

Study foresees more 'Woodruff Roads'

Greenville Journal 2/15/08

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Projections by the Strom Thurmond Institute show the amount of developed land in the eight-county Upstate region more than doubled between 1990 and 2000, from 222,745 to 576,336 acres, and is expected to grow to more than 1.5 million acres by 2030.

"Imagine more Woodruff Roads, a lot more Woodruff Roads," said Jeff Allen of the Strom Thurmond Institute as he and Upstate Forever executive director Brad Wyche unveiled the study in Greenville on Tuesday.

"The cost in infrastructure and providing services to this area (of sprawl) is astronomical," said Wyche as he and Allen scrolled through page after page of a Power Point presentation showing red developed zones essentially swallowing most of Greenville and Spartanburg counties.

"One of the points we want to make with this study is that things don't have to be that way," said Wyche. The study was done by the Strom Thurmond Institute in conjunction with Upstate Forever and the Saluda-Reedy Watershed Consortium.

Allen said the study takes into account satellite data and census bureau reports and estimates the sprawl to population



Michelle Mogavero/Staff

GRIM FUTURE: Jeff Allen, rear, of the Strom Thurmond Institute and Brad Wyche of Upstate Forever look over projected patterns of urban sprawl.

growth ratio at a conservative five to one or five acres of development for every one person in population growth.

At five to one the Upstate's "pave over rate" is about equal to one new Haywood Mall every day and the region can look forward to becoming a mirror image of Atlanta as it is today around the year 2030.

Dropping the development to population growth ratio to four to one decreases sprawl from 1.5 million acres to 1.3 million; at three to one, it's 1.1 million

acres; and at two to one the figure drops under 1 million acres.

The key to avoiding this traffic-snarled future is simple, said Wyche, and involves using a few market-driven incentive programs. Instead of sprawl spiraling from the mall, use development designs that incorporate shopping, schools and recreation.

Revitalize local areas, such as the work done with Greenville's downtown that propelled the area into a model for urban growth in the region.

Use infill projects within urban areas coupled with something called "transfer of development rights (TDR)." In traditional development, a previously rural area might have two-and-a-half homes per acre and an urban apartment area might have eight units per acre. Using TDR in a sensitive area, such as a wetland, would be a "sending zone" that is swapped for receiving zone land and easing zoning restrictions in return for conservation easements.

"The property owner gets to keep his land," Wyche said, "and the developer gets a break on building costs."

Using this technique the wetlands might achieve a 0.1 unit per acre (rural) density and the receiving zone (an area without wetlands) would hold 10 units per acre.

Bottom line, according to Wyche and the study, is that "The Upstate needs ambitious, forward-thinking regional planning (and) not a plan that treats the unthinkable as inevitable."

Wyche said there is a great deal of inertia that must be overcome within local governments and the public at large, but also notes that growth plans and projections for Greenville and Spartanburg jibe with the Strom Thurmond Institute projections.

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