

Suisun City in California is 2,840 miles away from Camden in New Jersey and although they sit almost opposite one another on the North American continent, they share similar latitudes (<http://www.city-list.com>) and a similar struggle. Suisun City is a successful example of redevelopment in a crumbling city. Camden, on the other hand, is still in the depths of its struggle. Efforts have been applied or are in the works, many similar to that of Suisun City but with little outward success. The key difference might be the social structure and poverty of the Camden area. Here tucked in the prime location the city suffers with the blight of poverty, crime, and corruption. This paper will investigate further the paths these two cities have taken historically and currently with redevelopment with emphasis on sustainable design; and where they might have digressed. It will look at such things as the waterfronts of each place and the business strategies employed.

Suisun City and Camden were both ranked, at some point, for being the worst place to live. The San Francisco Chronicle rated Suisun, in 1989, as the “worst place to live in the Bay Area” (www.smartgrowth.org). Camden, in 2004, was rated the most dangerous city in the Nation (www.msnbc.msn.com). Camden did equally as poorly in 2005. Already, Camden starts out with a bigger burden than Suisun City. Suisun did have a crime and drug-ridden section of its city that was growing as the city become more dilapidated. However, Camden has suffered for many decades with crime of all types – murder, rape, drugs, and corruption and has dealt with all types of criminals from petty thieves and first time offenders to corrupt governmental leaders and professional criminals. This weaves a more complicated problem, in my opinion, than in Suisun City’s case but I still argue that Suisun City is what Camden could be in the future.

A historical perspective might be the best starting point for better understanding their stories. A brief look into the past (settlement) and how they got to their critical points (decline in population or increase in crime) and what the cities are doing to combat these issues. I intend to illustrate each cities sustainable design as best I can because, it is/was the goal of both cities to use smart growth strategies and sustainable design techniques. Here, I am referring to ten principles of Smart Growth discussed in class.

Suisun City was a transport city founded in 1848 (Benfield, 72). Its location to the Suisun Slough or marsh was key to water transport in the beginning, then in 1869 the locomotive was the dominant form of transportation. A town developed around these anchors and a community thrived. Its’ waterfront property and the town would soon lose itself when in the 1960s Suisun was severely affected by the construction of Interstate 80 (<http://www.ci.suisun-city.ca.us>, Benfield, 72). San Francisco and other nearby cities were experiencing rapid population growth and so began the construction of I-80 because of increase need for a major

artery. Yet as it brought life to other areas it cut off the lifeblood to Suisun City. Business was pulled away from the area and shifted, leaving the waterfront and town center for inevitable ruin. The City then experienced an increase in crime and a drop in the housing prices. People were still interested, because of increasing property value in the surrounding area, in the properties on the outskirts of town but not near the once beautiful harbor.

Suisun reached a critical point when in 1989 when the San Francisco chronicle gave the city its worst ranked status. "At that time, Suisun City's historic Main Street was a strip of boarded-up storefronts, vacant lots, and auto body shops. Several blocks away, an oil refinery sat at the head of the heavily polluted, silt-laden Suisun Channel" according to www.smartgrowth.org. A key player of Suisun City success was and is James Spering. He was elected mayor in 1986 and is, in fact, still mayor of Suisun City. Through his vision, he headed up the transformation of the "historic downtown and waterfront area" (Benfield, 72). Spering was successful because he replaced one of the anchors to Suisun, its' waterfront. This time for recreation, scenic beauty and natural preservation instead of shipping. He, along with others, was able to successfully redevelop the area through a variety of conduits that will be discussed later.

Camden New Jersey's past was also based on access to transport and just like Suisun City; Camden is located on an important waterway, the Delaware River. Camden is directly across from Philadelphia and was once home to a major shipping and manufacturing industry. Where Suisun City experienced the traffic from the Gold Rush, Camden did from the ship building industry from the Naval Yard during World War II. Camden has had a much longer written history than Suisun City. Camden had begun to see heavy European foot traffic in the 1700s (<http://www.ci.camden.nj.us>) and by 1870 125 manufactures were located in Camden. With the on coming of the train and electric trolley Camden changed but was still a major industrial area especially along the Cooper River. Sections of Camden to the east were agricultural land.

In 2000, Bill Shralow ("Camden Still Struggles to Regain Lost Glory") and Jim Walsh ("Camden, Area Experience Turmoil, Hope") wrote separate articles for the Courier Post as a look back at the past thirty years. Each piece highlighted the history of Camden and how we came to know it as one of the Nation's Most Dangerous Cities. They were blunt about the past with the chagrin of vandalism, vexation of riots and its deeply imbedded past of corruption at many levels of governments from Senators to Mayors. However, they stressed the progress and the possibility of hope, something the current Mayor Gwendolyn A. Faison relies on as an inspirational focal point for rallying the city in an "aggressive revitalization plan" (<http://www.ci.camden.nj.us/index.html>).

Camden had a more hidden critical point. Suisun City's crux was Interstate 80; whereas, Camden's struggles, in my opinion, are less concrete. The articles mentioned in the previous paragraph shed light on some of the root issues of Camden's downfall. Obviously, the change in the shipping industry had an immense impact on the City's economy but Camden also suffered, like its neighbor Philadelphia, from the impact of post WWII suburban mania and from racial tensions. In 1971 race riots broke out stemming from police brutality of a Hispanic man. The Mayor and City Council turned a blind eye to the incident until the streets outside City Hall erupted in violence that lasted over 3 days and a State of Emergency was declared. By the end, every store on the main street front glass had been broken and the shops vandalized. The City's retail business really never recovered from this event. The next few years proved difficult ones. Mayor Angelo Errichetti and 20 other officials (city and state) were arrested and convicted by the FBI for corruption and receiving bribes. Then in 1991, the city suffered from arson, over 100 fires were set on Mischief night. Howard Gillette, author of Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City published in 2005, writes about these and other incidents that really brought Camden to where it is currently. These events are mentioned because they set the backdrop and the challenges for implementing smart growth principles in a place that has such political and social instability. Poverty is quite high in Camden. In 1999, the mean household income was \$23,421 in comparison; in Suisun City it was \$60,848 (<http://www.infoplease.com>). In 2004, 60.8 (Camden) to 3.7 (Suisun) were the ratio per 100,000 people for murder and 3440.9 to 1250 for Larceny Theft. Camden's population at this time was 80,648 compared to Suisun City's 27,279 (<http://www.areaconnect.com>).

Suisun City and Camden both tried to use their waterfronts as the center for revitalization efforts. Suisun had much success while Camden's holds strong but pattered out in terms of furthering redevelopment in surrounding city neighborhoods. Camden's waterfront boasts a marina, the USS New Jersey Naval Battleship, the Tweeter Center, Wiggin's Waterfront Park, and the New Jersey State Aquarium. Camden broke ground for the Aquarium in 1988 one-year prior to the new City Hall in Suisun City. Both projects were bold moves but Suisun certainly had better success. The new City Hall, in Suisun City, provided a focal point to start the revitalization. It gave the city the edge it needed to get help in many areas, from getting the derelict oil refinery to clean up the contaminated waterfront and move out of the area (Benfield, 73) to enticing interest in residential/commercial town center and encouraging walkable neighborhoods and a promenade.

How did Suisun City make the successful change towards sustainability in a smart growth manner: "In 1989, the City government formed a 13-member citizens committee to assist

in the formulation of a plan to revitalize the waterfront and Old Town. The committee's recommendations along with suggestions by the Mayor, City Council, and City staff were incorporated into the Downtown Specific Plan, which was adopted in 1991" (www.suisun.com). It also published a list of *Redevelopment Accomplishments* (see Appendix 1) they mirror the principles of smart growth. Suisun City is quite vocal about its' planning commission and has an active business page on the City's web page. They have a number of civic agencies that aim in increasing the awareness about the City's goals. The waterfront is also a Business Improvement District (BID). It came to be this way in 2003 "by the City Council at the request of the downtown area merchants. Businesses located within the BID boundaries are assessed an annual fee, determined by ordinance, to support the annual activities of the district. The goals of the BID are to improve the business climate in the waterfront district and promote the area as a terrific place to visit and conduct business" (www.ci.suisun-city.ca.us).

According to their official city website, Suisun City they used "new urbanism" to obtain goals. Suisun City did not benefit from any one particular funding source but from a combination of aggressive research and solicitation as well as, creative programs, such as, Federal Government Programs, Tax breaks and grants. It was their "common vision" from the community that drove the success. They wanted to emphasis the history of the town and encourage small business growth. They have achieved success and now because of it have been encouraged to keep moving forward in this direction.

Do not be mislead; however, to think that Camden has a failing waterfront. It does, indeed, have a lively Waterfront and as its web page promotes - it has a lot to offer. However, it is the surrounding downtown of Camden that has not been able to get itself out of trouble. In 2000, Camden had a number of vacant homes (18.75%) where as, Suisun City has currently only 1.95% of its housing listed as vacant (www.areaconnect.com).

Camden has tried to encourage its' retail and business district again by taking some inventive measures. Here is a sample of the excitable language used by the City of Camden to entice entrepreneurs and businesses (Appendix 2): "Deciding where to locate or relocate a business is never an easy decision. But what if there were a place where you could forget about paying sales tax on your business improvements and operating expenses?...0% sales tax! Or charge your customers half the sales tax everyone else is charging" (www.ci.camden.nj.us)? The City does have a reason to be excited, it is located in a prime real estate section of the East Coast. They are located across from Philadelphia and close to New York City. It has access to major rail lines, shipping ports and major trucking Interstates.

Camden enacted a master plan in 2002. It was called FutureCAMDEN and can be easily

downloaded from their site (www.ci.camden.nj.us). Camden is currently looking for Redevelopment Proposals and does an excellent job with having them all online with links included. They also see the need, in the future of redevelopment, for some residents to be relocated and have created a relocation program as well as a free booklet. Both cities are actually very forth coming with their City's agendas and budgets. They both stress public transportation, perhaps Camden a bit more, and ways to get involved in all aspects of their City's from current residents and business to visitors.

Other organizations that promote greening and smart growth in New Jersey have their eye on Camden. Two such organizations are New Jersey Future and Camden Greenways. New Jersey Future, founded 1986, is focused on "advance(ing) smarter land-use and growth policies" (www.njfuture.org). It is a nonprofit advocacy organization that tries to end sprawl, protect open land, and practice sustainable design and investigates "smart ways to grow." They gave the City of Camden a 2006 Smart Growth Award for Participatory Neighborhood Planning. It was for the Parkside Neighborhood Strategic Plan. "This plan, created with the input of more than 600 community members, will build on the neighborhood's strengths as a "complete" community of retail and housing, while enhancing and restoring its park and open spaces" (www.njfuture.org).

Camden Greenways, Inc (CGI) was established in 1993 as a group that focuses on connecting greenways and explaining their importance. "CGI is part of a Steering Committee which currently includes representatives from the Trust for Public Land (TPL), Camden City, the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority, The Delaware River Keeper Network and the Trust for Public Land. This Steering Committee was formed by TPL to develop a strategic plan to implement the Camden Greenway as part of the City's Redevelopment Plan. A component of this strategic plan will be to use the Greenway as a tool for integrating storm water management to help address flooding and overflow issues in the City. TPL has received funding from the Ford Foundation for this project" (<http://camdengreenways.org>). Camden Greenways is a sister organization of Philadelphia Green and is actively working with the communities to bring awareness of these issues.

The Smart Growth organization is a group of non-profits that came together to form a smart growth network it is funded by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. They had this to say about Suisun City, "The example of Suisun City illustrates growth can improve quality of life by adding services, creating opportunity, and enhancing access to amenities. It can also drive disinvestment, reduce competitiveness, and degrade the environment. Businesses, community leaders, developers, and local governments need to work to ensure that new growth improves the economy and environment of existing communities. In building places,

communities must build places people want to live in for what they are, rather than for what they are not. This is smart growth” (<http://www.smartgrowth.org>).

These smart growth principles are just what could save Camden. It has the chance to preserve open space along side two major rivers; create walkable neighborhoods that are within a preexisting urban center; it has a variety of public transportation; and it is situated near a great number of attractions. What Camden still struggles with is crime, poverty and a poor education system, perhaps it is these things that fragment the remaining communities. FutureCAMDEN addresses these issues and has funding to begin the process. Success lies in achieving a common goal. People need to have a new focus, as Peter Calthorpe discusses in “The Next American Metropolis”. There is a lack of continuity between the American Dream and the existing reality; one can see this in Camden. It has a harsh reality with poverty and disinvestment at the heart, but it is the potential that is the hope. If it could apply the Smart Growth principles that Suisun City has, it would be the comeback city of the east coast.

Works Cited

- Benfield, F. Kaid et al. Solving Sprawl Models of Smart Growth in Communities Across America. Washington: Island Press, 2001.
- Calthorpe, Peter. "The Next American Metropolis" expert in The Sustainable Urban Development Reader. Edited by Stephen M. Wheeler and Timothy Beatley. New York: Routledge, 2004. (pages 74-75)
- Howard Gillette, Jr., Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.

Camden Related Websites:

<http://www.ci.camden.nj.us/>
www.msnbc.msn.com
<http://www.courierpostonline.com>
<http://camdengreenways.org>
www.njfuture.org

Suisun City Related Websites:

<http://www.ci.suisun-city.ca.us>
<http://www.suisun.com>

Other Websites:

www.areaconnect.com
<http://www.infoplease.com>
www.smartgrowth.org
<http://www.city-list.com>

Appendix 1

Redevelopment Accomplishments

- *The revitalization of the historic Old Town commercial area*
- *The establishment of a Downtown Plaza as a focus of community activities*
- *The rehabilitation and development of traditional architecture*
- *The provision of full public access to the marina with over 5000 feet of newly constructed waterfront promenade*
- *Dredging of the harbor, providing deep water access*
- *The construction of a 150-berth, state of the art marina*
- *The creation of a functioning multi-modal transit hub surrounded by higher density development*
- *The development of Live/Work businesses on the waterfront*
- *The replacement of a deteriorating, high crime neighborhood with pedestrian-oriented neighborhood that matches the character of the rest of downtown.*

Adapted from www.suisun.com

Appendix 2

EMPOWERMENT AND ENTERPRISE ZONES

- The Camden Urban Enterprise Zone
- The Federal Empowerment Zone in Camden

TAX INCENTIVES - 100% SALES TAX EXEMPTION, NEW EMPLOYEE CREDITS AND MORE!

- Municipal Programs
- Tax Abatement Programs
- Federal and State Programs

COMPETITIVELY PRICED SMALL-BUSINESS LOANS, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, FIXED ASSET LOANS

- Municipal Programs
- State Programs

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS THAT WORK

- Latin American Economic Development Association, Inc. (LAEDA)
- First Camden Business Center
- Camden Redevelopment Agency
- Camden County Improvement Authority
- Cooper's Ferry Development Association
- Delaware River Port Authority

From www.ci.camden.nj.us