

Too many parking spaces?

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BY CHARLES SOWELL | STAFF

UPSTATE FOREVER is considering expanding a parking study to include sites in Greenville County after finding Greenville city building requirements had resulted in too many parking spaces at sites as diverse as major malls and small shops, said John Tynan, deputy director of the conservation group.

The aerial and street level survey was presented to city council earlier this year and resulted in changes in building requirements to reduce the number of parking slots, said Erika Hollis, who conducted the study with the aid of Furman University student volunteers.

At Haywood Mall, 87 percent of spaces were used on Black Friday in 2009, Hollis said. Surveyed again in March the mall had 25 percent usage.

The survey did not look at downtown parking usage.

"Some of that was probably due to the recession," she said. "But overall consumers are shopping more online and going to places like the mall at

a lower rate. So we feel the data is accurate."

The study was done in consultation with city economic planning officials and local developers, who stand to save a considerable amount by the reduced parking requirements, Hollis said.

Parking areas are an important factor in things like water quality since the runoff is a major source of pollutants in urban areas, she said.

Nationwide, according to the Upstate Forever report, impervious surfaces cover about 43,000 square miles. South Carolina, by comparison, covers just over 31,000 square miles. Parking areas are the third largest contributor to impervious surface coverage.

"When it rains, storm water washes off parking surfaces, collecting an assortment of pollutants (e.g., oils, greases, chemicals and heavy metals) and transporting this contaminated runoff at increased velocities into local water bodies. The end result can be severely degraded waterways with highly eroded stream banks and contaminated surface



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waters," the study said.

Data from the survey found that between 37 and 65 percent of off street parking in the city of Greenville are empty during peak hours, Hollis said. One of the more surprising findings of the study, Hollis said, is that connected shopping areas, where multiple stores share a parking area - like the major shopping areas on Woodruff Road, make the best use of available parking spaces.

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