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EPA opening ReVenture tracts for business use

The 667-acre site for ReVenture Park is no longer listed as a Superfund site, clearing the way for new businesses to move in at Forsite Development's eco-industrial park along the Catawba River.

But the biomass plant once planned at the heart of the project is unlikely to be one of them. Negotiations with Duke Energy Carolinas to buy power from the proposed plant have stalled. And it is unclear if they will resume.

Forsite President Tom McKittrick says the Environmental Protection Agency's decision to remove the site from its Superfund National Priorities List does not mean the remediation and clean-up work will cease. Rather, it is intensifying, he says.

But the EPA decision means new businesses that had no role in the contamination of the site can move in under a brownfields agreement that protects them from liability.

"No new projects could go out there until we accomplished this step," McKittrick says. "I think you will see a lot more activity at the site in this coming year with this milestone behind us."

He acknowledges negotiations for the development of a 10-megawatt biomass-fired electrical plant on the site are in limbo. But things are moving forward with plans for a solar farm. Several developers are working on proposals for part of the land, he says.

McKittrick says he also is in negotiations with a biofuel company, as well as a recycling company and another biomass developer that is considering a power plant using an anaerobic digestion technology to produce fuel for electricity. No contracts have been signed, he says.

In addition, discussions with Charlotte and Mecklenburg County about locating a wastewater plant in the park continue, he says.

McKittrick says Forsite is also negotiating to increase the size of the park, adding land along the Gaston-Mecklenburg border adjacent to the site.

The stalled talks with Duke have removed what had once been the most visible project in the development.

The biomass plant seemed on a clear path for construction in the summer of 2010, when the N.C. General Assembly approved legislation to allow power produced by the plant to count triple toward the energy credits Duke would need to meet state renewable-energy requirements.

But local opposition to the plant, rising regulatory hurdles for biomass and a decision last year by the legislature to reduce the incentives it had OK'd for the project in 2010 have put it on the back burner, at least. And they may kill it altogether.

However, ReVenture's development will continue, McKittrick says. In announcing the EPA's decision this week, Franklin Hill, the agency's Superfund program director for this region, said, "The path to redevelopment has been established, and it will lead to a productive community asset" at the park.

McKittrick says he still hopes to replicate the project elsewhere so that contaminated industrial sites "can be recycled to breathe new life into communities by creating economic development that produces green jobs, cleaner energy, and alternative fuels."

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