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## Poll backs funding park space

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A new Upstate Forever poll shows that a majority of Spartanburg County residents surveyed would support a plan that establishes restrictions on how land can be used and developed, as well as a plan for protecting open spaces, creating more parks and recreation areas and providing guidelines for managing growth.

To fund better growth-management policies and pay for more open spaces, 75 percent of those surveyed approve of using public money, and 50 percent were inclined to vote for a 1-cent sales tax referendum to raise the funds.

The findings are consistent with a county government survey recently conducted to gauge the public's perception of parks and recreation offerings, said Parks and Recreation Commission Director Jeff Caton.

"It's been survey after survey saying the same thing," Caton said. "People want more in the way of quality of life, so why is leadership not doing anything to make it happen?"

Monday, County Councilman O'Neal Mintz said he would not vote for the county's 2007-2008 budget unless funds for the parks and recreation commission were reduced. The commission had requested a 31 percent increase in its budget to about \$5.2 million. Council passed the county budget Monday night, reducing the commission's proposed tax rate, which will shave an estimated \$412,000 from the parks and recreation account.

The survey results also clash with long-held policies such as the Spartanburg County Unified Land Management Ordinance, which former County Planner David Rutherford characterized as a "masquerade" that does nothing to facilitate land-planning in a traditional sense.

"The (Unified Land Management Ordinance) establishes restrictions to some extent," said interim County Planner Joan Holliday, but it stops short of creating true zoning districts where the character of a particular geographical area is protected.

The ordinance is mostly made up of regulations that apply only to individual lots and properties, Holliday said, without taking into account the overall look of Spartanburg County - one reason a factory can be built next to a residence with only a "buffer" required to distinguish the two.

## County revising its plan

Upstate Forever's poll involved phone calls to a random sample of 410 county residents representing all demographics and party affiliations.

"We were encouraged by the results of the poll," said Angela Viney, director of the Upstate Forever Spartanburg Office. "(The survey) says what we've suspected, which is that people really would like to see a plan in place."

The poll was meant to coincide with Spartanburg County's massive revision of the county comprehensive plan, which Rutherford spearheaded before resigning in April.

Rutherford had said it was his goal to make the comprehensive plan an integral part of all the decision-making that takes place in the community - particularly that of developers who have considerable influence when it comes to how an area will look. The comprehensive plan had been created in the mid-1990s as a result of a 1994 state mandate, but had largely failed to inform public policy.

"The (comprehensive) plan has not been terribly relevant to the choices that have been made since it was adopted," Assistant County Administrator Chris Story said in January as the process for revising the plan was getting under way.

Although Rutherford said he resigned to take a job that would put him closer to his grandchildren, County Councilman Tom Foster maintains that Rutherford's proactive stance on land-use reform met with misguided resistance, making his job difficult.

"I think people were afraid the county was gonna start controlling their land," Foster said. "This new survey is along the same lines of what (Rutherford) was looking for."

Among other findings from the survey:

- 54 percent felt that controlling and managing growth should be one of council's top priorities.
- 89 percent agreed that managing growth helps control the type of development in a community.
- 78 percent agreed that managing growth helps reduce the cost of providing services such as roads, water and sewer.
- 82 percent agreed that managing growth helps protect property values.

Two priorities receiving strong support were recruiting new industry and jobs (84 percent) and road paving and repair (70 percent) - things Upstate Forever says are "inextricably linked" to growth management since good growth policies can provide a foundation for economic development and even make the building of roads, for example, more efficient and less expensive.

"People don't always realize that how we grow is connected to economic development efforts," said Emily Neely, Upstate Forever program manager.

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