



A new warning on growth

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This week's projection that Upstate South Carolina will become more and more like Atlanta should spur local, regional and state initiatives to make sure it doesn't happen. Clemson University's Upstate warning should give the Lowcountry an important ally on legislative measures to help local governments achieve regional planning and needed growth restrictions.

The university's Strom Thurmond Institute study on Upstate growth provides convincing evidence of the rapid pace of urban sprawl in the area, particularly in Anderson, Greenville and Spartanburg counties.

Researchers made their case through growth projections on aerial maps at periodic intervals, until 2030. The method was much the same as that used in the Institute's 1999 growth study of Charleston, Berkeley and Dorchester counties.

The Upstate study projects that urban acreage in the Upstate will increase from 720,000 acres to 1.5 million acres by 2030. The current pave-over rate is 80 acres a day and is outpacing population growth five to one, the study found.

"Do we want to be the next Atlanta?" said Brad Wyche in comments quoted by the Greenville News. "That's where this study says we're heading."

Mr. Wyche, a former chairman of the state Department of Health and Environmental Control, was speaking for Upstate Forever, a public interest group involved in growth issues.

In the Lowcountry, the threatened loss of farm and forest land, the increased public cost of infrastructure and the worsening traffic congestion forecast in the 1999 Clemson report helped galvanize public support for restraining growth. Clearly, though, there's still much to be done on the local and state level.

For example, there are bills to reform state annexation law and to provide local government the authority to require impact fees for school construction. Both measures would help local governments deal with growth problems.

Rep. Ben Hagood, R-Sullivan's Island, is working on a comprehensive annexation reform proposal that would, for example, discourage "zoning shopping" by developers among various jurisdictions. The statewide interest in planning for growth is reflected by a heightened interest among legislators this session, he said.

The latest Clemson study shows that the same pressures that threaten the Lowcountry are fast at work in the Upstate. Elected officials should make common cause against heedless development that threatens the character of and quality of life in South Carolina.

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