

Growth syndrome

Upstate examines how other cities manage urban sprawl

2030

5:1 Growth Ratio

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How will the Upstate look in 2030? Better yet, how *should* it look?

According to a Clemson University Strom Thurmond Institute study, the rate of development to the rate of population growth for an eight-county region in the Upstate is a 5-to-1 ratio. If this trend continues, 576,000 acres of developed land in 2000 will increase to more than 1.5 million by 2030.

"Our model tells us where the development will occur," says the project's leader, Dr. Jeffrey Allen.

Over the next several months, armed with charts and graphs, *Upstate Forever*, an environmental/growth watchdog, will visit county and city governments throughout the Upstate. The group says urban sprawl can be avoided through more efficient planning.

"This is a big quality of life issue," says Upstate Forever Executive Director Brad Wyche. "This is a hotbed for baby boomers. That whole retirement cycle is just starting."

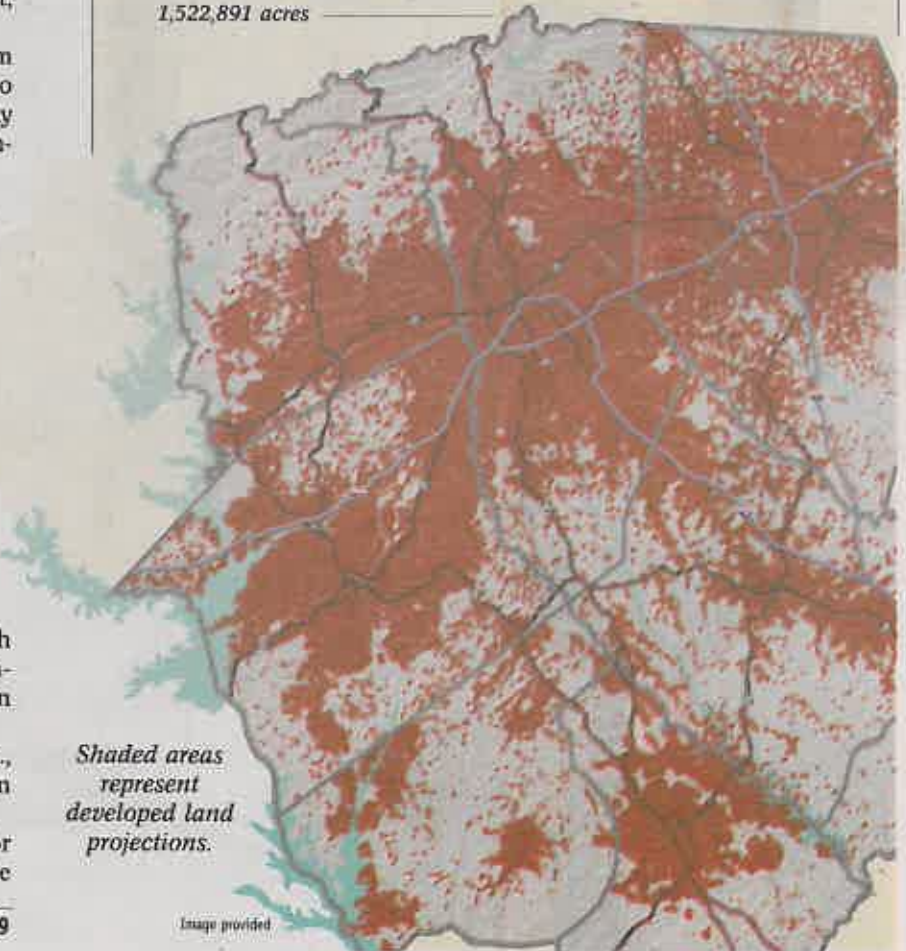
Upstate Forever is suggesting a variety of growth strategies, including infill projects, land use controls, transfer of development rights and urban service boundaries.

Cities such as Portland, Ore., Eau Claire, Wis., and Wheaton, Ill., are being touted for their urban planning.

Rebecca Esau, manager of land use services for Portland, says most commercial developers in the

Upstate South Carolina Predicted Urban Growth

1,522,891 acres



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area have become accustomed to the city's growth regulations. It also helps that neighboring communities are also on board.

"You don't have to drive miles and miles to get out to farmland and beautiful natural areas," Esau says. "It's just such a contrast to what I saw in Southern California."

Allen says Portland's growth ratio is approximately 2-to-1. Similar studies by Clemson show 5-to-1 ratios for the Charleston and Myrtle Beach areas.

Portland recently launched an infill development initiative to build 15-foot-wide houses on 25-foot-wide by 100-foot-deep parcels. The Living Smart Project held a competition that approved two designs for the houses. The decision came following public opposition to the demolition of smaller homes to build larger ones.

"Density and infill is encouraged along transit corridors," says Chris Dearth, a planning manager in the office of sustainable development.

SETTING BOUNDARIES

Eau Claire updated its urban service boundary in 2005. The plan says over the next 20 years the city will not extend services, such as water and sewer, beyond the boundary.

"It limits sprawl development," says city planner Darryl Tuft.

Wyche says governments go too far to service rural areas, such as building new schools and creating special purpose fire districts. Dearth says businesses come into Eau Claire because they can't get services outside the boundary.

"The boundaries are logical - where major highways, fire and other services already exist," Dearth says. "It forces higher-quality development into our community."

Portland has an urban service boundary, too. Esau says it brings developers back to once-thriving corridors. For example, Hawthorne Boulevard, which declined in the 1970s and '80s, is now a shopping district.

Retail growth in Greenville has shifted from Pleasantburg Drive to Haywood Road and Laurens Road, and most recently to Woodruff Road. In theory - and theory alone - these areas could see infill redevelopment should a boundary be set in Greenville.

But not everyone is happy with boundaries.

"Towns don't like it because we impose an authority over growth and urban expansion," Tuft says of Eau Claire's neighboring communities. "They pretend to be governments and they don't provide services, but just allow a lot of growth."

Boundary opponents say they artificially drive up property prices as land becomes scarce.

"Land values are still much lower than in comparable West Coast cities," Portland's Dearth says.

While home prices have dropped across the country, Standard & Poor's recently reported three major cities have shown year-over-year increases: Charlotte, at 2.3 percent, Portland, at 1.2 percent, and Seattle, at 0.5 percent.

Clemson's Allen mentions Wheaton, Ill., as a model for development policies.

"Wheaton is a well-desired address," says Liana Mirea, president of American

Commercial Real Estate Inc., based in nearby Bloomingdale, Ill.

She says Wheaton is an affluent, conservative town that is very selective of what kinds of businesses enter its borders. Independent retailers, attorneys and insurance agents are the most popular tenants downtown, and locally owned restaurants are favored over national chains, she says.

"The buildings have to have that feel and look of the old town, and you have to use certain colors and shapes," says Mirea. "It's a very long process working with business owners. A lot of people enter the process and then say 'forget it.'"

In Bloomingdale, Mirea had a deal fall through because the law required seven parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of office space.

"I may have someone who doesn't have a lot of employees and needs only two parking spaces," she says. "It doesn't count. It's based on square footage."

Even when the sustainable seems sensible, there's always contention, according to Bob McCoy, president of the Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce. An \$80 million mixed-use project was built on 14 acres downtown as opposed to a 27-acre parcel outside the city.

"It took less acres and brought a nice metro feel to the community, but you still had people who didn't want it in their backyard," he says.

And not all policies work the way they are supposed to.

While commercial growth in Eau Claire is managed "pretty well," according to McCoy, residential planning provides

some challenges. Homes are required to have more acreage.

"I really don't need to buy 10 or 20 acres, I'd rather buy three," he explains. "The land use, that's the biggest obstacle."

In the first five months of 2007, more than 100 green building bills were introduced in various state legislatures. According to the 2008 FMI U.S. Construction Overview, a projected \$21.2 billion of new nonresidential construction will use green principles this year. It represents a 58 percent increase over 2006.

"The whole country is really turning to sustainability as a major mission," says Bob Coleman, who specializes in commercial architecture for Enwright & Associates Inc. in Greenville. "Sustainability is here to stay." ☐