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Article published May 5, 2007

Spartanburg ranks high in affordability

By **MONICA MERCER**, Staff Writer

Spartanburg is doing well in the area of affordable housing if national rankings are any indication, says immediate past president of the National Association of Home Builders, David Pressly.

According to the association's housing market index, Spartanburg has the seventh most affordable housing market in the Southeast and the 43rd most affordable in the nation, making the area a place where 73 percent of homes in the last quarter of 2006 were considered affordable to those with median incomes.

The less-rigorous building regulations are probably a factor, Pressly says, which help to keep homes within reach of the middle class by lessening the burden on builders.

A \$150,000 home in Spartanburg can easily top \$500,000 in California, he adds, where builders must pass the added cost of stricter building rules to buyers.

The statistics, at least by one measure, indicate a favorable environment for Spartanburg County to continue growing, and came as part of Pressly's larger message of "planning for quality growth," which he presented to about 100 community members Friday morning in the first installment of Upstate Forever's "Building our Future" speaker series.

Partners for Active Living and the Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce also are sponsors.

Quality growth cannot occur without a consensus on community priorities, Pressly said.

As Spartanburg County moves forward on an 18-month revision of its comprehensive plan, a local set of priorities is still not clear. Officials hope the plan will come to inform land-use policies at every level for the first time

But Pressly outlined some guidelines that could apply to most communities.

Those include recognizing the need for a range of housing options and being open to different types of developments such as "high density" projects that often receive a skeptical eye in the Upstate, where land is plentiful and sprawl has been the common refrain.

"A lot of people have a hard time with higher densities where it would make sense," Pressly said. "It often meets with quite a bit of community resistance."

Len Reed, a Spartanburg developer, said the problem is that people in Spartanburg County still associate "high density" with housing for the poor, an outdated mindset considering the 48-unit upscale

condominium project set to be built downtown at Liberty and Broad streets.

As communities continue to build outward, urban revitalization also must be kept in mind, Pressly said, which demands innovative solutions to revive historic and blighted buildings.

He cautioned that if the local government lacks the political will for innovative projects, planning for quality growth is "useless."

"How do we assure the most appropriate growth that's right for the community?" Pressly asked.

"The answer is at the local level. No one plan fits all, and it's up to Spartanburg to decide what fits best."

Monica Mercer can be reached at 562-7215 or monica.mercer@shj.com.

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