

City observers say local economy faring well

A panel of developers and planners say Oklahoma City's economy is on the right track.

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A crowd consisting mostly of developers, business executives and civic leaders was told Wednesday that Oklahoma City's economy is recovering from what they described as a relatively moderate recession compared to the financial crash suffered by the country.

Oklahoma City Planning Director Russell Claus kicked off the latest “Breaking Through” luncheon hosted by the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber by releasing a set of statistics showing the city did not fare too badly in the recent recession.

Claus, joined by hotel consultant John Williams, developer John Wooley II with Raptor Properties and others shared statistics and observations that indicate the local economy is heading in the right direction after development hit a virtual freeze in 2009.

Claus noted commercial development is strong along Interstate 40 in west Oklahoma City, where the Outlet Shoppes at Oklahoma City recently reported a strong opening, along with the Memorial Road corridor and the Classen Curve area in north and mid-central areas of the metro.

Hotels, he added, are continuing to be built along Memorial Road, Meridian Avenue by the airport, and downtown.

He said he is continuing to see office development along Memorial Road, where Paycom recently opened its headquarters, NW 63 and Western where Chesapeake Energy is expanding, and downtown where the new Devon Energy headquarters is being built.

Those same areas will continue to be of interest, Claus said.

“We expect to see that pattern of development continue for quite some time,” Claus said.

Claus said housing construction is recovering nicely, and the drop in home sizes is insignificant compared to changes reported elsewhere.

“Single family construction bottomed out in 2009, and it's up now, but down 30 percent in the five year trend,” Claus said. “Nationally it's down 70 percent, so Oklahoma City is

holding up a lot better than the rest of the country.”

Williams, who previously managed the Skirvin Hilton but is now overseeing the Colcord Hotel along with food and beverage operations at Devon Energy Center, called the hotel market “upbeat” after crashing in 2009.

He noted the market was overbuilt leading into the national recession, but has since stabilized.

“When times were good, money was easy to get, the brands were chasing developers,” Williams said.

“And they have a brand for every customer. The brands drove the process, developers looked at the opportunity to build and operate or be flippers. It became an over developed market. Things pretty much stopped.”

Wooley said interest from national retailers plummeted through last year, but has since picked up.

He said the business slowed so much he could spend the day putting a golf ball down a hallway without getting a single phone call.

This year the picture is different, Wooley said, and he is fielding calls from national restaurant chains and other potential tenants interested in 130 acres Raptor Properties is developing near Memorial Road and Rockwell Avenue.

“We think we're going to be very busy next year,” Wooley said. “That whole intersection is about to bust open.”

Wooley said the company is also restarting development of an area along NW 150 and Pennsylvania previously promoted as Tuscana.

The development, redubbed Quail North, will no longer follow the original ambition of creating a “north upscale Bricktown” mixed use development, but will now consist of apartments, garden homes and offices.

“It would have been wonderful if that had happened,” Wooley said. “But with its location behind Quail Springs Mall and with our market not being as dynamic as others with professional football teams and such, that's not going to happen.”



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