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Springsteen demolition progressing

By Travis Jenkins

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Brick by brick, the remnants of the old Springsteen Mill are disappearing from the Chester landscape. The plan is for all but a few of the bricks to be gone by this summer.

For several weeks now, crews have been working at Springsteen, which has long been regarded as one of Chester's biggest eyesores.

"It seems like every day I drive by there and there is less debris than the day before," said Chester City Administrator Jeff Kerr.

The process of cleaning the Springsteen property has taken several years. Members of city council have long wanted to see the property cleaned up. At one point, the debris and rubble from the old mill was actually spilling over a fence onto the sidewalk. County Councilman Alex Oliphant told the council at one point that having such blight located at the city's gateway was deterring business and industry from considering Chester.

More than a year ago, a Phase I study determined that asbestos was present in the 100-plus year old structure.

Then the site had to be declared "slum or blight." The city also had to obtain ownership of the property from the Forfeited Land Commission before any work could be done.

The project got a boost when a \$500,000 grant from the federal Environmental Protection Agency was obtained to help pay for **demolition** and removal. The city and county are splitting a \$125,000 match on the grant, with much of that coming from in-kind services.

Finally, after all the appropriate paperwork was filed, the bids were requested and the NEO Corp. had the low bid.

Work actually began at the site in February and it hasn't taken long for people to notice the diminishing level of debris.

"I'm glad to see it gone," Councilwoman Linda Tinker said at city council last week.

Still, the tentative plans don't call for everything to be torn down and toted off. Four years ago, the City of Chester underwent a charrette, an intense period of planning and branding. The charrette plans for the Springsteen called for a sports complex to be built at the site.

In a computer-generated image, the smokestack remained intact amidst the ballfields, with the name of the park written on it.

Kerr said he likes that idea. It is far too early to know whether or not the property will ever house a ballpark, Kerr said, because years of study on the soil and other factors have to be considered. Cost will also be an issue. Just in case, though, the smokestack **will be saved if possible**.

"The plan is for the tower to be left standing, because that was the vision of the charrette years ago. An engineer will **ultimately determine** if it can stay. If it poses some sort of hazard, if there's a chance it could fall, it will be taken down," Kerr said.

Kerr said the area should be cleaned by August.