

TODAY'S SUNBEAM

New tool to clean up city

Thursday, January 18, 2007

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SALEM The City of Salem received its official Brownfield Redevelopment Area designation from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Wednesday morning.

Members of city council, Salem City Industrial District BDA Steering comprised of local businessmen, and officials from the state Office of Brownfields Reuse gathered at the municipal building to sign the documents officially making the city a Brownfields Redevelopment Area. Salem Mayor Earl Gage lauded the event as a significant jump for the city's progress.

"This is a tremendous step for the future of the City of Salem," he said before signing the bill with director of the Office of Brownfields Reuse Ken Kloo.

The city had applied to the state for the designation in March.

With the designation Salem now has 23 properties in the city, spanning over 230 acres, that are now known as brownfields.

"Brownfield properties are under-utilized, often abandoned industrial or commercial properties where, until recently, environmental contamination and or the stigma of suspected contamination has discouraged revitalization and or redevelopment," said Lawra Dodge, president of Excel Environmental.

Abandoned property on the rail line and waterfront, as well as property owned by Anchor Glass and the site of the former Sunoco Service Station on West Broadway are prime examples of brownfield sites within the City of Salem.

Dodge put together Salem's successful bid package that won the city its brownfield designation.

Salem now has access of up to \$5 million in grants from the NJDEP and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to be used for 100 percent of environmental investigation costs for brownfield properties within the BDA and up to 75 percent of the cleanup costs of brownfield properties within the BDA.

Finding the final 25 percent of cleanup costs will be the challenge the city's steering committee will face, as they team with the state and local government officials to receive the most out of the program.

"The BDA program offers many tools to assist communities in realizing their vision. The most innovative of these tools is the steering committee itself," Steering committee member and city Solicitor Dave Puma said. "Our job as steering committee members is to evaluate data which will be generated about our BDA and assist in prioritizing resources, generating ideas for remediation and reuse of the problem properties, and encourage cooperation of all interested parties."

The committee consists of 13 members, with members of the local government and private business sector working together to determine the best direction for the city to take with the program. Gary Shears of Anchor Glass, Hollis E. Irvine Jr. of Bermuda International Terminals, Michael T. Foglietta of National Docks, and Henry Barbera of Wire-Pro are all members of the steering committee who own or operate properties within the BDA.

These business owners and operators are joined by Barbara Wright, James Waddington, Puma, Louis C. Joyce, Jack Kugler, Robert Johnson, Chris Davenport, Elder Clayton Robinson, and Rev. Walter Kellum to

make up the Salem steering committee.

It was also announced Wednesday the steering committee's desire to name its first project. The committee announced it would first focus on the "gateway of Salem," namely the rusted tanks that greet drivers as they travel over the Veterans of Salem County Memorial Bridge into Salem from Pennsville Township.

"The gateway is our focus right now," Dodge said. "We're looking to get going with that project as soon as possible."

Kloo congratulated the steering committee and city for being so well informed on the process and for picking their first project, but he warned them that change does not happen instantly.

"The cleaning process can be slow, but don't be discouraged," he said. "A lot depends on your commitment to the project, and I can see that you all want a lot out of this."

Salem's BDA designation will last for approximately one year, and the city will be re-evaluated on Dec. 31, 2007 if it desires to apply for the designation again.

In addition to Salem City, Neptune Township in Monmouth County and Orange Township and West Orange Township in Essex County were designated Brownfield Redevelopment Areas.