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County approves setback rules for business projects

Conservation group thinks change will be good long term

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An amendment to Spartanburg County's Unified Land Management Ordinance might stymie some business in the short term, but will ultimately be good for the county's future, one local conservation group said.

County council voted unanimously Friday to impose setbacks on commercial or industrial projects that abut residential areas. The amendment includes a 200-foot setback from single homes and 500-foot setbacks from 25 or more homes and public or nonprofit structures.

The setbacks will be applied to all projects filed with the county planning department after Friday. The amendment could be lifted in 30 days when the council presents its new-and-improved design standards.

"Just about any business operator will tell you that land use is important for business recruitment, because it gives companies interested in locating here some kind of road map," said Shelley Robbins, project coordinator of the Spartanburg office of Upstate Forever, which advocates for sensible growth and conservation in the Upstate. "It's also important for neighborhoods. And right now we're having problems protecting our neighborhoods."

Robbins pointed to a number of situations that have generated concern in the community recently over the council's failure to previously update its land-use ordinance.

In July 2008, residents on Farm Lake Road railed against a \$3 million dollar development that included a gym near the intersection of Farm Lake and Highway 9 in Boiling Springs.

Also last year, residents of the Chestnut Lake subdivision off John Dodd Road found

their backyards assailed with fumes and noise when a trucking company moved in next door.

And earlier this year, the homeowners association at River Falls Plantation off Highway 290 was powerless to block a bank from building at the entrance to the golf course on which they live -- although that story continues to develop.

Public backlash erupted earlier this month after commercial developer Tab Patton of Woodruff announced plans to put a Dollar General at the corner of Country Club and Andrews roads.

"We are thinking 50 years down the road," Robbins said. "We want to make sure the tools are in place to make sure this area is as beautiful as it is right now. This (amendment) is a step forward."

County Councilman David Britt, who originally sought a moratorium to halt commercial and industrial development until the county could implement design standards, said the ultimate goal is to make the county look better than it does today.

"It's a self-fulfilling prophecy," Britt said. "If we allow one cheaper building to go in, the one to go in next door will likely be the same because there are no standards in place. This (land-use ordinance) will hopefully result in property values going up and our businesses looking better."
