

Makin' A Way Where There is No Way: Fostering Small Business
Connections in Camden, New Jersey

By

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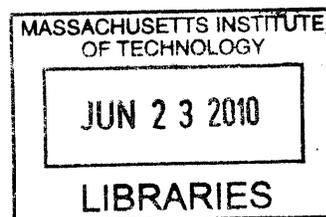
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ABSTRACT

In Camden, New Jersey, the benefits of state funded revitalization efforts focused on waterfront tourism and educational and medical institution expansion have yet to reach the city's current residents. The next iteration of this redevelopment strategy should include additional support and development of small businesses primarily located on the city's historic neighborhood commercial corridors. Camden small business owners have extensive local knowledge and experience in the city, view being located in Camden as a business opportunity, fill local market needs, give back to the community, and serve as role models. At the same time, these businesses face challenges, which include a lack of access to financial capital, a disconnect from economic development entities, an opaque and inefficient permitting and licensing process, and the challenge of promoting themselves in a city with a negative reputation. To overcome these challenges and better promote small business development, connections among the small businesses, between small businesses and government and economic development organizations, between small businesses and rooted institutions, and between small businesses and youth should be fostered.

Thesis Supervisor: Lorlene Hoyt
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A City Invincible?	5
Dominance and Decline.....	6
One of Many.....	8
Rising “with the Investment”.....	9
Small Business Development: A Critical Aspect of A Revitalization Strategy.....	13
Finding Small Businesses	20
Taking it to the Street.....	22
The Shoe Kings.....	22
Loida Daycare.....	22
Uniform City.....	23
Marcellus Construction.....	24
Friends Café.....	26
City Eyes.....	26
Universal Foto Estudio.....	27
Luis Records and Electronics.....	27
Jackson Associates Group, LLC.....	28
Camden Printworks.....	28
Arline Construction and Institute.....	29
Total Perfection.....	29
Corrine’s Place.....	30
Flowers by Mendez and Jackel.....	30
Caribbean Mega Center.....	31
Lessons Learned.....	33
Uncovering the Value of Camden Small Businesses	36
“We Love Our City”.....	37
“There is Great Opportunity Here”.....	38
“Give Back to the City”.....	46
“Normal People Would Just Quit”.....	52
Small Business Disconnect	58
Hard Times and “Scrappy Survivors”.....	58
“Afraid to Come In”.....	61
“There’s Not a Whole Lot of Support Here”.....	62
“You Need Money, Money, Money”.....	71
“On a Merry-Go-Round”.....	75
Fostering Small Business Connections	84
Connecting with Each Other.....	86
Connecting Small Businesses with Economic Development Organizations and City Government.....	89
Connecting with Rooted Institutions and the Waterfront.....	97
Connecting with Youth.....	100
Conclusion.....	105

CHAPTER 1: A CITY INVINCIBLE?

This is a viable city. It was great and it still is. ~ Iraida Afanador, Camden City Director of Code Enforcement

In the fall of 2004, when I checked the box “region most in need” on my Teach for America application form, I began my journey in Camden, New Jersey. During my first drive through the city I was struck by a sign posted at the city’s entrance reading, “Experience the Rebirth.” I immediately felt confident in the task of raising the educational achievement of 7th and 8th grade students. I thought making public such a slogan must mean the city acknowledges its current state and has a willingness to improve. At the time, I didn’t know that Milton Milan, the mayor when these signs were issued, was the third mayor in two decades to go to prison on corruption charges, and that newspapers and the media claimed that the city was on the verge of rebirth each time city leadership changed.¹

As a teacher I found my students full of potential in a city lacking opportunity. The state cares about the city’s redevelopment, as its money established an expanded aquarium, built a minor league baseball field and concert venue, improved the central business district streetscapes and expanded educational and medical institutions. Yet none of this appeared to touch my students or their families. Some students had parents working as security guards or nurses downtown, but it was more common for parents to hold a job in Philadelphia’s service industry or be unemployed. On weekends students spent time at Skate World in East Camden, The

¹ Fahim, “Rethinking Revitalization: In Crumbling Camden, New Challenges for a Recovery Plan”; Hirsch, Deborah, “Redd Looks to Produce Real Change in Camden.”

Gallery Mall in Center City Philadelphia, Cherry Hill Mall, or in their neighborhoods with friends, rather than going to these new downtown attractions. Where was the development for the 80,000 people living in the city? How were we meeting their needs for better education and jobs paying a living wage with benefits?

...

People involved in Camden's redevelopment want the city to succeed, but there is no easy "silver bullet" solution. In this thesis I argue for an equitable approach to economic development that does not leave my former students and their families behind. A critical part of this is supporting small business development in the city's neighborhoods. But before arriving at this conclusion, let us better understand Camden, New Jersey.

Dominance and Decline

Camden, New Jersey once supported entrepreneurship and innovation. Some companies started small, but grew to international fame. Campbell Soup Company profited from the use of Jersey tomatoes to expand their soup business. New York Shipbuilding Corporation made some of the largest World War I battleships in Camden. RCA, Radio Corporation of America, led the world in the manufacture of talking machines and its technology later made it possible for people at home to hear those first words uttered from the moon. The first drive-in movie theater and Walt Whitman, whose writing helped define free verse poetry, both called Camden home. The city's vibrant, often ethnically centered, commercial corridors of Broadway, Kaighn, and Haddon Avenue boasted, "movie theaters, real estate operations, doctors, dentists, and lawyers mixed with a host of commercial and retail services."² During World War I and through the

² Gillette, *Camden After the Fall*, 22.

depression these businesses remained strong, and continued to be run by local families striving to meet the needs of their neighbors.³

Despite these noticeable firsts, Camden has never been a wealthy city. Throughout its existence “its residents were overwhelmingly working people with limited access to wealth, but with considerable social capital on which to draw, enough to sustain them through difficult times.”⁴ Still, in the 1950s all residents had the opportunity for employment; Camden had more jobs than people.⁵ Then came industrial decline, white flight, attempts at urban renewal, and the 1971 riots, which left Camden in a state familiar to post-industrial cities across the country. In 1961 the newly opened Cherry Hill Mall began to draw business away from the historically dominant commercial corridors, adding to neighborhood decline.⁶ By 1973, Mayor Errichetti described the city as ““a rat-infested skeleton of yesterday, a visible obscenity of urban decay’...The years of neglect, slumlord exploitation, tenant abuse, government bungling, indecision and short-sighted policy had transformed the city’s housing, business and industrial stock into a ravaged, rat-infested cancer on a sick, old industrial city.”⁷ This decline remains omnipresent today. The city is one of the poorest in the country, one of the most dangerous (CQ Press using Uniform Crime Reporting Data has ranked Camden in the top five most dangerous cities for the past five years), majority minority (the 2008 American Community Survey reports the population as 49% black, 42.3% Hispanic, 4.7% white, and 4% other), largely uneducated (in 2009 54.9% of high school seniors graduated), young (according to the 2000 census, 35% of the

³ Ibid., 23.

⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁵ Pitts, Tyrone, “Personal Interview.”

⁶ Gillette, *Camden After the Fall*, 38.

⁷ Ibid., 89.

population is under 18 and 47% is under 25), and shrinking (the city had 124,555 people in 1950 and has 79,904 today).⁸

One of Many

Other post-industrial cities share Camden's trajectory of dominance, decline, and potential revitalization. With the shift from a manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy, many still struggle to find their niche.⁹ Industry that left town has yet to be replaced with jobs that are as well paid and skilled. Additionally, years of federal, state, and local policy aided development outside cities, makes it more difficult for these places to build their economies.¹⁰ These cities must confront challenges of unemployment and poverty on smaller budgets due to a declining residential tax base.¹¹

The statistics in post-industrial cities are startling similar. Many have high unemployment rates, high poverty rates, lower than average median household income, large minority populations, and low levels of educational attainment.¹² For instance, 42% of the population in Oakland, California has 42% lives below the poverty line and 18% are currently unemployed.¹³ In the Green Impact Zone of Kansas City, Missouri, a 150 block area targeted for new resources,

⁸ CamConnect, "CamConnect."

⁹ Vey, *Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing America's Older Industrial Cities*, 21; Hoyt and Leroux, *Voices from Forgotten Cities: Innovative Revitalization Coalitions in America's Older Small Cities*; Fox and Axel-Lute, *To Be Strong Again: Renewing the Promise in Smaller Industrial Cities*.

¹⁰ Vey, *Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing America's Older Industrial Cities*.

¹¹ Hoyt and Leroux, *Voices from Forgotten Cities: Innovative Revitalization Coalitions in America's Older Small Cities*; Fox and Axel-Lute, *To Be Strong Again: Renewing the Promise in Smaller Industrial Cities*.

¹² Hoyt and Leroux, *Voices from Forgotten Cities: Innovative Revitalization Coalitions in America's Older Small Cities*; Vey, *Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing America's Older Industrial Cities*.

¹³ Brandin, "Bridging the Gap: Designing a More Complete Energy Efficiency Retrofit Strategy for Oakland, California."

unemployment is at 13% and median family income is approximately \$22,000.¹⁴ Finally, in Lawrence, Massachusetts, a city most like Camden in terms of its population and geographic size, 70.8% of the population are minorities, 31% are under the age of 18, and 25% live below the poverty level.¹⁵

Post-industrial cities share a history of decline but they also share similar assets for revitalization to build upon. They often have land, infrastructure, access to a waterway, a small, walkable downtown center, and historic architecture.¹⁶ All of which are highly desirable in terms of development. There are cultural assets like universities and a great amount of diversity in terms of immigrant populations, niche markets, and entrepreneurship.¹⁷ The question now is how to use these assets to help overcome the challenges facing these cities.

This study focuses on Camden, but similar cities can use the ideas in its findings and recommendations. Each post-industrial city is unique but broadly they all share a similar history, set of challenges, and potential assets for revitalization. In order to bring back these types of cities, we must consider different solutions coming from all of these locations.

Rising “with the Investment”

¹⁴ Bozorg, “Spatializing Social Justice Through Place-Based Initiatives: Lessons from The Green Impact Zone in Kansas City, Missouri.”

¹⁵ Leavy-Sperounis, “Manufacturing Recovery: A Networked Approach to Green Job Creation in Massachusetts Gateway Cities.”

¹⁶ Hoyt and Leroux, *Voices from Forgotten Cities: Innovative Revitalization Coalitions in America's Older Small Cities*.

¹⁷ Hoyt and Leroux, *Voices from Forgotten Cities: Innovative Revitalization Coalitions in America's Older Small Cities*; Fox and Axel-Lute, *To Be Strong Again: Renewing the Promise in Smaller Industrial Cities*; Vey, *Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing America's Older Industrial Cities*.

In 1981 newly elected Governor Tom Kean and Mayor Randy Primas focused redevelopment efforts on what appeared to be Camden's greatest asset: its waterfront.¹⁸ Primas considered Baltimore's Inner Harbor redevelopment as a replicable model for Camden. "I don't believe you're going to find private sector investment in the neighborhoods...The only way to change that is by creating a viable downtown and having it grow from there."¹⁹ An expanded aquarium, children's garden, minor-league baseball stadium, battleship, concert venue, several office buildings, and an RCA warehouse converted into loft apartments occupied the waterfront by the turn of the century.

The 2002 Municipal Rehabilitation and Economic Recovery Act (MRERA) placed the city under state receivership and greatly impacted the direction of redevelopment. The act aimed to stabilize the local economy, to stimulate investment so the city no longer needed to rely on state funding, and to reform municipal government.²⁰ A chief operating officer oversaw the redevelopment of the city and had the power to overturn decisions made by the mayor and city council. Following the direction of previous development decisions, and some would argue political interests, \$175 million dollars of reinvestment money went largely to build waterfront tourism and to grow the city's educational and medical facilities.²¹ MREFRA funding passed over community development corporations and non-profit projects, seen as too small to create tangible city improvement. John Kromer, former Director of City Planning and the Camden Redevelopment Agency (CRA), a quasi-government department created under MRERA, reflects on the legislation's approach:

¹⁸ Gillette, *Camden After the Fall*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Kromer, *Fixing Broken Cities*.

²¹ Katz, Matt, "Camden Rebirth: A Promise Still Unfulfilled"; Kromer, *Fixing Broken Cities*.

In years prior to MRERA, major commitments of state funding had been made to finance development on the waterfront, with relatively little comparable state investment in neighborhoods, and a continuation of this pattern was reflected in MRERA financing approach: the aquarium received a \$25 million allocation of its own, while the city's neighborhoods had to vie for a share of the \$78 million available in the two generically designated 'neighborhood' funds (some of which would pay for demolition that would not be followed by new development).²²

Today residents and researchers question revitalization targeted at building up waterfront tourism and expanding rooted institutions in the central business district. Even in the beginning some wondered if Mayor Primas' waterfront focus would create a few highly paid professional jobs and many unskilled, low-paying positions held disproportionately by minorities.²³ Protesting the aquarium expansion, one resident told the Philadelphia Inquirer, "We got two and three families living in one house and beautiful fishes living in tanks by themselves."²⁴ In 2005, a survey of residents conducted by Camden Churches Organized for People (CCOP) and the Concerned Black Clergy of Camden (CBC) found only 26% felt the three-year-old MRERA revitalization was going in the right direction.²⁵ It has also taken longer than expected for money spent on the educational and medical institutions to trickle down to the rest of the city residents.²⁶ Today, after more investment in the waterfront and rooted institutions, education, unemployment, poverty, and violence levels have not changed. "Camden residents are just as poor today and just as likely to be murdered. They are just as unemployed and lacking in the skills to succeed at work. Their children's reading and math skills are just as abysmal. And the city is twice as reliant on state taxpayers as before."²⁷ In his extensive news story about Camden's recovery, Philadelphia Inquirer journalist Matt Katz found neighborhood resentment

²² Kromer, *Fixing Broken Cities*.

²³ Gillette, *Camden After the Fall*, 136.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

²⁵ Ott, "Revitalization Efforts get Failing Grade, Survey Says."

²⁶ Moss-Coane, "Taking Stock of New Jersey's Takeover."

²⁷ Katz, Matt, "Camden Rebirth: A Promise Still Unfulfilled."

toward the waterfront to be growing, which is understandable when residents see large amounts of money being given to an aquarium, which charges them twenty dollars admission and eight dollars to park.²⁸

Other cities utilizing a similar strategy post similar findings. Keating writes, “To an extent, these downtown-focused efforts have succeeded in reshaping the skylines of many cities, but they have not succeeded in reducing poverty, unemployment, or dependency in the low-income and working-class neighborhoods.”²⁹ More specifically trickle-down development has not benefited residents, and neighborhoods have fallen into greater disrepair as resources have been funneled other places.³⁰ In Baltimore, Camden’s model city, analysis shows developers; real estate speculators and financiers; suburban professionals commuting in for new jobs; young professionals moving into highly priced condominiums overlooking the harbor; and out of town tourists benefit from downtown development.³¹ Two Baltimores arose as “the ripple effects from the downtown investment boom did not reach most of Baltimore’s neighborhoods.”³² Ten years after redevelopment began, the number of residents living below the poverty line increased, housing conditions worsened, and the percentage of residents working in the central business district decreased.³³

Lowell, Massachusetts, known for its historic role as a birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution has also undertaken a “trickle down” development strategy. Downtown investment resulted in a hotel, biotechnology industry, auditorium, office and technology center,

²⁸ Moss-Coane, “Taking Stock of New Jersey's Takeover.”

²⁹ Keating, *Revitalizing urban neighborhoods*, 59.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

³¹ Levine, “Downtown Redevelopment As an Urban Growth Strategy: A Critical Appraisal of the Baltimore Renaissance.”

³² *Ibid.*, 112.

³³ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

and parking garages. Residents and community activists in The Acre neighborhood next to Lowell's central business district and new urban park believed Lowell's revitalization took city resources and services and applied them only to downtown and as a result excluded the "less attractive" parts of the city.³⁴ It all sounds eerily familiar.

Ray Lamboy, President of the Latin American Economic Development Agency (LAEDA) describes Camden's current state as an empty barrel. "All the water's gone. Most everyone's left. The people that are left are at the bottom of the barrel. The key is to put them on that rescue raft and pour the investment in so that they rise with the investment."³⁵ But the surviving residents are dehydrated and dying of thirst as the current investment being poured into the city does not reach their neighborhoods. The theory of investing in the waterfront and rooted institutions appeared to be a good place to start, but it has shown to leave behind those most in need. Now is time to broaden this approach to be more inclusive of city residents. A revitalization strategy must be economically comprehensive in order to create sustainable, long-term vitality where all residents contribute to the city's prosperity.³⁶ But how then can a strategy moving forward bring investment, resources, and a middle class while also supporting and serving the people who call Camden home? The next phase of redevelopment effort in Camden must include the support and promotion of the city's small businesses. Camden's small businesses, hidden on once great and now bypassed commercial corridors, positively impact the community. They are tremendous, yet unrecognized, assets to the City of Camden.

Small Business Development: A Critical Aspect of a Revitalization Strategy

³⁴ Gittell, *Renewing Cities*, 89.

³⁵ Lamboy, Raymond, "Personal Interview."

³⁶ McGahey and Vey, "Promoting Inclusive Economic Renewal in Older Industrial Cities."

Small businesses are the country's economic engine. Defined by the Small Business Administration (SBA) as any firms with less than 500 people, they account for 44% of the total US private payroll and they employ just over half of all private sector employees.³⁷ Between 1993 and the third quarter of 2008, small businesses created 64% of the 22.5 million net new jobs.³⁸ In 2004, the number of jobs created by small business equaled approximately the number of jobs lost by large firms.³⁹ Entrepreneurs do not take up a slice of the economic pie, but increase it; the success of one small business need not come at the expense of another.⁴⁰ Small businesses may get less press than large firms, but if we look closely, from the ground level we will find "people are still running small enterprises in order to send children to college and develop and maintain a sense of economic stability."⁴¹

The value of small businesses extends beyond economic arguments. These entities can help bring about the revitalization of their own neighborhoods and they also provide otherwise missing everyday goods and services.⁴² Real estate supply exceeds demand so businesses can develop within existing vacant space.⁴³ In so doing, they bring vitality and stability to otherwise desolate sections of the neighborhood. Businesses contribute to the tax base of the city,

³⁷ US Small Business Administration, "Frequently Asked Questions."

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Light, *Race, ethnicity, and entrepreneurship in urban America*, 202.

⁴¹ Butler, *Entrepreneurship and self-help among Black Americans : a reconsideration of race and economics*, 294.

⁴² Boston, "The Role of Black-Owned Businesses in Black Community Development," 173; Gittell and Thompson, "Inner-City Business Development and Entrepreneurship: New Frontiers for Policy and Research," 473; Bendick and Egan, "Linking Business Development and Community Development in Inner Cities," 6.

⁴³ Bendick and Egan, "Linking Business Development and Community Development in Inner Cities," 9.

increasing the pool of money available to improve the lives of city residents.⁴⁴ Finally, business owners are important political and social leaders, looked up to by others in the community.⁴⁵ This puts them in a position to advance the interests of their community.⁴⁶ Seeing the value of small businesses from this community and neighborhood development perspective requires a paradigm shift. Overtime the idea has evolved that inner-city communities, especially those with primarily black residents, cannot foster organizations or entities, like small business, to bring stability to and growth to the community.⁴⁷ Yet to equitably revitalize these neighborhoods we need to think differently about assets and acknowledge small businesses' positive impacts.

In addition to economic and neighborhood development arguments, the time is right politically for small business development. Generally Democrats and Republicans agree with increasing entrepreneurship opportunities, even if for different reasons.⁴⁸ The current economic recession means greater attention on small businesses to stimulate the economy. President Obama highlighted increased support for small businesses in his 2010 State of the Union Address, proposing using \$30 billion in repaid Wall Street bank loans to help community banks lend to small businesses, a new small business tax credit for hiring new workers, and eliminating the small business capital gain tax.⁴⁹ Congress later passed a jobs bill putting these ideas into law. Politically it makes sense to capitalize on the momentum toward small businesses and entrepreneurship happening at the federal level.

⁴⁴ Gittell and Thompson, "Inner-City Business Development and Entrepreneurship: New Frontiers for Policy and Research," 473.

⁴⁵ Bendick and Egan, "Linking Business Development and Community Development in Inner Cities," 10.

⁴⁶ Gittell and Thompson, "Inner-City Business Development and Entrepreneurship: New Frontiers for Policy and Research," 473.

⁴⁷ Boston, "The Role of Black-Owned Businesses in Black Community Development," 173.

⁴⁸ Light, *Race, ethnicity, and entrepreneurship in urban America*, 205.

⁴⁹ Obama, Barack, "State of the Union Address."

Broadly speaking, small businesses are a good idea. But is it possible for them to be part of Camden's economic development strategy? From a political perspective, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and Camden Mayor Dana Redd's next steps for Camden's revitalization make room for strengthening a small business presence. To begin, Governor Christie restored power lost under MRERA to Mayor Redd within days of taking office. He also realizes "efforts to upgrade the downtown waterfront will be undermined as long as Camden's neighborhoods remain unsafe and unschooled."⁵⁰ Small businesses, we have seen, are one way to revitalize neighborhoods. At the city level, Mayor Redd believes "the strength of our City lies within our children, our families, small businesses, our neighborhoods"⁵¹ And "what does not work is top-down planning. It has to be grassroots driven in terms of redevelopment and how we revitalize and stabilize our neighborhoods".⁵² Camden small business owners and supporters should not miss this political opportunity to have their voices heard and improvements made.

Encouraging small businesses in Camden also makes sense from a spatial perspective. Many small businesses are located on or near the city's commercial corridors, depicted in the map below, which connect neighborhoods and surrounding suburbs to downtown. Unlike in Baltimore, which redeveloped as an "economic island" from its neighborhoods, Camden's downtown can profit from its linkage with small businesses on the connecting commercial corridors.⁵³ The size of buildings on many commercial corridors also fits the needs of a small business owner and zoning often permits a business use. After all, these buildings were once

⁵⁰ Hirsch, Deborah and Jim Walsh, "Camden's in Christie's Hands."

⁵¹ Redd, "Mayor Redd's Transition Reports."

⁵² Hirsch, Deborah, "Redd Looks to Produce Real Change in Camden."

⁵³ Levine, "Downtown Redevelopment As an Urban Growth Strategy: A Critical Appraisal of the Baltimore Renaissance."

home to other businesses. The necessary infrastructure is, although dormant, in place, which should make revitalization less expensive.



Map 1: Camden Commercial Corridors

Indeed, there is already evidence of great small business success on Camden's Federal Street. Here businesses work together to transform a commercial corridor and neighborhood. Shoppers "have boosted a grassroots redevelopment effort as the city struggles to attract major

employers”⁵⁴ It is succeeding in providing residents jobs, and has the possibility to draw outside shoppers interested in its concentration of Latino stores. Federal Street is slowly proving that a corridor of small businesses together can revitalize an area and spur additional development much like a larger anchor institution sometimes can.⁵⁵

To better understand the value and possibility of small businesses, I set out to hear the stories of as many successful business owners as possible. Chapter two introduces each of the interviewed entrepreneurs and explains the methodology required, a methodology I discovered out of necessity, to uncover Camden’s hidden gems. The third chapter describes the contributions of the sixteen small business owners. First, I find each knows Camden or a similar location well before going into business; about half grew up there. This experience provides them with local knowledge and the ability to see business opportunities missed by outsiders. Second, the businesses are good for Camden. In agreement with relevant literature, they provide goods and services residents would otherwise not be able to find in their neighborhood; they employ local people; keep the streets safe; and, knowing the challenges Camden faces, believe that giving back to the community is an integral part of their business model. The presence of these resilient business owners brings stability to the neighborhood. Yet they face challenges familiar to business owners across the country. Chapter four examines the challenges these entrepreneurs face. These challenges, which include business owner disconnect with financial resources, city hall’s cumbersome licensing and permitting process, and economic development entities, and the outsiders’ perceptions of the city, pose obstacles to success. Chapter five provides solutions to resolve these disconnects and make visible small business contributions by forging small business connections among small businesses themselves, between small

⁵⁴ Conaboy, “Hispanic Shoppers revitalize Camden's Federal Street.”

⁵⁵ Lamboy, Raymond, “Camden Empowerment Zone Corporation Interview.”

businesses and supporting economic development entities and city government, rooted or anchored institutions, and youth. Let us now put on some boots and walk down the streets to meet some successful small business owners in Camden.

CHAPTER 2: FINDING SMALL BUSINESSES

I've been hitting the pavement for the last two hours. My 3pm cancelled – his nephew got hurt in gym class and so he had to go to the hospital with him. I've knocked on or stopped by six businesses all recommended to me. Scheduled one interview for tomorrow at noon. Went into a barbershop on Mt. Ephraim. Great store window and busy, but would hardly acknowledge my presence... ~ Gayle Christiansen, Field Notes, January 25, 2010

This project hinged on identifying and then interviewing successful Camden business owners. Doing so using a rigorous statistical method proved impractical. The Office of Licensing and Inspection provided me with a list of 974 businesses operating in the city in the first quarter of 2009. Information for each business included the type of license, but not business size or minority and/or woman ownership, my initial research focus. This proved to be the first methodological barrier. But even if I had this information, generating a random sample from this list would be problematic for two reasons. First, it would be difficult to get randomly selected businesses to talk with me. I am an outsider who is pursuing an academic project that many people do not understand in a city with a high degree of mistrust. Why would business owners give up their time to talk with someone doing research for a graduate degree? Second, I wanted to talk to businesses labeled as successful by people familiar with the city. If I used a predetermined definition of success such as the number of jobs created, or a certain amount of annual revenue, or number of years in operation, I might exclude businesses believed to be successful by those who actually use them or work with them on a daily basis.

As an alternative method of identification, I made my own list of successful Camden businesses by asking people who work for Camden's economic development organizations, employees of the city's Redevelopment Authority, Planning Department, and Code Enforcement,

and by reaching out to community leaders and activists I already knew from past experience in Camden. I asked these individuals for who they saw as successful small businesses according to their own definitions. This allowed me to capture a large, yet still manageable list of potential businesses and to use the term “success” in its local context instead of imposing an outside judgment. Further, when making initial contact with each business I could refer to the Camden source that recommended it as a successful business worthy of an interview. While this method is not as statistically rigorous as using available databases, it was more inclusive and thus more likely to generate valid and actionable information. Three of the sixteen interviewed businesses also do not appear on the initial licensing and inspections list. Using that method I would have passed by these businesses and used a data set perhaps less genuine to what people on the ground feel are successful businesses.

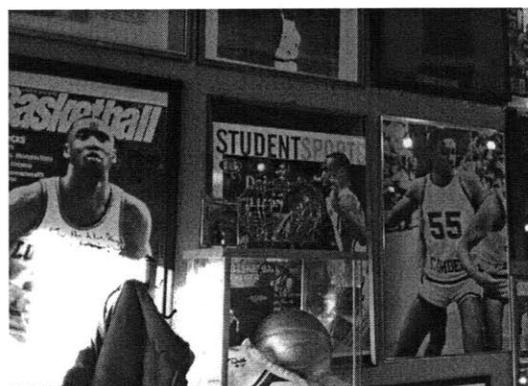
As expected, I found getting in touch with business owners very difficult; every five attempts (phone calls, knocking on doors, emails) resulted in approximately one interview. Cold calling or leaving a card with contact information and a brief explanation of the project with business employees did not result in any interviews. Instead I evolved my approach to possible businesses throughout this project. Ultimately I connected to most business owners through a shared contact. Being able to talk to successful small business owners required an additional layer of personal connection with a known and trusted person in the city. Here I drew upon my knowledge of local leaders and contacts from previous work in the city. Without prior experience in Camden, I would have found it impossible to reach these business owners, in addition to the challenge of getting them to open up to me.

Taking it to the Street

In the following pages I tell the story of how I met and interviewed sixteen Camden business owners. In Camden, it was not so simple as choosing a set of businesses and following through until granted an interview. Instead, I had to go where the city took me. Through the journey the business owners I met presented me with a valuable set of research findings, in addition to what I learned from each interviewee.

1. The Shoe Kings: The Camden Empowerment Zone Corporation (CEZC), where I was a summer intern, suggested The Shoe Kings, owned by brothers Byron and Darrien Gans.

Vintage for-sale sneakers line shelves below posters of great basketball players and antique cases displaying autographed equipment. The store looks like a museum. One wall features Camden memorabilia, which Byron and Darrien want kids to see so “then they may think they can do it too.”⁵⁶ At the end of the interview, the brothers suggested I speak with the owners of Forbidden



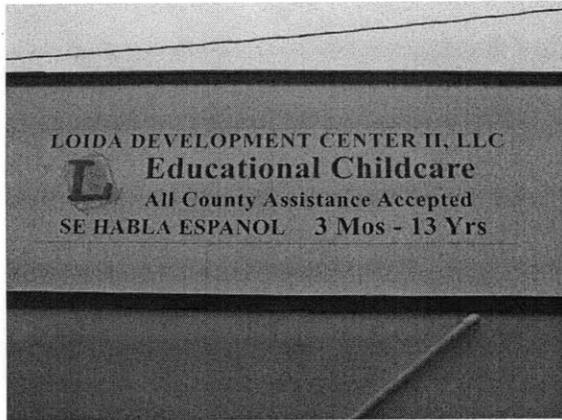
The Shoe Kings have a wall dedicated to Camden athletes.

Look, a boutique clothing store down the street. When I stopped by Forbidden Look the following day, I first had to wait until noon when they opened, then buzzed to be let in the store and found the owner not to be in. I left my card with contact information. For the first time I learned that leaving my card and explanation for an interview never leads to one actually taking place.

2. Loida Daycare: The Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ), whose office is located in City Hall, recommended speaking with Eunice Jose of Loida, a daycare. I stopped by the center in

⁵⁶ Gans, Byron and Gans, Darien, “Personal Interview.”

East Camden and found Eunice and her adult son Jose Manuel with their hands full of two year olds, but happy to speak with me provided they could continue monitoring the children. Jose and



New signage at Loida's second daycare facility.

Eunice, a retired Camden school teacher, recently opened this second daycare facility and hope to one day serve seventy Camden children. Eunice has also helped children in the Dominican Republic, her home country, by opening an orphanage with the support of her pastor and other church members.

The next day of interviewing began without a clear direction or scheduled interview. More than eight businesses had not returned my call and several had full voicemail boxes so I cannot leave a message. I chose a new strategy to target different geographic areas of the city. I drove to the Fairview section of Camden to see about businesses recommended to me by a neighborhood resident and activist working in the prosecutor's office. World War I brought increased business to the New York Shipbuilding Corporation, so the war department financed the building of Yorkship Village, a planned community of houses around the central Yorkship Square. Today stores in the Square include a barbershop, daycare, and laundry mat. Stopping in each, I spoke briefly with employees and handed out my card, but did not get any interviews. With no luck, I headed to a Broadway, a nearby commercial corridor.

3. Uniform City: I choose to stop in A-I Uniform City because I used to purchase my school uniform there. It was just as I remembered, with police uniforms, khaki pants, and school shoes filling the entire space. It remains the only place to buy the mandatory school district



Uniform City sells school shirts and pants.

student uniforms in Camden. I am lucky to catch owner Ralph Ishack between errands. After working in a similar store in the South Bronx he came to Camden to take over this uniform store. While sometimes a challenge, he continues to staff his store with local residents.

4. Marcellus Construction: Donna Helms, the Community Development Manager at the Camden Redevelopment Agency (CRA), mentioned Marcellus Hill's determination to employ local people to weatherize Camden homes in a conversation the previous summer about efforts to make the city more energy efficient. He doesn't have business cards or a business email, but he is still on the forefront of "greening" Camden. In contacting Marcellus via his cell phone he agreed to meet with me because I knew Donna. His office is in a stand alone, three story row house on the corner of Broadway and Carl Miller Boulevard. No sign denoted the building use, a person on the street told me it used to be a whore house, and the doorbell at the entrance was pulled out. Marcellus explained he is currently flooded with potential work from stimulus weatherization grants. He has owned has his own construction business for eight years, but has been in the field for twenty-two. He was born, raised, and still lives in Camden. He also works to get people in the city into local unions so they can have better paying jobs.



Marcellus Construction work in progress.

Looking for an interview for the next day, I returned to a commercial corridor based strategy and spent the afternoon walking down the busiest two commercial blocks of Broadway, between Martin Luther King and Benson Streets. I learned a company in Philadelphia owns the Value Plus store, the owner of The Source Sportswear would be in the next day around noon, and owners of a shoe store and coffee shop told me they were too busy or unavailable for an interview. Since walking the streets was obviously not working, I drove to a bodega on 8th and Elm, after a recommendation from a CEZC employee familiar with North Camden. The employee in charge said his brother Jose owns the bodega and that he is not in but will be available tomorrow. I asked for Jose the next morning and no one working knew who I was talking about. I asked if the owner was named Jose, and the man at the counter said no. When I asked if I could speak with the owner, they told me he was not in. Instead of pursuing this business further, I decided to focus on more promising interview opportunities.

I meet with Josue Figueroa, a Camden resident and Susquehanna Bank branch manager, because he helped Loida with a bank loan. I could use the contact with Loida to ask for some time out of his busy day. This meeting resulted in four more potential businesses to talk with, but none resulted in any interviews. One was never available when I called or stopped by, another never returned my calls, a third sets up several meetings with me but they always fall through, and the owner of Ralf's Heating and Plumbing was never in during the 7:00 – 8:00 a.m. window, which I am told is the best time to catch him. The principals at a suggested insurance company did not return my phone calls and the owner of Ritmo Records was always out of the store. Feeling defeated I turned to two interviews with Robert Lucas at Donkey's Place and Kelly Chang at Friend's Café I knew would take place because of previous conversations with business owners.

5. Donkey's Place: Donkey's Place serves one of the region's best cheese steaks. Since



Donkey's Place bar, virtually unchanged in over fifty years.

the restaurant first opened in 1943, the recipe has remained the same: steak meat and cheese on a poppy seed Kaiser roll with slow-cooked onions.

Donkey's draws its name from Robert's father Leon, an Olympian boxer. Robert agreed to an interview after I ate lunch there one day and of course complimented the chef.

6. Friends Café: I met Kelly Chang, owner

of Friends Café, this summer when some Rutgers students recommended his restaurant. Friend's

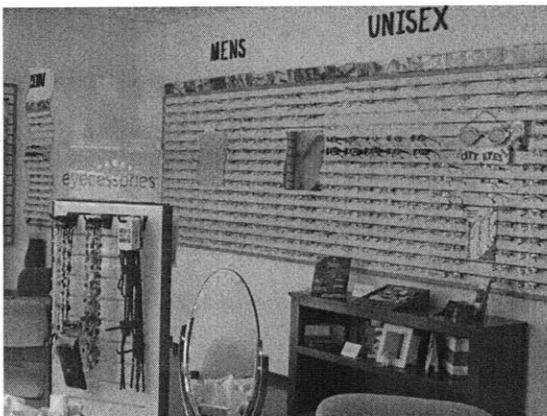
Café has an extensive menu of burgers, sandwiches, and Asian noodles. Located next to Rutgers University Camden, it is busiest during the lunch hour and before evening classes begin.

Friends also stays open late to accommodate club meetings and student study groups.



Friends Café, exterior.

7. City Eyes: Economic development



organization directors suggested the next two business interviews. Sue Brennan, the Director of the Broadway Main Street program, recommended an interview with Esther Williams, owner of the optical retail store City Eyes. After

City Eyes, interior.

working in the field for twenty one years, the last three at Cooper University Hospital, Esther decided it was time to start her own store, the only location in the city of Camden one can buy eye glasses.

8. Universal Foto Estudio: Ray Lamboy at the Latin American Economic Development Agency (LAEDA) gave me the names of five different business owners to talk to. Four owners



Patrons in Universal Foto Estudio.

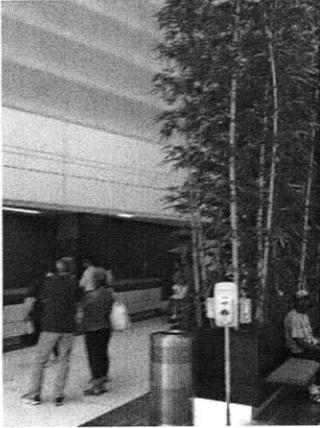
did not return phone calls and were not in when I stopped by. However, Miguel Benito of Universal Foto Estudio was available for a conversation when I stopped in his store. He immigrated to Camden from Mexico in 1995 and opened his store specializing in photo printing and design with the help of his brothers, who were already entrepreneurs in the region.

9. Luis Records and Electronics: The next interviewee, Luis Japa, also immigrated to the United States, but from the Dominican Republic where he graduated from college with a degree



CDs, musical instruments, and music posters fill Luis Records and Electronics.

in economics. His store has evolved over its sixteen years in existence. It first specialized in Spanish music tapes, then pagers, and now a little bit of everything including pre-paid cellular phones, money transfer services, key chains, gifts, and balloons.



Jackson Associates Group, LLC oversaw the construction of the new Cooper University Hospital.

10. Jackson Associates Group, LLC: After several unreturned phone calls, I emailed Connie Jackson of Jackson Associates Group, LLC, a woman owned construction management firm. I got her information from several Camden Redevelopment Agency (CRA) employees. Before opening her own firm, which has overseen Camden projects of \$40 and \$160 million dollars including the Cooper University Hospital addition pictured here, Connie worked as the head of rent control for the city and earned a masters degree in Community Economic Development from Southern New Hampshire University.

11. Camden Printworks: Members of the Young Urban Leaders (YUL) organization recommended several of the interviewed business owners. The group, started by Camden activist Sean Brown, meets once a month to discuss current issues, developments in the city, and to support each other's work. In their January meeting they discussed purchasing group t-shirts printed at the Camden Printworks. The next day, I sought out Adam Woods, Camden Printworks owner, who happened to be in the shopped when I stop by. He first came to Camden from Tennessee via Philadelphia to teach at Urban Promise Academy, the organization that once owned and oversaw the print shop. Having printing



An employee screen-prints a pillowcase at Camden Printworks.

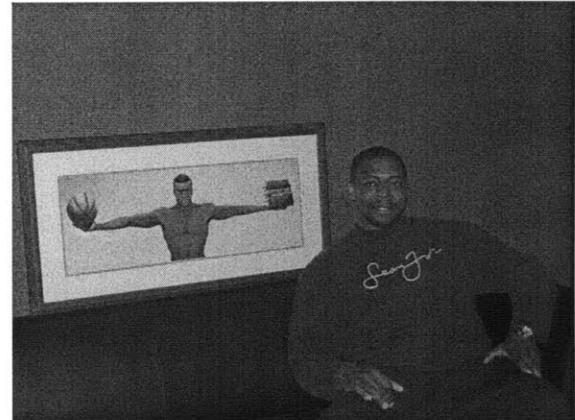
experience, an artistic eye, and a drive to employ local people at a living wage, Adam took over the business after a brief stint working for Campbell Soup Company.

12. Arline Construction and Institute:

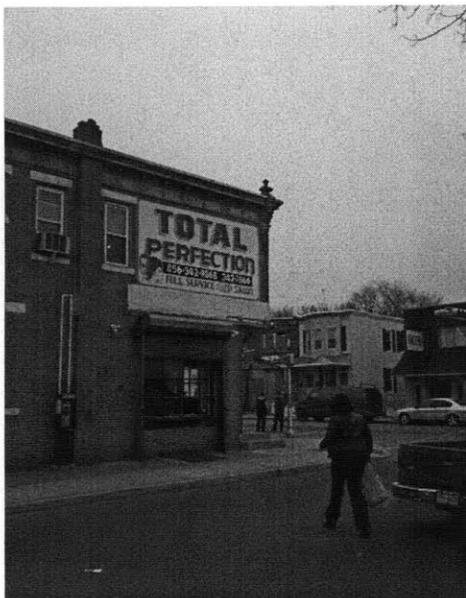
Exchanging emails with a member of Young Urban Leaders (YUL) lead to Tyrone Pitts, owner of Arline Construction and Institute, calling *my* cell one morning asking *me* if I would like to talk with him for my project. He is friends with several

of the YUL members, and was interested in what someone from MIT was doing researching Camden. He grew up in city, attended the

University of Pennsylvania on an academic and basketball scholarship over many other offers, and went on to assistant coach basketball at Cornell University before returning to Camden to



Entrepreneur Tyrone Pitts with a painting depicting the ability to find success through balancing athletics and academics.



The exterior of Total Perfection Hair Salon.

open multiple businesses working to improve the quality of Camden housing and education.

13. Total Perfection: Sean Brown, of Young Urban Leaders (YUL), recommended Total Perfection Hair Salon and barbershop to me because this is where he goes for his hair cuts. On Mt. Ephraim Ave., down the street from The Shoe Kings, it is only a couple of blocks from my old school, a fact brought to my attention by graffiti completed by several former students on neighboring buildings. Barry Watkins, a

former Camden basketball player, runs a barbershop with six busy chairs downstairs and four stylists working upstairs. I talk for a bit with a former student, who happened to be getting his lines redone the day I stopped in, and the conversation about the business grew to include Barry, the student, and several other barbers.

14. Corrine’s Place: Driving down Atlantic Avenue from Mt. Ephraim to Haddon Avenue I came to Corrine’s Place, a pink store front with teal grating over the windows. Corrine serves “soul food with a touch of class.”⁵⁷ A social activist in North Camden, business owner Connie Jackson,



Homemade pies, Corrine’s Place.

Parkside Business and Community in Partnership (PBCIP) Community Development Corporation and several of the economic development organization leaders recommended speaking with Corrine. One wall of the restaurant showcases newspaper clippings about her business, photos of her and celebrities like Denzel Washington, and letters from satisfied customers. Anyone who writes or seeks information about a success on the commercial corridors has talked with Corrine; she is the model.

15. Flowers by Mendez and Jackel: The next day I headed to East Camden and the River Road and Federal Street commercial corridors because much of my focus thus far was in the southern section of Camden. Jenny Greenberg, Project Manager at The Cooper’s Ferry Development Corporation, the master developer for the Camden Waterfront, recommended

⁵⁷ Powers, Corrine, “Personal Interview.”

speaking with Rhonda Mendez at Flowers by Mendez and Jackel because she was an active member of the Cramer Hill Business Association and helped with the Cooper's Ferry's River



Flowers by Mendez and Jackel, ready for Valentine's Day.

Road streetscape project. Mendez and Jackel Flowers are one of the only floral shops in the area. They specialize in funerals, weddings, quinceañeras, and sweet sixteens for customers in the neighborhood and the surrounding suburbs.

16. Caribbean Mega Center: I heard the

reggaeton blaring from speakers on the street as I approached the Caribbean Mega Center, Camden's

very own "pequeño Best Buy" plus, specializing in radios, video games, dvds, cell phones, car equipment, cash for gold, and money transfers.⁵⁸

The interior space is divided into five counters with different vendors, like a mini-mall. When I asked, several East Camden residents who I



The Caribbean Mega Center, Federal Street.

volunteer with in Camden suggest this business, which has been meeting neighborhood needs for the last eighteen years.

The following table summarizes the information I gathered about the sixteen business owners interviewed for this study:

⁵⁸ Marrera, Jose, "Personal Interview."

Table 1: Characteristics of Interviewed Businesses

Business Owner	Business	Business Classification*	Neighborhood	Owner Ethnicity	Owner Gender	Number of Employees	Camden Connection	Formal Business Assistance	Informal Business Assistance	Years in Operation
1 Byron and Darian Gans	The Shoe Kings	Retail - Shoe store	Whitman Park	Black	Male	2	Grew up in Camden	Camden Empowerment Zone Corporation (CEZC)	None	1
2 Eunice and Manuel Jose	Loida Daycare	Social Service - Daycare	Stockton (East Camden)	Dominican	Female and Male	14	Previous Camden Employment	Camden Empowerment Zone Corporation (CEZC), Latin American Economic Development Association (LAEDA), PNC Bank, Sunwahama Bank, New Jersey Department of Health and Human Services	Family / Friends	6
3 Ralph Blake	A-1 Uniform City	Uniform Supply	Waterfront South	Indian	Male	7	Worked in Similar City	None	None	11
4 Marcellus Hill	Marcellus Construction	Construction	Waterfront South	Black	Male	6	Grew up in Camden	Labors Local 55	Family / Friends	8
5 Robert Lucas	Donkey's Place	Full-Service Restaurant	Parkside	White	Male	3	Grew up in Camden	None	Family / Friends	67
6 Kelly Chang	Friends Café	Full-Service Restaurant	Downtown	Korean	Male	4	Educated in Camden	None	Family / Friends	3
7 Esther Williams	City Eyes	Retail - Optical	Copper Plaza	Black	Female	2	Previous Camden Employment	Greater Camden Partnership (GCP)	Family / Friends	1
8 Miguel Benito	Universal Foto Estasis	Service (photography), Retail	Dudley (East Camden)	Mexican	Male	5	Immigrated to Camden	None	Family / Friends	10
9 Luis Japa	Luis Records & Electronics	Retail - Electronics	Cramer Hill	Dominican	Male	7	Immigrated to Camden	None	None	16
10 Connie Jackson	Jackson Associates Group, LLC	Construction	Downtown	Black	Female	5	Grew up in Camden	Cooperative Business Association Corporation (CBAC), National Association of Minority Contractors (NAMC)	None	5
11 Adam Woods	Camden Printworks	Service (Screen Printing)	Cramer Hill	White	Male	5	Previous Camden Employment	None	Family / Friends	3.5
12 Tyrone Pitts	Atline Construction and Institute	Construction, Educational Services	Cramer Hill	Black	Male	80	Grew up in Camden	None	None	10
13 Barry Watkins	Total Perfection	Barbershop / Beauty Salon	Liberty Park	Black	Male	10	Grew up in Camden	None	None	5
14 Corriane Powers	Corrine's Place	Full-Service Restaurant, Catering	Parkside	Black	Female	8	Grew up in Camden	None	Family / Friends	20
15 Rhonda Manulez	Flowers by Mendez and Jackel	Retail - Florist	Cramer Hill	White	Female	6	Lived in Camden as a Teen	Cooperative Business Association Corporation (CBAC), Latin American Economic Development Association (LAEDA)	Family / Friends	97
16 Jose Marrera	Caribbean Mega Center	Retail - Electronics	Marlon (East Camden)	Puerto Rican	Male	4	Grew up in Camden	None	None	18

* Classification from 2007 North American Classification System (NAICS)

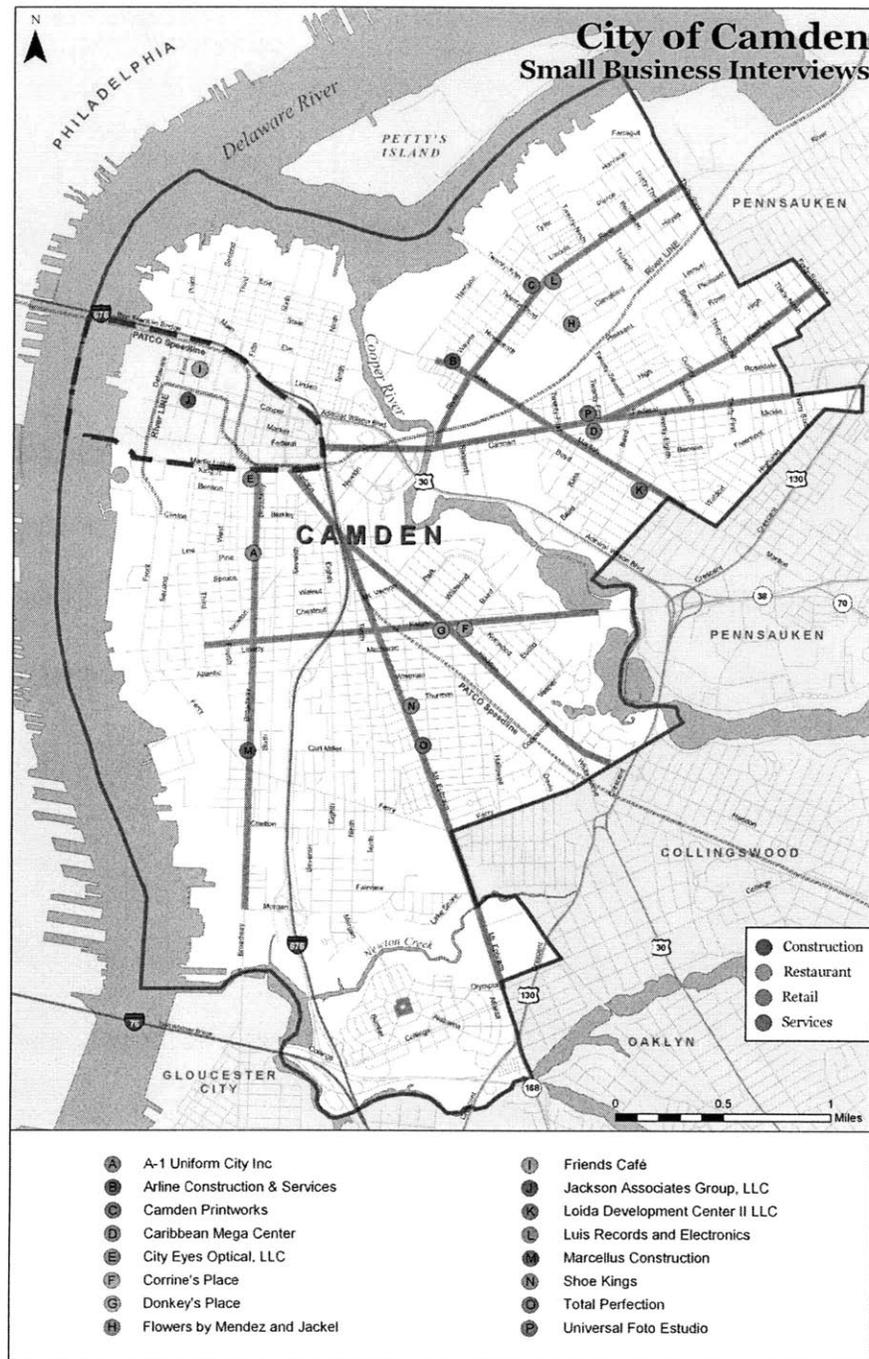
Even though I kept the definition of a “successful business” intentionally unspecified in my conversations and interviews, the people I asked for “successful” businesses often suggested the same businesses over and over again. Corrine’s Place is probably the best example, but it is not the only one. The Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ) and Camden Empowerment Zone Corporation (CEZC) recommend Loida Daycare. Members of the Young Urban Leaders, a Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper article, business owner Marcellus Hill, and Jenny Greenberg at Cooper’s Ferry Development Association all recommended Tyrone Pitts. Camden Curfew Program volunteers and Josue Figueroa at Susquehanna Bank told me to speak with the owner of Ritmo Records, but I was never able to get in touch with him. Both Jenny Greenberg and Camden Curfew Program volunteers recommended Luis Japa. This convergence makes me confident that I did in fact reach a distinct group of business owners in Camden.

Lessons Learned

The method does have limitations. The businesses interviewed are diverse in terms of their location in Camden (see Map 2 below), but are not necessarily proportional in terms of the percent of occupied businesses on each commercial corridor or a proportional representation of business type. For example, none of the interviewed businesses are in manufacturing, even though this has historically been Camden’s niche. Also, in only interviewing business owners identified as successful, I have no data to compare their traits to businesses seen as unsuccessful or failed. However, given the challenge of seeking out successful businesses, reaching out to those that failed would have been impossible. These businesses may not be typical of Camden businesses. From walking the commercial corridors I suspect they are not. But even if they do not represent Camden small businesses more generally, these business owners are an interesting

and important group. They give evidence for one way the city can develop by bringing up current residents instead of displacing them with a new middle class.

Map 2: Interviewed Camden Small Businesses



This method of data collection may appear haphazard, but it reflects a persistent effort to interview businesses that are successful by Camden standards. Its strength lies in its success at

generating candid interviews with business owners unlikely to have been identified and interviewed by any other method. While the method is inherently opportunistic, the prior description would permit replication in other impoverished cities. It begins with interviews with community stakeholders readily identified from city and community organizations. It then uses successful interviews for locating additional ones. When possible it utilizes personal experience, underscoring the need for an interview request to be made in person and using a mutually recognized person. Yet it is clearly valid given the convergence of recommended “successful businesses” and useful as exemplified by some of the findings suggested in these introductory comments such as the number of successful businesses opened by Camden residents or immigrants. And the definition of success indicates clear value in comments about employing residents or promoting positive civic identification. These and other success characteristics will be the subject of subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 3: UNCOVERING THE VALUE OF CAMDNE SMALL BUSINESSES

Being from here we get categorized. Once you hear 'Camden', soon as you mention it to the corporations, immediately we're on the defensive. Don't walk down Mr. Ephraim Ave., don't say hi, because of the wrap. But when you open the orange up, peel the orange, see the real fruit, then it's a different taste. – The Shoe Kings⁵⁹

Do these diverse businesses make the same type of contribution to Camden's revitalization? On the surface, it appears not. Owners operate different types of businesses, from restaurants to construction firms to daycares and retail shops. The oldest business in my sample opened in 1907, while the newest opened just over a year ago. Some serve the local population with cell phones and music, while others offer regionally recognized soul food bringing people into the city from the surrounding region. These men and women have different life experiences; some grew up poor and one spent time in jail, while another graduated from an Ivy League college and worked as an executive at a Fortune 100 firm. They are African American, white, Dominican, Puerto Rican, Korean, and Indian. Yet, upon closer inspection some commonalities arise. First, these business owners have a strong footing in Camden either from growing up in the city or working there. Second, with an insider's perspective they view the city as a business opportunity; it has a market, a workforce and customer base. The small business owners contribute to neighborhood stability by serving otherwise unattended neighborhood needs and keeping their doors open even in tough times. Third, these entrepreneurs incorporate a sense of neighborhood responsibility and giving back to the community into their business model. Finally, these businesses exhibit the resiliency and sustainability necessary to survive in a

⁵⁹ Afanador, Iraida, "Personal Interview."

regulatory environment as confusing and transitory as Camden's; their tenacity is ideal for contributing to Camden's continuing transformation. This chapter explores each of these qualities in greater detail.

"We Love Our City"

All the interviewed business owners have a deep connection to Camden or a similar city. These relationships go beyond being from the South Jersey region or having knowledge of the city demographics. Ten of the business owners grew up in Camden (Table 1, page 32). When I asked business owners why they chose Camden, I commonly heard responses like Jose Marrea's: "We're from Camden. Raised in Camden. That is why the store is here. We still live here too. We love our city. We know how it goes. Why would you want to leave an environment that you know for somewhere you don't know?"⁶⁰ Two business owners, Miguel Benito and Luis Japa immigrated to Camden. Miguel followed his brothers and others from his hometown in Mexico and Luis came to Camden from the Dominican Republic via New York. An additional two business owners worked previously in the city. Adam Woods taught theater at Urban Promise Academy. "My business is intentionally located in Camden. I'm staying in Camden because that is where I want to be."⁶¹ Kelly Chang of Friend's Café graduated from Rutgers Camden and at one time worked at the Campus Deli, the same building in which his restaurant now resides.⁶² Finally, Ralph Ishack, who had the least connection with the city when he opened his uniform

⁶⁰ Marrera, Jose, "Personal Interview."

⁶¹ Woods, Adam, "Personal Interview."

⁶² Chang, Kelly, "Personal Interview."

retail store eleven year ago, previously worked in the South Bronx, an area he describes as very similar to Camden.⁶³

Having a previous relationship with the city equips these business owners with local knowledge, leading them to see Camden as a place rich in business opportunities. They make up for lacking “the resources to access comprehensive, sophisticated market and demographic information” by having an intimate understanding of the city.⁶⁴ Instead of poverty and danger, business owners see unmet demand, a workforce and customers. Some say growing up in Camden endowed them with resilience requisite for owning a business. These embedded business owners understand the problems Camden faces and want to use their business as a way to give back and improve conditions; it isn’t only about profit or image.

“There is Great Opportunity Here”

These small business owners see opportunity where outsiders see obstacles. “It is amazing that a lot of people don’t recognize the opportunities that are available in the city of Camden. They kind of look at it as a place where business doesn’t occur, and to be truthful there is a tremendous amount of business waiting to happen, but people just have to uncover the opportunity. There are so many untapped opportunities here,” Tyrone Pitts explains.⁶⁵ Rhonda Mendez echoes this sentiment. “There is a lot of good that people don’t see.”⁶⁶ Jose Marrera believes, “Camden is not what people think. There is great opportunity here.”⁶⁷ They discover possibility in a city others believe to be a wasteland of poverty, violence, and crime. Camden

⁶³ Ishack, Ralph, “Personal Interview.”

⁶⁴ Waxman, “Why Improve Neighborhoods? Shifting the Goals of Inner City Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization,” 46-47.

⁶⁵ Pitts, Tyrone, “Personal Interview.”

⁶⁶ Mendez, Rhonda, “Personal Interview.”

⁶⁷ Marrera, Jose, “Personal Interview.”

residents, the people these business owners grew up with or went to school with or now live next door to, are not useless, but a potential workforce and clientele for goods and services absent in the local or regional economy. Corrine Powers of Corrine's Place does not acknowledge the drawbacks to her home city of Camden. She exclaims, "I was born down at Cooper Hospital. I was educated from grammar to college right there in Camden. I graduated from Rutgers. I'm often asked, 'Why Camden?' and I say, 'Why not?' You know, why not?"⁶⁸

Fourteen of the sixteen business owners dispute Camden's unsafe and violent reputation. Ralph Ishack and Jose Marrera have never been robbed in all their years of operation, eleven and eighteen respectfully.⁶⁹ Over this time Ralph has observed an increase in safety. "There is more law enforcement, and less drugs and hookers" near his South Camden store.⁷⁰ Adam Woods is "hopeful for the day when we can demystify the economy of drugs. People don't want to live in Camden because there is all his drug violence. But like I work in Camden and I've never been the victim of violence. I live in South Philly and I've been the victim of violence (there) twice."⁷¹ At Total Perfection, Barry Watkins acknowledges that he's heard people told not to walk down Mt. Ephraim Avenue because it's "bad." He asks people to keep the cursing out of the shop in order to create a positive culture as a barbershop is no place for street culture. Jose Marrera wants people's perception of Camden to align with the reality. "Camden has changed a lot for the better. The people from outside, I'd like to invite them to come to Camden. They think of this as a scary area. This is not."⁷² Kelly Chang encourages his Rutgers-Camden student customers to take their education beyond the university walls. He asks the University, "What are you telling

⁶⁸ Powers, Corrine, "Personal Interview."

⁶⁹ Ishack, Ralph, "Personal Interview"; Marrera, Jose, "Personal Interview."

⁷⁰ Ishack, Ralph, "Personal Interview."

⁷¹ Woods, Adam, "Personal Interview."

⁷² Marrera, Jose, "Personal Interview."

these kids? It's still dangerous out there? It's not. I wish the Rutgers students could go out and really mingle."⁷³ These businesses owners experience the city everyday; they know that Camden's advantages outweigh any crime statistics. They realize and take advantage of the business opportunity overlooked by larger outside enterprises.

Most businesses shy away from opening in places like Camden because of its unsafe reputation and its high poverty rate. Tyrone Pitts challenges this perception. He explains that just because people are poor does not mean they have no money to spend:

What they (potential business owners) don't understand is, and it's kind of worked to my benefit, is that most of the people here, although their incomes are low, they dispose of everything they have. So they utilize all their money and it becomes disposable income, which makes for a very fertile business development endeavor. People live day-to-day, week-to-week, month-to-month and a lot of what they receive or all that they receive can be put back into the local economy.⁷⁴

Understanding that neighborhood people have money to spend is especially important to businesses selling convenience goods, or things people require for daily life. Instead of spending their money outside the city, people can purchase these items close to home. Small business owners capture local money and keep it within the city's economy. Before Jose Marrera opened the Caribbean Mega Center he wondered, "Why do people from Camden have to go out of Camden? I looked at Best Buy and thought, 'Maybe we can do the same thing in Camden.' My store is not as big as Best Buy, but here you can get everything they have."⁷⁵ He views people as music lovers and video game players, not as too poor to afford a television or cell phone.

Academic literature reinforces these findings. Michael Porter writes that the inner city has a great amount of unmet demand and local dollars for businesses to capture.⁷⁶ In meeting the

⁷³ Chang, Kelly, "Personal Interview."

⁷⁴ Pitts, Tyrone, "Personal Interview."

⁷⁵ Marrera, Jose, "Personal Interview."

⁷⁶ Porter, "The Competitive Advantage of the Inner City."

needs of people in these neighborhoods, small businesses prosper by exploiting untapped consumer buying power.⁷⁷ And in providing convenience goods close to home, people no longer have to travel outside their neighborhood to shop.⁷⁸ When people are able to purchase goods in their neighborhood, they stop the leakage of dollars to outside towns and businesses, thus restoring local markets and building wealth in urban neighborhoods.⁷⁹ It helps to close the gap in economic progress that low-income neighborhoods suffer.⁸⁰

The people of Camden work hard to earn their disposable income. Eleven of the sixteen business owners site a strong local work-ethic. People do not spend idyll time on corners; they work as hard as the interviewed business owners to make ends meet. Rhonda Mendez explains a common conversation with customers from the surrounding suburbs. “They say, I love your flowers, they are so beautiful. Where are you located? And you say Camden. And everyone gasps and says *Camden*. But here people are honest and hard working.”⁸¹ Other business owners in East Camden agree. “People think Camden is the worst city. People have to come here and see for themselves that we aren’t a bad people. We work hard. We’re good people.”⁸² Luis Japa extends this idea to Camden’s illegal immigrants “The Mexicans are really making the city better off because even though they are illegal immigrants, they work.”⁸³

Local people are also a labor source. While some downtown business won’t hire ex-convicts, Corrine Powers believes, “Sometimes there are a lot of unhorrible people that have

⁷⁷ “Investing in Equity: Targeted Economic Development for Neighborhoods and Cities,” 43.

⁷⁸ Waxman, “Why Improve Neighborhoods? Shifting the Goals of Inner City Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization,” 46; Light, *Race, ethnicity, and entrepreneurship in urban America*, 216.

⁷⁹ “Investing in Equity: Targeted Economic Development for Neighborhoods and Cities,” 93.

⁸⁰ Suggs, “Bringing Small Business Development to Urban Neighborhood.”

⁸¹ Mendez, Rhonda, “Personal Interview.”

⁸² Marrera, Jose, “Personal Interview.”

⁸³ Japa, Luis, “Personal Interview.”

been incarcerated.”⁸⁴ A former juvenile intake officer and now chef and caterer, she goes out of her way to hire troubled youth. Marcellus Hill feels the same way about the people he hires for construction jobs. “We have a lot of people out here who want to work, they just don’t get a fair share and opportunity. I pick different people out in different distressed areas I work. I’m actually going to pull them in and let them work in the company for a minute and then push them through the union to get more training and benefits for their family.”⁸⁵ He adds that the construction and weatherization fields have plenty of room to employ people on welfare or in half way houses.⁸⁶ Together the sixteen businesses create 168 jobs, many held by city residents (Table 1, page 32). Arline Construction and Services is a bit of an outlier with eighty jobs due to the fact it consists of many, vertically integrated companies. Taking out Arline, on average each business contributes approximately six jobs. In recruiting a local labor force, these entrepreneurs improve economic outcomes for disadvantaged residents, reducing the unemployment rate, growing a wealthier population, and fueling revitalization in low-income communities.⁸⁷

In telling their stories, only three of the sixteen business owners spoke about negative experiences with local people. The accounts include run-ins with drug dealers wanting to sell on the sidewalk outside a business, people acting disrespectfully in the store, and bringing street language and attitude into the shop. However, local knowledge from experience in Camden allows them to diffuse potentially heated situations instead of calling for police or implementing elaborate surveillance. Ralph Ishack at Uniform City vents his frustration with people who curse at him, feel entitled to special deals, or make racist comments. “It is hard to connect with people

⁸⁴ Powers, Corrine, “Personal Interview.”

⁸⁵ Hill, Marcellus, “Personal Interview.”

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Boston, “The Role of Black-Owned Businesses in Black Community Development,” 173; “Investing in Equity: Targeted Economic Development for Neighborhoods and Cities,” 24.

because they can talk disrespectfully. The best way to get through with them is to ignore some of the behavior. You don't know what will happen if you talk back to them and then it gets heated. Anyway, people always come back because we have a product people need."⁸⁸ In allowing the customers to get upset at him, he feels disrespected but does not take it personally, knowing they will return when they need uniforms again. People sometimes displaying street behavior do not persuade Ralph to close shop. Barry Watkins struggled with and then learned how to control this type of disrespectful behavior at Total Perfection. He knew taking the shop to the next level required setting a more professional tone for both his employees and their clients. To do this he made rules and then, the more difficult part, constantly reinforced them by speaking to those who broke them. Being from the city, he knew what to say and, more importantly, how to say it for people to take the new professionalism seriously. Today Total Perfection is a cohesive shop, known as the place to get hair done before a wedding or prom.⁸⁹ Luis Japa respects, but does not tolerate drug dealers who want to occupy his store's corner of 27th and Federal streets. After reasoning with drug dealers they leave his corner:

So many times people try to sell drugs around here. I walk outside my store and I say, look, I understand you try to do some business. I don't care about if you do the business, I am not going to call the police on you, but this interferes with my business so I don't want you here. I have cameras. I'm recording everything over here so find another place not around my business.⁹⁰

Over the last sixteen years of running his business he has had no outbreaks with drug dealers and his corner remains free of loiterers.

The business owners are also skilled in knowing and meeting consumer demand. Luis Japa advises provides potential entrepreneurs to "think about the service that you are going to

⁸⁸ Ishack, Ralph, "Personal Interview."

⁸⁹ Watkins, Barry, "Personal Interview."

⁹⁰ Japa, Luis, "Personal Interview."

give to the people and look around and see if those services are being performed well.”⁹¹ Robert Lucas of Donkey’s Place adds, “People who want to start a new business really have to understand what the needs of people are. They need to find a product in demand. If you want to attract people (from outside the city) you need to have a unique product.” Half of the business owners explained how they followed these recommendations by opening a business that capitalizes on government funding, meets a city need, or has an advantageous location.

Tyrone Pitts entered the construction and tutoring businesses because he wanted to meet Camden’s two most important needs: education and housing. “What I try to do is meet the needs of the community I grew up in. We got evicted when I was like in 8th grade. I know what it is like to be homeless and so I think housing is important. It gives people stability and a point of reference. A lot of people get into trouble because they don’t have that point of reference.”⁹² Jose Marrera and Luis Japa also fulfill city necessities by operating bill payment and money transfer centers in their stores. Luis explains, “In this city many people don’t have a bank account so then they come here to pay their bills.”⁹³ Uniform City sells uniforms for all city schools and the police department. Ralph Ishack says, “At present there is no local competition. We are the only uniform company in the area. You can get the products other places, but that requires going far away.”⁹⁴ Rhonda Mendez monopolizes the flower market. “We have a lot of funeral work, a lot of weddings, sweet sixteens, sweet fifteens. There was a need for a floral shop in this area because there wasn’t one.”⁹⁵ Her stunning floral arrangements also reach customers in

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Pitts, Tyrone, “Personal Interview.”

⁹³ Japa, Luis, “Personal Interview.”

⁹⁴ Ishack, Ralph, “Personal Interview.”

⁹⁵ Mendez, Rhonda, “Personal Interview.”

surrounding counties via internet ordering. Based on their knowledge of the city and without sophisticated market analyses, the business owners uncover and meet consumer needs.

While some businesses focus on a niche their product fills, others build their businesses around government funding programs specific to places like Camden. Abundant young Camden children, as well as social service programs like Workforce New Jersey and the New Jersey Cares for Kid, keep Loida in business. “When there is a parent who is on county assistance, like TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), and they are working, they can get a childcare referral to us.”⁹⁶ In hard times the daycare depends upon the outside funding from these organizations and referrals. Marcellus Hill bids on weatherization jobs funded through a different government program, the American Recovery and Reinvestment and Act (ARRA) or stimulus. “The stimulus money is for bringing everybody up. If you don’t have a business, you’ve got a great opportunity to start.”⁹⁷ With this funding source he can hire additional workers to complete more jobs and gain a greater reputation as a weatherization firm.

Location is a critical component to some business owners. Esther Williams opened an eyeglasses store within sight of Cooper University Hospital because there are three eye doctors nearby, all with patients who previously had no convenient optical retail option.⁹⁸ Now after an appointment patients can walk down the street to her store. Donkey’s Place has franchises in the suburbs and on the Jersey Shore, but the original location remains important to its success. After fifty years in business, the state recognized the business as a landmark.⁹⁹ Additionally, people coming in from the suburbs to try the renowned cheese steak appreciate the side parking lot, the only one on the commercial corridor. Moving anywhere else would mean upsetting the charming

⁹⁶ Jose, Manuel, “Personal Interview.”

⁹⁷ Hill, Marcellus, “Personal Interview.”

⁹⁸ Williams, Esther, “Personal Interview.”

⁹⁹ Lucas, Robert, “Personal Interview.”

interior, virtually unchanged since Robert's parents owned the business. Purchasing a new building would mean paying for updates and making it restaurant-ready. Finally at Friend's Café, the food served, hours of operation, and location across from the Rutgers-Camden campus cater to the 70% of the customers who are students.¹⁰⁰

In sum, these Camden entrepreneurs challenge popular conceptions of the city and its people to uncover opportunities some think nonexistent in Camden. In doing so they exploit the urban market and create jobs for local residents.

"Give Back to the City"

"You can go past the potholes and see the people that are really giving back. We are not selling shoes, taking the money and leaving to buy hummers. We say this because of what we're surrounded by. I don't care what color you are. If you don't give back, you're sucking us dry," said Byron of the Shoe Kings.¹⁰¹ All the entrepreneurs have a business plan focused of profit and long-term growing, but thirteen of the sixteen owners also view owning a business as a tool for giving back to their community and improving the city; helping others is an expectation of a good business owner. This finding is in line with Thomas Boston's research on black business owners. In a study of the 350 fastest growing African American companies with ten to one hundred employees he finds that 71.4% went into the business in order to serve the community.¹⁰² Cities should employ strategies that actively support these small businesses as a way to capitalize on the will of small business owners to do good things for their communities.¹⁰³

Where Boston's research relies on survey data, the following examples describe ways in which

¹⁰⁰ Chang, Kelly, "Personal Interview."

¹⁰¹ Gans, Byron and Gans, Darien, "Personal Interview."

¹⁰² Boston, *Gazelle Index*.

¹⁰³ Boston, "The Role of Black-Owned Businesses in Black Community Development," 162.

interviewed businesses serve the community: some owners take on local leadership roles, others go out of their way to meet community needs, and still others talk about working with youth, the city's future entrepreneurs. It should be no surprise that these business owners who invest so much of their time and energy contributing to the city resent other businesses who locate in the city and appear to give nothing back.

Each business owner understands the need to give back differently. Connie Jackson explains her business is in Camden because, like Corrine Powers, she is “from here, grew up here, went to school here. I wouldn't have had my business anywhere else. I wanted to be able to give back to the city.”¹⁰⁴ She served on the Camden City School Board from 1996-1999, started the Friends of Creative Arts, which raises money for student activities at the Creative Arts High School, currently serves as President of the New Jersey Chapter of the National Association of Minority Contractors (NAMC), and mentors potential entrepreneurs.¹⁰⁵ At Loida Manuel and Eunice Jose give back to the city's people by making sure all children in their daycare flourish. One time they had a student with emotional challenges they could not meet. Instead of just dropping the child from the center, they made the phone calls and found a more suitable daycare. The passion they have for the well being of the city's children means, “he gets help where he needs to, even though we lose out on a child.”¹⁰⁶ Robert Lucas sees giving back in a different way. On an early spring day he plants flowers along the sidewalk in the property next door to Donkey's Place. Byron Gans at the Shoe Kings talks about the extra effort he puts into creating their store's ambience. “I say, why can't we have a nice store? Why should it be cold? And why should I serve you something through plexiglass? I say we're not doing that to the people that's

¹⁰⁴ Jackson, Connie, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Jose, Manuel, “Personal Interview.”

around here. People respect that.” For Adam Woods a screen printing business includes providing prevailing wages and health benefits to all employees. Most of the clients “are from Camden and those that aren’t in Camden are using me because I am in Camden so it’s like we’re all trying to tap into the same overarching social mission.”¹⁰⁷ With the increased business he can hire and support more employees. Esther Williams has hosted three business owner meetings at City Eyes to “come up with ideas of how we can better become successful, how we can partner to let each other know about other businesses that are here.”¹⁰⁸ By taking the initiative to reach out to other businesses, they all gain from building new relationships and joint problem solving. These business owners may not have money to donate to nonprofit organizations or for philanthropy, but they have the energy and passion to donate their hands and hearts to city improvement.

Six business owners currently work with city youth or a desire to work with youth in the future. Corrine Powers says, “during the summertime they (the city) have programs and they always send me the kids that no one else can handle. That is no problem. This is what I do.”¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, it is not just a job to learn food preparation. “They learn life skills in terms of how to talk, how to walk, how to look...so it is like a training program also.”¹¹⁰ She adds, “If I don’t do anything else, I’ve made a difference. Children that leave up out of here and do fantastic reflect back to what I took them through and appreciate it.”¹¹¹ Architects at Arline Construction mentor youth from Met East, a Big Picture high school. The students spend two days a week

¹⁰⁷ Woods, Adam, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁰⁸ Williams, Esther, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁰⁹ Powers, Corrine, “Personal Interview.”

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

learning architectural principles and the tools used to create renderings.¹¹² Barry Watkins empowers youth in a different way. The barbers in his shop teach children to shake hands when greeting someone, to speak in a respectful manner, and are act with self-confidence.¹¹³ The professional tone he sets for his employees transfers to the customers they serve. The Gans brothers offer their store, The Shoe Kings, as a safe space for youth after school, an alternative to spending time on nearby drug corners.¹¹⁴ Finally, in the future Kelly Chang at Friends Café wants “to get involved with the high schools and bring them here and teach them about culinary arts. I’ll give them a job here and teach them how to run a small business. Make it kind of a credited class – not just running a business, but paying the bills, showing them what a bill looks like and doing QuickBooks.”¹¹⁵

Small business owners can be role models for youth growing up in cities. In urban areas “networks of kin, friends, and associates are more likely to include a higher proportion of individuals who, because of their experiences with extreme marginality, tend to doubt that they can achieve approved societal goals.”¹¹⁶ Small business owners break this trend and show youth an alternative. They are passionate about their work and they work hard. Young people can learn from witnessing and working with entrepreneurs.

Businesses grew from hobbies, which entrepreneurs are just as passionate about today. Darien Gans of the Shoe Kings explains, “We’ve always been into sneakers and basketball since we were young. Our love for sneakers is what you see. It’s our motivation.”¹¹⁷ Friend’s Café is a direct product of Kelly Chang’s love for food. “Cooking was always a passion. I always get lost

¹¹² Watkins, Barry, “Personal Interview.”

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Gans, Byron and Gans, Darien, “Personal Interview.”

¹¹⁵ Chang, Kelly, “Personal Interview.”

¹¹⁶ Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, 76.

¹¹⁷ Gans, Byron and Gans, Darien, “Personal Interview.”

in the food and the aroma of making food. It brings a kind of harmony to a meeting or family gathering and I like that.”¹¹⁸ At the Camden Printworks Adam Woods exclaims the best part of his work is “really kicking butt on a piece of art work and then showing it to a client on a t-shirt with a printing method they didn’t even know existed and just watching them. They gave you an eyedropper full of idea and you turned it into like Niagara Falls and they see it and are just so thrilled.”¹¹⁹ This leads him to want to create more and better work for his clients. After fifteen years as a barber, Barry Watkins still enjoys getting to bond with people and seeing neighborhood children grow up.¹²⁰ A love for their work encourages these entrepreneurs.

This passion leads to investing a lot of energy into the business. Being a small business owner requires a tremendous amount of time and hard work, a characteristic important to communicate to today’s youth. Rhonda Mendez advises potential business owners:

Your heart and soul really have to be in it. Because owning your own business is a lot of work and a lot of headache. If this is what you really want to do and it is all you think about from the morning when you wake up till you go to sleep at night and your hearts really in it, then fine... You have to put in an extreme amount of hours. It’s not like you work for someone from nine to five. It’s more like eight to twelve, twelve at night. When you go home you are still doing business.¹²¹

Adam Woods talks about work hours the same way. Since opening “in September ’06, I’ve been here eighty hours a week. Somebody said the best part of being a business owner is you get to pick which seventy hours a week you are going to work, which is pretty true.” Manuel Jose speaks with awe and pride about his mother’s ability to run the daycare at an age when most people retire. “You don’t think of her as business savvy or that she has the willpower and energy to take on something like this. But she runs circles around me. She’s up at six a.m. and beats me

¹¹⁸ Chang, Kelly, “Personal Interview.”

¹¹⁹ Woods, Adam, “Personal Interview.”

¹²⁰ Watkins, Barry, “Personal Interview.”

¹²¹ Mendez, Rhonda, “Personal Interview.”

to the daycare more of the time.”¹²² Youth observing and working with these business owners will learn how to turn one of their passions into an enterprise, while at the same time learning what it looks like to work hard.

Whether working with youth or not, the same business owners who contribute to Camden are upset with those businesses who do not meet their standards of contributing the city. For instance, they resent businesses obtaining tax breaks known as PILOTs (Payments in Lieu of Tax) when they, themselves cannot participate in the program. Under the PILOT program, large businesses operate for ten, twenty, or thirty years by making a smaller payment to the city instead of paying regular taxes. The aquarium PILOT, for example, is approximately one-sixth its tax bill.¹²³ Small businesses have never been incorporated into this program. Corrine Powers struggles to pay her taxes, especially during this economic recession. She thinks it’s unfair for “people to come into the city that have no connection with the city, to open up businesses and then they are compensated... they employ very few people from Camden and they don’t have to pay any taxes.”¹²⁴ Kelly Chang believes these businesses have the wrong attitude. The city doesn’t need to make these businesses a deal to open in Camden. It should be the other way around; the businesses should be giving to their neighbors. “If you don’t pay taxes here, that money should go somewhere. There has to be some sense of social responsibility. They think we’re just here, that’s enough, you should be thanking us.”¹²⁵ The Shoe Kings agree. “They (the city) need to stop giving those grants out to those that don’t give back to the community. We’ve been here our whole lives and this is like our money we’re using out of our pockets. We aren’t

¹²² Jose, Manuel, “Personal Interview.”

¹²³ Moss-Coane, “Taking Stock of New Jersey's Takeover.”

¹²⁴ Powers, Corrine, “Personal Interview.”

¹²⁵ Chang, Kelly, “Personal Interview.”

asking for any handouts, but we do give back.”¹²⁶ The riff between the “two Camdens” grows as those with local city knowledge discover opportunities, struggle to open shop, and then give back to their neighborhoods while other large businesses are recruited into the city, given tax breaks, and then, from a resident perspective, provide little for neighborhoods and may not last. Previous city and state redevelopment efforts have neglected to support the city’s small businesses, even though the accounts of these small business owners show they positively impact their neighborhood and city by taking the extra energy to give back to the people and place around them. Future redevelopment strategies should support these small businesses because they benefit the city beyond paying tax revenue and creating additional jobs.

“Normal People Would Just Quit”

If these business owners can use their local knowledge to reveal and maximize opportunity, do they also remain in business for a long time? Of the sixteen interviewed businesses, four have been open for less than five years, six have been open for between five and ten, four between eleven and twenty years, and two are more than twenty years old (Table 1, page 32). Current owners of businesses with the longest tenure did not open their businesses, but took over from family members or older partners. These older businesses weathered the city’s industrial decline, remaining open when others closed their doors or moved away. Being in business a long time increases neighborhood stability. Occupying otherwise vacant buildings reduces blight and encourages others to locate nearby.¹²⁷ The interviewed business owners support and grow the local economy while also improving the physical neighborhood.

¹²⁶ Gans, Byron and Gans, Darien, “Personal Interview.”

¹²⁷ Waxman, “Why Improve Neighborhoods? Shifting the Goals of Inner City Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization,” 49.

Additionally, the business owners exhibit documented characteristics shared by successful business owners everywhere, suggesting that Camden entrepreneurs will remain open in the future and continue to contribute to and transform their neighborhoods. Using data from the Characteristics of Business Owners compiled by the US Census Bureau and an extensive literature review, Fairlie and Robb outline general successful small business owner attributes.¹²⁸ They find business owners possess a strong general education in reading, writing, and math, have specific business skills like marketing, and have prior work experience in a similar type of business and/or experienced apprenticeship type training in a family business. They start small and finance their growth. Finally, successful business owners tend to begin with a good amount of personal wealth and choose a more profitable industry. Except for having a large amount of personal wealth to begin a business, a difficulty addressed in the next chapter of this study, the majority of interviewed businesses fit the academic characteristics of success.

One common theme for sustainability is to start small. In speaking about the need to start small and grow, Adam Woods of the Camden Printworks recommends all business owners dip a little toe in before ordering a lot of inventory or setting up an expensive shop.¹²⁹ “Start as incrementally as you can and finance your growth based on what you can stock away from what you are making.” Marcellus Hill of Marcellus Construction explains how local non-profit, the St. Joseph’s Carpenter Society, gave him his first big break. “They actually trusted me to go in a house and do the trim work. Once they saw that, I did the numbers and put in the bid to do one house. I knocked the house out fairly quickly and it went on from there. I got better, people

¹²⁸ Fairlie and Robb, *Race and entrepreneurial success : Black-, Asian-, and white-owned businesses in the United States*.

¹²⁹ Woods, Adam, “Personal Interview.”

trusted me with more work, it grew from there.”¹³⁰ The Caribbean Mega Center serves as a third example of starting small and growing. “We started off real small and after a year passed we started to grow. As I saw people needed more things, I got more things. We started to add one thing at a time.”¹³¹ Storeowner Jose Marrera uses the following metaphor for business growth: “It’s like going to school. You start in kindergarten and then you go up. Business is the same way. After the years pass you learn more and more and more.”¹³² In the near future he will expand this business by opening a fruit stand in a once vacant building further down the block from his store on Federal Street.

Another common theme for sustainability is having a solid education and/or business experience. Twelve of the sixteen business owners had previous experience in their current industry or small business more generally. For instance, Ralph Ishack of Uniform City worked in a similar business in the South Bronx before coming to Camden;¹³³ Miguel Benito of Universal Foto Estudio learned from his brother who had a similar Philadelphia based business;¹³⁴ Robert Lucas took over Donkey’s Place from his parents, who began the restaurant in 1943;¹³⁵ Eunice Jose started her daycare after retiring as an elementary school teacher;¹³⁶ Adam Woods of the Camden Printshop worked in a Tennessee print shop during his teens;¹³⁷ and Esther Williams of City Eyes opened her optical retail store after running the optical dispensary office for Camden’s Cooper University Hospital.¹³⁸ Jose Marrera, who got his start in his mother and stepfather’s

¹³⁰ Hill, Marcellus, “Personal Interview.”

¹³¹ Marrera, Jose, “Personal Interview.”

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ishack, Ralph, “Personal Interview.”

¹³⁴ Benito, Miguel, “Personal Interview.”

¹³⁵ Lucas, Robert, “Personal Interview.”

¹³⁶ Marrera, Jose, “Personal Interview.”

¹³⁷ Woods, Adam, “Personal Interview.”

¹³⁸ Williams, Esther, “Personal Interview.”

Camden grocery store, explains, “You have to work for somebody or go to school to learn. You have to know what you are doing first. You have to know your product. If you start a business with no knowledge, no matter how much money you have, you are going to be out of business. You are going to sour.”¹³⁹

Formal education can augment direct experience. Luis Japa, owner of Luis Records and Electronics, enhanced his understanding of business from seeing his father run a grocery in the Dominican Republic, but also by getting an economics degree from La Universidad de la Republica Dominicana.¹⁴⁰ Other business owners interviewed also have an education in either business or the specific field their business is in. Tyrone Pitts attended the Wharton school of business at the University of Pennsylvania before becoming an entrepreneur,¹⁴¹ Connie Jackson earned a masters degree in community economic development before opening her construction management firm,¹⁴² and Marcellus Hill studied building trades and maintenance mechanics at Camden County Vocational and worked for a construction company before becoming a general contractor.¹⁴³ At least seven of the sixteen owners of businesses, 44%, earned a bachelor’s degree. This suggests business owners are better educated than average Camden citizens. Only 5.4% of Camden residents over the age of twenty-five have a bachelor’s degree.¹⁴⁴ In a less academic setting, Rhonda Mendez of Flows by Mendez and Jackel completed an entrepreneurial training program offered by LAEDA, the Latin American Economic Development Agency.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Marrera, Jose, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁴⁰ Japa, Luis, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁴¹ Pitts, Tyrone, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁴² Jackson, Connie, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁴³ Hill, Marcellus, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁴⁴ “Camden (city) QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau.”

¹⁴⁵ Mendez, Rhonda, “Personal Interview.”

Camden business owners have another quality, often a byproduct of their Camden roots, that contributes to sustainability: grit and resiliency. Tyrone Pitts said, “It is my makeup coming from a place like Camden where things get tough a lot of times. You learn to endure and work through problems that normal people would just quit.”¹⁴⁶ For Connie Jackson, growing up poor in Camden and fighting for survival has turned her into the entrepreneur she is today. “My parents didn’t have money. We basically didn’t know what we were going to eat from day to day. My mother was on welfare because she got sick and couldn’t work anymore. Despite that, we still fought to get where we are... I was working at the age of thirteen and have worked all my life. I don’t know what it is to not have a job or a career.”¹⁴⁷ Byron Gans of the Shoe Kings summarizes his thoughts on the city’s toughness and responds, “This city will break you. It will break your spirit. It will break you. But I’m a stickler for this.”¹⁴⁸ The people of Camden have a unique resiliency, which well serves business owners operating in an uncertain world. They persist, overcoming obstacles and remaining open for business.

Findings from the small business interviews add to previous literature about the ability of small businesses to take part in larger economic development and neighborhood transformation. A connection to the city leads business owners to see an opportunity for business success others may not. Once established in the city, the businesses provide needed goods and services, add local employment options, and contribute positive activity to the neighborhood. Fortifying Thomas Boston’s research, these Camden entrepreneurs show how a desire to give back manifests itself in helping other business owners or wanting to be role models for youth. Finally, the small businesses can contribute to neighborhood transformation because they are sustainable.

¹⁴⁶ Pitts, Tyrone, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁴⁷ Jackson, Connie, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁴⁸ Gans, Byron and Gans, Darien, “Personal Interview.”

Business owners exhibit characteristics described in the literature on successful entrepreneurs and have additional resiliency and grit. Overall, the businesses are a strong asset, contributing value to the city.

CHAPTER4: SMALL BUSINESS DISCONNECT

One cannot look over the dilapidated inner cities of the United States, filled with unemployed people, and come away satisfied that the existing system is also optimizing the supply of entrepreneurs who know how to run laundromats, plumbing supply warehouses, or discount clothing stores. ~ Light and Rosenstein¹⁴⁹

If these small businesses are a strong asset and a source for city transformation, why have well-intentioned efforts to revitalize the city left them marginalized and unrecognized? This chapter uncovers the immense challenges Camden small business owners face. Each of these is framed as a disconnect: a disconnect between the perception of the city held by business owners and by the more general public; a disconnect between businesses and the economic development entities meaning to assist them, exemplified through the disconnect between business owners and financial resources; and a disconnect between business owners and city government. Additionally, business owners face hard economic times piled on top of Camden's fifty-year slow decline. When these businesses emerge from this recession they will look different from when the downturn began. These myriad disconnects explain why the rooted Camden businesses go unrecognized as assets in a city full of need. In Camden, a successful small business owner really is making a way³ where there's no way.

Hard Times and "Scrappy Survivors"

The economic recession hit small businesses especially hard. It was the most pressing current challenge in the minds of ten of the sixteen business owners. (Note: two of the

¹⁴⁹ Light, *Race, ethnicity, and entrepreneurship in urban America*, 210.

interviewees who did not speak about the recession are those who have only been open a year old and so have no knowledge of operating during a pre-recession era.) Benito Miguel at Universal Foto Estudio advises potential business owners to wait until after the recession to open. “Before 2008 it was busy, but now there is hardly anything. We still make money, but not as much as before. We make only enough to feed ourselves.”¹⁵⁰ The recession caused Connie Jackson to let go of some employees. “With a small business, when things get slow and you may have to lay off and you’re down to one or two people, the burden is heavier on you because you automatically wear three, four, five hats and you now put on a couple more hats.”¹⁵¹ Luis Japa has not had to release employees, but cannot invest in making upgrades to his store. “Small businesses are facing difficult times. Lately it is like you make some money and you have already promised that money. You can’t save it to do changes in the store or to invest in merchandise or inventory or changes to the environment or presentation or showcasing the store.”¹⁵²

Rising unemployment caused by the recession also affects these small businesses. At Loida daycare “within the last three months we’ve lost maybe fifteen customers because parents are losing jobs. The economy is still not as good as it was. Parents, especially this fall, lost more jobs than I’ve seen.”¹⁵³ Out-of-work parents stay home with their children because they do not have the money to pay for daycare. “I don’t think that people are holding money and not spending. I think that it is they don’t have money to spend. If you have high unemployment, people are going to buy the basics – food, shirts,” explains Luis Japa.¹⁵⁴ He has seen a decrease

¹⁵⁰ Benito, Miguel, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁵¹ Jackson, Connie, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁵² Japa, Luis, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁵³ Jose, Manuel, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁵⁴ Japa, Luis, “Personal Interview.”

in sales because he sells electronics and not the basics. And at Friends Café, Kelly Chang has suffered a decrease in patrons because families are struggling. Eating at home is less costly than eating out.¹⁵⁵

Camden small business owners have drawn on their resiliency and grit to survive the recession. Businesses at the end of the economic downturn will look differently than before. With the construction industry Marcellus Hill explains, “The market had changed to make the construction go down. I started trying to get other jobs, just the economy was so bad. It wasn’t just me, everybody’s going through it. So I just redirected my energy into weatherization because I got a whiff that was going on.”¹⁵⁶ Today Marcellus recruits new employees to complete stimulus-funded weatherization jobs and plans to continue such work in this new industry after the recession. Jose Marrera confronts the recession not by changing the nature of his business, but by renting some of his building space to smaller vendors. “The economy is bad. If I’m going to pay the mortgage for the building, being by myself I can’t afford it. Now I have five stores in my one location. I rent out to people. And then these people help me to pay the mortgage and pay the bills.”¹⁵⁷ Other business owners are not sure what to do. Adam Woods at the Camden Printworks prepared for the recession, but he is finding it more difficult than expected:

We were ready for it. We had some savings built up, we were keeping a minimal inventory. We were doing really short orders, all the stuff you are supposed to do to be a scrappy survivor. We did all those things and we did them right and so we were able to weather the storm for a long time. I would say by October 09, we first started to see things pick up out of the slump, but they aren’t picking up at a fast enough clip. So consequently we have people that are laid off. When we emerge from hibernation it is probably going to look a little different than it did before we went into it.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Chang, Kelly, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁵⁶ Hill, Marcellus, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁵⁷ Marrera, Jose, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁵⁸ Woods, Adam, “Personal Interview.”

Small businesses across the country feel the pinch with the economic recession. Those in Camden have to cope with it on top of the struggles existing in a city with long standing industrial decline and poverty.

“Afraid to Come In”

Eleven businesses discuss the challenge of overcoming the city’s negative image. Small businesses struggle to break down the divide between the possibility-rich Camden that they see, and the crime-ridden nightmare that outsiders, their potential customers, perceive. Rhonda Mendez explains, “Just trying to get people to see a better perspective of our city is the hard part. I do a lot of home consultations with brides because of that. They are afraid to come in.”¹⁵⁹ The Gans brothers add, “Being from here we get categorized. Once you hear Camden, soon as you mention it to the corporations, immediately we’re on the defensive. Don’t walk down Mt. Ephraim Ave., don’t say hi, because of the wrap.”¹⁶⁰ “Camden’s not a destination. It’s like a place when you drove through with your mom when you were a teenager and she locked the doors on the car.”¹⁶¹ Even with these small business owners working to share a different message about the city, it is difficult to overcome Camden’s long-term perception.

Business owners fault local media for sensationalizing negative aspects of Camden. According to Luis Japa, “The news here sometimes they make people scared. The news take one thing and they blow it up. But the paper they want to sell so sometimes they exaggerate what is going on in Camden. I’d like more people to come down here. I’d like to invite them to come to

¹⁵⁹ Mendez, Rhonda, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁶⁰ Gans, Byron and Gans, Darien, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁶¹ Woods, Adam, “Personal Interview.”

Camden.”¹⁶² Byron Gans asks the media to cover positive news. “Whenever something negative happens out there, they have a Fox 29 van with media coverage. But when somebody is doing well, for example what we’re doing, do you think we have media coverage?” For Camden small businesses to open and grow they must bridge this relentless divide.

Corrine has been able to overcome the city’s perception. She shares: “People will travel here. Despite of what they hear about Camden, I have been blessed that people still come here. You hear a lot of negative things about Camden, but I have doctors, lawyers, actors that have come in here.” Perhaps the difference is in the product. Few places serve soul food as good as hers. People come out of their comfort zone and into the city for the excellent dining experience. If the small businesses can sell and advertise a unique product, perhaps they can bring more people into the city to shop. Once in Camden these customers will have the opportunity to see the city as the business owners do.

“There’s Not a Whole Lot of Support Here”

A disconnect exists between business owners and economic development organizations that should assist with financing, technical assistance, and business training. The table below, taken from Table 1 on page 32, shows formal and informal business support obtained by business owners.

	Business	Formal Business Assistance	Informal Business Assistance
1	The Shoe Kings	Camden Empowerment Zone Corporation (CEZC)	None
2	Loida Daycare	Camden Empowerment Zone Corporation (CEZC), Latin American Economic Development Association (LAEDA), PNC Bank, Susquehanna Bank, New Jersey	Family / Friends

¹⁶² Japa, Luis, “Personal Interview.”

		Department of Health and Human Services	
3	A-1 Uniform City	None	None
4	Marcellus Construction	Laborers Local 55	Family / Friends
5	Donkey's Place	None	Family / Friends
6	Friends Café	None	Family / Friends
7	City Eyes	Greater Camden Partnership (GCP)	Family / Friends
8	Universal Foto Estudio	None	Family / Friends
9	Luis Records & Electronics	None	None
10	Jackson Associates Group, LLC	Cooperative Business Association Corporation (CBAC), National Association of Minority Contractors (NAMC)	None
11	Camden Printworks	None	Family / Friends
12	Arline Construction and Institute	None	None
13	Total Perfection	None	None
14	Corrine's Place	None	Family / Friends
15	Flowers by Mendez & Jackel	Cooperative Business Association Corporation (CBAC), Latin American Economic Development Association (LAEDA)	Family / Friends
16	Caribbean Mega Center	None	None

Business owners mentioned three economic development organizations more than once. The Latin American Economic Development Association (LAEDA) offers a nine-week entrepreneurship course covering fourteen areas of business practice, including business math, business law, and government regulation.¹⁶³ LAEDA also helps new business owners find a location. In fact, LAEDA purchases and rehabilitates buildings for this purpose.¹⁶⁴ Rhonda Mendez describes working with LAEDA: “They helped with a lot of support with the bookkeeping and tax information, which I knew nothing about. I did my business plan and then they helped me go to find the funding to get my business started. And they kind of pointed you in the right directions. You just had to do the footwork.”¹⁶⁵ The Camden Empowerment Zone Corporation (CEZC), which provides business grants and loans from a pool of money established by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), made loans to both the Shoe

¹⁶³ LAEDA, *Entrepreneurial Development Training*.

¹⁶⁴ Lamboy, Raymond, “Camden Empowerment Zone Corporation Interview.”

¹⁶⁵ Mendez, Rhonda, “Personal Interview.”

Kings and LOIDA. The Shoe Kings used these funds to market their business and improve the store’s interior.¹⁶⁶ CBAC, the Cooperative Business Assistance Corporation, creates opportunities for businesses and banks by participating in SBA programs.¹⁶⁷ Rhonda Mendez says, “CBAC was always there to help us out. When we were having hard times, they made sure that I didn’t fail. They were with me every step of the way to make sure everything turned out okay. They helped us find a contractor and worked with us on the payments for the contractor.”¹⁶⁸ A few businesses used these organizations for entrepreneurship training and business financing, but the majority of the sixteen businesses go without support from organizations that aim to assist businesses. These three organizations are the exceptions.

From interviews with economic development entities I discovered twenty-three different organizations which in some way could support small businesses. The table below organizes each of these supporting entities.

Table 2: Economic Development Entities

<u>Business Support</u>	<u>Economic Development Entities</u>
Financing	
- Community based	Cooperative Business Association Corporation (CBAC) Camden Empowerment Zone Corporation (CEZC)
- Local Government	Economic Recovery Board (ERB) Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ)
- State Government	New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (NJ DCA) New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJ EDA)
- Banks	Bank of America PNC Susquehanna TD
- Third Party Lending	Jeffery Krum
Entrepreneurship and Business Development	Latin American Economic Development Association (LAEDA) Rutgers-Camden Business Incubator Rutgers Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

¹⁶⁶ Gans, Byron and Gans, Darien, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁶⁷ Diemer, Mike, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁶⁸ Mendez, Rhonda, “Personal Interview.”

Chambers of Commerce	Camden County Chamber of Commerce
	Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Other Community Based Organizations	Broadway Main Street
	Cramer Hill Business Association
	Greater Camden Partnership (GCP)
Community Development Corporations (CDCs)	Cramer Hill CDC
	Heart of Camden
	Parkside Business and Community in Partnership (PBCIP)
	Save Our Waterfront
Developer	Coopers Ferry Development Association

The disconnect is not due to a lack of organizations, rather it appears the business owners do not know the resources available to them. For instance, Adam Woods laments, “I guess I’m surprised by how little there is out there for small businesses. All my life I was told there was a lot of stuff for small businesses.”¹⁶⁹ Tyrone Pitts explains:

A lot of people have great ideas about starting businesses but they don’t have any support. There’s not a whole lot of support here to help individuals trying to start them. I know I did most of my stuff by trial and error. A lot of the services for startup businesses aren’t readily available or people don’t know where they are or the access to information is sometimes a hindrance to those who want to start a business.¹⁷⁰

The Shoe Kings agree. “People are not informed. They don’t know about a lot of different programs. A lot of people don’t go through with things because they don’t have the right information on how to do it. They might have great ideas, but they’ll never take flight because they have no one around them to be the avenues to make it happen.”¹⁷¹ Luis Japa says the businesses “need more advice – how to deal with certain situations, how to invest, how to keep it going, how to deal with finance situations, how to deal with advice in marketing” so business assistance services would not go unused if owners knew it existed.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Woods, Adam, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁷⁰ Pitts, Tyrone, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁷¹ Gans, Byron and Gans, Darien, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁷² Japa, Luis, “Personal Interview.”

The disconnect between businesses and certain organizations is especially surprising. First, I would have anticipated community development corporations (CDCs) to have a greater knowledge of the small businesses on the commercial corridors in their neighborhoods. I called PBCIP, Parkside Business and Community in Partnership, expecting that given their name they would be able to connect me with of a couple of successful businesses to talk with. The result: the name of only one business. Through other avenues I discovered four additional businesses to potentially speak with. Adam Woods explains this disconnect with CDCs. They focus on “building the new homes, getting new families, or keeping the families by making the neighborhood nicer,” and generally do not have the expertise to take on small business development.¹⁷³

A second surprising disconnect is with the Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ). Its director, Vince Basara, knows of and has worked with six of the twenty-three other economic development entities, more than any other organization.¹⁷⁴ If businesses work with CBAC, CEZC, LAEDA, GCP, one would think they would also mention support from the UEZ, a partner of each of them. But no one mentions the UEZ. Perhaps this is because business owners do not experience the impact of tax incentives, UEZ’s main service, on a daily basis.

Third, Rutgers-Camden has many potential small business resources in its Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Business Incubator, and new Office of Civic Engagement. But these also function apart from current small business operations. The Business Incubator strives to bring high tech, biotech, and life science businesses to Camden and the region by providing technical assistance and capturing venture capital funding.¹⁷⁵ After so much discussion about the

¹⁷³ Mendez, Rhonda, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁷⁴ Basara, Vince, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁷⁵ Zammit, “Camden Empowerment Zone Interview.”

types of businesses thriving in Camden, this entity appears very out of place. There is no market or space for these industries in Camden, so once a business graduates from the incubator, even if the owner grows to appreciate Camden, many move their businesses.¹⁷⁶ In general, an incubator can only be successful as the market around it. Without a connection to the local economy it is just cheap real estate.¹⁷⁷ The Rutgers-Camden small business incubator falls into this category.

The only interviewed business owner to look into the Rutgers-Camden Small Business Development Center services was Kelly Chang, a Rutgers Camden graduate. He and the SBDC “met a couple of times, and like talked about everything. He (SBDC employee) tried to do the numbers but even he was pulling his hair.”¹⁷⁸ The SBDC is a small shop that sees 1,000 clients a year from three counties in Southern New Jersey and so they do not have the capacity to do a lot of outreach to city businesses or have the time for extensive consultation.¹⁷⁹

Recently Rutgers-Camden held a civic engagement symposium with one session dedicated to successful entrepreneurship activities. It highlighted the work of students to develop business plans and briefly mentioned the idea to locate student businesses in the community in the future.¹⁸⁰ The session became less about civic engagement, or two-way learning between the University and its community, and more about applauding student apprenticeship ideas. At the end of the symposium Chancellor Pritchett announced that to increase economic activity in our city, we will:

Host a series of small business market places inviting local business owners to come and present their goods and services to the Rutgers Camden Community. This initiative will work closely with students, faculty, staff and the Camden Urban Enterprise Zone and other interested stakeholders to ensure local businesses understand the needs of the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Glasmier, “A Better Way to Create Jobs.”

¹⁷⁸ Chang, Kelly, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁷⁹ Rago, Gary, “Camden Empowerment Zone Interview.”

¹⁸⁰ Pritchett, “Rutgers Civic Engagement Symposium: Entrepreneurship.”

campus community as well as helping the campus community understand the depth and quality of the products and services offered by these businesses.¹⁸¹

This raises several concerns. First, if the UEZ is to recruit the businesses, who will come? The successful small businesses interviewed for this study have no connection to the UEZ. The voices, ideas, and needs of businesses will be lost if the UEZ represents them in planning and executing the event. Second, it would be better for the businesses if the Rutgers community came to them. By doing so, people on campus would learn where the stores are so they can shop there again; businesses benefit from spillover effects of increased foot traffic. Visiting the businesses on the commercial corridors would also challenge students to reconsider their potentially negative perception of the city, while bringing businesses to campus only reinforces the idea that the outside neighborhood is unsafe. Overall, this new initiative appears to be more about the benefit to Rutgers than supporting small business owners.

In the absence of institutional support, some businesses are fortunate enough to turn to family and friends. Nine of the businesses rely on this type of informal assistance. For five of these businesses this is their only source of support (Table 1, page 32). Esther Williams advises, “Get as much family support as you can... you really have to have the backing of your family and areas you know you will be able to cut back and still be happy.”¹⁸² Miguel Benito learned how to start and run his business from his brothers who had opened two businesses within the region.¹⁸³ In starting her business, Corrine Powers had faith, her husband and mother to assist her. One week at a time they grew their business, which started by catering to local barbers and

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Williams, Esther, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁸³ Benito, Miguel, “Personal Interview.”

jail workers.¹⁸⁴ Kelly Chang utilized the support of a former employee and friend, “He knows this town well. He still lives in Camden. He helped me with this building and decorating it. He’s really handy and knows electric.”¹⁸⁵ As discussed previously, many business owners also rely on family and friends for financial support.

Why the disconnect between these organizations and the business owners? William Julius Wilson finds neighborhoods like those in Camden are socially integrated and have “high levels of local neighboring while being relatively isolated from contacts in the broader mainstream society.”¹⁸⁶ Family and friends support small business ventures while the more institutionalized and “other” economic development organizations cannot reach the businesses. The “two Camden” divide between the neighborhoods and downtown institutional and waterfront developments appears to be more than physical.

Evidence of this divide comes from the way some economic development organizations speak about Camden and its small businesses. The director of one economic development organization explains the only “successful businesses would be in that manufacturing, school, hospital sector for Camden. There are few retail. We have pizza places in Camden. We have no other restaurants. Restaurants have typically failed in Camden, abysmally. The only ones that succeed are those up by Rutgers here that the kids can go.” Just in the sample of interviewed businesses, this excludes both Corrine’s Place and Donkey’s Place, both established and well-known eateries, and both able to attract customers from outside the city. Later the director complains about Latino businesses, “Many of the businesses are not legit and that’s basically the problem with the Hispanic community, not only here but in general is that they are not legit.”

¹⁸⁴ Powers, Corrine, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁸⁵ Chang, Kelly, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁸⁶ Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, 63.

And at a different economic development organization, the director warned against me going to a couple of businesses because they are “down in a very tough neighborhood.” If those people who are supposed to support and advocate for Camden businesses see them as illegitimate, in a part of town too dangerous to visit, or unsuccessful, they will not be able to offer these businesses any value. These support organizations have connections and resources, such as access to capital, already inaccessible to neighborhood business owners. They’re opinions make them gatekeepers, rather than distributors, of vital information.

The above are minority viewpoints; most economic development organizations do not feel this way about the small businesses. But for multiple additional reasons they do not know how to best connect with the businesses. Luis Japa astutely notices, “I think they (economic development organizations) are not that much connected because I think there are not the channels of how to get to those people.”¹⁸⁷ Some organizations wait for business owners to find them, which is a flawed strategy. Entrepreneurs are busy with the daily operations of running a business and do not have time to invest looking for business support, especially when they have no evidence that support is out there for them. Kelly Chang shares, “It’s not that the material isn’t out there, but I didn’t know it was there. Information I got regarding loans and such is from the people, from customers. I really didn’t have time to get out there because I was running the business almost by myself.”¹⁸⁸ Ray Lamboy, a former small business owner and now LAEDA president recognizes this common problem. “The paperwork is daunting. If you want them to fill things out, you really need to do it with them. Otherwise if you just drop off the paperwork they are too busy and won’t get to it.”¹⁸⁹ Other organizations send out mailings. If all business owners

¹⁸⁷ Japa, Luis, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁸⁸ Chang, Kelly, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁸⁹ Lamboy, Raymond, “Personal Interview.”

act as Adam Woods, then this strategy does not work either. “I get so much mail a day, I just look for the bills and junk the rest.”¹⁹⁰

There are exceptions to these passive engagement efforts. The Camden Empowerment Zone, Broadway Main Street, and Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ) go door to door talking to business owners about their services. Elizabeth Rodriguez, former Community Outreach Coordinator at the Camden Empowerment Zone quickly found dressing and acting “professionally” did not result in many interested businesses.

I was supposed to go to the stores all dressed up, but I would go home and change first. Nobody’s going to talk to you looking like that. They’ll think you’re from the IRS. So I wore my big hoop earrings and talked to the businesses before really introducing myself. I’m from the neighborhood. I know what to say. And then after a while I would explain who I was and why I was there.¹⁹¹

Rodriguez’s approach mirrors my own. Walking into a business and trying to sell oneself or organization does not work unless you can first start to build a sense of trust or rapport with the business owner. In sum, small business owners operate apart from the multiple organizations that could provide assistance. They find greater help from family and friends within their current networks, even though these individuals have fewer resources to supply. The business owners lack the channels to connect with more mainstream organizations.

“You Needed Money, Money, Money”

Small business literature, especially that discussing minority- and women-owned business, documents the entrepreneurs’ challenges in obtaining start-up and working capital. Many potential small business owners have the will and vision needed to start a business, but

¹⁹⁰ Woods, Adam, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁹¹ Rodriguez, “Camden Empowerment Zone Interview.”

lack the financial resources, and/or technical knowledge required.¹⁹² Other potential entrepreneurs lack the skills needed to run ones own business.¹⁹³ Some of these inadequacies can be traced back to discrimination of minority business owners in terms of bank lending and educational opportunity.¹⁹⁴ The interviewed business owners also struggle with funding even though at least thirteen of the sixteen set aside financial resources before opening. Kelly Chang and Esther Williams saved money from their previous corporate jobs.¹⁹⁵ Connie Jackson worked for the city of Camden managing the Office of Rent Control for seventeen years before opening Jackson and Associates.¹⁹⁶ Also opening a business after retirement, Eunice Jose started LOIDA daycare with money saved from her tenure as a teacher.¹⁹⁷ Similarly, Barry Watkins, Ralph Ishack, and Marcellus Hill saved money from their previous jobs in the their current field before starting on their own.¹⁹⁸ To finance his first business Tyrone Pitts used real estate holdings instead of saved cash. “I utilized the real estate that I had and I developed a strategy where I would take some of the equity out to start my business.”¹⁹⁹ The interviewed business owners had money set aside to start their own shop, suggesting they had some understanding of the financial undertaking of opening ones own business.

¹⁹² Bates, *Race, Self-Employment, and Upward Mobility*.

¹⁹³ “Investing in Equity: Targeted Economic Development for Neighborhoods and Cities,” 29.

¹⁹⁴ Fairlie and Robb, *Race and entrepreneurial success : Black-, Asian-, and white-owned businesses in the United States*, 97; Bates, *Race, Self-Employment, and Upward Mobility*; Butler, *Entrepreneurship and self-help among Black Americans : a reconsideration of race and economics*; Gittell and Thompson, “Inner-City Business Development and Entrepreneurship: New Frontiers for Policy and Research.”

¹⁹⁵ Chang, Kelly, “Personal Interview”; Williams, Esther, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁹⁶ Jackson, Connie, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁹⁷ Jose, Manuel, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁹⁸ Watkins, Barry, “Personal Interview”; Ishack, Ralph, “Personal Interview”; Hill, Marcellus, “Personal Interview.”

¹⁹⁹ Pitts, Tyrone, “Personal Interview.”

Yet some were still surprised by the amount of money required to start a business. Miguel Benito explains the high, upfront startup costs, “It was not easy to get started. There were a lot of problems and you needed money, money, money. Money for a printer, a camera, a computer.”²⁰⁰ He required this equipment for his photo and print shop, but did not have the money to pay for it until he had some customers. Marcellus Hill also faced startup costs with the need to be an insured and certified general contractor with insurance. To pay for these things, “I had to work little side jobs. Some of the money I was supposed to take home to pay the bills, I would take that money and buy a certification.”²⁰¹ Kelly Chang at Friends Café admits he underestimated the amount of money needed to open a business. “I didn’t know it was going to cost me \$100,000! The building was in shambles and all the licensing and the furniture and the inspections, it just added up. Maybe I fell into a money pit.”²⁰² Esther Williams spent almost a year before opening doing research into what it takes to open an optical retail business in Camden, and accurately predicated initial investment costs. However she still believes, “the biggest challenge is money. You never really have enough. I haven’t had a paycheck in a year, but I’ve heard I can go up to three years without a paycheck.”²⁰³ For these business owners, thinking about and knowing the struggles that come with opening a business does not make living these challenges much easier.

Business owners looked to banks to provide additional debt financing, but obtaining a bank loan was nearly impossible. Adam Woods explains the challenge of getting a bank loan:

If you want to start a small business and you are not a person of privilege, you can’t. You can’t afford to start one. If you’re not a person of privilege you are not going to be credit worthy either so the bank’s not going to give you any money. The banks said no because

²⁰⁰ Benito, Miguel, “Personal Interview.”

²⁰¹ Hill, Marcellus, “Personal Interview.”

²⁰² Chang, Kelly, “Personal Interview.”

²⁰³ Williams, Esther, “Personal Interview.”

I was like a twenty four year old kid that didn't own a house. I owned a used car that was worth an 8th of what I needed to borrow. So when the government says they're going to shore up SBA lending, that's still discretionary for banks.²⁰⁴

Jose Marrera's son chimed in with the same observation, "If that person (the potential business owner) doesn't have any credit, how are they going to take it out of the bank. You have to have credit to get credit. And for me, in order to get credit you have to buy something. And how can you buy something if you have no money."²⁰⁵ LAEDA President Ray Lamboy says Camden loan recipients "basically need to have A1 credit, resources, et cetera and you have to be prepared to sign over your first born as well." He continues, "There is this urban legend on the street of grants to small businesses. I get so many people calling here saying they heard about grants for starting small businesses and I tell them, if you find it, let me know."²⁰⁶ Loida was the only business to successfully borrow from a bank. Its owner Manuel was able to access the bank, in part, through his childhood friend Josue Figueroa who manages Camden's Susquehanna Bank branch. Manuel recalls, "He'd been talking to us for awhile and helped us do a consolidation loan and also gave us money to help us start this place."²⁰⁷ This example affirms the importance of a personal connection and relationship even when it comes to securing commercial money.

Businesses not only require financing to get started, they also need working capital to maintain and expand once they are established. This is Tyrone Pitts largest struggle and one of the biggest surprises he has faced as an entrepreneur.²⁰⁸ Corrine has had a similar experience. "Being in business for twenty years, I would think that by this time I would be somewhat

²⁰⁴ Woods, Adam, "Personal Interview."

²⁰⁵ Marrera, Jose, "Personal Interview."

²⁰⁶ Lamboy, Raymond, "Personal Interview."

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Pitts, Tyrone, "Personal Interview"; Powers, Corrine, "Personal Interview."

financially fit. I should be doing better than what I am doing in terms of financing.”²⁰⁹ The need for financial assistance does not stop once a business opens.

Because they are disconnected from mainstream financial institutions, these businesses once again turn to family and friends. Marcellus Hill says, “I have never gotten a loan from a bank. I borrowed money from friends, family members. I remember one time I borrowed money from my sister to pay for my insurance.”²¹⁰ Rhonda Mendez thanks her husband for his help, “Thank god my husband was there to support me. For weeks I didn’t receive a paycheck, I had him to fall back on.”²¹¹ Of all the business talked to, Manuel Jose had the most intricate financing. He was able to attain financing from a local economic development financing entity and two banks but in the end still fell short. He explains, “The biggest challenge is funding. Honestly, in the end, we were about \$30,000 short and she (his mother) ended up taking out of her retirement to start this. So we have a big debt to her. We’re paying her back little by little.”²¹² Jose Marrera summarizes the lack of lending. “We need a chance. You go to the bank, you go to the city to get loans. We need more loans from the banks that help small businesses.”²¹³ The lack of financial capital for small business is not new, but it continues to affect how businesses start and run.

“On a Merry-Go-Round”

Six businesses complained about the complexity of starting a business in Camden. The licensing and permitting process requires too many steps, and takes too long which discourages

²⁰⁹ Powers, Corrine, “Personal Interview.”

²¹⁰ Hill, Marcellus, “Personal Interview.”

²¹¹ Mendez, Rhonda, “Personal Interview.”

²¹² Jose, Manuel, “Personal Interview.”

²¹³ Marrera, Jose, “Personal Interview.”

potential business owners. “There is a lot of red tape. People I guess don’t know how to deal with the red tape,” shares Marcellus Hill.²¹⁴ Kelly Chang at Friends Café describes his experience this way:

Originally I thought it was targeted because I am Asian...Nobody was helping me. Oh go to this floor, oh go to this floor, where do I ask about sanitation? Nobody wanted to give me answers, they were just like go everywhere, fill this out, pay here. Pay, pay, pay, that is all it is. Register for this, register for that, show me your bills...It was so strenuous. Half of them are not there and you don’t know where you are going. You don’t know what you are doing. Nobody wants to help you... If you have an issue with permitting, they’ll answer your question about permits, but they may not follow up with you to let you know after this you need to do this. There’s never a follow up as to next steps... You’re in the wrong office and you’re sitting there for an hour. They finally say, oh, can I help you? You go up there and they say you’re in the wrong room.²¹⁵

Tyrone Pitts adds, “You have to operate with how they (the city) operate...some people think it is going to be easy, but it is all a struggle.”²¹⁶ The complicated permitting and licensing process did not deter Tyrone, but if the process were more straightforward it would deter less potential business owners. Why jump through all the hoops in Camden when it is easier to open elsewhere?

Economic development entities also struggle with the current permitting and licensing system. According to UEZ Director Vince Basara, “People get frustrated and they call it the carousel.”²¹⁷ Similarly LAEDA’s Ray Lamboy says the city is “not recruiting, they are not retaining, they are putting you on a merry-go-round.”²¹⁸ CBAC Director Mike Diemer explains, “There is nobody really that can say, okay you’re here, now first you have to get this, then you have to go over here and get this, and kind of wade them through the process of setting up. This

²¹⁴ Hill, Marcellus, “Personal Interview.”

²¹⁵ Chang, Kelly, “Personal Interview.”

²¹⁶ Pitts, Tyrone, “Personal Interview.”

²¹⁷ Basara, Vince, “Personal Interview.”

²¹⁸ Lamboy, Raymond, “Personal Interview.”

one (department) doesn't know what this one is doing."²¹⁹ Ray Lamboy agrees, "It's not the steps aren't true, it's that this guy doesn't know this step exists and that guy doesn't know that this other step exists. They don't know what each other is doing."²²⁰

I also mapped the process of how to start a small business in Camden. I found out that many people who are part of this process, from city director positions to clerks working front desks, have different ideas about the steps to permitting a business. My best efforts of talking with department directors, individuals working the front desks of the departments, business owners, and economic development organization leaders, can be seen in Table 3 below.

²¹⁹ Diemer, Mike, "Personal Interview."

²²⁰ Lamboy, Raymond, "Personal Interview."

Table 3: Current Permitting and Licensing Process (parts 1-3 sequentially)

Time 

<p>Federal</p> <p>Get Tax Id (FEIN) A unique number assigned by the IRS to identify business - cost: n/a - requirements: n/a - timeframe: n/a - location: online: IRS website; phone: 1.800.829.4933; office: 57 Haddonfield Rd, Cherry Hill</p>		
<p>State</p>	<p>Register Business Receive original formation/authorization cert. & state ID - cost: \$125 - requirements: FEIN or Social Security card - timeframe: n/a - location: online: www.state.nj.us/treasury/revenue/; office: One Port Center, suite 200, 2 Riverside Dr, Camden</p>	<p>Register for Taxes Receive state sales tax certificate of authority - cost: n/a - requirements: FEIN or SS, state ID - timeframe: n/a - location: online: www.state.nj.us/treasury/revenue/; office: One Port Center, suite 200, 2 Riverside Dr, Camden</p>
<p>City</p> <p>Find Property/Location To anticipate environmental remediation problems consult County Clerk Office for previous uses - cost: n/a - requirements: location address - timeframe: n/a - location: Camden County Courthouse, rm. 102, 520 Market St, Camden</p>	<p>Consider Location Zoning Required for zoning permit/approval - cost: n/a - requirements: n/a - timeframe: n/a - location: Municipal Clerk's Office, rm. 105, Camden City Hall</p>	<p>Pick up Zoning Approval/Permit Application - cost: n/a - requirements: n/a - timeframe: n/a - location: Planning and Zoning Department, rm. 224, Camden City Hall</p>
<p>Industry Specific: Ex/Food</p>		

City	<p>Ensure Water and Sewer Taxes Paid to Date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cost: n/a - requirement: zoning application - timeframe: n/a - location: For unpaid taxes leading to tax liens see Camden Tax Office, Camden City Hall, rm. 117; For current charges see PNC Bank, Broadway & Market St, Camden 	<p>Complete Zoning Application</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cost: range \$56-\$209 - requirements: Completed application, proof of ownership, drawings/floor plans - timeframe: permit/approval granted within 10 days if all information is correct and within zoning code. If asking for zoning variance, must go to zoning board. Large additional cost and up to 3 months. - location: Planning and Zoning Department, rm. 224, Camden City Hall
	<p>Create Detailed Floor Plan (3 copies)</p> <p>Include measurement of habitable space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cost: variable - requirements: Pencil sketch alright for continuing use/occupancy Addition or fences? Need plot plan/survey. For new construction or addition get professional architectural drawings - timeframe: variable - location: For plot plan/survey, Engineering Dept., Armory Bldg., 101 Newton Ave., 3rd fl., Camden 	
Industry Specific: Ex/Food	<p>Submit Plan for Health Department Review</p> <p>Pre-approval from health department</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cost: \$75-\$200 based on menu complexity, type of food served - requirements: menu / food plans - timeframe: 30 days by law, average time is 5 days - location: Camden County Health Department Division of Environmental Health, Food Surveillance Unit, DiPiro Center, 512 Lakeland Rd, Blackwood; email: foodinspections@camdencounty.com; phone: 856.374.6052 	<p>Attain Health Certificate</p> <p>Requires health inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cost: \$50 - \$110 based on menu complexity - requirements: pre-approval complete - timeframe: inspector scheduled based upon availability - location: see previous step

City	<p>Obtain City Business License</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cost: varies (approx. \$200?) - requirements: 2 passport size photos; copy of valid drivers license or other ID (birth certificate, valid passport, alien registration); copy of Social Security Card; State Sales Tax Certificate of Authority; zoning approval; proof of ownership/lease; pass inspections - timeframe: Inspectors come within a week (depending upon availability). If pass inspection, receive license. If fail, need construction permit - location: Bureau of Licenses & Inspections, rm. 220, Camden City Hall 	
	<p>Obtain Certificate of Occupancy / Continued Certificate of Occupancy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cost: \$240 (continued cert.) - requirements: Must first pass all inspections. If fail, need construction permit - timeframe: 4 inspectors scheduled based on availability - location: Building Bureau Office, rm. 403, Camden City Hall 	<p>Obtain Construction Permit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cost: based on cost of job, \$56 min. - requirements: zoning permit, two sets of signed and sealed architectural drawings for major construction otherwise sketch - timeframe: up to 21 days - location: Building Bureau Office, rm. 403, Camden City Hall

Along the way I found information listed on the city’s website often cited the wrong office for departments (those on the fourth floor have moved to the second due to construction).

When I called one number, I got a full mailbox. I called another phone number listed on a business license, and the gentleman who answered informed me it was his personal cell number. City employees working the front desk snapped at me when it became apparent that I wasn't sure I was asking the right questions of them, and when I called the Building Bureau Office for a question about architectural drawings, they put me on hold for twelve minutes. Unless they could cite a specific law, city directors and employees could not answer questions regarding average costs or timeframes.

It should be noted that my field research into starting a business did not include any direct experience with inspectors, who some business feel hold up the process. Waiting on an inspection delayed the opening of Loida's second location. Jose Manuel reflects, "The process just took two to three months longer than what we wanted. They finished construction in September and we had this place empty for three months, which really hurt because we were paying full month rent."²²¹ Kelly Chang, who found the beginning of the process so challenging, also ran into conflict with a couple of the inspectors. The Fire Marshal complained about a tank he personally approved six months prior and the plumbing inspector told him he could not have black and white pipes together. Kelly joked with the inspector, "'Are there racist pipes?' and he (the inspector) didn't laugh."²²² Ray Lamboy struggles with another problem with inspectors being sent to businesses, like bodegas, where the owners speak very little English and they speak no Spanish. A lot of misunderstandings could be resolved by taking away the language barrier.²²³

A confusing process leads several of the economic development organizations to devote a lot of time to "hand holding." At the UEZ:

²²¹ Jose, Manuel, "Personal Interview."

²²² Chang, Kelly, "Personal Interview."

²²³ Lamboy, Raymond, "Personal Interview."

If they come to us, what we do, we really try to direct them to who they need to speak with. Joe Thomas, the community outreach individual, walks businesses through the process. Joe will take the time to walk them through this whole process. It is a lot of hand holding. Everybody does it. Particularly they (small business owners) fell like city hall is the worst place to deal with.²²⁴

At LAEDA, “Our position is to actually take they the hand, take them to city hall, take them to meet with a realtor, or meet with this to get them into business.”²²⁵ Or at CBAC, “We’ll send them over to Dubois and Sheehan (a law office), which is over on Cooper Street here and they’ll shepherd them.”²²⁶ Instead of time building necessary relationships with business owners, these organizations spend time walking these businesses through a process over and over again.

Department directors in City Hall are familiar with permitting and licensing complaints. Iraida Afandador, Director of Code Enforcement, who oversees the Building Bureau and Licensing and Inspection explains, “We are doing more with less. Sometimes things get tied up due to lack of staffing.”²²⁷ Presently they lack inspectors so getting a business license or construction permit may take longer than the ideal timeframe. She also speaks about contractors, not controlled by the city, who sometimes slow the process by not signing off on paperwork promptly. It isn’t always fair or right to always blame the city.²²⁸ All her employees have received and will continue to receive customer service training, and if she hears about inspectors who request cosmetic changes, like changing the color of building paint, they are suspended and then retrained.²²⁹ In the Zoning Department, Director Ed Williams points to the problem that the city first enacted a zoning review process in 1990. “We still have a long way to go because the zoning code was enacted in October 1958 so you figure between 58 and 90 a whole lot of illegal

²²⁴ Basara, Vince, “Personal Interview.”

²²⁵ Lamboy, Raymond, “Personal Interview.”

²²⁶ Diemer, Mike, “Personal Interview.”

²²⁷ Afanador, Iraida, “Personal Interview.”

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

activity went on. That is going to take a long time to eradicate.”²³⁰ Additionally, commercial properties turn over every eighteen to twenty five months, causing an increased number of permits to review each month. There are only so many people available to review all of the information on top of other zoning jobs and obligations. Yet even given these explanations, it became clear in my interviews that the different city departments exist with little understanding of what happens in the others. One director confused the roles of the planning and zoning boards, another suggested the UEZ keeps all information on business funding when in reality they only know they’re own programs and those of the state, and two of the departments pointed fingers at one another for delaying the process. A better business permitting and licensing process should include rethinking the steps within city hall. All this confusion results in unnecessary inefficiencies, frustrated small business owners and potential businesses choosing to open in other locations instead of Camden.

Small business owners may be successful, but it is not easy. They must overcome disconnects between their perceptions of the city and those of potential customers in surrounding locations, a disconnect with economic development entities who could provide technical assistance and access to financing, a disconnect with traditional lending institutions, and a disconnect with a bureaucratic city process for opening a business. Fascinatingly, these sixteen small businesses have bridged these disconnects, making a way to run a successful business. But it should not be this hard. The next chapter considers forging new business connections in order to better promote, grow, and sustain Camden small businesses.

²³⁰ Williams, Ed, “Personal Interview.”

CHAPTER 5: FOSTERING SMALL BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

What is needed is to set entrepreneurs loose to identify the opportunities and to connect socially and economically unconnected parties who could derive mutual benefits from an association... Overcoming the problems of inadequate information and social disconnection could foster the entrepreneurial spirit and business development in the inner city. ~ Ross Gittell and J. Philip Thompson²³¹

To equitably transform Camden and similar post-industrial cities, small businesses must be understood as underutilized assets embedded in the community. They provide goods and services locally, keep money in the city, employ local people, mitigate city ills like drug dealing, and contribute to the city by giving back. Camden business owners share key characteristics with successful business owners across the country. Additionally, they display a fighting spirit, which contributes to business and neighborhood sustainability. Promoting, growing, and developing the city's small businesses is an obvious strategy for improving the city's image, meeting the needs of its residents, and creating jobs.

Small businesses must foster connections among themselves, between supporting economic development entities, with city government, and with youth to unearth small business potential. All parties need to overcome the disconnect between the city's perception, economic development entities, financial resources and the permitting process. The diagram below shows these different sectors involved in building small business connections.

²³¹ Gittell and Thompson, "Inner-City Business Development and Entrepreneurship: New Frontiers for Policy and Research," 489.

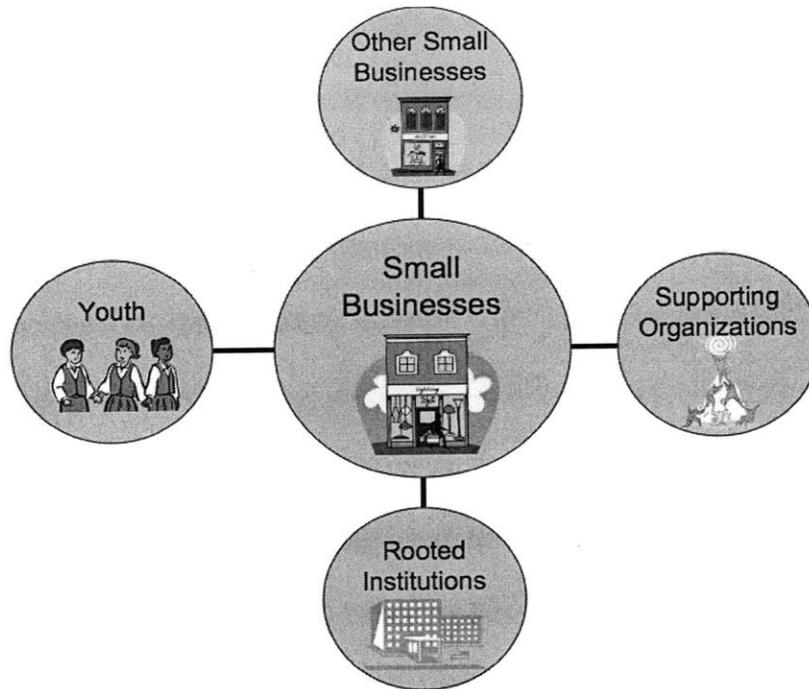


Figure 1: Small Business Connections

Each of these connections can take place simultaneously as actors from each of these groups reach out to small businesses.

As described in Chapter 2, I found reaching out to businesses challenging. Institutions and individuals looking to partner with small businesses should follow this roadmap: First, be willing to go out and meet business owners in their place of employment. Have knowledge of the business and let the business owner share his or her frustrations, ideas, and thoughts before pitching an idea or offering a new service. Listening goes a long way in relationship building. Having a common contact establishes a certain amount of trust from the beginning and makes relationship building easier. Additionally, the process of finding small businesses requires persistence. One must not be discouraged by unreturned phone calls, absent business owners, or cold shoulders. After an initial conversation, follow-up with the business. Checking in will continue to grow the relationship. Reaching out to businesses owners in this way is new territory

and will require some getting used to for all involved. However, through this process a sense of community grows between different types of people, which builds a better-connected city.

Connecting with Each Other

The most important recommendation is for small businesses to form a relationship with one another through a business network. The interviewed business owners have shared characteristics and challenges, but do not benefit from this collective knowledge or power because they lack knowledge of one another. Suggesting an informal business network differs from proposing the formation of a citywide business association. Business owners do not have the time or money to be part of a formalized, bureaucratic business organization where half of the meeting time goes to discussing organizational matters like reviewing minutes from the last meeting. For business owners to participate, they need to derive value from the group. The purpose and make-up of the network will depend on the viewpoints of the participating businesses, but some suggestions include:

- *Convening Informal Business Meetings.* At a monthly, rotating potluck lunch hosted by a different business owner, participants discuss a different topic of interest. One subject could include current city events affecting business owners. This was the impetus for starting the Cramer Hill Business Association, which participant Rhonda Mendez describes as a “very informative type thing. Especially with Cherokee (a potential redeveloper), we were trying to keep everyone on the same page.”²³² The meetings could also cover other business concerns like how to locate new financing streams, best practices for the city hall permitting and licensing process, how to run a seasonal business through the entire year, and discussing how

²³² Mendez, Rhonda, “Personal Interview.”

they might market together to cut individual promotion costs. Broadway Main Street has begun to create this type of space for the business owners on its commercial corridor and can be a model for a more general city network.

- *Mentoring One Another.* The network could also provide an opportunity for business owners to form either informal or, if desired, more defined and programmatic mentoring relationships. Business owners interviewed have a desire to give back. Why not give back in a field in which they are experts by sharing their experiences with potential entrepreneurs? Connie Jackson provides a replicable example for other small business. She starts a conversation with potential entrepreneurs with the following exercise:

I'll take them to the board and say what type of business are you looking to start and why. I ask them to explain to me everything they think needs to happen for the business. And so they do. And then I make another column and say okay, here are all the things you missed in terms of the business and all the things you will have to do, marketing, getting a good accountant, having access to an attorney, have to have a certain number of dollars to invest into your business initially. It is a real eye opener and makes them think.²³³

With the support of a mentor who has successfully overcome these challenges, the new entrepreneur will perhaps struggle less.

- *Becoming Self-Advocates.* Better-connected businesses can also advocate more strongly for themselves. If there is no one thinking about small business interests, how will they be included at the city's decision-making tables? Using the network, small businesses can work on base building to strengthen their collective political power. Perhaps they organize around a critical issue affecting them and then present their interest at a city council or redevelopment plan meetings. They may also take up the fight for more lending opportunities

²³³ Jackson, Connie, "Personal Interview."

from the city's banks. Coming together and making their interests publicly known shows potential business owners Camden is a location where small business exists.

- *Creating Shared Services Agreements.* Small businesses can discuss the value of shared services agreements where they can join together to buy in bulk when it comes to accountants or lawyers or bank services. For instance, Susquehanna Bank appears to be the most open to finance small businesses. Its branch manager, Josue Figueroa, works personally with many small business owners and knows Camden well as he grew up in the city.²³⁴ If the small businesses joined together and agreed to all use Susquehanna Bank, they might be able to obtain better financing terms.

No business owner has the time or energy to start connecting businesses to form a network. LAEDA would be a good candidate to undertake the initial organizing work because it is better known and trusted than other economic development entities. No one in city government works directly with small businesses and no position has the ability to take on an additional responsibility; we have seen they are already doing more with less. This task can begin immediately. With an operating small business network the following business connections with supporting institutions including city government, with the city's rooted institutions and previous waterfront development, and with city youth, the entrepreneurs of the future, will fall more easily into place. The rest of this chapter illuminates ways for a small business network to improve small business connections across the city.

The table below summarizes the suggestions for how to connect small businesses with one another.

²³⁴ Figueroa, Josue, "Personal Interview."

Timeframe: Immediate: 0-6 months
 Short-Term: 6 months - 2 years
 Medium-Term: 2 - 5 years
 Long-term: 5+ years

Recommendation: Connect Small Business with One Another			
Action	Timeframe	Actor(s)	Key Tasks
Create a Business Network	Immediate	LAEDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contact potential business owners - Hold monthly informal meetings - With business owners determine activities to take up. For instance, a business mentorship program, business advocacy, creating shared services agreement - Connect with rooted institution leadership, economic development organizations, city government, school district

Connecting with Economic Development Organizations and City Government

Many resources exist for small business owners, but they are disconnected from the supporting economic development organizations and government departments who have knowledge on these opportunities. Because these institutions already exist in part for the purpose of assisting small businesses, their connections should be strengthened.

Including Small Businesses in Redevelopment Plans and Actions

The city of Camden can follow the example of former Chicago Mayor Harold Washington in improving an economic development agenda to include neighborhood businesses. Faced with unequal development between downtown and the neighborhoods who supported him in the election, during his administration Chicago’s Department of Economic Development emphasized, “small-business development and its recruitment of African American and Latin professionals, who aggressively pursued minority business deals.”²³⁵ The administration

²³⁵ “Equity Policies and Practices of the Harold Washington Administration: Lessons for Progressive Cities,” 68.

“advocated values of fairness and equity for people who had been left out, a policy framework that emphasized the role of neighborhoods and their organizations, and a set of governmental tools that above all increased the capacity of nongovernmental actors.”²³⁶ The Mayor carried out this mission by giving funding to neighborhood programs, being transparent about city processes, appointing neighborhood activities to decision making roles, and using city government to advocate in neighborhood issues.²³⁷ The Washington administration shows it is possible to represent neighborhood interests while in office.

In Camden, city planners in the Department of Planning could run a small business focus group and then include specific references and actionable items for small businesses in Redevelopment and Human Capital Plans. It also means considering more creative financing for growing and retaining businesses. Granting PILOTS to large businesses coming into the city builds resentment among small businesses, and also limits the amount of money available to the city. Enough investment exists downtown and in the neighborhoods so there is no longer a need to compensate businesses just for locating in the city. When both small and large businesses pay taxes the city is better able to independently support itself.

Streamlining City Government Process for Opening and Working with Small Businesses

Small business owners are not sure where to turn in city hall to start the process of opening a business. The process is drawn out, confusing, and off-putting for less committed owners. Additionally, when established businesses need assistance from city hall, many do not know which department to turn to. The inner workings of city hall require an overhaul. If city hall offered clearer process, more people who wanted to start a small business would be able to

²³⁶ Giloth, “Social Justice and Neighborhood Revitalization in Chicago: The Era of Harold Washington, 1983-1987,” 83.

²³⁷ Ibid., 86.

do so more efficiently, and could encourage others to follow suit. An increase in business activity means fewer vacant buildings, improved neighborhoods, new jobs, and additional city tax revenue – all concerns of city government. Within the next six months, the process for opening a business outlined in chapter four should be shared with business owners, organizations working with small businesses, and all city hall departments. This updated process should also be posted online. City hall departments should also have improved signage to let business owners know the name of the department, its function, the documentation required for a permit or license in that department, where to go next, and who to contact with additional questions.

Another immediate step is to assign a business ombudsman, as called for in a recently released transition team report to the new Camden mayor regarding economic development and entrepreneurship. The report describes appointing a business ombudsman as “a number two person with a team of people who are responsible for ensuring that the city is responsive to businesses, both existing and prospective... The Ombudsman would also serve as the single point of contact for the existing business community and have the authority to direct rapid response efforts.”²³⁸ The ombudsman will also be able to usher business owners through the permitting process. Ideally someone with knowledge of economic development in Camden, city government, and small businesses should hold this position appointed by the Mayor’s Office.

In the short-term, or between six-months and two years, audit the current process with current department heads, economic development organizations with experience assisting small businesses through the process of opening a business and interacting with the city, and business owners. The purpose is to separate the valuable aspects of the process and reduce any steps that have always been there but serve no purpose. Participants in this process need to ask, what can

²³⁸ Lamboy and Davis, *Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee Report Recommendations for Mayor-Elect Dana Redd*, 2-3.

we consolidate? For instance, does the Zoning Department, Building Bureau, and Licensing and Inspections each need their own set of inspectors? Instead, if it is a building with a new use, the building inspectors can also inspect zoning at the beginning of the process and then recommend specific needs to be addressed for a building permit. Currently the process to obtain a business license and certificate or continued certificate of occupancy requires zoning approval. Zoning becomes a bottleneck because everyone needs to pass through the office even if a restaurant is just changing hands. While many zoning violations probably exist in the city, these are better addressed systematically, one part of the city at a time instead of piecemeal as businesses change hands. The Zoning Department can use time saved by not requiring business licenses and continued occupancy certificates to also obtain zoning approval to undertake a city wide zoning analysis. The audit should also consider one office, which can have all property information including its zoning, sewer and water tax information and previous use. Currently potential business owners must go to at least four different locations for this information. Finally, audit results should include a new starting location for the permitting process. The Zoning Department is not intuitive to most potential business owners.

In the medium-term, or between two and five years, update business tracking tools. All businesses should be put into a database accessible by city departments working with businesses. This way each person who talks with the business will be able to quickly pull up a business snapshot, showing previously attained information, current difficulties in the permitting process and the businesses' next steps. The city will then also have a record of each business in one place, which will make processes like tax collection or license renewal more precise and straightforward.

In the long-term, after five or more years, create a one-stop shop for businesses large and small. This recommendation, also outlined by the economic development mayoral transition team, says a Department of Business Growth and Development will coordinate all functions related to businesses for the city, recruit businesses, provide process oriented business assistance, and be a business liaison with other business development entities.²³⁹

Even though city government is often thought of as a large, bureaucratic machine resistant to change, overhauling and improving city departments is possible. Former Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist explains in his book, The Wealth of Cities, how he cut government spending while improving city services. He first advises cities to undertake a critical analysis of their current operation. Asking questions like, “Why does this department exist? What is its purpose? What are the obstacles to meeting its goals? What needs to be improved? How do we measure progress?”²⁴⁰ In Milwaukee this process resulted in bringing stratified departments together. For instance, instead of two jobs filled by separate people, after analysis the Forestry Division brought together all boulevard maintenance positions. Now the same employees plant flowers and trim trees.²⁴¹ Departments are now organized according to their intended outcomes and individual roles and steps arise from thinking about the process back from the desired results.

Centralizing Business Support Information

When businesses need support they must seek out many different organizations, which they do not have time for. The organizations themselves may point businesses to each other, but often have misinformation about what each organization can offer. Information about the

²³⁹ Ibid., 3.

²⁴⁰ Norquist, *The Wealth of Cities*, 38.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 32.

different types of support at a city, state, and national level need to be compiled in one accessible place for businesses and their supporting entities.

Within the next six months, economic development organizations should meet for a roundtable discussion to get to know one another better by explaining the services they offer. From this initial meeting can come a packet of information in English and Spanish to be updated quarterly and distributed to each of the economic development organizations for potential businesses. Much like the process for streamlining the city permitting and licensing process, later discussions can look for synergies and or inefficient redundancies with the goal of each organization providing the best services within its own niche. For example, in the end the Camden Empowerment Zone Corporation may not offer entrepreneurship workshops because this is already covered and covered better by the SBDC and LAEDA. Its resources can be directed elsewhere. Additional roundtables can include conversations about emerging problems or needs affecting all of the organizations. A roundtable requires an organizer, a role filled by any number of active economic development organization leaders. All the organizations can chip in to share the cost of compiling the information.

Creating a roundtable of economic development entities to centralize business information strengthens the relationships between these organizations. Many foundations and even the federal government with stimulus plan now place greater emphasis on partnerships. A standing roundtable can be cited in a funding application or be utilized when partnerships need to be pulled together quickly.

In the short-term of six months to two years, the new business ombudsman should reach out to the economic development entities involved in compiling the service information to assist with creating a searchable database of support opportunities. Ideally potential business owners

would come to a computer, fill out a general page with their information, press go, and see a page of different training and financing programs they are eligible for. Each of the organizations participating and funding the database creation will have their own copy.

In the medium-term, these organizations might consider creating a referral system by hiring in an outside organization or creating a new function of the present parties to be the initial first stop for all potential businesses. From here this new office can refer people to different organizations. In the long-term this organization might be taken over by the city, who will then have funds to support it, turning it into the central one-stop department.

The San Francisco community based, non-profit Mission Economic Development Agency’s (MEDA) current construction of Plaza Adelante serves as one example of a business one-stop. Non-profits providing financial support, technical assistance, and education for home and business owners in the Latino community will lease space in the new building. The non-profits operating in Plaza Adelante share classroom space, conference rooms, and building costs but are not merging into one entity. MEDA aims to increase communication between the organizations, deliver services more efficiently, and better reach community members by bringing multiple service entities under one roof.²⁴²

The following table summarizes how to connect small businesses with supporting entities like city government and economic development organizations.

Recommendation: Connect Small Businesses with Economic Development Organizations and City Government			
Action	Timeframe	Actor(s)	Key Tasks

²⁴² MEDA, “Our Vision | Plaza Adelante Capital Campaign.”

Include Small Businesses in Redevelopment Plans	Ongoing	City Planning Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Run small business focus groups - Include actionable items for small businesses in Redevelopment and Human Capital Plans - Consider financing alternatives to PILOTS
Streamline City Government Process for Opening and Working with Small Businesses	Immediate	Mayor's Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Post most accurate process diagram on city website and distribute hard copies to economic development organizations, businesses, and city hall employees - Improve signage in all city hall departments - Assign a business ombudsman
	Short-Term	Ombudsman (convener), Department of City Planning, Code Enforcement, Business Owners, Economic Development Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Audit current process based from businesses' experiences and asking questions of why certain steps exist and what can be consolidated
	Medium-Term	Ombudsman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Update business tracking tools by creating a database accessible to all city departments working with businesses
	Long-Term	Mayor's Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create the Department of Business Growth and Development to handle all business needs
Centralize Business Support Information	Immediate	LAEDA, Greater Camden Partnership (GCP), etc. (convene); other economic development organizations to participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hold roundtable discussions with all economic development entities to understand services each offer and to compile a brochure all entities can give to business owners
	Short-Term	Ombudsman (convener), Economic Development Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design a searchable database of business assistance information
	Medium-Term	Economic Development Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create business referral system

Connecting Small Businesses with Rooted Institutions and the Waterfront

Most of Camden's revitalization thus far has focused on improving the waterfront and the city's rooted institutions, its universities and hospitals. Even though this strategy has left Camden's residents and neighborhoods behind so far, the future should work on maximizing the already invested resources by strengthening the connection between the rooted institutions and waterfront development and small businesses. The waterfront and rooted institutions are an asset small businesses should work with to create a larger revitalization impact.

Partnering with Universities and Colleges

In the short-term, Rutgers-Camden leadership, being explicitly committed to civic engagement, should allow their newly created Office of Civic Engagement to determine incentives for professors, especially those in the business school, to teach courses providing students with the opportunity to work directly with small business owners. As suggested, the professors might find businesses to work with using the type of methodology presented in this thesis or, once it is running, make connections through the business network. Students would learn first hand from business owners what it takes to run a business in a very challenging environment. The business owners will benefit from students having the additional time and knowledge to assist them in improving the business. Perhaps students could connect business owners with different financing tools or develop a marketing campaign for the business. Clear expectations and reflection by all those involved will ensure learning happens in both directions, the business owners from the students and the students from the business owners.

The next step in this process is to create internships where students earn credit for assisting small businesses. The Rutgers Small Business Development Center can house the program. It suffers from a lack of manpower and does not have the funding to pay additional consultants. Student interns earning credit rather than money could be an optimal solution.

Including Opportunities at Rutgers-Camden Business Incubator

The Rutgers Business Incubator is an excellent resource with no current connection to Camden small businesses. While it focuses on science and technology, it could link with some small business owners like Marcellus Hill in the weatherization field. If the business incubator were able to recruit from businesses with a Camden base, it would not experience the current reality of assisting business owners who then graduate from the incubator and leave the local area. We have seen small business owners from the city or with a Camden connection have a great allegiance to and sense of pride with being in the city. This is a long-term action as there are very few start-up small businesses in the city working in the field of science and technology. Perhaps the new green economy will inspire the younger generation to be entrepreneurs in this field. The business incubator director should be working now with other economic development entities and perhaps city youth to make the center's services known.

Social Entrepreneurs of New Orleans (SENO), which opened to capture the entrepreneurial spirit of New Orleanians after Katrina, is a model business incubator. To begin, it concentrates on social entrepreneurs, or those who enter business in part to create change in their communities, across multiple sectors. The interviewed Camden small business owners, who see their business as a tool for giving back to the community, fit this description. SENO offers a mentoring program where new business owners are matched with an experienced social entrepreneur who coaches them and provides advice in management, long-term financing, and business and media planning.²⁴³ They maintain and grow a network of partners, including the Louisiana Office of Social Entrepreneurship, to assist businesses with pro-bono professional

²⁴³ SENO, "SENO – Social Entrepreneurs of New Orleans."

services, conducting market analyses, and framing different business opportunities.²⁴⁴ One of their innovative programs is pitchNOLA where participating business owners attend a workshop about elevator pitches and then give theirs to a large audience and a panel of judges. It is a creative and fun way for business owners to hone their skills.

Encouraging Complimentary Small Businesses

The Cleveland Foundation helped establish the Evergreen Cooperatives, in Cleveland, Ohio. The currently established worker cooperatives: a laundry company, solar panel installer, hydroponic greenhouse employ local people in businesses that meet the needs of a cluster of educational and medical facilities.²⁴⁵ As the rooted institutions grow they will create more opportunities for small local businesses.

In Camden, City Eyes and Uniform City are two businesses benefiting from the expansion of Camden's hospitals. As the rooted institutions continue to expand, more opportunities will open for small businesses offering complimentary goods and services. For example, a new Rowan Cooper University Medical School means additional residential students looking for coffee shops, bookstores, and entertainment options such as dining and perhaps a movie theatre. In the next two to five years, the Greater Camden Partnership (GCP), an organization made up of representatives of the educational and medical facilities, should conduct market analyses using predicted population increases to determine the possibility for new complimentary businesses. GCP can then work with businesses within the business network to find new entrepreneurs for the incoming demand. Having small businesses ready to meet the

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Iuviene, "Building a Platform for Economic Democracy: A Cooperative Development Strategy for the Bronx."

needs of people using the educational and medical facilities improves the desirability of the location and overall quality of life.

The diagram below summarizes these recommendations.

Recommendation: Connect Small Business with Rooted Institutions			
Action	Timeframe	Actor(s)	Key Tasks
Partner Students with Small Business Owners	Short-Term	Rutgers-Camden Office of Civic Engagement	- Create incentives for professors to offer field based classes - Reach out to potential business owners
	Medium-Term	Rutgers-Camden Office of Civic Engagement	- Create for credit internships for students to work with small business owners
Include Opportunities for Small Business at the Rutgers-Camden Business Incubator	Long-Term	Business Incubator Director	- Make services known to the business community through the business network - Recruit local businesses when there are openings
Encourage Complimentary Small Businesses	Short-Term	Greater Camden Partnership (GCP)	- Conduct market analyses inclusive of population growth projections - Work with business network to grow businesses that will meet this demand

Connecting with Youth

On the first day of seventh grade, Ajamir Mitchell wrote on his “411: Getting to Know You” worksheet next to answers about his favorite type of candy and the subject in school he finds the most difficult that when he grows up he wants to take over his grandpop’s store. Throughout the year Ajamir struggled in his classes. Multiple phone calls home, lunch meetings, strategic planning between teachers did very little to help him focus in class and complete his work. Like so many of the students, he lacked any connection with what he was studying. How was learning about the periodic table or the rock cycle going to help him as an entrepreneur? Students do not believe that they should learn something because they will need it again in high

school and college; they know the reality is many of them will not complete this much education. And they will not need this information for work. In fact, growing up in a city where new jobs never replaced those lost with deindustrialization means young people grow up without knowing what “work” looks like because a good number of adults in their lives do not work.²⁴⁶ If Ajamir could connect with his grandpop or another small business owner he could learn about business and benefit from a strong mentor. He would be more invested in his studies seeing the vast amount of knowledge required for running a business. So far this study’s recommendations apply to start-up and established businesses. But Ajamir’s story hints at the missing part of the small business pipeline: the city’s future entrepreneurs, who are the current youth. For small businesses to have a truly transformative impact there must be a “mechanism that creates incentives for the transfer of the requisite business skills, values, and networks *from* those who have them *to* those that need them,” the youth or entrepreneurs of tomorrow.²⁴⁷ In making connections between the small businesses and youth we sustain a current emphasis on small business development.

The building blocks for stronger connections between youth and small businesses already exist. Some small business owners already connect with youth and serve as role models in the community and others want to have a larger relationship with youth. Business owners have important local knowledge, a fighting spirit, and a resiliency, which youth brought up in the city also exhibit. Understanding Camden and the environment the youth come from will make it easier for business owners and youth to connect. Youth, in particular African American youth in low-income areas, have a strong interest in starting a business and also have characteristics currently exhibited by business owners; eight out of ten African American youth believe it

²⁴⁶ Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, 52.

²⁴⁷ Fairlie and Robb, *Race and entrepreneurial success : Black-, Asian-, and white-owned businesses in the United States*, 97.

important for an entrepreneur to give back to the community beyond just providing jobs.²⁴⁸

However, without a positive outlet for their entrepreneurial tendencies, youth may turn to criminal behavior as a viable role in life. Entrepreneurial education then becomes more about redirection than stimulation, which is successful when “a young person who would have later become a fence, drug dealer, or prostitute opens a dry cleaning establishment, a body shop, or a plumbing supply warehouse instead.”²⁴⁹ Encouraging youth to work with small business owners will continue small business enterprises, which benefit the neighborhood and prevent youth from becoming addicts, inmates, or welfare mothers.²⁵⁰

Young people also bring meaning to their studies by working directly with a small business owner. Entrepreneurship training teaches students to “develop attitudes of inner control, self confidence, goal setting, decision making and inspire students to take school more seriously, provide basic entrepreneurial skills, and a working knowledge of economic principles.”²⁵¹ The youth also gain a positive role model required but absent in many urban neighborhoods.²⁵² Business owner mentors are adults youth can turn to for career and personal advice, and emotional support.²⁵³ Even if the youth do not go on to start their own business, entrepreneurship education prepares them to be critical thinkers, teaches responsibility, and shows them how to

²⁴⁸ Walstad and Kourilsky, “Entrepreneurial Attitudes and Knowledge of Black Youth.”

²⁴⁹ Light, *Race, ethnicity, and entrepreneurship in urban America*, 217.

²⁵⁰ Light, *Race, ethnicity, and entrepreneurship in urban America*, 212; Bendick and Egan, “Linking Business Development and Community Development in Inner Cities,” 10.

²⁵¹ Rasheed and Rasheed, “Developing Entrepreneurial Characteristics in Minority Youth: The Effects of Education and Enterprise Experience,” 266-267.

²⁵² Wilson, *When Work Disappears*; Suggs, “Bringing Small Business Development to Urban Neighborhood,” 493.

²⁵³ Bendick and Egan, “Linking Business Development and Community Development in Inner Cities,” 10.

contribute to the economy.²⁵⁴ In linking with youth, business owners complete part of their mission to give back to the community. They also acquire an extra set of hands to assist in the business at a lower cost. For business owners thinking of retiring, working with a younger person interested in entrepreneurship can ensure the business continues.

Starting After-School Programs for Young Entrepreneurs

Teachers interested in helping students learn about entrepreneurship can, in the medium-term, start an after-school program linking students with local small business owners. This teacher would serve as the contact person and advisor for the students who would work with business owners after class each day. Students and business owners will be expected to participate in information sharing, reflection, and learning across placements. It is the role of the teacher to plan a loose curriculum of learning objectives to ensure each student and business owner benefit from the relationship. Because setting up such a program requires a lot of additional work on the part of the teacher, this recommendation is best executed after establishing the business network so the teacher has less difficulty finding interested business owners. School and district administration should support teachers wishing to introduce such a program in their schools.

Creating Summer Employment Opportunities

The Camden County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) often receives money for summer youth employment. Usually larger businesses or non-profits create youth positions, but if small businesses were aware of the option, they too could work with youth in the summer.

²⁵⁴ Suggs, "Bringing Small Business Development to Urban Neighborhood," 503; Rasheed and Rasheed, "Developing Entrepreneurial Characteristics in Minority Youth: The Effects of Education and Enterprise Experience," 263.

Several steps must take place to make this recommendation a reality. The WIB needs to connect with both schools and small businesses. The first is already being accomplished. The WIB can find interested small businesses with connecting to the business network. Business benefit from an extra set of hands at a subsidized price and youth gain the skills, knowledge, and experience of being an entrepreneur.

Launching an Apprenticeship Model to Aid Post-Graduation Job Placement

Some countries, like Germany and Japan, have strong linkages between high schools and employers. In Germany students often take time while in school to participate in an apprenticeship program and transition smoothly into a career after graduation.²⁵⁵ To an extent this already happens with MetEast, Camden's big picture high school, which sends students into the community two days a week to work in a field of professional interest. In the long-term school district administrators can incorporate this into all the high schools. Using the business network administrators can find partnering businesses to work with the students. Overtime as the relationship between the school district and the business network grows, teachers will better learn what applicable skills and knowledge need to be taught in the classroom and business owners will learn to trust the students coming to work for them because they know the teachers.²⁵⁶

The following diagram shows the described ways in which small businesses can connect with youth.

²⁵⁵ Rosenbaum, *Beyond College for All*.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

Recommendation: Connect Small Business with Youth			
Action	Timeframe	Actor(s)	Key Tasks
Start Entrepreneur After-School Programs	Short-Term	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design a curriculum and expectations for students and business owners - Utilize the business network to find partnering businesses for youth - Lobby administration for program support
Use Summer Employment Monies to Place Youth in Small Businesses	Medium-Term	Camden County Workforce Investment Board (WIB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilize business network to locate small businesses - Recruit youth participants
Develop Apprenticeship Model for Education	Long-Term	School District Administration, Camden City Board of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Find partnering businesses through the business network - Revamp curriculum to match entrepreneurship program

Conclusion

In uncovering the value of Camden small businesses, I often wonder what the city would be like today if a portion of the state funded Municipal Rehabilitation and Economic Recovery Act (MRERA) went to small business support. What would it look like if the Economic Recovery Board (ERB) allocated \$5 million dollars, or 3% of the total \$175 million or one fifth of what went to the aquarium expansion, to small businesses. A quick back of the envelope calculation shows the magnitude of the impact. If each business received \$80,000 of support in various forms, perhaps \$35,000 in a business loan (which is the maximum size of a loan from the Small Business Association)²⁵⁷, \$2,500 in entrepreneurship training, and the remaining \$42,500 for building improvements, the \$5 million dollars could aid approximately sixty-two businesses. In this study, the Camden small businesses employ approximately six people. Taking a lower estimate and saying this money might lead to four new jobs held by local residents means the

²⁵⁷ “Small Business Administration - Get Ready.”

creation of 248 new jobs. The city will also benefit from the tax revenue generated by sixty-two new or expanded enterprises. From a spatial perspective, dividing these sixty-two new or expanded businesses amongst Camden's nine commercial corridors would result in approximately seven new businesses per corridor. Filling vacant storefronts to create at least one new, whole city block on each corridor would send positive signals to other potential businesses owners that there is opportunity in Camden. Neighborhoods would also benefit from the rise of sixty-two new leaders and role models who work to improve their community. And while the impact is less quantifiable, it should not be glazed over; places cannot change without the aid of passionate people.

This hypothetical thinking is only helpful in illustrating the potential of small businesses if included in a larger, well funded economic development strategy. The reality is that the federal and state governments are most likely not going to bail out the nation's post-industrial cities. Logistically, the country doesn't have enough money even if it wanted to. So what do we do? We start to see the value of small businesses and assist them incrementally through multiple avenues, by building connections, taking down obstacles, and promoting their strengths. An economic downturn on top of years of disinvestment requires us to think more creatively about how to revitalize post-industrial cities. We need to leverage all of these cities' assets, which include their small businesses, which are truly hidden gems. Now is the time to go out and uncover them.

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