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EPA Grants \$1 Million to Green Atlanta BeltLine Brownfields

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ATLANTA, Georgia, June 2, 2009 (ENS) - The City of Atlanta today received a \$1 million grant to clean up brownfields sites along the Atlanta BeltLine and other redevelopment corridors.

At a ceremony at Historic Fourth Ward Park in Atlanta, U.S. EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson announced the grant, saying the funds will be used to clean up 10 local sites contaminated by hazardous chemicals or pollutants, which will be restored to help fuel the local economy. This move will help spur redevelopment, secure jobs and create greenspace.

The Beltline is a planned 22-mile corridor of transit, parks and trails that loops around Atlanta's core along old rail lines. Although there are an estimated 1,100 acres of brownfields within the 6,500 acre BeltLine, supporters hope the project will encourage more affordable housing, parks and walking trails in neighborhoods near the loop over the next 20 years.

"Rehabilitating these sites will protect human health and the environment and create new economic possibilities for these communities," said Jackson. "EPA is providing solutions in these challenging economic times, and making clear that – in Atlanta or anywhere else in the country – we don't have to choose between a green economy and a green environment."

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Part of the BeltLine behind Piedmont Park (Photo by Daniel Mayer)

Of the estimated 950 brownfield properties within Atlanta as a whole, about 140 are located along the BeltLine. The city is focusing on remediating these BeltLine sites as well as other redevelopment corridors.

"Brownfields initiatives demonstrate how environmental protection and economic development work hand-in-hand," said Stan Meiburg, acting EPA regional administrator in Atlanta. "This funding will help local efforts in transforming underutilized properties into community assets while providing a boost for the economy through the creation of jobs."

Atlanta was selected to receive a \$1 million EPA Revolving Loan Fund grant, with \$550,000 allocated for sites contaminated by hazardous substances and the remaining \$450,000 allocated for sites contaminated with petroleum.

The grant will be used to capitalize a revolving loan fund from which the City of Atlanta will provide loans and subgrants to support cleanup activities. Grant funds also will be used to manage the revolving loan fund, oversee cleanups, and support community outreach activities.

City officials hope the Beltline will create a rebirth in Atlanta by attracting dense, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods of homes, businesses and entertainment within walking distance from mass transit stops.

A health impact assessment of the BeltLine found that brownfields redevelopment can help reduce urban sprawl and lead to healthier

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communities by creating more greenspace and walkable areas.

Cleanups funded through the Revolving Loan Fund grant will reduce potential human exposure to contaminants and help spur redevelopment of idle properties into economically productive uses and greenspace.

Al Bartell, a community stakeholder with the BeltLine Network, says, "The BeltLine is a state of the art approach to connecting 45 critical, core neighborhoods in the city of Atlanta. Right now, Atlanta is fragmented along physical, economic, and social boundaries. The BeltLine is a community-oriented approach to connecting the city's neighborhoods on every level."

"Atlanta is a very fragmented city, compared to others," says Kwabena Nkromo chairs NPU-T, or Neighborhood Planning Unit T. "There are some obvious divisions, socially, economically, and physically. These are hurting Atlanta. By connecting people with transportation, with community involvement, and with economic opportunity, the BeltLine will help to connect people on every level."

The BeltLine plan increases the city's greenspace, which would connect 40 of Atlanta's parks, add over 1,200 acres of new greenspace and improve about 700 acres of existing greenspace.

The greenspace promised by the BeltLine can be used to grow food within the city, says Nkromo. "I believe that Atlanta needs to have its own agriculture, and the BeltLine is a perfect opportunity. Growing food in the city is more sustainable than trucking it in from all over the country, all over the world. And, by having vegetable gardens on BeltLine greenspaces, we can encourage urban citizens to supplement their diet with healthier foods."

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