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Spartanburg awarded EPA revitalization grants

Funds to help assess ex-industrial sites

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EPA regional administrator Russell Wright, left, presents Mayor Bill Barnet and the city of Spartanburg with a check for \$400,000 in brownfields grants at City Hall on Friday.

City of Spartanburg officials hope \$400,000 in Environmental Protection Agency brownfields grants will further economic development by identifying and revitalizing former industrial and commercial sites.

Russell Wright, acting deputy regional administrator for EPA Region 4, presented the funds to the city Friday to use for environmental assessments. "We will ask you to let this be a small beginning for a great ending in assessing and beautifying the great areas here within Spartanburg," he said.

Brownfields are sites where use and redevelopment are limited by potential contaminants. Julie Franklin, Spartanburg director of economic development, said some developers are afraid to touch sites that might suffer from environmental contamination.

"We're looking for sites that are blocked for redevelopment because of these real or perceived contamination issues," she said. "They're hindering the redevelopment, the reuse, of these properties. So what we're looking at is for this money to help us get past that so we can bring those properties back into more productive use for the community."

City officials will identify sites available for redevelopment to assess and determine whether that location has outstanding environmental issues. If not, the property can be developed. If contamination is present, the grant money can be used for cleanup planning, and applications for further grants can be made in the future.

Mayor Bill Barnet vowed to make the EPA proud of how Spartanburg uses the grant funds.

"I know that EPA and (the state Department of Health and Environmental Control) strike fear in the hearts of many, but I have learned ... that by honestly assessing problems and challenging those problems that we can work together to solve those problems to the benefit of our community," he said.

In the Spartanburg area, EPA funds previously helped clean up the old Arkwright Mill and the North Street dump, said ReGenesis founder and state Rep. Howard Mitchell.

The brownfields grants cannot be used for the Arkwright dump cleanup because that area has been designated as a Superfund site, Mitchell said.

Partners in the current cleanup efforts include the Mary Black Foundation, Upstate Forever and the Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce.

The EPA also awarded \$1.2 million in brownfields grants to other communities in South Carolina. Those were Aiken, Anderson and Richland counties and DHEC in Anderson.

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