

By J. Todd Davis
Mayor, City of Dillon

I would like to start out by saying that the State of our City is in fairly good shape financially. We just recently completed reviewing our fiscal year ending this past June 30th of 2008. Our debt load from the General Fund and Water and Sewer Fund decreased by approximately 1,000,000. We have a little more than \$200,000 cash in our general fund than we did at the same period last year. The primary reason we find ourselves in decent shape to withstand the downturn in the economy and less revenues from the state coming in this year is from a variety of areas:

- The city has maintained a thin but efficient payroll compared to other cities our size. Our city averages about 87 full time employees with very little turnover.
- We also increased the franchise fees of Progress Energy, Time Warner Cable, and SCE&G to help offset the increased cost of capital purchases of \$228,000. The franchise fee charges to these utilities went from 3% to 5%, which is allowed. Other cities have been doing this and we felt the need for the increase. Unfortunately, the utilities pass this fee hike to the subscribers.
- The city also budgeted \$4 per gallon fuel cost which has eased.
- There has been a very slight increase in garbage rates.
- It also helped that each department has to eliminate non-essential items and they will again this year also.

We are still in a stressful environment financially. If the economy doesn't turn this year, tax revenues will go down along with state aid and the number of business license fees will decrease. For now there is no need to cut services or downsize the work force.

I, along with Council, look forward to working with the County on consolidation. We have already informed the new County Administrator about a meeting date. We don't want to consolidate services on the back of either municipality. There are areas that might make sense and save a lot of money in the process without sacrificing quality. One area is recreation. I believe a lot can be done if turf battles don't dominate discussions. Zoning is another area that may be beneficial along with some fire protection discussions. We will address County Council with an open hand and I have no doubt they will do the same. For our City and County to thrive and go forward, there can be no other way. I was very encouraged after the Chamber of Commerce retreat at the Wellness Center a few weeks ago. I was very encouraged with the new County Administrator, Charles Curry. There were also about 60 stakeholders at that meeting which was also encouraging.

If you have not viewed the Market Analysis recently completed by Muldrow and Associates, please do on the City's website on dilloncitysc.com. Five months of hard work was put into the market analysis. We know where and how much money is spent coming into town, leakage to other places, and what other businesses can thrive in our area. The amount of money that comes into our City annually is staggering. We also are beginning a new but familiar branding campaign for our city, which uses our current city logo. You will see our logo

more in the future. The analysis will not be shelved. It is already being acted upon.

About 15 months ago we took possession of the Dilmar Oil properties on East Main Street. Presently, we are in discussions with a private developer to rehabilitate the buildings. They are looking at retail space on the bottom floors and apartment housing upstairs. There is not a better way to revitalize Main Street than having people live there. This project is also being encouraged by the State Department of Education. I'm hoping possession with some strings attached will be granted over to the developer in the next month to bid out the work.

Also, the empty lot on MacArthur Avenue beside the theatre will soon be starting to gear up. We are currently trying to work out some irrigation issues now. We are going to preserve the original walls and make it a sitting park. If you have not viewed the logo on the wall please go by and look.

The Wellness Center continues to impress. Council's desire to build this before I became mayor was truly visionary. It has really been something for everyone. You only had to be there Saturday a week ago with the Ben Bernanke Interchange Ceremony to see first hand. The Wellness Center will be two years old this April. As of this past January, there were approximately nine hundred members. It is literally carrying itself in memberships alone. I shudder to think what we would do without it today!

Our most pressing challenge currently is out at the spray field. We have a state of the art facility, but we have got to expand and be completely out the river one day. DHEC wants us out, and we want to be out also. That means acquiring additional land along with a huge capital outlay. This project is one that could take 5 to 10 years, but it will have to be done. We think our Water and Sewer rates are fair compared to other cities that are larger and smaller than us. The challenge to maintain a facility to treat affluent is very expensive. I don't begin to know how smaller communities can continue to offer services and maintain reasonable rates for their citizens. It's certainly a challenge for a city even our size.

Please be sure you're counted in the upcoming census. Dillon has been listed at a population of about 6,500 since the last count. We are significantly undercounted. We have done our own documented count, and it's more like a citywide population of about 8,000. It's important to get our fair share of federal funds based on our actual size.

In closing, I see brighter days ahead. Things are taking place presently that will shape our future for decades to come. We are in the center of a destination where millions desire to be. We are presently upgrading infrastructure needs which current and new industries must have. Our natural resources and highway systems are the envy of millions of other communities. I can't think of a better place to live and raise a family.