



Shaping Our Future Growth Alternatives Analysis Case Study Series

The Upstate region will likely welcome more than 300,000 new residents by 2040. The Shaping Our Future (SOF) Growth Alternatives Analysis is an evaluation of the likely trade-offs that will result depending on how and where that growth is accommodated. At a regional scale the following will be evaluated: land consumption, fiscal impact (i.e. cost of infrastructure and property tax revenue generation) and impact to sensitive ecological resources and agricultural lands.

At a smaller geographic scale (i.e. county, city or sub-region), additional topics will be studied through a case study series. Studying these “themes” at a smaller geographic scale will allow for deeper and more credible analyses of topics that don’t naturally lend themselves to analysis over a large geographic scale. Various information and data collection methods will be used to inform case studies including: software modeling, stakeholder interviews, previous document reviews, surveys, focus group meetings, etc.

Specific topics have surfaced throughout the SOF stakeholder engagement process, and the following case study topics will be explored as a part of the final project report:

- Access to Education, the True Cost of School-Siting
- The Economic Value of Natural Areas, Open Space and Local Water Resources
- Home Preferences for a Changing Demographic & Lifestyle
- Transit in Urban & Suburban Landscapes
- How Others’ Investments & Decisions Impact the Landscape (Woodruff Road Corridor)
- Working Farms & Local Food Systems
- Preferred Development Patterns, Who Chooses?
- The Intersection of Land Use, Communities & Social Equality

Each case study will follow a similar format: a brief, academic discussion about the issue or opportunity (typically one page); a list and map of areas in the Upstate experiencing similar conditions (typically one page); a summary of the challenges or opportunities important to the topic (typically two or three pages), and a detailed overview of specific tools and/or policies being utilized within the Upstate or in other similar regions or communities across the country to address the issue or take advantage of the opportunity effectively (typically two or three pages).

Each steering committee member will be assigned as an “advisor” to one case study topic so that each topic will have two or three “advisors”. The role of the advisors will be to inform development of the case study “discussion” as it will appear in the final report by providing background information that illustrates how the topic impacts the Upstate; identifying specific Upstate sub-regions, counties or municipalities where the issue is most pressing or relevant; sharing contacts and/or past reports to be considered as our consultants research the issue; and finally, identifying areas where successful strategies are being used to address the issue effectively.

Access to Education, the True Cost of School-Siting

Sprawling development patterns, increasing land costs, and fewer school locations are moving new school construction to the fringes. This produces many unintended consequences for the students and teachers: schools disconnected from neighborhoods they serve, increased transportation costs in terms of both time and dollars, and reduced physical activity for students that historically walked to school.

School districts and local governments have not traditionally engaged in long-term coordinated planning for siting new schools. Short-term financial decisions may not reflect long-term goals, and full-cost accounting principles (on-site and off-site) for evaluating costs and benefits of different school styles and locations are often not utilized. Recent shortcomings in the process have produced schools with excess or insufficient capacity, schools located far from neighborhoods, and unanticipated transportation and infrastructure costs.

This case study will explore the true on-site and off-site costs associated with school siting in urban, suburban and/or rural areas including expenses associated with capital, operations, maintenance, and rehabilitation. It will also examine the broader community impacts that result based on where schools locate in relation to existing population centers and infrastructure and the myriad reasons school districts choose the locations they do – including land costs, regional development patterns and state laws governing school siting.

Key Research Questions:

- What factors drive school site selection (i.e. state laws governing site requirements, neighborhood objections to school siting near existing residential areas, land costs, etc.)?
- How are communities, school districts and utility providers currently working together to select school sites, and how can that process be improved?
- How do infrastructure costs for schools built within the urban footprint versus outside the urban footprint compare?
- How do student travel modes vary across alternative school siting scenarios (i.e. number of walkers, bus riders, car riders)?
- How have student bussing services changed over the last two decades (i.e. route length, costs, etc.)? How are those services funded?
- In each school-siting scenario, what are specific site design choices that can be made to reduce costs and improve the student experience?

Potential Focus Areas:

Pickens County School District
Spartanburg County School District(s)
Oconee County School District (Walhalla High School)

The Economic Value of Natural Areas, Open Space and Local Water Resources

Natural areas such as forests, grasslands, and local water resources – as well as working farmlands – provide significant economic, environmental, recreational and public health benefits to surrounding communities. These lands and waters are productive assets that generate significant value for the region and positively impact the character and “feel” of the Upstate – making it a unique place to live, work and visit and attracting new residents and business investments.

Unfortunately, the benefits provided by these resources are often not well understood and many times under-valued in policy debates and funding decisions. Protected open space — both public and private — currently represents approximately 13% percent of the Upstate’s land area (most of which is in the Blue Ridge Escarpment, or northwestern corner of the region). In addition to this protected open space, the Upstate benefits greatly from lands currently in forest or grassland cover – which while currently undeveloped – are also unprotected and experiencing increasing development pressures as the region grows. The reliance on property tax revenue to fund local government facilities and services makes land protection decisions very sensitive. Land conservation groups are often asked to demonstrate the economic value of protecting open space.

This case study will explore the economic benefits of forest and grassland areas and local water resources using information generated from national and local studies. The economic benefits will be examined from several perspectives: (1) direct revenue to individuals or governments; (2) higher property sales values and tax collections; (3) free or low-cost fees for access to recreation amenities; and (4) avoided infrastructure costs (when natural infrastructure provides services such as stormwater filtration, flood control, etc., for which built infrastructure would otherwise be needed).

Key Research Questions:

- How would each of our four land use scenarios impact our region’s ability to retain “open space” identified as the most critical for providing high quality habitat, sediment and nutrient retention (water quality) and carbon sequestration? What are the economic benefits to be gained by leaving those areas undisturbed?
- How do development patterns and land use choices impact the amount of impervious cover in the region, and in turn our local water quality?
- How do development decisions upstream – for instance in Greenville’s urban area – impact local communities and economies downstream (i.e. property values around downstream lakes, tourism, etc.)?
- How are Upstate tourism agencies highlighting natural assets to boost tourism? How are economic development groups selling those assets to recruit industry?
- How does the community currently take advantage of existing parks, trails and water resources?
- How can Upstate officials and local governments best balance growth and development with protection of some critical lands and other natural resources?

Potential Focus Areas:

Oconee County
Greenwood County
Spartanburg County
Greenville County

Home Preferences for a Changing Demographic & Lifestyle

The demands --- or market – for different housing products and price points in a region changes among consumer groups represented and is influenced greatly by residents’ income, age, household size, and available financing. Residential growth patterns throughout the Upstate over the last 25 or so years have favored suburban, greenfield development where buyers are willing to ‘drive for value’ (to afford bigger homes and larger lots while counting on low-cost gas and continuous road improvements to offset longer commutes). In the Upstate’s more urban areas, residential growth is following national trends toward more infill development and redevelopment, including a mix of for-sale and rental housing products integrated within a mixed-use, walkable environment.

Baby Boomers (53 to 71 years old in 2017) and Millennials (20 to 36 years old in 2017) are expected to drive real estate preferences in the next decade. Boomers will be aging out of conventional single-family homes and looking for lower-maintenance and lifestyle housing products. Many may choose to live in rental housing in more walkable and dynamic locations, which may offer greater flexibility to move freely in future years. Others may choose to ‘down-size’ into patio homes or townhomes (some with elevators), or live in two or more smaller homes in different parts of the US throughout the year. Millennials, especially single and newly married, will continue to drive rental and higher density housing products in urban, walkable communities. Millennials starting families may seek ‘near-in’ neighborhoods that emphasize safety, schools, privacy, convenience, and more space but are more walkable and/or more walkable than the conventional Upstate suburbs of the last two decades.

This case study will explore home preferences for a changing demographic and lifestyle in the Upstate, focusing on perspectives from different consumer groups, home builders, and local government officials and comparing them to available inventories (housing types, locations and price points). It will examine barriers including local policies, neighborhood objections, etc., which home builders at times face when attempting to provide what may be considered non-traditional or innovative home types in the Upstate. The intersection between public health, land use and home preferences will also be explored.

Key Research Questions:

- What housing gaps exist in the Upstate and what barriers do home builders face when trying to fill them (i.e. local land use policies, neighborhood objections, etc)?
- How can Upstate communities better accommodate home preferences of our rapidly expanding senior population? How can existing suburban areas “reinvent” themselves to better appeal to the evolving demands of millennials?
- How does neighborhood design and location (proximity to other uses) impact public health?
- What local land use policies could most easily be changed to allow home builders more flexibility in delivering unconventional products to market?

Potential Focus Areas:

Greenville County/City of Greenville/Travelers Rest
Pickens County/Clemson/Easley

Transit in Urban & Suburban Landscapes

Public transit in the United States (essentially regional bus service in the Upstate) is credited with reducing traffic congestion, improving air quality, and offering more choices for getting around the region. Several conditions are identified by transit advocates for a successful system, including a concentration of potential transit patrons, all-day travel demand, multimodal connectivity to transit, and regional connections to major destinations. The density, mix and pattern of development near transit service greatly influences the potential for a financially-stable, well-used system.

Transit advocates claim any city (urban or suburban) with sufficient population or employment density to cause traffic congestion has sufficient population and employment to support some level of public transit investment. Urban areas in the region provide the density, mix and pattern of development for a more traditional transit system, which provides access to nearby destinations using a series of interconnecting routes and high-frequency service. Development characteristics for more suburban areas typically do not support traditional transit systems without major subsidies, and transit advocates in these areas try to identify one or more transit investment corridors that collect riders from surrounding low-density, single-use areas (using park-and-ride facilities) and connects them to major destinations in more urban areas where parking availability or pricing and road congestion levels discourage single-occupant vehicle travel. Service in suburban transit corridors is typically focused on peak morning and evening commute periods.

This case study will explore different development types, patterns and intensities that support specific transit investments in urban and suburban areas. Three general categories of transit investment will be considered: increased service (more transit vehicle miles), improved service (more comfortable, convenient and reliable), and transit-oriented development. The connection between land use planning & policy and transit functionality will be a focus of this case study. As well, this case study will look at possibilities for better connecting independently functioning bus systems in the region.

Key Research Questions:

- Which Upstate corridors might be targeted for providing some level of service (via park & ride facilities) to residents living in suburban or rural locations?
- How do Upstate communities compare with peer locations in relation to local funding allocations to transit?
- What sorts of land use policies could be considered for communities trying to build a more transit-supportive development pattern?
- What are the most logical public transit investments for Upstate communities to consider in the next 20 years?
- How can local funds be generated to leverage federal transit investments?

Potential Focus Areas:

Greenville County (Greenlink)

Pickens/Oconee County (Clemson/Central/Seneca service provided by CATbus)

How Others' Investments & Decisions Impact the Landscape (Woodruff Road Corridor)

Woodruff Road (SC 146) was originally built as a two-lane facility serving low-density residential traffic, but has evolved significantly over the years to become the most congested commercial corridor in the City of Greenville and Greenville County. Industrial development started the trend, moving to the corridor in the 1960s with construction of the General Electric Turbine Plant and associated businesses. Commercial development in the 1970s and 1980s (starting with the Greenville Mall in 1978) transformed the corridor from rural to suburban, and started a major investment period represented by the extension of Interstate 385 to Interstate 85 in the vicinity of Woodruff Road, new residential neighborhood construction, and a massive push to rezone property adjacent to the corridor from 'residential' to 'commercial'. By the 1990s, big box stores and other national retailers abandoned their locations near Laurens Road and other in-town locations in the City of Greenville to become part of the 'regional commercial super corridor'.

Increasing congestion through the years transformed the corridor into a five-lane suburban street. Approximately 120 driveways (curb cuts) and 17 traffic signals between Verdae Boulevard and SC 14 attempt to move traffic through the corridor; however, residents label the road dangerous, highly-congested and one to avoid whenever possible.

So how did this happen? What caused the road to become something residents want to avoid at times? Who was responsible, and how did a series of decisions and investments get us to this point?

This case study will explore the evolution of Woodruff Road and summarize a series of 'big decisions' made to transform the corridor into what it is – and how it functions – today. It will focus on specific land use policies, transportation policies and investments, market forces, and political realities that influenced decision-making for various government agencies, political officials, and private development interests. Findings from the case study will be useful for future multi-agency corridor planning.

Key Research Questions:

- What specific different choices could have been made in the evolution of Woodruff Road to result in a better functioning commercial corridor?
- What will the costs likely be to local, state and federal governments to effectively address congestion issues on Woodruff Rd? Could those costs have been avoided with more proactive planning and different land use decisions?
- How can Upstate communities work with developers to ensure large-scale commercial developments are designed to promote walking (versus driving) from store to store within the development; excess parking is avoided; and curb cuts are minimized?

Potential Focus Areas:

Greenville County

Working Farms & Local Food Systems

Most food in the United States is produced hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles from where it is consumed, which requires significant energy (and cost) for handling and transportation, increases food spoilage during the journey, and undermines local markets that often grow or produce similar products. In the Upstate, the number and variety of agriculture commodities registered in the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture for the ten-county region — 8,178 registered farms, 858,714 acres of farmland and \$340,355,000 in gross market value (before taxes and production expenses) sold or removed from local farms — shows opportunity for a more sustainable, and local-first food system. Bringing together farmers and consumers in the region will strengthen the agriculture economy in rural areas and improve access to healthy food for suburban and urban communities. Additionally, local land use planning and policy decisions will impact how much farmland is preserved into the future.

Food systems include all aspects of food production: the way food is grown or raised; the way food is harvested or slaughtered; and the way food is processed, packaged or otherwise prepared for consumer purchase or food distribution. There is much work currently being done in the Upstate to bolster local food systems. How can that work be supported by wise land use planning and policy?

This case study will survey farms in the Upstate in terms of size, production, and location and summarize key indicators using information published in the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture. It will build on the substantial amount of work already being done in the Upstate to boost local food systems by exploring land planning and policy tools and programs (i.e. voluntary agriculture districts, agricultural conservation easements, etc.) that could help support local farmers and protect working farmland. It will also explore how the ability of urban areas to offer local food products is highly reliant on surrounding rural Upstate counties where that food is often sourced.

Key Research Questions:

- How can local government best support local farmers through more proactive land use planning and policy decisions?
- What are the main challenges farmers are facing in the Upstate and how can those be addressed by local governments (i.e. land costs, development pressure, etc.)?
- How do our urban centers – many of which are heavily promoting a “local food culture” – rely on our more rural counties for supply?
- What policy tools are being used elsewhere in the country to protect local farmlands and could those be put to use in the Upstate (i.e. voluntary agriculture districts, etc.)?

Potential Focus Areas:

Greenville and Spartanburg County “food sheds” (including surrounding more rural counties AND rural areas of more urban counties where food is sourced)
Oconee County

Preferred Development Patterns, Who Chooses?

Different development patterns and intensities found in the region are driven mostly by five general growth factors: demographics, interest rates, the economy, developer interests, and government policies and ordinances. The influence of each factor in relation to the others changes over time and often varies by location or land use category. Nonetheless, each factor is present to some degree when development occurs, or does not occur, in a community.

One or more special interest groups influence conditions for each of the growth factors. The demand for different development types, patterns and intensities is established by future buyers or renters attracted to the area that will fill new products and pay different price points (i.e., market demand). Banks and other institutions establish minimum lending criteria and set interest rates for borrowing money needed to fund new development (i.e., available capital). The local economy helps influence how quickly development occurs in an area, most often influenced by new employment opportunities and their ability to bring new residents (and other businesses) into the community (i.e., growth outlook). The private sector helps decide who builds, what they build, where they build, and why they build in a community, which is driven primarily by when a developer is confident about the other growth factors and decides to ‘take the chance’ to start a new project (i.e., construction). Government policies and ordinances are used to promote (or restrict) development in line with a community vision established for the area, funds available for extending infrastructure, local politics, etc. (i.e., policy framework).

This case study will examine the interplay of five major factors impacting how and where growth occurs in the region: demographics, interest rates, the economy, developer interests and government policies and ordinances. Input from local bank representatives, development groups, professional organizations, government officials, etc. will capture the complexities of ‘creating the deal’ and help examine the challenges associated with bringing one or more development types, patterns or intensities to a community.

Key Research Questions:

- Which of the factors is most influential in different areas of the Upstate?
- What are the ramifications when one or two factors over-shadow all others?
- How can local government best ensure the type of development their community envisions through land use planning and policy, while also responding to market conditions?
- How can utility providers and local planners work more effectively together to ensure the community is developing according to the community vision?

Potential Focus Areas:

City of Anderson/Anderson County
Spartanburg County
Greenville County

The Intersection of Land Use, Communities & Social Equality

Social privilege cannot be understood without the context of place. Economic, housing, immigration and social conditions shape the structure of our cities and neighborhoods. And the structure of our cities and neighborhoods shape access to affordable housing, quality education, healthy food, good jobs and reliable transportation. Many of these challenges relate to how communities and regions are planned and built, and to how places are promoted and maintained to retain land values.

This case study will explore the way land use and transportation planning, policies and investments impact social equity. The distribution of income, wealth, race and ethnicity compared to land values will be evaluated. How the structure of our communities impacts access to affordable housing, quality education, healthy food, good jobs and reliable transportation will also be explored.

Key Research Questions:

- How can cities prosper more equitably?
- How can local governments influence outcomes related to social equity through the land use and transportation decisions and investments they make?
- How can Upstate communities address the affordable housing crisis?
- How can communities who invest in redevelopment and large-scale community amenities (which drive nearby land costs up) avoid pushing out or otherwise negatively impacting existing residents?

Potential Focus Areas:

City of Greenville

Southern Greenville County (rising property values making it difficult for farmers to retain land)

City of Spartanburg/Spartanburg County (Northside project)