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Neighborhood meeting airs ideas to improve city's community life

By George Moore

Record-Journalstaff

MERIDEN — Residents said they would like to see improved bulky-waste removal and fewer absentee landlords at the first of five community meetings on neighborhood revitalization.

The meeting, held at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church Learning Center, brought in only seven residents. The city is having consultant Vita Nuova conduct the meetings as part of a larger Environmental Protection Agency grant focused on blight and “brownfield” remediation. Residents were encouraged to talk about any issues affecting the health of the community.

Colleen Cyr complained that the city Health Department does not have a glucometer, which diabetics use to measure blood glucose levels. Having a glucometer at the Health Department, which conducts several types of health screenings, would be especially important to Meriden's black and Latino populations, which are at higher risk for diabetes, she said.

Cyr also said the city should support community gardening. The Beat the Street Community Center's community garden at the Hub, she said, had to be discontinued a few years ago because of problems accessing water.

“We just have to find someone to pay for the water,” she said.

Elizabeth Day Summers said absentee landlords are a big problem in the inner city area. Absentee landlords “are not visible” and are not held accountable for bad practices, she said. Cheryl Fitzgerald agreed, stating that many absentee landlords are not careful about whom they rent to, allowing drug dealers to come into neighborhoods.

They also said many low-income residents have no way to dispose of bulky items, especially after the city discontinued bulky waste pickup. The situation, they said, can lead to illegal dumping and unsightly piles of refuse.

City Councilor Hilda Santiago responded that a free bulky waste disposal day, on which anyone can dispose of items free of charge at the transfer station on Evansville Avenue, is set for May 15.

Council of Neighborhoods President David Swedock said the city should take steps to reduce density in some neighborhoods that have three- and four-family homes.

David James, a resident, said the city should reduce commercial waste deposited in local rivers.

At the start of the meeting, representatives from Vita Nuova, which is working with the city on urban renewal, spoke about issues they say hurt quality of life, such as pollution and poor access to public transportation.

They also touted green initiatives as a way to improve community health. Vita Nuova Sustainability Coordinator Lauren Thomas said local food production improves the nutrition of a community while it

also "creates local wealth."

Regina Winters, architect and planner for Vita Nuova, said the information from the meetings will be compiled and will aid future city planning and investment. She added that Vita Nuova is also planning a large city-wide meeting on community revitalization.

Each of the meetings is geared to a specific neighborhood, though anyone can attend. Tuesday's was focused on the Lewis Avenue neighborhood. The rest will be held as follows: Downtown business district, May 13, Greater Meriden Chamber of Commerce, 3 Colony St., suite 301, 5:30 p.m.; Dutch Hill, May 19, Miller Memorial Community, 360 Broad St., 6:30 p.m.; Action 13, May 20, Immanuel Lutheran Church, 164 Hanover St., 6:30 p.m.; City Park, May 24, Mount Hebron Baptist Church, 84 Franklin St., 6:30 p.m.

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Regina Winters, architect and planner with the consulting firm Vita Nuova, speaks to Meriden residents during a neighborhood meeting on community revitalization at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church on Tuesday.



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