LOCAL NEWS

Central has tourist potential

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Central needs to do a better job of marketing itself if it hopes to attract more tourists and businesses, according to a just-completed marketing/tourism survey.

That was just one of several recommendations from the study presented Monday night to the City Council and area business and community leaders by Greenville-based Arnett Muldrow and Associates.

Clemson University's Bob Brookover, who worked with Tripp Muldrow on the study, told the group that in the next year Central needs to develop tourism products and themes centered around its history as a railroad hub between Atlanta and Charlotte.

The city recently opened a railroad history museum downtown, and Brookover suggested that over the next year city officials consider restoration of Central's train depot.

Central leaders have said they hope the $12,000 study will give them ideas on how the city can best leverage its tourism industry and thereby attract more people to the area.

In a preliminary report to Central City Council in April, Muldrow said Central has ample opportunities to grow its retail business.

At Monday's presentation, Muldrow reaffirmed those findings, adding that the city should begin now to put itself in a position to grow that retail once the state's economy begins to rebound over the next year to 18 months.

"What we're seeing now is a major shakeout" in the economy, Muldrow said, adding that Central should now begin launching a marketing campaign to "get the Central brand out into the community."

Beyond the immediate steps, the study recommends that over the next two to three years the city should staff a position on tourism and economic development.

"There are cities much smaller than Central that have this position," Muldrow said.

He said Central should also work with the private sector in the future redevelopment of the Central Roller Mill just off Main Street in the city.

Muldrow said the mill, which for years was a landmark in Central, could house a full-service restaurant, farmers market and become a gathering spot for outdoor movies that would help draw people to the downtown area.

"We see that working in a lot of communities," he said.

Central took steps recently to lure more tourists to the city with the return of its Central Railroad Festival held last month in downtown.