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Revitalization effort gets failing grade, survey says - The two church groups that fought for the \$175 million plan are demanding that \$24 million be set aside for use by residents.

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Author: Dwight Ott INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

A survey of Camden residents has given the city's multimillion-dollar revitalization effort failing grades for the first three years of its implementation.

The survey was conducted by two influential Camden church organizations that fought for the controversial legislation that aims to revitalize this distressed river city.

Camden Churches Organized for People (CCOP) as well as Concerned Black Clergy of Camden (CBC) yesterday rallied nearly 500 residents in East Camden. The two groups used the results of the report to hammer home a demand that \$24 million from the legislation be set aside for the discretion of residents.

State Treasurer John McCormac promised not only to work to make the money available, but also to make staff available in Trenton to help with applications for the money. He said such expertise was limited in Camden.

McCormac also promised to make more money available for home improvement, and to implement a one-stop job application center.

A large number of the complaints were about city services. McCormac said city officials would have to address those.

But those who could address those issues - Mayor Gwendolyn Faison and state-appointed Chief Operating Officer Melvin R. "Randy" Primas Jr. - did not attend the meeting.

"They said they disagreed with the format," said Msgr. Robert McDermott. "It's unfortunate."

Rosa Ramirez, a longtime CCOP activist, was more blunt: "Where is Mr. Primas . . . ? The message you are sending is that you do not care. All we wanted you to do was listen to the presentation and say you will work together with us."

Most of the \$175 million allotted for the five-year plan has already been spent, officials have said.

Some at last night's meeting said they want massive development projects replaced with smaller neighborhood efforts.

"We don't need to have home runs," said Michael Polk. "But some of these neighborhoods need to get a single or a double. . . . We're tired of seeing things going up downtown and nothing in the neighborhoods."

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According to 953 respondents polled, only 26 percent said they felt the revitalization effort was headed in the right direction. Sixty-eight percent were either not sure or felt that the recovery was on the "wrong track." Nonresidents, who made up the remainder of the survey results, were more optimistic.

Residents were also pessimistic about law enforcement efforts and economic development performance as well as public education strides. A fourth or more of the respondents in both categories said things had gotten worse.

"We look at this as a failing grade," said the Rev. Willie Anderson, in an interview before last night's session.

The survey is being released just before July 22 - this Friday - which will mark the third anniversary of the bill-signing ceremony that created the five-year recovery act. Both CCOP and CBC supported the act because of the state resources and new leadership that they hoped would improve conditions of children and families, their leaders said last night.

Both the CCOP and CBC have representatives on the powerful Economic Recovery Board responsible for distribution of funding under the recovery act.

"It's time to take stock of where we are at this important milestone," said Rosa Ramirez, the CCOP's representative on the Economic Recovery Board, "and to make any mid-course corrections that might be needed to make the most of this historic opportunity."

The survey and analysis was done by CCOP and CBC with the aid of **CamConnect**, a grassroots organization that does statistical analysis.

Contact staff writer Dwight Ott at 856-779-3844 or dott@phillynews.com.

Caption: PHOTO

SARAH J. GLOVER / Inquirer Staff Photographer The Rev. Willie Anderson (right) and the Rev. James C. Jones (center) lead the meeting on Camden's recovery plan. Some participants said they favored neighborhood efforts over massive projects.

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