

Let's control our destiny

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Each citizen has a responsibility to help

shape how our community grows —

to decide what we pave, what we save.

A Clemson University study has delivered sobering news about growth in the Upstate, projecting 340,000 more residents by 2025. It's a call for this community, its many government stakeholders and each individual resident to begin a dialogue about how we can meet this challenge. Clearly evident is the need for change in how our community manages growth.

We have a choice. Business as usual means more road construction, more sprawl and rabid land consumption that may not adequately protect our pristine rural communities and irreplaceable urban greenspace. Or, we can dedicate ourselves to taking a more active approach, where we plan carefully and mold growth to protect our air quality, greenspaces and overall quality of life. Greenville and the Upstate can enjoy the benefits of growth without bankrupting our natural assets.

But to do this we need to emulate the best examples of smart growth across the country. We got off to a good start last week by inviting Greg Bell, a Utah state senator from the Salt Lake City area, who shared with the Greater Greenville Forum his community's success story. There, early planning resulted in less sprawl, more parks and greenspaces, better air quality and a widely used public transportation system that is the envy of the nation.

It all began just eight years ago in the Salt Lake City area with an engagement of local governments, communities and civic organizations. Environmentalists began talking to

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businesses. Businesses began talking to urban planners. Politicians willingly engaged, sacrificing parochial interests for the greater rewards of preserving a livable community.

The same has to happen in the 10-county Upstate region. These groups must talk, and local governments must agree to operate under a shared vision that's mindful of the hazards but recognizes the opportunities that accompany the scale of growth we're anticipating. Now is the time to coordinate these seemingly disparate groups — businesses, environmentalists, political parties — and find common ground.

We generally want the same things. The study reinforces how planning makes good economic sense. For example, more traffic means more road building and maintenance, which takes more tax dollars. More traffic also means poorer air quality, which means less industrial growth. We pay for unplanned growth in many ways, including in less job creation and in higher taxes. At stake is our quality of life here in the Upstate.

A good way for citizens to get involved is to talk to their representatives on the Greenville, Anderson and Spartanburg county councils (greenvillecounty.org, andersoncountysc.org or spartanburgcounty.org).

Let your county councils know your concerns. And help our Upstate community start planning for growth that's certain to come.
