

YOUR VOICE

Draft Greenville land use plan falls short

By Brad Wyche

There is good news and bad news about the draft comprehensive land use plan for Greenville County.

First the good news: The plan was developed over the last 18 months with tremendous input from Greenville County residents. "Imagine Greenville," an initiative managed by the Greenville County Planning Department, included six citizen committees to discuss and make

recommendations on community facilities, cultural resources, economic development, housing, land use and transportation, and natural resources.

The committees recommend strong measures for managing growth and protecting natural and historic resources. For example, the Land Use and Transportation Committee asks for "drastic changes in the methods and approaches to land use and transportation

planning conducted by Greenville County," while "the fundamental conclusion of the Natural Resources (Committee) is that aggressive measures must be taken to protect the most valuable and vulnerable resources in Greenville County."

A scientific survey confirmed that the recommendations of the citizen committees are supported by most Greenville County residents.

The first three chapters of the plan are solid and

helpful, presenting basic facts and figures about Greenville County and explaining the public process for revising the plan. Chapter 4 contains the Future Land Use Map, which provides an exciting blueprint for growth and development in Greenville County over the next 10 years. The map shows that most future growth should take place in the center of the county, with the northern and southern areas classified as "rural land use."

Chapter 5 identifies three "priority investment areas" of the county where new and expanded infrastructure and services, such as roads, water, and sewer, should be provided in the future.

Now the bad news: What should be the cornerstone of the plan — the final chapter titled "Next Steps" — is only three pages long. It does not contain a single recommendation for the policies that are needed to make the plan a reality.

GUEST COLUMN



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An appendix to the plan lists the more than 60 recommendations of the citizen committees.

For each recommendation there are "priority scores" by the County Council, the Planning Commission and the staff, and a timeline that ranges from "ongoing" to 20 years. But nowhere in the plan or in the appendix is there any indication of which, if any, of the recommendations will actually be implemented. The citizen committees deserve better than this — they expected that the recommendations to which they devoted so much time and attention would actually be important and meaningful in the final plan.

The Achilles heel of planning in Greenville County (and the entire Upstate) has always been the "I-word" — implementation. We have done a very good job of drafting plans with beautiful maps and all the right words, but we have done a lousy job of making these plans a reality.

I will never forget standing next to a developer in Spartanburg as we were both studying the proposed future land use map posted on the wall. He asked, "What is this thing?" I explained that it was the proposed land use plan for Spartanburg County, and with a sigh of relief, he said, "Oh good, it's just a plan."

Planning is the easy part — the challenge is implementing it. For example, it was easy to draw up a plan for revitalizing downtown Greenville — narrowing Main Street, putting in wide sidewalks and planting trees. That plan could have gathered dust on a shelf, but city leaders made a commitment to implementation, and we now see and enjoy the spectacular results.

The draft plan is on the Council's agenda for a public hearing and second reading on Tuesday at 6 p.m. at County Square. I hope concerned citizens will attend the hearing and urge their County Council representatives to include in the final plan a list of the specific recommendations

from the citizen committees that will be adopted in order to implement the plan, to establish a clear timetable for doing so (not to exceed one year), and to allow public comment on the list before it is included in the plan.

This is a critical time in Greenville County's history. Every day our population increases by 14 people, and until the economic crisis, land was being developed at the rate of 16 acres per day.

County Council has the opportunity and the authority to establish the policies needed to keep our county from becoming a sprawling mess with exorbitant costs of providing services, severe environmental impacts, a highly diminished quality of life and an unattractive place for new businesses. Ten years from now, when the next process for revising the comprehensive plan begins, it will be too late.