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## Developing a green look can work

[By Emily Dagostino](#)

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Developers and builders from around Spartanburg County spent Friday morning with nationally renowned advocate of conservation planning Randall Arendt, who flipped through slides of developments throughout the country that have been designed with a creative eye toward conservation.

"I think it's great," said Jeff Hardee, with Hardee and Associates. "It shows some new ideas, some thoughts and some new direction for the county."

Arendt emphasized rural designs with smaller lots but bigger open spaces - less lawn maintenance for homeowners, he said - and mixed-use urban developments with parks, skinnier streets and sidewalks.

"Wherever people have legs, they should have sidewalks," Arendt said.

### Single-loaded streets

He showed rural developments built around natural features, like native plants and trees, to preserve scenic views and add value. One development incorporated an existing orchard. Others ran roads along existing hedgerows. Arendt emphasized the importance of single-loaded streets, with houses developed only on one side. "Sometimes we can improve upon what we have been given," he said. "Not just preserve, but improve upon."

For more urban subdivisions, Arendt said multiple green spaces built around trees that are already there, narrow streets with one way in and one way out, and sidewalks were important. With driveways and

alleys in the back, houses don't have to sit on streets in the front, he said. Instead, front doors can open onto sidewalks and shared parks.

"A simple little change makes a big, big difference in beauty and livability," Arendt said.

With regard to rural subdivisions, Will Gramling asked Arendt how to mesh the demands of consumers - who tend to want more acreage of their own as part of the country package - with conservation-based planning, which stresses smaller lot sizes. Arendt said planners should incorporate as much buffer space as possible between houses while still selling the idea of smaller lots based on the added open space for which they allow.

### **Big lots vs. small lots**

"Inviting people on the site walk is a big, big plus," he added.

Angela Viney, director of Upstate Forever's Spartanburg office, followed up on Gramling's question.

"There is a feeling that people want big lots," she said, and that feeling creates a certain fear among builders and developers that if they don't give customers what they want, they won't invest.

"You have to be a risk-taker to do that as a developer," she added.

Again Arendt insisted that planning village greens and single-loaded streets works: "People really do respond to this."

The number of developers and builders at the workshop, hosted by Upstate Forever, seemed to indicate growing interest in conservation-based planning in Spartanburg.

"It is risky but there's a saying, 'If you keep doing what you've always done, you'll keep getting what you've always gotten,' " Hardee said. People are moving to Spartanburg who have lived elsewhere, he added. They have seen or lived in subdivisions like those Arendt described, and many want those things.

"I think it's something you're going to start seeing simply because it's happening all around us," Hardee said. "I hope that it's something that happens real soon."

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