

County needs more planning

Greenville knows what uncontrolled growth looks like. The new council needs to revisit land-use issues.

One of the more important issues facing the new County Council next year is coming up with a land-use plan that balances respect for individual property rights with the need to develop some protection for many rural parts of the county. Uncontrolled growth isn't pretty, and worse, it often forces local and state governments to spend huge sums of money to make the infrastructure adequate to handle increased traffic, school attendance and other demands.

Greenville County is growing, and some of its most beautiful areas lack zoning or other land-use controls that would prevent unplanned development. Fights over land-use restrictions often have been nasty in this county, and that in part accounts for the County Council showing little enthusiasm for new controls. But as Grant Cunningham, a professor of landscape and urban planning at Clemson University, told this newspaper's Jason Zacher, "The notion that these resources are not limited or are renewable is not smart thinking."

The Greenville County Council needs to encourage various communities to become engaged in the land-use planning process. And the county needs to ensure that people who support land-use restrictions can participate in the democratic process without being intimidated or threatened.

As Tom Faulkner related in Zacher's story on Wednesday, he had the wind taken out of his sails when his grass-roots-inspired effort to bring some land-use regulations to the Lake Robinson area nearly ended in a fistfight.

In an August 2003 guest column for this opinion page, Faulkner told how he and some neighbors got a grant and asked local nonprofit Upstate Forever to help compile a land-use survey for the area north of Greer, which is "experiencing dramatic growth and change."

At the first meeting on April 28, 2003, a professional planner had his presentation interrupted so many times that he could not complete it, Faulkner wrote. The following night, most of the same people were back and continued to object to the plan. A particularly outspoken critic, according to Faulkner, was a man from Abbeville, the state director of the South Carolina chapter of the League of the South.

The third meeting was canceled, but the planners were available in case anyone showed up, Faulkner wrote. "Sure enough, they were confronted by several of the same group of angry people who had overwhelmed the previous two meetings. The security guards suggested that they leave the premises for their own safety."

Robert Hayes of Abbeville later bragged in his director's report, published on the S.C. League of the South's Web site, that after his group's success before the Greenville County Council in fighting the Martin Luther King holiday, "we took on" Upstate Forever and the Greenville land-use issue in northern Greenville County. And he claimed his group "pretty much took over" the two meetings to discuss land-use controls.

Greenville County needs to pursue a reasonable land-use policy that helps direct development in rural parts of this county. The public debate should be free of intimidation, and all sides should be allowed to present their views. The new County Council should put this issue near the top of its priority list next year.