



## Office of the Mayor

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### **Students to make financial investment in Athens by assisting non-profits**

The City of Athens and Dekko Foundation are putting money into high school students' hands and giving them the responsibility of investing it to enhance their community.

The students, who are members of the Athens Mayor's Youth Commission, are accepting community grant proposals from non-profit organizations with a program, project or event that will benefit Athens. The students plan to award grants ranging from \$100 to up to \$1,000.

Each year, the Youth Commission receives funding from various entities like Dekko Foundation to operate the community grant program. This year, Dekko Foundation supported the program with \$1,300 from a grant and a \$4,000 gift. Students will decide how much of the gift to allocate based on the proposals.

As part of the process, students set priorities and accept grant proposals from non-profits. The students, who are in grades 10-12, review and score the proposals and debate which ones should receive funding. Last year, for example, the Youth Commission funded several endeavors including hospital equipment, after-school tutoring, teen enrichment and the Merchants Alley renovation.

"These Youth Commissioners are passionate about the endeavors they want to support, and they will argue and defend their position and work toward a compromise so the group as a whole can make a decision," Athens Mayor Ronnie Marks said. "It's really fun to watch their process, but more importantly, it's reassuring to me to see their passion about Athens and what they believe will make us a vibrant community."

The Youth Commission's priorities this year are:

- Education
- Healthcare
- Recreation
- Special events
- Environmental
- Small business
- Arts
- Helping people in need

"It means a lot that my community trusts its youth to appropriately distribute money," said Youth Commissioner Claudia Henson. "Their faith in our maturity helps us as students give back to the city that raised us."

In addition to financially investing in the city, the program gives Youth Commissioners ways to give back with their time. Agencies who submit proposals are asked to provide volunteer opportunities for Youth Commissioners. For example, in recent years students have funded and volunteered with a teen program at the Family Resource Center and funded equipment needs for Athens-Limestone Community Association and then volunteered at the organization's Black History Month events. ALCA oversees the historic Trinity/Fort Henderson site.

Youth Commissioner Marilyn Swint said that without Youth Commission, "I never would have known about Trinity School and its history. The Trinity School is such a huge part of Athens history, and I am so glad I am now more knowledgeable about that history."

Youth Commission mentor/organizer Holly Hollman said increasing community awareness for students like Swint is an essential component of the Youth Commission grant program.

“This community grant program opens our Youth Commissioners’ eyes to community needs, volunteer opportunities and organizations that work tirelessly to enhance Athens and can utilize their support,” Hollman said. “If we can spark an interest in these students to love where they live, volunteer their time, share their talents and be engaged citizens, we all benefit.”

Proposals from non-profits will be accepted through April 21, 2022, at 4:30 p.m. Those interested in an application can go online at [www.athensal.us](http://www.athensal.us) or contact Hollman at [hhollman@athensal.us](mailto:hhollman@athensal.us).

**About Youth Commission:** The Athens Mayor’s Youth Commission is comprised of sophomores, juniors and seniors from Athens High, Athens Bible and Lindsay Lane Christian Academy schools. They work with mentors to learn about local government’s role and their role to be engaged and informed citizens. They meet monthly, attend City Council and school board meetings and participate in community service projects. They oversee a community grant program and produce the podcast “All In With Athens.”

**About Dekko Foundation:** Dekko Foundation, created by the late businessman and philanthropist Chester E. Dekko in 1981 in Kendallville, Ind., fosters economic freedom through education in communities where Dekko had business or personal interests, including the City of Athens and Limestone County. The foundation invests in organizations that support children and young people from birth through age 18 in building knowledge, skills and character so they can be self-sufficient and capable of achieving economic freedom as adults.