



Westminster considers conservation along Chauga

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WESTMINSTER — The city of Westminster is currently weighing the pros and cons of conservation.

City Administrator David Smith headed up a discussion session last night to delve into the topic of a possible conservation easement agreement on the city's property along the Chauga River.

"There's been an ongoing discussion about conservation here," Smith said, "We've talked about it many times, but at this point, not everyone has bought into it."

Westminster owns some 100 acres along the Chauga River, the city's main water source. That land has sat along the river near Long Creek unused since the 1920s, Smith said.

"The city has the option to sell it," Smith said. "My concern about an absolute outright sale is that where the property is, downstream is where we get our drinking water. The last thing I want is having asphalt and concrete running into the water because waterfront property tends to get developed."

Upstate Forever, a non-profit funding organization operating in nine Upstate counties to promote conservation and responsible development in [South Carolina](#), has expressed interest in funding an easement or conditions of use for the property.

"Under the agreement, you still own the property," Smith said. "If we were to move forward with the easement, Upstate Forever would make an offer under conditions restricting certain kinds of development at that property. It would forever protect that land based on restrictions placed on it, even if it was sold later."

Smith said Westminster finds itself somewhat between a rock and a hard place with the property, as sitting on the undeveloped 100 acres may be seen as wasteful, while liquidating a valuable asset for cash may not be financially prudent, and a conservation easement may severely restrict future selling power.

"Waterfront property is a valuable asset," he said. "If it's worth 'X' dollars today, it'll be worth more tomorrow. So if you cash out and spend the money, that's over and done with, and you no longer have that asset. So there's a tendency to want to try and hang onto it."