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Meriden

City seeks input from neighborhoods on fate of blighted areas, brownfields

By George Moore

Record-Journalstaff

MERIDEN — As an offshoot to its effort to tackle blighted sites and brownfields, the city will hold five community meetings in May to hear residents' ideas about redevelopment and neighborhood improvement.

The meetings will be held in neighborhoods in the city's urban core, areas that are more likely to be affected by blight or contaminated industrial sites, known as brownfields.

Residents will be able to air their concerns about blight and any other issue affecting quality of life, said Economic Development Director Peggy Brennan. Topics, for instance, could include pedestrian accessibility or access to gardening opportunities.

"We're looking at brownfields that might be in various neighborhoods, and also blighted structures," Brennan said, "and also we want to create a neighborhood that is healthy in a lot of other ways." Four of the five meetings focus on residential neighborhoods — Dutch Hill, Action 13, City Park and Lewis Avenue. Another meeting will focus on the downtown business area.

The city will conduct the meetings as part of a \$200,000 federal Environmental Protection Agency grant to address blight and brownfields. About \$35,000 of that grant pays for a city contract with Vita Nuova, an urban planning firm from Sandy Hook that will identify and map contaminated sites in the city. The firm will also run the community meetings.

In doling out brownfield money, the EPA wants to know that municipalities are working closely with neighborhoods to find solutions, Brennan said. The city, for instance, scheduled neighborhood meetings in order to address Factory H, a dilapidated property on Butler Street that the city now plans to demolish. The EPA also gave money toward that work.

The city is working closely with neighborhood associations to get the word out about the meetings.

"We're working with the neighborhood associations and the chairmen of each area," said Economic Development Assistant Trudy Magno-lia, who is overseeing outreach for the meetings.

Magnolia spoke to the Council of Neighborhoods a couple of weeks ago about the meetings and has been circulating fliers. City Park Neighborhood Association Chairwoman Ethel McQuiller said residents in her area will likely talk about the need to increase home ownership there.

Information gathered at the meetings could help direct future initiatives geared toward neighborhood revitalization or redevelopment, Brennan said.

gmoore@record-journal.com (203) 317-2275



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