

### Chattanooga: Drive to think, plan regionally

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By: [Dave Flessner](#)  
([Contact](#))



By: [Mike Pare](#)  
([Contact](#))

GREENVILLE, S.C. — Brad Wyche has two straightforward recommendations for Chattanooga in the wake of the city’s landing Volkswagen’s new \$1 billion assembly plant.

Have a regional conversation about land-use planning and then implement it, he said.

“It’s a good problem to have when you’ve got a company like VW coming to an area,” said Mr. Wyche, who heads a nonprofit organization that promotes sensible growth in the Greenville-Spartanburg area. “But the problem you’ve got to address is that it could cause severe harm to quality of life.”

The Greenville-Spartanburg area is home to automaker BMW’s only assembly plant in the United States. Since its start-up in 1994, the plant has grown to employ 5,400 employees and contractors. Suppliers and other companies are estimated to provide more than 17,500 other jobs.

The size and population of Greer, S.C., the town that literally surrounds the BMW plant, has grown nearly 2 1/2 times since the 1990 census to 10,000 people, in large measure because of BMW, officials said.

Mayor Rick Danner said the growth has created challenges for the city, which grew up as a railroad and textile town. But Mr. Danner said the extra tax revenues generated by that growth have paid for extra roads, sewers, police and fire protection “and we haven’t had a tax increase in more than eight years.”

#### Regional Growth

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson County area at over 1 million people. That’s up from more than 830,000 in 1990, or more than 20 percent.

Ben Haskew, the Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce chief executive, said BMW’s arrival helped propel the economic success of the region.

“This is another level,” he said, noting BMW has driven more knowledge-based business development and boosted per capita income.

But, he said, added business and growth generally in the region have prompted people to take a look at urban sprawl and



Staff Photo by Patrick Smith  
Downtown Greenville

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air-quality issues.

Mr. Wyche said his group, called Upstate Forever, was founded 10 years ago when few were talking about issues of growth and urban sprawl and how to deal with them.

He pointed to a Clemson University study which found that more and wider roads, big box stores, abandoned older shopping areas and more distant subdivisions with ever-larger lots were among the culprits for rapid sprawl in the area in the 1990s.

Following the same pattern, the study shows developed land in eight counties around Greenville-Spartanburg will increase by nearly 200 percent by the year 2030.

“It’s got to be addressed,” Mr. Wyche said, who called the study “a huge wake-up call.”

To address the issue, he said, partnerships and alliances are required among government, business, homebuilders and others.

“You’ve got to approach it on a regional basis,” Mr. Wyche added. “We do have a choice.”

He said that without the proper steps, the Greenville area “could end up looking like Atlanta.” Atlanta has one of the longest commute times in the country and is a example of unchecked urban sprawl.

Mr. Wyche said solutions to managing growth include concentrating infrastructure and services in areas where growth is desired, or so-called urban service boundaries in which a community picks places where it wants to grow.

“That’s where you put the roads, schools, sewers,” he said. “We’re not talking about no-growth boundaries. No one says you can’t do what you want to do.”

Other concepts include revitalization of existing developments and infill programs, he said.

Mr. Wyche, who also is a lawyer, said land-use planning does not mean putting people into high-rise buildings, but rather building on lots which are one-fifth of an acre rather than one-third of an acre, for example.

“Over 30 years it has huge implications,” he said, noting that continuing the present path will eat up large quantities of land.

Mr. Wyche said the cost of providing new services is spiraling.

He said his group is putting together numbers to show public officials the savings with compact development. Estimates show a \$15 billion difference in costs, Mr. Wyche said.

Mr. Haskew added that Greenville-Spartanburg, like Chattanooga, has challenges meeting ozone standards and will face even more if the Environmental Protection Agency stiffens regulations.

The Chamber there is helping bring the state and businesses together with people concerned about issues such as growth and air quality, he said. The Chamber works with them on new regulatory policies, the official said.

“It’s always in our minds,” Mr. Haskew said. “It’s how to maintain this balance.”

#### CHATTANOOGA READY?

Chattanooga Mayor Ron Littlefield, a former city planner, said he looks forward to the challenges of trying to manage more growth in the region. Volkswagen’s plant is slated to start operation at Enterprise South industrial park by early 2011.

Mr. Littlefield, who recently returned from Greenville-Spartanburg with other local public officials and economic developers, said Chattanooga is ready for Volkswagen.

“Having worked with many of the surrounding counties in the past, I believe we can approach this opportunity as a region,” he said.

LESSONS FOR CHATTANOOGA

Officials predict that in addition to Hamilton County, Bradley County in Tennessee, Catoosa County in Georgia, and others, will have a large amount of growth because of their proximity to the plant.

The mayor predicted that “we won’t be as big of a regional center as Atlanta, but we will be more of a regional center than we have been in the past.”

The mayor said the Chattanooga area needs to be prepared to be like Atlanta, but avoid the urban sprawl problems that Atlanta encountered.

Knox White, mayor of Greenville, called the German automaker “a crowned jewel” of the region.

“BMW has helped fuel a total restructuring of the economy,” he said.

Mr. Wyche said BMW has had a huge impact on the 10-county region and people there welcome the growth.

“We can have it both ways — protect the environment and quality of life,” he said.

\* Plan regionally

\* Land-use plan needs to reflect Volkswagen’s impact

\* Think about urban service boundaries

#### RAPID LAND USE

\* Developed land in an eight-county region around Greenville-Spartanburg, S.C., grew from 222,000 acres to 576,000 acres from 1990 to 2000, a study shows.

\* Under current practices, developed land would grow to 1.5 million acres by the year 2030 — a rate of 86 acres a day, according to the Clemson University study.

#### FAST FACT

Upstate South Carolina’s so-called “pave-over rate” of new land is equal to almost one mall every day, according to Upstate Forever and Clemson University.

Upstate Forever Executive Director Brad Wyche talks about population and sprawl projections for the Greenville, S.C., area.

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