

## State of the City: very good

### Sande looks favorably upon the past year in North Mankato

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#### NORTH MANKATO —

The president is required by the U.S. Constitution to provide a periodic “ State of the Union” address, the governor of Minnesota does a “ State of the State,” and on Monday night North Mankato City Administrator Wendell Sande gave the first — possibly annual — “ State of the City.”

Unlike the State of the Union, it didn't last anywhere close to an hour.

Nobody in attendance yelled “ You lie!” And there weren't repeated instances of half the City Council standing and cheering while the other half sat stone-faced.

But the purpose was essentially the same, Sande

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North Mankato City Administrator Wendell Sande's report provided an upbeat summary of how the city is doing.

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said after his two-page speech.

"It really was a good exercise to go back and think about what we've done in the past year," he said.

"Plus, it was an eventful year."

The city's biggest challenge - dealing with \$1.2 million in state aid cuts during the past three fiscal years - has also left residents wondering how difficult a situation North Mankato is in, according to Sande. He provided the basic answer in the first line of the address.

"As we begin 2010, I believe the State of the City is very good," Sande told the council, a dozen or so people in the audience and future viewers of the meeting on public access television.

He talked of North Mankato's infrastructure - streets, sewers and drinking water - being in solid shape, of a smaller than average city work force that's proven efficient in the face of budget cuts and of a growing tax base despite the deep economic recession.

"Building permit revenue in 2009 exceeded our budget by nearly 10 percent," Sande reported.

Even in the midst of a sharp downturn in the housing economy, two new residential subdivisions kicked off last year, numerous new businesses have located in the city and the city's halfpercent local sales tax has matched anticipated revenue of about \$400,000 a year. Economic development projects, funded largely through state grants, included assisting a management buy- out of Thin Film Technology, the impending commercial/residential construction on a long-vacant Belgrade Avenue lot and road projects that will promote the enlargement of the city's industrial park.

The past year also brought the completion of the expansion of the popular Taylor Library and improvements to Benson and Spring Lake parks, all funded by the local sales tax, Sande said. He also praised the city's early efforts in providing its own convention and visitor planning, including the attraction of state and national softball tournaments to the Caswell Park softball complex.

The city's decision to withdraw from a joint convention and visitors organization cosponsored with Mankato brought some criticism from community members who want to see the two cities working together more aggressively. That criticism - along with another push by Mankato to move toward consolidated city services - wasn't a motivation for the State of the City address, Sande said.

But the report definitely provided an upbeat summary of how North Mankato is doing as an independent municipality.

" There's a lot of good things happening," Sande said.