

## Business commission would fast-track top development proposals

By [Larry Clark](#) | Hickory Daily Record

Business activity increases jobs, and Hickory needs to stimulate business development.

That's the message city staff members gave the Hickory City Council on Tuesday.

The Small Business Job Growth Team, formed to develop recommendations to assist small businesses in creating and retaining jobs, wants a seven-member Business Development Commission to screen commercial proposals.

Andrea Surratt, assistant city manager, spoke on behalf of the team and the city staff.

"There are no easy solutions to unemployment," Surratt said, outlining the team's reasoning for a development commission.

"Jobs come from an increase in activity."

Surratt said there are many ideas for revving up economic activity, and the commission's job would be to vet proposals so the most viable could be fast-tracked for council consideration.

All business sectors would be represented, she said. Commission members should be "unselfish and independent thinkers" and also be committed to a team approach to evaluating development proposals.

Public input would also be solicited.

The seven members would be appointed by council and become the new commission's executive committee. Professionals and residents contributing to the process would be ad hoc part of the commission, but not appointed for a specific job or position.

The executive committee would take the best ideas on small business development and put them at the top of the list for consideration.

The idea comes with a price tag.

Researching and ironing out details of proposals entertained by the commission would require the services of city staff.

City Manager Mick Berry said existing staff could handle such requirements in the short term.

However, depending on the scope and success of the commission, additional staff resources or a possible option of contracting for consultation services may be necessary. That would affect the budget.

"We need to explore this," Council Member Jill Patton said, because the proposal fits the city's development objectives.

Berry emphasized that the commission would be focused on long-range planning and strategies, but not be part of making specific business deals.

Council members want city staff and the Job Growth Team to continue working out details on the commission and report next month.