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# Growth's speed found to be testing area's limits

*Population lags development in study*

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A new Clemson University study projects an Upstate boom through 2030 with land development outpacing population growth by a ratio of 5-to-1 -- creating gridlock -- unless regional development policies change.

Urbanized areas would more than double from about 720,000 acres in 2005 to 1.5 million acres in 2030 and blanket about two-thirds of Greenville County from State 11 in the north to Fork Shoals in the south, said the report, a four-year project by Clemson's Strom Thurmond Institute with Upstate Forever and the Saluda-Reedy Watershed Consortium.

Brad Wyche, Upstate Forever's executive director, called it "one of the most important studies that has ever been done for our region," but he said he doesn't advocate curbing population growth or curtailing business development.

Instead, he said the same growth can consume fewer acres of land, in some cases through voluntary development incentives that draw projects into urban areas and away from sprawling rural districts without heavy-handed government regulation.

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At issue is the changing face of the Upstate and the ability of local governments to plan ahead instead of reacting to costly development side effects such as traffic congestion and neighborhood flooding.

The report comes at a crucial time when Greenville County is updating its future land use plan, and it describes a "pave-over" rate in an eight-county Upstate region equivalent to roughly one Haywood Mall per day, or about 80 acres.

As sprawl creeps in on residents in the rural north and south, some are changing their minds about government's role.

Still, any new growth strategies will be a tough sell for voters who feel "the only good thing about regulations is when we get rid of them," said Glen Halva-Neubauer, a political science

professor at Furman University, a member of Upstate Forever and a self-described urbanist.

"The voters in this county, I don't think are going to be easily persuaded -- even for things that are minimally regulatory," he said.

Among the potential solutions is a system where landowners in desirable rural areas such as State 11 could sell their development rights to developers who would buy them to increase the allowed density of projects in urban areas, Wyche said.

County Councilman Joe Dill, a staunch property rights advocate whose cooperation could be crucial since he represents the vast northern third of the county, said he has floated the idea before community groups and found them warm to it.

"This is one tool that can be used," he said, adding that he wouldn't want to add bureaucracy to handle the system.

The pace of development between 1940 and 1990 was half the pace of population growth, according to an earlier Clemson study, but then spiked tenfold in the following decade, with the amount of developed land outstripping population growth 5 to 1 between 1990 and 2000, the new report said.

In actual numbers, population grew by 15 percent during the 1990s while development acreage increased by 80 percent, said Jeff Allen, director of Clemson's South Carolina Water Resources Center.

That 5-to-1 ratio is the basis for projections through 2030 and relies on census figures and satellite images of growth in the region defined by the Saluda and Reedy rivers, Allen said.

"Do we want to be the next Atlanta?" Wyche said. "That's where this study says we're heading."

Allen said, "There is a lack of vision at a lot of different levels in South Carolina."

In Dill's district, the rural conservative way of life is colliding with unchecked development, creating some dissonance. Some of the same people who inherently distrust government call Dill constantly wanting to know "what's the county doing about this?" he said.

Wyche's "toolbox" for smarter development includes a return to "traditional neighborhood design" where instead of building individual spurs off major highways such as Woodruff Road, development includes a grid of more compact, walkable streets and a mixture of development types in one place.

Filling in urban gaps, revitalizing older developments and establishing boundaries for how far crucial infrastructure like water and sewer service is extended are additional options, though the latter has been hotly criticized in County Council.

If development acreage outpaced population growth by only 3 to 1, instead of the projected 5 to 1, the report shows a reduction of nearly 400,000 development acres by 2030, or 25 percent less.

Noting development patterns as recently as the 1960s, Wyche said a 1 to 1 ratio is "very doable," and that reducing "large lot" home sites from half an acre to a third of an acre would have a huge impact.

Allen said he believes the majority of new development acreage is residential.

Clemson and Upstate Forever officials will present their report to county officials in the next few days. In addition to a divided council, they face election year politics.

"I'm a believer in empowering the people to choose their destiny," Dill said.

Their best bets, Halva-Neubauer said, are development measures that create incentives while letting the market ultimately determine where growth will happen.

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