Seneca, Westminster tout development at Oconee Alliance

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SENECA — Westminster Mayor Derek Hodgin and Seneca City Administrator Greg Dietterick were the featured guests at Thursday morning's Oconee Alliance meeting, and both men took opportunities to toot their respective horns regarding positive steps being taken in their cities.

Hodgin started off the meeting by emphasizing his excitement in the newly-renovated historic Westminster train depot, which will house the city's Chamber of Commerce and is expected to become an attractive location for parties and other events. Hodgin said the completion of the depot was an arduous task marked by understanding the ins and outs of the state grant process.

"It was a learning experience for us to say the least," he said.

Hodgin also touched on Westminster's negotiations with conservation group Upstate Forever over a possible conservation easement agreement that would provide the city with financial compensation for not commercially developing more than 100 acres of city-owned land along the Chauga River, Westminster's water source.

Hodgin spoke about the city's efforts to grow economically, citing a new restaurant coming in on Main Street as well as the recently reopened Westminster Speedway.

"We've had a lot of activity on the west side of town with the race track," he said, later referring to reports of gas stations and restaurants seeing a significant spike in business on Friday nights.

"We're really excited about the economic stimulus package the race track has given us," Hodgin said to a chuckling audience.

The mayor went on to emphasize his excitement over a new Frisbee golf course in Westminster.

"It's consistent with two elements we have for the vision of our county," he said. "That is healthy choice and recreation."

Dietterick highlighted Seneca's use of federal stimulus dollars, specifically the $515,000 in Department of Transportation money that has been approved for repaving the parking lots at Norton-Thompson Park.

Much of Dietterick's address to the alliance featured Seneca's robust water and sewer system, which provides water to areas as far north as Salem and as far south as Interstate 85.

"We are now taking sewer in from the nuclear plant now down 130 into our collection system," Dietterick said of the recently completed sewer line, allowing Seneca to treat Duke Energy's wastewater.

"Just to show you how this works with infrastructure and how important it is, immediately after we got that line open, we had the announcement of Keowee River project," he said. "Why do you think that is? Sewer is available."

Keowee River is a planned 774-acre mixed-use development project along lakes Hartwell and Keowee near S.C. Highway 130 north of Seneca that is set to yield $200 million in development in the next 20 years.

Both Hodgin and Dietterick emphasized that a municipality's success not only benefits the cities themselves, but helps Oconee County as a whole meet its goal of becoming a prime destination in the Southeast for recreation, tourism and business.

"We realize when Seneca rises, everybody rises. When Westminster rises, everybody rises," Dietterick said.



Andrew Moore/Staff

Seneca City Administrator Greg Dietterick reviews some of the city's projects during the Oconee Alliance's education meeting Thursday morning, which was held at Thrift Development in Seneca.