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Toxic site targeted for redevelopment

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By Fiona Williams
Staff Writer

SANTA FE SPRINGS -- Sleek new industrial buildings may one day spring up in place of the field of weeds that have grown at the Waste Disposal Superfund site for decades.

For the past several months, city consultants have been meeting with concerned community members to help develop a master redevelopment plan for the site on Los Nietos Road between Santa Fe Springs Road and Greenleaf Avenue. The effort is being funded by a \$100,000 federal Environmental Protection Agency grant to encourage reuse of former toxic waste sites.

Potential plans for the parcel show several large or mid-sized industrial buildings situated on the perimeter of the property, with a large area in the middle for truck loading and parking.

Area residents would like to see something go up at the site, which they consider an eyesore.

"I don't care what they do with it, as long as it looks halfway decent and that it has no long-term effects on people or short-term effects ... as long as they keep it safe," resident James Woodward said.

Resident Debbie Smiley said she and other community members asked that the plan divert future truck traffic from Greenleaf Avenue, which faces a large residential area. By the request of school officials, a large wall would be constructed to separate any development from St. Paul High School, which sits to the north off of Greenleaf Avenue.

"We didn't want to see any more traffic there," Smiley said. "Sitting in on the process has made a big difference. We've had a chance to have our say."

The unanswered question is: Who will pay for the redevelopment?

A group of 21 companies who contributed to the pollution are responsible for paying for the remediation of the site but not for redeveloping it, consultant Andy Lazzaretto said.

Mayer Rep. Tom Bon Kernes expressed hesitancy to commit city dollars to



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MAYOR FLO TENNOR KERNES expressed hesitancy to commit city dollars to the project at a recent City Council meeting. The project is potentially very expensive, while there are many less problematic parcels ripe for redevelopment dollars in the city, he said.

"I don't want the city to stick it's neck out," Kernes said.

"The Community Development Commission can't afford to get involved in this," Mayor Louie Gonzalez added.

The 43-acre Waste Disposal site was declared a federal Superfund site in 1987, after the city and the EPA conducted tests and found high levels of benzene, DDT and lead among other toxic materials. At the center of the waste site is a 42-million gallon underground concrete reservoir that was originally used to store crude petroleum. After the container was decommissioned in the late 1920s, it was used to dispose of various waste products -- including paint, industrial sludge and construction debris.

The EPA is proposing to put a protective cap over the wastes at the site, while venting gases contained in the soil and treating them if necessary. This area cannot be built on but can be used for parking, as is reflected in the architectural plans.

But for remediation and development to go ahead, some or all of the businesses that currently operate on the periphery of the site would have to be relocated, according to Lazzaretto.

The responsible parties have agreed to cover the costs of appraising all the properties and estimating the cost of relocating them. How expensive this turns out to be may make or break the redevelopment plans, Lazzaretto said.

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