

Town accepted into 'Main Street'



Written by Jordan-Ashley Baker (O-N-E Staff Writer)

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Catawba was recently accepted into a North Carolina Department of Commerce program designed to stimulate economic development through historical preservation.

The town is now part of the Main Street program, which is designed for towns with fewer than 50,000 residents and was developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Catawba applied for the program last year, but wasn't accepted.

"It's good to know we were finally accepted," said Catawba Mayor Vance Readling. "We missed it last year, and we're pleased that we got into the program."

More than 1,000 towns across the country implemented the Main Street program since it was created. The program promotes economic development through a four-point approach, which focuses on organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring of the town's business district.

"The program is going to give people an idea of what Catawba can be," Readling said.

Main Street staff members will arrive in Catawba on Sept. 9 to kickoff the program.

"They'll be interviewing individuals to get the direction they want the town to go in," Readling said.

Membership in the program also makes additional grants and funding available to Catawba.

"Hopefully it'll help us get some grants for the town that we wouldn't have been able to get otherwise," Readling said.

One Catawba council member, however, is concerned about the town's status in the Main Street program.

Catawba Town Council voted at its Monday meeting not to purchase a property on South Main Street in the town's business district, and this decision makes the property available to another buyer.

"I think we could potentially lose our Main Street program," said Karen Ester, Catawba councilwoman. "They've been shown that property, and they've been shown through the center of town."

Readling, however, said he isn't worried about losing the town's Main Street program acceptance after Council's decision not to buy the property.

"That (building) wasn't part of the provision," he said. "It was just speculation (that the program could be taken away)."

Former Town Manager Jonathan Kanipe was instrumental in the Main Street approval process, and Readling said he should be commended for all his hard work.

Kanipe left Catawba on July 1 for a town manager position in Columbus.

Eric Davis is serving as interim town manager until the town finds a permanent replacement for Kanipe.

"He's great. Period," Readling said of Kanipe. "It's a shame we can't keep him permanently, but I think he's a little out of our price range."

The town posted the town manager position on its website before Kanipe left.

The town is no longer accepting applications, and Davis is reviewing each candidate's qualifications.

"He's more or less looking through each application to find the ones who are suitable for the job," Readling said.

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