

New library will be built on former Woolfolk site

By Audrey Y. Williams
The Macon Telegraph

FORT VALLEY — A new Thomas Public Library will be built on a site that once contained dangerously high levels of arsenic if federal environmental officials approve.

The move is part of a redevelopment plan designed to make the now-abandoned, fenced-in property near the old Woolfolk Chemical Works plant "more useful to the city as a whole," said Gilda Stanbery-Cotney, di-

rector of Peach Public Libraries.

Stanbery-Cotney — with help from the library board, the Chamber of Commerce and the Redevelopment Authority — is spearheading the effort. Redevelopment is slated for about three acres of land, roughly bordered by Troutman and Oak streets and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive.

The library is the hub of the plan, which includes turning the Troutman-Chapel house into of-

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Library part of redevelopment plan for Fort Valley site

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rice space and another house into an Adult Reading Literacy and Learning Center.

State funding will cover 65 percent of the cost of the library, estimated at \$2.2 million, Stanbery-Cotney said. Local contributions — including \$475,000 from Canadyne-Georgia Corp., which is responsible for the cleanup of the Woolfolk site — will cover the remaining cost. Canadyne-Georgia bought out about a dozen homes that once stood on the vacant lot. That land will be donated for the project.

However, an actual move-in date is still far off. The library can't get ownership of the property until the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issues a final decision on how the land should be cleaned up, Stanbery-Cotney said. Canadyne-Georgia will also have to shoulder any liability associated with the project.

Redevelopment usually isn't a part of the federal government's cleanup plan — typically in such operations contaminated sites would be cleaned up and abandoned, said Tim Woolheater of the EPA. A federal initiative to help cities who want to redevelop contaminated land is still in the pilot phase.

"This is still pretty new. It's never been done before in the Southeast," said Woolheater, a remedial project manager for the EPA's South Superfund Branch.

Canadyne-Georgia suggested redevelopment in late 1993, but proposals by the company included "projects the city couldn't really support because they didn't necessarily benefit the community," said City Councilman Jimmy Barnes.

City officials decided against redevelopment at least three times in the summer of 1994 but in a Sept. 29 council meeting, Barnes made a motion, that was approved by the council, to support the current plan.

"It was a last-ditch effort. We couldn't see the other things as feasible that Canadyne was offering," Barnes

said. "Instead of getting into a turmoil over it, we turned (the project) over to the library board, the chamber and the Redevelopment Authority. This was a local initiative."

Woolheater said if Stanbery-Cotney's proposal hadn't been "so solid, it probably wouldn't have flown."

The EPA "is not really responsible" for redevelopment, but the agency supports it as long as it's protective of human health and environment, Woolheater said. The library will sit on an asphalt cap that will "basically eliminate the exposure," he said.

But the Rev. Morris Hillsman, president of the Woolfolk Citizens Response Group, said he believes the proposal was "pushed through" by Canadyne-Georgia and EPA officials and it doesn't reflect the wishes of people who live in the neighborhood bordering the redevelopment site.

"We were never against redevelopment. We just would feel better if the land was cleaned up to residential standards and then they put a library there," Hillsman said. Most of the group's members live near the redevelopment site, he said.

Hillsman said group members already have unanswered questions about the Woolfolk site and the EPA can't convince them that paving over the redevelopment site won't be harmful in the future.

The land earmarked for the library once had arsenic levels as high as 180 parts per million, but has since been reduced to levels between 30 and 100 ppm, Woolheater said. For residential development to take place, all the land would have to be cleaned to meet EPA's residential standards of 30 ppm.

Canadyne-Georgia's contribution to the redevelopment project comes from the money it saved by cleaning up the arsenic tainted site to meet commercial standards, rather than residential, said Sissy Jones, spokeswoman for the company.

Jones said the current redevelopment plan is "more than satisfactory and really, what Canadyne wanted is what the community wanted."