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Concerns about the number of empty storefronts in downtown Pickens have led the city to put together a panel to look at ways to improve the area and draw businesses.

# Group to tackle Pickens improvements

## City wants to bring more business downtown

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PICKENS — A group of Pickens residents, business owners and officials has kicked off an effort aimed at improving and developing the city and attracting more businesses.

"There's no doubt about the number of empty stores on Main Street that make this an absolute urgent issue that we develop and market ourselves," said Pickens City Administrator Katherine Brackett. "We have so much potential."

She said an 11-member steering committee is being formed to guide the process and will include the city's five planning commission members, three representatives from the business community and three residents.

The group got an orientation and an overview of the vision process at a planning commission meeting earlier this week.

Jerry Sweitzer, past chairman of Pickens County Vision 2025, said some of Pickens' neighboring towns are moving ahead with efforts, from bicycle-friendly plans in Easley to a focus on the railroad in Central.

Sweitzer said Pickens could join with Easley on bicycle efforts to tap into cycling enthusiasm, and said creating a theme — perhaps an Italian village where people could sit around tables and fountains — for downtown Pickens can also help bring in more businesses.

He said the four "F's" to a successful small town are flowers, fountains, festivals and food.

"Growth is going to happen in this area," Sweitzer said. "It's either going to be by choice or by chance ... If you just let it happen, you've got no input."

Brackett said all the members of the committee should be in place at the next planning commission meeting on Nov. 23 and said public input meetings will be a part of the process.

The hope is to determine how people want the city to be defined and how they want it to look.

She said it's important to get downtown revamped, including continuing streetscape efforts, and to get businesses to locate downtown.

"It's good for the citizens," she said. "It's great for the city to kind of get some more stability."