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Metro area grows by 2.1 percent

Population estimated at 275,534 in 2007

[By Jason Spencer](#)

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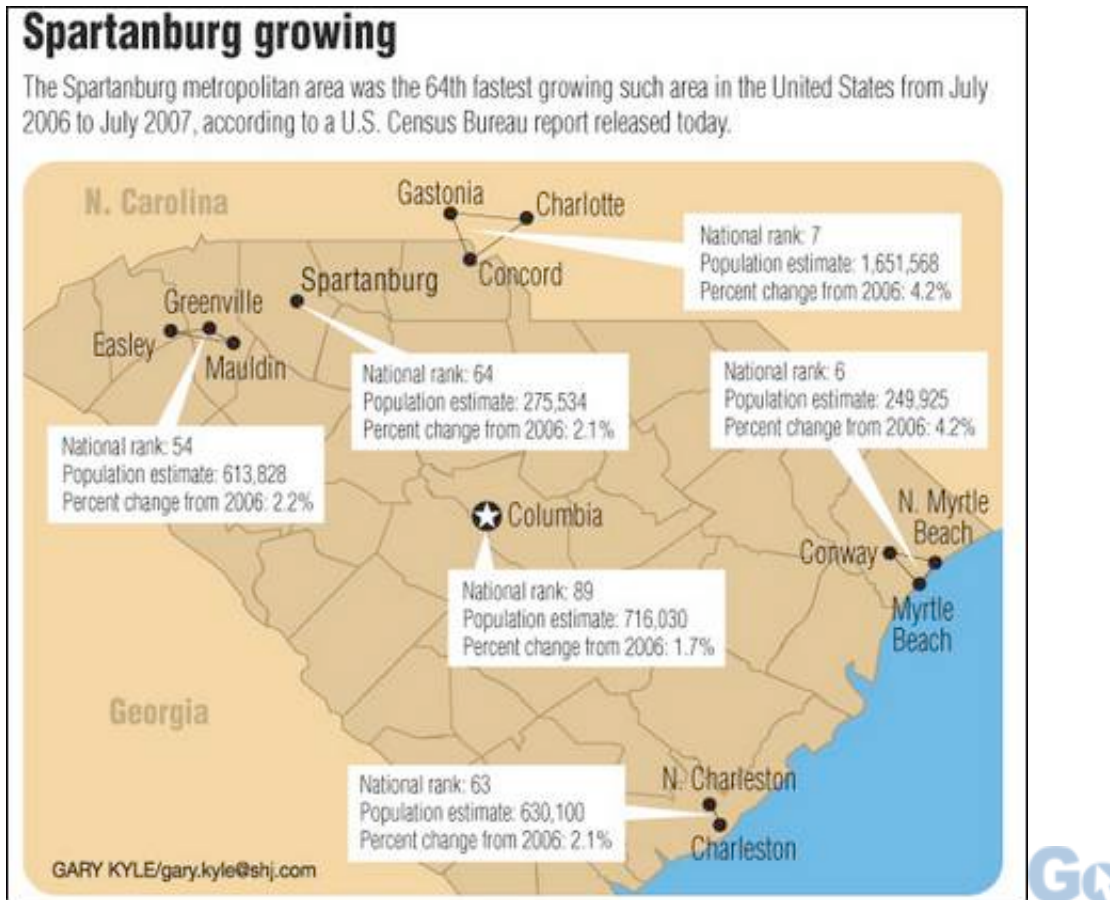
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Between July 2006 and July 2007, the population of the greater Spartanburg area grew by 2.1 percent to an estimated 275,534 people, according to census information that will be released today.

That makes this the 64th-fastest growing metro area in the country. The U.S. Census Bureau tracks 363 metropolitan statistical areas.

As more people call the Upstate home, ideas and attitudes seem to be changing.

Democrats, in a typically Republican-dominated county, had record-setting turnout during this year's presidential primary. Planning groups like Upstate Forever, which promote conservation and stricter land-use regulations, are optimistic that countywide zoning, which has long been opposed here, could take root within a year. And as more subdivisions sprout, people from out of state want to see rules in South Carolina governing homeowners associations more reflective of those in North Carolina, or Florida, or Arizona.

But some attitudes are changing in other ways.

"Even the people who moved out here in the last 10 years, they moved out in this area because it was the rural country. You see their attitude changing because everything is growing up around them. They moved out to this area to get away from that," said Reidville Mayor Gene Snow, 51, who was born and raised in that small town.

"A lot of the transplants, they've told me, 'We moved here because it was country.' "

Spartanburg County Councilman David Britt cited the coming of BMW in 1992 as the trigger that set off this area's growth. Thousands of jobs for suppliers and other ancillary companies have been created in the years since.

But it was also a bookend to the textile presence that had been here - a presence that allowed people to live and work in villages that had their own small stores, and often, looked after their own housing and infrastructure needs.

"Some of the things we need to do a better job of, which we're addressing now, is planning for this growth. The growth kind of caught us off guard - not just here, but everywhere in the country. Look next door in Greenville. ... We're putting some policies in place, for instance, to prevent what happened in Boiling Springs," Britt said.

"That's where the balancing act comes. That's going to be one of the big challenges to us in elected office to open our minds up, and put everybody together at the table. This is like turning a battleship around in a creek. You can't do it overnight, or you're going to get stuck in the mud."

Communities like Gramling, Pauline and Walnut Grove need to be protected without putting too many restrictions in place, Britt said.

The fastest growing metro area in the country is Palm Coast, Fla., followed by St. George, Utah, and Raleigh-Cary, N.C., according to the census data. The Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord, N.C., area, which spills over into South Carolina, was the 7th-fastest growing. Greenville-Mauldin-Easley ranked 54th. Charleston-North Charleston ranked 63rd. Columbia ranked 89th.

About half of the top 100 fastest-growing areas were in Southern states, including Texas.

Census numbers released last week showed that Spartanburg County's population has increased by about 8.6 percent since 2000.

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