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Fewer failing to pay property tax

Richland, Lexington numbers improve; are economic woes easing off?

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Pre-Auction Tax Numbers

This year looks better than last in the Midlands, with fewer properties set to be sold

	Nov. 2010		Nov. 2011	
	Properties	Their value	Properties	Their value
Richland	4,566	\$9.4 million	4,313	\$8.4 million
Lexington	4,555	N/A	3,497	\$4.1 million

The number of properties with delinquent property taxes is down this year in both Columbia-area counties, reversing a post-recession trend.

Year-to-date figures for Richland and Lexington counties show the positive trend is far stronger in Lexington, which has 23 percent fewer properties facing delinquent tax sales next month compared to the same time in 2010. In Richland, the figures are down 5.5 percent.

"I hope it says good things — that more people are doing well this year," Richland County Treasurer David Adams said of the 4,313 properties on which the owners have not paid their 2010 taxes. "We're waiting to get back to the good old days of 1,200 properties going to tax sales."

The number of properties whose owners who are behind in Lexington is 3,497 as of Nov. 21, said Gene Rishkovski, who handles delinquent property taxes for Treasurer Jim Eckstrom. The property taxes owed add up to \$3.895 million for real estate and site-homes and \$220,000 for mobile homes.

That's 23 percent fewer properties than the 4,555 at this time last year, Rishkovski said. He could not explain why the numbers are so much better in Lexington than in Richland.

"I would say the economy is getting a little better as far as tax payments go," he said of the trend in both counties.

At this time of year in 2009, Lexington had 3,638 properties with past-due tax bills.

Across the Congaree River, the 4,313 single-family homes, commercial buildings and mobile homes that have not had their current taxes paid "is still a lot of properties," Adams said.

Altogether, owners of those properties owe Richland County \$8.4 million in taxes, Adams said.

Last year at this time, taxes were not paid on 4,566 Richland County properties, which totaled \$9.4 million in back taxes, he said. In 2009, 3,860 properties were facing tax delinquency at this time as annual tax sales loomed. Adams did not readily have a total on how much taxes were owed.

Property owners often pay their taxes just before tax sales, so the actual number of properties that will be sold at auction routinely drops substantially, county officials said. This year's sales in both counties are scheduled for Monday, December 5.