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County growth rate ramps up

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Spartanburg County's population is growing at a faster annual rate than it has since 2000, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates released this week.

Spartanburg was the 12th-fastest growing county in South Carolina between July 1, 2000, and July 1, 2006, with the number of people here increasing by 6.5 percent to an estimated 271,087.

Much of the growth in South Carolina is concentrated in the Upstate -- with the exception of Union and Chester counties -- along the coast, and in a swath of the Midlands that includes Kershaw, Richland, Lexington and Aiken counties.

The growth along the coast and in the Upstate likely is due to the I-85 and Highway 17 corridors, said state demographer Michael Macfarlane with the S.C. Office of Research and Statistics. But the population boom could begin to taper off.

"It's just like what happened in Florida: You get to a point where people look for somewhere that's not so congested," Macfarlane said. "We're seeing that now, where people are looking for other places for retirement and recreation."

The entire population of South Carolina is up to more than 4.3 million people, though that's still less than the number of people in metro Atlanta, which the latest Census figures indicate has surpassed 5 million.

Close to home

In the year ending July 1, 2006, Spartanburg County gained more than 4,300 people, increasing in size by 1.6 percent, Census Bureau estimates show.

Percentage-wise, that's the single biggest year-to-year population increase since at least 2000, according to Herald-Journal research.

To County Manager Glenn Breed, that means an increased demand on services, more trash to pick up, more traffic on the roads - and more of a need to plan for growth.

"We need to try to maximize our advantages toward controlling the growth," Breed said.

"Do we want to continue to have issues with land use? Do we want a hodgepodge ... a mixture, of houses and industry in a certain area? Or do you want to segregate that? I'm not talking about zoning. I'm not advocating anything. We have to have a lot of education and a lot of participation when we're talking

about our land use."

The county is in the process of updating its land use plan, and a public meeting on that plan was held Thursday night.

When asked, Breed said county leaders have not had any discussion on impact fees.

Impact fees are a popular tool in rapid-growth areas - Pinal County, Ariz., for instance, which is one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation - that are often billed as making growth pay for itself. An impact fee for education, for example, would cost a developer x number of dollars, dollars that would go directly to schools and, in essence, pay for the added demand on the school system. Similar fees are used for roads and other infrastructure.

Gov. Mark Sanford pushed for impact fees in his 2006 State of the State address, though the idea didn't catch on.

Increasing diversity

From the summer of 2005 to the summer of 2006, Greenville County ranked No. 1 in terms of people moving in from other countries. Spartanburg placed fifth in terms of international migration - 480 people moved here from another country - with Richland, Charleston and Beaufort counties in between.

The presence of multinational corporations like BMW and Michelin are obvious draws for a high legal immigrant population.

But adding such diversity in the mix also must be taken into account when planning, said Angela Viney, director of the Spartanburg office of Upstate Forever.

Such a trend affects the expectations of people, she said.

"Especially people moving from Europe, they're much more interested in sustainable practices," Viney said. "In Germany, for instance, I don't think they actually trash anything. They would have no problem giving away bins, as the (county) seems to have, for people to recycle."

Breed, with the county, said the overall growth of this area doesn't shock him, but added it was "rather high."

"Any time you have a demand on services, it creates challenges," Breed said. "One, you're asking your employees to do more with less. And, two, you have an increased demand on services. That takes its toll, and you end up having to spend money to handle growth."

Cherokee County saw only minimal growth between July 2000 and July 2006 - about 2.3 percent - and Union County lost more than 5 percent of its population.

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