

# Upstate Forever director: 'Big box' stores have big impact on small communities

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Diane Eldridge says large retailers – such as Wal-Mart and Lowe's Home Improvement – typically look the same no matter where the store is in the country.

"They tend to be separate from the rest of the town," she said. "The building usually doesn't blend into the surrounding community."

Eldridge, director of education and advocacy for Upstate Forever, spoke to members of the Greenwood City and County



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ELDRIDGE**

Planning Commission and others Tuesday about the impacts of "big boxes" on a community. Upstate Forever is a nonprofit organization that promotes the growth and protection of special places in the Upstate.

"Big boxes" – large, single retail stores that also include retailers such as Home Depot and Target – typically measure 20,000 to more than 250,000 square feet.

Eldridge said "big boxes" need space for not only the store, but also parking lots for customers and docks to receive merchandise.

"Some structures take up as much as six acres, but that doesn't include space for parking lots," she said. "They do take up a lot of footprints. Some companies look for sites with at least 30 acres."

include increased traffic, noise and disruptions. "Big boxes" also generate as many as 946 car trips per hour and lower the value of surrounding properties.

Eldridge said some communities strive to limit the impact of "big boxes" by passing ordinances restricting the zoning, placing a cap on store size or requiring architectural and design standards.

"Retailers wouldn't have facades or trees in their parking lots unless communities required them to," she said.

To meet the requirements in Mount Pleasant, S.C., Eldridge said Lowe's added a façade, awnings, trees and landscaping for storm water management to its store.

"There have been studies that found that people stay longer and

spend more money in stores with landscaped parking lots," she said.

Other options include agreements between the city and store concerning abandonment protection and to provide incentives for locally-owned businesses surrounding large retailers.

Eldridge said abandoned sites could be broken up into smaller spaces for multiple businesses or integrated into surrounding communities as housing or recreational areas.

Eldridge said Greenwood could pass ordinances limiting retailers, which could prevent abandoned properties in the future.

"There has to be more than you sitting in this room," she said. "It takes the whole community."