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NATIONAL INITIATIVE ANNOUNCES \$550,000 INVESTMENT TO ADVANCE VIBRANCY, EQUITY, CIVIC LIFE, & SOCIAL CONNECTION IN CAMDEN

CAMDEN, NJ—Reimagining Civic Commons (RCC), a collaboration of national foundations and civic leaders dedicated to revitalizing urban spaces for greater social, economic, and environmental benefits, has announced a \$550,000 investment in Camden, New Jersey.

This grant has been awarded to the Camden Special Services District (CSSD) in conjunction with Camden Community Partnership (CCP). Team Camden is proud to lead this effort with the support of key collaborators, including The Trust for Public Land, the Daelight Foundation, Not In Our Parks, the City of Camden, Camden County, and a host of dedicated community organizations. The grant is made possible through the generous support of The JPB Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, The Kresge Foundation and The Miami Foundation, which serves as the initiative’s fiscal sponsor. Camden’s participation is supported by Subaru of America Foundation and the William Penn Foundation.

“I’m thrilled that Camden will continue participating in the Reimagining the Civic Commons Fund, thanks to our new grant award of \$550,000 over the next three years,” said Camden Mayor Victor G. Carstarphen and Co-Chair of Camden Community Partnership. “Through this initiative, we’ve gained valuable insights into how other cities use their parks and open spaces to engage residents, and I’m even prouder to share our own successes with others. This latest round of funding will not only allow us to continue collaborating with our cohort members, but also give us the opportunity to pilot a model for ensuring the long-term care and maintenance of our city’s most treasured assets—our parks.”

In 2022, Camden joined ten other cities - Philadelphia, Akron, Chicago, Cincinnati, Detroit, Lexington, Macon, Memphis, Minneapolis | St. Paul, and San José - in a learning network that fosters the cross-pollination of ideas for more sustainable and impactful public spaces. Through this, Camden has made significant strides in transforming the city’s parks and public spaces. In collaboration with other city institutions and nonprofits, Team Camden, to include Not in Our Parks have engaged youth ambassadors to organize regular park cleanups, have educated residents on park maintenance, and promoted access to public spaces.

“Research and experience tell us that a well-maintained public realm boosts trust in neighborhoods,” said Bridget Marquis, director of Reimagining the Civic Commons. “We look forward to learning from the collaborative effort in Camden as it pilots a new operating model for maintaining and programming high quality public spaces in four neighborhoods across the city.”

This effort has improved over 20 acres of parkland, fostered partnerships with groups such as The Rails to Trails Conservancy and Hopeworks, and redefined park maintenance and activation strategies. Events like the Camden Night Gardens, which attracted over 5,000 attendees in 2023, exemplify the success of these initiatives, with attendance across all programming increasing by 35% and residents praising cleaner, safer parks that reflect their culture.

Building on this momentum, Camden is piloting a sustainable, equitable model for park maintenance and programming in four key neighborhoods, leveraging existing resources and partnerships to ensure lasting impact.

Parks that will be covered by this grant funding include:

- Elijah Perry Park in Centerville
- Whitman Park in Whitman Park Neighborhood
- Coopers Poynt Waterfront Park in North Camden
- Roosevelt Park Plaza in Downtown Camden

Over the next three years, this funding will support data collection, resident and business engagement, park cleaning and the enrichment of Team Camden’s knowledge base with travel to other cities. The goal of the program is to develop a long-term funding and maintenance plan for Camden’s parks.

Central to the CSSD’s mission are the dedicated Yellow Jacket Clean & Safe Ambassadors, whose commitment to keeping Camden’s streets and public spaces clean and welcoming has become a hallmark of our organization. We take immense pride in exclusively hiring Camden residents for these roles, ensuring that our team reflects the community we serve while creating local job opportunities. Under this grant, their expertise will expand to include the maintenance of key parks, ensuring these spaces remain well-kept and accessible for all.

“This generous investment from Reimagining the Civic Commons and its partners marks a transformative moment for Camden and its public spaces” said Ray Romo, Director of Operations for the Camden Special Services District. “By fostering collaboration, engaging residents, and leveraging the expertise of our Clean & Safe Ambassadors, we are building a sustainable model for vibrant, inclusive public spaces. Together, we’re not just cleaning parks – we’re strengthening community connections.”

In collaboration with CCP, Not in Our Parks, Daelight Foundation and Trust for Public Land, the CSSD will lead efforts in:

- **Park Maintenance & Youth Engagement:** Provide Clean & Safe services for key parks, including Elijah Perry Park, Whitman Park, Coopers Poynt Waterfront Park, and Roosevelt Park Plaza, with support from youth ambassadors.
- **Community Engagement & Programming:** Facilitate resident-driven charrettes and host two community meetings to gather input, collaborating with Downtown businesses to shape seasonal programming.
- **Event Development & Marketing:** Assist in developing a schedule of weekly spring and fall events, creating a marketing plan to attract business, institutional, and corporate partners.
- **Strengthening Community Connections:** Foster inclusivity and accessibility in Camden’s public spaces, building stronger community ties and promoting engagement.

For more information about The Reimagining Civic Commons, click [here](https://civiccommons.us) or visit <https://civiccommons.us>.

About Camden Special Services: *The Camden Special Services District (CSSD) is a dynamic local organization dedicated to enhancing Camden’s vibrancy and livability through strategic investments in public spaces, community engagement, and economic development. By providing Clean & Safe services, facilitating inclusive programming, and fostering partnerships with local organizations, CSSD works to create welcoming, accessible spaces that reflect the needs and culture of Camden’s diverse residents. Through collaboration with community development corporations, businesses, and civic leaders, CSSD is building a resilient and thriving Camden, one that fosters connection and cultivates pride across the city.*

About Camden Community Partnership: *The Camden Community Partnership (CCP) is a nonprofit organization committed to driving Camden’s revitalization through collaboration, innovation, and strategic investments. Focused on sustainable development, CCP works to improve the city’s quality of life by fostering partnerships with community groups, businesses, and civic leaders. Through initiatives in public space enhancement, workforce development, and community engagement, CCP empowers residents and builds connections that strengthen neighborhoods. With a mission rooted in equity and inclusivity, CCP is dedicated to creating a Camden where every resident can thrive and take pride in their community.*



Photos provided by
Camden Community Partnership