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Public hears how to shape growth

Greenville County officials promise 'guide' with clout

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Greenville County residents clutching newspaper clippings and scanning county land use maps listened intently Thursday, as county officials told them that a new countywide growth plan will turn out however they shape it and promised a "guide" that will profoundly shape future development decisions.

On the last row alone was a difference of opinion on how that should look.

Avid outdoorsman Mike McNamara said he is no big-government advocate, but something needs to be done about the county's dwindling natural resources that it has long been known for. He favors a middle-ground incentive model, where landowners are steered toward protecting trees and water bodies, but not forced.

Down the row, Nancy King said she just wants to see individuals keep their property freedoms and expressed skepticism about government intervention even when new development damages another person's property.

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All governments -- from the United Nations to Greenville County -- control too much already, King said.

In the divide are county officials frequently caught in contentious, tract-by-tract fights over new developments increasingly blamed for traffic gridlock and neighborhood floods.

Thursday's meeting kicked off a yearlong, state-mandated process to collate citizen input and hammer out a comprehensive growth plan for the next decade that officials say could address those problems on the front end before haphazard development patterns create new headaches and congested corridors.

Mellone Long, head of the county's planning department, spent several minutes telling the crowd why the "Imagine Greenville

County" plan will be different from "Designing our Destiny," the late-1990s version widely criticized for its scant effect on actual growth decisions. Among the changes will be timetables for implementing specific recommendations, she said.

Eight community meetings will be held this month and next at local high schools, and residents can sign up for six committees that will meet seven times each on specific planning issues such as economic development and community facilities.

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