



Published: September 19, 2011

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## Business picking up in Hickory

By Sharon McBrayer

When the economic recession hit, business development seemed to evaporate in the area. But commercial development is slowly improving and coming back, Brian Frazier, planning and development director for Hickory, said.

McDonald's on US 70 across from the Paramount Kia Hickory is rebuilding. A Dollar General is planned on the property on US 70 where Mongolian Barbecue was located and another on Lenoir-Rhyne Boulevard on a vacant lot near Texas Roadhouse, Frazier said. The US 70 site is moving along, with the shell of the building up.

Several other fast food chains already with a presence in Hickory are planning to open other locations, mostly in the 127 South area, he said.

"So we're seeing a slow up-tick," Frazier said.

In addition, Nissan of Hickory, which is located on US 321, is looking to move to US 70 across from Hickory Dickory Dock. He said demolition on the site is complete and construction is supposed to start by the end of the year, he said.

The former Hickory Auto Group dealership on Robinson Road will become administrative offices for Shurtape Technologies. Stephen Shuford, executive vice president of the company, said the company has set the end of the year as a target move-in date but figures it will likely be early 2012 before the move is finished.

Shuford said the employees who have been occupying offices at First Plaza Building will move to the new location, as well as employees from the company's corporate building on Highland Avenue and Springs Road. He said the idea is to bring people together in the same location for collaboration and execution reasons.

A building on US 70 that has been several different restaurants and is located adjacent to the parking lot of the shopping center that houses Hancock Fabrics and CiCi's Pizza will become a nightclub, Frazier said.

"So we're making some good progress," Frazier said.

Frazier said the city has been getting a lot more walk-ins, phone calls and requests for information from businesses about what kinds of grants and other help could be available. The up-swing in interest started about six months ago, he said.

However, the single-family housing market is still slow and more people are fixing up their homes. Frazier said permits for single-family new homes have been very slow but permits for renovations have increased significantly. It also seems developers are moving away from single-family homes to building multi-family units, he said. The city has approved 200 multi-family units for construction, Frazier said, with some of those units expected to start by the end of the year.

Rumors of other sporting goods retailers have circulated but the city hasn't received any official word.

"Right now, everything is pretty much speculation," Frazier said. "I am cautiously optimistic because God knows we could use the jobs and the tax base."