

PLANTING THE SEED

Urban gardens may help fill lots

By Tarryl Jackson

tjackson@citpat.com — 768-4941

Urban gardening can do more than provide fresh produce and help neighbors get to know each other, experts say.

It can also help revitalize the area's economy by turning foreclosed properties and vacant lots into usable and profitable space.

"Urban gardening is so much more than just growing food in the ground," Kate Nault, an urban agriculture consultant from Lansing, told about 25 local officials and community members Monday.

"It requires communities to be creative."

The local Community Foreclosure Coalition hosted the meeting at the Community Action Agency, 1214 Greenwood Ave., to talk about making urban gardening work for the Jackson community and economy.

The Community Action Agency launched the Community Foreclosure Coalition in July to respond to the crisis in Jackson, Hillsdale and Lenawee counties. The goal is to offer a network of support for local residents who have lost their homes or are on the verge of foreclosure.

One of the coalition's goals is to reinvest in foreclosed properties, and urban gardening goes hand-in-hand with that idea, said Director Neeta Delaney.

Many cities have used community gardening as a way to promote self-reliance, improve curb appeal and reduce blight.

"Seeing it as an entrepreneurial and economic activity is a relatively new idea," Nault said.

"There's not one-size-fits-all approach to urban agriculture."

Jane Bush, business development

JACKSON CITIZEN PATRIOT
TUESDAY, MAY 11, 2010

Gardens may fill city lots

Continued from A1

specialist for the Ann Arbor-based Food System Economic Partnership, said urban gardening helps raise property values and makes people feel good about living in their neighborhoods.

One obstacle is getting local residents to buy into the idea of community gardening.

"We need more forums, we need more outreach," said Jon Hart, a community organizer for the Community Action Agency. "It's going to be a challenge, and it's going to be up to education."

Jackson officials are promoting urban gardening, hoping to transform dozens of vacant lots into flower and vegetable fields.

The city has about 80 vacant lots that officials consider appropriate for farming or gardening. So far, one group is moving forward to cultivate a city lot on Franklin Street.

Volunteers and residents are already cultivating gardens at the Barham Neighborhood Resource Center, 711 S. Mechanic St., and near the City of Zion Church under the Partnership Park Neighborhood Association.

"It's going to take a lot of partnership to make this successful and sustainable," Jackson County Treasurer Karen Coffman said about boosting urban gardening in the area.

"We're definitely at the table."