

Westminster on a roll

Mayor, city cautiously eye various upgrades in address

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WESTMINSTER — Westminster is doing quite nicely, thank you very much.

Mayor Derek Hodgin has delivered the first State of the City address to several dozen local residents, touting a host of improvements and plans, but also issuing a cautionary word about the impact of the current economy on the city's ability to move forward.

"There's a ton of good stuff to talk about," Hodgin told a crowd assembled at West-Oak Middle School. "The state of our city is very good. It is better than last year, and last year was better than the year before that."

Hodgin presented a 30-minute program that touched on everything from a new water tower, fire truck and police car, to plans to rehabilitate the former Butler School property and embark on an extensive downtown beautification program.

"We are making investments in our city," the mayor said, pointing to \$1,135,179 in grants the city obtained over the past couple of years. That money has been and will be used for a variety of projects, including restoring the depot that was destroyed in an arson

fire, refurbishing City Hall and purchasing property for a new fire station.

Hodgin also displayed a sense of humor when it came to the fire station project, which is a joint effort with the county. To the delight of the crowd, he put up a picture of the Taj Mahal and commented that the city's "first design" didn't meet with much approval.

He also showed a picture of rain buckets spread across the floor of a City Hall room, commenting that roof repairs had been made. "We're going to have a garage sale, and we've got plenty of buckets to sell," he quipped.

Hodgin also praised employees and local residents for their involvement in a number of initiatives such as Music on Main, a tour of homes and Westminster pride. He lauded new business efforts, saying, "It's amazing how many things are happening in the business community of Westminster given the economy."

He talked extensively about plans to develop a city master plan for recreation, an effort being overseen by Clemson University faculty and students. An 11-question survey was given to those attending, asking them to identify their current recreational interests. Hodgin also discussed plans



Mayor Derek Hodgin

for a beautification project in the commercial district that would create a series of town squares at major intersections along Main Street.

However, he also issued a cautionary statement when questioned about the economy and its impact on the city's plans.

"From a business standpoint, our accounts receivable could grow," he said, referring to utility payments. "Usage (of water and electricity) may go down and, for some, there will be an inability to pay.

"We are going to keep a close eye on our reserves and what we have available and adjust like everyone else does," he added. "The city is just like a home budget on steroids.

"We have to do the best we can to predict what is coming. We are holding our own but will be cautious going forward."