

Jefferson County lands EPA brownfields grant

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JEFFERSON — Jefferson County has been awarded a \$200,000 grant by the United States Environmental Protection Agency to complete a brownfields assessment in the local community.

A brownfield is land once used for an industrial purpose that since has been abandoned. The land is sometimes contaminated, but once cleaned up, it can play host to new development.

In 2002, the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act was passed to help states and communities around the country cleanup and revitalize brownfields sites. Under this law, the EPA provides financial assistance to eligible applicants through competitive grant programs.

The Jefferson County Economic Development Consortium (JCEDC) applied for the grant on behalf of Jefferson County and its communities and will be working to complete the assessments.

The grant will allow Jefferson County to conduct five environmental site assessments, to create an inventory of potential brownfield sites in the area, and to conduct community outreach activities.

“Developing a countywide inventory of brownfield sites will place a magnifying glass on the environmental and economic issues which most impact the growth and sustained economic development of our region,” said Jefferson County Administrator Ben Wehmeier. “This investment in the county establishes a baseline for future investments in brownfield remediation and will empower our communities and property owners to then help track improvement at these locations over time.”

JCEDC executive director Genevieve Borich agreed,

“Some of the most valuable buildings and sites within the county need extensive remediation so they may be put to better use; this grant empowers our community’s leaders to prioritize investment in key properties in our area,” she said.

JCEDC Board Chairperson and Watertown Mayor John David added, “Our county and communities will be strengthened by the knowledge we gain from this assessment. This is the beginning of comprehensive regional alignment to elevate the use of properties struggling from choices of the past.”