

State of our City is STRONG! - Neighborhoods First: A City For All

Mayor Victor G. Carstarphen Delivers 2026 State of the City Address

June 3, 2026

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good evening!

Welcome to our State Legislators, County Commissioners, Council President Fuentes and members of City Council, Superintendent Alfonso Llano, Camden residents, clergy, business leaders and community stakeholders. I am proud to be able to deliver my annual report on the State of the City, and I thank you for joining me here at my alma mater, The Camden High School Campus.

To my family and friends: To my daughters—thank you both for your constant love and support. To my mother— you have always been there for me, and I love you. And to all my loved ones who have stood by me, believed in me, and prayed with me: I love you, and I thank you for your support.

To my cabinet, staff, and every municipal employee—you are the unsung heroes of this city. The work you do every day may not always make headlines, but it changes lives. Thank you for your service and for keeping this city moving forward.

As I acknowledge our employees and my Directors ...I note with sadness that the City's Director of Planning and Development is not here. Dr. Ed Williams passed away on April 6th after devoting four decades to his career to this City. His contributions are too vast to list but he is deeply missed by his coworkers and I, and he is missed by his family in faith and by the residents of Camden.

And I'm pleased to know that City Council shares my feelings for Ed and will soon be voting to rename Fenwick Road after him because Dr. Williams served as the Senior Pastor of the Word of Faith Christian Fellowship on the 3000 block of that street.

Thank you, Dr. Williams, for your decades of service to Camden.

This year's theme "Neighborhoods First: A City For All", references my guiding principles of community engagement, equity, and access for residents and business citywide. These principles have resulted in real success, and I assure you they will continue to play an essential part of my strategy over the next four years.

That strategy focuses on several key pillars which are leading the way for Camden's historic transformation. As always, we remain fully committed to three foundational elements (or as the Congressman Norcross says ...the "three-legged stool").

1. **Public Safety:** It's our top priority and it will remain a fundamental building block. The engagement by the Camden County Police Department has resulted in proven and tangible results. Our streets are safer, and the quality of life in our neighborhoods continues to improve.
2. **Economic Growth & Job Creation:** We must continue to foster an economic climate where large corporations want to be a part of Camden's growth and small businesses flourish within that same environment. The long-term economic mobility of our

residents must be driven by increased local employment, aligning employer demand with a skilled pipeline and a job-ready workforce.

3. Providing Quality Education: We are rebuilding and improving school facilities, while providing families and students with the choice of quality Charter, Reinsurance, or public-school educational opportunities.

But there are additional pillars which I feel also play a huge role!

- Attracting top tier events
- Supporting small businesses
- Investing in new infrastructure
- Developing quality housing
- Promoting clean open spaces and quality parks
- Nurturing public-private partnership and encouraging private investment

If you don't know already, this room is packed full of "people who love to help people". It's a collection of incredibly dedicated individuals who work together to move Camden forward.

While I am the Mayor, I simply cannot get anything done by myself. It is all about partnerships, collaboration, and Teamwork. I have always been a big believer in teamwork...you will continue to hear that from me often.

Whether it's the tremendous advances in public safety, solidifying our bond rating and finances, millions of dollars invested in new infrastructure and new roadways and the investments in our parks and open spaces...or providing high-quality programming for our youth and seniors, or the growth of our Camden Loop micro-transit systems, providing top quality health care for Camden and the region, creating pipelines to college and a successful career,...just to name a few.

"WE" achieved this together...this is the right team, and "WE" are getting the job done for our residents.

That is why I am so pleased to inform you that the State of our City is **STRONG!!!!**

I feel our collaboration is what makes Camden so unique and it's why we are seeing progress take place across our city and in every neighborhood.

Thank you to our elected officials who are my partners ...City Council, Camden County Board of Commissioners, New Jersey's 5th Legislative District, and Congressman Donald Norcross.

And thank you to Governor Mikie Sherril, for being such a big supporter of all things Camden. I look forward to working with her as we improve the quality of life across this community. We have witnessed great progress thanks to our relationships with this Governor and her predecessors.

Finally, thanks to "Team Camden" ...corporate partners, community stakeholders, faith based-leaders, residents, friends and family. You are all my trusted partners.

It's through collaborators that we are building a bright future for our city.

Over the next four years, I have a vision and strategy that will result in even more progress. Real progress that everyone can touch and see! I look forward to working with each of you over the next four years to continue this great work!

The City of Camden is witnessing an incredible transformation, and it is taking place in every neighborhood citywide. And our city is safer than it's been in more than five decades. I have to go back before I was born to find a safer time ...let that statement sink in!

In fact, Camden was recently featured in the New York Times for our public safety efforts. The city has realized a dramatic 90% reduction in homicides since 2012, marking historic lows in violent crime not seen in decades. And for the first time in more than fifty years the City of Camden has experienced a homicide free summer and winter.

This is a total reset for public safety, and this change was unthinkable just over a decade ago.

The years of investment in new technology, de-escalation training, and community engagement by our Camden County Police Department have produced tangible results. Camden's streets are safer, and our residents have embraced this new reality.

The CCPD continue to engage through youth sports, open gyms, reading to students, participating in community cleanups, senior activities, block parties, and family movie nights, and more. I am proud to say our officers embody Camden's transformation, and they are doing a tremendous job.

In addition to our police, I remain committed to bolstering our Camden Fire Department to make sure they have the training and equipment they need to protect our community and remain the top Fire Department in the State!

In October 2024 we took delivery of two new vehicles. In March, we unveiled a brand new \$1.5 million dollar Ladder 3 fire apparatus. This was part of eight additional fire vehicles purchased for the CFD ...and part of my \$14 million investment in equipment and improvements to firehouses since 2022.

Our police and fire departments are leading the way ...and public safety will always be the foundation for every form of progress in our city.

Thanks to these investments... we have a safer community, we are addressing illegal dumping, we have beautiful parks that are used and loved by our community, we are investing in new roads and infrastructure, and we are attracting significant public-private investment and new development.

With all this new investment, we are ready to capitalize. Whether its America 250, the FIFA World Cup, or the MLB All-star Game, Camden and the region will be buzzing with activity in 2026.

The City of Camden plans to take full advantage by hosting community gatherings within the city's business districts, in addition to large events, fireworks displays, and concerts along the Delaware River at venues such as Freedom Mortgage Pavilion, RCA Pier, Coopers Poynt Waterfront Park, Wiggins Waterfront Park, and Wiggins Park Marina.

The City of Camden and Camden County are pleased to offer so many great events ...and keep in mind, many of these events are FREE to the public!

Camden will be hosting a FIFA World Cup watch party and soccer fest, the County Summer Concert Series (which features the Commadores), Battleship NJ events, Camden's Juneteenth Celebration and the 69th Annual San Juan Bautista Parade, ...just to name a few.

All these events and more can be found on our website, socials and now at "SouthJersey250.com". In fact, County Commissioner Cappelli and I unveiled this website as our central "hub" of event schedules and information for the public.

We encourage businesses, South Jersey residents, and visitors from across the region to join us as we celebrate America's 250th and a full schedule for 2026!

Supporting Camden's small business community and giving them the tools to grow and thrive has always been a top priority. That is why I launched the Buy Camden 1st initiative.

The very first step in this initiative was to create a website containing a searchable directory of Camden-based small businesses. As of today, BuyCamden1st.com's business directory has more than 170 Camden-based small businesses listed in dozens of business classifications.

In addition, businesses who have earned the Camden Verified badge have improved their ability to do business and taking on bigger and more lucrative procurement opportunities.

We are so encouraged by the response we've received from the City's small businesses and the corporate, healthcare and institutional sectors.

We can account for more than \$66,000 in sales (primarily micro-purchases) as a direct result of the Buy Camden 1st initiative. And we know it's likely much higher than that.

Small business bazaars featuring those in the directory are being hosted by companies like Campbell's, American Water and TRIAD1828 where they can sell their goods to company employees for Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Christmas and other holidays. The model is successful, and we're looking to expand these bazaars to other corporations and institutions in the city.

Employment opportunities also play a huge role in the city success as Camden experiences economic progress ...and its being driven by strategic investment, improved public safety, and strong partnerships.

Camden Works is ensuring that our residents are part of that progress. We are connecting people to jobs, removing barriers, and helping families build a stronger future.

This initiative reflects what is possible when we align resources, leadership, and opportunity around the needs of Camden and its neighborhoods.

Since its inception, Camden Works has evolved from a pilot workforce initiative into a coordinated, citywide platform designed to align residents, employers, and training providers.

Based on the 2025 Camden Works Annual Report...in 2025 alone, more than 750 Camden residents engaged with Camden Works and its partners for workforce support services, while 315 residents were hired or supported in securing employment across key industries, including healthcare, skilled trades, government, and financial services. Cumulatively, Camden Works and its partners have supported the hiring of more than 1,675 residents.

Camden's participation in the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia's Reinventing Our Communities (ROC) Program further strengthened the initiative's approach, reinforcing the importance of aligning workforce systems, employer demand, and supportive services to drive long-term economic mobility.

Education remains one of the most important issues facing our city because there is no stronger investment we can make than in the future of our children.

Just over a decade ago, too many families in this city had lost faith in the school system. School buildings were crumbling. Student achievement was ranked among the lowest in the state. And many parents felt like they had no real options for their children.

Why did those families lose faith? Because in 2011, exactly eleven students graduated with academic metrics indicated they were prepared to attend college. Yes, that is correct, eleven students out of the thousands of young men and women who graduated from Camden Schools that year.

But this city decided... we were not going to give up on our children.

Over the last decade, Camden has shown what is possible when people come together around kids. We have seen new schools built, new opportunities created, and academic outcomes improve for thousands of students. Camden's low-income students have closed nearly half of the achievement gap with the statewide average over the last twelve years.

Those gains did not happen by accident. They happened because educators, families, school leaders, community organizations, and partners across this city decided that our children deserved better. One of the biggest reasons Camden has made progress is because this city built a culture of collaboration around children. A culture where schools, nonprofits, philanthropy, government, faith leaders, and community organizations began solving problems together instead of apart.

Do you remember those eleven "college ready" students I mentioned? Just a couple weeks ago, I attended "College Signing Day" where I saw thousands of Camden students being accepted to institutions of higher learning. We didn't just move the needle ...we moved the decimal point over two whole places!

Education is one of the most fundamental civil rights we can protect. When a child has access to a great education, they gain more than academic skills. They gain opportunity, dignity, independence, and the ability to shape their own future.

That is why education has always been central to movements for justice and equality in this country. And that is why it remains central to Camden's future today. But our work to improve education in this city is far from finished.

We know there are still too many students missing school. We know families still want great choices for their children. And we know preparing our students for success after high school graduation is more important than ever.

So, my responsibility as Mayor is to bring people together around solutions.

Over the coming weeks, I will continue working closely with our Superintendent, with the Governor and NJ Commissioner of Education, and with other committed partners because difficult decisions require collaboration and a shared vision.

I recently spoke with the new Commissioner of Education. I am inviting her to Camden so she can see firsthand both the progress we have made and the opportunities that remain ahead.

The future will require difficult conversations, but Camden has never backed away from doing what is necessary for our children. Our children must be at the center of every decision we make.

As Mayor, I will continue fighting for resources and accountability. I will do everything in my power to ensure that every child in Camden has access to the kind of education that prepares them for college, career, and life.

Because the future of this city is sitting in our classrooms right now and they deserve our best.

In partnership with Camden County and all our utility partners, the city continues to make substantial investments in new infrastructure and critical utilities along our waterfront, at our ports, in our downtown, and in every neighborhood.

We are improving both neighborhood streets and major throughfares. This work is “setting the stage” for even more new development.

As you can see from this map, a significant amount of work has been completed in every part of the city.

Since 2021, more than 300 roads have been paved or are underway citywide. More roads have been paved during this 5-year period than at any other time over the past 50 years! This 35.22 miles of roadway is an overall investment of more than \$54 million dollars.

There is even more infrastructure work on the way! The city and its partners plan to resurface or reconstruct an additional 46.99 miles of roadway. That’s 254 more roads over the next four years. That’s almost \$107 million dollar investment over the next four years.

As a part of that investment and over the next three years, Camden County has committed \$85 million dollars to roadway projects including a complete reconstruction of Haddon Avenue and the Port Area Roadways along with work along Mount Ephraim Avenue, and Federal Street as well as the replacement of the Kaighn Avenue Bridge over Cooper River and Collings Avenue Bridge over Newton Creek.

As we make roadway improvements, we also work with Camden County MUA to coordinate projects which assist with stormwater management and upgrades to our sewer system.

In addition to the coordinated replacement of thousands of gas lines and gas meters with PSE&G and replacement of lead services water lines with American Water.

Camden is building strategically ...not just for now but for the future.

Camden has become a national model of urban revitalization, and this progress is driven by our Eds & Meds community ...anchor institutions like Cooper University Health Care, Virtua Health, and Coriell Institute.

When complete, Cooper's \$3 billion dollar "Project Imagine" will mark the largest building investment in Camden County's history. The project reinforces Cooper's commitment to driving economic growth and underscores their 139-year commitment to Camden.

Thanks to the leadership of Chairman George Norcross, Cooper has begun construction on a \$3 billion expansion of its Health Sciences Campus in Camden

This investment not only reinforces Cooper's commitment to driving economic growth but also underscores their long-standing commitment to our Camden residents.

What makes it even more impactful is that Cooper isn't just building ...they're training and hiring Camden residents through a groundbreaking partnership with the building trades.

In addition, Virtua Health is investing \$500 million to expand and renovate Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital along Haddon Avenue, featuring a new 6-story, 254,000-square-foot Marvin Samson Pavilion.

These historic expansions leverage billions in capital already invested in Camden.

And in Camden since 1953, Coriell Institute is undertaking a \$95 million expansion. The project will create 150 new permanent plus 100 construction jobs, in addition to attracting world-class scientist and biopharmaceutical companies.

All three of these projects will be a tremendous economic boost to our neighborhoods, Camden, Camden County, South Jersey, and the region ...in addition to commitments to local hiring and local sourcing.

I thank our incredible anchor institutions for making this investment in Camden!

The housing market in Camden is stronger than ever, and we are excited to welcome potential new homeowners to our community.

Market rate housing values are up 40%, while maintaining the lowest average property taxes in New Jersey. In 2015, the average price of a home sold in Camden was \$61,748. The average price has since increased by 79% in 2025 (recent sales \$380,000 and above).

Last fall, the city and its partners announced a comprehensive housing strategy aimed at expanding our relationship with our non-profit/CDC partners, matching them up with larger for-profit developers. We are utilizing some existing programs to leverage part of this strategy including:

The Camden Home Improvement Program (CHIP) is a citywide home rehabilitation program, which provides low- and moderate-income homeowners with forgivable loans to make essential life safety home improvements.

In addition, we are working with Camden County to provide first-time home buyers with access to funding for downpayments.

And finally, upgrades to existing & new affordable housing are taking place.

-\$130 million - renovation of North Gate One

-\$165 million - development of Ablett Village & The Harrison

-\$24 million - housing & healthcare facility Oliver Station (pictured in the slide)

The 1st of this kind in South Jersey, Oliver station integrates quality affordable senior housing with top-notch health care.

This demand for housing is proof that our investments are resulting in real change.

Slide 14 – Walter Rand Transportation Center & Beacon Tower

The State of New Jersey plays a huge role in the city's renaissance, and their investments are many. As a part of NJ Transit's plan for a 21st century public transportation center, the state has committed \$250 million dollars to redevelop the Walter Rand Transportation Center and the surrounding area.

The new Beacon Building will be the tallest building in Camden and part of the fourth largest transit hub in the state of New Jersey.

This is an exciting 25-story, 500,000-square-foot office development project which has the potential to change the landscape in Camden like no other!

This public-private investment, in combination with the Cooper University Health Care expansion, will not only transform the gateway into New Jersey but I expect will spark even more new development in the city's downtown.

As you can clearly see, there is a lot of exciting projects and great work taking place in Camden, but we are not finished ...stay tuned as there is more to come with even more positive announcements on the horizon.

When you work really hard at something ...you take a lot of pride in it. And we've worked hard to reduce crime, improve educational outcomes, and pave roads. All of you in this audience and every member of team Camden is proud of our city and we are proud of the positive things that have been accomplished so far.

So, it hurts me to the core when bad actors treat the city like it's their dumping ground. From contractors that illegally dump construction debris to landlords who place tenants' property onto our curbs, to people just throwing trash on the ground as they walk down the street ...some people just don't get it.

Some people don't put in the work, so they don't feel the pride that we do. That bothers me and it should bother you too. So, while I work with DPW, Code Enforcement, and our CCPD to hold

these people accountable. I'm simultaneously taking action to clean some of the City's most troubled sites and keep them clean.

I'm proud to announce my "Go Green" initiative. Through Go Green, the city is leveraging \$2 million in grant dollars to purchase equipment for our Department of Public Works and will bolster their ongoing efforts with contracted support.

The City recently went out to bid and Council will be awarding contracts to entities who will thoroughly and routinely clean lots across the City. This will allow our sanitation inspectors and their crews to focus on curbside trash and recycling collection and keeping our streets clean.

I'm grateful to Council for their support. Because of it, we'll reduce litter and illegal dumping, improve curbside collection, and still have resources to systematically attack any litter that makes its way to city streets.

I mentioned bad actors who simply don't care about our city. This includes those who prey upon our residents by providing sub-standard living conditions. These slumlords only care about their bottom line and growing their bank accounts.

We will not tolerate this disgraceful behavior! So, we are hitting them where it counts ...in their pockets. Our Code Enforcement Office and the municipal prosecutor are holding bad landlords accountable.

Recently, three individuals were issued fines which exceeded \$340,000 in addition to receiving court sentences of community service and even jail time!

This is part of a larger effort to improve the quality of life across Camden. My Administration remains committed to treating our Camden residents with respect and the dignity they all deserve.

I feel a good quality of life is one of those foundational elements and a key to success. It has been at the forefront of my strategy since I became mayor in 2021.

It all began with my Camden Strong Campaign. Now in the 6th year, Team Camden kicked off the 2026 Camden Strong neighborhood cleanups on Earth Day!

We have had over 6,500 volunteers participate over the past 5 years!

And we are realizing tangible results. We average 100-150 tons of trash per cleanup. That's over 1,300 tons of trash and debris removed per season.

And we're not just picking up trash and debris, we are engaging with the community and residents ...tackling everyday issues like ...abandoned cars, vacant houses, code issues, and other quality of life matters.

In fact, our next cleanup is taking place on June 10th at Farnham Park right here in the Parkside neighborhood! We hope you can make it and expect all our team Camden volunteers to participate!

As you can see, Camden is no longer a “City of Potential” ...it’s a “City of Progress”, and it’s a “City of Strength and Community” and it’s a “City For All”!

It’s my honor to serve as Camden’s Mayor during such an exciting time as we experience this impactful and tangible change.

You can see we are doing our part as elected officials and city government ...but we also need you!

Progress is defiantly a “We thing” ...government alone will not solve every challenge. The VIP of team Camden is you ...our non-profits, corporate partners, faith leadership, businesses and our residents. We all must work together for a common goal.

I cannot begin to express how blessed ...how grateful ...and how humbling it feels to have earned your trust to lead our great city ...our home ...Camden, New Jersey ...for another four years as your mayor!

I do not take this moment lightly. Not for one second.

It is hard for me to believe that just five years ago, I was selected by my councilmates to step in as mayor. And then, a short year later, you entrusted me to serve my first full term.

And now, once again, you have placed your faith in me to continue this journey with you.

I truly hope that during these past five years, I have made you proud ...not just of me ...but even more proud to call Camden home.

Because you see, running for office was never about me...

It has always been about serving you. It’s about continuing Camden’s upward momentum and making sure every single person in this city feels that there is no other place they would rather live.

Our work is connected ...the effort, improvements, and investments made along the Waterfront, or in Parkside, Fairview, Cramer Hill, North Camden, Morgan Village, Liberty Park, Whitman Park, Waterfront South, Centerville, Bergen Square, Lanning Square/Cooper Plaza, East Camden ...it’s all related.

Progress for one means progress for all!

Our waterfront and downtown (or our body) is only as strong as the “belly” which is our neighborhoods. The belly must be strong for the entire body to become strong.

Camden has been counted out more times than we can remember. But we always find a way to stand back up.

Our resilience, our pride, and our shared belief that has moved forward... it has risen... it has become stronger... and CAMDEN is without a doubt... the future of this region and our state.

Thank you!

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