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Building blocks: Appleton launches registration initiative to strengthen neighborhoods

Oct. 9, 2013

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Four-year-old Eliana Grondahl of Little Chute, who attends school near by, stopped by the fountain in City Park with her father, Kevin, Tuesday, October 8, 2013 in Appleton, Wis. The city of Appleton's new neighborhood registration program hopes residents stake a claim to portions of city blocks to spur identity and interaction. Sharon Cekada/Post-Crescent Media / Sharon Cekada/Post-Crescent Media

Written by
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APPLETON — Andrew Dane sees considerable potential in his neighborhood near City Park. He envisions amenities like community gardens, new trails and an aesthetically attractive place for people to gather.

A new program offered by the city could make those things happen.

Appleton's neighborhood registration program is designed to allow residents to stake a claim to portions of city blocks to spur identity and interaction.

"The idea is to strengthen neighborhoods through local investment, revitalization and education," said Brad Schmidt, Appleton's principal planner in charge of the program.

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Breanna Everetts, a Lawrence University student, enjoys lunch in City Park Tuesday, October 8, 2013 in Appleton, Wis. The city of Appleton's new neighborhood registration program hopes residents stake a claim to portions of city blocks to spur identity and interaction. Sharon Cekada/Post-Crescent Media / Sharon Cekada/Post-Crescent Media

How to register

To register your neighborhood visit bit.ly/AppletonNeighborhoods or contact Brad Schmidt

[More](#)

So far, nine neighborhoods throughout the city have registered. Last week marked the first part of a seven-week academy aimed at fostering public interest in the effort.

Matt Rehbein, the city's economic development specialist, said the goal is to strengthen neighborhoods and the [bonds](#) between residents.

"We don't have specific projects in mind — it could be parks, gardens, benches or maybe it's signage or decorative lighting to mark that specific neighborhood," Rehbein said.

The program has \$5,000 specifically aimed at low- to moderate-income areas as designated by the U.S. Census Bureau. Roughly one-third of Appleton's neighborhoods meet that requirement with 80 percent or lower of the median household income.

A matter of 'placemaking'

Dane said the program is all about "placemaking," a process of [enhancing](#) public spaces and engaging neighbors. It goes beyond the already-established Neighborhood Watch.

"The Watch is really more of a problem-driven initiative and addresses safety," Dane said. "We want to address all facets of a [healthy](#) and positive neighborhood."

He said placemaking could include community gardens, trails or [simple](#) changes to road designs that help with pedestrian traffic.

And then there are the often-discussed trains that rumble through swaths of city blocks at night.

"We know it won't get fixed overnight, but there have to be things we can do to mitigate the noise impacts of the trains," Dane said.

"We seem to have a rotation of conductors and sometimes they really lay on the horn at night."

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