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Contact: Meishka L. Mitchell, Vice President
Mobile: 856-571-2786
Email: meishka@coopersferry.com

PRESS RELEASE

Camden hosted first virtual Environmental Summit, highlighting equitable improvements to the environment and recognizing 3 Environmental Heroes

The annual Summit explored inequities faced by vulnerable communities and efforts to engage people of color in conservation efforts

Camden, NJ – On Tuesday, November 24, 2020, the Camden Collaborative Initiative (CCI) hosted the 2020 Camden Environmental Summit to highlight innovative and equitable efforts locally to protect and enhance Camden’s environment. The Summit was held for the first time virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 250 residents, environmental leaders, advocates, and stakeholders from the public, private, and non-profit participated in the 8th annual Summit, presented by New Jersey American Water. The Summit featured American author, poet, wildlife biologist and “Black Birdwatcher”, Dr. J. Drew Lanham, as the Keynote Speaker.

With a combination of live and pre-recorded remarks, speakers from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) offered remarks on the community and environmental benefits provided by public-private partnerships. In addition, Mayor Frank Moran delivered his annual “Sustainability Address” where he discussed recent efforts to combat illegal dumping which has been on the rise during the pandemic. Mayor Frank Moran emphasized the large amount of funding required to cleanup illegally dumped waste—set to surpass the high of \$4 million in 2020. “Today Camden confronts environmental injustice head-on, exploring what has been done to overcome past mistakes and what we can do to prevent them in the future,” said **Camden Mayor Frank Moran**. “Joining together to clean up a vacant lot is a metaphor for the partnerships that are required to tackle the formidable environmental challenges that we still face.”

Those recognized for their leadership in promoting environmentally sustainable practices in Camden as the 2020 Camden Environmental Heroes included Parkside Business & Community in Partnership’s Parkside Learning Garden; Jackie Santiago, a North Camden resident, and organizer of the North Camden Community Gardens; Mike Morgan, a Waterfront South Resident, citizen scientist, and active CCI-Air Quality Working Group member.

Cheryl Norton, Cooper's Ferry Partnership Board Member and President of New Jersey American Water, the event's sponsor, said, "New Jersey American Water is so proud to be a part of Camden Collaborative Initiative's efforts to promote environmental health and equity in the City of Camden. American Water looks forward to continuing our high standard of service and partnership with the City, as well as doing our part to preserve the health of our thriving community."

Dr. J. Drew Lanham's thought-provoking keynote address, "Coloring the Conservation Conversation" gave a poignant view of being a "Black Birdwatcher" and discussed the need for greater diversity in environment and conservation fields. Five 5-Minute Fast Talks gave a crash course on sustainable fashion, water quality and lead awareness, the Cramer Hill Waterfront Park, stormwater management, and air quality.

Other speakers touched on the community and environmental benefits offered by developing robust public-private partnerships.

"EPA is pleased to collaborate with the many dedicated partners in Camden's successful journey to overcoming sustainability challenges and planning for a brighter future," **said EPA Regional Administrator Pete Lopez.** "It has been truly inspiring to watch the City of Camden rise to the occasion over the past several years. It is this type of constructive engagement and community-focused cooperation that is the hallmark of our success working with local, state and federal partners across both the public and private sectors."

"The New Jersey DEP is incredibly proud of its work with the Camden Collaborative Initiative, which is truly making Camden stronger and fairer for its residents," **said Olivia Glenn, Deputy Commissioner for the DEP.** "In fact, CCI has become the role model for DEP's own Community Collaborative Initiative, which we have now deployed in more cities throughout the state with support from Governor Phil Murphy and our partners at the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. CCI's success is a testament to the environmental, public health, and economic improvements that we can achieve when we work together and lift one another up."

About Camden Collaborative Initiative (CCI)

Launched in 2013, CCI is a partnership between more than 70 governmental, non-profit, private, and community-based agencies to implement innovative strategies to improve the environment and the quality of life of Camden's residents. Led by the City of Camden, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, United States Environmental Protection Agency, Cooper's Ferry Partnership, and the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority, CCI is comprised of five working groups that focus on air quality, land use, waste and recycling, food access, and water equity.

CCI serves as a model for proactive, voluntary, and urban environmental enhancement partnerships. Since its creation, CCI has transformed a five-acre contaminated waterfront parcel into a public park; cleaned and secured the state of New Jersey's largest urban illegal dumping hotspot; engaged thirty Camden City high school students in the Green Jobs Summer Ambassadors Program; constructed 50 green infrastructure projects that capture 62 million gallons of stormwater runoff every year; and facilitated the City's Sustainable Jersey Silver certification.

For more information on the 2019 Camden Environmental Summit or CCI, please visit www.camdencollaborative.com.

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