

By ELLY GRIMM

• Leader & Times

The city of Liberal gave its own edition of the State of the Union address with its State of the City address Thursday evening.

During the address, various members of the city staff gave the citizens of Liberal an update about the state of affairs in the city, particularly focusing on the financial recovery effort from the recession, which included an update on the effects of the 1-cent sales tax.



Several of the city departments were also recognized for their work throughout the city. Future projects were also laid out for the citizens and commissioners who attended.

"I thought it was good, very informative," said Chris Ford, finance director for Liberal. "With the facts and figures, I think it helps open people's eyes to what we do as a city. It can be somewhat overwhelming when you see the numbers in print and by the time you factor in everything, it's pretty overwhelming, and we do what we can with the resources we have."

The financial portion of the address brought of the theme of budget tightening several times,

with Vice Mayor Janet Willimon saying that Liberal's financial situation is better than many other areas in the nation and in the state, even after being weakened by the recession for the last five years.

"Because we have made tough and, sometimes, unpopular choices to be prudent with our reserve usage and contain spending, (it) has enabled us to not jeopardize our overall financial stability," she said in the address.

Willimon also talked about job outlook, saying that while the city's work force, unfortunately, had to shrink again, they were able to enter this year with 191 regular employees.

Willimon also discussed how the city has been able to pull in trade from out of town and how Liberal's pull factor for shoppers is 8th in the state.

"We don't just have a perfect balance of trade but pull-in trade from outside our city limits," she said.

The middle of the address recognized several of the city's departments for their works around town. While the address was overall well-received, there were a few things that some felt deserved more recognition.

"If anything, I would say the fire department and their various activities," said Liberal citizen Jack Taylor. "They don't just go to fires, they go to accidents and removal of people from their automobiles that are trapped in there, and if there's an ambulance call, a fire department person goes, too."

The last part of the night's address dealt with the effects of the city's 1-cent sales tax, which has raised more than \$67 million since it was voted into effect in 2001. It alone has helped fund projects such as the water park and renovations to the park. The sales tax will continue to help fund future planned projects including renovations to a couple of the other parks in town and downtown, as well as a new city limits sign to the west entrance of the city.

“My hope is that 2014 will be another year we can remember as ‘mission accomplished,’” said Mayor Dave Harrison.