

Trenton restoration campaign has high hopes for city's future



Trenton Neighborhood Restoration Campaign interns Eljayy Holder, Liz Krauser and Crystal work with project manager Iana Dikidjieva on Ellsworth Avenue in Trenton on Tuesday, June 17, 2014. The grant funded project organized by Isles Inc. will be the first survey of each property in the city in many years and the data will be provided to the city government to use in economic development and public safety. In their first week going block to block, interns from Rutgers and volunteers surveyed 3,294 properties and identified over 450 as vacant. The teams conduct the surveys on smart phones where the data is uploaded multiple times a day. Martin Griff / The Times of Trenton

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TRENTON — The team of orange-vested volunteers going door-to-door down every block in the city has completed its survey, pinpointing the vacant or abandoned properties and lots that appear in every neighborhood in Trenton.

The Trenton Neighborhood Restoration Campaign, funded through local nonprofit Isles Inc., found in preliminary results that about 1-in-5 buildings in the city are either vacant or abandoned — a number lower than the team had originally expected to see.

“It is still high,” said Iana Dikidjieva, the project manager. “But it is not as frightening as we thought.”

On the map that the team has been using during the project, the vacant lots are colored red while a bright blue denotes those occupied.

"Of course there are neighborhoods where you just see red, red, red, red, red," Dikidjieva said, zooming in on the color-blocked map of the Trenton on her laptop. But there are large swaths of blue in the city's downtown where the state offices sit and in wealthier neighborhoods like Hilltonia.

The collected data will be compiled and made public.

"When the information is public, people become more aware and start taking care of the properties," Dikidjieva said.

The project was made possible thanks to the generous outreach of the community, who housed the team in various headquarters and neighbors who came out to collect data, Dikidjieva said.

It has been a learning experience, too, for the Rutgers students who were the core team collecting data each day.

Jacqui Abeltin, a graduate student and intern, said she will use this experience to help her in her thesis. Crystal Vega, a Rutgers undergrad, said her perception of Trenton has changed.

"(Trenton) has tons of pretty parts and everyone that we bumped into was nice," said Vega.

The information collected during the project is expected to be published in about a month.

http://blog.nj.com/centraljersey_impact/print.html?entry=/2014/07/trenton_restoration_campaign_has_high_hopes_for_citys_future.html

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