

# City gets grant to improve downtown

Ronald Hawkins rhawkins@reporter-times.com

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## MARTINSVILLE

Martinsville has been awarded a \$50,000 grant from the state Office of Community and Rural Affairs. The grant will help the city develop plans to revitalize downtown Martinsville.

Joanne Stuttgen, president of the Morgan County Historic Preservation Society, said the state grant was awarded just before Christmas. A steering committee and elected officials will meet next week to get the work underway. And Stuttgen hopes property owners will get involved, she said.

"It's critical to get building owners or prospective owners involved," she said.

An incentive for property owners becoming involved is that they won't be able to receive state development funds later if they don't participate, Stuttgen said. That funding could include as much as a 90 percent state contribution as part of a larger pool of money as large as \$500,000.

The planning will include three components, Stuttgen said. They are:

- A retail and marketing demographic study.
- Developing building rehabilitation plans.
- Developing a landscape plan to make downtown Martinsville more attractive.

Architect Benjamin Rawlins of Odle McGuire Shook Corp. will be working with the group to develop plans. Master gardeners also will be involved in the process.

Stuttgen estimated that the process would take five to six months or more, but could be completed more quickly.

"The goal is to get this done by October," Stuttgen said. "I'm excited. This is the first direct step in physically turning around downtown."

After next week's meeting, the steering committee will be seeking public input, Stuttgen said. Persons who would like to make suggestions or ask questions may call her at 765-349-1537.

"We're going to be beating the bushes on this," she said.

To obtain the grant, the city provided a \$5,250 matching grant. That money came from the historic preservation society, Rediscover Historic Martinsville, the city, the Greater Martinsville Chamber of Commerce and the Reporter-Times.

RHM was admitted into the state Main Street program in December 2008. In the application prepared by Stuttgen, the group stated the goal of being a member was to help enliven downtown Martinsville.

Being a Main Street community, according to state officials, improves Martinsville's ability to obtain grants. The state Office of Community and Rural Affairs gives extra points to grant applications from communities with Main Street programs.

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