HICKORY IS GROWING
AND WE COULDN’T BE HAPPIER

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Hickory’s Focus on the Future

Hickory is a city with a focus on the future. The work that the city is engaged in today is done with forethought and the desire to build a stronger Hickory for tomorrow. City Council, city staff, and city residents share a joint vision that highlights Hickory’s potential for a robust economy, a vibrant arts and culture scene, and a diverse population.

In 2014, the citizens of Hickory passed a $40 million bond referendum, thereby supporting the City’s initiative for economic development and growth. Today, the City is in the design stage for four projects: a City Walk that will greatly enhance pedestrian access from Lenoir-Rhyne University to Downtown Hickory, a Riverwalk that will follow the waterfront to connect the current Geitner-Rotary Park to the Highway 321 bridge, a Streetscapes and Gateways plan that will enhance Hickory’s entrances and roadways, and Park 1764, which will be an advanced manufacturing business park, jointly developed by the City of Hickory and Catawba County.

“I am excited about the total scope of the bond program, particularly the enhancements that will provide opportunities for the enjoyment of our natural resources. The City Walk, River Walk, bike trails, and paths that will be available to our whole community will be an enticement for people to visit,” said Hickory City Councilman David Zagaroli.

Anthony Laxton, a Bond Implementation Commission second-term member, and young professional who lives and works in Hickory, feels that creating the conversation is important, but those conversations require action. Laxton pointed out, “The young professional groups talk about how to bring more people here? How do we make it better?" He said, “We can’t wait for someone else to do it. The bond projects create a culture of opportunity to create an economic development program to have companies outside of Hickory come here.”

What is Crafting Hickory?

These bond projects spurred the City’s Crafting Hickory initiative. Crafting Hickory not only includes the four bond projects, but also encompasses multiple, city-wide improvements, many of which are public/private partnerships. For example, the Kiwanis Park Splash Pad, which opened in the summer of 2016, was built partially with City funding and partially with money raised by two local Kiwanis Clubs. There is also the recently opened Lowes Foods City Park in Downtown Hickory that was privately funded with donations raised by the Friends of Hickory organization. A highly anticipated, public/private partnership is the Deidra Lackey Memorial Park, a generous renovation of Geitner-Rotary Park, which will be largely funded by the Bob Lackey family. Because of private partnerships, like these, additional projects can be created, as well as enhancements to current projects can be made that tax dollars alone are not able to do. With the energy of these partnerships and projects, the City anticipates more to form in the future. Hickory is fortunate to have numerous citizens who take an active role and share in the work of crafting a successful future for the city.

“Lively parks with splash pads in neighborhoods, and in the heart of the city, coupled with art, science and history museums, live music from all genres in outside concert venues, quaint restaurants, and refurbished mills, as well as the farm to table and craft beer scene, have people talking about how Hickory has crafted the perfect life for people of all ages," said Mandy Hildebrand, Hickory Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau. “Plans for the City Walk and Riverwalk are creating upbeat conversations with locals and visitors and will keep the momentum of Hickory’s positive growth moving forward for decades.”

While every city is unique, there are some basic concepts for promoting growth and revitalization that are unchanging from city to city. Hickory’s City Council has visited some successfully revitalized cities, like Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Greenville and Rock Hill, South Carolina. Crafting Hickory, of course, is tailored specifically to Hickory, but it is not unlike the plans established years ago for those cities.

Like Hickory, they also suffered difficult economic setbacks of their own, but today, they are lively and economically sound cities.

Crafting Hickory is not simply beautification projects and added amenities for the city. Its true purpose is to spur economic activity and produce job growth for the city. Government cannot directly create jobs, but it can create an atmosphere that promotes job growth and encourages private corporations to relocate or open new businesses within the target municipality. An important part of creating the necessary pro-business environment is offering a quality of place that is attractive to businesses and the employees they want to hire. Tax incentives, and other financial motivations, undoubtedly, are important, as well. But, being a place where people and businesses want to be is imperative.

For many, Hickory is already a great place to call home. Hickory residents are proud to be a part of Catawba County and the Western North Carolina region. There are numerous parks, trails, and access to outdoor recreation, as well as cultural activities, like museum visits, symphony and choral concerts, and community theatre performances. The city has new restaurants and shops that are opening regularly, as well as the mainstay businesses that have served Hickory for years. Most importantly, Hickory has hard-working residents who are good neighbors and shape a friendly community.

“The City’s vision is to build connectivity, literally and figuratively. The designs of the projects are meant to connect people across the city and to encourage more active lifestyles. As a millennial, that is an attractive quality for a city to have,” said Hickory Young Professionals (HYP) President Zachary DeLaRosa. “I believe that the root of any growth is when there is purpose behind it. HYP’s membership has doubled since January 2017. Every event that we host, we purposefully think how it will directly benefit the people who will come. We want people to ask the questions like, “How do I get involved with the recycling committee or how do I get a board or commission application?” People go back to their neck of the woods and then get involved. Having impactful events fueled...
HYP’s growth: the speakers are inviting young people to come. We don’t cater toward one group or industry. Our goal is to create an organization for everyone, to build leaders. Professional and personal development, as well as social networking, is a part of that. We want to show that Hickory has a lot to offer.”

Hickory’s Educational Opportunities Abound

In addition to the social aspects of connectivity, Hickory’s educational opportunities abound, with both private and public schools, a community college, and a university.

“There’s a renewed sense of optimism for Hickory among citizens, local leaders, and businesses. From the difficult days of job losses and falling property values, we are beginning to see tangible evidence of economic resurgence-across a multitude of sectors. It is this resurgence, vision, and resilience that makes it such an exciting time to be part of the Hickory community. Around the corner are dramatic changes and growth. In ten years, Hickory will be a much different City, but still a great place to live, work, learn, and play,” said Hickory City Councilman Brad Lail

“Hickory is a wonderful place to grow and learn. We’re progressive - as we personalize education for all students,” said Dr. Robbie Adell, the Superintendent of Hickory Public Schools (HPS). “HPS offers families more than a journey of excellence in education. Children who attend HPS, a district of educational service since 1903, experience life-changing opportunities setting a course for success in higher education, the workforce, or military,” added Dr. Adell.

“Lenoir-Rhyne University has called Hickory home for over 125 years and has enjoyed a productive and collaborative partnership with our city. We look forward to another 125 years working collaboratively to enhance the health and quality of life for individuals, families, and communities,” said Lenoir-Rhyne University’s President Dr. Fred Whitt. “The City Walk, which will connect the Lenoir-Rhyne campus with downtown Hickory, is one of several exciting bond projects focused on improving and connecting Hickory’s many communities and visitors. We look forward to enhancing the opportunities for our students to access the many services, shops, and entertainment venues Hickory has to offer. In addition, Lenoir-Rhyne embraces and welcomes our community to visit and enjoy the many resources our campus provides.”

“The future of our region lies within our ability to embrace change and to execute innovative initiatives that will create a return on investment for our citizenry. Catawba Valley Community College has embraced this challenge as evidenced by the successful implementation of the Catawba Valley Furniture Academy with its many vested partners. Leveraging resources and the unique skills of our stakeholders has created a sustainable pathway to work for our region. Other initiatives such as K-64 and the construction of the new Workforce Solutions Complex will continue to lead the development of superior talent for our economic drivers,” said President of Catawba Valley Community College Dr. Garrett Hinshaw.

The Hickory of Tomorrow

The Hickory of tomorrow will not only have the same charm and characteristics that it does today, but it will have more. There will be more businesses and job opportunities, establishing a stronger economy. There will be more outdoor amenities for recreation and pedestrian access. The arts will continue to flourish
and have an important role in the Hickory community. There will be additional entertainment options and a greater appeal to the younger generation. A larger diversity of citizens living in Hickory will come as the population grows. But Hickory will maintain its integrity and identity as a great place to call home.

“Hickory’s promise is evident to our recent economic development prospects and consultants. The City’s commitment to itself is visible and tangible as we drive through, whether it’s at LRU, the developing City Walk, the liveliness in Downtown, and the new mill village scene. It’s fun to show off this energy and I am proud it is my hometown. I can’t wait to see what it is next year and in ten years!” said Catawba County Economic Development Corporation President Scott Millar.

Millar is not alone in his excitement for the Hickory area. Lindsay Keisler, Catawba County Chamber of Commerce President and CEO had this to say about Hickory and Catawba County, “The Catawba County Chamber’s number one priority is attracting, recruiting, and developing talent to fill jobs. Adding qualified talent to our county’s workforce will yield increased productivity, business growth and expansion, and paychecks that will stimulate the local economy. I’m encouraged that these priorities are top of mind and tip of tongue for city and county leadership.” She added, “With the bond projects underway, the recent announcement of a comprehensive economic development strategy effort for Hickory, and the continued commitment to working alongside the Chamber and other economic development key stakeholders in addressing our community’s most critical issues, I am very optimistic about our future and the direction we are headed.”

“The spirit of “Life Well Crafted” is alive and well among our Hickory residents and visitors,” said Hickory City Councilman Hank Guess. “I talk with people every day in our community who are engaged in the process and excited about our future. Our city is on track to grow jobs, grow our population, and increase our tax base.” Guess added, “Your City staff and elected leaders are constantly reviewing and updating strategic plans to position the City of Hickory to take advantage of every opportunity for economic development. Our goal is to make Hickory the best possible place to live, work, and raise a family.”

Brad Stevens, co-owner of Carolina Pedal Works said, “If you look at Morganton, I’ve gone with my family several times to Morganton to ride their greenway. Just getting people on bicycles is what we like to see.” Since Carolina Pedal Works is housed in the renovated Hollar Mill, Stevens was asked about what he thought of the renovated mills, “We love the space. The renovated mill is super cool and has a cool vibe with the brewery next door.”

Investing in Hickory’s Renovation

Speaking of the renovated mills, Hickory’s University Mill district has undergone amazing changes. Private investors have changed the landscape for Hollar and Moretz Mill, Piedmont Wagon, and Lyerly Mill.

Paul Thompson, Founder and Chairman of Transportation Insight, a multi-modal lead logistics provider, with nine operating centers and 50 client-service offices in North America, had the vision to invest in an old, run down mill that was at a main entrance into the City and created a new and inviting space that houses their corporate headquarters. “It was a cool space,” he said. “We had conversations for three to four years before we determined this was the space. Of course, there were issues with it and it needed a tremendous amount of work. It had to be totally rebuilt. The cost of the renovation exceeded new construction. But, we recognized that our associates really wanted a more vibrant lifestyle. They want to be able to drive five minutes to a cool place to eat. They want to be able to be convenient to amenities and have a different type of lifestyle than a remote corporate campus. We felt like this location was better for our associates than a remote corporate campus.”

In a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) with more than 365,000 residents, including a Catawba County population of more than 155,000, a downtown Hickory corporate campus offers an opportunity for close proximity to resources and amenities that appeal to a broad demographic.

“Any time you do something, there are multiple reasons,” Thompson added. “We hire a lot of millennials, roughly 30 to 40 people per year straight out of college. Being able to attract Catawba County residents is an easy win. Being able to attract and retain millennials out of college that can choose to live anywhere in the country is much more difficult. We placed a bet - a big bet - that if we and other businesses will invest in the community, then the community will invest in itself and become more vibrant and meet

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the needs of the next generation."

“People have changed over the last two decades. They want fun things to do weekly on weekends,” said Thompson. “Our society is driven by the internet and we live in social media and see the lives of other people. We look for short bursts of excitement and euphoria. Young and old, people want lots of options. Often I think older adults think young people want this vibrant life and they think bars and clubs and that’s not it. It’s all kinds of things; mixed-couple kickball leagues, outdoor spaces where you congregate, activities."

“Hickory is really, geographically, crazy well-positioned, from Lenoir to Morganton to Lincoln to Statesville. We have medical services, restaurants, and shopping. As Hickory invests in infrastructure, people will flood in here for the activities that we create.”

Thompson believes that with awareness, momentum is being built. “These things take years,” he said. “If you, today, have children, and you want them to live in this community, you better start investing today.” He added, “This cannot all be on the back of municipalities, either. Small and big businesses have to come alongside to create things, one piece at a time.”

“We loved Hickory, and raising our kids in Hickory. You can’t get a better place to raise your family. Living in Hickory has been one of the biggest blessings of my life. The community has been good to me and we want to give back to it for it to be everything it can be,” Thompson said. “You start to think about legacy, not money. I hope we make Hickory a better place to live, more vibrant and be a small part of that big picture. If we can create a vibrant daily lifestyle, we have something special and unique for the country.”

Not only has the University Mill district area seen improvements to the mills, but the old Piedmont Wagon in West Hickory, the oldest building in Hickory, has also been renovated by Richard Swartzel, President and CEO of CornerStone United, a warranty and service contract provider. “Hickory has been supportive of us,” said Swartzel. “It is a two-way street. We couldn’t have done what we did without the City and the

Brownfield Program that the City used to inspect our property before we chose to take this location. It helped us to jump start the renovation. It cut a huge block of time off the beginning and decision process to relocate to this building. It took the unknowns away.”

Swartzel added that choosing the Downtown location for their business wasn’t necessary to drive sales, but that it was selected for convenience and an employee benefit. “Our employees feel much more connected to Hickory and being involved in Hickory in many capacities,” he said. “Employees have come together to form committees and have become engaged in the community by working with the Hickory Soup Kitchen once a month, as well as other areas of service. Not everyone even lives in Hickory, but they feel connected to Hickory now.”

Not only has the relocation of his company been a good move for the employees, Swartzel said that seeing more development occurring around them helps to attract more talent to Hickory and their company. “It helps us bring employees here to supplement the local talent base,” Swartzel added. Additionally, by making the improvements to the building, like CornerStone United did, they have been able to land new business. “We were able to take a potential client on a tour of our facility and show them the transformation that occurred. Because of that, we were told that if a company is willing to invest this much in their employees, and the details in their space, this is who we are looking for to take care of our customers,” he said.

Swartzel said that the development at Lenoir-Rhyne Boulevard at the mill district area is fantastic. “I am hoping it continues to spread throughout the city. I would like to see it connect all the pockets of growth in the entire city and spur redevelopment along the way,” he said. “Charlotte is seeing this happen. I see similarities with what can occur with the future City Walk in Hickory. It takes time. I hope it spurs incentive from all businesses along the City Walk to ask, “How can I spruce my business area up a bit too?”

“The City Walk can provide our employees and the community a safe place to walk. It will be built to accommodate a variety of levels of exercise and lifestyles for the community,” Swartzel believes. “When our employees are healthier that equates to a healthy workplace with our insurer, which is a benefit to any company.”

“These stories are just a few of the amazing transformations that have been occurring in Hickory. Hickory is proud of what these private partners are doing for their businesses and in this community. It has been encouraging to see the type of redevelopment that has occurred, as well as the potential development that we know will occur, especially along the City Walk, in our Central Business District area, that brings new jobs and people to Hickory,” said Assistant City Manager Andrea Surratt. “That’s what Crafting Hickory, Inspiring Spaces, the bond projects, and all we are working on is about.”

**Future Economic Growth Plans**

The City of Hickory is also investing through assessments for future development and economic growth. Between 2007 and 2015, the City received four grants, totaling $800,000 through the Community Wide Brownfield Assessment Grant program, which is administered through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In 2015, the City was awarded a $200,000 EPA Area Wide Planning Grant to create the Southside Area Plan, which includes the area between Highway US 70, between South Center Street and US 321. In the 2015 round, only 20 communities throughout the United States received this grant. Hickory was the only one in North Carolina to receive such an award. This plan provides a vision for the redevelopment of that corridor, taking into account the environmental challenges posed by Brownfield properties. A three-day, intense neighborhood workshop, where neighborhoods met with a consultant from Amex Foster Wheeler and City staff, was held.

As a result of the citizen input, needs were discovered. This led to the replacement of a lot of faulty street lights in the southern part of Ridgeview in the Green Park area and being able to fast track the addition of a sidewalk between US 70 and Highway 127 on South Center Street. This plan showed potential redevelopment scenarios in the catalyst sites, which are specific infrastructure projects that the city can undertake to spur redevelopment and revitalization. This plan provides vision for the future to that area. As private investors want to invest, these plans could be implemented. City staff continue to look for funding sources to implement the plan.
Continuing the Momentum

Hickory has an estimated daytime population of around 100,000 people. As a result of the large industrial and corporate base, the per capita property tax base is also as large as one you would find in a City more than twice Hickory’s size. The per capita sales tax collection reflects the fact that Hickory is the economic hub of a metro area of 365,000 people. The utility system serves 97,000 customers. I-40 and US 321 carry over 100,000 cars per day through Hickory. The City has an enviable inventory of cultural and sports amenities (i.e. SALT Block, Hickory Community Theatre, Western Piedmont Symphony, Hickory Choral Society, Hickory Crawdads).

Hickory City Manager Warren Wood said, “Regarding the approach to economic development, we need to think like a community of 100,000 people, not 40,000.” Wood continued, “There is now new economic energy and optimism in Hickory that was lacking during the “Great Recession.” Our community’s thinking has evolved from “survival” to “recovery” to “prosperity.”

The City does not currently have a formal Economic Development Plan. However, a tremendous foundation was laid in 2010 with the adoption of the Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan. Wood added, “The 2030 Plan provides the framework for a new Economic Development Plan. This plan had not been fully developed or implemented because we were in survival mode, but now is the time.”

Hickory’s population and sales tax collections now exceed pre-recession levels. The property tax base grew by four percent in 2016. Between 2015 and 2016, about 75 percent of all job creation in NC took place in the Charlotte and Raleigh metro areas.

NC net job creation increased by 99,600 in 2016. “We are in direct competition with the rest of the State,” said Wood. Seventy percent of new NC residents came from another state or country in 2016. “This plan is necessary for Hickory to be competitive in the market for businesses to come here,” said Wood.

The Economic Development Plan will contain eight strategic areas of focus:
• Major Industry/Business Recruitment/Retention/Expansion
• Small to Mid-sized Business Development/Retention/Expansion
• Redevelopment
• Downtown
• Planning & Development
• Place Making (Bond Projects Implementation)
• Transportation Planning
• Marketing/Brand Management

The end result will be a more robust Economic Development Program that is more comprehensive, better coordinated, and better resourced. The results of this plan will be measured by job growth, population growth, and tax base growth. “We hope to have the final recommended Plan to City Council later this fall,” said Wood.

Mayor Jeff Cline stated, “In 20 years, newcomers arriving in Hickory will never imagine the recession we went through in the early part of the century. They’ll see the vitality, the amenities, the excitement, the jobs, the lifestyle, and they’ll understand why everyone wants to move to Hickory. But all that will be the result of the planning and investment we’re doing right now.”

For more information about Crafting Hickory and the bond projects, please visit: HickoryNC.gov/CraftingHickory.com.

Hickory: Kiplinger’s 10 Great Places to Retire 2017

By Pat Mertz Esswein, Associate Editor | From Kiplinger’s Personal Finance, August 2017

• “When ticking off desirable features for places to live, millennials and retirees have a lot in common. Affordable homes? Check. A selection of good restaurants? Absolutely. A vibrant arts scene? Sure. Lots of outdoor recreation? You bet. A strong network of doctors and good health care facilities? That’s important no matter how old you are.”

• “Revitalization of downtown Hickory is under way and picking up steam. Union Square hosts a farmer’s market and festivals (including Oktoberfest), a summer concert series and more. The SALT Block, a cultural arts complex, houses a library, a science center, an art museum, an arts council, a choral society and a regional symphony.”

• “In 2014, Charles and Gwen Elmore, 68, formerly of Norfolk, Va., relocated to Hickory to be near his extended family.”

• “People here, as a rule, are so kind and not in such a hurry,” says Gwen. The couple love Hickory’s many restaurants and enjoy RV camping with their dogs.
Lowes Foods City Park

Friends of Hickory is an organization of private citizens, dedicated to investing in the welfare and prosperity of the City of Hickory and its surrounding communities. The Friends of Hickory hope to foster a sense of community pride, support existing resources within the City, and develop new projects that will have a positive impact on the lives of all residents and visitors. They would like their efforts to help improve the quality of life, attract new residents to our community, and improve the local economy. “We wanted to start something that allowed citizens to make a difference in their city and show that you can make a difference,” said Allison Holtzman, Founder of Friends of Hickory.

The Friends of Hickory’s first project was the development of a downtown park that incorporates play space, an interactive water feature, an attractive place to sit and enjoy, as well as a place where children can explore the unique "unrestricted play" equipment and cool themselves with an interactive water feature, which is an educational tool due to its Catawba River mosaic. It also has geographic references to Hickory’s central location between Asheville and Charlotte. The historic downtown area currently attracts a wide variety of businesses and visitors to Hickory. The addition of the park adds to the appeal of shopping, dining, and doing business in Union Square, offering an active destination for our youngest visitors and their families. “We decided to build a downtown park because it’s central, it affected a lot of people, and it’s in our front yard,” Holtzman said. “It shows people who visit and stop by Hickory that things are happening here and that there’s life. It, also, brings more people to Downtown Hickory on a more consistent basis.”

The park initially opened in December 2016, with a grand opening celebration on March 18, 2017. The park, located just west of Union Square on the corner of Third Street and Main Avenue NW, is the culmination of over two years of planning and fundraising by the non-profit group. Friends of Hickory board members collaborated with City staff, representatives from local businesses, regional artists, and private donors, and City Council to transform the present overflow parking lot into a new community gathering space. The parking lot adjacent to the park was reconfigured for additional parking spaces, which can be utilized by the public. Lowes Foods is the naming sponsor, while CommScope and Corning Inc. Foundation also stepped up as lead donors to make the park a reality, in addition to numerous other individuals and groups.

Address: 306 Main Avenue NW, Hickory, NC 28601 (Corner of 3rd Street NW and Main Avenue NW)

For more information about the Friends of Hickory, please see their website at www.FriendsofHickory.com.
Geitner-Rotary Park Improvements

Future Deidra Lackey Memorial Park

The Robert Lackey family of Hickory and the City of Hickory entered into a private/public partnership to improve approximately 20 to 30 acres of the waterfront at the City-owned Geitner-Rotary Park and the parks that link to it. This came through a multi-million dollar monetary contribution from the Lackey family. Mr. Lackey wanted to establish a memorial for Deidra Lackey, his late wife. This memorial gift to the City of Hickory and the community is anticipated to be the single largest donation in the City’s history. The renovated park will be at one end of the City’s future Riverwalk.

“Mrs. Lackey loved kids and ministering to kids. She loved gardening and flowers. She loved the conservatory at the Biltmore,” said Mr. Lackey. In thinking of a way to capture Mrs. Lackey’s memory, Mr. Lackey and his family thought, “Maybe what we need to do is build a park in her memory.” From there Mr. Lackey looked all over the City for land and found what he said was a “perfect piece of land” to create a memorial to his wife, but also to create an Inspiring Place for the entire City to enjoy. “We look forward to partnering with the City and making it a beautiful place for Hickory,” said Mr. Lackey.

In 2015, in a joint meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Hickory City Council, they both voted, unanimously, to approve the conceptual plans that were presented and move forward. Because of the size of the project and the private/public partnership, there are many details and legal documentation to establish before the construction can begin. Part of the process was to establish a Conservancy Board, which will manage and operate the Deidra Lackey Memorial Park, as well as raise funds for park-related projects. This Board was established in 2016, but details are still in discussion.

The Lackey family hired TSW Architecture out of Atlanta to design the park. The project encompasses 18.9 acres of Rotary-Rotary Park for the new Deidra Lackey Memorial Park. The idea is to create a public event space, conservatory, related gardens, and trails, while maintaining or replicating current items into the new design. In the Master Plan, TSW has designed some excellent amenities for this park. They have designed with the attitude to be “green” wherever possible. They are interested in allowing the property to be a teaching ground on how ecology works.

A formal processional leads to the entry of a Lake House that is designed to be functional day or night with meeting rooms, office space, a back patio area, and an amphitheater leading to an event dock. The Conservatory will have two outdoor spaces, which include an observational deck and patio.

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Mountain Bike Trail Improvements

Hickory citizens, Kirk Brittain and Brad Stevens, approached the City in early 2017, seeking to adopt the trails between Hickory City Park and Geitner-Rotary Park and spearhead an effort to revamp the existing trails. Brittain and Stevens are both members of The Northwest North Carolina Mountain Bike Alliance (NWNC MTB), a 501c3 chapter of the International Mountain Bicycling Association that focuses on trail access and advocacy. The project and funding are to be run through the NWNC MTB Alliance for their expertise in this arena, and their non-profit status. The existing trails that join Hickory City and Geitner-Rotary Parks are very technical and difficult to maneuver for less experienced mountain bikers. The proposed initiative would privately fund the improvement of the trails so that mountain bikers of all skill levels could utilize them.

After receiving City Council’s approval to move forward with the plan, the two volunteers set up a fundraising website to meet their $100,000 goal and immediately began receiving donations from individuals and businesses like Rock n’ Road Bicycles, Hickory Springs Manufacturing, Broyhill Family Foundation, Lightning Cycles, Alex Lee, Pepsi Hickory, and others. The first phase of the project is already partially complete, with more than 65 percent of the fundraising goal met.

The first phase of the project includes a 1.8 mile beginner flow trail, which recently opened to the public, and a pump track skills area, for both advanced and beginner riders, while the second phase will consist of intermediate and advanced trails. Professional trail contractors, Terra Tek Trails, have been hired to complete the work.

“The trails are really shaping up nicely,” said Parks and Recreation Director Mack McLeod. “We’re proud to have locals, who grew up in Hickory, give back to the community and really create a first-rate experience for riders of all skill levels, and even walkers and hikers, as well.”

In addition to the recreational enhancement, Brittain and Stevens also see the opportunity for economic development. “We’ve already heard from riders around the region who plan on coming to Hickory to ride the trails,” said Brittain. “Hopefully, they’ll stay here, eat and drink here, and also support the local bike shops. It will also be a great space for organizers to hold races and events, which will bring even more people here.”

Consider supporting the trail by sending a tax-deductible, direct donation to the Lake Hickory Trail System Fund at www.LakeHickoryTrails.com. Every donated dollar goes to building, supporting, and maintaining the Lake Hickory trail System.

CDBG Park Improvements

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and assists communities with resources to address a wide range of unique community development needs. The City of Hickory, which is allocated around $280,000 per year, depending on the federal budget, uses these funds for project improvements in lower income neighborhoods.

A large part of the funds are utilized for housing programs to assist citizens with low to moderate incomes who need help with first-time home buying, housing rehabilitation, or urgent repairs. The city also offers a microenterprise grant program for low income entrepreneurs starting their own businesses.

However, CDBG funds can also be utilized for neighborhood-wide projects in areas where residents predominately have low to moderate income levels. A past example is the construction of the Ridgeview Branch Library, which was funded, in part, by CDBG funds.

More recently, CDBG funds have been used for park improvements, creating enhanced public spaces in neighborhoods that are most in need. In 2014, a new picnic shelter and restrooms were constructed.
We All Have A Story...
The Mayor and Hickory City Council approved the Bond Commission and appointed its 42 members at the February 3, 2015 Hickory City Council meeting.

The bond commission is an advisory board to City Council on the bond projects, budgets, timeframes and more, which will continue throughout the entire bond process. Members are appointed to staggered terms from one to three years. The length of term for the initial members was randomly selected and each member was able to be reappointed to one full three-year term. Each commission member is also appointed to a subcommittee that represents each of the three projects that this commission is responsible for, City Walk, Riverwalk, and Streetscapes/Gateways.

Each Bond Commission member is assigned to a subcommittee. The subcommittees develop recommendations for each of their respective projects for the full Bond Commission to consider, in accordance with the ordinance. All final approvals are voted on by City Council.

“I’m honored to serve on the City’s Bond Implementation Commission,” said Chair Burk Wyatt. “It’s important for the public to have a voice in how the bond dollars are spent and to advise City Council on bond-related projects. I believe that these projects will help showcase our great city, will help kick start additional phases of collateral development, and will help take Hickory to a different level so it can continue to grow to its full potential.”

The Bond Commission is currently made up of the following: Allison Holtzman (Vice Chair), Michael Thomas, Stacee Rash, Eloise Bradshaw, Michael Bell, Katherine Rogers, Suzanne Trollan, Nick Walden, Jim Campbell, Jennifer Clark, Jennifer Beane, Kay Schmucker, James Tilton, Anthony Laxton, Patricia Bowman, David Baldwin, David Roberts II, Clise Johnson Plant, Ed Farthing, Susan Walker, Jason Yates, Burk Wyatt (Chair), R. Alan Barnhardt, Frank Young, Kimberly George, Rob Dickerson, Alan Jackson, and Paige Brigham.

Each of the City’s boards and commissions appointed ex officios to the Bond Implementation Commission, totaling 13.
- Business Development Committee, Dana Chambers
- Citizens Advisory Committee, Cliff Moore
- Community Appearance Commission, Charlie Hayes
- Community Relations Council, Sandi Fotheringham
- Hickory International Council, Hani Nassar
- Hickory Regional Planning Commission, Meg Jenkins Locke
- Historic Preservation Committee, Ernie Sills
- Library Advisory Board, Carolyn Sinclair
- Parks and Recreation Commission, Jim Powers
- Public Art Commission, Jennifer Helton
- Recycling Advisory Board, Norm Meares
- University City Commission, Rachel Nichols
- Youth Council, Mikaela Simmons
- The Catawba County Chamber of Commerce appointed Will Locke as their ex officio representative.

Holtzman said about the bond projects, “I think that this is Hickory taking a forward initiative to take advantage of what we already have here and to draw people who are already coming to this area of North Carolina and to make them notice Hickory.”

“I am very happy with the way the bond projects are progressing. I know that to an outsider it seems like nothing is happening, but they don’t fully understand all of the work that goes into the mechanics of the projects,” said Hickory Councilman Vernon Tarlton. “I believe the economic impact is going to be excellent and last over many generations.”

“I am excited to see the progress our Bond Commission has made on all of our projects. Our staff has done an amazing job in getting grants, totaling over $17 million, so far, to add to our $40 million bond. It will offer us the ability to further expand what we planned for our project,” said Hickory Councilwoman Jill Patton.

“The citizens of Hickory saw the vision of a new era for Hickory and passed the bonds overwhelmingly! Everyone will benefit from the Bond projects.”
Anthony Laxton

Anthony Laxton has been engaged in the Bond Commission since the inauguration. As an original one-year term member of the bond commission, Laxton was reappointed by Danny Seaver in Ward 3 for a second term of three years.

Laxton is not a stranger to Hickory. As a young professional from Hickory, he graduated from St. Stephens High School and Lenoir-Rhyne University. He works for Bivarus, previously known as the Jackson Group, as a Data Analyst for close to two years, and previously worked at Transportation Insight, which is headquartered in Hickory in the historic Lyerly Mill building. Laxton was a Hickory Young Professional member and past President.

“I see that Hickory has enormous potential for young professionals, families, and older generations,” said Laxton. “The bond commission creates a large amount of positive change by creating an economic space, as well as new avenues for people to live here and make Hickory a lifetime home.” Laxton continued, “I am blessed to be opportunistic. It is easy to get caught up talking about change, but not take the necessary actions to implement it. Ideas, through discussions with friends, or thoughts that the community have outwardly expressed, can be done. It takes action and people putting their best foot forward. This process allows us to follow through with the ideas we have, jointly.”

Laxton stated that being a part of the Bond Commission has been one of the finest professional developments he has been a part of. “Sure, people may disagree and we do quite a bit, but we are all professionals and have the same end goal of making Hickory a better place. By keeping this focus, we are able to put differences aside and come to an agreement,” he stated. “It shows how proficient the bond process is; we put aside our own benefits to better the whole community. The City has allowed us to create dialogue on each subcommittee. At the end of the day we come to one conclusion that goes to City Council for approval.”

Laxton wants the Bond Commission’s work to be progressive. He believes these changes are for the better. He added, “It shows that Hickory isn’t stuck in an old way of doing things and wants to move forward. We all would like new businesses to move here, along with all of their employees, and on top of that, we want our young professionals to stay in this great town.”

Laxton stated that at first, there were ideas. He believes that now, the Commission is seeing the designs and opportunities for economic development, especially within the City Walk and Riverwalk. “These projects are cultivating the idea of what you can do and what Hickory can be. Of course we want to continue growing and bring new venues to our town, but that does not mean that we do not have things to do here. Hickory has amenities for all ages” he added.

Laxton pointed to cities like Greenville, South Carolina, as an example of what Hickory is doing; stating that their bond is done now and it helped to create their amenities.

“By creating the Park 1764 Business Park, adding this to the other projects, shows the initiative the City is trying to bring for economic development,” he feels. “The Business Park will sustain business for a long time, especially with the location. But we must not stop there.”

Being a young professional, Laxton spoke to the perception of the younger, millennial, nightlife desire. Nightlife is not the only thing that young adults in Hickory want. They want options for things to do during the day as well. He said, “We have an amazing SALT Block for arts, the Hickory Community Theatre, shopping, the Carolina Theatre, which is amazing for $3 a ticket, golfing, disc golf, and fantastic restaurants with brewed beers, to name a few.” Laxton added that millennials also take pride in buying local, “For example, they appreciate the Farmers Market during the week and weekends, as well as the farm-to-table-restaurants that Hickory has to offer.” He also added that “Hickory is a central hub for other ventures outside of Hickory. Charlotte, Boone, Asheville, and Winston Salem are close to an hour from Hickory. They are simple day trips. So, if there are any events close by, it is nothing to take the trip to enjoy on the weekends.”

“I am of the opinion that we have every kind of amenity in Hickory that people could need. I love to broadcast that and continue to make it even better,” he said.

“I believe that the City has done a great job of saying, “Here’s what’s going on in the community,” but communication is two-fold. It is also up to organizations and individuals to engage with their members and their social networks. Sure, we can always say that more can be done in regards to communication, but it is up to the individual to want to pay attention to it.” Laxton believes that the young professionals that have recently moved to the area want to be involved and attend more things in Hickory. He says that it isn’t only up to the city government to help connect new people and provide all the information; he says that it takes everyone sharing in that responsibility, including the businesses in which these professionals work. “When I first started getting involved, civically, I used to see a lot of the same faces on boards and organizations, but now we are starting to see the culture change within the young professional community. We are seeing new faces, new young professionals getting involved and becoming active in making the changes that we hear and talk about on a daily basis,” he added.

Ultimately, Laxton encourages everyone to take pride in where they live and to make the best of it. “I’ve learned a lot. If I don’t like something, I ask if it can be changed for the better and work to make it happen. I grew up knowing about city government, as my mother worked and retired with the City. Seeing her passion has helped my growth to follow in her footsteps.

Laxton left us with the following to think about, “With all of the work that we are doing in this community, even if everyone does not agree, at the end of the day, we all have the drive, and hope, to make Hickory better. Either way, we work to continue to shape and mold Hickory into what we want it to be. My hopes, in the end, are to help create and drive change in the community that will be everlasting, that will let my kids and grandkids continue to progress and move forward. I encourage everyone to be the change that you want to see.”
As a small business owner, Sinclair has established her consignment boutique, Adrienne’s, as Hickory’s oldest, independently owned, women’s clothier. The shop has been a local go-to for upscale clothing and accessories for over 39 years.

Sinclair is deeply rooted in the local community through her work at the boutique, raising her family in Hickory, and volunteering on various boards, like the Public Art Commission and the Library Advisory Board, in addition to her service on the Bond Implementation Commission.

Sinclair chose to serve on the Bond Commission out of a desire to expand her own experiences and to work on projects that are meaningful to the community. “When I travel around now, I hear more people talking about Hickory,” Sinclair explained. “Hickory is an affordable place to live, there are cultural and outdoor opportunities for all ages, and the Bond projects will raise the bar and allow us to compete with other cities for a great quality of life.”

As a small business owner, Sinclair has a unique perspective and interest in Hickory’s economy and growth. “Hopefully, this will be the beginning of attracting new residents, new entrepreneurs and new businesses. In addition, the influx of funds, energy, and community involvement can only help our existing businesses thrive,” she shared. Sinclair enjoys talking with her customers, who come in to shop from all over the city and beyond. She discusses the bond projects with them and listens to their thoughts and ideas, and then uses that feedback for her work on the Commission.

A member of the City Walk Subcommittee, Sinclair utilizes her own desire to be active and outdoors to assist in the decision-making process for City Walk. “I get outside every day, and often walk the City Walk path and envision what it’s going to look like,” said Sinclair. She believes the City Walk and Riverwalk will bring more people outside and encourage more activity like walking and biking. “Great public spaces are great equalizers for people,” Sinclair went on to explain. “They’re places where people can get together and communicate, be creative, and hopefully some entrepreneurship comes out of those relationships.”

Clise Plant is new to the Bond Implementation Commission and is fairly new to the Hickory area, having lived here for just over six years. A native of Knoxville, Tennessee area, Plant has settled down in Hickory with her family and has been quick to get involved in the community. “Hickory has definitely welcomed my family,” Plant said. “There has been an ease with getting involved, whether it’s been going to public events, like free concerts, or volunteering to work on various service projects.”

In addition to her role with the Bond Commission, Plant serves as chair of the Hickory Community Relations Council, is a member of the Service League of Hickory, and is also a Hickory Museum of Art Audience Engagement Committee Member. She is passionate about taking an active role in volunteering for various organizations, in an effort to create a stronger community for everyone and to give back to those who need it most.

While Plant is new to the Bond Commission, she is very familiar with the bond process and the four projects. When she heard a presentation about the proposed projects, prior to the bond referendum, she was immediately engaged and was in favor of the plan. “I have lived in a place where the city invested in itself, transformed itself, and as a result, flourished,” explained Plant. “I have seen people struggle for jobs and lived in a city that was decimated by the recession, so I am excited and humbled to have a part to play in Hickory’s recovery.”

Plant is in the targeted age demographic that the city is seeking to attract and retain. She believes that “once we create the environment that we are continually open for business, more young families will come.” As a Riverwalk Subcommittee member, she is also hopeful that the added connectivity and ability for walking and bike riding will help promote wellness in the community.

“We are staying positive and vigilant and ensuring that the bond dollars are spent wisely and that we get a good return on our investment,” explained Plant. “As an unofficial ambassador for the bond projects, I would tell people that change takes time. Little by little, good things will come.”
Hani Nassar, appointed to the Bond Implementation Commission as an ex-officio of the Hickory International Council (HIC), is also the chair of the HIC. One of his goals is to bring inclusivity to everyone within Hickory. Nassar stated, “I love the City and what I do is for the City. I like to volunteer. I get so much satisfaction from volunteering for something that has impact and value.”

Nassar, the Manager of Corporate Strategy for KLINGSPOR, a Hickory-based company, was thankful to his company, who has allowed him to stay very engaged and active in Hickory and the organizations that he is a part of. “I am fortunate to have leaders who understand that being involved in the Hickory community is important to the City and to KLINGSPOR, and they have been very generous to allow me the opportunities that I have to be involved.”

Nassar has a passion for creating inclusivity through local events that the HIC supports, “Hickory has great events that bring awareness to the world, and you don’t have to drive to other bigger cities for them.” He added, “For example, the Children’s International Film Festival screens over 500 films from over 50 countries every year to show. And, the children from the private schools and all three local public school systems love it.” Nassar continued,

“Model UN, in collaboration with Lenoir-Rhyne University and the Boy Scouts of America Exploring Division, invites over 150 Middle School and High School students from the surrounding counties who will read, debate, and make resolutions that, on paper, impact nations. I wish we had this opportunity when we were growing up. "Folkmoot USA," Hickory edition, is an international folk festival that brings four groups every year to the SALT Block from international destinations to showcase their culture through top-notch song and dance. “Great Decisions,” a Foreign Policy Association program, brings teachers, professors, doctors, lawyers, all citizens, together, to discuss topics of US interest in world affairs. Not everyone agrees, but we all boldly share our opinions. It’s a lot of fun,” Nassar said. Additionally, Hickory brings in three to four foreign films every year in collaboration with the Footcandle Film Society, which Nassar is actively involved with. The International Christmas Concert in December caps off the year with Romanian and American hymns and carols.

If all of those things weren’t enough, Nassar also spends his time raising money for the different community projects, working...
Reverend David E. Roberts, II

Reverend David Roberts has been a member of the Bond Implementation Commission since the beginning. When asked what being a part of this commission means to him, he said that he wants to ensure that every citizen in this community is considered. Roberts brings a voice from the Ridgeview community, where he is also the Reverend of Morning Star First Baptist Church. “I believe it is critical to have a voice on this Commission from the Ridgeview area, so we don’t forget about things that impact this community, as well as the entire City,” Roberts said.

Roberts grew up in Asheville and was a theatre arts major in school. He enlisted in the Navy and was deployed and on call for various conflicts and wars. After retiring from the Navy, he became a teacher at Quail Hollow Middle School in Charlotte, teaching students with behavioral issues. Roberts explained that his move to Hickory was because God had revealed to him to move here and he answered him on that. Roberts said, “What impressed me was that Hickory won “All America City” a couple of times. Being an “All America City” says that a city is all inclusive for all citizens.”

Roberts has been here 10 years. “I know the struggles that we have had in this country. I served this country and I fought for everybody,” said Roberts. “I respect everybody and they respect me too. I have a lot of respect for the people on the Commission and what they have to say. I do support what we are doing.”

Roberts wants people to say, “Have you thought about Hickory? There is a lot going on. It’s a nice place.” Roberts added, “Other cities are our competition, we need to be appealing.” He referenced that the loss of furniture affected Hickory. He wants to see companies come that will bring economic development growth to this community.

“We care about everyone, no matter their economics, race, sex, or religion. We’re all God’s people. I, also, want to make sure the Bond Commission isn’t just the projects, but it’s also about the community, and keeping the place that God has sent me to that is three minutes from downtown in mind.” He added, “You can come through Ridgeview to come to downtown. There is a rich heritage in this area.” An example that Roberts gave was Interfaith Housing’s efforts in the historical preservation of the old Ridgeview Library. “It’s important to preserve the rich heritage and culture to Hickory and North Carolina,” he said.

Roberts believes that Hickory appeals to families right now. There are great religious organizations, the Hickory Crawdads, and parks, just to name a few things, but he feels that for the single 21 to 40 year olds, Hickory nightlife is not necessarily what they desire, which has evolved more in some of the other cities. “This is one of the reasons why we are doing what we are doing,” he said. He added that reaching the 19 and under ages to validate them and show that this community cares about them, respecting the sacrifices the civil rights group made, who are the older demographics, building a technology scene, continuing to invest in the medical community, as well as a focusing to bring diversity and movement downtown are all things Roberts believes is needed for Hickory’s future and growth.

“Something’s getting ready to happen in Hickory,” Roberts said. “We are close enough to Charlotte, the mountains, the beach is close by, as well as rural life and farming.” Of course Roberts is interested in the projects that the Bond Commission are working on, but he is also vested in what he calls “Phase Two,” which he sees as developing, beautifying, and bringing jobs to this area.

“Things don’t happen overnight,” Roberts said. “I’m excited and patient. Compromise is key.”

with TEDx Hickory, a TED-like event in our community, which he pointed out is innovative for Hickory for Technology, Entertainment, and Design ideas, better known as “Ideas Worth Spreading.” Additionally, he serves on the Western Piedmont Sister Cities Association and on Frye Regional Medical Center’s Regional Advisory Committee. On the more personal side, his passion is tennis and he has been playing for most of his life. He created a tennis league in Hickory of close to 100 players of various levels, playing together, at different locations all year round. It is in its 12th year. He is also on his sixth year on the SALT Block Foundation Board and he was on the United Arts Council for seven years. Nassar is a member of the Bond Commission’s Riverwalk Subcommittee. “I think that what we are accomplishing can and will enhance economic development. An additional benefit is to have the people who live here and come here be able to enjoy Hickory’s amenities.”

Nassar gave examples of how the bond projects can create economic development. He stated that the Lackey family’s contribution to enhance Geitner Park and the City’s connection of the Riverwalk to Highway 321 is what other cities have done by using their water as an asset. “The Riverwalk is for everyone,” he said. Looking toward the future, there is even more potential economic development that can occur to bring commercial, as well as residential growth to the area near the Riverwalk. Nassar pointed out, “These projects are not just about what we are doing now, but into the next phase.” He sees the City Walk, along Main Avenue to downtown being able to fill with jobs and commercial development. “I am sure it will enhance the people’s lives who live here. Eventually it will keep and bring people here,” he added. “This isn’t a quick turnaround, but we’re moving in the right direction.”

Nassar definitely has passion for Hickory and shows it, “I love the City, especially when I go to other cities. We are close to the things we need; the SALT Block, the lake and waterways, the mountains, and to big cities. We have so many positive attributes in this City.” He added, “Why do people come here and retire here? Because the collective attributes are attractive to them. I know people who have moved back from other places. Their roots are here. The grass isn’t always greener on the other side. I do feel that I will stay here. I will continue to do what I think will create international diversity and inclusivity in the City and the international community.”
The City Walk is a pedestrian link from Lenoir-Rhyne University through the downtown area and continues the mill redevelopment and corporate headquarter opportunities that have already taken place, along this corridor. The City Walk is comprised of 1.7 miles of pedestrian, bicycle, roadway, streetscape, safety, signage, signalization, intersection, crosswalk, and public meeting space improvements.

The goal of this project is to create destinations for jobs and corporate headquarters, service, and professional opportunities in the City’s Central Business District, as well as connectivity along that corridor. There are locations, along the City Walk, that are viable for corporate headquarters, urban residential units, commercial services, and retail jobs.

“This City Walk is our spine, a physical connector, but from this, potential, future projects can be building accessible routes and pathways to the SALt Block, to Ridgeview, and to Old Lenoir Road that will be a future arts district,” said Allison Holtzman, Vice Chair of the Bond Implementation Commission. “If we commit to a pedestrian-friendly city, we can be a prototype for other cities in the country.”

Employers who seek to grow their companies by employing college graduates and others, who fit the 20 to 30 year-old demographic, recognize that their employees want to work in an urban setting. Many of them, who work in this area of the City, want to bike or walk to work. They want to take their lunch break and go into a downtown setting. The City Walk encourages that, giving Hickory a competitive advantage that helps to recruit professional jobs and headquarter opportunities.

Paul Thompson is the Founder and Chairman of Transportation Insight, a multi-modal lead logistics provider, headquartered in Hickory. His firm redeveloped the historic Lyerly Mill building, adjacent to the future City Walk. He said that the bond projects will create activity areas. Thompson feels that a central area for activities will increase Hickory’s visibility and inspire people to come to Hickory. “People want cool places to hang-out with things to do like Arts in the Park, the Symphony, the Hickory Community Theatre, and clothing and antique stores to shop. Our downtown area is more vibrant than it has been in my last 24 years here, but it can explode with the creation of these new amenities,” said Thompson.

Thompson recognized that there wasn’t enough parking for the future traffic the City Walk and a vibrant downtown will bring. “We partnered with the City to co-develop our parking lot for night and weekend parking for the City Walk,” Thompson said. “It is a central location for access to the green space. It is a great place to get on the City Walk.”

When determining a location for Carolina Pedal Works, co-owner Brad Stevens, said that the future City Walk was key. “We had heard that the City Walk was coming right by here,” said Stevens. “We knew that we could possibly rent bikes when it opens and have easy access to the greenway.” He added, “I think it will get more people on bicycles in general, and maybe even more people commuting to work. I think it will bring people in town and will open up the opportunity for us to make bike repairs, since we are right here off the greenway.”

The City of Hickory received the Surface Transportation Block Grant – Direct Attributable (STBGDA) and Transportation Alternatives Program – Direct Attributable (TAP-DA) grants to supplement construction funds for the City Walk bond project. The grant combined total of $14.1 million for the two grants includes a maximum award not to exceed $11.28 million (80 percent) in Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), which is administered through NCDOT, funds in accordance with the project scope of work and the provisions set out in the Agreement, with a required contribution of $2.82 million by the City (20 percent). The funds will be distributed to the City as qualified monies are spent.

The City plans to apply for the United States Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Discretionary Grant program again this year, once it is opened by the Department of Transportation, who also reviews and awards this grant money. If the City receives this grant, it would assist with additional funding towards the City Walk.

“The City Walk is a multi-year project,” said Assistant City Manager Andrea Surratt. “We are on track with our projected timeline for this project, but with the additional $11.28 million grant money being received, an amount which is phenomenal, there are more reviews and processes in place. Additionally, we are waiting on permitting from the railroad. We want to make sure all ‘i’s’ are dotted and ‘t’s’ are crossed, which takes time.” Surratt added, “Construction is slated to begin in 2018.”
“The project is currently at 60% complete design,” said Surratt. “We have seen features such as a seat wall, medallions, and the pedestrian bridge over Highway 127.” An exciting announcement is that with the additional funding, we have been able to extend the City Walk from 4th Street NW to 9th Street NW.”

Richard Swartzel, President and CEO of CornerStone United, located in their renovated Piedmont Wagon building, the oldest building in Hickory, said, “I am tickled to death that the City Walk is extending to 9th Street. This brings a lot of potential for the West Hickory area.” He added, “I will use the City Walk. Actually, I come to work early every morning and I run the path that the future City Walk will take from my building to LRU and back.” Additionally, he said, “Our employees like to walk to lunch. We moved from Tate Boulevard to our current building to have more access to retail, banks, and the Downtown Farmer’s Market for our employees. There are huge benefits to having a business downtown; it’s central to everything.”

Hickory City Councilwoman Jill Patton added, “The City walk has been able to include four additional blocks due to grants. I can’t wait for the first shovel to hit the ground on our City Walk! This is an exciting time for our City.”
The Riverwalk will be Hickory’s first on-water boardwalk experience, along the shoreline of Lake Hickory. The mile long ADA accessible walkway will extend from Highway 321 to Geitner-Rotary Park.

The Riverwalk is designed to have substantial pedestrian access, letting people view and experience the water, as they make their way along the Riverwalk. The exact type and use of this space is being determined by the Riverwalk Subcommittee with the help of professional designers.

Allison Holtzman, Vice Chair for the Bond Implementation Commission stated, “We need to make the water visible, accessible, and really just show it off.”

The Riverwalk’s first phase is a boardwalk and path that is slated to be roughly one mile that runs along Lake Hickory through the City parks, along the water. The entire Riverwalk will now hug the shoreline over the water. It will be a pedestrian boardwalk. One point will start at the Deidra Lackey Memorial Park, where Geitner-Rotary Park is slated to be renovated. The other point begins near the Highway 321 bridge, which is slated for renovation through the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

Some of the concepts include a combination concrete path and deck section over the water, low level pedestrian lights, including architectural character into the railing and deck lighting, and overlooks that will have backless benches for best full visual ability.

“The Riverwalk is going to give everyone access to the lake and it’s going to benefit the people who live here, as well as let people know, regionally, that we have a lake,” said Holtzman.

At this time, the geotechnical work for the support system, which allows them to work on the structure of the preliminary design, is being completed. “A city should build off of its assets and being on the water is one. It is rare to be able to live in a city and also have access to the lake,” said Holtzman.
Recognizing that the City’s major thoroughfares are adequate public transportation, but lack modern pedestrian facilities and updated landscaping, the City realized that this is an area that needed improvement. In the communities that Hickory competes against for jobs and for population, their streets have better pedestrian access, are more aesthetically pleasing, and the importance of gateways, as entrance identifiers into their cities, are vital.

Hickory has major thoroughfares that run through the City, especially on Interstate 40 and Highway 321. As people are moving through the Hickory area, something is needed at those exits that tells people they have arrived, that they are at a destination. Wayfinding signage is also a critical piece of enhancing the City’s commercial centers.

There are multiple Streetscape projects. One will be on Lenoir Rhyne Boulevard between Highway 70 and Tate Boulevard. Another Streetscape will be along Old Lenoir Road, which will connect the City Walk to the Riverwalk. The next steps for the Streetscapes include soliciting qualifications for design services in the fall of 2017.

The current Gateway plan consists of an artistic leaf structure, along with landscaping, at Highway 321 and 70. The other Gateway will be placed at Lenoir-Rhine Boulevard and Interstate 40. City Council has approved the Gateway plan at Hwy 321 and 70. The LR Blvd. I-40 Gateway has not been designed yet. There are many opportunities for smaller gateway features and welcome to Hickory signage at key intersections. A coordinated system of gateways will develop over time.

The City installed 104 new Wayfinding signs that direct drivers throughout the City of Hickory to various locations, buildings, shopping districts, and more. The Wayfinding signage helps to guide visitors, reminds locals, creates consistency in signage by projecting a branded community image, reduces sign clutter, and promotes safety. “We’re making an effort to make people notice when they pass Hickory. It helps to show that we’re taking care of our city and that we’re here,” said Allison Holtzman, Bond Implementation Commission Vice Chair.
Park 1764 is a joint venture between Catawba County and the City of Hickory. The mission is to develop an advanced manufacturing business park compatible with the surrounding community and to promote a harmonious development for job creation for Catawba County citizens. Park 1764 is an upscale business park, just under 200 acres, located south of Catawba Valley Community College, between Robinwood Road and Startown Road, with excellent access to Interstate 40 and Highway 321. Additionally, natural lands will be set aside within the park for permanent conservation and covenants will be established to protect the park environment and the adjacent community. $5 million of the bond funds are earmarked for the City’s portion of the development costs.

**Park 1764 Details**

- Park 1764 will be the only Class A Business Park in the entire region and will appeal to international and upper-end business opportunities creating higher technology jobs, a substantial opportunity unlike any other in the area.
- Park 1764 is patterned after Treyburn Business Park in rural Durham County - a clean, high-end, two-lane rural environment.
- Covenants and restrictions will be in place to maintain low-impact, eco-sensitive development appropriate to the rural setting.
- Distribution centers and heavy manufacturing will not be allowable uses within the park.
- Annexation of surrounding properties will not be facilitated by the development of Park 1764.
- Views will be shielded.
- Only necessary turn/ deceleration lanes that are needed for current or future developments are planned.
- Natural lands will be set aside within Park 1764 for permanent conservation and there will be access to public walking trails.
- Every 100 jobs created in the park equates to 177 jobs throughout the community.
- The financial impact 100 new jobs is equal to handing $1 to every citizen in both North and South Carolina (and half of Tennessee!) and asking them to spend it in Catawba County.

**Updates**

- The North Carolina Industrial Development Fund (NCIDF) grant for $671,920 from the Department of Commerce was received for infrastructure that includes off-site sanitary sewer, entrance road, landscaping, and berm, as well as an entrance sign and water line for the development. This grant is a 50/50 split, which means the City and County have to spend at least $671,920 on the project to receive the $672,000 from the NCIDF. The City and County agreed to equally split the cost of the development of Park 1764.
- The property is currently being marketed through the Catawba County Economic Development Corporation.
- There is a joint City/County Executive Committee that makes the financial and development decisions that represents the Hickory City Council and Catawba County Commissioners. Decisions are ultimately approved through these two entities.

**History of the property**

In the early 1760’s, an industrious German named Ulrich Krauter arrived at a German community established by Heinrich Weidner at Muddy Creek, a tributary to the South Fork of the Catawba River. Weidner was Catawba County’s first settler. In 1764, the British Crown granted Krauter (Crowder) 450 acres as part of the Granville Proprietary. Crowder had development plans for this property, and started selling lots in Ulrichsburg, a section of the Crowdtown/Crowder’s Town parcel, with the sale of 16 lots of 9/10 acre each. A popular 1886 map of Catawba County locates Crowder Town Stock Farm and Crowder Town Road...
Cont. from page 23

along Muddy Creek and identifies John B. Lutz, the foundation for one of the most notable and unique Jersey dairy operations in the State. By the early 1900s, five of their children established separately owned and operated, but “one in purpose” dairies known as the “Dutch Dairy Farm #1 – 6” with the unifying theme of the co-op “to create bargaining power, reach outside markets, increase prices, reduce cost per unit, establish uniform standards, improve quality, and enhance the ability to specialize, make long range plans, and gain relationships.”

Interesting things about the individual dairy farms:

- The first dairy school ever conducted in North Carolina was held in 1908 on the farm of Mr. Henry P. Lutz (Dutch Dairy Farm #1) in an old tenant house. Classes were conducted by Professor J.A. Conover, a dairy specialist from the North Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical College in Raleigh. Professor Conover taught classes on feed rations, milk production, butterfat testing, packaging of dairy products, and more, and the event became a marked occasion that spread throughout the state.

- Dutch Dairy Farm No. 2 owned by W. Raymond Lutz Sr. was located on Startown Road in Newton. The main tract was originally planned to be the county seat of Catawba County and named Crowertown, but when developer Ulrich Crowder went broke, those plans failed.

- W. Raymond Lutz Sr. and his wife Bessie, who owned and operated Dutch Diary Farm No. 2, built their own milk processing facility in the early 1920s. They sold Grade A raw milk in glass bottles that was delivered twice daily to houses and businesses in the Hickory area. The operation became the largest retail milk business in Catawba County.

Grant Funding for City Projects

Grant dollars play an important role in the development of the bond projects. While voters approved the $40 million bond referendum, grant dollars can go a long way in supplementing the $40 million. City staff are always looking for additional grant funding opportunities that will benefit the community.

The City was recently awarded funding from the Federal Highway Administration, allocated through the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). A total amount of $11.28 million was awarded for the City Walk project, with a required 20 percent local match of $2.82 million, which will be taken from the bond funds. The combined amount of $14.1 million will be partially used for the City Walk Pedestrian Bridge over Highway 127, which is being designed to be an iconic gateway feature. The funds will also be used for the extension of City Walk from 4th Street to 9th Street.

The NCDOT is planning to replace the bridge on Highway 321 that goes over Lake Hickory. The City recognized this replacement as an opportunity to create a gateway feature into the City. The NCDOT awarded the City $3.5 million, which they will use to construct additional design elements on the bridge. The additional elements will serve to create an aesthetic welcome into the city and craft a memorable visual of Hickory. The bridge has not yet been designed, but a firm will be hired by the City to design the bridge. This NCDOT Bridge is not one of the bond projects, but is a recommendation from the Inspiring Spaces Plan.

The City also received a North Carolina Industrial Development Grant in the amount of $671,920 for Park 1764. The funds are being used for the business park's sanitary sewer infrastructure and entrance road development. The awarded grant comes with a 100 percent matching requirement. The City of Hickory and Catawba County entered into an agreement on March 21, 2016 to equally cover the cost of this phase of development, which includes sanitary sewer outfall extension to the park, house/property acquisition, berming, and an entrance road development with landscaping and fencing. The total investment will be $1,766,690, with the City and County contributing $547,385 each and the grant funding of $671,920.

A federal grant that the City plans to compete for is the highly sought after United States Department of Transportation TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) Grant. The application process is competitive, as numerous cities across the country apply for the grant each year. While the city is looking for multiple grants and funding opportunities, the awarding of a TIGER grant could go long way in offsetting the cost of the City Walk project.

While receiving grant dollars is always positive for helping to fund projects, they often come with additional regulations and mandatory procedures, which can require additional time and effort to complete the projects. Currently, the bond program timeline is on schedule, but the City remains flexible to fulfill requirements as needed as additional grant funding is accrued.