

Other views

The 'Z word' to be explored at Greenville conference

By Brad Wyche

Zoning is one of the most misunderstood and controversial subjects in the Upstate. It was not that long ago that mention of the "Z word" attracted loaded shotguns at a local courthouse. Today, the word may no longer bring out the guns, but it continues to generate heated and bitter debate.

What exactly is zoning? How does it work? What are its good points and bad points? How should the Upstate, which is a rapidly growing but essentially unzoned region, manage growth? What are the legal issues associated with zoning? What is community-based zoning? How can the free market be combined with zoning both to protect rural areas and to attract growth to the urban areas where much of the infrastructure is already in place?

These questions will be addressed at Upstate Forever's upcoming conference titled "The Z Word: A Discussion of Zoning in the Upstate," which will be held at the Palmetto Expo Center in Greenville on May 16 from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

That last question will be discussed by Rick Pruetz, the author of the widely acclaimed book, "Saved By Development," which explains how "Transfer of Development Rights" (TDR) program is used, and are being used in other parts of the country, to protect rural areas.

Basically it works like this.

The county designates areas where it wants most future growth to occur, such as in and around urban centers (called "receiving areas"), and areas where it wants to discourage growth (called "sending areas"). It then relies on the free market to allow developers to negotiate and purchase development rights from landowners in the sending areas and to transfer those rights to the receiving areas.

Montgomery County, Md., probably has the most successful TDR program in the country. Since 1985, more than 3,000 TDR transactions have taken place in the county, which have accomplished the preservation of approximately 29,000 acres of rural land. The program is entirely voluntary — landowners do not have to sell, or even talk about selling, any of their development rights unless they want to.

Upstate Forever believes that the TDR approach holds great promise for our region where many citizens are distrustful of government but at the same time are deeply concerned about how and where growth is occurring. Mr. Pruetz's presentation will give us the opportunity to learn much more about this approach.

Another important topic that will be addressed at the conference is the community-based zoning initiative in Anderson County. Before the County Council has finished a process that allows citizens in the various voting precincts to decide whether or not they want zoning in their area.

Jeff Ricketson, the director of

GUEST COLUMN

Brad Wyche is the executive director of Upstate Forever, a non-profit organization that describes its mission as promoting sensible growth and protecting special places in the Upstate region of South Carolina. He can be reached at 250-0500 or at bwyche@upstateforever.org.



Wyche

the Anderson County Planning Department, will describe that program and its results to date.

The Upstate is experiencing phenomenal growth and change. Its population is increasing at the rate of 39 people a day, while its open land is being converted to development at the rate of 33 acres a day.

That is the equivalent of a brand new Haywood Mall every three days.

Yet except for the major cities, about half of Greenville County and a part of Anderson County,

WANT TO GO?

■ To register for the conference, please call us at 864-250-0500 or e-mail us at info@upstateforever.org.

ON THE NET

■ To see the entire agenda and download the registration form, log on to Upstate Forever's Web site at www.upstateforever.org/conferencemay2002.pdf

there is no zoning anywhere in the region. We have asked Joel Russell, a renowned authority on zoning and planning, to address this situation.

What are the impacts of continued rapid growth and change on a

region that is mostly unzoned? Should the approach in Anderson County be followed throughout the Upstate? What should we do?

Traditional zoning is certainly no panacea. It segregates activities, forcing lengthy automobile trips between uses, and it has been applied in an exclusionary way to keep lower-income residents out of certain areas.

A planner, a developer and a sociologist will present their perspectives on some of these problems. Then Tom Low, an architect with Duany Plater-Zyberk in Charlotte, will describe a "smart growth" zoning ordinance that has been developed to address many of the disadvantages of traditional zoning.

The conference will end on an exciting note with a panel of

County Council representatives from each of the six Upstate counties discussing and debating many of the issues.

This conference will be of great interest to anyone concerned about the future of the Upstate and its quality of life. To register for the conference,

please call us at 864-250-0500 or e-mail us at info@upstateforever.org.

You can see the entire agenda and download the registration form on our Web site at www.upstateforever.org/conferencemay2002.pdf.

We hope to see you on May 16