

# Land-use tool gets airing at conference

*Anderson Indep. 5-17-02*

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Independent-Mail

GREENVILLE — It is all but non-existent in the Upstate, but a type of land-use control mechanism that protects open space and costs almost zero taxpayer dollars may be one of the best ways to keep Interstate 85-driven sprawl from overrunning entire counties.

At least that's the hope of Upstate Forever Executive Director Brad Wyche, who brought an expert in "transfer of development rights" programs to speak at a zoning conference Thursday.

Transfers of development rights allow landowners in undeveloped places such as farmlands to sell the rights to build on the property to a developer. But instead of actually building on the farm, the developer is allowed to build at a higher density area somewhere else, using the "TDRs" as currency.

The developer typically makes extra profits even though he had to buy the TDRs, said Rick Pruetz, the California-based expert in this type of land-use mechanism who spoke Thursday at the Palmetto Expo Center.

Mr. Pruetz described a scenario in which a property

owner with the right to build one unit per 25 acres in an area designated as preservation-worthy — a "sending" area — could sell the right to that unit to a developer. The developer could then increase density in a "receiving" area from three units per acre to, say, five units per acre. With a second TDR, he could build perhaps seven units per acre.

The development allowed in the receiving area has to be carefully selected so there is no sense of elitism, he said. There are many ways to increase density in already-dense areas that actually please residents because it amounts to revitalization, he said.

It's a market-driven approach so it's inherently a gamble, he said. Sometimes, communities set up transfer programs without studying the market carefully enough, so activity fails to materialize. Of more than 140 transfer-of-development-rights programs now operating, two-thirds have been somewhat or highly active, he said.

Sometimes, the programs are started with modest "seed money" from local governments, but other than that, almost no taxpayer dollars are involved, he said.