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Hickory pushes to continue redevelopment of old properties

By Larry Clark

Hickory has completed its first round of assessing potentially contaminated property and is ready for another phase.

The program is an element in the city's goal to foster redevelopment of old business and industrial sites.

City Planning Director Brian Frazier told the City Council that two \$100,000 federal grants obtained in 2007 have been used to research and examine nine properties in Hickory.

The city is applying for another \$400,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency to continue the project with additional sites.

The EPA refers to potentially contaminated sites as Brownfields.

Phase I of an assessment is a historical review of a property to determine if it warrants further examination.

Phase II is checking a building, the ground and water for pollution.

Phase III is what Frazier called remediation, or removing the contaminants that can include petroleum, chemicals and other toxic, hazardous substances.

Here are the sites reviewed using the initial \$200,000 from the EPA. Nine were Phase I assessments, six were Phase II and two resulted redevelopment plans:

- Former St. Stephen's Elementary School at the corner of McDonald Parkway and Springs Road/16th Street, NE.
- Former Piedmont Wagon Manufacturing Co. on Main Avenue, NW, at 10th Street, NW.
- Former Hollar Hosiery, off Lenoir-Rhyne Boulevard on Highland Avenue, NE, near the new railroad bridge over Lenoir-Rhyne Boulevard.
- Former S&W Chemical (on First Avenue, SW, at U.S. 321.
- Former Hutto Convenience Store (corner of 29th Avenue, NW, and N.C. 127. That property is a now a new location for Verizon Wireless.
- Former Bumbarger Investments (on N.C. 127 North, at 14th Avenue, NE.
- Former Lyerly Mills on N.C. 127 at First Avenue, SE.

- Moretz Mills off Lenoir-Rhyne Boulevard Extension, behind King Hickory.
- Regal Manufacturing on the corner of Third Street, NE and 12th Avenue, NE.

“By conducting environmental assessments and redevelopment planning activities, the sites are in a significantly better position to remarket them for adaptive reuse,” Frazier said in an earlier statement.

“The Brownfield program helps redevelop vacant properties, clean-up neighborhoods, create jobs and increase the tax base.”

The process is a partnership between the city and the property owners. Assessment determines the steps necessary for the property to be restored for business purposes.

City Council member Sally Fox said, “This is such an exciting program. It puts us in a positive position for redevelopment and growth in areas that need it.”

The \$400,000 grant would be to continue the program from 2011 to 2014.

The grants are competitive, and Hickory’s proposal will be ranked by EPA based on community need, project description and feasibility of success, community engagement and partnerships, and project benefits, according to information from the city.

City officials said the next round of assessments, if the grant is approved, will be similar to the sequence just ended, with special emphasis on areas targeted for revitalization.

Grant approvals will be announced this spring.