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Spartanburg receives \$400K in EPA cleanup grants

Money will go toward restoring polluted properties

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The city of Spartanburg will be making use of two Environmental Protection Agency grants totaling \$400,000 as planners look toward future development and redevelopment.

The grants will fund the assessment of brownfields, defined by the EPA as "real property, the expansion, redevelopment or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant or contaminant." The local funds are part of \$1.6 million in brownfields grants awarded to South Carolina communities to help them revitalize "problem properties" that are either contaminated or have the stigma of being contaminated.

Brownfields could be former mill sites, gas stations or even dry cleaning businesses, explained Spartanburg Director of Economic Development Julie Franklin. The city will receive \$200,000 for petroleum assessment and \$200,000 for hazardous materials assessment.

"There is a need. That's why we received the grants," Franklin said. "EPA acknowledged that we have some challenges ... because we are an urban city with a lot of redevelopment opportunities. It's consistent with the character of an older city."

Franklin said the grant is a first of its kind for Spartanburg, and no specific areas have yet been

earmarked to receive the funds. The citywide grant is for assessment, so the first step will be to involve the community and inventory potential sites.

"The grant will allow us to get funding to identify those sites and to do some assessment on those sites to determine if there are any environmental issues and how they can be addressed," Franklin said.

The Mary Black Foundation was one of the local organizations backing the city through a letter of support in asking for the brownfields grant.

Philip Belcher, foundation president, said the assessment and cleanup of brownfields sites goes along with the foundation's mission of improving health and wellness in Spartanburg County.

"When there are environmentally troubled sites that can be cleaned up with a brownfield reclamation project, it opens the door for cities to be connected, for communities to be connected," Belcher said. "How the city develops and how the county develops is very important to how physically active people can be."

Angela Viney, director of sustainable communities at Upstate Forever, also wrote a letter of support to the EPA.

"It's almost like recycling. It's taking land that is a brownfield, maybe not all the time environmentally degraded, and recycling that urban land into something for the city," Viney said. "It's providing some economic growth within the city limits, it's reusing land, it's revitalizing an existing community. It's all those things that we promote."

Spartanburg will receive the grant money in late June.

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