

Blighted area to become focus in Fellsmere

By LAMAUR STANCIL

FELLSMERE — The Rev. Ned Childress is frustrated when he sees rundown homes and playground equipment with graffiti in the Carter Hall James subdivision, Fellsmere's black neighborhood.

"I drive through black communities in Gifford, Wabasso and Vero Beach, and I see a lot of change," said Childress, pastor of the New Bethel AME Church on Lincoln Street in Fellsmere. "I come here and I see a forgotten part of the city. It's uncalled for, and it's unfair."

Childress said he's been trying to get leaders in the city and Indian River County to pay attention to the blight in Carter Hall James subdivision. Both the city and the county have promised they'll be a receptive audience at a community meeting planned there April 21.

"We want to be there to listen and have them tell us what the problems are," City Manager Jason Nunemaker said.

The county's Health Department wants to bring its PACE program, or Protocol for Assisting Community Excellence, to Fellsmere, director Julianne Price said.

The county initially was interested in helping out residents near Carter Hall James, who are on two short roads just north of city limits. However, with those residents being so close to Carter Hall James, Price said the plans expanded to including the subdivision and the city.

The subdivision has about 100 homes and has qualified in the past for state grant programs because it is a low-income area.

Through the PACE program, the state provides money for improvement projects based on reports generated from community meetings. Price cites successes for the program in Wabasso, where she said county officials had assumed the residents primarily wanted drainage improvements. Instead, the residents told them the lack of streetlights was the top concern.

"They didn't feel safe when it was dark," Price said.

Similarly, streetlights are one of the concerns in Carter Hall James. Childress said the community is pitch black after the lights go out at Grant Park. Childress said the city should pay closer attention to the neighborhood.

"There's no need to sugarcoat it," Childress said. "I've been a pastor here for four years going on five years, and all I've seen from the city is nothing."

But Childress has some expectations for residents in the neighborhood, too.

"There's no black people on the City Council, but that's on us," he said. "We need someone here to step up and be a voice. I would shoot for it if I lived here."

When: 11 a.m. April 21

Where: Grant Park in the Carter Hall James subdivision

What's happening: Residents will tell officials from Indian River County and the city of Fellsmere what their concerns are for the neighborhood

For more information: Contact Julianne Price at the county's Health Department, (772) 794