

This is a printer friendly version of an article from GoUpstate.com

To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

---

Article published Feb 11, 2007

## Planning for growth protects local investment, character

**EMILY CROW NEELY, For the Herald-Journal**

We don't think about it much these days, but land -- the acquisition of it, the ownership of it, the use of it -- has shaped our history, our culture and our sense of identity in the South.

We in Spartanburg County are no exception.

We still possess a strong sense of self that is in many ways tied to the land. Many of us grew up in rural communities or share a collective memory of rural ties.

Our land was our livelihood. It made us self-sufficient. Our neighbors were sparse. It's no wonder we are an independent-minded lot, championing the property owner's rights to use his land as he pleases.

But there's an old bit of common sense that it seems we've neglected. The saying goes something like this: "Your right to swing your fist ends where my nose begins."

With Spartanburg County's population growing at the rate of about seven people per day and land being developed at the rate of about 15 acres per day, we really need to change how development happens in Spartanburg County, and we need to plan for the future.

Right now residents in unincorporated areas of the county have no means to protect their property from encroaching uses they feel do not reflect their communities' character or jeopardize their own property's value.

Not all development is equal, and we in Spartanburg County have been scared to make demands of -- let alone say "no" to -- anything. And if you never say no, the result is, in the words of land-use expert Ed McMahon, "You get the worst of everything."

Though our lack of land-use planning has caused problems in the past, 2006 provided a banner year.

Remember Waste Management Inc.'s attempts to build a new landfill near the Enoree community? If a land-use plan had been in place before Waste Management started looking for a new landfill, that controversy would have been completely avoided.

The bitter battle over who would provide sewer service to the unincorporated Sugar Tit and Abner Creek areas resulted in lawsuits and even caused the city of Greer to consider secession from Spartanburg

County.

Then there is the property that a California developer purchased near the historic Block House in Hunting Country -- an area that includes portions of Polk County in North Carolina and northern Spartanburg and Greenville counties. He wants to build a high-density project (more than 40 times more dense than the surrounding area) in Spartanburg and Greenville counties because we're the only ones that will allow it. Polk County's regulations prohibit it.

Now this is not to say that Spartanburg County shouldn't allow high-density projects. But these projects are more appropriate for areas that already have density and the infrastructure to support it rather than areas that we would like to see remain rural in nature.

All three of these situations -- the close call with Waste Management, the dispute over Sugar Tit and Abner Creek and the proposed project near the Block House -- point to the fact that Spartanburg County needs a plan that will ensure that its residents are the ones to decide how and where growth occurs in the future.

Planning for growth protects local investment and local character while at the same time maximizing the use of local government resources and our natural resources.

The alternative is to continue down the path of more haphazard and incompatible developments, more disputes and lawsuits and more waste of our tax dollars.

Spartanburg County Council recently began work on the revision of the county's comprehensive plan, to be completed by 2008. As part of this process, council members will have the opportunity to adopt quality growth provisions.

Over the next year, council members will spend much of their time on land-use planning decisions. As residents of Spartanburg County, we should stay informed and involved by attending monthly council meetings and supporting our council members as they work to assure continued economic progress and quality growth in our community.

Emily Crow Neely is program manager for Upstate Forever's Spartanburg office.

---

.