital Plan for the Cooper Plaza Lanning Square Neighborhoods, Camden New Jersey,” April 28, 2008, p. 4.

¹⁰ Urban Strategies, Inc., “Cooper Lanning Human Capital Plan for the Cooper Plaza Lanning Square Neighborhoods, Camden New Jersey,” April 28, 2008, p. 4.

¹¹ Jim Walsh, “Lanning Square Residents OK with Renewal,” *Courier-Post*, May 29, 2008, p. 1.

¹² Deborah Hirsch, “Lanning Square Project OK’d,” *Courier-Post*, July 23, 2008, p. 1.

¹³ Jim Walsh, “Lanning Square Plan Advances,” *Courier-Post*, June 13, 2008, p. 1.

¹⁴ Eileen Stilwell and Jim Walsh, “Another Camden project Hits Snag,” *Courier-Post*, August 23, 2008, p. 1.