

# Simpsonville makes a request of school district

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**A**ngst is no stranger in a school board meeting room, Greenville County's or any other.

Pride, for that matter, joy, anger, fear, practically the entire gamut of human emotion finds voice at the microphone where, one by one, the public comes forward to speak.

A public of mostly parents. Sometimes a community group will weigh in on an issue. What is less usual is a city at the mike.

One reason for that is where they generally put schools these days — way out in no-man's-land beyond the edges of cities. Then developers build subdivisions where the schools are.

Which is why school districts around the country



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have lately begun to hear themselves called "sprawl merchants."

The whole city of Simpsonville wasn't at Tuesday night's school board meeting. Not by a long shot.

But those present had copies of resolutions passed by the Simpsonville Chamber of Commerce, the City Council of Simpsonville and the leadership group 2020

Simpsonville.

So the debate over what will become of Simpsonville Elementary School pretty much boils down to the city of Simpsonville versus the school district.

The city of Simpsonville wants the elementary school to stay right where it is, right where a school has been since 1885, one block off Main Street. In the heart of town.

Beside the fire department, which is beside the police station, which is next to a large city park. The school's children walk to the fire and police departments on field trips and to the city park to play.

A number of children actually walk from home to school and back — some-

thing that half of all U.S. schoolchildren did in the 1960s. These days, only about one in eight kids in the U.S. walks to school.

The school district has said it wants to close Simpsonville Elementary and build a new school about a mile away, where Morton Elementary is now. Inside the city limits, but not downtown. Where the neighbors on three sides are industrial.

The Morton location has enough land to meet state Department of Education requirements. Big land requirements are a big factor in why they build new schools way out yonder.

But exceptions can be made so great old schools get renovated. Augusta Cir-

cle is an example. And Stone Academy.

The city of Simpsonville wants Simpsonville Elementary renovated, not torn down. It has a design and estimates to show this can be done well and at a lower cost than constructing a new school.

The city has Upstate Forever on its side. And parents. Rich and Bev Brette, for instance, have sent out more than 1,300 letters urging that the old school be preserved.

A new school at Morton is not without supporters.

But Mayor Dennis Waldrop says the old school is part of a downtown the city has spent years of hard work on. "Not only have we invested money, we've in-

vested our hearts and souls in it."

So there they were, Brette, Jeff Richardson, Butch Kirven and, on their side, Upstate Forever's Brad Wyche, one by one, at the microphone before the school board last week. They spoke for a school, but also for a city.

A true city, with a distinctive character and a heart that beats, says something about the human spirit. About roots and hope and common endeavor. And believing in something.

And wouldn't a school district want to be part of that?

■ Jeanne Brooks' column appears on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. She can be reached at (864) 298-4261.