**CRAMER HILL 2030 NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN**

Thursday, March 18, 2021

9:00 to 10:30AM

Remote Zoom Meeting

1. **Agenda and recap from last meeting**
2. **Neighborhood Overview**

A quick overview of key neighborhood facts was provided by the planning team as a background for breakout sessions. A copy of the presentation will be available online (www.cramerhillplan.com).

1. **Breakout Sessions**

Three breakout sessions were held simultaneously addressing the 6 planning themes framing the future Cramer Hill Plan: Housing, Infrastructure and Transportation, Environment and Open Space, Economic Development, Land Use and Quality of Life. The following notes summarize discussions held at each of the sessions:

1. **Breakout Session I – Infrastructure, Transportation, Environment and Open Space**

**Participants:**

Brian DuVall – Center for Aquatic Sciences

Tucker Birmingham – Upstream Alliance

Cari Wild – NJ Natural Lands Trust

Peter Kroll - CCMUA

Mary Cortes – Cramer Hill resident

Olivette Simpson - CRA

Melanie James – Camden Promise Charter School

Kathy Cullen – Cooper’s Ferry Partnership

Rudisha Okezie – NJ Conservation Foundation

Meishka Mitchell – Cooper’s Ferry Partnership

Claudia Bitran – Kitchen & Associates

* Flooding
  + Flooding is worse on River Road, and spreading to Cleveland Ave
  + There used to be a bridge on River Road at Von Nieda
  + Flooding at Von Nieda Park has improved since the improvements completed by CFP (water wills up but it goes down much quicker)
  + Need to focus future improvements on capturing stormwater before it gets to Von Nieda.
  + Future improvements at Ablett Village will also provide an opportunity to address flooding risks on the southern end of the neighborhood.
* River Road Concept Development Report - Camden County
  + River Road has water mains underground on both sides of the road that prevent separation of the combined sewer.
  + County is moving forward with realignment of River road and Federal to create a safe left turn option.
* Feasibility Study to extend Harrison Ave to Linden Street
  + Alignment has been proposed but final design and/or construction not funded.
  + Some Cramer Hill residents were previously against this proposal because of fear of increased traffic through the neighborhood.
* Street Repairs: There is a significant core of streets that need to be addressed. Recent block conditions survey done under the Choice plan mapped street conditions and that can be a first reference for City’s investments in repairs. Reference map helps visualize areas in need of repair.
  + The option of using concrete instead of asphalt for road repair on heavily travelled roads was also discussed.
* School Traffic Issues: Traffic generated around schools is a key concern in the neighborhood. There are multiple schools in the area and they attract over 2500 kids from both the neighborhood and the City. Drop off and pick up hours are particularly problematic but schools work individually to find solutions to address those issues.
  + Camden Promise Charter School has separate start and finish times for each campus
  + Add pedestrian beacons; cars sometimes blow through stop signs
  + 31st & Hayes is a problem area.
  + Add oversized stop signs to prevent drivers from speeding through the school zone.
  + River Road & Bergen Ave is another problem area.
  + Cleveland Ave is a particularly problematic area, especially in the winter. The area is also a dumping area.
  + Not many students bike to school; parents do not feel that it would be safe; Camden Promise has a biking program.
  + What is proportion of students from Cramer Hill in neighborhood charter schools?
  + Are there ways to encourage alternative options for neighborhood residents in order to minimize the use of private cars for short term trips?
* Brownfields: Recent development has addressed many of the brownfield sites in the neighborhood but there are still areas to be cleaned up.
  + Cramer Hill is a Brownfields Redevelopment Area. That means that there is an additional $1 million available for assessment and cleanup HDSRF funds available via CRA.
  + Magnetic Metals is the largest brownfield in the neighborhood with 8 acres of land.
    - Cleanup of the site is almost completed to a commercial standard.
    - Site provides a great opportunity for redevelopment and should be a key topic on the agenda for this neighborhood plan.
  + Other sites are located along the waterfront (properties between the Kroc Center and Nature Preserve). Among others, these sites can help complete the greenway along the waterfront. But current uses also inhibit the use of the park (trucks, air pollution).
  + Land uses along the back channel also deserve a second look.
* Cramer Hill Waterfront development
  + Discover the Delaware: Group of orgs and stakeholders interested in the backchannel area and reconnecting residents to the river
  + Water quality issues with the CSO at 32nd Street
  + Want to encourage outdoor and on-water activities
  + Creating and maintaining a buffer will be significant from water quality standpoint and protect against river rise
  + How can we most efficiently get people to experience new open space amenities without driving? Transit? Shuttle?
  + Don’t want future development with increased truck traffic or that would impact future enjoyment of parks and open spaces

1. **Breakout Session II – Housing and Economic Development**

**Participants:**

Ray Lamboy (LAEDA)

Candice Jefferson (City of Camden)

Priscilla – Pastor and entrepreneur

Sulena Robinso Rivera(CRA)

Jade Long (Michaels)

Kelechi Okusobi (Michaels)

Pilar Hogan (SJCS)

John Theobald (K&A)

**Topic I / Housing:**

The session was initiated with an overview of recent work done by the Housing Authority along with Michaels and K&A related to the Choice Neighborhoods plan and housing strategies coming out of that plan. The Cramer Hill plan provides an opportunity to expand that discussion for the broader neighborhood and identify specific areas for future investment.

Question 1: Base on background information provided regarding homeownership trends in the neighborhood, where should we be focusing our attention in terms of neighborhood housing? For context, we need to consider increased maintenance costs and property taxes as challenging people who want to remain in the neighborhood. But that is also an obstacle for those who would like to buy a home.

* Education is critical. People need to know they would be able to qualify for homes.
* Collingswood provides a good model of revitalization with old multifamily buildings converted back to single family homes and incentives to homeownership. We also need to look at homeownership demographics. There is significant homeownership among senior residents. Merchantville built senior housing to allow residents to move in and release larger older homes for new families and residents.
* Many large extended families are occupying housing in Cramer Hill. What are their needs?
* Landlords will rent if sale prices are not high enough to justify sale.
* A potential approach would include the following strategies:
  + Take vacant housing and rehab and establish ‘bottom level’ of market.
  + Take vacant lots and create a greater variety of homes for 2nd tier market with larger homes that are more desirable for families.
* Duplex housing works for multi-generation families. West New York and other places in North Jersey have examples of alternatives to building senior housing. Duplexes can also help a family pay their mortgage.
* Supporting new ownership is key to stabilizing neighborhood with an ageing population whose income may not be sufficient to maintain their homes. It would be helpful to understand how much it costs to build a new home or duplex and compare to cost/value of housing and what people can afford. Educating residents on ownership with a fact sheet that shows how you achieve homeownership what you need financially to buy a home or rehab a home.

**Topic II/ Economic Development**

Pilar introduced the topic highlighting River Road as an anchor for Cramer Hill with over 50 businesses between retail and services.

Question: How can we strengthen River Road as a commercial corridor? What should be our focus?

* It is important to build relationship with businesses. Build relationships and help attract businesses. Help businesses buy property in the area.
  + Small businesses don’t typically own buildings. Can we find this out for Cramer Hill businesses? Landlorship?
* Knowing about ownership of the building on the corridor is important. How does this impact facade programs and the improvements?
  + CCDA coordinates Main St Program. Main St program should be at center of River Road –
  + 27th Street is situated perfectly for a town center. 26th, 27th, River Road there is a lot of land and a great opportunity for a mixed use area with housing, retail and services with opportunities for a gathering place.
  + Washington School would make a great Senior Complex with River Road amenities in Walking distance –
  + There is a large lot at 26th and River with barbed wire around it. That has potential.
  + Current city parking ordinance is deterrent to development and variance for parking is expensive since you have to pay city this deters development.
  + Parking supply is an issue here and recent streetscape improvements took away more parking spaces.
  + Haddon Ave is an example Ray is working with PBCIP on recruitment of 2nd store business owners incentivizing opening 2nd location – this will build wealth in the neighborhood
  + Nodes: Orellies? and Santana Bakery - node can extend to 36th st opportunity for growth in this area
* What about graduates of Ray’s entrepreneur program? What is hardest thing for someone to launch?
* The market has to work - if there is no market for bicycle shops, don’t open a bicycle shop. There is need for a market study to identify categories and buying power and match up businesses. PBCIP conducted a market analysis for Parkside, it shows leakage rate –

Previous Claritas reports showed up to 75% leakage rate in Cramer Hill.

* What about unidentified (new) nodes - rails and trails waterfront park - new amenities can create new markets - bike shop and kayak - Harrison Ave and State St as potential for new commercial activity. Can we create parking - dedicated for employees and timed parking (not meters) for patrons?
  + Ray: Shared example of family store on 5th St & Lehigh Ave in Philadelphia - employees parked on 5th St leaving no room for patrons, solution was meters and separate dedicated employee parking lots.
  + Pilar: Would city parking authority create strategic parking to create revenue?
  + Ray: Rutgers has surface lot with metered parking
* Westfield Ave strategy is a good reference but plan for a shared parking lot was not implemented. This idea could help multiple Corridors
* Question: What types of business should we target along River Road?
* Real estate type matters - 1000 SF is a lot of space for entrepreneurs - 500 SF units are more supportable - working capital runs out if space too big to support – there is a need for a variety of sizes.
* What about shared space, popup spaces? Can this create opportunity?
  + Ray: Vineland has an example – “The Spot” converted 10000 sf store into indoor market, not manned you bring the product to a single cashier, there multiple businesses set up stalls (the size of Rainbow on Federal St)
  + In Parkside the planned retail is too big for many entrepreneurs. They need smaller incubator spaces to start before they can move into storefronts.
* What about live-work units to fill residential vacancy on River Road to convert ground floor for retail space / incubator space - 1br above retail ground?
* What about makerspace?
  + N Camden created an artisan makers space - access to equipment like kilns

1. **Breakout Session III – Quality of Life**

**Participants:**

Linda Cairnes (Center for Aquatic Sciences)

Vedra Chandler (Project Manager at Coopers Ferry Partnership)

Ivana Quinones (Center for Aquatic Sciences and resident)

Adriana Amador-C…? (Center for Aquatic Sciences and local artist)

Benjamin Ovadia (Kroc Center)

Dylan Kelly (Action-Pak)

Erica Acevedo

Joseph Conway

Enrique Rivera (SJCS)

Dan Farrell (K&A)

**Topic I / Public Safety:**

Question 1: For those who live or frequent Cramer Hill, are there any places you feel unsafe at night or just in general? We’ve heard complaints about Von Nieda Park at night. It’s not well lit and there’s a bunch of youth there. Same story around Harrison Ave where it’s not well lit and people congregate. Any other places you can think of?

* No responses noted

Question 2: Crime isn’t just violence or robbery, there’s physical crimes like dumping that impact quality of life. Is there any experience of that anywhere in the neighborhood?

* Cramer Hill Nature Preserve. There’s dumping and paintball parties there. Mike Hogan has tried to do regular cleanups. She went through in September and saw a ton of paint splatter around from a paintball party. It’s a secluded space so people can go there unseen.
  + Do you feel unsafe there?
    - Never during the day but she it is usually ok if you are with people.
    - At night, the area feels less safe.
* Vedra is working on a project for illegal dumping with Coopers Ferry. Talked to manager at Centennial Village who said they keep the gates closed because people come in and use dumpsters. It is a problem in the neighborhood.
  + Enrique has heard similar stories in East Camden.
* There is a lot of trash on the street. Kroc Center does clean ups and said they need to be cautious about personal properties because some neighbors get upset when people clean the trash up. They find it offensive when strangers are cleaning up their own yard.
* Dylan at Action-Pak informed that they have a street cleanup every other Saturday on the stretch of road in front of their business. Within a few days there’s trash back there whether it be from the wind or people littering. They are trying to put up signs to dissuade people from littering.
* There are properties that could take a whole weekend to clean up. It is important to empower residents to clean up their blocks.
* Cleveland Ave from 29th-31st St at the railroad tracks has a lot of trash.

Any ideas on how to get residents to keep the neighborhood clean?

* Linda said she has been doing work at Pyne Point Park. Years ago, there was a ton of trash but recently it’s been much better. Noticed a lot more people and activity. One time there she noticed trash around so brought in trash bags and trash cans. The next weekend she noticed less trash on the ground and because people used the cans.
  + Are there public trash cans in Cramer Hill? Should there be a campaign in the community addressing trash?
* More trash cans may not be the solution as there aren’t enough resources to collect trash by the city. Partner like Action Pac and Kroc Center keep their properties visibly clean, so maybe there is a different model that leverages local resources? Vacant lot cleanups don’t stop the dumping. They are typically trashed shortly after cleanup.
  + Enrique suggested that this can be a community support rally. Referring to blocks coming together to clean after trash day.
* The dumping is usually larger than trash cans. Things like furniture and household items. Maybe fencing around those areas should be considered.

**Topic 2: Arts and Culture**

How can we celebrate the local culture and involve local artists?

* Coopers Ferry has been working with residents on a local mural. They have been trying to connect with local residents. It’s been great to work with local residents on the beautification process as the city is lacking a definitive art scene. The city needs galleries and things like night clubs. Artists can be included in a lot of these planning processes.
  + There aren’t communal space for artists. A communal space at the local park or the Kroc Center would be good. People just wants a space to meet.
  + The Kroc Center does art giveaways, lectures, and would love to see things like theater there. The Kroc Center and local schools could be a great space for the arts.
* The arts are an economy as well. We want to make sure we’re rewarding arts and culture. Grants could be a good way to fund those initiatives. Coordination among local organizations could help identify those opportunities.
* The Aquatic Center is trying to get a space at the waterfront park and art could have a space there as well. Possibly a mural.
* Cramer Hill mural options were presented to the group. Emphasis was given to the need to include artists from the beginning of these funding processes.
* The biggest art piece at the Kroc Center was from a volunteer group.
* There should be money to pay residents in grants. If they are involved, they should be compensated at least a little sum.

Any ideas on how to get local artists work seen? How this could be an entrepreneurial scene.

* Farmers markets could provide a good channel. Would like to see an arts fair at the parks or the Kroc Center.
* There have been flea markets. Camden Night Gardens is a great place-making idea.
  + Night Gardens Link: (<http://www.ctlcamden.com/camden-night-gardens.html>)
* The new waterfront park is a great opportunity for something like this. The NJ Conservation Foundation is looking into initiatives like fishing and kayaking. There could do a program to set up artist stalls at those events.

**Topic 3: Community Engagement**

How to build leadership? How do we give residents more of a voice?

* The Aquatic Center believes that this can be achieved by engaging residents in local activities such as water recreation activities. The youth are a great target. Newark has a youth core that goes around and cleans parks. That could be a model for something in Camden.
* Getting the groups together is key. A youth summit would be great. It’s a young city so that needs to be targeted. Agencies could do a listening tour to hear the top issues for residents. People that want to be heard are heard but those whose voices aren’t as loud also deserve be heard.

Issues we’ve heard is the lack of information about programs. How do we get the word out and build on the existing neighborhood groups?

* There’s a lot of opportunity to combine efforts. Example from what the Kroc Center is doing is job fairs with the community but also working on a teen option with the schools. The center does a lot of social media and tries to encourage a campaign of sharing.
* We want to make sure the residents are using these opportunities but also want to try and get outsiders to come. People go outside of Camden for farmers markets and book fairs. We need to get the word out and change the perception of the neighborhood. People need to feel Cramer Hill is a place to be and to make sure everyone knows.
* Petty’s Island could provide another great opportunity for engagement.
* Camden is a neighborhood city. Things are decentralized so it’s hard to get the word out to other neighborhoods. There needs to be more meetings. There needs to be a place for communication because that leads down the line with sharing.
  + The challenge with neighborhoods is that there is not enough manpower for meetings and such. There used to be a CDC but it no longer exists. There’s a constant challenge of having to get the word out because there’s nothing consistent.
* Ideas like a newspaper, a neighborhood app, billboards and posters were mentioned as options. Possibly a video targeting residents about information.
  + There’s a clear need for more media.

1. **Breakout sessions report and wrap up**

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END NOTES