

Furman forum to discuss Northwest development

'Theo-Eco' explores ecological, moral, economic views of growth

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Like many residents, Pam Shucker is enjoying the growth that is making it convenient for her to shop closer to her northwestern Greenville County home.

At the same time, she ponders how to preserve the quality of life integral to this area of the county.

Shucker and others will help educate the public on concerns of balancing development and conservation in an area experiencing tremendous growth.

She will serve as moderator for a panel discussion Tuesday at Furman University featuring representatives of environmental, theological and economic viewpoints.

The forum is sponsored by the Furman Center for Theological Exploration and Vocation. It is intended to educate and raise awareness for more responsible development in relation to the quality of life and natural life issues.

The event will focus on the extensive development of northwestern Greenville County and the repercussions that the rapid growth will have.

Shucker, who will moderate the event, said they hope to present the idea "that we would like to not lose the aspects that we enjoy in this area but yet bring in some of the advantages of development."

"Yes, we've enjoyed the stores at Cherrydale and not having to drive across town. We've enjoyed having the theaters there and especially the restaurants. It's bringing more development and with that how can you still retain the quality of life that you've enjoyed in a less traffic-dense part of town."

The panelists will include Diane Eldridge, associate director of Upstate Forever; Al Masters, pastor of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church; Furman professors Ken Peterson (economics) and David E. Redburn (sociology); and Rob Hanley, an environmental consultant with RMT Inc., a commissioner with the Greenville County Soil and Water Conservation District and vice president of Friends of the Reedy River.

Each speaker will give a short presentation. Afterward the audience will have the opportunity to ask questions.

Shucker said the forum has been dubbed "Theo-Eco" for the three intertwined strands of modern life on which it seeks to raise awareness and promote action: the intersections of the theological/ethical, the ecological and the economic.

The theological/ethical considerations were brought into the discussion, Shucker said, "because so much of the world now, our natural environment which contains the resources on which all life is based, is destroyed by the development that we're doing in increasing urbanization of things.

"This side of town has enjoyed more of the natural than the rest of Greenville County has, and so for those reasons we feel like it's really important that we look at the whole picture."

Masters said the event is to bring awareness to all issues.

His part of the presentation "will seek to bring theological awareness to the environmental issues as they relate to us, and specifically, our group is hoping to provide resources for the local religious community."

WANT TO GO?

■ A panel discussion on quality of life and conservation in northwestern Greenville County will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday in Furman University's Burgess Theater. Admission is free and the event is open to the public.

Redburn said he will talk about population growth in the county and the northwestern region in terms of future development. He also plans to discuss a survey that Furman has conducted on attitudes toward growth in the county.

Eldridge said the northern section of the county is growing quickly, and the communities affected probably need to start thinking together about the changes that are going to come.

The northwest is predicted to be one of the hot spots for growth over the next couple of decades, Eldridge said.

"We're already seeing signs that that's true," she said. "If they are interested in avoiding some of the same problems seen in the southern part of the county with the booming growth there, for example Woodruff Road, it's probably time for them to start thinking together about how to address those issues."

The forum will be followed by action projects which will include presentations to local churches and civic clubs, a tour of development and conservation areas in the northwestern area, and physical work on the residual Lowe's property, Dreamland.

Shucker said their hope is that Tuesday's event will include a wide audience of concerned citizens, public officials, students, property owners and developers, with many also taking part in the action projects to follow.