

CDI 2019 ADVANCED YEAR REPORT



STAR OF THE OUACHITA



WELCOME



UNIVERSITY OF
CENTRAL
ARKANSAS

CENTER FOR
COMMUNITY
& ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

WHAT IS THE CDI ADVANCED YEAR?

The Community Development Institute Central (CDI), established in 1987 at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, trains community and economic development professionals in Arkansas and surrounding states. The complete CDI experience is a three-year training program (with an optional fourth year of training), with one week of training per year. Participants are exposed to a comprehensive, applied approach to the field of community and economic development. CDI is coordinated by Assistant Vice President of Community and Workforce Development Amy Whitehead, Managing Director Shelby Fiegel, and Project Coordinator Moriah Bruner.

The CDI Advanced Year is an optional fourth year of training for CDI graduates. The Advanced Year was created to provide a unique opportunity for CDI graduates to apply their knowledge and skills to a real-life situation and to kick start a community and economic development process in one community in Arkansas. During the week of CDI, the Advanced Year participants conduct research on the selected community, visit the community for a driving tour, focus groups, and interviews with citizens and community leaders, and host a public presentation on their findings where they identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and priorities for the community moving forward.

Camden, Arkansas was selected as the CDI 2019 Advanced Year community.

To learn more about CDI visit www.uca.edu/cdi.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communities in Arkansas were invited to apply for the unique opportunity to become the CDI 2019 Advanced Year community, and Camden was selected. Camden has great assets and is doing many things very well. The unique attractions, vibrant downtown, three school districts, various community events, and robust defense industry are signs of visionary leadership in the community. It is also a mark of leadership to look to the future, engage your citizenry, and tap strategic resources that can help move your community forward.

The challenges and opportunities identified by community leaders in Camden and the surrounding area are shared by many other communities in our state and nation, and the community now has a unique opportunity to address these challenges and opportunities moving forward. Our goal is that this process will equip the community of Camden to become a model for the nation as it identifies and implements the priorities identified in this report to realize its full potential and desired future.

In the digital world we live in today, people check out communities online before visiting them, so the CDI 2019 Advanced Year team researched Camden online to gather insights about the community. When the team came together during the week of CDI, they went to Camden and interacted with citizens and community leaders, took a guided driving tour, and hosted a focus group session on key community and economic development interest areas. At the end of the week, the team presented their findings to the community during a public presentation, and finally pulled all of their insights and future recommendations together into this report.

This is not a comprehensive analysis of all economic sectors of Camden, but it does represent a fresh look at the community from several outsiders who brought community and economic development experience and expertise into this setting.

The CDI 2019 Advanced Year team found that the citizens, leaders, organizations, and businesses in Camden have much to be proud of. So the recommendations found in this report will build on the good work that the community is already doing.

We hope this report serves as a spark for future growth in Camden!

KEY PARTNERS

A special thanks to these key partners who made this initiative possible:

- UCA Center for Community and Economic Development
- Lorie Robertson of Chaffee Crossing (CDI Advanced Year Class Director)
- Amy Williams of the Cabot Chamber of Commerce (CDI Advanced Year Class Director)
- CDI Advanced Year 2019
- City of Camden
- Ouachita Partnership for Economic Development
- Camden Area Chamber of Commerce
- Community leaders in Camden and the surrounding area



CDI 2019 ADVANCED YEAR AND ASSIGNMENTS

The CDI 2019 Advanced Year began with a five-day, intensive workshop where a team of University of Central Arkansas Community Development Institute (CDI) graduates worked in Camden. The class was led by Lorie Robertson of the Fort Chaffee Redevelopment Authority and Amy Williams of the Cabot Chamber of Commerce. Technical assistance was provided by Emily Smith of the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (UAEX). Members of the team include:



Jonathan Dean,
Cleco Power LLC



Erin Holliday,
City of Hot Springs



Corey Parks,
Conway Area
Chamber of
Commerce



Dana Poindexter,
City of Bryant



Lorie Robertson,
Chaffee Crossing:
Class Director



Amy Williams,
Cabot Chamber of
Commerce
Class Director



Emily Smith,
UAEX
Technical Assistant

During the research phase of the CDI 2019 Advanced Year, the class explored the following roles: a family with young children looking to relocate, tourist, industrial prospect, retiree, and young entrepreneur looking to establish a small business.

ONLINE COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Young Entrepreneur

Pros:

- Cross promoting of all resources and trainings available
- Leadership Camden
- City officials contact information on website
- OPED – Opportunity Zones listed and flyover videos
- Available property online for residential and commercial
- Good information regarding parks, trails and community events
- Chamber membership and business license application available online

Cons:

- Downtown Camden Master Plan not online
- Real estate information is limited on leasing
- Need more networking and mentoring opportunities
- Create a process on how to get involved in the community

Industrial Prospect

Pros:

- Century 21 – some data on available land
- OPED (Team Camden) website has a site listed at the airport
- Population 11,000 with 5% unemployment rate (500 people)
- Government leadership is diverse
- Single building permit process is simple
- Two industrial organizations – CADC and CDIC
- Close proximity to two Industrial Parks
- OPED – strong social media and job postings
- Golden Triangle is linked to AEDC
- Two railroads (switching facility with warehouse), river port, and airport
- OPED Board voted to pursue the Competitive Communities initiative at AEDC
- ARSOUTH.COM – great job on mapping

Cons:

- No listings on LoopNet
- No information on city site for rezoning
- City boundaries need to be tightened up
- Could not find GIS on city website
- Building permit needs to be digital
- No links to CADC or CIDC
- Heavy text on OPED (Team Camden) website
- No links to AEDC or Entergy
- OPED tax not renewed and no plan
- Current tax rate is 11.25%

- 65% of households have computers
- Only 54.2% of households have access to Broadband
- Golden Triangle needs to update website
- Revamp citizens Police Academy to reconnect to community
- Available sites not on city website - what about the certified site?

Family with Young Children Looking to Relocate

Pros:

- Website – active and vibrant
- Appearance of united city and business relationship
- Data shows an increase in number of families with children
- Three school districts: Camden Fairview, Camden Harmony Grove, and Victory
- Opportunity to expand real estate market
- Section 8 housing
- Elementary schools are beating odds by high growth in ACT Aspire
- First Friday Market
- Movie on the River event
- Available jobs with livable wage
- Simplify website and feature ACT Aspire success
- Partnership with Lockheed Martin, school district, STEM, women and minorities

Cons:

- Need more comments and reviews on online profiles
- Negative social media reviews on public spaces
- Pediatric Clinic (limited to GP's)
- School websites lack luster (form and data driven vs. personable)
- Separate non-active social media for schools
- Eldorado offers the El Dorado Promise - Camden does not have a similar program
- Real estate market cannot cover growth of workforce
- New employees typically do not live full time in Camden and return to other communities they call home on the weekends
- Wages are leaving the market
- Higher end housing needs in Harmony Grove
- Need more updated and move in ready residences for all price ranges

Tourist

Pros:

- Good website for Ouachita Historical Society
- Multiple historic sites in area
- Daffodil Festival
- First Friday Market

- The city is clean
- Multi-use trails
- Use of solar power
- Great downtown area with unique amenities and art
- Splash pad and Olympic sized pool
- Access to hotels with good reviews and ratings

Cons:

- Sites repetitive – too much information, need to condense down to 3 clicks
- High crime rate
- Public safety unknowns
- Poverty rate
- Need more amenities for families



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK AND TRENDS

During focus groups and interviews with Camden citizens, the CDI Advanced Year collected citizen feedback and identified key trends. The feedback included the following brightspots, challenges, and opportunities in each of these community and economic development sectors:

Physical Environment

Brightspots:

- Volunteer clean-up day
- Upgrades to water and sewer
- Infrastructure
- Progressive energy production (solar)
- First Friday Markets
- Walking trails (the Trace)
- Bike trails
- Ouachita River
- B and M Painting (provide jobs to those who have re-entered the workforce after incarceration)
- Only Olympic size pool in south Arkansas
- Lafayette school (9.2 acres – Arkansas Historic register)
- 500-mile Civil War trail
- Riverfront parks
- Woodfield Trucking
- Port of Camden
- Camden Airport
- Washington Historic District
- Leadership Camden
- Sewer Capacity 3.5 MGD
- Highways
- Hospital upgrades
- Positive living environment
- Workforce
- Family/church oriented
- Education
- Coleman Stadium
- Two electric providers (Entergy and Ouachita)

Challenges:

- Workforce housing
- Sandy Beach Flooding
- Vacant and Blighted Property
- City Streets
- Retail Shopping
- Dining options
- Expanding industry in Camden
- Affordable housing
- Talent attraction
- Lack of public transportation
- Website and marketing issues
- Internet and broadband access
- Redefine downtown
- Larger signage to welcome people to Camden
- Attracting and retaining Millennials

Opportunities:

- Utilize SAU Tech
- Youth recreation
- Job opportunities
- Communicate with residents on vision for Camden
- Developable land
- Night life (entertainment)
- Improving streets and sidewalks
- Improve housing
- Work to develop a plan for water and sewer

Education

Brightspots:

- SAU, SAU Tech, South Arkansas (regional access)
- Project search and lead the way
- Department of Workforce Services
- SAU proximity to Highland Industrial Park
- Police and fire training
- Unified vision
- SWAPDD and workforce relationship
- Central Arkansas Development Council
- Employer/education partnerships
- Career Readiness Certificate and WAGE
- Healthcare access (Cath Lab and Mobile Unit)
- Adult education
- OPED (Team Camden)
- Tech infrastructure

Challenges:

- Uniting Camden's diverse population
- School Safety
- Teacher Support
- Employment access
- Talent retention
- Career Readiness Certificate and WAGE requirements vs. preferences
- Early childhood education
- Childcare
- Retaining teachers and talent
- After school programs
- Soft skills
- Single parent households
- Resource awareness

Opportunities:

- Limit barriers to employment and process
- Identify single parent employment opportunities
- Create a program similar to the El Dorado Promise
- Do asset mapping (create more public/private partnerships)

Recreation and Things-To-Do

Brightspots:

- Pool
- Bowling alley
- Parks and trails (the Trace)
- Planting a Seed Foundation
- Camp Ouachita
- First Friday Market
- Swimming lessons for kids
- Local restaurants
- Amphitheater
- Camden is a sportsman paradise (hunting and fishing)
- Splash pad
- Swimming pool
- Local, unique places to shop
- Historical places to visit

Challenges:

- Pool maintenance
- Park updates
- Programs for school aged kids (before and after school and summer)
- More recreational activities
- Funding
- Marketing for events

Opportunities:

- New amenities such as: skating rink, movie theater, community center, maker space, dog park, paintball/laser tag, or indoor aquatic center
- New equipment at Carnes and Clark Parks
- Live music
- Develop a Parks/Recreation Committee
- Create more festivals and events
- Capitalize on business partnerships and sponsorships

*Healthcare and Wellness***Brightspots:**

- County hospital and Cath Lab
- Visionary/forward thinking
- Anytime Fitness
- Local high school graduates going to medical school and coming back to Camden
- Community wellness
- Food pantry (The HUB)
- Community garden and Farmers Market
- Women's Crisis Center
- Cardinal Clinic
- Eye care centers
- Project Search
- Arkansas Rehab
- Color Run
- Hanna House
- Urgent care clinic
- Line dance class
- Tennis Club

Challenges:

- Recruiting physicians, nurses, and other clinical staff
- Health risks in the community such as: hypertension, diabetes, cancer, and obesity
- Too much fast food; need more healthy food options
- North end of town is a food desert
- Transportation to get healthy foods
- Homeless population and housing shelters
- Garden location
- Opioid challenges
- High youth pregnancy rate
- Childhood hunger
- Under-utilized fresh food
- Veterans
- Cost of drugs/healthcare
- There is no health/nutrition store

Opportunities:

- School garden
- New techniques to recruit healthcare staff (doctors, nurses, etc.)
- Delta Regional Authority programs
- UAMS
- Create a resource directory
- Create a program to provide food for kids after school
- Veteran transportation to healthcare
- Health Coalition
- Outdoor after school activities/wellness programs
- School initiatives surrounding community

Arts and Culture

Brightspots:

- Fairview Park Event Center
- Two art galleries
- Youth Holiday Market and summer camps
- Daffodil Festival
- Murals in downtown
- Arkansas Arts Center; November performance is free to the public
- High School Fine Arts Theatre
- River Amphitheater
- Faith community
- Poetry night
- Light pole adoption for art
- Chidester House
- Historical societies

Challenges:

- Funding for projects and creating more public art
- No city owned space for theatre performances

Opportunities:

- Create a Farm to Table event
- Develop a Walk of Fame
- Develop a “Where History Lives” campaign
- Civil Rights Museum
- Makers Space through county extension office
- Cemetery Tours
- Hospitality training
- Apply for CDBG funds
- Consistent signage
- Theatre group for symphony

Business and Industry

Brightspots:

- Location to water, highways, and the south central part of Arkansas
- Solar plant and expansion
- Strong and growing defense industry
- Timber
- Rail
- Warehouse space
- Oil industry
- SAU Tech/workforce services
- History of Camden
- OPED (strong relationship with AEDC)
- Industrial park expansions that create jobs
- Opportunity for small businesses
- Leadership Camden
- Local home-owned restaurants
- More outside residents investing in local businesses
- Specialty shops owned by local residents
- Start up businesses

Challenges:

- Workforce (qualified)
- New housing
- Perception of local schools
- Attitude climate from residents
- Generational poverty
- High local taxes
- Drug problems and drug related crime
- Tell our story to improve our resume
- Amenities/quality of life
- Expand and market the Trace
- Present diversified front to attract businesses/residents
- Simple process to start business

Opportunities:

- Expand the defense industry sector
- Timber abundance/no market
- Healthcare (hospital remodel)
- School system by identifying kids and their learning environment
- Partnership between defense and schools
- Attracting residents
- Advertising regionally
- Proximity to major cities/states
- Disposable income by young professionals
- Training for businesses

*Downtown Development***Brightspots:**

- Selection of quality specialty shops
- Variety of unique restaurants
- Camp Ouachita
- Proximity to the river
- First Friday Market
- Amphitheater
- Good bones
- Beautiful architecture

Challenges:

- Finding opportunities for restoration
- Creating more activities for youth
- No Main Street/Downtown/Business Owners association
- Vacant buildings being used as storage
- Amphitheater flooding
- Struggle to change mindsets of citizens and business owners
- Welcome package not updated
- No coordinator for events/activities

Opportunities:

- More regularly schedule events and activities
- More public art and murals
- Encourage development of vacant buildings/ create relationships with owners
- Mixed-use development
- Utilize the Amphitheater more
- Develop Entertainment District
- Recruit more locally owned businesses



CARDINAL SEEDS (GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES)

Build on your assets – plan **TOGETHER** to become a bright spot in the state of Arkansas! Consider the following Cardinal Seeds (things that are working well and continue to grow and flourish):

- Create entry signage to make visitors feel welcome
- Focus on building more robust parks/recreation amenities
- Expand the Trace
- Camden has a beautiful, thriving downtown; continue to support its development
- Support the Ouachita Regional Health Clinic and Hospital
- Generate support for the historical societies and market Camden’s historical assets
- Continue to grow and support the Daffodil Festival
- Continue to grow and support the First Friday Market
- Create opportunities to further unify the community
- Further develop community-school partnerships
- Grow Project SEARCH and Project Lead the Way
- ACT Workkeys (CRC) and WAGE programs
- Market Camden’s great location and infrastructure (telecommunications, water, highway, access to south and central Arkansas)
- Grow the defense industry and focus on clustering in and around that sector
- Industrial parks have opportunity for new businesses and expanding existing businesses
- Continue to utilize existing A&P funding for projects/events that citizens identify

TAKING FLIGHT (NEXT STEPS)

Consider the following next steps (projects/topics that, with attention and care, could grow into initiatives that result in large impact):

- Ignite and harness passion among citizens to create ONE Camden (#OneCamden campaign)
- Strengthen Camden’s relationship with local, regional, state, and federal stakeholders
- Continue to foster better relationships between different races and eliminate real and/or perceived challenges
- Improve internal and external communication
- Identify community strengths and assets
- Benchmark peer and aspirational communities
- Align education offerings to meet workforce needs (CRC and WAGE)
- Pursue additional employer involvement in community initiatives (education, public art, and infrastructure)
- Recruit residential developers to increase differentiated housing
- Encourage downtown merchants to stay open later
- Create and implement a tourism plan
- Seek additional childcare and after-school programming options
- Promote an employment culture that supports a flexible and transparent environment
- Partner with healthcare organizations to evaluate and improve community health and wellness
- Research additional grant funding opportunities (CDBG, Main Street, etc.)

LOOKING FORWARD

A special thanks to the following individuals for their leadership, cooperation, and hospitality in welcoming the CDI Advanced Year team to Camden:

- Mayor Julian Lott, City of Camden
- Amy Wright Perrin, City of Camden
- Rose Moore, City of Camden
- Travis Daniel, City of Camden
- James Lee Silliman, Ouachita Partnership for Economic Development
- Beth Osteen, Camden Chamber of Commerce

We appreciate the community leaders in Camden who came out and participated in the focus groups and public presentation. Your active participation and commitment is invaluable to the community development process.

Camden is a special community with unique assets and opportunities. You have a great foundation on which to build the future you desire for your children and grandchildren. The citizens of Camden are the most knowledgeable about your community, and are in the driver's seat moving forward. We hope this report offers some useful observations, recommendations, and quick wins that will be helpful to you on your journey.

Thanks to all who have been involved with this initiative so far - we look forward to seeing great things happen in Camden!



