



The Camden Parks and Open Space Plan

2020





Volunteers painting a mural at Pyne Poynt Park. © COURTESY OF THE CAMDEN COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENT; **FRONT COVER, TOP:** Opening of the Cooper's Poynt Family School Green Schoolyard. © ELYSE LEYENBERGER FOR THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND; **BOTTOM:** "City Invincible" art installation created by various local artists as part of the Connect the Lots initiative. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP; **BACK COVER:** A young boy blows a wish on a dandelion. © HANNAH LOZANO

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The Trust for Public Land creates
parks and protects land for people,
ensuring healthy, livable communities
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Visitors to Cooper's Poynt Waterfront Park take in the view of the Delaware River, the iconic Benjamin Franklin Bridge and the Philadelphia skyline. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

Preface

Acknowledgments

Over 500 people helped to create the Camden Parks and Open Space Plan, from community members who participated in workshops and focus groups to local public sector and nonprofit employees who guided our mapping and community engagement as Steering Committee and Technical Advisory Team members. This was a collaborative effort from start to finish, and it would not have been possible without the outpouring of community support. In addition to these community participants, the Camden Parks and Open Space Plan was made possible through the generous support of the Sidney and Sandy Brown Foundation.

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Parks and Open Space Plan Partnership

The Camden Parks and Open Space Plan came together through a partnership between The Trust for Public Land and Cooper's Ferry Partnership. Plan advisors from the Core Team included the City of Camden, Camden County and the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority. The Steering Committee supported community outreach and provided plan recommendations. The Plan content was informed by geospatial analysis and in depth community outreach.

CORE TEAM MEMBERS



STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Steering committee members included, but were not necessarily limited to, the following organizations:

American Littoral Society, American Water, Aspen Institute, Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, Camden City School District, Camden County Police Department, Camden Health and Athletic Association, Camden Lutheran Housing Inc., Camden Redevelopment Agency, Camden Special Services District, Campbell Soup Foundation, Center for Aquatic Sciences at Adventure Aquarium, Center for Environmental Transformation, Center for Family Services, Circuit Trails Coalition, Cooper Foundation, Cooper Grant Neighborhood Association, Cooper Lanning Civic Association, District Council Collaborative Board, Education Over Everything Foundation, Fairview Neighbors, Greater Philadelphia YMCA, Hopeworks, Lanning Square West Residents Association, Mastery Charter Schools, NJ Conservation Foundation, NJ Department of Environmental Protection, NJ Natural Lands Trust, NJ Tree Foundation, North Camden Little League, Parents for Great Camden Schools, Parkside Business and Community in Partnership, PowerCorps Camden, Project Little Warriors, Salvation Army, Sixers Youth Foundation, St. Joseph's Carpenter Society, Tri-State Transportation Campaign, Upstream Alliance, Urban Promise

Project Partners

THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to creating parks and protecting land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. Since 1972, The Trust for Public Land has helped protect more than three million acres in all 50 states.

COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP (CFP) is a Camden-based nonprofit community and economic development corporation that serves as a catalyst for the preservation and growth of a vibrant City of Camden. Since its founding in 1984, CFP has utilized strategic planning as the framework to implement initiatives to improve the quality of life for people in the City of Camden. CFP's holistic approach includes empowering residents to create, manage, and sustain their vision(s) for healthy, strong, and vibrant communities through resident-driven planning and working in partnership with government, institutional, and community stakeholders to fund and implement equitable programs, projects, and initiatives. Working with residents, stakeholders, and community-based organizations, CFP leverages technical expertise, process-oriented convening, and strong collaborative relationships to address the persistent challenges facing the City of Camden. CFP is currently managing park development and renovation projects and initiatives throughout the City of Camden.

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Sidney and Sandy Brown Foundation

The Sidney and Sandy Brown Foundation is proud to have inspired a wide variety of stakeholders to work together on a Parks and Open Space Plan for the City of Camden. We are confident that the spirit of partnership forged through collaboration on the plan will remain and grow so that we continue to build a stronger community for all of us to enjoy. We are committed to Camden and look forward to all that can be accomplished through combined efforts like these in the future.

– SIDNEY AND SANDY BROWN FOUNDATION

Message from the Trust for Public Land

A high quality public green space is uniquely powerful in its ability to advance a breadth of public priorities. In a given moment, a park or green schoolyard provides neighbors a place to connect and support each other, it cools the air, it cleans the water, it heals the mind. The Trust for Public Land is thrilled for the role this plan will serve in identifying why, how and where public, private, and nonprofit resources can best be concentrated to yield the greatest impact on climate, health and equity. The collective and coordinated efforts of diverse partners around park improvements in recent years has helped demonstrate the importance of strategic, targeted investments. We are thrilled to join Cooper's Ferry Partnership, the City and County of Camden, and many others in the creation of this plan, and to realizing the enormous potential that parks can serve in Camden's future. We are deeply grateful to the Sidney and Sandy Brown Foundation for their leadership support that made this work possible.

– OWEN FRANKLIN, STATE DIRECTOR, THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

Message from Cooper's Ferry Partnership

At Cooper's Ferry Partnership, we focus on community and economic development projects, programs and initiatives that benefit Camden residents. Recognizing the essential role that parks play in strengthening communities, we have planned and implemented park development and renovation projects throughout the City of Camden over the last decade. Our work is community-driven and collaborative in nature, and planning is a critical first step. We are thrilled to partner with The Trust for Public Land, City of Camden, Camden County, and Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority on the development of this plan, and are thankful to the Sidney and Sandy Brown Foundation for generously supporting this effort. We are proud of the community and data-driven plan we have created, and feel that it is representative of the needs and wants of Camden's diverse voices and formulates an equitable, inclusive, and implementable vision for the future of Camden's park system.

– KRIS KOLLURI, CEO AND PRESIDENT, COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

Message from the City of Camden

Over the last decade, the City of Camden has focused acutely on strengthening neighborhoods and improving the quality of life for its residents. By investing in our diverse neighborhoods, we have changed the City's trajectory. High-quality parks are a critical component in Camden's holistic revitalization strategy. Working with our tremendous public-private partners, non-profits, and community-based stakeholders in addition to building upon our collaborative efforts with agencies at the federal, state, county and local levels, Camden is building the exceptional park system that our residents deserve. When I signed on to the 10-Minute Walk movement more than two years ago, I committed to doing everything in my power to ensure that all Camden residents have safe, easy access to a high-quality park within a 10-minute walk of their home. This plan is the roadmap to achieving that goal, and my administration and I are eager to continue this rewarding work.

– THE HONORABLE FRANCISCO "FRANK" MORAN, MAYOR, CITY OF CAMDEN

Message from Camden County

Camden County is committed to improving the quality of life for its residents through park investment. Since the City of Camden is the center of life in Camden County, it's vitally important that the parks in the City are of a high quality and reflect the needs of the residents. The Camden Parks and Open Space Plan is an important step towards achieving this goal. From capital investments to long term maintenance, the County has a long history of supporting parks in the City of Camden. We know parks provide a place for residents to meet outside of their primary places of home and work. These places are extremely valuable to the community because they provide a haven for people to meet, creating a sense of place for thousands of users every day. Camden County is an enthusiastic supporter of this work because it combines a data-driven approach with authentic community engagement. We are excited to build on the momentum generated through the Camden Parks and Open Space Plan.

– COMMISSIONER JEFFREY L. NASH, CAMDEN COUNTY

Message from the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority

Thanks to the overwhelming support of the Camden County Freeholders and the Camden County Municipal Utilities' Board of Commissioners, the CCMUA is fully committed to improving water quality and working with the City of Camden to eliminate combined sewage flooding through an approach that aims to improve the environment and the community in a financially responsible way. This approach has led to the design and construction of dozens of green infrastructure projects and the creation of two waterfront parks in the City over the past eight years. As the CCMUA continues its work to address combined sewage flooding, it welcomes the opportunity to continue to partner with the City of Camden, the Camden County Parks Department, Cooper's Ferry Partnership and The Trust for Public Land to re-envision existing parks and design new ones that incorporate stormwater capture components. This report demonstrates the unique way that parks can help the City of Camden and the CCMUA meet its water quality and combined sewage flooding goals while meaningfully engaging the community.

– SCOTT SCHREIBER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAMDEN COUNTY MUNICIPAL UTILITIES AUTHORITY

Executive Summary



Camden's Trumpet Chic's perform at the 2018 Camden Night Gardens festival. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

In 2018 Camden Mayor Frank Moran committed to ensuring that all Camden residents have safe and easy access to a high quality park within a 10-minute walk of home by 2050. The Camden Parks and Open Space Plan creates a roadmap for how to achieve this goal. As the first Parks and Open Space plan for the City of Camden, the plan identifies opportunities to prioritize open space investment that will maximize community benefits while improving the urban environment.

Geographic information system analysis highlights climate, health and equity challenges that Camden faces today and will face in the future. Meanwhile, public health experts have demonstrated that parks can improve the social determinants of health by improving the public realm. Therefore, this plan sets out to prioritize park and open space investment targeted to meet these issues. Recognizing that parks are an effective tool only if they are well used and cared for by the community, this plan endeavors to understand what Camden residents need in their parks and how to encourage greater use, informed by a robust community engagement effort. The community priorities taken together with the geographic priorities form the objectives of the plan which are further defined through key strategies.

As they say, it takes a village. The Trust for Public Land and Cooper's Ferry Partnership collaborated on the development of this plan with a core group of partners from the City of Camden, Camden County Parks Department and the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority. We are thankful to the stakeholders who contributed time and good ideas to this effort and recognize that this plan would not have been possible without the early vision and leadership of Sidney and Sandy Brown.

Community Priorities

The Camden Parks and Open Space plan engaged nearly 500 residents and stakeholders through various in-person engagement methods, an online survey, and virtual meetings. Key findings include:

- Parks play a major role in supporting **social cohesion** in Camden, with 52 percent saying these use parks to hang out with friends or family. Community members identified more picnic

areas and places to cook as top priorities for making parks even better places to socialize.

- **Exercise/fitness** was the second most frequent park use. Residents listed the lack of restrooms and water fountains as the top barriers to being physically active in the park.
- Seventy-three percent of respondents reported having experienced flooding in Camden. Creating parks and **green infrastructure to mitigate local flooding** is a high priority for the community, with strong support for volunteer stewardship. Eighty-one percent of survey respondents said they would be willing to care for and maintain a tree or garden near their property.
- There is a need for **safe walking routes** to parks as a high percentage of residents travel to parks on foot.

Barriers to Park Use

While 70 percent of Camden residents reported using parks at least once a month, the numbers are not very high when compared to urban park use in other communities. What is striking is that 7 percent of people surveyed reported not using parks at all. To better understand the relatively low park use rate, we reviewed barriers to use:

- **PARK SAFETY.** Fifty-eight percent of online survey respondents said that a safer environment would cause them to increase their park use. Some Camden youth reported avoiding parks altogether and recreating on their school grounds or at home instead.
- **POOR QUALITY PARK AMENITIES.** Fifty-two percent of respondents support "better equipment, courts, and fields".
- **POOR PARK MAINTENANCE.** In listening sessions we learned that residents perceive poorly maintained parks as havens for unhealthy activities, thereby deterring legitimate park use.
- **DEFICIENT PARK PROGRAMMING.** The survey results were substantiated by listening sessions that reported a goal to hold more events in the parks. The top requests for programs and events included special events such as concerts in the park, festivals and movies; art events like theater, painting, and dance; and fitness classes such as aerobics or yoga.



Mayor Moran volunteers at the Pyne Poynt Park Clean Up Day. © COURTESY OF THE CAMDEN COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENT

Geographic Priorities

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis was crucial to identifying the areas within Camden with the greatest need for park and green infrastructure investment as defined by environmental, social, health and equity considerations. Because parks and open space provide so many interconnected benefits, we have created the Green + Healthy Camden Decision Support Tool, which is an interactive planning resources and a GIS analysis organized into the following objectives:

- **ABSORB.** Many homes and streets in Camden flood with rainwater and sewer system backup during heavy rainfalls. This analysis identifies the areas of flooding, the impervious surface cover and the contributing sewersheds that leads to combined sewage flooding in Camden.
- **COOL.** Soaring summer temperatures are the leading cause of climate related death in the county and this is no exception for Camden. This analysis identifies heat islands as well as tree canopy cover to help planners mitigate dangerous urban heat.
- **EQUITY.** Many Camden residents contend with multigenerational poverty, linguistic isolation, and multiple social vulnerabilities. We know that parks, when targeted to support underserved communities, can help to generate positive outcomes. This analysis identifies the socially vulnerable

neighborhoods in Camden to help achieve equity through park investment.

- **PROTECT.** Camden is a city surrounded by tidally influenced rivers. These rivers are predicted to rise with increased climate change. The Protect Analysis identifies areas where parks and open space can be a tool for minimizing coastal riverine flooding
- **ACCESS + PARK SIZE.** Camden residents have a high rate of access to parks, at 97 percent. However, the parks in Camden are smaller in area than other communities with only 7 percent of Camden's land area available for parks, as compared to 15 percent nationally.

Challenging Times

Access to the outdoors has become particularly important during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Social isolation was a growing public health challenge even before the pandemic, and that isolation has amplified during the pandemic. Parks have become the last bastion of public space where people can connect while physically distancing. With more and more time being spent in front of screens, the outdoors can be a restorative space, especially for children, who the CDC recommends should be getting an hour of physical activity every day. Outdoor play is a great way to build healthy habits early in life.

Implementation Objectives

The vision of creating a healthy livable Camden through high quality park investment will require persistence and collaboration. The plan outlines the objectives and strategies that emerged from community engagement, interviews with local stakeholders, guidance of the project's core team and steering committee and results of the analysis. Objectives are organized under the seven headings that spell out CAMDEN'S:

CLIMATE READY

Design parks to maximize climate resilience by targeting park development, tree planting, and cool pavement technologies in urban heat islands, undertaking a comprehensive riverine flood planning effort to safeguard flood vulnerable communities and increasing capacity to advance comprehensive stormwater management through green infrastructure.

AMENITIES FOR ALL

Increase high-demand park amenities by continuing to build partnerships with amenity providers, and creating typical designs and costs for features involving water to plug into parks.

MAINAINED

Improve park maintenance by increasing community capacity for stewardship, increasing public sector maintenance capacity, reducing litter and dumping and establishing greater coordination among park providers.

DIVERSE FUNDING

Increase park funding by obtaining federal, state and local funds to offset the City of Camden's capacity for funding. Prioritize advancement of the Camden County ballot measure for open space and increase private funding for Camden's parks.

ENGAGED COMMUNITY

Provide better information to community members through park signage and regular updates to park users. Increase collaboration between stakeholders by organizing regular meetings for Camden parks stakeholders.

NURTURED

Increase park programming by supporting and growing capacity of existing program providers, building new partnerships with program providers, designing parks to facilitate programming, streamlining the permitting process and improving event outreach.

SECURE

Create safer recreation environments by expanding Camden's green schoolyards, incorporating safety principles into all parks (such as limbing trees to create clear lines of sight) while ensuring that parks remain welcoming to all user types, and establishing regular community police presence.

Proudly emerging from the depths of adversity, Camden is clearly the City Invincible. The Camden Parks and Open Space Plan shows WHY, HOW and WHERE parks and open space can be a tool for climate smart, healthy growth for all communities in Camden, especially those most vulnerable. Let's work together to make the incredible potential for CAMDEN'S parks a reality.

SECTION 1

Introduction to the City of Camden



Baseball at Pyne Poynt Park. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

Situated just across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the heart of the nation's seventh-largest metropolitan statistical area (MSA) (Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington), Camden, New Jersey, is a small city of 9 square miles and 77,000 residents. For comparison sake, its neighbor to the west, Philadelphia, is 141 square miles and has nearly 1.6 million residents.

History

Camden was originally inhabited by members of the Lenni Lenape tribe. European settlers arrived in Camden in the 1600s. As neighboring Philadelphia grew, so did Camden, and a booming ferry business emerged over time. By the early part of the 20th century, Camden was the Silicon Valley of its day, an industrial hub of innovation, technology, and commerce. Corporate giants such as RCA, Campbell Soup, and the New York Shipbuilding Corporation called it home.

Construction of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge started in 1922. When it was completed, the bridge enabled a new link between Camden and Philadelphia with an expanding network of roads. The bridge was soon followed by the creation of Admiral Wilson Boulevard in the late 1920s, a highway bisecting Camden that connects the Ben Franklin Bridge to the Camden County suburbs. These events marked a shift in transportation methods and subsequently industry. People and goods no longer traveled primarily by river or rail but by vehicular means. At a regional level, this new car infrastructure offered greater connectivity, but on a local level, the location of jobs shifted away from communities. Locally, Sears-Roebuck was the first company to signal this shift by insisting that it locate along Admiral Wilson Boulevard instead of downtown.

Camden's peak year of industrialization was 1950, when workers filled over 45,000 manufacturing jobs.



123 AERIAL VIEW OF CAMDEN, N. J., SHOWING CAMDEN-PHILADELPHIA BRIDGE

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6A-H1092

Historic depiction of the Camden Waterfront. © COURTESY OF DVRBS.COM

RCA had 23 of its 25 manufacturing facilities in downtown Camden, totaling 20,000 jobs in sales, manufacturing, and offices. For RCA's national sales force competition, the top prize for sales was a free weekend trip to downtown Camden, New Jersey. A pioneer in the field of technology, Camden was the birthplace of numerous transformative innovations, including the recording studio in 1907; the facsimile system for the U.S. Navy in 1934; the factory installed automobile radio in 1936; TV tube projection in 1938; the electron microscope in 1940; the TV receiver in 1946; the baby monitor in 1953; and communications on the moon in 1969.

During the second half of the 20th century, Camden experienced an extended period of decline as a result of shifting technologies and suburbanization. What was once a vibrant center of industry, commerce, and arts and culture, became characterized by population decline, industry loss, failing infrastructure, a degrading environment, public health challenges, and a lack of economic opportunity.

Current Context

Since the 1950s, Camden's population has steadily declined from its peak of 125,000 to 73,973 in 2018. Today, Camden is home to a predominantly young, poor, and minority population. In this aging urban center, 50 percent of the population identifies as Hispanic and 42 percent as African American. Over 35 percent of Camden residents live below the poverty line, which far exceeds the statewide poverty level of 8.7 percent. Moreover, vulnerable populations, including youth (individuals under 25), make up nearly half (47 percent) of the city's population.

Lack of access to healthy foods, safe places for physical activity, and affordable health prevention/treatment services in Camden results in devastating consequences for residents. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) County Health Rankings and Roadmaps reveal that, of a total of 21 New Jersey counties, Camden County ranks 19th in quality of life; 18th in health behaviors; and 17th in physical environment, health outcomes, and length of life. The RWJF 2010 Rutgers Center for State Health Policy Study reported that 35–50 percent of children residing in 7 out of 10

neighborhoods that were studied in Camden were overweight or obese. Research shows that the environments in which we live directly affect the foods we eat and how much physical activity we get. Unfortunately, the health of Camden residents impairs the ability of this already marginalized population to succeed.

Furthermore, residents of Camden live immersed in some the nation's worst environmental conditions. Exposure arises on all fronts in Camden, which scores at or above the 90th percentile in all exposure pathways and scoring between the 95th and 99th percentiles for wastewater discharges, superfund sites, lead paint, traffic proximity, risk management plans, and multiple air contaminant categories.¹ One of Camden's most significant environmental burdens is its overburdened and obsolete combined sewer system, which leads to localized wastewater flooding and overflows into nearby waterways during periods of heavy rain.

As in any historic city, the pipes that convey stormwater during rain events also convey sewage from homes to the wastewater treatment plant. These pipes were designed before cars dominated the environment, so planners did not anticipate the acreage of impervious surfaces (i.e., paved surfaces) that covers Camden today. During a medium or large storm event, the pipes cannot handle the flow of stormwater. Thus, it mixes with sewage, which in turn backs up into the streets and some homes of Camden residents.

Nevertheless, Camden is nothing if not resilient, and the city is bouncing back, characterized as a "symbol of promise for the nation" by President Obama during his 2015 visit. Buoyed by strong and stable leadership, passionate and diverse residents, a multitude of high-quality education and health institutions, a favorable business climate, and a strategic location, Camden is rising and its momentum is palpable.

Camden today is in the midst of a \$2.5 billion development boom. Spurred by a state tax incentive program, companies have quickly made a home in Camden, bringing a new population of employees to the city and employment opportunities to residents. This commercial development boom has been a great complement to the investments by Camden's education and medical institutions that have been a driver of Camden's recovery for over a decade.

The city's transformation over the last decade is summarized in the following excerpt from the 2019 report *The Positive Impacts of Investments in Camden, NJ on Social Determinants of Health*, commissioned by the Rowan University/Rutgers-Camden Board of Governors:

After 50 years of social and economic decline, Camden is experiencing a renaissance. The foundation of this turnaround is the partnerships and commitment between state and local governmental entities, business leaders and community stakeholders to develop and implement a holistic strategy focused on improving the city's fundamental systems. Public safety, education, and neighborhood infrastructure are driving outside investments and interest in Camden. Private investments are building on foundational improvements driven by the public sector. Camden is seeing marked improvements in the economic, health, educational, and social wellbeing of its residents for the first time in half a century...

Improved together, fiscal health, public safety, and K-12 education became the building blocks of Camden's economic resurgence. This resurgence is occurring on a scale unseen in a century. Through the whole city strategy, Camden's comeback was designed to be, and is functioning as, a self-sustaining process... These investments, policy initiatives, and programs have driven improvements in the quality of life of every Camden resident.²

As referenced in this report, public safety has improved dramatically over the last eight years, contributing to an enhanced quality of life for city residents. Since the Camden County Police Department replaced the challenged Camden City Police Department in 2012, crime rates have fallen dramatically. In total, the city has experienced a 52 percent decrease in violent crime and a 55 percent decrease in nonviolent crime. In early 2020, Camden made national news as a model for effective community policing in minority-majority cities. As reported by the *New York Times* Editorial Board on June 1, 2020, "reforms can happen right now, as departments around the country have shown. And when they do, the police and citizens begin to see one another as collaborators rather than antagonists. In Camden, N.J., where the policy recently

adopted some innovative reforms, officers marched alongside protesters."³

Park System and the 10-Minute Walk Campaign

Over the last decade, the City of Camden has focused on strengthening neighborhoods and improving the quality of life for its residents. By investing in the city's diverse neighborhoods, the City of Camden plans to shift its own trajectory. Camden is proud of its ability to provide a relatively extensive neighborhood park system to city residents despite the challenges it faces. According to The Trust for Public Land's ParkServe database, 97 percent of Camden residents are within a 10-minute walk of a park, compared to the national average of 54 percent.

While the data highlight the relative prevalence of parks in the city, many of these parks are in deteriorated condition, a fact that the City is eager to address. In January 2018, Camden Mayor Francisco "Frank" Moran, a former county parks director and self-described park lover, endorsed the 10-Minute Walk Campaign, a national movement spearheaded by the National Recreation and Park Association, The Trust for Public Land, and the Urban Land Institute to ensure that all residents have safe, easy access to a high-quality park within a 10-minute walk of home by 2050. Subsequently, Camden became part of the first cohort of 10-Minute Walk technical assistance grantees, providing additional support for the Camden Parks and Open Space Plan.

Owing to budgetary constraints, the City of Camden does not have a stand-alone parks department. Rather, parks are maintained by the City's Department of Public Works – it is challenged, given available resources, to maintain the entire park system. Permitting, events, and programming of city parks are managed separately by the Department of Human Services.

The city of Camden is also home to several parks owned and operated by Camden County and the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority (CCMUA). Several other partners are also heavily involved in park planning, development, programming, maintenance, and operations, including but not limited to Cooper's Ferry Partnership, the Camden Special



Pierce St. in Cramer Hill flooded with wastewater. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

Services District, PowerCorps Camden, The Trust for Public Land, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

WATERFRONT PARKS

Camden is also a critical connection within the Circuit Trails, Greater Philadelphia's vast regional network of hundreds of miles of multiuse trails, connecting directly to Philadelphia via the Ben Franklin Bridge's multipurpose walkway. Much of Camden's Circuit Trails system, both built and planned, is located along the city's 14 miles of waterfront. The city is bounded on three sides by the Delaware River, the Cooper River, and Newton Creek. Most of its waterfront property was at one point industrial, and only a fraction of it is currently accessible to residents.

Although some waterfront industry remains today, Camden is also home to large swaths of vacant, often contaminated, underutilized, misused, or poorly used waterfront lands. Today, as Camden experiences a resurgence, the city is once again looking toward the river, creating and implementing plans for connected, accessible, inclusive, mixed-use waterfronts, leveraging one of the city's greatest assets for the benefit of all residents.

In the last five years, five new waterfront parks have opened, and several more are in the pipeline, including the 62-acre Cramer Hill Waterfront Park, a nearly \$80 million landfill closure and park development project currently under construction on the Delaware River Backchannel that was funded

by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. The monumental project is slated for a September 2021 opening, and the park is poised to become a unique and ecologically significant resource and destination within the region. In addition, a homegrown movement has taken shape over the last five years to explore Camden's serene waterways by kayak and canoe, increasing demand for waterfront park infrastructure such as nonmotorized boat launches.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Significant investments have also recently been made in Camden's network of neighborhood parks, which are vital assets that have been historically underfunded as a result of the City's severe structural deficit and limited budget. Deferred maintenance has limited many parks' usability, and illicit activities have filled the void, further exacerbating the poor condition of many neighborhood parks. As a result, many families travel outside their neighborhood or outside the city to visit parks or do not regularly visit parks at all. By investing further in neighborhood parks, we strengthen communities. Parks have been shown to improve both physical and mental health outcomes, decrease crime, provide economic benefits, increase neighborhood pride, and generally improve quality of life. They are essential infrastructure, and all Camden residents deserve to have access to one. In the last decade, over \$15 million has been invested in building and upgrading neighborhood parks, and another \$15 million is expected to be invested over the next five years.

Green Infrastructure and Stormwater Management

Camden is plagued by severe stormwater management issues that adversely affect the quality of life of its residents and the water quality of adjoining urban waterways. As a result of Camden's aging and over-taxed combined sewer system, a one-inch rainstorm can leave major roads impassable, turn parking lots into stagnant lakes, and send sewage into parks, homes, and waterways. Not only is this a nuisance, it is a public health crisis that degrades the quality of life of Camden's residents and negatively affects the city's economic viability and environmental quality. Camden residents are routinely affected by Camden's overtaxed combined sewer system, walking through sewage to work or school, bailing wastewater out of basements, and canceling Little League games due to flooded fields.

To combat this crisis, in 2011 a coalition of six entities – Cooper's Ferry Partnership (CFP), the City of Camden, Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority (CCMUA), Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) Water Resources Program, New Jersey Tree Foundation (NJTF), and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) – created the Camden Stormwater Management and Resource Training (SMART) initiative. Camden SMART is a community-driven movement that tackles Camden's water-related challenges, including water quality and stormwater management, through the development of green infrastructure and stormwater management projects and programs. To date, Camden SMART has constructed over 50 green infrastructure projects throughout the city of Camden, which capture, treat, and infiltrate over 62 million gallons of stormwater each year that would otherwise have contributed to overflows of the combined sewer system into Camden's streets, parks, homes, and waterways. Camden SMART also distributes rain barrels to Camden residents, plants trees, and hosts events and workshops.

Camden SMART sparked the creation of and was subsequently incorporated into the Camden Collaborative Initiative (CCI), a solutions-oriented partnership among governmental, nonprofit, private, and community agencies that spearhead innovative, cross-disciplinary approaches to tackling Camden's

environmental issues. Founded in 2013, the CCI began as a partnership comprising the City of Camden, Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority (CCMUA), New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Cooper's Ferry Partnership. Since its creation, the CCI has connected with more than 80 educational, environmental, and health agencies. It has also recruited thought leaders from diverse backgrounds to form multiple working groups that tackle the health and environmental issues that most affect the daily lives of residents. In addition to addressing water-related issues, the CCI convenes stakeholders to tackle issues related to air quality, waste and recycling, land use, and food access. Under the CCI, the work of Camden SMART was expanded to address water equity. With support from the US Water Alliance, Camden's Water Equity Taskforce created The Water Equity Roadmap for Camden.

In addition, the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority (CCMUA) is currently developing the City's Long Term Control Plan with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. The goal of the plan is to reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs) in the Delaware River as well as in the Cooper River and Newton Creek. The Long Term Control Plan, which is expected to be released late in 2020, will identify the role green infrastructure will play in reducing CSOs and provide systems to advance regulatory compliance. Stakeholders anticipate a significant increase in the need for collaboration in planning, design, and green stormwater infrastructure maintenance when the plan is adopted.

These efforts, and others throughout the region, have made great progress in making the Delaware River a cleaner body of water. In fact, in 2020 the Delaware River was awarded the River of the Year by American Rivers. Despite great progress, however, the Delaware River still receives CSOs from Camden, Philadelphia and upstream sources.

SECTION 2

The Camden Parks Plan Approach



Residents designing the Dominick Andujar Park during an outreach event. © DANIELLE DENK FOR THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

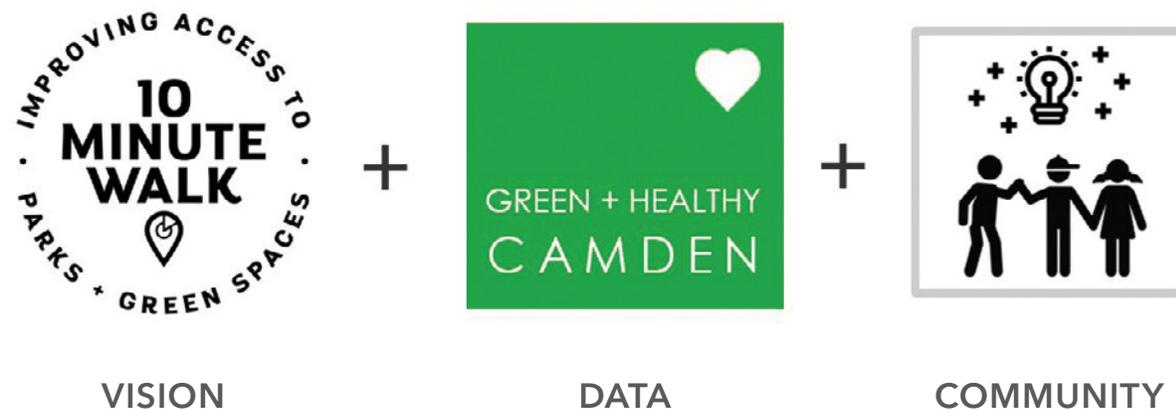


FIGURE 1. Model of the Camden Parks and Open Space Plan approach.

The Camden Parks and Open Space Plan is an effort to create a shared vision for building stronger, happier, more resilient communities through parks. The plan incorporates scientific data, technical analysis, and community engagement results to answer key questions about the people, parks, and environment in the city of Camden (see Figure 1).

Community Engagement

Community engagement was a key component of the Camden Parks Plan process. Only by hearing

directly from community members could the planning team understand barriers to park use and priorities for the area’s parks. In order to hear from as many residents as possible, the project team employed a variety of in-person (see Table 1) and remote engagement strategies. The plan also draws on community engagement results from the Aspen Institute’s State of Play study, which engaged Camden students in an online survey in early 2019. For a full discussion of community engagement results, see Section 4.

TABLE 1. IN-PERSON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

Event	Date	Type	Approximate number of people engaged
Cooper’s Poynt Holiday Gala	12/12/19	Speak-out	30
Roots to Prevention Partnership Meeting	12/16/19	Speak-out	30
City of Camden Teddy’s Toys for Camden Kids	12/17/19	Speak-out	50
Lanning Square West Residents Association	2/3/20	Listening sessions	15
Mastery High School teacher conferences	2/5/20	Speak-out	20
North Camden Stakeholders Meeting	2/13/20	Listening sessions	20
Cooper Grant Neighborhood Association meeting	2/24/20	Listening sessions	15
Parkside Business and Community in Partnership Community Meeting	2/26/20	Listening sessions	40
St. Joseph’s Carpenter Society Community Meeting	2/27/20	Listening sessions	15
Youth Focus Group with PowerCorps and Mastery High School	2/27/20	Focus group	30

SPEAK-OUTS

Speak-outs involved interactive tabling at scheduled community events and were conducted at four public events, including the City of Camden's Teddy's Toys for Camden Kids holiday celebration, Mastery teacher conferences, Cooper's Poynt Holiday Gala, and the Roots to Prevention meeting. Speak-outs reached 15 to 50 people at each event. They allowed the planning team to meet community members, share the project with them, and get input from residents who may be unlikely to attend other events or participate in the survey.

LISTENING SESSIONS

Listening sessions involved planning team members attending existing meetings throughout Camden. The planning team generally requested a small portion of the agenda to facilitate a discussion among attendees. Six listening sessions were conducted at meetings of the Lanning Square West Residents Association, North Camden Stakeholders, St. Joseph's Carpenter Society, Parkside Business and Community in Partnership, the Cooper Grant Neighborhood Association and the Camden Collaborative Initiative. Listening sessions were held at different locations throughout Camden to maximize the racial, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity of voices and the project's reach. Roughly 100 community members participated in listening sessions. For detailed listening session notes, see Appendix 3.

FOCUS GROUP

In February 2020, a youth focus group was carried out with PowerCorps and Mastery High School students. Participants discussed their perceptions of Camden parks, barriers to use, and ideas for improvement. Additional focus groups that were planned to engage seniors, individuals involved in park programming, and youth sports coaches had to be canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For detailed focus group notes, see Appendix 3.

ONLINE SURVEY

The online survey allowed residents to share thoughts about current parks in the area and where to focus future improvements. The survey was available in English and Spanish from December 2019 through the



PowerCorps Camden members and Mastery High School students weigh in on priorities for park development in Camden. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

end of March 2020. It received 204 responses. Outreach occurred over social media and through the planning team's distribution of hard-copy surveys at speak-outs and listening sessions. For detailed online survey results, see Appendix 3.

Stakeholder Engagement

STEERING COMMITTEE

Over 50 local experts participated in the project's Steering Committee. This group was tasked with advising on engagement strategies and reviewing preliminary results. The Steering Committee also provided guidance on the project's approach and recommendations. Three in-person Steering Committee meetings were held over the course of the project. Specific Steering Committee responsibilities included framing the project's overall approach, assisting with community input, helping to build public support, and developing implementation strategies. Steering Committee participants represented the public, private, nonprofit, community-based, institutional, and philanthropic sectors. For a full list of Steering Committee members, see Appendix 4.

INTERVIEWS

Five community leaders and key stakeholders participated in interviews for the Camden Parks Plan. Input from interviews helped inform other community engagement efforts and provided important context throughout the planning process. The interviews covered a range of topics relating to parks, health, equity, the arts, and other community issues.



Camden youth designing their dream park at the City's annual holiday event.
© COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

Mapping and GIS

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) serve an integral role in the Camden Parks Plan. GIS analysis was crucial to identifying the areas within the study area with the greatest need for park and green infrastructure investment. The plan's GIS analysis was organized into the following mapping topics, each of which is discussed in more detail in Section 3:

- **EQUITY.** Supporting communities with historic under-investment
- **ABSORB.** Addressing stormwater flooding challenges
- **PROTECT.** Minimizing coastal and riverine flooding
- **COOL.** Mitigating urban heat islands

Many datasets were collected for each mapping topic. These datasets were weighted based on their importance and then “stacked” to create a topic-specific map. These topic area maps were “stacked” to create overall recommendations about the areas with the greatest need in an Overall Results Map shown in Section 4. For a detailed list of the GIS data used and analysis methods, see Appendix 1.

The process for building the Green + Healthy Camden decision support tool was guided by a group of local experts who served as a Technical Advisory Team (TAT). Through webinars and in-person meetings, the TAT guided the analysis by helping to (1) compile a list of relevant criteria to map, (2) collect the best available data, (3) review results to ensure that they accurately reflect on-the-ground realities, (4) prioritize relative criteria for Camden, and (5) become trained on how to use the tool for their own efforts.

In December 2019, the planning team celebrated the release of Green + Healthy Camden and then kicked off the Parks Planning Process to build on the results.

THE DECISION SUPPORT TOOL

As noted above, in addition to the static PDF maps that are available in this report (see Section 3. Mapping Results), all Camden Parks Plan GIS data and the Green + Healthy Camden Decision Support Tool are available online. In addition to viewing the data, users are able to locate potential parks based on individual priorities, sketch possible projects, and measure their likely benefits. These decision support tools have become a consistent feature in The Trust for Public Land's planning projects, and several real-world examples of how these tools can be used already exist.

- **PLANNING PROJECTS.** In Los Angeles, the decision support tool is being used to inform the general plan and to examine socioeconomic vulnerability and its overlap with urban heat island impacts. In New Orleans, partners are using the decision support tool to site campus projects and create a strong connection between health and equity.
- **PRIORITIZING PROJECTS.** The decision support tool can help find high-priority lands for conservation work and protecting open space. In New Mexico, Bernalillo County has adopted a decision support tool as part of the planning process for acquiring lands for open space. Each proposed acquisition has to meet certain community-determined criteria to move forward.
- **FUNDING PROJECTS.** In New Orleans, the Sewer Authority uses the decision support tool to create requirements for requests for proposals. In other cases, the tool can provide organizations seeking funding a quick way to gather the necessary information for compelling grant applications.
- **DEMOCRATIZING DATA.** The decision support tool helps democratize data – especially for small organizations that do not have in-house GIS capabilities. In Los Angeles, the small nonprofit From Lot to Spot uses a decision support tool to identify the best places to turn vacant lots into parks.

The Camden Parks Plan and the Green + Healthy Camden Decision Support Tool and user guide can be accessed at http://web.tplgis.org/camden_csc.

SECTION 3

Mapping Results



Mapping key resources, hazards, and demographic factors was a fundamental part of the Camden Parks Plan process. To determine the highest-priority areas for park or green infrastructure investment, the planning team employed Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to map the most critical datasets for determining park need. For more on this, see Section 2.

The project’s GIS analysis was organized into the following mapping topics:

- **EQUITY.** Supporting communities with historic under-investment
- **ABSORB.** Addressing stormwater flooding challenges
- **PROTECT.** Minimizing coastal and riverine flooding
- **COOL.** Mitigating urban heat islands

In this section, each of these mapping topics is explained along with the resulting topic-specific map. Although these specific mapping topic results were combined to create one Overall Priorities Map (see Figure 2), the results of each topic are also useful independently, as they are associated with particular interventions. The Cool Map indicates where to focus urban tree planting to reduce heat islands. The Absorb Map and the Protect Map both relate to flooding. While the Absorb Map helps to prioritize areas for



Training of the Green + Healthy Camden Decision Support Tool.
© DANIELLE DENK FOR THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

green infrastructure to manage stormwater flooding, the Protect Map prioritizes areas that could be preserved to minimize riverine flooding. The Equity Map shows where there are underserved populations who may have greater need for the services provided by parks.

This process was guided by a group of local experts serving on a Technical Advisory Team (TAT). Through webinars and in-person meetings, the TAT guided the analysis by helping to (1) compile a list of relevant criteria to map, (2) collect the best available data, and (3) review results to ensure that they accurately reflect on-the-ground realities. This mapping process was iterative, with regular review from the advisory team, followed by revisions based on its input. A list of criteria was generated at the TAT kickoff meeting, during which criteria were added and removed based on data availability and the continued input from the TAT. As the analysis progressed, the TAT changed from meeting as an entire group to smaller topic-specific subcommittees composed of experts in that field.

Detailed GIS metadata with descriptions of how criteria were categorized as “Moderate,” “High,” or “Very High” are available through the Green + Healthy Camden mapping portal. The portal also hosts the project’s decision support tool, which allows users to view the project’s GIS analysis results in an interactive setting, sketch potential projects, run queries, generate parcel reports, and measure their impacts.

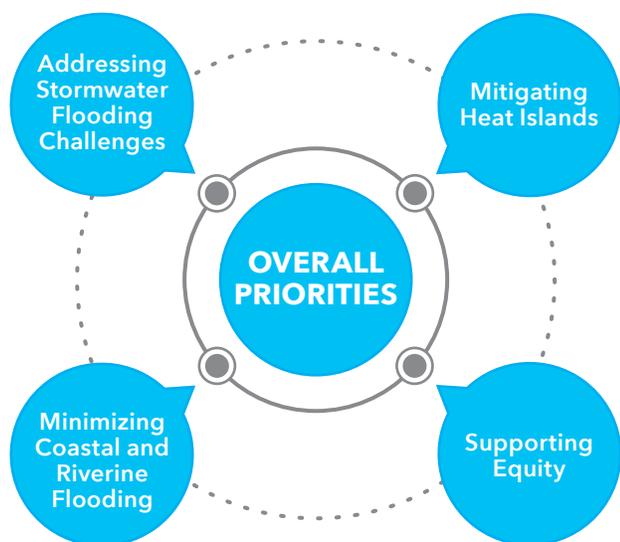


FIGURE 2. The project mapping framework offers a holistic view of park and green infrastructure investment need by incorporating data from varied topics into a single analysis.



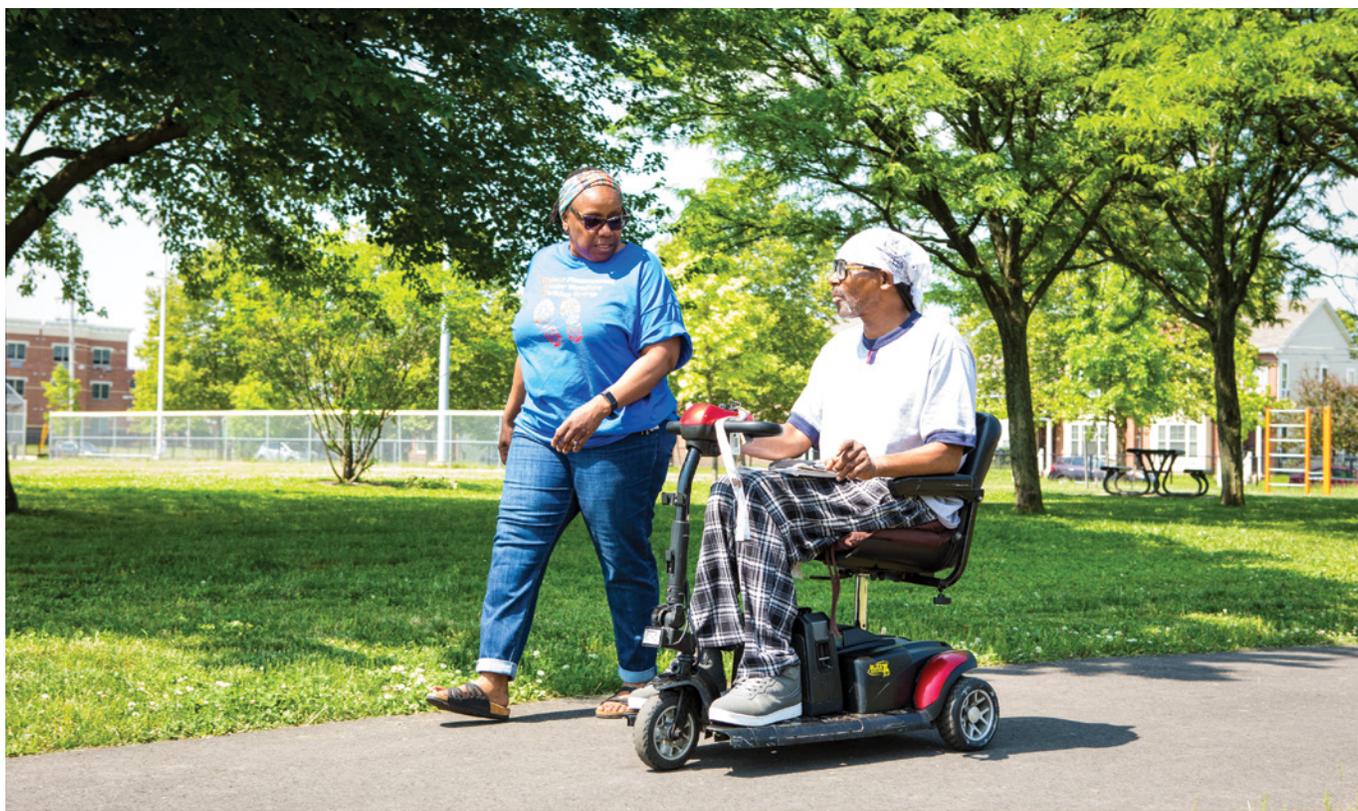
Students enjoy their Green Schoolyard, 1 of 200 completed by the Trust for Public Land in New York City. © TIMOTHY SCHENCK FOR THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

Equity

Equity is a crucial consideration in park and green infrastructure planning. Communities of color, communities of poverty, and communities with historic marginalization may have the greatest need for the services provided by parks. They may also have the most limited ability to travel long distances to access these services or to pay to use private recreational facilities. Likewise, disadvantaged and underserved communities are often hurt first and worst by the impacts of climate change. In these communities, climate change can be a new and complicating environmental challenge stacked on top a history of pollution, disinvestment, and discrimination. Without action, climate change will dramatically accelerate these inequities, exacerbating the injustices present in urban environments today. Delivering multi-benefit parks and green infrastructure can help redress some of these systemic inequities in cities. Figure 3, The Equity Priorities Map highlights areas with a higher density of underserved and disadvantaged populations. It was created by combining the following Equity criteria:

- Renters
- Low-income households
- Disability
- Linguistic isolation
- Children under five
- Seniors
- Single-parent households
- Unemployment
- Households without a vehicle

The largest concentrations of very high priority areas occur in the Pyne Poynt section of the North Camden neighborhood, the Marlton section of the East Camden neighborhood, and the Morgan Village neighborhood. All three neighborhoods contain large high or very high priority areas in all nine of the equity criteria, with only very slight exceptions (e.g., most of Marlton has a relatively low concentration of children under five).



New accessible walking path. © JENNA STAMM FOR TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

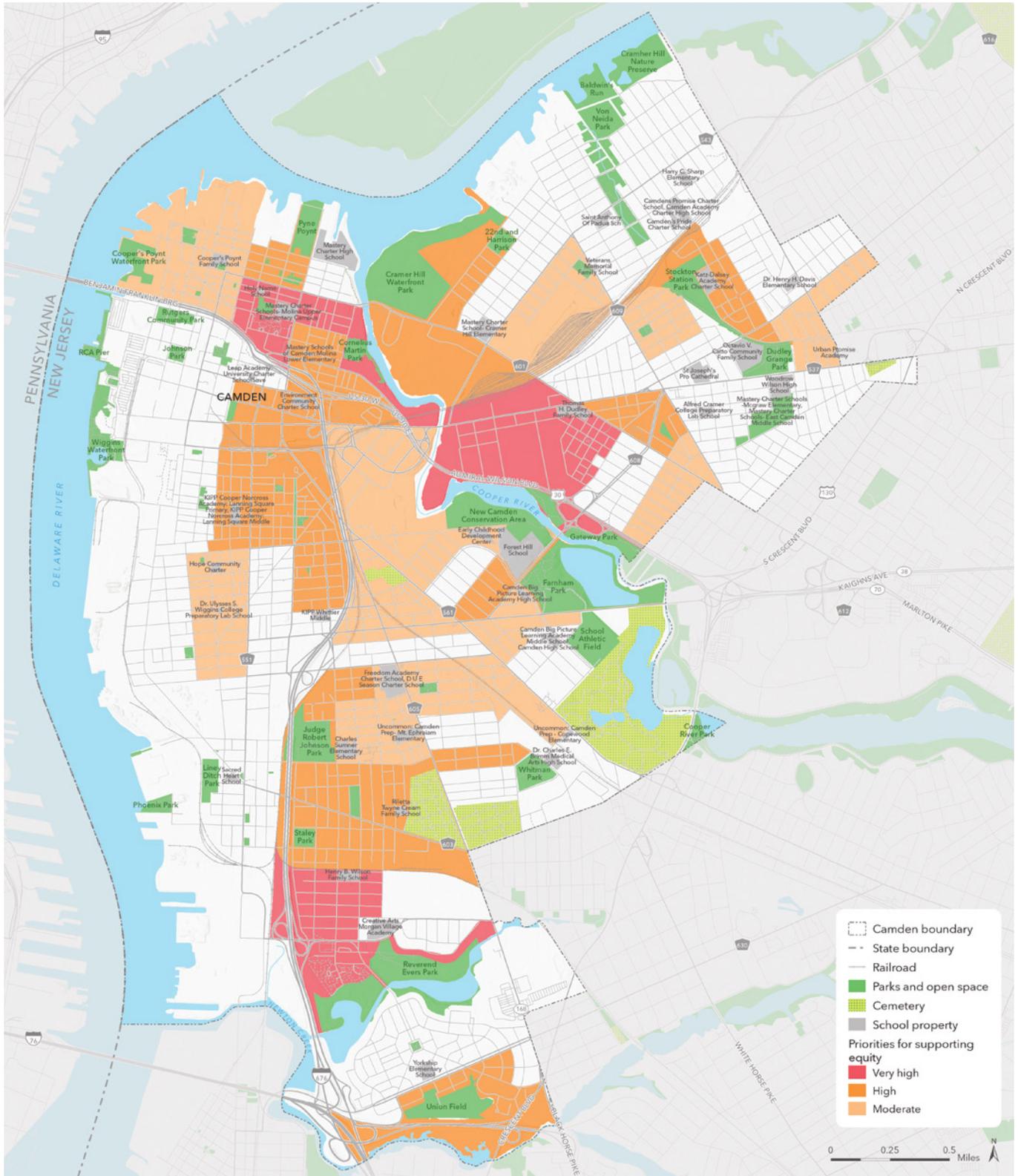


FIGURE 3. Supporting Equity
 CLIMATE-SMART CITIES CAMDEN: EQUITY PRIORITIES



Relaxing on the lawn at RCA Pier. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

EQUITY CASE STUDY → INCOME AND PARK QUALITY

Everyone deserves a high-quality close-to-home park. However, the services provided by a park are particularly important to residents in low-income communities who frequently cannot afford to travel long distances to visit parks or pay to use private recreational facilities. For these communities, parks often provide places to exercise, hold birthday parties, interact with nature, have some quiet alone time, and cool off from the heat. Figure 4 draws on both the project's mapping and the results of a recent park quality assessment, and can help to identify parks, open spaces, and schoolyards for future investment based on their maintenance

status and the income levels of the surrounding community. In Waterfront South, for example, Liney Ditch Park is located in an area where over 75 percent of the households are low income. The park is in need of major repairs. Likewise, in North Camden, Mastery Molina Upper School is located in an area where over 75 percent of households are low income. The schoolyard is in need of major repairs. The Centerville neighborhood, with its high concentration of low-income households, contains Staley Park, which is also in need of renovation.

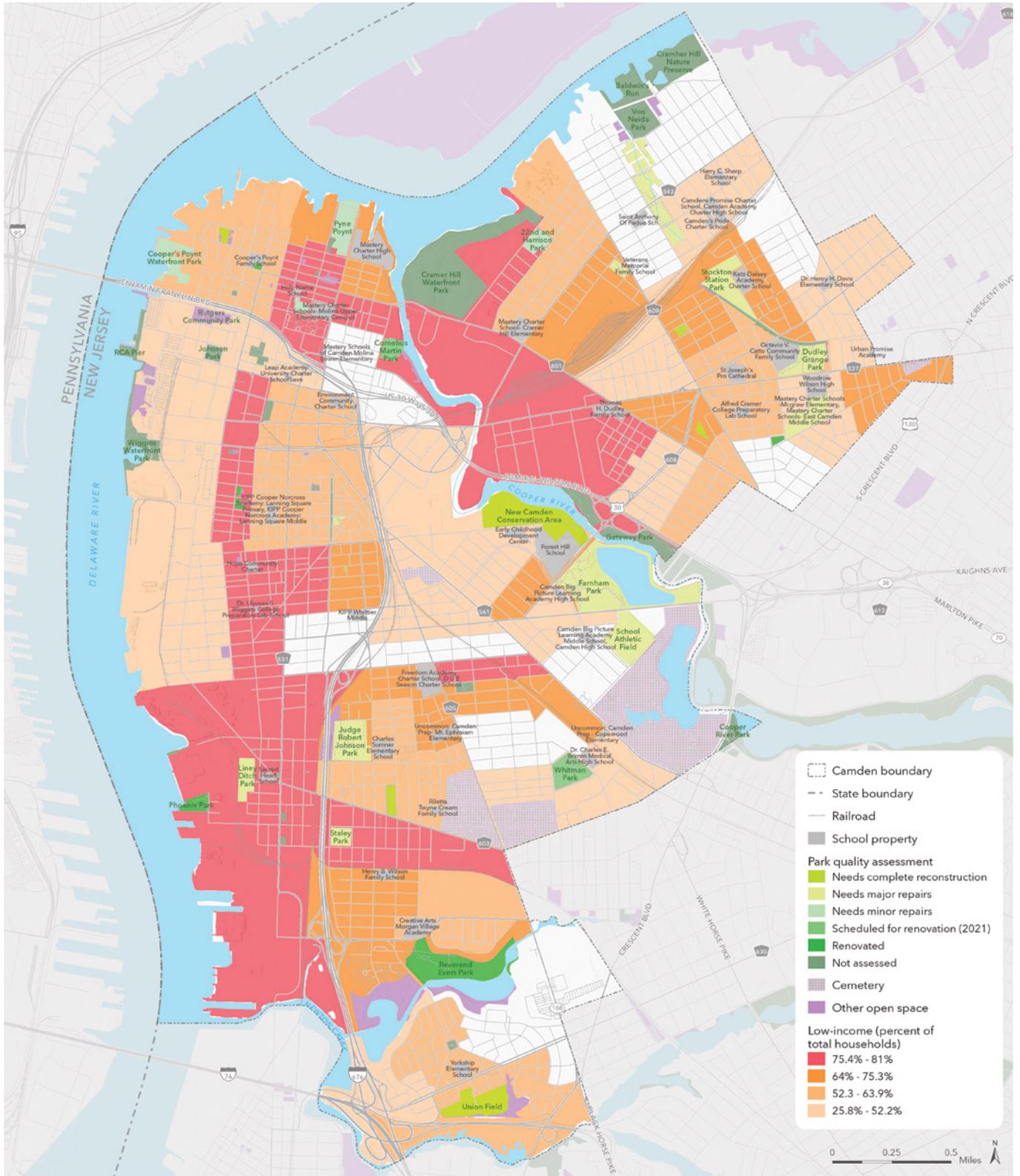


FIGURE 4. Low-Income Households
 EQUITY CASE STUDY: EXAMINING PARK QUALITY WITH AN EYE TOWARD INCOME

Absorb

Water-smart parks, playgrounds, and green streets are types of green infrastructure that absorb stormwater runoff, reduce flooding, improve water quality, and provide multiple community benefits. The Camden Stormwater Management and Resource Training (SMART) initiative is a community-driven movement created in 2011 to tackle Camden’s water-related challenges, including water quality and stormwater management, through the development of green infrastructure and stormwater management projects and programs.

Increased stormwater leads to stream channel erosion, increased levels of pollutants entering the city’s streams and rivers, increased flooding potential, and higher demands on the city’s combined sewer system, which result in combined sewer overflows and, in some communities, combined sewer flooding. Stormwater also creates other challenges, including

increased carbon emissions as water is pumped through sewer systems and then treated in treatment plants. Figure 5, the Absorb Priorities Map, highlights areas that may be at risk due to flooding from storm events. It was created by combining the following mapping objectives:

- Reduce localized storm flooding
- Reduce combined sewer overflows
- Reduce impervious cover

In Camden, very high priority areas for reducing stormwater flooding include the Biedeman section of the Cramer Hill neighborhood, which experiences very high CSO issues and localized flooding, and Waterfront South and the Marlton section of East Camden, which have high concentrations of impervious cover, moderate-to-high concentrations of CSOs and localized storm flooding.



Camden partners tour a schoolyard rain garden/learning garden in Philadelphia. © DANIELLE DENK FOR THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

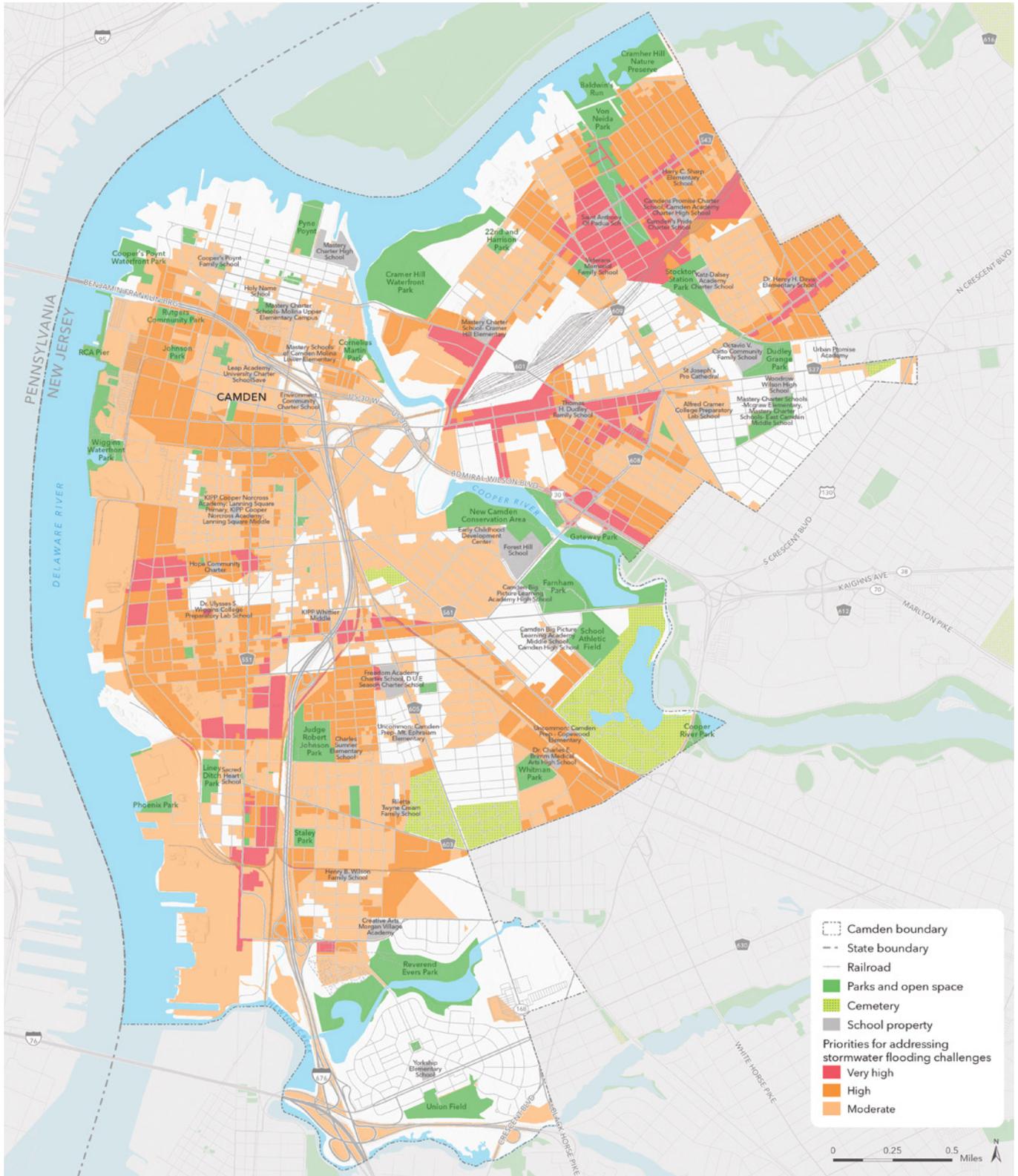


FIGURE 5. Addressing Stormwater Flooding Challenges

CLIMATE-SMART CITIES CAMDEN: ABSORB PRIORITIES



Swinging at 4th & Washington Park. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

ABSORB CASE STUDY → PARKS AND SCHOOLYARDS TO MANAGE STORMWATER

Parks and schoolyards that include green infrastructure can better serve the community by including lush planted rain gardens and water smart recreation as part of the park design. For these communities, parks provide places to relax in nature, enjoy the shade of a large tree, or watch nature thrive in the native habitat. The Absorb Priorities Map highlights areas that may be at risk of flooding during storm events as correlated with the location of parks and schoolyards. In the Cramer Hill neighborhood, for example, Von Nieda Park and the surrounding residential community are inundated with wastewater during heavy rains. Over the last decade, Camden County, the City of Camden, and Cooper's Ferry Partnership have implemented a multiphase project to utilize Von Nieda Park for stormwater management while at the same time enhancing its utility to the surrounding community. The first two phases of this project are complete. They include separating the combined sewer system from the stormwater system in the park, raising the

elevation and reconstructing the park's ballfields, building detention and bio-retention basins, and reestablishing a section of the former Baldwin's Run tributary to the Delaware River that once existed at Von Nieda Park. Together, the improvements collectively capture 50 million gallons of stormwater per year through diversion, infiltration, and storage.

By continuing to integrate green stormwater infrastructure into Von Nieda Park (a third phase is scheduled to be completed in 2021), Camden can significantly mitigate stormwater impacts. Likewise, Henry Davis Schoolyard could manage the high concentration of stormwater that collects by conveying it to rain gardens that can also provide a background for learning outside. Cornelius Martin Park presents an important opportunity to manage stormwater in a high-flood area. Because this site is slated for renovation, Camden should consider green infrastructure for future upgrades.



Wastewater flooding Cramer Hill's River Road after an average rainstorm. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

Protect

Climate change will increase coastal communities' vulnerability to flooding because higher sea levels will allow waves and storm surge to reach farther inland than in the past. Preserving natural floodplains and areas prone to coastal and riverine inundation through the creation of parks and open space can prevent flooding from threatening people and infrastructure. The Protect Priorities Map (Figure 6) highlights areas that may be at risk due to flooding from coastal storm events and sea level rise and was created by combining the following mapping objectives:

- Minimize flooding in FEMA-designated floodplains
- Minimize impact in frequently flooded areas
- Minimize impacts from projected coastal and riverine flooding
- Prioritize open space buffers based on flood depth for six-foot sea level rise
- Reduce flooding impacts in low-lying areas based on projected
- Reduce storm surge impacts from hurricanes and other major storms

Priority areas are largely scattered along the banks of the Delaware River, the northern banks of the Cooper River, and along Newton Creek.



The 0.7 mile waterfront edge of the Cooper's Poynt Waterfront Park will help mitigate rising floodwaters while providing Camden residents with spectacular views. © STEVE JACOBUS/NJDEP

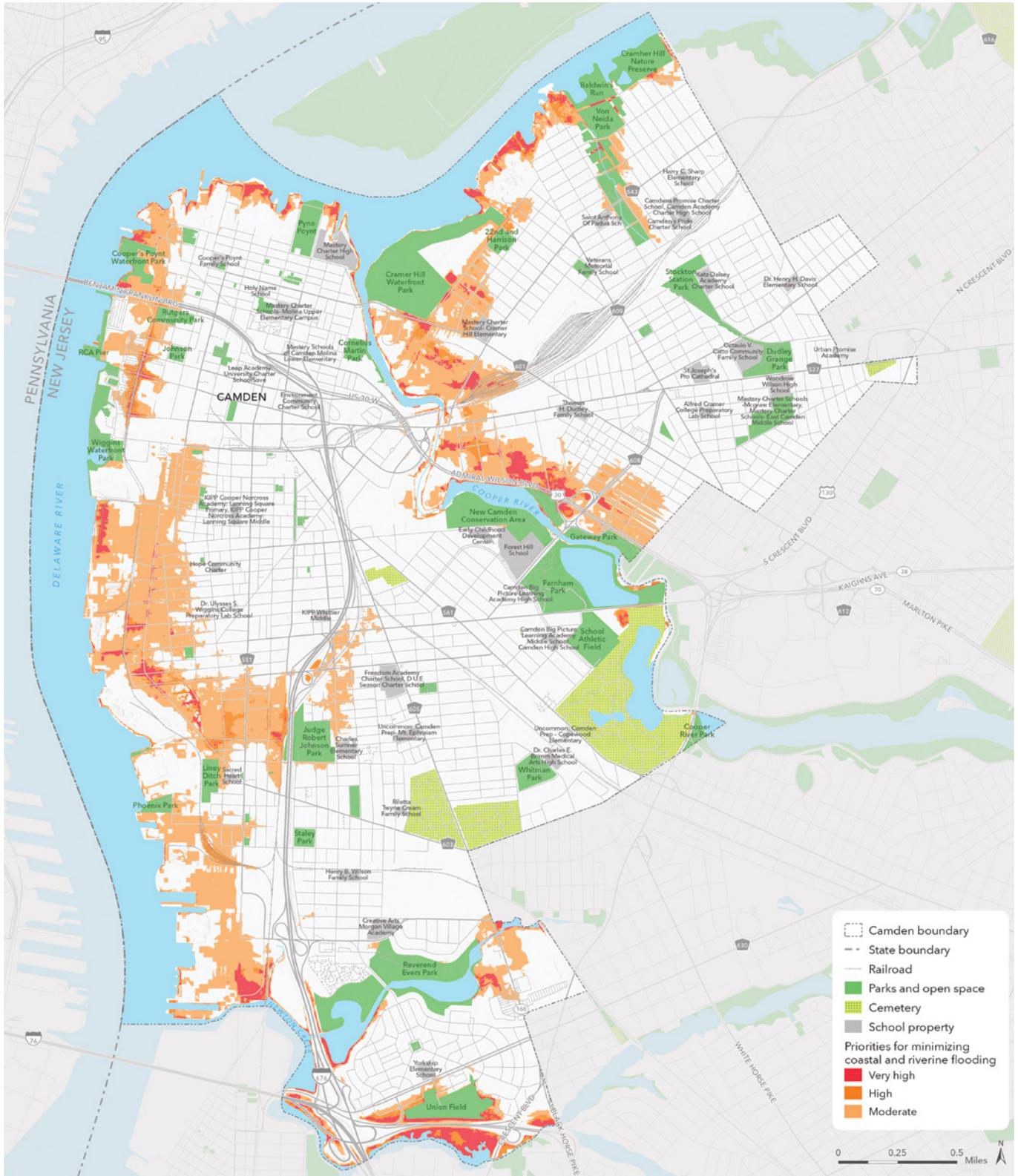


FIGURE 6. Minimizing Coastal and Riverine Flooding
 CLIMATE-SMART CITIES CAMDEN: PROTECT PRIORITIES



Green schoolyard. ©TIMOTHY SCHENCK

PROTECT CASE STUDY → PARKS AND SCHOOLYARDS TO MITIGATE RIVERINE FLOODING

Parks and schoolyards that include resilient shorelines and water absorptive landscapes can better serve the community by protecting them from pending floodwaters. With climate change we can predict inundation along the waterfront and in neighborhoods in Camden. For these communities, parks provide resilience and serve to buffer the impacts of climate change. This map highlights areas that may be at risk of riverine flooding due to climate change as correlated with the location of parks and schoolyards.

For example, both Mastery Charter High School and the Cramer Hill Waterfront Park are located at the confluence of the Delaware and Cooper Rivers. Because these areas are predicted to flood, green spaces can be designed to mitigate flooding. Reverend Evers Park along Newton Creek can serve the same purpose. Mastery Charter High School and Cramer Hill Waterfront Park include resilience in the design and will serve as models for future development along the Camden waterfront.



Phoenix Park. © DOUG BURNS FOR CCMUA

Cool

Elevated temperatures can have negative health impacts and also increase summer peak energy demand, air-conditioning costs, air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. These high temperatures can necessitate an extra 5–10 percent of energy use for cooling urban buildings during peak energy use periods. This has important climate change impacts, as extra energy use for cooling results in additional greenhouse gas emissions, a vicious cycle that will further increase global air temperatures and urban heat challenges. Shady green spaces reduce the urban “heat island” effect, protect people from heat waves, and reduce summer energy use. The Cool Priorities Map (Figure 7) was created by combining the following mapping objectives:

- Reduce urban heating
- Increase tree canopy
- Reduce impervious cover

Urban heat is a relatively ubiquitous issue in Camden, although, interestingly, the highest concentration areas for Cool priorities include Camden’s waterfronts; neighborhoods along the Delaware River (Waterfront South, Central Waterfront, Cooper’s Poynt section of North Camden); and, to a lesser extent, the Cooper River (Gateway neighborhood). All of these neighborhoods were identified as very high priority areas for reducing impervious cover and increasing tree canopy. The concentration of heat islands was particularly high in the Central Waterfront neighborhood, and many occurred around marine terminals or large parking lots. Many of these heat islands end where they meet large parks (e.g., Wiggins Waterfront Park and New Camden Park). Even smaller parks in Camden (e.g., 2nd and Elm Park and Northgate Park) create cool areas that provide a break from the surrounding heat islands.



Volunteers organized to tend the Green Alleys to mitigate urban heat. © ANNIE BANG

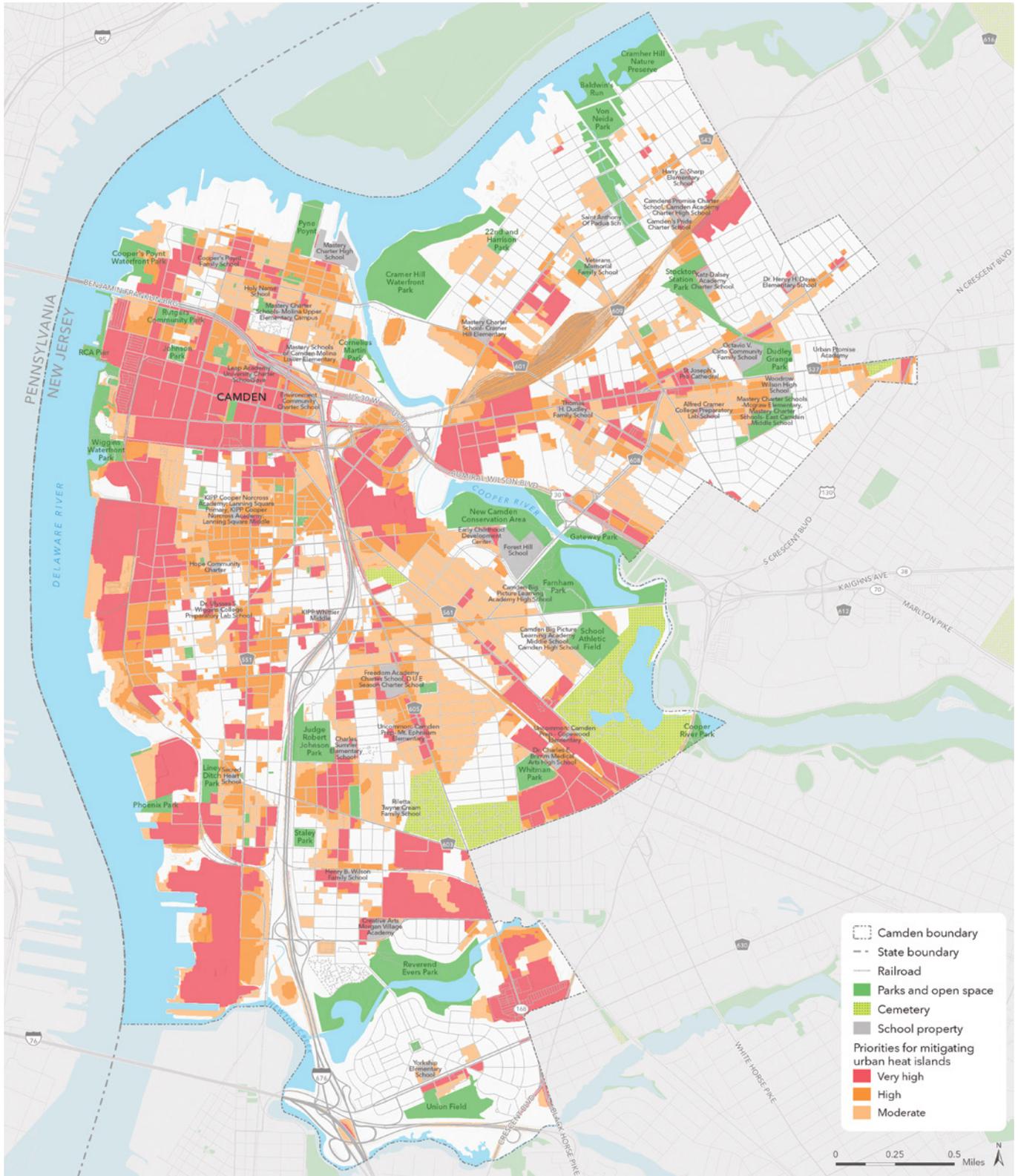


FIGURE 7. Mitigating Urban Heat Islands
CLIMATE-SMART CITIES CAMDEN: COOL PRIORITIES



Spraygrounds are vital during the summer in Camden. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

COOL CASE STUDY → HEAT ISLANDS AND CRIME

Over time many community members and police chiefs have noted the apparent relationship between heat and crime. Recent studies have confirmed that this observation is based in fact. For example, a 2019 study conducted by the University of Southern California found that in Los Angeles, on days when the maximum temperature is above 85 degrees, overall crime increases by 2.2 percent and violent crime by 5.7 percent. The researchers also noted that the relationship between heat and crime is even more pronounced in low-income areas.⁴

Examining the Cool priorities together with data on crime in Camden (see Figure 8) can help policymakers

and advocates decide where investments in cooling green infrastructure (e.g., parks, trees, and cool pavements) could help to reduce crime in Camden. For example, the Lanning Square/Central Business District census tract is identified as a highest-crime-rate neighborhood and also struggles with heat, particularly in its northern reaches. The Lanning Square/Central Business District census tract alignment with a higher crime rate is compounded by the fact that few public green spaces are in this area. The city and its partners should plant street trees and create new green space in the Lanning Square/Central Business District census tract to mitigate urban heat and provide respite.

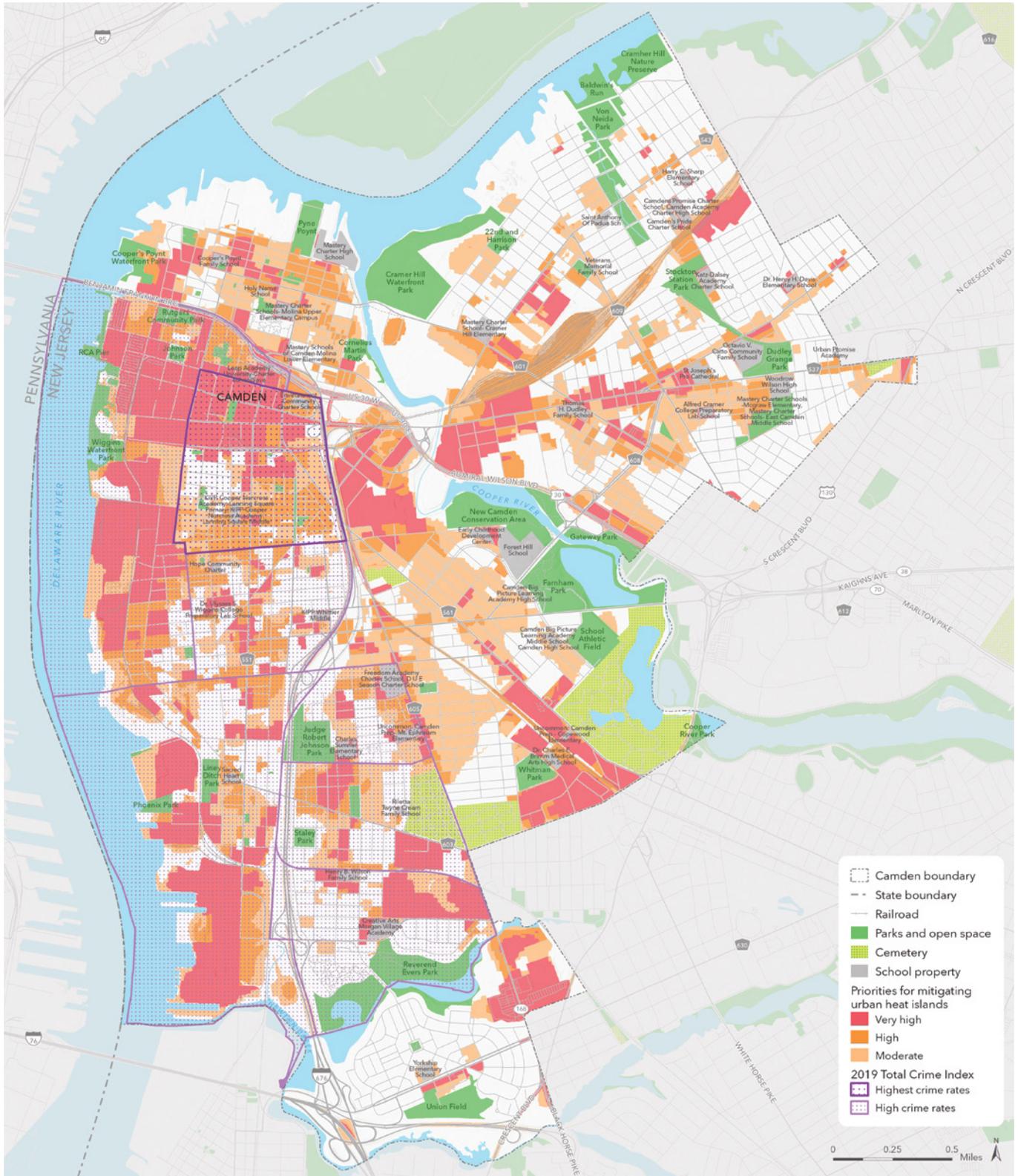


FIGURE 8. Crime and Mitigating Urban Heat Islands
COOL CASE STUDY: CRIME AND MITIGATING URBAN HEAT ISLANDS

Overall Priorities

Camden is committed to incorporating climate preparedness into its decision-making processes. The Overall priorities map (Figure 9) highlights the results of a data-driven approach to highlight priority areas for park and green infrastructure investment that could provide multiple benefits needed to reduce the risk of flooding from stormwater, reduce the urban heat island effect, minimize impact from coastal and riverine flooding, and address the vulnerability of at-risk residents. This map was created by combining all the priorities that the decision support tool considers:

- **EQUITY.** Supporting communities with historic under-investment
- **ABSORB.** Addressing stormwater flooding challenges
- **PROTECT.** Minimizing coastal and riverine flooding
- **COOL.** Mitigating urban heat islands

Moderate- and high-priority areas are relatively scattered throughout Camden, although they are less prevalent in the eastern, northern, and far southern extents of the city. By far the largest concentration of very high need areas occurs in the East Camden neighborhood. This is unsurprising as it had large swaths of very high priority areas in all four of the analyses described above. Additionally, much of the Marlton section of East Camden and neighboring Cramer Hill area lacks park access. Although 97 percent of Camden residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, these communities have some of the city's remaining areas without park access. Although the large Gateway Park does pass through this area, much of it is nearly impossible for community members to access on foot due to Route 30/Admiral Wilson Boulevard and the Cooper River.



Pedestrian bridge at the Cramer Hill Waterfront Park in Camden, NJ. © © STEVE JACOBUS/NJDEP

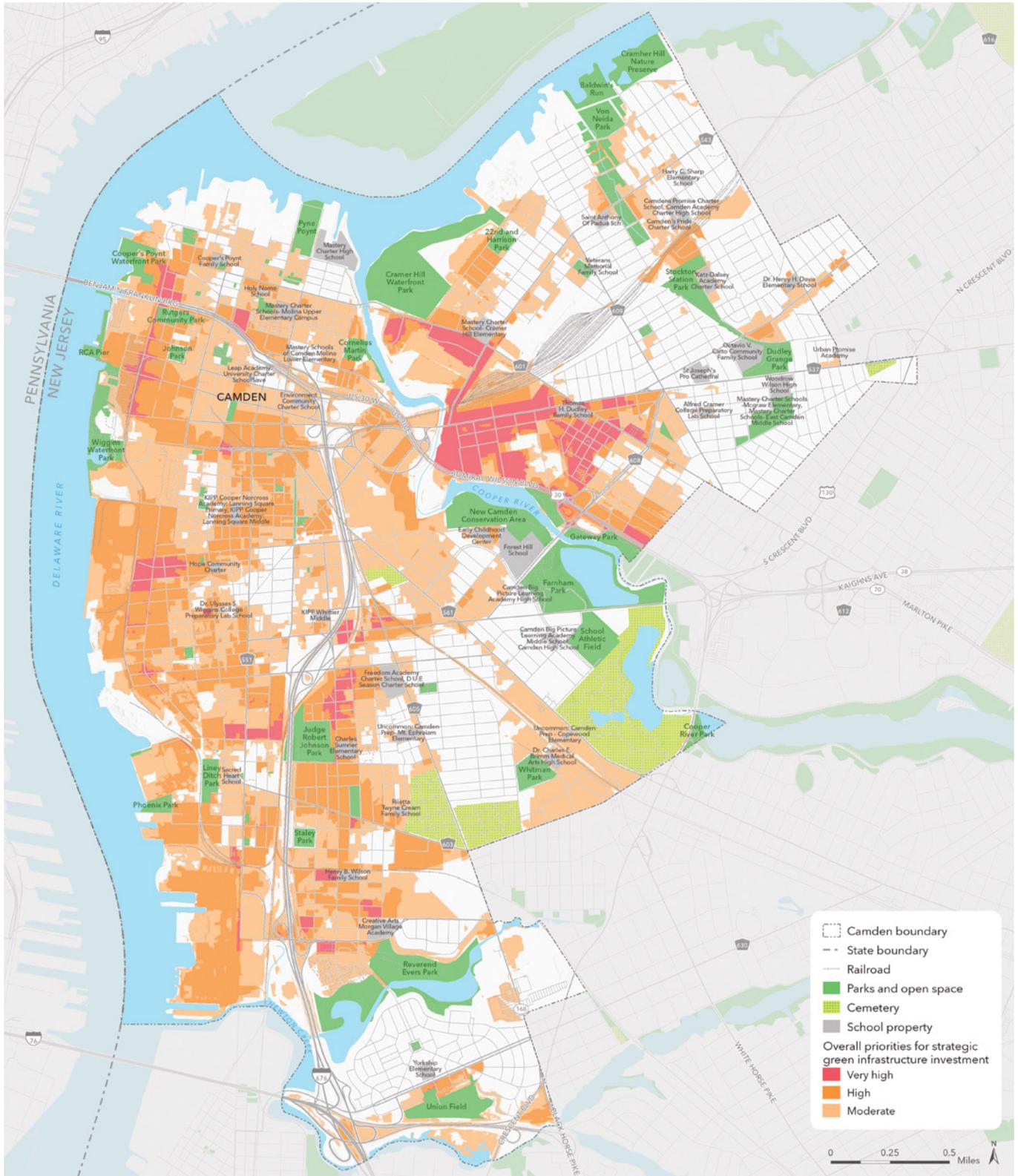


FIGURE 9. Strategic Green Infrastructure Investment
 CLIMATE-SMART CITIES CAMDEN: OVERALL PRIORITIES



Canoeing on the Delaware River during I Paddle Camden. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

SECTION 4

Community Engagement Summary



"Five years from now every park will be elite, A-1, the best."

- POWERCORP CAMDEN YOUTH DESCRIBING THEIR DREAM PARKS FOR CAMDEN TO STUDENTS FROM MASTERY HIGH SCHOOL

Overview

Community engagement was an essential part of creating the Camden Parks Plan. The project reached approximately 439 community members, including 204 people who participated in the online survey, 30 high school students participating in a focus group, and 205 people who were engaged at neighborhood meetings and public events. These findings also draw on results from a Camden Youth Advisory Council meeting and the Aspen Institute’s State of Play survey. (For a complete listing of engagement activities, see Section 2.)

Understanding Current Park Use

Nearly 70 percent of Camden residents visit parks at least once a month, as shown in Figure 10. This high percentage of park visitation indicates the value of parks for Camden residents and the large impacts of park benefits. The most common park visitation rate in Camden is 1 to 4 times per month (38 percent). Roughly a third (31 percent) of respondents visit parks on average at least once a week (5 to 9 times per month, 10 to 20 times per month, or 20+ visits per month). The final third (31 percent) of survey participants either said they visit parks less than once a month on average (24 percent) or answered “I don’t go to parks” (6 percent).

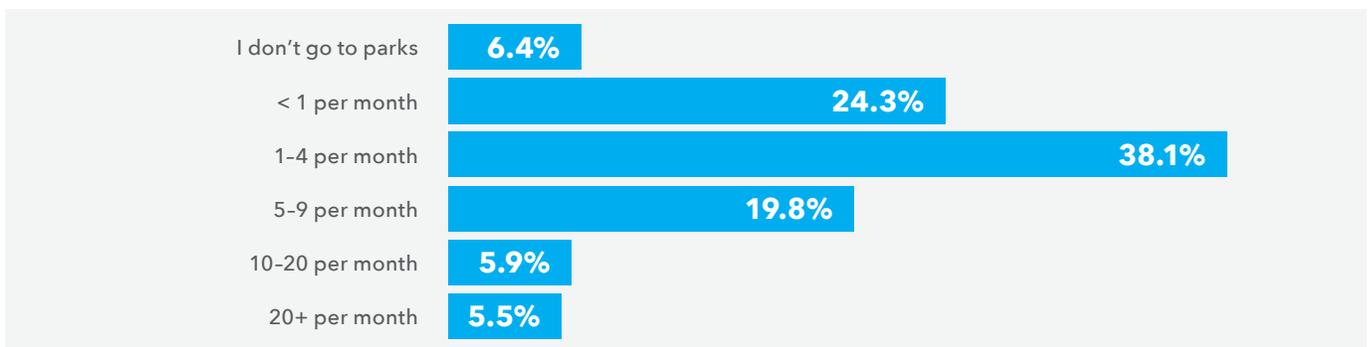


FIGURE 10. Park visitation rates in Camden.

WHICH PARKS ARE PEOPLE VISITING THE MOST?

The most highly visited parks in Camden included Pyne Poynt (17 percent) and Cooper’s Poynt (7 percent). Although located outside Camden, Cooper River was one of the most visited parks with a 14 percent response rate (see Figure 11).



FIGURE 11. Online, unedited, word-for-word survey results from the question “What is the park you visit most?” with more frequently used words appearing larger.

GETTING TO THE PARK

Over half (52 percent) of survey respondents stated that they walk to the park (see Figure 12). Driving was the second most common method, with a 36 percent response rate. The lack of parking at certain parks was an issue continually identified by residents. Community members specifically called out the fact that free parking availability on the central waterfront has become more limited due to recent development there.

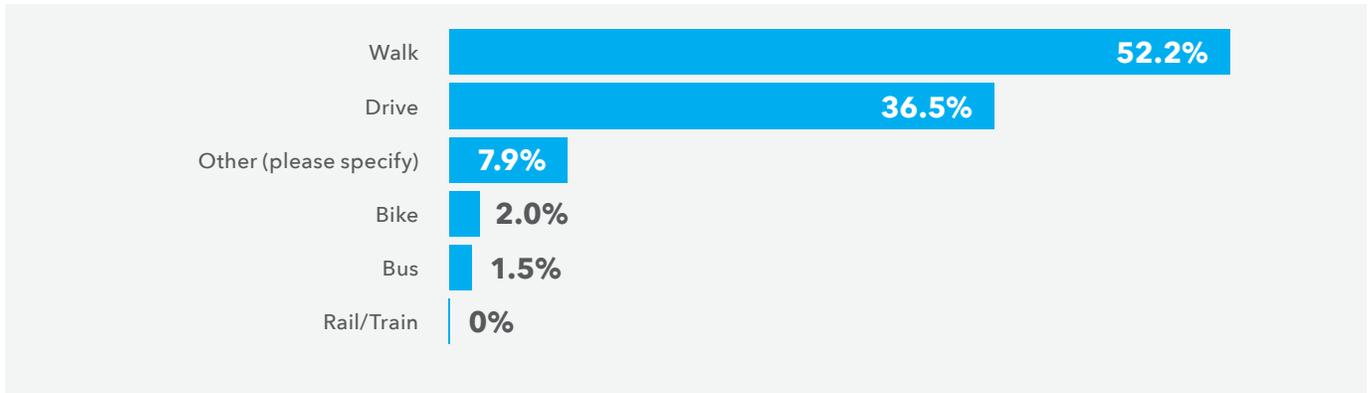


FIGURE 12. How do you get to that park?

WHY PEOPLE GO TO THE PARK

Camden park users are highly social. Fifty-two percent said they use the park for “hanging out with friends.” The second most frequent reason for using the park was recreation, exercise and fitness, and taking their kids, all scoring between 47 percent and 49 percent in a three-way tie (see Figure 13).

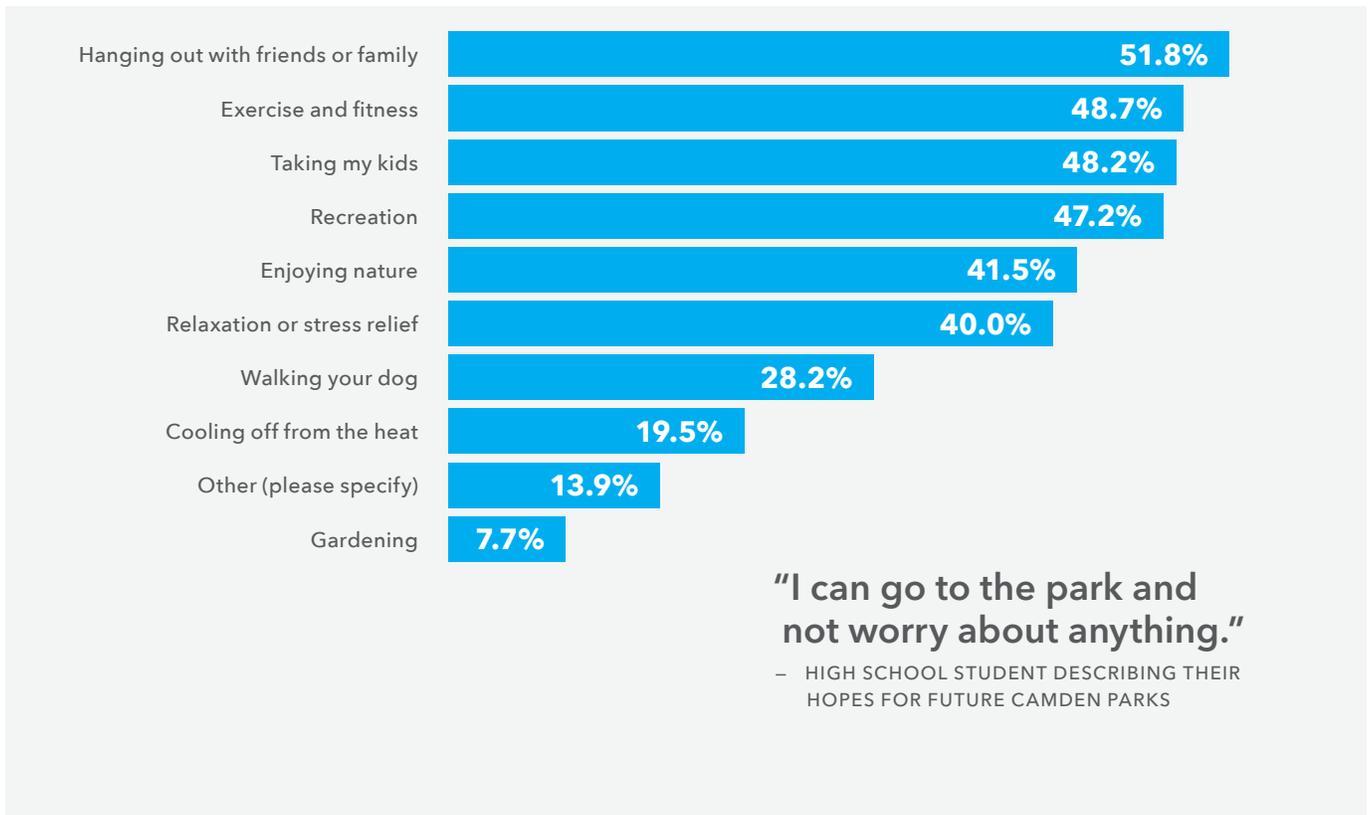


FIGURE 13. Why do you use parks?

Community Priorities for Park Improvements

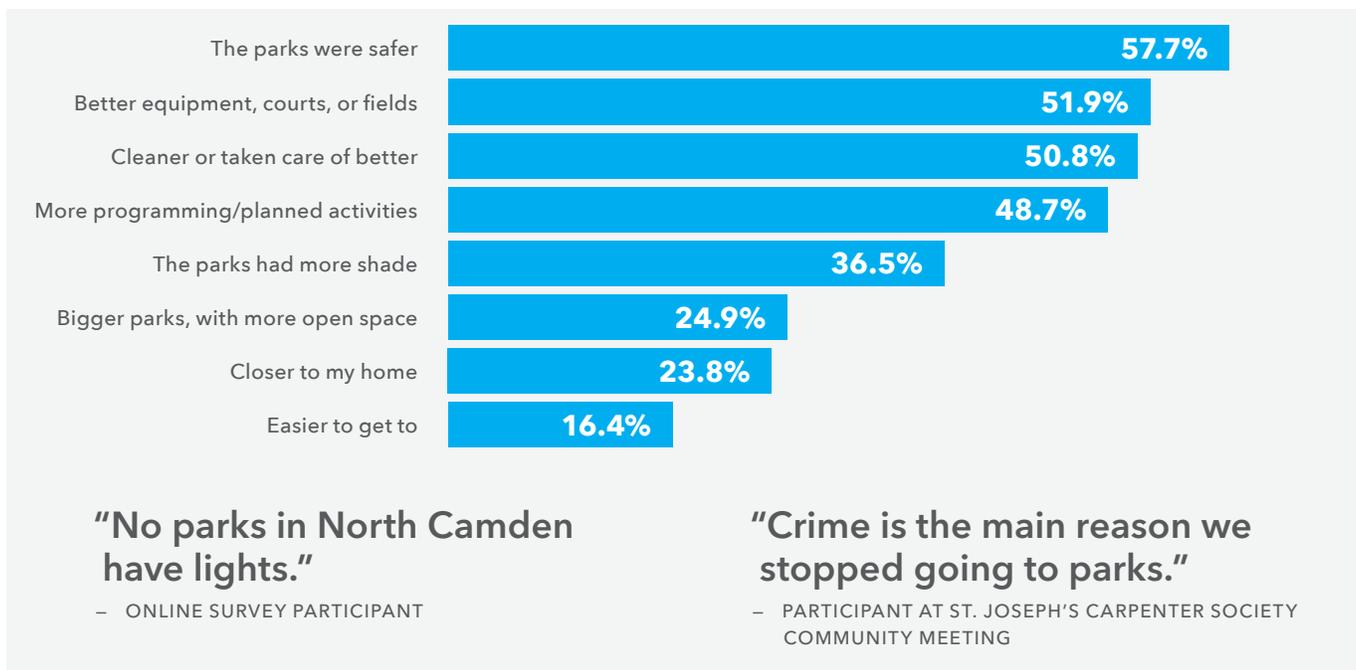


FIGURE 14. I would use parks more often if the following were true.

SAFETY

Safety arose as the biggest barrier to park use. Fifty-eight percent of online survey respondents said that a safer environment would encourage them to increase their park use (see Figure 14). “Safety” was also the leading response when participants were asked what would make parks more relaxing (60 percent), followed closely by seating (59 percent).

Safety concerns also came up repeatedly during in-person engagement. For Camden youth, the feeling of being unsafe was one of the biggest reasons given for not visiting parks. They specifically cited the presence of gangs and drug dealers. Many said they spend free time at home instead of going to the park, or recreate at their school, which feels safer. Community members listed emergency call boxes, lighting, increased security, cameras, and neighborhood watch patrols as changes that would make parks safer. Stakeholders noted that Camden parks should consistently incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, in particular visibility. The lack of visibility from the street at Cramer Hill Waterfront Park was given as a specific example.



Security call box at Gateway Park. © COURTESY OF THE NEW JERSEY CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

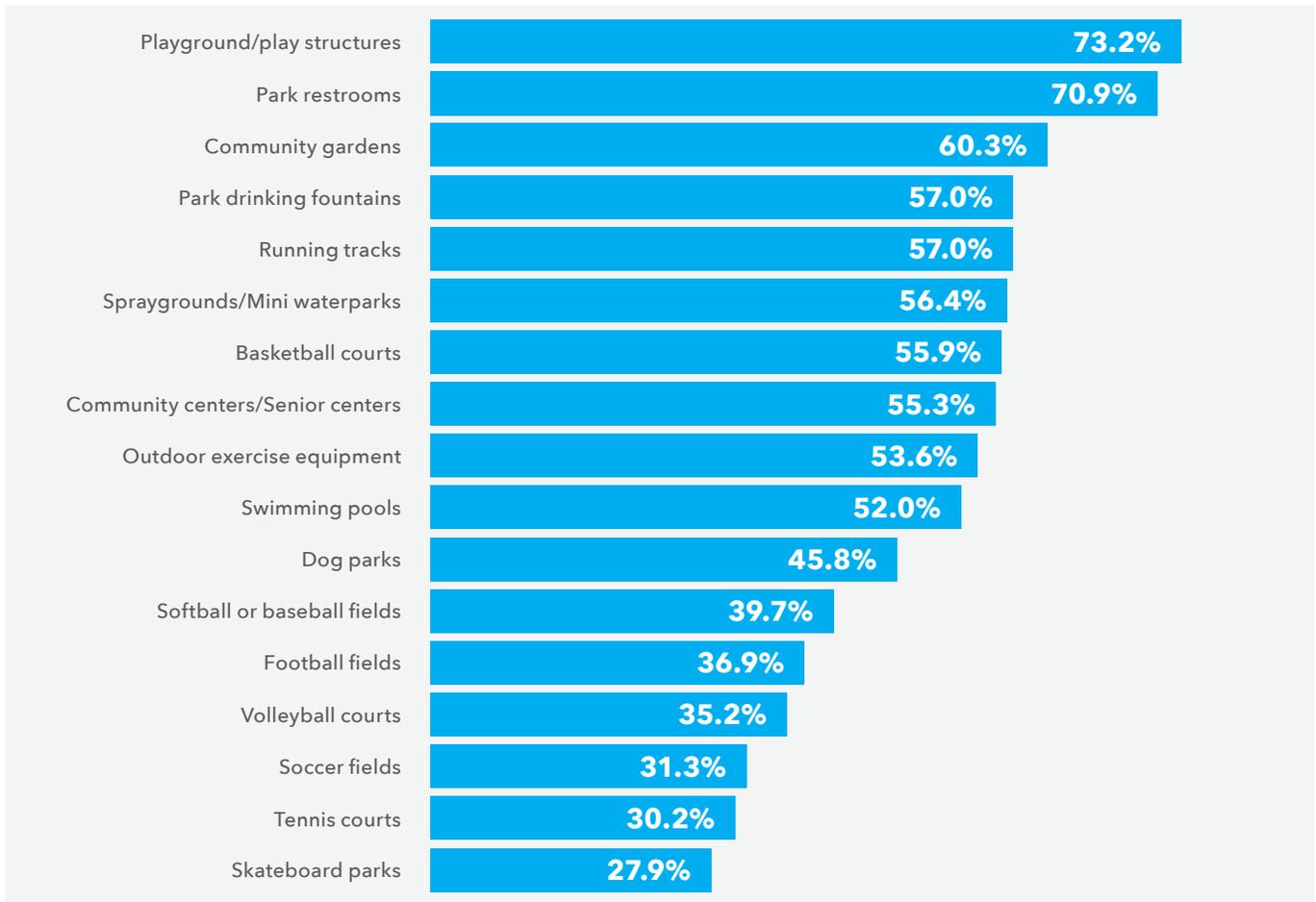


FIGURE 15. Top priority park amenities in Camden.

PARK AMENITIES

After safety, “better equipment, courts, and fields” was the second-highest community priority, with a 52 percent response rate.

The highest-ranking park amenities in terms of popularity, as shown in Figure 15, included:

- Playgrounds/play structures (73 percent)
- Restrooms (71 percent)
- Community gardens (60 percent)
- Park drinking fountains (57 percent)
- Running tracks (57 percent)
- Spraygrounds (56 percent)
- Basketball courts (56 percent)

The importance of these features also surfaced in several other places throughout the survey and in-person engagement. The lack of restrooms (50 percent) and the lack of water fountains (36 percent) were listed as the biggest barriers to physical activity in parks. Community members also noted the prevalence of broken water fountains and locked park restrooms, as many are open only when a sports team is given a key for a game or practice.

When asked how to make parks better places for socializing, community members said picnic areas (64 percent). Places to cook and a safer environment were also top responses, tied at 54 percent (see Figure 16).

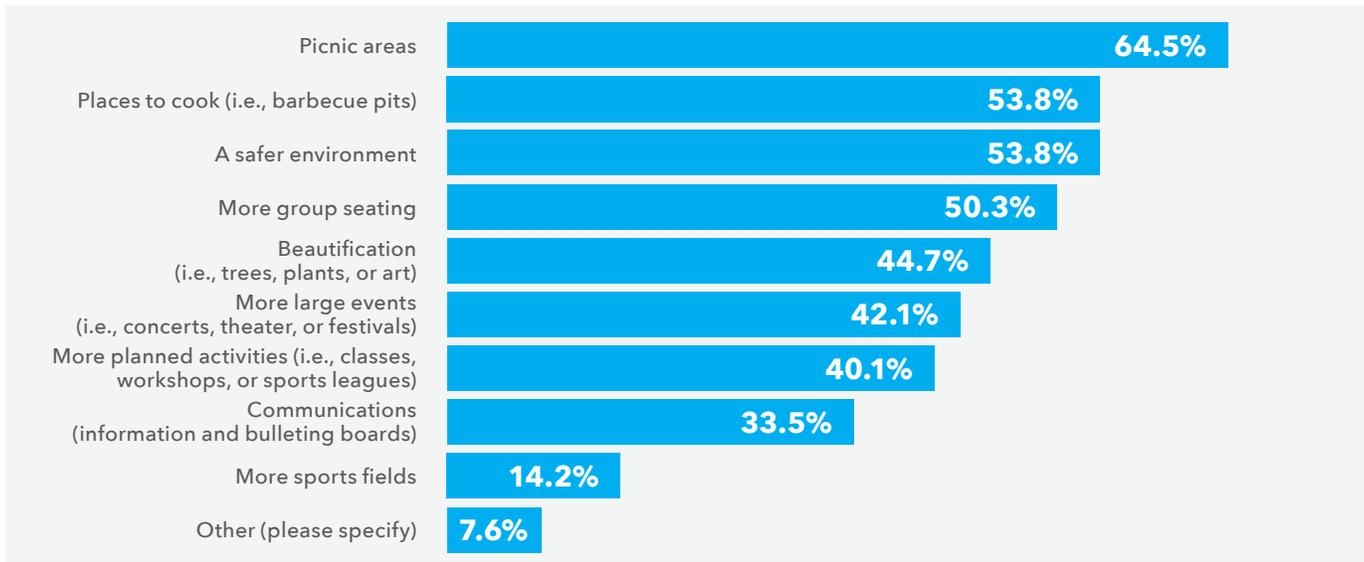


FIGURE 16. Are there changes that would make Camden parks better places for socializing?

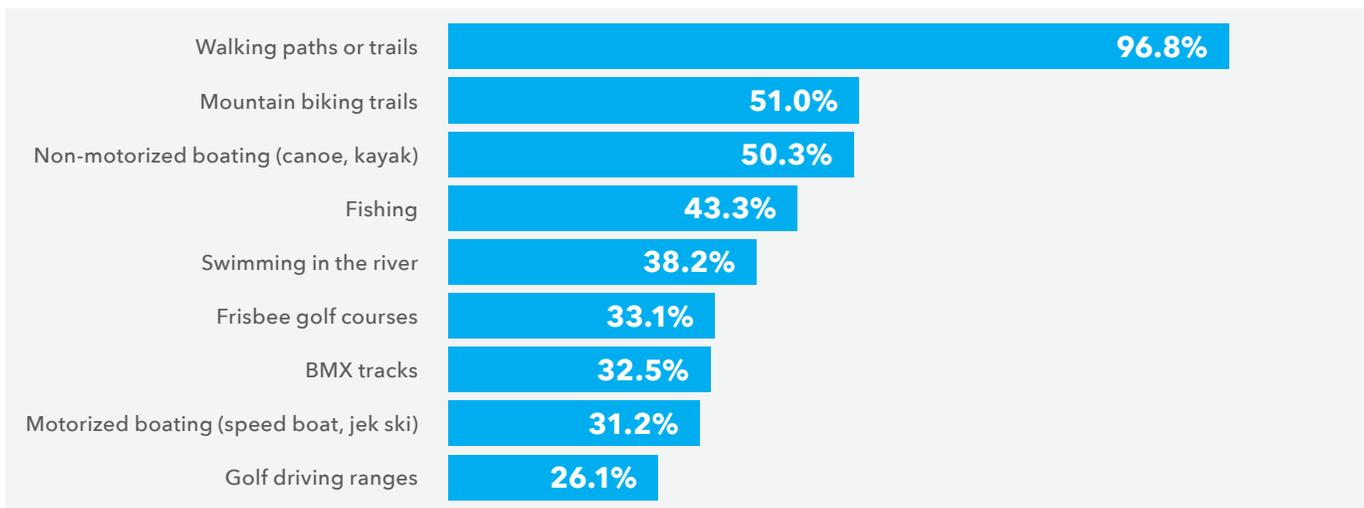


FIGURE 17. Top priority open space amenities.

The highest-ranking open space amenities, as shown in Figure 17, included:

- Walking paths or trails (97 percent)
- Mountain biking (51 percent)
- Nonmotorized boating (50 percent)
- Fishing (43 percent)

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Youth noted that while they are interested in open space activities like camping and canoeing, the current perception that the water in Camden is dirty is a barrier to these activities. As mentioned in Section 2, the Camden Parks Plan benefited from the community engagement conducted as part of a concurrent effort, Aspen Institute’s State of Play study. The study surveyed hundreds of Camden students and found that the sports that were the most highly played or requested included:

- Basketball
- Tackle football
- Soccer
- Volleyball



Mastery Charter High School Students research design of their waterfront schoolyard by enjoying Bartram's Mile Waterfront Park in Philadelphia.
© DANIELLE DENK FOR THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

MAINTENANCE

Maintenance and upkeep were the third-highest community priority. Fifty-one percent said that they would use parks more often if the parks were cleaner or taken care of better. Meeting participants noted the need for a proactive solution to dumping in the parks (such as cameras), so that stewards and staff would not have to continually clean them. Other issues included the existence of mosquitoes in standing water, goose droppings, and broken basketball hoops and play equipment, and the need for durable needle disposal bins and more trash cans and recycling bins in parks and along the streets.

Stakeholders noted the need for increased stewardship as an effective way to improve park upkeep and create a sense of community ownership over parks. Suggestions included forming neighborhood-based beautification teams throughout Camden or a citywide adopt-a-park program. An adopt-a-park program did exist in the past, but it became problematic as coaches were using the program to obtain priority to use certain fields. A simpler, more transparent permitting process might help to avoid these types of conflicts in the future (see Programming). Stakeholders also thought that increasing the positive park uses through additional programming would help to deter vandalism.

"It's not just about building them, but who is going to maintain them?"

– COMMUNITY MEMBER AT A PARKSIDE BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY IN PARTNERSHIP (PBCIP) MONTHLY COMMUNITY MEETING

"I remember being a kid and being able to roll down in the grass from the top of the hill down to the middle. My boys tried it one time and I almost passed out for the simple fact that now here in the city it's just something you can't do. The fear of any child rolling down that beautiful hill and Lord knows if they get stuck with a needle."

– ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANT

PROGRAMMING

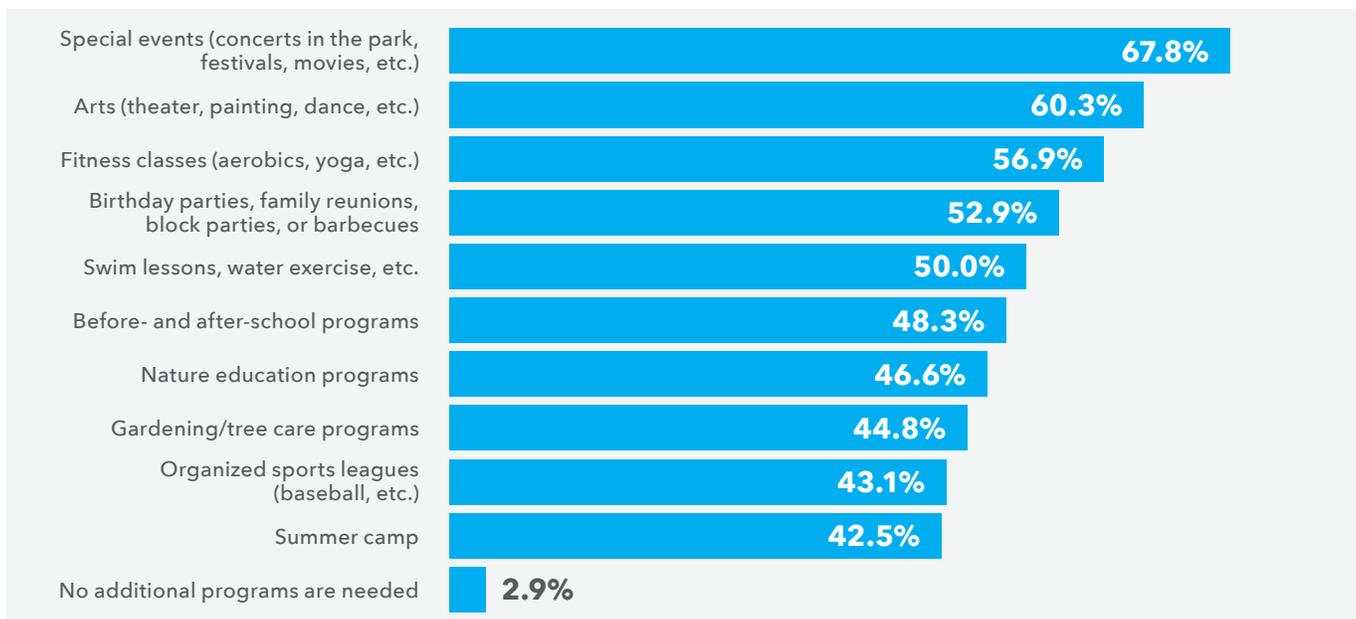


FIGURE 18. Top priorities for events and programs.

Programming and planned activities were the fourth-highest priority for increasing park use, with a 49 percent response rate. The top priorities for programming and events were:

- Special events (concerts in the park, festivals, movies, etc.) (68 percent)
- Arts (theater, painting, dance, etc.) (60 percent)
- Fitness classes (aerobics, yoga, etc.) (57 percent)

Stakeholders noted that structural changes to parks would make programming easier. Although many parks have dedicated spaces for active recreation, creating more flat open spaces would help to facilitate the types of large special events community members were most interested in, as well as smaller informal activities. The lack of electrical outlets and shade structures also hinders programming, while the presence of bollards and fences makes it difficult for trucks to bring in the necessary materials for programs. Stakeholders felt that swing gates would be preferable.

Stakeholders also noted that administrative changes would allow for improvements in programming. Many community members are interested in starting sports leagues, but the process to obtain permits is often unclear to them. Camden would benefit from a centralized permitting system, managed by the City, which allows coaches and other programmers to see what is available and sign up. This would simplify the process and empower community members to take action in carrying out programs. Pennsauken was highlighted as a model for this type of platform. Some stakeholders also felt that the fees paid for permits should go into a park improvement fund, to help maintain park quality for future events.

“The more we can get the community involved to be an eye in the sky, the better off our parks will be. If you don’t have community involvement, that is where you have a lot of vandalism in the parks. When residents see more people who care for their neighborhood there will be less vandalism.”

– TAMARA JEFFERSON, SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE ANALYST,
CAMDEN CITY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS



Lanning Sq. West Residents Association members discuss park operations with the Camden County Police Department. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

MULTIGENERATIONAL PARKS

There were also several generation-specific findings. Teenagers felt that there was not enough for them in Camden's parks. Equipment needs for teenagers included spinners, bigger slides, more swings, open fields for football/soccer/volleyball, fitness equipment, and separate structures for big and little kids. Unlike their adult counterparts, youth survey participants also listed running tracks and pools as more important. Moreover, youth participants suggested creating small gathering areas for classroom learning or reading and expressed a particular interest in integrating music and musical instruments (e.g., xylophones, drums, etc.) into the parks.

Specific recommendations for seniors included walking trails that are easy to navigate and have a solid surface and seating placed regularly along the path, places for games (e.g., dominoes or checkers), and more shade trees.

FLOODING AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Flooding is a major issue for Camden residents. Seventy-three percent of survey respondents reported experiencing flooding (see Figure 19). The majority of participants in the youth focus group had also experienced flooding in or near their house. They specifically mentioned the Cramer Hill and Centerville neighborhoods, the Crestbury Apartments in the Morgan Village neighborhood, Kaighn Avenue in Parkside and across the Cooper River into Pennsauken Township, and the intersections of Harrison Avenue and State Street in Cramer Hill and North 7th Street and Linden Street in North Camden.

"Parks get boring when you are older."

– HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

"Many Camden parks are designed for children."

– ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANT

"[There is] not enough exercise equipment for adults."

– ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANT

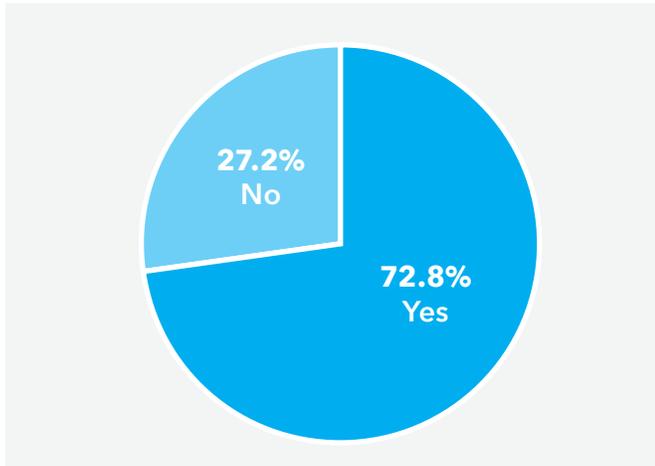


FIGURE 19. Have you experienced flooding in Camden?

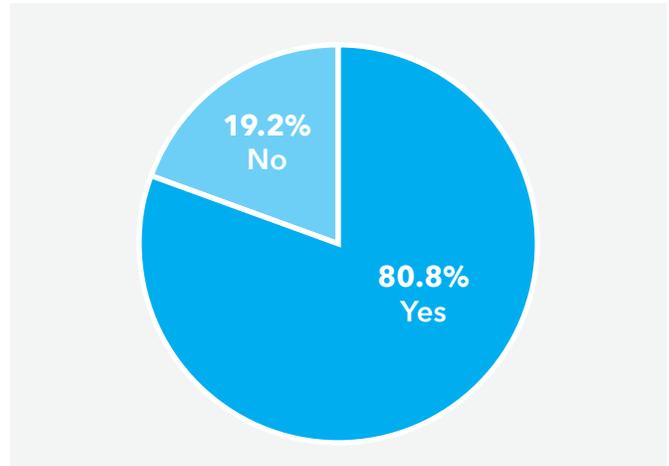


FIGURE 20. Would you care for and maintain a tree or garden near your property?

Youth participants suggested addressing the flooding issues by adding green infrastructure projects and rain barrels to large apartment complexes, planting street trees, and installing planter boxes. Eighty-one percent of survey respondents reported that they would care for and maintain a tree or garden near their property (see Figure 20).

Stakeholders identified a need for greater coordination among the various parties doing parks and green infrastructure work, bringing a broader spectrum of stakeholders into the process during the planning phases. Some felt that if green infrastructure were incorporated into the early planning phases of a project, it would yield better results. This would also diversify the potential funding pool for projects (e.g., philanthropic funding, utility funding, city funding, county funding). This is significant, in that a lack of resources at the city level was identified as one of the major barriers to implementing green infrastructure in city parks.

The importance of increasing resources for maintaining green infrastructure was also stressed. Most of the green infrastructure being built in Camden is constructed using state revolving funds. These funds mandate proper maintenance, but such maintenance is unfunded. Although maintaining green infrastructure is a challenge, it is also an opportunity, as Camden struggles with job creation. A new entity focused on maintaining green infrastructure projects could be a major source of green jobs in Camden.

INFORMATION

Many participants at outreach events noted a lack of information surrounding Camden’s parks. They mentioned feeling uncertain where parks are located and cited the need for a widely accessible map. Some also expressed confusion about irregular hours of operation at some parks. Stakeholders agreed on the need to inform community members about parks (e.g., openings, closings, what amenities and programs are available), noting that getting information out in Camden is still largely done through word of mouth.

Stakeholders also noted the lack of signs indicating park rules (e.g., “Clean up after your dog,” “No smoking,” “No dogs off leash”) and felt that adding more of these would help to deter negative behaviors.

Camden’s youth noted the need to promote greater awareness of and access to parks and to provide programs that build community support for parks. Youth also mentioned informational signage in parks, noting the need to share Camden’s history, possibly with historical facts displayed on signs throughout the parks.

SECTION 5

Implementation Strategies



Camden Night Gardens 2018. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

This section outlines implementation strategies to address issues discussed in previous sections of this plan. These recommendations were developed after reviewing the results of the project's mapping, community engagement, and discussions with stakeholders. The high-level objectives reflect specific issues identified by community members and stakeholders, while the strategies suggest actions that can be taken to address these issues.

OBJECTIVE → **Create Safer Recreation Environments**

Safety arose as the biggest barrier to park use in Camden. Participants at in-person events and online survey respondents frequently repeated that if the parks felt safer, they would use them more regularly.

STRATEGY: EXPAND CAMDEN'S GREEN SCHOOLYARDS

For Camden's youth, the feeling of being unsafe was one of the biggest reasons given for not visiting parks, specifically the presence of gangs and drug dealers. Many said they spend free time at home instead of going to the park, or recreate at their schoolyards, which feels safer. Expanding access to green schoolyards throughout Camden could drastically increase outdoor recreation because it would meet residents, especially children and youth, where they are. Schoolyards that are greened and open to the public for use after school can put the benefits of a high-quality park within a 10-minute walk of most Camden residents. Green schoolyards improve the educational setting for students but do not require more land.

Green schoolyards are a strategy that puts communities at the center of addressing multiple challenges simultaneously. As communities suffer from increased isolation, green schoolyards build social cohesion by creating a safe space for people to gather surrounded by nature. Incidental exposure to the natural environment can increase attention to other people, facilitate collective engagement, and enhance prosociality – tendencies to care for, help, and assist others.⁵

Green schoolyards enhance the educational setting and provide students with hands-on instruction. Given funding constraints, public schools in Camden lack

some of the amenities found in wealthier education systems, and green schoolyards offer a high-impact tool for innovative education. Studies have found evidence of a positive association between urban green space and attention, mood, and physical activity.⁶

Green schoolyards improve social determinants of health by improving our social and physical environments. While zip code informs health outcomes more than DNA code, green schoolyards strengthen social health by bringing people together. They also offer opportunities for active recreation and relaxation in safe and trusted green spaces.

The importance of play for children's healthy development is grounded in a strong body of research. As a natural and compelling activity, play promotes cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being, offering the necessary conditions for children to thrive and learn. Through play, children can experiment, solve problems, think creatively, cooperate with others, and so on, gaining a deeper knowledge about themselves and the world.⁷

Nature contact and environmental education can improve health outcomes and scientific engagement of children. Such outcomes could help reduce the health and educational disparities of low-income, urban, Black and Hispanic youth.⁸

Green schoolyards improve climate resilience in the communities that are most vulnerable to climate change. Climate change is compounding environmental injustice, but green schoolyards improve air quality, reduce urban heat, improve water quality, and improve climate adaptability by exposing children and families to caring for nature. Place-Based Stewardship Education (PBSE) models help students become aware of the natural environment in an urban setting and develop the motivation and skills for effectively addressing related ecological issues through collective action.⁹

To support implementation of green schoolyards in Camden, The Trust for Public Land has been working with CCMUA, the Camden City School District, and Mastery Charter Schools to transform blighted spaces into welcoming community destinations. Table 4 outlines the condition and status of schoolyard



Volunteers activate the learning trail. © COURTESY OF CAMDEN COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENT

development in Camden and shows a great deal of opportunity to expand this effort.

STRATEGY: INCORPORATE SAFETY PRINCIPLES INTO ALL PARKS WHILE ENSURING THAT PARKS REMAIN WELCOMING TO ALL USER TYPES

In some cases, residents noted that park design and maintenance issues, such as a lack of visibility, make parks feel unsafe. Although park professionals have historically recognized Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) as a standard for incorporating safety standards into park and open space design, the Black Lives Matter Movement has recently shed new perspective on the deficiencies of CPTED. For example, in 2019 Minneapolis approved the extension of CPTED practices for all new developments. CPTED principles are said to help discourage crime by orienting building windows and entrances to aid in providing “eyes on the street” that monitor activity, but in practice this strategy can end up serving the same suppressive purpose as stop-and-frisk policing – to assure that anyone considered suspicious is made to feel uncomfortable.¹⁰ This plan does not recommend that all CPTED principles should be incorporated into all urban park design and maintenance, but certain recommendations contribute to a sense of safety.

MAKE THE PARK WELCOMING

Ensure that parks remain welcoming to all user types by including varied types of amenities in the design and selecting surface types that encourage accessibility. Provide shaded places to sit in the park so people will choose to linger rather than move through. Welcoming entryways provide a sense of arrival that encourages visitors.

ACTIVATION IS KEY TO SAFETY

Programming for active use is an essential strategy. Connect the Lots (CTL), a collaborative initiative of the City of Camden and Cooper’s Ferry Partnership, is designed to activate Camden’s vacant and under-utilized spaces through the implementation of artistic, cultural, and recreational projects and activities. The goals of the initiative are to engage Camden residents in neighborhood transformation, create safe nodes of activity, and bring vibrancy to Camden’s corridors, trails, and public spaces. From 2017 to 2020, CTL engaged over 35,000 people in 11 different parks throughout the city of Camden. Ninety-two percent of the 161 attendees surveyed at CTL’s 2019 Camden Jam indicated that the event promotes positive community.

MAINTENANCE AND SAFETY GO HAND-IN-HAND

Broken equipment and unkempt public places encourage inappropriate behavior. The broken windows

theory holds that disordered and disinvested urban environments promote criminal activity. Blighted urban environments can erode a sense of mutual regard among residents and passersby, signaling that no one cares and that illegal activity will be tolerated in a space.¹¹

Maintaining landscaping and gardens will demonstrate a high level of care for a space. Gardens and tidy landscaping discourage unwanted behavior. A study by Kondo Michelle et al. of Philadelphia’s Green Stormwater Infrastructure program found gardens and tidy landscaping had an effect on safety in nearby areas. The models found significant reductions in certain crimes over an average four-year follow-up period, indicating that a relatively long-term impact might be expected. The study found that construction of GSI projects was associated most strongly and consistently with reductions in the occurrence of narcotics possession. Possession indicates the buying of narcotics rather than the selling of narcotics.¹²

STRATEGY: ESTABLISH A MORE REGULAR POLICE PRESENCE

Camden residents and stakeholders also felt that changes in the policing strategy around parks could help create a safer atmosphere in parks. Park users observed that police most often visit parks only after an incident has been reported. Many stakeholders felt more regularly scheduled patrols would benefit park safety. The presence of bike patrols would also be beneficial, as it would allow officers to access more remote park areas via the trails. Bike patrols may make it easier for park users to speak with officers, thus adding to the positive work the Camden County Police Department has already done to build stronger relations with the community. In addition, developing partnerships among neighborhood groups, nonprofits, institutions, government, and the Police Department to monitor parks has proved to increase user feelings of safety and comfort. Some also suggested installing more eye-in-the-sky cameras to aid in real-time monitoring.

At 4th and Washington Park in the Lanning Square neighborhood, the Lanning Square West Residents Association has volunteered to monitor and assist with the maintenance of the park since it was reopened post-

renovation in September 2019. This partnership has yielded positive results to date, as park use has skyrocketed and vandalism and other issues have decreased.

OBJECTIVE → Increase High-Demand Park Amenities

After safety, “better equipment, courts, and fields” was the second-highest community priority, with a 52 percent response rate. The addition of new amenities would increase park use and make parks more interesting destinations for residents. Many of these amenities also have health benefits.

TABLE 2. TOP AMENITIES

Park amenities	Open space amenities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playgrounds/play structures • Restrooms • Community gardens • Park drinking fountains • Running tracks • Spraygrounds • Basketball courts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking paths or trails • Mountain biking • Nonmotorized boating • Fishing

STRATEGY: CONTINUE TO BUILD PARTNERSHIPS WITH AMENITY PROVIDERS

Camden should seek to build relationships with nonprofit and philanthropic partners who fund park amenities, and continue to grow existing partnerships. Organizations like the Sixers Youth Foundation, American Water Charitable Foundation, Jaws Youth Playbook, U.S. Soccer Foundation, and KOMPAN have funded park amenities in Camden recently. Growing these relationships and building new relationships could help Camden increase access to park amenities such as play structures, spraygrounds, soccer mini-pitches, basketball courts, and football fields.

STRATEGY: ADD DOG PARKS

Forty-eight percent of Camden residents reported an interest in adding dog parks to the city park system. This strong interest in dog parks stems from the fact that Camden does not have a dog park. Dog parks,



Dog park at Lanier Playground in South Philadelphia. © ELYSE LEYENBERGER FOR THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

when added to an existing park, activate park usage and help to drive out unwanted activity. Dog parks bring people out at all hours of the day and night and bring people together. Strong social bonds are formed when neighbors meet informally at the dog park. The Lanier Playground in Philadelphia includes a small dog run and an all dog run that have been very successful additions to this neighborhood park. In order for a dog park to be successful, specific materials, equipment and design must be included. In addition, dog parks require a dedicated group of dog owners to manage and maintain the space to keep it clean, safe and welcoming.

STRATEGY: CREATE TYPICAL DESIGNS AND COSTS FOR FEATURES INVOLVING WATER

Designing and implementing improvements that involve plumbing can be cumbersome and expensive. However, many of these features (spraygrounds, water fountains, and restrooms) were highly requested by Camden residents. Camden should work with design and/or construction professionals to create a typical set of design drawings and specifications for implementing these renovations in parks with a standard range of costs for each element. This would make the process of adding these elements to parks faster and more straightforward and make maintaining these features easier.

STRATEGY: DEVELOP LARGER PASSIVE PARKS

Findings from community engagement highlight the importance of large-scale open parks for events and passive recreation. Meanwhile, review of data reveals that parks in Camden are very small when compared to those in other cities. To compound these facts, COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of parks for recreation and mental health. Because of the abundance of vacant land in Camden, a key recommendation is combining vacant and/or City-owned parcels with existing parks to increase the size of parks in Camden. In addition, we recommend converting vacant land into green spaces and upgrading use to include trails, lawns, and gardens. We also recommend making space for passive features, like pathways and open lawns, in existing parks.

STRATEGY: CREATE A CITY OF CAMDEN PARKS DEPARTMENT

Currently, the Department of Public Works (DPW) is tasked with maintaining the city's entire park system, along with numerous other public realm maintenance responsibilities. Competing interests within the DPW limit the City's ability to focus on maintaining and operating its park system, which in turn leads to accelerated degradation of the system as a whole. Creating a dedicated parks department would have myriad benefits, providing more attention and accountability over parks, making organization simpler, and taking the burden off the other departments and partners. It would also help to streamline opportunities for funding and outside collaboration if internalized. For example, a parks director would be able to apply for funding, enter into agreements, and develop a multi-year capital investment and maintenance plan.

OBJECTIVE → Improve Maintenance

Improved maintenance and upkeep were the third-highest community priority. Over half of participants said they would use parks more often if the parks were cleaner or taken care of better.

STRATEGY: INCREASE COMMUNITY CAPACITY

One way to address park maintenance issues is to increase the community's capacity to carry out

stewardship activities in the parks, facilitating community member involvement and increasing overall capacity. Increasing stewardship in this way would also give neighborhoods a sense of ownership over these parks. Furthermore, stewardship creates a positive community presence in the parks at different times of day, and these “eyes on the park” can help deter crime and the misuse of parks.

The City of Camden should consider several organizational structures with regard to organizing volunteers. One possibility is to create neighborhood-based beautification teams that take on volunteer projects in their own neighborhoods. As these groups could be organized by residents, with a large degree of self-direction, they would require less management from the City. However, they would be more difficult to implement in neighborhoods that do not already possess an organized Community Development Corporation (CDC) or neighborhood organization. Another possibility is the creation of an adopt-a-park program organized by the City, or a citywide park ambassadors program. However, given the administrative role involved with this undertaking, the ideal solution may be the creation of a separate nonprofit or conservancy focused on Camden parks that has the ability to raise funds and organize volunteers, similar to Park Pride in Atlanta or the Austin Parks Foundation.

The Camden County Parks Department operates a park ambassadors program that serves the 21 parks in the county’s park system. The City of Camden could model a program after this existing program, or partner with the program to provide ambassadorial services in additional parks in the city.

Providing funding for stewardship is also important. Community members may be willing to donate their time to local parks, but providing financial support for things like shovels, gloves, and plants will make it more likely that residents will participate. Some avenues for this already exist, such as the New Jersey Clean Communities Program. However, more are needed. No-cost training is also needed to teach volunteers best practices for park maintenance.

City of Camden should take advantage of the many corporate headquarters located in the city and seek corporate funding to support stewardship and other

upgrades. For example, a corporation could partner with a particular park friends group to support stewardship in the parks, or adopt a specific park. City of Camden should also consider the possibility of using naming rights for parks to entice corporate donors as well as signage thanking donors.

STRATEGY: INCREASE PUBLIC SECTOR MAINTENANCE CAPACITY

Increasing the city’s capacity for park maintenance is also important. This is certainly challenging given the limited funding available for park maintenance. Still, some low- or no-cost improvements can be made.

Greater training for City staff is an important start. Currently, the City’s capacity to incorporate any type of horticulture into design is highly limited. Additionally, the City currently has no certified playground safety inspectors on staff, which means that playgrounds are going largely unchecked.

The City should also formalize a maintenance review process for each park in the system. Currently, there is no mechanism for DPW field staff to report maintenance issues in the parks to DPW office staff. Creating a checklist for field staff to assess park quality issues, which could be submitted to DPW office staff, would allow the City to remedy maintenance issues more quickly and efficiently.

In addition, the City of Camden may consider developing a Park Rangers program to provide additional oversight throughout the park system. One example to consider is the City of Seattle’s Park Rangers program. According to the City’s website, “the primary function of park rangers is to support positive use of our parks, to educate and assist park users and to seek voluntary compliance with laws and Park Code. They can issue warnings, citations and parks trespass warnings. They can be called on to address repeated Park Code violations or minor infractions, and will respond when available. The Park Rangers have limited authority, are not sworn law enforcement officers, and are not armed.”¹³

STRATEGY: REDUCE LITTER AND DUMPING

Trash and dumping were major deterrents for community members. Camden should consider investing in durable, ground-mounted trash cans, increased signage



Two men using the equipment at the Powell Barnett Fitness Zone opening celebration. © REBECCA WEAVER FOR THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

about dumping, and gates and surveillance systems to prevent vehicles from entering parks to dump. Illegal dumping is a major burden on the City of Camden and negatively affects quality of life for residents. In recent years, the City has spent up to \$4 million per year mitigating illegal dumping. In 2019, DPW employees made 340 trips to illegal dumping spots throughout the city, removing over 7,000 tons of waste.

STRATEGY: GREATER COORDINATION AMONG PARK PROVIDERS

Several entities manage, maintain, and/or own parks within Camden (Camden County Parks, CCMUA, PowerCorps, and Camden Special Services District), and this leads to differing maintenance standards. Greater coordination and partnership between these organizations would ensure that all parks are maintained to a similar standard and allow the entities to cover more ground by coordinating their efforts. A standing quarterly meeting focused on partner coordination could address this gap.

The Steering Committee organized to support the Camden Parks Plan is well suited to strengthen coordination among park providers moving forward.

OBJECTIVE → Increase Programming

Programming and planned activities was the fourth-highest priority for increasing park use, with a

49 percent response rate. The top priorities for programming and events were:

- Special events (concerts in the park, festivals, movies, etc.) (68 percent)
- Arts (theater, painting, dance, etc.) (60 percent)
- Fitness classes (aerobics, yoga, etc.) (57 percent)

STRATEGY: SUPPORT AND GROW CAPACITY OF EXISTING PROGRAM PROVIDERS

Several active providers operate park programming in the city of Camden, including but not limited to Rutgers Center for the Arts, Camden County Library System, the Greater Philadelphia YMCA, and the Connect the Lots (CTL) initiative. The magnitude of their efforts is directly correlated with the availability of funding and can change drastically from year to year. Identifying more stable and longer-term sources of funding would allow these programs to scale up and increase their reach and impact.

STRATEGY: BUILD NEW PARTNERSHIPS WITH PROGRAM PROVIDERS

In order to provide the types of programming Camden residents are requesting, Camden should build new partnerships with regional program providers. Sixty percent of survey participants requested more arts programming in the park, including theater, painting, and dance. Developing partnerships with groups like Mural Arts Philadelphia, Shakespeare in the Park, and FringeArts (Philadelphia) would be a boon to Camden participants. As these groups are active in Philadelphia, attracting them to Camden is a realistic possibility.

As an example, in 2018 and 2019, Coopers Ferry Partnership and Connect the Lots Camden partnered with Camden County and the Trenton Circus Squad on a pop-up social circus program during the Camden/Philadelphia July 4th Freedom Festival celebrations. The Big Top was set up with the backdrop of the picturesque Ben Franklin Bridge in the beautiful Cooper's Poynt Waterfront Park. Throughout the week, youth groups visited during the day to see a performance and join in a workshop. By night, the tent was transformed into a magical performance space. In all, the circus served over 1,600 children in workshops and an audience of 1,000 people.

STRATEGY: DESIGN TO FACILITATE PROGRAMMING

Stakeholders noted that structural changes to parks would make programming easier. Although many parks have dedicated spaces for active recreation, more flat open spaces would help to facilitate the types of large special events community members were most interested in, as well as smaller, informal activities. The lack of functional electrical outlets and shade structures also hinders programming, while the presence of bollards and fences makes it difficult for trucks to bring in the necessary materials for programs. Stakeholders felt that swing gates would be preferable.

STRATEGY: STREAMLINE THE PERMITTING PROCESS

The City should also consider administrative changes that would allow for improvements in programming, namely streamlining its permitting process. Many community members are interested in starting sports leagues, but the process to obtain permits is often unclear to them. The City would benefit from a centralized online permitting system, managed by the City's Department of Human Services, which allows coaches and other programmers to see what facilities are available and to reserve space. This would simplify the process and empower community members to take action in carrying out programs. Pennsauken was highlighted as a model for this type of platform.

Further complicating the permitting process is the varied ownership of parks in Camden. While most are owned and operated by the City of Camden, some are managed by Camden County or the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority (CCMUA). Centralizing the permitting system for all parks within Camden and clearly identifying which entity owns each park and how to obtain a permit for each park would greatly improve the permitting process.

STRATEGY: IMPROVE EVENTS OUTREACH

Many residents voiced interest in participating in park programs, but they expressed frustration that there was not an easy way to learn about upcoming events. Camden should develop a citywide calendar for all public events, similar to that of [New York City](#). Likewise, the City could consider an approach similar to that of Camden County, which currently puts out a parks guide every spring that is mailed to every



Girls planting. © CARA COLSON FOR THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

household in the county. A seasonal email blast would also be effective.

OBJECTIVE →

Maximize Climate Resilience

The city of Camden is particularly vulnerable to climate-driven hazards because of high exposure to extreme heat and flooding as well as social and economic stressors that exacerbate the impact of these threats. Camden is surrounded by tidally influenced rivers, already experiences extreme heat, suffers from flooding, and has a disproportionate number of residents who are economically and socially vulnerable. What we learned from outreach is that, aside from localized flooding, Camden residents are not aware of, and are not prepared for, the climate hazards that are becoming more severe.

STRATEGY: TARGET PARK DEVELOPMENT, TREE PLANTING, AND COOL PAVEMENT TECHNOLOGIES URBAN HEAT ISLANDS

According to the latest National Climate Assessment, heat waves in the United States have almost tripled compared to the long-term average] and on average kill more people annually in the United States than all other weather-related hazards.¹⁴ As our climate warms, we can expect these threats to become even more severe. Based on a national analysis conducted by the Union of Concerned Scientists, historically Camden has experienced six days per year when the heat index reached 100 degrees. If current emissions and climate projections hold, by mid-century (2036–2065) Camden will likely experience 35 days per year when the heat

index exceeds 100 degrees and 61 days per year by late century (2070–2099).^{15]} In addition to increased temperatures citywide, it’s important to note that surface temperatures across Camden can vary significantly based on the amount of pavement, buildings, and green space. According to data in the Green + Healthy Camden Decision Support Tool, average land-surface temperatures can vary from the mid-70s to as much as 104 degrees. This variation is due to the urban heat island effect that can be mitigated using parks and open space. In fact, a study in Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, DC, showed that on one of the hottest summer days, parks were a cooling oasis – as much as 17 degrees cooler than parts of the city lacking trees and green space.¹⁶ The cooling benefit of parks can extend as far as a half mile from park boundaries, helping cool the neighborhood and reduce heat stress for residents.

In order to mitigate heat islands, this plan recommends a comprehensive review of data in the Green + Healthy Camden Decision Support Tool to identify heat islands to target park development, tree planting, and where to install cool pavement technologies. The Park and Schoolyard Assessment Matrices (Tables 3 and 4) identify the parks and schoolyards in Camden that are located in urban heat islands. This plan recommends de-paving, cool-coating, installing native gardens, and planting broadleaf deciduous trees in these parks and schoolyards to help address dangerous urban heat. In addition, we recommend prioritizing the preservation of existing mature trees whenever possible in instances when new real estate and infrastructure development contemplates their removal and replacement.

STRATEGY: UNDERTAKE COMPREHENSIVE RIVERINE FLOOD PLANNING AND POLICY REVIEW TO SAFEGUARD FLOOD VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Camden is a city surrounded by tidally influenced rivers, making residents and infrastructure particularly vulnerable to sea level rise and storm surge leading to increased riverine flooding. The 100-year floodplain already encroaches on developed areas, and as sea level rise increases in the coming years, the floodplain well may become the new rivers’ edge. Based on readily available data from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

(NOAA), we mapped projected floodwater elevations in Camden based on one- to six-foot sea level rise scenarios, storm surge from Category 1, 2, and 4 hurricanes, and more. These findings are available in the Green + Healthy Camden Decision Support Tool. Through outreach to residents, we learned that many are unaware of the flooding threats posed by climate change. In addition, through the Water Equity Task Force, convened through the US Water Alliance, we learned that climate planning is a top priority for key stakeholders in Camden.

In order to prepare residents for additional flooding, we recommend targeted outreach to the community about climate vulnerabilities. In addition, the City and the County should prioritize comprehensive riverine flood planning and policy review to safeguard flood vulnerable communities. Planning recommendations should include strategies to dissipate floodwater through natural solutions as well as protective grading to buffer developed areas. Opportunities to advance climate resilience can be layered onto existing master plans. As an example, in 2009, the North Camden community came together to envision its 1.4-mile waterfront as a connected series of vibrant green parks. Some of these parks have been developed, while others await funding and development opportunities. All of these parks present a key strategy for safeguarding the city through water smart park design. To pilot this kind of development, The Trust for Public Land is working with Mastery Charter High School and the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority to develop a resilient green schoolyard at the school. This



Cyclists enjoying the view. © RICH FREEDA

project will pilot flood mitigation through the installation of a resilient shoreline and floodable passive recreation. To ensure that future development responds to climate change, policy and design standards need to anticipate the 100-year floodplain more aggressively. The Green + Healthy Camden Decision Support Tool is a publicly available planning resource that city planners and development partners can use to identify parcel-level vulnerabilities. Comprehensive training on how to use the tool and respond to threats through design should be implemented as a baseline measure.

One existing policy that should be reviewed for effectiveness is the City's Sustainability Ordinance, enacted in 2015. The ordinance requires all applicants to the Camden City Planning Board and/or the Zoning Board of Adjustment for new development, or for modification to existing development, to submit with their applications an Environmental Impact and Benefits Assessment (EIBA) which evaluates the potential impacts and benefits that the proposed activity could have on the environment, public health and general welfare of the residents of the City of Camden and the general public at large. Though the intent of the ordinance is positive, enforcement appears to have been limited since its enactment.

STRATEGY: CONSERVE AND PROTECT OPEN SPACE

Natural climate solutions are critical tools to improving community resilience and protecting people from increasingly severe climate hazards like flooding and extreme heat. Protected open space often acts as a sponge, soaking up rainwater during storms, preventing or reducing flooding from occurring in developed areas. A study in Middlebury, Vermont showed that natural flood plains and wetlands reduce potential flood damage in that one community by up to 78 percent during major storm events¹⁷. Conserved open space can also help address extreme heat. Densely forested tracts of land serve as a cooling oasis during heat waves. In fact, a federally-funded study in Baltimore and D.C. showed that during a heat wave, densely forested areas were as much as 17 degrees cooler than nearby neighborhoods that lacked adequate parks, trees, and green space¹⁸. We recommend conservation of undeveloped

riverfront properties to maintain the natural flood plains and wetlands.

STRATEGY: INCREASE THE CAPACITY TO ADVANCE COMPREHENSIVE STORMWATER MANAGEMENT THROUGH GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Including green infrastructure in the design of a park is a nationally recognized strategy for advancing climate resilience and reducing stormwater runoff. Green infrastructure is essential for advancing the City of Camden's goals to eliminate combined sewage flooding and reduce combined sewage overflows (CSOs). There are several ways in which the City of Camden can increase its capacity to advance comprehensive stormwater management through green infrastructure.

UTILIZE THE GREEN + HEALTHY CAMDEN DECISION SUPPORT TOOL

The Green + Healthy Camden Decision Support Tool identifies low-lying areas in the city and areas that frequently flood. In addition, it maps the location of CSOs and tributary sewersheds. The tool has the capability to review green infrastructure suitability for any given parcel in Camden and therefore will be a helpful in advancing the adoption of green infrastructure in park and open space projects. We recommend that Camden SMART Partners and the CCI use the Green + Healthy Camden Decision Support Tool to identify and coordinate green infrastructure opportunities.

COORDINATE SEWER MAINTENANCE

Although there has been momentum in the development of Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) in Camden and plans are in place to increase GSI adoption, outreach to stakeholders reveals an ongoing concern regarding GSI maintenance. The Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority has limited ability to maintain systems as it does not own the sewer infrastructure. Furthermore, the City of Camden, which owns the sewer infrastructure, has very little capacity to conduct regular maintenance. New Jersey American Water is under contract to provide pipe cleaning, which is helping, but it does not maintain aboveground improvements. Clearer division of authority and expectations regarding maintenance responsibility will help ensure that pipes, inlets, and rain gardens are being properly cared for.



PowerCorps Camden crew members planting a tree. © DOUG BURNS FOR CCMUA

SUPPORT POWERCORPS CAMDEN

Center for Family Services, the City of Camden, and CCMUA have partnered to develop PowerCorps Camden, a workforce development program for at-risk young adults to maintain green infrastructure and parks. PowerCorps members make positive change in Camden by helping to keep the river clean and public spaces green and beautiful. However, the work needed sometimes exceeds their ability. In addition, the program needs a sustainable source of funding to ensure long-term operation and to provide additional training and growth.

INVEST IN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Outreach from the park plan revealed a strong interest from the community in managing flooding and in maintaining trees. We recommend continued work with partners, such as the New Jersey Tree Foundation, to prioritize tree planting. The Green + Healthy Camden Decision Support Tool can identify where trees are most needed to respond to urban heat. All efforts should include capacity building at the residential level. Best practices include training residents on tree planting and tree care. In addition, we recommend including green infrastructure awareness and care in community engagement programs so that residents can begin to value the critical role GSI plays in keeping their streets, homes, and rivers clean. A great example in Philadelphia is the Water Ambassador who tables at community events to engage residents in a fun way about the importance of keeping streets and inlets

litter free, helping to care for rain gardens, and building an awareness regarding CSO and GSI.

BUILD THE CAPACITY OF CAMDEN SMART

Moving forward, Camden SMART (also known as the CCI Water Working Group) should consider the following to enhance collaboration and impact:

- Create a subcommittee focused specifically on shepherding green infrastructure projects from inception to completion. Camden SMART's mission and reach has expanded in recent years, and a renewed focus on implementing green infrastructure projects will provide benefit to the city.
- Develop a living document of pipeline development projects citywide, including real estate development, park development, and roadway reconstruction. This will ensure that green infrastructure elements are woven into all applicable projects in their infancy.

INCLUDE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE IN PARK RENOVATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

At the administrative level, there is additional need for capacity to permit, review, and potentially fund the increased green infrastructure that will come to Camden.

- Increase capacity to monitor and review regulatory compliance during design and construction
- Create stormwater permits for development that triggers earth disturbance greater than 15,000 square feet. This will ensure that regulatory conditions are met by large-scale development and will hold contractors responsible for stormwater management.
- Consider creating a green infrastructure grant program to support green infrastructure development by others. The Philadelphia Water Department's Stormwater Management Incentives Program (SMIP) Grant is a good model.
- Increase public-private partnerships that will enable the delivery of green infrastructure at scale throughout the city, such as a Green Schoolyard Program and a Green Park Program.
- Explore opportunities to increase funding for green infrastructure maintenance and grow the capacity for key stakeholders to conduct regular systems maintenance.

TABLE 3: PARKS IN CAMDEN LISTED BY CLIMATE PRIORITY, AMENITY OFFERINGS, AND STATUS OF REDEVELOPMENT

PARK/OPEN SPACE NAME	GREEN + HEALTHY PRIORITY			RECREATION AMENITIES											CIVIC AMENITIES						OVERALL ASSESSMENT	STATUS as of August 2020	PRIORITY to Renovate				
	Cool	Equity	Absorb	Soccer field	Baseball Court	Football Field	Multi-Use Field	Basketball Court	Tennis Court	Handball Court	Track	Fitness	Playground	Sprayground	Pool	Ampitheater	Lighting	Access Road	Parking	Pavillion				Fishing Pier	Hiking Trails	Comm. Garden	Walkway
4th & Washington	●	●	●				■	■		■		■	■			■			■							Renov.	
7th & Clinton Park	●	●	●					■				■	■	■		■	■		■					■	Major repairs		■
7th Street Mall	●	●	●																								
22nd & Harrison Park	●	●	●		■		■									■							■	Minor repairs		■	
Alberta Woods	●	●	●				■					■	■			■									Renov.		
Baldwin's Run	●	●	●																				■				
Bradley & Ormond Park	●	●	●																				■				
Broadway & Ferry Park	●	●	●																				■				
Cooper's Poynt Waterfront Park	●	●	●									■				■	■	■							Minor repairs		
Commonplace Park	●	●	●																								■
Sheila Roberts Park	●	●	●									■				■											
Cornelius Martin Park	●	●	●	■	■		■					■													In prog.		■
Cramer Hill Nature Preserve	●	●	●															■			■						
Cramer Hill Waterfront Park	●	●	●									■			■	■	■	■			■	■	■	■	In prog.		
Dominick Andujar Park	●	●	●		■		■					■				■	■							Recon.	In prog.		■
Dudley Grange Park	●	●	●					■			■	■	■		■	■	■	■					■	Major repairs			■
Elijah Perry Park	●	●	●		■		■					■	■			■							■	Recon.	In prog.		■
Farnham Park	●	●	●				■				■	■	■			■	■	■	■				■	Major repairs			■
Ferry Avenue Rain Garden	●	●	●																								
Gateway Park	●	●	●														■	■			■		■		In prog.		■
Hopeworks Community Garden	●	●	●																			■					
Liney Ditch Park	●	●	●	■			■	■	■			■	■		■	■						■	■	Major repairs			■
Memorial Park	●	●	●																								
Michael Doyle Fishing Pier	●	●	●													■	■		■								
Mickle-Eutaw Park	●	●	●				■					■				■	■						■	Recon.			■
New Camden Park	●	●	●		■		■	■				■											■	Recon.	In prog.		■

TABLE 3: PARKS IN CAMDEN LISTED BY CLIMATE PRIORITY, AMENITY OFFERINGS, AND STATUS OF REDEVELOPMENT

PARK/OPEN SPACE NAME	GREEN + HEALTHY PRIORITY			RECREATION AMENITIES													CIVIC AMENITIES							OVERALL ASSESSMENT	STATUS as of August 2020	PRIORITY to Renovate	
	Cool	Equity	Absorb	Soccer field	Baseball Court	Football Field	Multi-Use Field	Basketball Court	Tennis Court	Handball Court	Track	Fitness	Playground	Sprayground	Pool	Ampitheater	Lighting	Access Road	Parking	Pavillion	Fishing Pier	Hiking Trails	Comm. Garden				Walkway
North Camden Community Center	●	●	●												■												
Northgate Park	●	●	●	■				■		■			■	■		■	■							■	Major repairs		■
Phoenix Park	●	●	●														■	■	■					■			
Pyne Poynt Park	●	●	●		■			■				■	■				■	■						■	Minor repairs		
Ralph Williams Memorial Park	●	●	●					■	■			■	■			■			■					■	Recon.		■
Reverend Evers Park	●	●	●		■			■				■	■	■			■	■	■	■				■		Renov.	
Robert B. Johnson Park	●	●	●		■	■		■				■	■				■	■	■					■	Major repairs	In prog.	■
Roosevelt Plaza	●	●	●																								
Rosedale Greenway	●	●	●																					■			
Rutgers-Camden Community Park	●	●	●	■	■							■					■							■	Minor repairs		
Rutgers Campus	●	●	●																					■			
Spruce Street Park	●	●	●									■					■								Recon.		■
Staley Park	●	●	●		■	■		■				■					■							■	Major repairs		■
Stockton Park	●	●	●		■	■		■									■	■	■						Major repairs		
Union Field	●	●	●		■	■						■					■	■							Recon.		■
Veterans Park	●	●	●									■					■								Major repairs		
Von Nieda Park	●	●	●	■	■			■				■	■				■	■	■						Major repairs		■
Waterfront South Rain Gardens	●	●	●																								
Whitman Park	●	●	●					■	■	■		■					■									In prog.	■
Whitman Square	●	●	●									■															
Wiggins Waterfront Park	●	●	●														■	■						■			
Yorkship Square	●	●	●																					■			

Green + Healthy Priorities:

- Very High
- High
- Mid
- Low

Recreation Amenities:

- Needs Improvement
- Good Condition

Abbreviations:

- Recon. = Recommended for full reconstruction
- Major/Minor Repairs = Major/Minor repairs are needed
- In Prog. = Project currently in progress
- Renov. = Project currently being renovated

*Overall Assessment data provided by the 2019 Camden City Parks Assessment by Camden County.

OBJECTIVE → Increase Park Funding

The Parks and Open Space Plan for Camden outlines the benefits of upgrading new parks and schoolyards to best serve the needs of the community. It outlines the benefits of programming and increased maintenance and articulates the value in creating systems for long-term stewardship. These recommendations build a framework for park quality, one that will require two key ingredients to advance. The first is a steadfast commitment to parks from elected officials and residents. The second key ingredient is funding. In this section we will review the various types of funding available to parks and open space in Camden. Park funding generally falls in two distinct areas: public and private.

STRATEGY: PURSUE FEDERAL FUNDING SOURCES

Public funding is available at the federal, state, and local levels. At the federal level, several resources have been developed specifically to advance park and recreation opportunities.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund, or LWCF, is a longstanding federal program that directs fees from oil and gas drilling to investments in parks and open space. It costs taxpayers nothing – but benefits everyone. However you get outside, chances are LWCF has contributed to a place you know and love. It has protected 8 million acres in all 50 states, invested \$20 billion in communities since 1964, and funded a park or open space in 98 percent of U.S. counties.¹⁷

In August 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) was passed into law. This will allocate \$900 million per year to parks and conservation through the LWCF. The GAOA includes two components: providing \$900 million per year automatically to LWCF and making significant investments in long-standing maintenance backlogs in our national parks, forests, and other public lands. Both the U.S. Senate and the House passed the legislation with strong bipartisan support.¹⁸

The Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program (ORLP) allocates a portion of the LWDF funding to urban communities. ORLP, a nationally competitive

grant program, delivers funding to urban areas – jurisdictions of at least 50,000 people – with priority given to projects located in economically disadvantaged areas and lacking in outdoor recreation opportunities. These awards help urban communities address outdoor recreation deficits by supporting projects in cities and densely populated urbanized areas that create new outdoor recreation spaces, reinvigorate existing parks, and form connections between people and the outdoors.²⁰ Camden is well positioned to qualify for ORLP funding for urban park development. Typically, ORLP will award projects that are “shovel ready,” or ready for construction. This includes projects that have successfully completed community engagement and are fully designed.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is committed to environmental health, awarding more than \$4 billion in funding for grants and other assistance agreements. From small nonprofit organizations to large state governments, EPA works to help many visionary organizations achieve their environmental goals.²¹ EPA grants fall into a couple of buckets, such as Air Grants, Brownfield Grants, Environmental Education Grants, Environmental Justice Grants, and many more. These grants mentioned represent good opportunities to support parks in Camden, especially if the parks support cleaner air, cleaner water, cleaner land, and increased environmental literacy.

Other buckets of federal funding fall under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program provides annual grants on a formula basis to states, cities, and counties to develop viable urban communities that offer decent housing and a suitable living environment and expand economic opportunities, principally for low- and moderate-income persons.²² In Newark, New Jersey, The Trust for Public Land partnered with the City, Essex County, and the Ironbound Community Corporation to develop the Newark Riverfront Park. Located on a brownfield next to the Passaic River, the park added much-needed green space while linking residents for the first time to the water. The City combined \$2.6 million of its CDBG funds with \$4 million in other public money and \$2.7 million in private money, and the project's first phase was completed in 2013.

Another good indicator for Camden is Promise Zone status. Through the Promise Zones Initiative, HUD will work strategically with local leaders to boost economic activity and job growth, improve educational opportunities, reduce crime, and leverage private investment to improve the quality of life in these vulnerable areas.²³ Since many neighborhoods in Camden are recognized as Promise Zones, parks in Camden are well positioned to secure federal resources.

STRATEGY: PURSUE STATE FUNDING SOURCES

New Jersey is one of the most innovative states when it comes to park funding. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) established the Green Acres program in 1961 to achieve, in partnership with others, a system of interconnected open spaces whose protection will preserve and enhance New Jersey's natural environment and its historic, scenic, and recreational resources for public use and enjoyment. To date and in partnership with public and nonprofit partners, the Green Acres program has directly protected 650,000 acres of open space and provided hundreds of outdoor recreational facilities in communities around the state. Over the years, voters have authorized \$3.3 billion in Green Acres funding, approving every bond referendum put before them.²⁴

Camden has a long history of securing Green Acres funding for parks and recreation. Recently, the Green Acres program provided \$2 million for the construction of RCA Pier on Camden's Central Waterfront. The Green Acres program has also pledged \$1.8 million to the renovation of Whitman Park in the Whitman Park neighborhood and \$425,000 to the development of Sadler's Poynt Waterfront Park on the North Camden waterfront, both of which will begin in 2021.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has provided a diverse set of resources and technical assistance that have helped envision, create, fund and leverage park development in Camden. Through the Office of Brownfield and Community Revitalization efforts, many brownfield sites and the city's former landfill have been (or are in the process of) becoming parks in the city. The Office of Brownfield and Community Revitalization has provided over \$40 million in Hazardous Discharge Site Remediation Fund (HDSRF) grants that provided



Camden's 14 miles of waterfront are a tremendous opportunity for continued park development. © COURTESY OF COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

monies to investigate and/or cleanup abandoned contaminated sites into parks including Cramer Hill Waterfront Park, RCA Pier Park and the future Sadler's Poynt Waterfront Park, Dominick Andujar Park and Whitman Park (Camden Labs portion). In addition to providing over \$25 million in HDSRF grants for the former Harrison Avenue Landfill to help build the Kroc Community Center, HDSRF investigation and cleanup monies at the park helped catalyze the commitment of \$4.1 million of Site Remediation Program Public Funds for the removal of industrial wastes and securing NJDEP Office of Natural Resource Restoration's use of \$48 million of natural resource damages settlement monies to complete the 62-acre park.

NJDEP's Water Resource Management's Municipal Financing Program has worked closely with the CCMUA and city of Camden to provide significant funding for green infrastructure projects and the creation of or rehabilitation of parks that have also helped green the city. The Municipal Financing Program, working with the Infrastructure Bank, has provide over \$250 million in water infrastructure loans and grants in the last decade that have supported economic development and environmental restoration in the city. NJDEP Municipal Financing and Infrastructure Bank monies were the primary funding

sources for the rehabilitation of Von Neida Park, and the creation of Baldwin's Run Stream Daylighting and Phoenix Park projects.

Other NJDEP programs that have had an important impact on park development and maintenance in Camden include the Community Collaborative Initiative (CCI) in the Office of Brownfield and Community Revitalization, and the Compliance & Enforcement Program. The Community Collaborative Initiative has a dedicated NJDEP Liaison (Armando Alfonso) who attends local working group meetings and brings information back to NJDEP to find resources and expertise to work on environmental issues in Camden, including parks. The Compliance & Enforcement program has been supporting the city and Camden County Police Department in the deterrence of illegal dumping, and has utilized its enforcement discretion to negotiate Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEPs), local environmental projects in the areas where past violations have impacted local communities.

Other state funding sources that support the development of parks include the NJDEP Recreational Trails Program. The Recreational Trails Program utilizes Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funds to provide financial assistance for developing and maintaining trails and trail facilities.

STRATEGY: INCREASE LOCAL FUNDING

Owing to its small size and shallow tax base, the City of Camden is limited in its ability to provide funding for parks in Camden. Camden County, on the other hand, is a well-resourced county with a comparatively deep tax base. Both the City of Camden and Camden County have a history of supporting parks within the Camden city limits. In fact, the Camden County Parks Department has prioritized the renovation of parks in the City of Camden, investing \$5 million in Camden parks since 2017 with an additional \$14 committed over the next five years. In an effort to strengthen funding for parks in Camden County, the County is exploring a ballot measure that would assess a 1 cent levy on property. Voters in Camden County have demonstrated their strong support for local funding for parks and land conservation for over 20 years.



Learning Trail event. © COURTESY OF CAMDEN COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENT

Twice Camden County voters have overwhelmingly approved countywide funding measures increasing property taxes to fund the protection of parks and natural areas. The Camden County Open Space, Recreation, Farmland, and Historic Preservation Trust Fund was created in November 1998, when voters approved a public referendum with 67 percent support. This successful ballot measure allowed for the collection of an additional tax of up to 1 cent per \$100 of assessed property valuation. Voters again showed their strong support for county funding for land conservation in November 2005, approving another open space referendum with 68 percent support and increasing the open space tax by an additional 1 cent to 2 cents per \$100 of assessed property value.

Voters at the municipal level in Camden County have also strongly supported local land conservation and park funding measures. Nine municipalities in Camden County have asked for and received voter approval of their own municipal open space taxes, as listed in Table 5 below.

A 2018 poll of Camden County voters also showed strong support for the county's land conservation program.²⁷ The poll tested support for increasing the county open space tax from 2 cents to 3 cents, which would require a county-wide referendum. When informed of the structure of the open space trust fund, how the funds would be used, and arguments both for and against the proposal, fully 59 percent of county voters surveyed said they would support the

proposal, 32 percent opposed it, and 9 percent were undecided. Voters polled felt that the most important uses for the funds were to protect drinking water sources and the water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams; preserve farmland; provide nature education for children; protect wildlife habitat; preserve natural areas; and provide clean, accessible parks.

As noted elsewhere in this report, one important funder of parks in Camden is the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority (CCMUA), which provides financial support when parks perform stormwater management functions. CCMUA not only supports the development of green infrastructure in parks, such as Gateway Park, but it also conserves vacant land for recreation, such as Phoenix Park and the Cramer Hill Nature Preserve.

STRATEGY: INCREASE PRIVATE FUNDING FOR CAMDEN'S PARKS

The City of Camden has a robust history of generous support from a wide variety of philanthropic partners. Individuals, foundations, and corporations are looking for great organizations to fund that can help them apply their charitable giving in meaningful, impactful ways. Parks and open spaces that are publicly accessible to everyone form a compelling case for support because they are capable of providing a multitude of positive health, environmental, social, economic, and equitable outcomes.

The places where we live, learn, work, and play impact our health and well-being before we reach the doctor's office. Parks are an essential component of those places and too often an underutilized tool for community health. Having access to quality outdoor spaces promotes health and well-being by ensuring that the default design of the built environment promotes activity. Not only does living closer to a park increase people's likelihood of being physically active, parks provide time for mental and social well-being. Spending time in nature can boost mood and decrease stress, and parks provide public space where people can connect. Analysis shows that across Camden, neighborhoods have not been invested in equitably. This inequity plays out in who has access to high quality public parks, which impact their social determinants of health. This plan spells out an equity framework for park investment which will improve the physical environment for many Camden residents. Health funders are interested in improvements that will drive an increase in physical activity, opportunities for restorative time in nature to reduce stress and to support social health. Parks deliver these opportunities for the residents of Camden and therefore have the ability to unlock health funding.

Prior to asking potential funders for financial support, it is important to fully understand the scope of each project. Once they know where the potential site is,

TABLE 5. CAMDEN COUNTY MUNICIPALITIES WITH CURRENT OPEN SPACE TAXES²⁵

Municipality	Most recent year approved	2019 tax per \$100 assessed value	2019 tax revenue
Berlin Borough	2008	\$0.015	\$110,900
Berlin Township	1999	\$0.04	\$242,200
Cherry Hill Township	2000	\$0.01	\$781,038
Clementon Township	2000	\$0.02	\$49,842
Gibbsboro Borough	2001	\$0.02	\$45,980
Gloucester Township	2001	\$0.02	\$883,169
Haddonfield Borough	2016	\$0.005	\$113,481
Stratford Borough	2013	\$0.014	\$57,247
Voorhees Township	2003	\$0.02	\$638,000

fundes will also want to know who else is involved, how long it will take, when the work will get under way, what's being proposed, and why their money is needed.

Philanthropy can drive innovation in park creation. When public funding is accessed to effect particular outcomes, additional funding can be brought to a project from philanthropic sources to achieve more desired outcomes. Often, parks and open spaces can be funded from a mix of sources.

Public funding when restricted for specific uses can be leveraged toward a fuller impact when supplemented with contributed income. If state and federal dollars can be accessed for capital investments, then philanthropic sources can be leveraged to conduct community engagement and cover staff time to execute the project, for example. Much of the success of parks and open spaces comes from those who use them most. Philanthropic sources can be accessed to conduct in-depth, creative community engagement in design and then the stewardship of parks and open space.

A number of philanthropic funding sources make grants for programming in parks. Often the organizations that oversee stewardship activities and events will have connections to those who fund their work. Funders prefer that prospective grantees seek to work in partnership to achieve shared outcomes and objectives whenever possible. Organizations that seek to fundraise together on projects they undertake should consider formalizing roles, responsibilities, and expectations in writing before embarking on the process.

Philanthropic contributions help foster equitable and innovative solutions for park design and creation, activations, and long-term stewardship, which in turn cause an uplift that benefits the entire community.

The support of private philanthropies has pushed equitable and innovative solutions for park creation, stewardship, and community empowerment. Philanthropic leadership and support is critical, and the strategies outlined in this plan will be best advanced through public-private partnership.

OBJECTIVE → **Give Community Members More Information**

STRATEGY: INCREASE PARK SIGNAGE

Camden should increase park signage. Although some park signage should be devoted to basic information like park hours, rules (e.g., no smoking, no ATVs, etc.), other signage could be more interpretive, sharing pieces of Camden's history or knowledge of local flora and fauna. Camden's youth suggested fun trivia signage with historical facts displayed on signs throughout the parks, as well as push notifications on smart phones that educate park users on park features, history, or ecology when they walk past.

STRATEGY: PROVIDE REGULAR UPDATES

Many residents expressed frustration with the lack of basic information sharing about the park system. They frequently didn't know which parks were open or closed, when renovations were scheduled, or all the park locations. The City should create a dedicated Camden Parks website to provide information, updates, and a system-wide map of all the parks in Camden. By indicating ownership of each park, the website would also help people figure out whom to contact to obtain a permit.

OBJECTIVE → **Increase Collaboration Between Stakeholders**

STRATEGY: SCHEDULE A REGULAR MEETING FOR CAMDEN PARKS STAKEHOLDERS

Many stakeholders noted the lack of collaboration and organization among various parks stakeholders in Camden. This is unsurprising, as close to 30 groups are involved in park or outdoor recreation, planning, programming, and advocacy in the area. A regularly scheduled monthly or bimonthly meeting to convene all of these stakeholders would benefit Camden parks by facilitating greater collaboration. This could be carried out through a new structure, or as a separate, specifically parks-focused subcommittee through the existing Camden Collaborative Initiative (CCI) infrastructure.

SECTION 6

Collaborating to Overcome Challenges

Proudly emerging from the depths of adversity, Camden is clearly the City Invincible. Parks and green infrastructure will continue to play a crucial role in the city's renaissance. Camden struggles with many challenges, from flooding, to urban heat, to equity issues. This plan shows WHY, HOW and WHERE parks and open space can be a tool for climate smart, healthy recovery for all communities in Camden, especially those most vulnerable. Turning this plan into real on-the-ground change will be a collaborative effort, led by the many passionate park managers, advocates, and community members that are already leading the fight for a greener, healthier, and more equitable Camden.



Volunteers huddle at a clean-up event at Pyne Poynt Park. © COURTESY OF CAMDEN COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENT

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Father and son enjoy a park. ©CHRISTOPHER T. MARTIN



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