

# Golden Strip big sprawl contributor

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## Greenville-Spartanburg area ranked fifth worst in nation

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Growth in the Golden Strip is one reason the Greenville-Spartanburg metropolitan area has been ranked by Smart Growth as the fifth worst sprawling region in the United States.

"I think there's absolutely no question that the Golden Strip plays a big factor in this ranking because of the growth there in the last 10 years," said Diane Eldridge, associate director of Upstate Forever, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote sensible growth in the Upstate. "For example, there are miles and miles of nothing but housing and then there's nothing but miles and miles of congested commercial areas."

Smart Growth, headquartered in Washington, D.C., is a nationwide coalition that promotes what it describes as better ways for cities and metropolitan areas to grow.

The coalition promotes policies that protect farmland and open space, revitalize neighborhoods, keep housing affordable, and provide more transportation choices.

The coalition recently undertook a study to measure sprawl in the nation's 83 largest metropolitan areas.

Finishing ahead of Greenville-Spartanburg were Atlanta (fourth); Raleigh-Durham, N.C. (third); North Carolina's triad of Winston-Salem, Greensboro, and High Point (second); and

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Riverside-San Bernardino, Calif. (first).

In the last 10 years, the Upstate's population has grown by more than 140,000 people. The Golden Strip has accounted for more than 16 percent of the growth in both its cities and planning area — growing from 43,401 in 1990 to 66,285 in 2002.

In the next 10 years, another wave of the growth is expected to occur.

"This region is growing and will continue to grow," Eldridge said. "Part of the solution is

what Greenville County is already considering: writing a policy that encourages developers to mix those uses and build connecting street networks like on a grid system."

Mauldin and Simpsonville are already taking steps to combat becoming another sprawl area, such as Atlanta.

Plans are in the works in both cities to revitalize their central business districts, to redevelop vacant commercial sites and to upgrade their road systems.

"I think any concern about sprawl is legitimate," said Simpsonville City Administrator Barry Hickman. "On the other hand, Simpsonville City Council has

been very conservative in their growth plan. We're looking at the commercial growth corridors, areas that are going to impact the city itself so we can annex them and better control what happens to them. We feel very good about our plan."

Each of the 83 regions was studied and ranked based on four major factors, including: housing compactness, mixed use of land; number of residential, commercial and town-like centers in the Upstate; accessibility of street networks; and the overall sprawl index.

Greenville-Spartanburg scored below average in each category.

Don Chen, executive director of Smart Growth America, said the study and report was prompted mainly to find empirical evidence of sprawl on a metropolitan scale, and to find out how American communities are growing with respect to growth or sprawl.

"We wanted to find out what the impacts on the quality of people's lives might be due to sprawl," Chen said. "For example, people who live in sprawl areas drive a lot more, breathe more polluted air, are subject to higher traffic fatalities, they have to own more cars, and they use public transportation less."