

## UPSTATE UPDATE NUMBER 32

April 22, 2002

### *Upstate Forever's Monthly Bulletin on Important Issues and Events in the Upstate*

***Please Attend Upstate Forever's Third Annual Conference:***

The "Z-Word": A Discussion About Zoning in the  
Upstate

***Thursday, May 16, 2002  
Palmetto Expo Center, Greenville, S.C.***

***Download the registration form at our website***

***<http://www.upstateforever.org/conferencemay2002.pdf>***

***or contact our office by email at [info@upstateforever.org](mailto:info@upstateforever.org)  
or by calling (864) 250-0500***

#### ***1. Keep The Green in Greenville!! WE NEED YOUR HELP!!***

Why are so many parking lots in Greenville County so big and ugly?  
Why do we have these massive, treeless seas of asphalt?

The main reason is that Greenville County does not have a basic landscaping ordinance for parking lots. But hopefully, that's about to change.

Last Monday, April 15, approximately 300 *Upstate Forever* members and county residents turned out in force to show support for an ordinance that will establish minimum landscaping standards for large parking lots. At the meeting, Greenville County Council's Public Service, Planning and Development (PSPD) Committee reviewed a draft of the ordinance submitted by the Greenville County Planning Commission and its staff.

This ordinance, if adopted, will require landscaped buffers along new parking lots with 10 or more spaces and landscaping within new parking lots with 60 or more spaces. The interior planting provisions include one tree for every 15 parking spaces, with 75 per cent of the trees required to be large shade trees of at least two inches in caliper. In addition, for office and commercial buildings with over 60,000 square feet, parking areas that exceed 110 per cent of the minimum number of required spaces must be constructed of an alternative surface that uses grass over supporting plastic or concrete grids.

A similar ordinance was submitted more than a year ago but no action was taken. We are pleased to report that this time the PSPD Committee listened to the citizens and voted to send the ordinance to the full Council for consideration.

***But this is just the first step! We still need your help! Upstate Forever*** has been advocating for this ordinance for more than two years. We have worked with the Planning Commission staff and a group of citizens to create a set of minimum standards that are reasonable and effective.

***A public hearing will be held on the ordinance at Greenville County Square on Monday, May 20, 2002 at 6:30 p.m.*** The supporters of the ordinance will be asked to stand so it is critically important that we have another good turnout. Please mark your calendars now and make plans to attend.

Also, please write and call your representative on County Council and any other representative on Council whom you know and ask them to vote for this ordinance. You can find contact information for County Council members at [www.greenvillecounty.org/countycouncil](http://www.greenvillecounty.org/countycouncil) .

Thank you for your support in keeping the green in Greenville!

***2. Greenville County School Board Decides To Close Simpsonville Elementary. ☹***

We are dismayed at the decision of the Greenville County School Board to close Simpsonville Elementary School, only one block from Main Street. The Simpsonville City Council, the Simpsonville Chamber of Commerce, and the Simpsonville 2020 Vision group unanimously passed resolutions urging the Board not to close the school. Over 150 Simpsonville

Elementary parents signed petitions asking the school to be kept open. *Upstate Forever* Associate Director Diane Eldridge actively supported the efforts of these citizens and community leaders.

The Johnston Design Group, an architectural firm in Greenville, presented an analysis comparing the cost of renovating Simpsonville Elementary with the cost of constructing a new school at the edge of town. It showed that the School District would save approximately \$1.8 million by keeping Simpsonville Elementary open. Simpsonville Mayor Dennis Waldrop asked for an opportunity to meet with the School District staff to discuss the alternative plan and the City's role in implementing it.

At the School Board's March 26, 2002 meeting, trustee William Herlong made a motion directing the staff to meet with the City and to evaluate the merits and costs of the alternative plan before taking any further steps toward building the new school. Incredibly, the motion was defeated, meaning the doors to Simpsonville Elementary will soon be closed.

On the other hand, there is some good news in Spartanburg where School District Number 7 decided to renovate and substantially expand Pine Street Elementary, the oldest school in the county. The school will remain a wonderful asset of the downtown area, attracting residents and improving the quality of life in the community. The Greenville County School District staff argued that the Simpsonville Elementary site (about 8.5 acres) is too small to accommodate the necessary expansion. Yet the Pine Street site occupies almost the same amount of land, which brings to mind the saying, "Where there's a will, there's a way."

### ***3. Oconee County Prepares To Pass Its First-Ever Subdivision Regulations.***

Oconee County Council is close to enacting the first set of subdivision regulations in its history as a step toward better managing the phenomenal growth that is taking the county by storm. The draft regulations have passed both first and second reading and will be considered at a third and final reading next month.

With its majestic mountain ranges, pristine rivers, stunning vistas, and fertile agricultural land, Oconee County is one of the most spectacular areas in the country. But with no zoning or other land use regulations (beyond some basic regulation of sexually-oriented businesses, height of buildings

near the airport, and cell tower distribution), the very characteristics that make it so special are now gravely threatened.

In recent years, Oconee County has grown from one of the sleepiest to one of the state's fastest growing counties. The county's population increased by only 3 per cent in the 1950s and 1.3 per cent in the 1960s, but averaged 17.6 per cent per decade from 1970 to 2000. Realizing that this trend is not going to change, county leaders have wisely begun to take steps ensure that future development meets certain standards. If adopted, the subdivision regulations will be implemented in September of this year. While the regulations are extremely basic and mainly address standards for the construction of roads in subdivisions and storm water management, they are certainly a step in the right direction.

For more information about Oconee County's proposed subdivision regulations, please contact Planning Director Tom Hendricks or planner Art Holbrooks at (864) 638-4218.

#### ***4. Upstate Forever Sponsors Trip To Charlotte To Study Storm Water And Flood Plain Management.***

Last month *Upstate Forever* hosted a trip to Charlotte to see and learn how that area is addressing storm water and flooding problems. Several local government officials from the Upstate participated.

Andrew A. Burg, P.E., Capital Project Manager with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services (CMSWS), led our group on a day long tour of several exciting and innovative projects. At Burns Avenue Elementary School we saw how a system of retention ponds with river rock and native plants is filtering runoff from the school and surrounding neighborhoods. The project also incorporates boardwalks and educational signage for students to use as an outdoor laboratory.

We visited two areas where the county acquired and then demolished homes in the flood plain, thus moving people out of harm's way while at the same time providing more green space for the community. In another project along Little Sugar Creek, the county is protecting and restoring the stream and its flood plain by revegetating the banks and planting hardwood trees in a 30-foot wide buffer. At the county's maintenance yard, an elaborate filter system of rocks and vegetation filters cleans the runoff before it is discharged into the stream.

To learn more, check out CMSWS's fantastic web site, [www.co.mecklenburg.nc.us/coeng/storm](http://www.co.mecklenburg.nc.us/coeng/storm). CMSWS is a national leader in storm water management, flood control and stream restoration. Hopefully, their programs will inspire similar efforts in the Upstate.

**5. *Upstate Forever Advisory Council Member George Dean Johnson, Jr. Breathes New Life Into Downtown Spartanburg.***

*Upstate Forever* Advisory Council member George Dean Johnson, Jr. returned home to Spartanburg only three years ago and already is having a profoundly positive impact on the city. The founder of Extended Stay America, a Fortune 500 company, Johnson is moving the company's national headquarters from Florida to Spartanburg where he is constructing a \$13.3 million, four-story granite and brick building that will house both Extended Stay and another Johnson company, Advance America.

The two companies will eventually employ about 500 people in a building that has become the cornerstone of a development boom in the city. Several other projects are planned or have begun near Opportunity Block where Johnson's building will be constructed, including a new city parking garage, a classroom building for First Baptist Church, and a second office building by Johnson. In addition, the first phase of the \$120 million Renaissance Park project with a Marriott Hotel and Conference Center is underway several blocks to the north.

Spartanburg Mayor Bill Barnett called the groundbreaking of the Extended Stay building a "signature event in the rebirth of this great city." He added, "This commitment dramatically increases the economic development energy sweeping our central business district."

*Upstate Forever* is a strong advocate for strengthening and revitalizing our region's downtown areas. Kudos to George Dean Johnson, Jr. for leading the way in Spartanburg!

**6. *Pinnacle Consulting Group Unveils New Reedy River Web Site.***

Whether you're an avid paddler, a river advocate, or just want to learn about the Reedy River, there is something on this web site for you! With a grant from EPA, Greenville-based Pinnacle Consulting Group has developed a comprehensive guide to the river, complete with interactive maps, videos,

instructions on paddling and safety, and information about the river's natural history.

*Upstate Forever* Board Chairman Dave Hargett, a principal with Pinnacle, said, "We are excited about the educational and informational potential of this site and would like to apply this template to other recreational rivers in South Carolina and elsewhere to promote river advocacy and recreational paddling."

Please visit the website at [www.paddlessc.net](http://www.paddlessc.net) and enjoy a virtual trip down the Reedy River!

**7. *Anderson County Soil & Water Conservation District Is Named The Best In South Carolina!***

The Anderson County Soil & Water Conservation District received the South Carolina Conservation District of the Year Award at the annual joint meeting of the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, and the South Carolina Association of Conservation Districts. The Anderson District was recognized for its outstanding programs and activities in conservation, including the countywide essay contest for grades K through 8; its participation in the Area 14 Special Olympics; its sponsorship of the state Envirothon competition; and its participation in National Farm City Week. Congratulations to the Anderson District—keep up the great work!

**8. *Friends Of Paris Mountain State Park Sponsors Its Third Annual Friends Day On Saturday, April 27.***

Make plans to attend this all-day event at Paris Mountain State Park. Designed for families and people of all ages, the day will include educational programs and children's activities, environmental demonstrations, mountain fun-runs, a 10K race for serious runners, paddling on Lake Placid, and musical entertainment.

You and your family can take an ecotour of Lake Placid to learn about aquatic ecology, listen to a history of the park presented by Furman University's Judy Bainbridge, and enjoy a nature scavenger hunt—all while enjoying the beauty of one of Greenville County's greatest assets. Food and drinks will be available for purchase or you can bring your own picnic

lunch. Admission is free. For more information, visit the Friends website at [www.parismountain.com/sp](http://www.parismountain.com/sp) or call the park at (864) 299-5565.

### **9. *Symposium On Natural Landscapes.***

The South Carolina Foothills Chapter of Wild Ones Natural Landscapers, Ltd. will host a one-day symposium about natural landscapes for businesses and homes on Saturday, May 4 at Keowee Toxaway State Park from 9:15 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Featured speakers will include Clemson University horticulture professor Dr. David Bradshaw, who also serves as the naturalist for the S.C. Botanical Gardens, Peter Loewer, host of the radio show “The Wild Gardener,” and *Upstate Forever* Land Trust Coordinator Dana Leavitt.

The program features lectures, workshops and field trips designed to inform participants about natural landscapes and how to create them. In addition, Dana will discuss the conservation easement as a method to protect environmentally significant properties. The cost of the symposium is \$45.00 and includes lunch, snacks and all related activities.

To learn more about this event, visit [www.chaoticgardening.com](http://www.chaoticgardening.com) or contact Karen Hall at [KAREN@chaoticgardening.com](mailto:KAREN@chaoticgardening.com). To learn more about Wild Ones Natural Landscapers, Ltd., visit their website at [www.for-wild.org](http://www.for-wild.org).

### **10. *Quote Of The Month.***

“The truth is that Spartanburg County Council has not listened to the needs and wishes of homeowners. It has not given them the protection they need. Homeowners will continue to see their property values decline and their standard of living suffer as haphazard and unplanned development continues.”

Editorial, Spartanburg Herald-Journal  
March 10, 2002