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City panel targets urban environment

By Megan DeMarco
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Trenton residents ranked abandoned buildings, litter and open space the top three most pressing environmental issues facing Trenton on Sunday.

Attendees at Prioritizing for Action, a community meeting hosted by Trenton Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE), voted on eleven environmental issues facing Trenton, distributing voting chips among the issues they felt most need attention.

Trenton CARE is funded by an Environmental Protection Agency grant, and is the grass-roots element of the Trenton Green Initiative. Trenton CARE is also partnered with Isles Inc.

At a series of public meetings in the fall, the CARE team surveyed the public about the most concerning environmental health issues, and developed issue briefs for the eleven issues raised the most. In addition to abandoned buildings, litter and open space, other issues were air pollution, asthma, brownfields, flooding,

infrastructure, lead, pests and water pollution.

"There's a tremendous amount of interest in environmental issues in Trenton," said Liz Johnson, Isles' chief operating officer.

The results of Sunday's meeting will help the CARE team come up with an action plan for its next CARE, due in March. The grant would be for a maximum of \$300,000.

According to Julia Taylor, the Isles director of energy education, planning and research who led the discussion of abandoned buildings, there are 1,719 known abandoned buildings in Trenton, but the actual number is probably larger.

Abandoned buildings are related to crime and have a direct impact on property values, she said.

Dion Clark, a city resident who said he is passionate about abandoned buildings, mentioned abandoned properties on Walnut Avenue.

"It started years ago," he said. "If the city would just maintain them ... then you'd have more people wanting to

buy the homes."

Because abandoned buildings was the issue most people voted for, the CARE level two grant application will most likely focus on an action plan to combat the issue.

CARE level two grants are highly competitive. Last year, only nine applications were accepted out of more than 200.

Even if they do not receive the grant, though, officials on Sunday said they will continue their work to better Trenton's environment.

"The most important part is that you're all here talking to each other," Johnson said. "We can definitely do a lot whether we get a grant or not."

Doug Hughes, a member of the CARE team, encouraged participants to stay involved.

"We can't afford to walk away from these issues because these issues are compounding every day," he said. "We have to educate our folks ... We have to come up with solutions that are ongoing."

For more information, go to trentoncare.com.