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County Council delays tree ordinance *Opponents say proposal favors wealthy city dwellers over country folk*

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After a packed-house public hearing that included allegations of an attempted governmental power grab and warnings that Greenville County is losing trees at an alarming rate, a divided County Council decided tonight to hold off second reading of a tree conservation ordinance that has been two years in the making.

Councilman Fred Payne made the motion, saying he heard some ideas during the hearing that should be considered before proceeding with a vote that could either kill the proposed law or send it for a third and final reading. His motion passed, 6-5.

Opponents of the measure, which is aimed at keeping developers from clear-cutting property unless they replace some of the trees, made impassioned pleas against what they called government intrusion into their property rights as Americans.

"It's about power, it's about control, it's a move toward socialism, and it just ain't right," said Charles Heatherly, a resident of southern Greenville County.

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"Most of the support for this ordinance comes from city dwellers, the media, environmental groups, etceteras, and it panders to the influential, the elites and the monied, while we country folks are being exploited," he said, stirring a rousing cheer from the audience.

Supporters of the ordinance, who appeared to hold a slight advantage in numbers based on a show of hands, were more subdued, and many of them wanted to see changes before final approval.

"Greenville County is experiencing a mind-boggling loss of its tree cover," said Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, who cited a study that showed a loss of 80,000 acres between 1985 and 2000 and a continuing loss of trees at a rate of 14 acres a day.

Councilman Cort Flint interrupted the speakers opposing the ordinance to point out that it doesn't apply to private property owners.

It only applies to them if they develop an area large enough to require a county grading permit, and then only on that portion of their property, said attorney David Holmes, chairman of the committee that drew up the proposed ordinance
