

Pocket of rejuvenation: Trash, weeds evicted for Cooper-Young's Seattle Street project

By Cassandra Kimberly

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Recently, nine commercial real estate brokers traded their suits and ties for string trimmers and scythes in a grassroots effort to help the [Cooper-Young Development Corp.](#) revive a nearby Midtown area.

Starting at 8:30 a.m., local professionals from [Colliers, Wilkinson & Snowden, Commercial Advisors](#) and [ProLogis](#) cleared weeds, trash and debris from six vacant lots along Seattle Street where the CYDC is trying to sell six new, affordable homes for low-income families.

"We're trying to do our part ... to keep the lots cleaned up so the Cooper-Young Development Corporation can sell these houses," said [Andy Cates](#), vice president at Colliers and member of CYDC.

In the spring, CYDC completed the development of nine homes on the residential street, which runs parallel to McLean in the [Rozelle-Annesdale](#) neighborhood west of [Cooper-Young](#).

Averaging 1,300 square feet, the three-bedroom homes were built by the Cooper-Young organization in an effort to eliminate blight and dilapidated, dangerous and substandard housing in Rozelle-Annesdale.

Since 2002, the organization has also been working with the [Memphis Police Department](#) to eliminate crime, drug activity and prostitution in the neighborhood.

The group has developed 12 homes on Seattle. Six of them are on the market, averaging \$80,000 each.

"We've seen how investments in places like Seattle Street can turn around a community and be a great monetary investment," said Sutton Mora Hayes, executive director of CYDC.

In the early 1990s, the southeastern quadrant of Cooper-Young looked a lot like Seattle does now, Hayes said.

Using federal funds dispersed through [Memphis' Department of Housing and](#)

[Community Development](#) and from the [Tennessee Housing Development Authority](#), CYDC, a [Community Housing Development Organization](#), has been able to rebuild the Cooper-Young neighborhood over the past 15 years.

Since 1994, CYDC has rehabbed or built almost 60 homes in Cooper-Young.

One group's efforts to clean or rebuild small parts of a community eventually spread to the rest of the neighborhood, increasing quality of life, said Jeb Fields with [Commercial Alliance](#).

"It starts with little pockets of rejuvenation, and it grows," he said.

Now that CYDC has started the revival of the Rozelle-Annesdale neighborhood, it is looking for potential homeowners to invest as well.

Qualified buyers can make no more than 80 percent of the area median family income.

"Being a nonprofit, it gives us the ability to work with people and gives us the time to make sure ...they can afford the house and make sure we are putting them in a safe product," said CYDC's Hayes.

However, the national housing crisis has put a kink in the sale of the homes, and CYDC has been left to foot the bill for longer than the group expected.

"We are a nonprofit, but we run more like a small business," Hayes said. "When we're not selling our product, we are not getting a lot of income in."

Hayes said she hopes support from the community, like the brokers' cleanup efforts, will generate interest in the homes and the neighborhood in the near future.

"Once people see what we have done and see the potential of the neighborhood, they get pretty jazzed up about it," she said. "The (cleanup) efforts are hopefully the first step in getting people more interested."

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