

Courier News

Community leadership institute targets abandoned and problem properties

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TRENTON — Representatives from Plainfield joined leaders from 11 other New Jersey cities at a two-day seminar in Trenton last week to explore best practices for tackling vacant property challenges and restoring neighborhoods.

The Summer Institute for Community Leadership is part of an engagement between Plainfield, the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey, New Jersey Community Capital, the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association, local community development corporations and the national Center for Community Progress. The two-day seminar looked at new tools for keeping private properties up to code, taking control of derelict properties, planning reuse strategies, and exploring changes in local and state laws that impede community control of problem properties.

“It is important to us to have safe, healthy neighborhoods for our residents and our workforce, and we have been taking steps to address the problem of vacant and abandoned properties,” said the Rev. Jeremy Montgomery, executive director of the Greater Plainfield Habitat for Humanity, a participant at the institute. “We’re looking forward to exchanging ideas, best practices and workable solutions with our peers in other cities.”

Greater Plainfield Habitat for Humanity aims to transform neighborhoods block by block using a holistic approach, according to a news release from the organization. It is working to join residents, nonprofits, businesses, local government and the faith community to create and implement a shared vision of revitalization. Since its founding in 1989, acquiring and transforming blighted and vacant properties have allowed the group to build 33 homes in Plainfield.

Research has shown that abandoned properties foster crime, fire hazard and public health problems, while reducing the value of neighboring homes and businesses. For cities like Plainfield, they are a double problem, draining municipal resources with their demands on police, firefighting, trash removal and code enforcement, while reducing the local property taxes municipalities need to provide those services, according to the organization’s news release.

“Addressing the problem property issue is a big step towards helping Plainfield and our

neighborhoods be healthy and strong,” Montgomery said. “As a community leader in Plainfield, I am proud to be part of a process to identify ways to help our city increase their revenues and improve our neighborhoods. Just look at our successes East Sixth Street.”

Plainfield Habitat began construction on July 18 on its next home at 716 E. Sixth St. in Plainfield. That land was purchased for \$28,000, and the home will be the sixth on the street to have been built by Habitat.

“We’re honored to be working to turn these vacant spaces into vibrant, tax-paying spaces,” Montgomery said.

Municipalities across the state have begun to work together to find workable solutions to turn these problem properties and make them a part of thriving communities — as evidenced by the seminar Montgomery attended.

“I am excited that our city will be starting this process,” Montgomery said.