

Workshop teaches green space preservation

'To make sure your neighborhood urban oasis is always there'

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Wyman Park residents plant a community garden in a grassy triangle at 33rd Street and Remington Avenue. The plot was recently restored by the city, more than three years being torn down because of a federally-mandated sewer project. (By Wilimina Sydnor / July 19, 2011)

About three years ago, Wilmina Sydnor and other residents reluctantly tore up their well-tended community garden, on a grassy triangle at 33rd Street and Remington Avenue, and watched Baltimore City turn the open space into an 80-foot pit as part of a federally mandated sewer project.

Now, the Stony Run Interceptor is almost done and the city, true to its word, has filled in the pit, even planting an oak to replace the tree crews ripped out for the project.

The gardeners are back in business and recently replanted the garden in Wyman Park, Sydnor said.

"We have finally gotten it back," she said.

Open space is prized in north Baltimore and around the city — which is why Sydnor attended a workshop July 16 called "How to Preserve Your Neighborhood's Green Space," which was held at the Episcopal Cathedral of the Incarnation on West University Parkway.

Presented by Baltimore Green Space, the Community Law Center and the Greater Homewood Community Corp., the workshop offered advice ranging from how to get grants to how to legally guard gardens from developers, drug dealers and trespassers.

Residents attended from Hoes Heights, Waverly, Evesham Park and Reservoir Hill, among other neighborhoods.

Stephanie Seipp wanted to corral a community garden near the bus stop at York Road and Northern Parkway, in Lake Evesham.

"We really need some assistance in redesigning it, because it has gotten a little out of hand," Seipp told Miriam Avins, of Waverly, workshop moderator and founder of the four-year-old Baltimore Green Space, a nonprofit land trust that partners with Baltimore communities to preserve their open spaces, gardens and pocket parks.

While some came for specific advice, others were there for general interest — "just to see if there was information we could get," said Sydnor, 66.

The purpose of preserving the spaces is "to make sure that your neighborhood urban oasis is always there," Avins told about 20 attendees.

According to the website <http://www.baltimoregreenspace.org>, Avins and her neighbors started the Homestead Harvest Community Garden as an organic, cooperative garden in 2004, on an abandoned lot that was a drug users' haven.

Two years later, Avins began researching how to preserve open spaces managed by neighborhoods. In 2007, she and three other community gardeners founded Baltimore Green Space, and she won an Open Society Institute Community Fellowship to develop the land trust.

Baltimore Green Space can provide liability insurance for open spaces, technical support, access to research papers, an overview of what it takes to start a green space, a list of funding sources, and access to the University of Maryland Extension Service and its Master Gardener program.

The Community Law Center, <http://www.communitylaw.org>, can help get the city's permission to create community gardens, clean up vacant lots and paint public murals, according to information provided at the workshop. Services of the Keswick-based law center are generally free after an application fee per issue.

The law center also offers self-help nuisance abatement, if, for example, a privately owned lot is overgrown with weeds, strewn with debris and rat-infested. If the owner doesn't abate the nuisance after proper legal notice, the community can legally enter the property and clean it up.