



STAFF FILE PHOTOS

## PRESERVING OUR Quality of life

**THE 'S' WORD:** County is facing serious challenges to manage growth, sprawl

By BRAD WYCHE  
For the Herald-Journal

**G**rowth represents the greatest challenge that Spartanburg County faces in trying to maintain and improve the quality of life for its residents

The county's population now exceeds 250,000 and continues to increase at the rate of about seven people per day. Land in the county is being developed at the rate of more than 10 acres per day, which is the equivalent of a brand new WestGate Mall every six days. It is the highest rate of land development in South Carolina

One thing is certain. The county is going to continue to grow and develop. The fact is that by 2015, there will be 39,000 more county residents. They will need 14,000 more homes, will drive 26,000 more cars and will discharge 5.6 million more gallons per day of wastewater.

The momentous questions that Spartanburg County must address are: Where will all of these new residents live and work? How will their needs be met

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*"Land in the county is being developed at the rate of more than 10 acres per day, which is the equivalent of a brand new WestGate Mall every six days."*

BRAD WYCHE,  
Executive Director, Upstate Forever



People flock to a festival in Barnet Park. Spartanburg's scenic park was completed three years ago.

## SMALLER SCHOOLS: Trend of 'mega-schools' should end

By DIANE ELDRIDGE  
For the Herald-Journal

Small neighborhood schools could be making a comeback in South Carolina if a bipartisan coalition of legislators, including several from the Upstate, has anything to do with it. Heralding the many benefits of small schools, they have introduced a new bill that will make it easier to build new schools in existing neighborhoods by eliminating existing acreage requirements. In addition, the bill places a cap on the number of students one school can serve, making it possible to

return to the smaller, more personal schools of the past.

The bill, however, has been criticized by some who contend that it is too expensive and usurps local control of public schools. I respectfully disagree with both assertions.

Cost is regularly cited as the justification for school closure and consolidation and for the construction of mega schools — all too often built on remote sites or along interstates, far from any real community.

The fact is that smaller, community-centered schools are a bargain for



*"Neighborhood schools have been proven to produce higher achievement rates, higher graduation rates ..."*

CAROL S. NICHOLS,  
Director of education and advocacy  
Upstate Forever

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## VISION DRIVEN: Task force eyes balanced growth and protection of resources

By KEN JACKSON  
For the Herald-Journal

**A**s South Carolinians, we are blessed with an exceptional quality of life: healthy communities, a diverse cultural heritage and abundant natural resources. Although these blessings have been ours to enjoy for many years, they now are threatened by the deleterious impacts of unbalanced, poorly managed growth.

Unless we take measures to change the status quo, South Carolina stands to compromise those very assets that define our quality of life.

Gov. Mark Sanford commissioned a 29-member task force to formulate ideas about how to maintain and protect South Carolina's quality of life. The phrase "quality of life" means different things to different people, and Gov. Sanford tapped a diverse group of people — lawmakers, conservationists, developers and businesspeople — who represent a wide range of perspectives and interests.

Remarkably, the task force found that what united us, a common vision for quality of life in South Carolina, was much stronger than what divided us, our individual causes. By working toward a common goal based on shared values, the task force was able to submit a report containing more than 60 recommendations, each one of which was agreed upon by consensus, not majority vote.

While members varied in what areas they thought were most important, we were united in our vision of balancing



*"... South Carolina stands to compromise those very assets that define our quality of life."*

KEN JACKSON,  
Governor's Quality of Life Task Force

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# Jackson: Infrastructure is a critical consideration for South Carolina

◆ **VISION** continued from A13 protection of our natural and cultural resources with vibrant economic growth.

One of South Carolina's greatest assets is the strength and diversity of its communities. Unfortunately, the current trend toward "mega-schools" threatens that sense of community, negatively impacting our quality of life. New public schools are increasingly massive and far from the communities that they serve.

A growing body of research clearly establishes that smaller neighborhood schools are more beneficial to children's education, particularly to lower-income students. Mega-schools promote sprawl, augment traffic and congestion and further encourage fragmented development around the remote site.

We recommend eliminating minimum acreage requirements to give school districts more flexibility in site selection, capping enrollment at new schools and examining funding options that promote expansion and renovation rather than new construction.

The task force also focused on another key issue critical to sustaining our quality of life: public infrastructure decisions. Given the present infrastructure deficit in South Carolina, it is imperative that taxpayers' dollars are efficiently spent and appropriately directed. By following the simple directive, "plan where you build, and build only where you plan," policies are removed from public investment decisions, thereby reducing infrastructure inefficiencies and saving taxpayer dollars. The future benefit to South Carolinians would be that roads, schools and sewer lines would be directed to desirable growth areas while significant natural and cultural resources are preserved.

A crucial component of establishing a vision-driven — not politics-driven — infrastructure model involves agency prioritization and coordination. Simply put, local and state entities need to identify growth areas as well as conservation areas, coordinate these plans with other area public service agencies and implement according to plan. Developers and conservationists alike agree that close coordination and planning can produce mutually desirable outcomes that reduce sprawl and undue stress on traditional rural communities and natural resources.

The central theme of stewardship permeates the report with recommendations emphasizing taking care of what we have before constructing something

new Community schools fall into this category, as does highway maintenance.

Currently, South Carolina's roads continue to decline while the state spends a mere 20 percent of its total Infrastructure budget on road maintenance. The task force recommends that highway maintenance take precedence over new road construction, and where new road capacity is justified, that the state Department of Transportation be directed to choose the least expensive way to meet these needs.

Another key tenet of the task force report was bottom-up decision-making and incentives over regulation. The recommendations include stronger measures to conserve our natural resources by strengthening conservation incentives for private landowners — specifically, raising the percentage cap in the Conservation Incentives Act and increasing the maximum annual credit limit of \$52,500 per year. We also recommend increasing funding of the Conservation Bank.

In order to achieve quality growth in South Carolina, we need to streamline agency permitting and regulatory processes. While regulatory agencies exist to protect the environment, often agency regulations are in conflict with one another and cause unnecessary permitting delays and increased costs to the landowner and consumer. We include recommendations supporting streamlined regulations and out-of-office processes.

South Carolina is a treasure to all of us who live and work here. Our natural and cultural resources attract many visitors to our state, and our quality of life is a major drawing card for new and relocating businesses.

We are fortunate that the challenge before us is to protect our quality of life, not restore our quality of life. The recommendations for Gov. Sanford reflect the task force's mission of balancing economic growth and environmental conservation by emphasizing education, incentives over regulation, market principles and respect for private property rights.

*Ken Jackson, co-chairman of the Governor's Quality of Life Task Force, is president of the S.C. Association of Realtors.*

*State Department of Health and Environmental Control Board Chairwoman Elizabeth Hagood, former executive director of the Lowcountry Open Land Trust and co-chair of the Quality of Life Task Force, contributed to this column.*

# Wyche: Growth management is issue for both local, stat-

◆ **SPRAWL** continued from A13 without degrading the quality of life for everyone! Will Spartanburg County become like "Anywhere USA," or will it continue to be a truly special place?

Spartanburg County is not alone. Many fast-growing counties in South Carolina must address the same questions — a fact recognized by none other than the new governor himself. During his campaign and in his first State of the State Address, Gov. Mark Sanford emphasized the urgent need to face the challenges posed by rapid growth and development. He even mentioned the "S" word (sprawl), the first governor in the history of South Carolina to use the word in the State of the State Address! We have come a long way!

Shortly after he took office, Gov. Sanford appointed a Quality of Life Task Force to consider these important issues and make recommendations on what needs to be done. It is a broad-based group of people from around the state, with nearly every viewpoint represented.

The task force unanimously approved its report and delivered it to the governor in February. It provides an inspiring blueprint on how our state and local governments can accommodate the dramatic growth that is taking place while protecting and improving the environment and quality of life for all.

Some of the recommendations relate primarily to policies and changes needed at the state level, but there are others that local governments like Spartanburg County Council could implement right now, such as:

- ◆ Support and fund programs to protect environmental and historic resources.
- ◆ Require that major projects be consistent with local land-use plans.
- ◆ Favor the restoration and construction of community-based small subdivisions over the construction of new mega-schools.
- ◆ Designate "priority investment areas" for future growth.

◆ Public agencies wherever they build, and they plan."

◆ Give preferences: existing highways over new sites.

◆ Integrate transit with land-use planning.

◆ Remove legal limitations on neighborhood-wide incentives for new development and redevelopment of field sites.

It is a terrific report will inspire Spartanburgers to take action today. County will be ready if they do, it should be known that the governor side.

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## Eldridge: Smaller neighborhood schools are getting better

◆ **EDUCATION** continued from A13 taxpayers. Dropout costs, transportation costs and services and infrastructure costs are just some of the factors that make this true.

Several studies have found that dropout rates are higher at large schools. For example, a study of 126 New York high schools determined that schools with 600 or fewer students had a 5 percent dropout rate compared with 13 percent for larger schools.

High school dropouts impose enormous costs on society.

For example, 82 percent of the adults in American prisons are dropouts. And half of the heads of households receiving welfare did not finish high school.

Cost comparisons often do not take into account the buses, bus drivers, fuel and maintenance necessary to transport students within the large geographic area served by a big school. Parents who drive their students to school and students who drive themselves bear the costs of their own transportation both in terms of mileage and in time.

In 1995-96, Americans spent \$1.4 billion transporting public school students, twice as much as was spent 25 years ago. Today, South Carolinians spend an average of 74 minutes in the car every day, many of which are spent chauffeuring children to and from school.

The S.C. Department of Education currently has minimum acreage requirements for new school sites based on grade level and number of students served.

For example, a 1,000-student elementary school (Greenville County's new prototype) requires at least 20 acres, and a high school with 1,500 students (approximately the size of Spartanburg

High School and Anderson's T.L. Hanna High School) needs a minimum of 43 acres.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to find enough undeveloped land in existing communities to meet these standards. Even where sufficient land is available, it can be prohibitively expensive.

Thus, school districts are forced to build schools on large tracts of "cheap land" in the countryside. Soon another problem occurs. The school attracts sprawling development, which requires governmental services such as new or widened roads, water, sewer and police and fire protection.

Dorman High School in Spartanburg County is an excellent example of this phenomenon.

Relocated from an urban location to a rural site along I-26, the new school opened last year on a 297-acre site (twice the size of the Winford campus). Costs to provide services to the surrounding area already are being incurred — a 39-home subdivision is being developed close by on the site of a former peach orchard and grape vineyard. The developer was quoted in the *Herald-Journal* as saying he believed the new neighborhood would be a success "because of the growth spurt the area is going to experience because of the high school." Another nearby development with 375 homes, 180 apartments and 35 acres of commercial property also is under way.

In numerous studies conducted nationwide, neighborhood schools have been proven to produce higher achievement rates, higher graduation rates, lower dropout rates, less violence and vandalism, greater teacher satisfaction and more parental involvement. Isn't that what education

is all about?

Regarding the local more than half of the devoted to public education, therefore, clearly has impose reasonable so that these funds are effectively as possible established an array of building specific certification and curricular.

Surely the state has limits on the number allowed in a school, as space for extraordinary indeed. In view of the stated with larger schools can be made that obligation to do so.

The small schools would give local school power in the choice as preserved. It would the infrastructure. Not only would this criteria to build more schools, it also would have by not requiring structure and service tiers.

The basic principle schools initiative are Bill known as the South and Commu H. 3608, which is open Upstate legislators. T'win" for taxpayers would bring neighbor to South Carolina.

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