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We need to be able to assure compatibility

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What one word can cause an otherwise reasonable person to become enraged, incite a riot, incense a landowner, cause consternation and dismay among planners and just generally divide a community?

The word is "ZONING."

Seems like a fairly harmless six-letter word, doesn't it? And if you go to dictionary.com, you will see the following definition: "Any continuous tract or area that differs in some respect, or is distinguished for some purpose, from adjoining tracts or areas, or within which certain distinctive circumstances exist or are established." And yet zoning has become a fightin' word in South Carolina. Say the word in mixed company, and your life could be in danger.



From what I have been able to surmise, the main objection is to government control. Those who oppose land-use regulations don't want the government to tell them what to do with their property, however, those same people are OK with the government telling their neighbors what to do with their property.

Yes, as soon as an adjoining property owner decides to sell his land to Tyson Foods or Smithfield Farms for a factory farm operation or to the mega retail giant Wal-Mart, the local municipality's phone lines light up!

Again, land-use regulations are merely a means by which to separate one set of land uses from another, to assure compatibility, to provide certainty and to protect citizens from the devaluation of their property. Most people who move into gated communities do so for the covenants and restrictions that come along with those communities.

Of course, land-use regulations are also a means by which to protect the health and welfare of citizens by setting aside special areas and determining where industry and

agriculture will be located, while at the same time allowing mixed uses where needed and appropriate.

Call it what you will - zoning, land-use regulations, smart growth management tools, the comprehensive plan - it does not matter. The bottom line is that Spartanburg needs a way to assure land-use compatibility.

For the past few months, Spartanburg County has been working with LandDesign, a firm that has been contracted by the county for the purpose of providing guidance, facilitation and educational services to support the development of new land-use planning and growth management policies and ordinances. The first order of business for the firm was to provide an audit of the current Unified Land Management Ordinance (ULMO).

Information from the audit provided several key points about Spartanburg County's current state. Spartanburg County lacks a system of land-use compatibility and related districts; has no process for considering planned, coordinated mixed-use projects; does not have zoning districts so therefore cannot adapt typical planned unit developments to local use; cannot grant approval of a single, coordinated plan showing residences and neighborhood shopping (mixed use); has no real growth management tools in place; and current regulations are inadequate to preserve community character and appearance as development continues.

These are but a few of the audit findings, and you can view the entire report at the Spartanburg County Web site by going to this link:
www.co.spartanburg.sc.us/govt/depts/cc/docs/GrowthAuditWorkshopPresentation.pdf.

With the projected growth of another 80,000 people in Spartanburg County over the next 20-plus years (a 30 percent increase), we must begin to plan for our new residents to be sure that, in the process of accommodating their needs and wants, we do not lose our "sense of place" but rather maintain our identity. There are many smart-growth strategies that we could employ to include the revitalization of existing areas, traditional neighborhood developments, infill projects, the transfer of development rights and land conservation.

I think it is also important to mention that the whole concept of the government not telling us what to do with our land has another side to it. There are many developers and landowners who cannot do what they want with their land because the government has not enacted the necessary ordinances. Where is the fairness and equity in that?

In doing some research recently on smart growth, I came across the National Association of Home Builders growth policy statement: "Land use planning should be the exclusive province of local units of government. Their decisions, based on direct citizen input, best reflect the needs, desires and priorities of their communities."

Now is the time to get involved by reviewing the audit findings and the policy choices and then participating in the public education forums. Everyone will then have a hand in defining "zoning."

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