Pickens makes Main Street

Program to help city with its revitalization efforts in downtown

By Julie Howle
STAFF WRITER
jhowle@greenvilleonline.com

The city of Pickens has been accepted to the Main Street South Carolina program as efforts continue in the city to bring in businesses and visitors and enhance downtown.

"We have some really good businesses existing that we want to retain, but we've also got vacant buildings that we need to get serious about filling," Pickens City Administrator Katherine Brackett said.

Brackett said the local program will be called the Pickens Revitalization Association and is the newest member of the Main Street South Carolina program.

"Having a strong Main Street is the absolute heart of a downtown," she said.

"We've got to get people who want to take a risk on bringing businesses to our downtown that will bring jobs or provide places to eat," Brackett said. "They can eat, play and work here."

She said the board of directors for the association began training Monday, and the new association will officially start its work July 1.

Main Street South Carolina has been in existence since the 1980s and is a service of the Municipal Association of South Carolina, said Beppie LeGrand, manager of Main Street South Carolina.

LeGrand said the program is affiliated with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which houses the National Trust Main Street Center.

"We provide training and resources to communities to help them get organized to improve the economic vitality of their core downtown," she said. "In Pickens' case, we're going to be working citywide."

LeGrand said there are four main points in the model — economic restructuring, design, promotion and organization.

"We're also going to be looking at what kinds of businesses need to be recruited to the community to help it stay vibrant," she said.

Brackett said some cities do the program in-house and some set it up as a nonprofit. She said in Pickens, they are doing it as a nonprofit.

NEWS

a top priority

She said City Council has appointed the first board of directors, which includes business owners, residents and city officials.

Brackett said an executive director will be hired by the board of directors by July 15. It will be a part-time position.

She said the program in Pickens will include downtown and Main Street but will also be citywide.

"We want to identify the assets that we have and capitalize on them," Brackett said. "We think that there's a lot of potential in Pickens. We just have got to have an organized effort on how we market it."

Brackett said the estimated cost in the first year for the city would be about $25,000 to $35,000. The money is coming from hospitality tax and the general fund.

She said the idea is that the city's contribution will decrease over time due to fundraisers and grants

Brackett said the program has a historic preservation aspect as well.

"It brings in everything that's part of making a viable downtown," she said. "There's the heavy recruitment and retaining part of economic development, and then there's the promotion side, marketing."