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Responding to the Inquirer's Series on the Camden Economic Recovery:

The Inquirer's series on Camden's \$175 million recovery legislation offered a refreshing focus on accountability. However, characterizing officials' recent statement that over \$1 billion would be required to address Camden's woes as mere opinion misses the mark.

The editors responded that leadership, not money, was the solution. Camden deserves both, but pinning hope on a single person with inadequate funds creates impossible expectations— again.

Camden's 2008 budget was \$153 million. Over half the land is vacant, public, or tax-exempt. Subtract required payments to the school district and county, and the city collected only \$18 million despite increased collection rates. Add other municipal revenues, \$4.6 million in payments in lieu of taxes (the only source of recent revenue growth) and you still don't cover a quarter of the budget.

The remainder is "formula state aid" (paid to all municipalities) and "special state aid" which rose from \$11 million in 2001 to \$61 million in 2008. Increases are required to match salary and benefit growth. *The tax base would need to triple to eliminate special state aid.*

While not sufficient, private investment is necessary. As the most productive aspect of the recovery, retention and attraction of private investment and employment must expand.

Sincerely,

Stephen Singer
Executive Director, CamConnect