

UPSTATE UPDATE 37

Upstate Forever's Monthly Bulletin On Important Issues And Events

September, 2002

1. *Greenville County Council Approves Parking Lot Landscaping Ordinance With Original Standards!*

We began our work and advocacy on the landscaping ordinance for large office and commercial parking lots in Greenville County almost three years ago. At the time we thought that enactment of the ordinance would be a relatively easy process. After all, it applies only to large business parking lots, and these ordinances are now routine in most rapidly growing metropolitan areas. How wrong we were!

For almost three years, the ordinance bounced back and forth among the County Council, the Council's Public Service, Planning and Development Committee and the Planning Commission where it was considered at no less than 16 official meetings!

As the ordinance spun on the regulatory merry-go-round, more and more citizens became involved. Hundreds began turning out for the meetings, taking time away from their jobs and families. Garden clubs were energized, petitions were circulated, Council members were called, and letters poured in to the local papers. As just one example, an employee at Sears came by our office two days before the final vote. She was not a member and we didn't know her, but she is deeply concerned about the continuing loss of green space in the county. She decided to do some Internet research on the issue, found a tree ordinance from a county in Michigan, and brought it to us, hoping it would help. Take that level of interest and multiply it many, many times, and you will understand why County Council not only approved the ordinance but also reinstated the original, more stringent standards. Actually, in the end, it was not even close—9 in favor, 3 opposed.

An unexpected bonus during the meeting was an amendment that reduced the minimum number of parking spaces required for office and commercial buildings. Many developers complain that the county's ordinance forces them to

put in more parking spaces than necessary. This amendment will give them more flexibility in designing parking lots and hopefully result in less asphalt in Greenville County.

Major kudos go to *Upstate Forever* Associate Director Diane Eldridge, the Greenville County Planning Commission staff, garden club leader Linda Sisson, and Friends of Paris Mountain president Mary Lou Jones for their persistent and resilient efforts, and to the media for their outstanding coverage.

No doubt this is an important, urgently needed ordinance, but the interest, support and passion extend far beyond trees in parking lots. What we witnessed during the last year is an outpouring of concern about what is happening in Greenville County—the loss of open space, mounting traffic problems, harmful patterns of development and so forth. It is a concern shared by citizens everywhere. As a statewide poll conducted by the University of South Carolina Institute of Public Affairs in 2000 showed, more than 70 per cent of our state’s citizens support the following: state and local funding to protect open space; the creation of green belts around cities; and restrictions on the type of growth that can take place in certain areas. Four of five South Carolinians agree with the statement: “Protection of the environment should be given priority, even at the risk of slowing down economic growth.”

The ordinance’s tortuous process had one enormous “silver lining”—citizens became actively involved with their local government. For many, it was the first time they had ever attended a County Council meeting or ever talked to their representative. They are now engaged, knowing their voices can make a difference. We hope their example will inspire citizens throughout the Upstate to speak out as well on these critically important issues.

2. *Spartanburg Water System And Upstate Forever Join Forces In The First PDR Program In The Upstate!*

The Spartanburg Water System has approved the first Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program in the Upstate and will join forces with *Upstate Forever* to implement it. On September 24, the Water System Commissioners gave final approval to spending \$35,000 to purchase conservation easements to protect land along the North and South Pacolet Rivers. These rivers are the major tributaries to Lake Bowen, the county’s most important source of public drinking water.

There is overwhelming scientific evidence that preserving land along rivers and streams—referred to as riparian buffers—is essential to maintaining and improving water quality. These buffers act like sponges, slowing upland runoff and keeping pollution out of waterways. By spending one dollar today to protect these buffers, the Spartanburg Water System will save many future dollars in treatment costs. New York City is the classic example of the wisdom of this policy. By protecting land in its watershed, the City expects to avoid the expenditure of billions of dollars for a new water filtration plant. Buffers also provide many other benefits—cooler stream temperatures, wildlife habitat and green corridors for communities as well as increases in the market value of the adjoining upland.

The Spartanburg Water System’s program is a dream come true for *Upstate Forever!* From our inception, we have strongly advocated for local PDR programs in the Upstate to protect open space, prime farmlands, scenic vistas, and environmentally significant lands, such as riparian buffers. In other communities, these programs have been highly successful and strongly supported by the public.

Upstate Forever applauds the Water System’s Commissioners and Graham Rich, the General Manager, for their visionary leadership in launching this program. We are honored to be a partner with them, and we hope their initiative will inspire local governments throughout the Upstate to establish similar programs.

3. Vote Yes On Zoning In Laurens County On November 5!

Yogi Berra said, “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.”

Laurens County has arrived at the fork in the road to its destiny. Its population now exceeds 70,000 and is growing at the rate of about 3 persons per day. The county’s population increased by almost 20 per cent from 1990 to 2000—the highest rate of growth in the Upstate. By 2030, assuming the same rate of growth, there will be about 50,000 more residents of Laurens County, who will own approximately 18,500 more homes and 33,500 more cars.

One thing is for certain: Laurens County will continue to grow. We cannot, and should not, try to build a wall around the county and say, “No more growth, no more business.” Continued growth is essential to providing better economic opportunities for all of the county’s citizens.

The great challenge facing Laurens County is not whether growth will occur, but how and where it will occur.

This Election Day, November 5, the voters in Laurens County will directly face this challenge. They will have the opportunity to say whether or not the time has come for zoning in Laurens County. A no vote will mean the county should continue on its current path of continued growth with minimal land use controls. A yes vote will mean that the other fork in the road should be taken and that the citizens of the county (through their elected leaders) should be the ones to determine how and where growth occurs in Laurens County in the years ahead.

It is one of the most important votes in the history of the county, and we urge Laurens County citizens to vote yes. Upstate Forever is working with a local group of concerned citizens on a booklet entitled “Protect and Improve the Quality of Life in Laurens County: Vote Yes To Zoning on November 5,” which we hope to distribute widely throughout the county. It will explain the principal provisions of the proposed ordinance and explain why the benefits of zoning far outweigh the burdens and costs.

Like Laurens County, most of the Upstate has no zoning. Thus, the issues facing the voters in Laurens are common throughout our region. When the booklet is complete, we will post it on our website where it can easily be downloaded and printed, or please call our office and we will be glad to send you one.

For more information, please call the Laurens County Planning Department at 864-984-8803 or ***Upstate Forever*** at 864-250-0500.

4. Proposed Revisions To Anderson County’s Development Standards Ordinance Are A Good Step In The Right Direction.

For the last two years, Anderson County Council has been reviewing and debating proposed changes to the County’s Development Standards Ordinance (DSO), which has not been significantly modified for over 15 years. The changes cleared first and second reading in 2000 but have become stalled by opposition from the Anderson County Taxpayers Association and some members of the National Rifle Association and Anderson County Homebuilders Association. The president of the Taxpayers Association recently said, “I’m not going to let bureaucrats tell me what to do or not to do with my property.” Anderson Independent-Mail, Sept. 1, 2002. p. 3B.

Upstate Forever strongly supports the proposed revisions and recently sent the following memo to all members of the Council, urging approval as soon as possible:

“At the outset, we would like to commend the Council for taking the initiative to review and revise this ordinance. It has had no significant changes since 1987, but the county has experienced significant changes in both its population and the amount of developed land since that time. It would be irresponsible *not* to review and modify the ordinance.

“Every week, Anderson County’s population increases by about 39 people while more than 34 acres of its land are developed. If current trends continue, by 2030 there will be nearly 95,000 additional people in the county and a minimum of 60,000 more acres of county land will have been developed. Using generally accepted standards, we estimate that this additional 95,000 people will need over 35,000 new homes and 1.9 million square feet of new retail space that provides over 6,000 new parking spaces. They will bring more than 60,000 additional cars that will generate nearly 790 million vehicle miles.

“One thing is certain: Anderson County will continue to grow. Continued growth is essential to providing better economic opportunities for all of the county’s citizens. The great challenge facing Anderson County is not whether growth will occur, but how and where it will occur. Now is the time to plan for the future of Anderson County!

“The proposed revisions to Development Standards Ordinance are an important step toward higher quality development in Anderson. The planning staff has done an admirable job of balancing the interests of the community-at-large with the rights of property owners. After obtaining input from a diverse cross-section of citizens, they have presented to you an ordinance that is considerably more flexible than most of the other development standards ordinances in the Upstate. A number of the regulations are designed to respond to increasing development pressures without placing undue hardship on individual property owners. For example, in many communities, small landowners who wish to subdivide their land must submit a drainage plan similar to those for standard subdivisions (Sec.38-314.) The Anderson County code addresses this issue by waiving the requirement for subdivisions with five or fewer lots.

“Other flexible standards have been established to protect environmental resources and reduce the impacts of development. Buffers along rivers, streams,

and creeks are to be protected from intense disturbance associated with large-scale development, but individual homeowners are not restricted from landscaping those areas if desired (Sec. 38-631.) Tree retention is encouraged during development but not required (Sec. 38-397.) Additionally, minimum parking space requirements for large retail shopping centers have been reduced, giving the developer some relief from excessive standards and reducing the amount of impervious surface that will replace natural landscape (Sec. 38-210.)

“These and other revisions to the existing ordinance are hardly dramatic changes. Rather, they will merely ‘tweak’ the current standards by reducing some standards, strengthening others, and making a number of clarifications. Many opportunities to improve the ordinance still exist such as creating incentives for conservation and mixed-use developments and establishing design standards along rapidly developing corridors like Highway 81. The proposed revisions are the very least that should be adopted, and we urge you to approve them at the earliest possible date. Thank you for your consideration of our views on this important ordinance.”

We hope that the revisions to the DSO will be on the Council’s agenda for third and final reading in December. If you live in Anderson County, please call your Council member to express your support for these important revisions to the ordinance.

5. *Former Chairman of Pickens County Planning Commission Speaks Out On Development Standards Ordinance.*

Speaking of development standards, Tom Smith, the former Chairman of the Pickens County Planning Commission, has weighed in on the controversy surrounding the revisions to that county’s Development Standards Ordinance. Here’s his letter to the editor that was published in September 11, 2002 issue of The Easley Progress:

“Based on recent comments at County Council meetings and in the local newspapers, one would think that an alien space ship landed in Pickens County this past spring and left behind the Development Standards Ordinance (DSO 304).

“Folks, the Development Standards Ordinance has been around since the late 1980s and has been amended several times. Work on the most recent amendments were begun in late 1999, finalized in October 2000 and forwarded to County Council. Council referred the changes to committee and the final document was

reported out of committee earlier this year and was adopted by Council after three readings. During the entire process, public hearings were held, all meetings were open to the public and in fact, a citizens task force reviewed the entire DSO and made recommended changes to the planning commission.

“Let’s reflect and ask ourselves some questions here. Given the level of growth in Pickens County, do we want some means of managing that growth or do we want growth and development to manage and overwhelm us? Do we want a racetrack, a landfill, a truck terminal, an adult club or a Wal-Mart built in our neighborhood without an opportunity to voice our views or opinions? Are we at all interested in preserving the natural beauty of our county? Do we want our roads cluttered with more and more signs? Do we want our tax dollars spent on items which developers should have provided (i.e. roads, water and sewer lines)?

“It is very easy to complain, criticize, call people names, and accuse folks of wrongdoing. Working to deal with issues, solve problems and come up with reasonable solutions is hard work. So rather than sitting on the sidelines while others do the work, why not get involved in the process? Use some of the effort and energy now being expended on whining and complaining to find out when boards and commissions meet, come to the meetings and offer to help with the task forces, study groups or subcommittees working on issues. Be part of the process of solving problems and deciding the future of this great county.”

Well said, Mr. Smith!

6. *New Study Shows Link Between Development And Water Supply—Upstate Was One Of The Areas Studied.*

It is well known and well documented that development causes water pollution. The rain that runs off roads, parking lots and other impervious surfaces carries a myriad of pollutants, including oil, grease, and metals, into our rivers and streams. In fact, this runoff is one of the nation’s most serious water quality problems.

Not as well known but just as serious is the impact of development on water quantity. As more and more of our forests, wetlands and open spaces are paved over, less and less rain seeps into the ground to replenish aquifers and sustain streamflows, thus depleting our water supplies. This impact is the subject of a new study, “Paving Our Way To Water Shortages,” released last month by American Rivers, Smart Growth America and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The researchers first determined the 20 metropolitan areas in the United States that have experienced the most development over the last 20 years. Half are in the Southeast, and one of those is the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson metropolitan region. (This region comprises most of the six-county “Upstate,” as defined by *Upstate Forever*).

The study established a “range of imperviousness” for new development in these 20 areas. Assuming regional average soil types and accounting for regional rainfall patterns, the authors calculated the amount of rainwater that runs off the land instead of soaking into the ground and recharging groundwater resources. By comparing the extent of impervious cover in 1997 to that in 1982, they found the potential amount of water lost to infiltration on an annual basis.

Here are the annual infiltration losses for the 10 southeastern regions (expressed in gallons of water):

Atlanta:	57 to 132 billion
Charlotte:	13 to 31 billion
Dallas:	6 to 14 billion
Greensboro:	7 to 16 billion
<i>Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson:</i>	<i>13 to 30 billion</i>
Houston:	13 to 30 billion
Nashville:	17 to 40 billion
Orlando:	9 to 21 billion
Raleigh-Durham:	9 to 22 billion
Tampa:	7 to 17 billion

To put these numbers in perspective, Atlanta’s loss amounts to enough water to supply the average daily household needs of 1.5 to 3.6 million people. The losses in the Upstate would supply the needs of 350,000 to 800,000 people.

The water, of course, is not truly lost, but development dramatically changes how a region functions hydrologically. Floods occur more often and at higher levels, and during dry periods, streamflows are less because of reduced groundwater levels. Indeed, one study found that groundwater-influenced stream flow fell to 10 per cent of the regional average when the level of imperviousness in the watershed reaches 65 per cent.

Communities around the country are turning to a range of strategies to cope with water shortages, including conservation. But for the most part, communities are ignoring the important role that smart growth policies can play in addressing water shortage issues. The study recommends that the following policies be adopted:

1. Establish funded programs to identify and protect important lands and water resources;
2. Integrate water supply into planning efforts by coordinating road-building and other construction projects with water resource management activities;
3. Invest in existing communities by rehabilitating existing infrastructure before building anew—a “fix it first” strategy;
4. Encourage compact development that mixes retail, commercial and residential uses;
5. Manage storm water by replacing concrete sewer and tunnel infrastructure with low-impact development techniques that allow filtration of storm water to replenish aquifers;
6. Devote more funding and time to research and analyze the impact of development on water resources and make this information widely available.

The study concludes: “These are efficient, cost effective and proven approaches. They would provide multiple benefits for communities that not only want to conserve water but also to find relief from endless commutes, air and water pollution, and disappearing open spaces. All we need is the political will to adopt them.”

The study could not have come at a better time. The recent drought and the problems of the thirsty behemoth, Atlanta, make clear that we can no longer take our water supplies in the Upstate for granted. By applying smart growth principles, we will be able not only to protect this critical resource but also to create better places to live.

The entire report is available on the American Rivers website, www.americanrivers.org.

7. *Recycling In The Upstate—How We’re Doing.*

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) recently released its Solid Waste Management Report for 2001. The report includes, among other things, detailed information about recycling rates in all counties in the state. The state’s goal, as provided in the South Carolina Solid Waste Policy and Management Act, is to recycle at least 35 per cent of waste. In 2001, only 9 of the state’s 46 counties met that goal, with Greenville being the only Upstate county in the group. But Anderson, Laurens and Oconee came very close. Here are the percentages, along with the statewide ranking:

Greenville:	37.95 per cent (no. 8)
Anderson:	31.51 per cent (no. 10)
Laurens:	31.50 per cent (no. 11)
Oconee:	28.23 per cent (no. 13)
Spartanburg:	23.13 per cent (no. 21)
Pickens:	18.19 per cent (no. 26)

It should not be difficult to achieve the 35 per cent goal. In fact, 4 counties in South Carolina—Marlboro, Lancaster, Berkeley and Jasper—recycled more than 50 per cent of their waste, with Marlboro achieving an astonishing 87 per cent rate!

There are several important activities and initiatives relating to recycling in the state, but in the long term none is more important than education. As the next generation learns more about recycling, through such programs as “Action for a Cleaner Tomorrow” and “Recycle Guys,” recycling hopefully will become a way of life in South Carolina.

To obtain a copy of the 2001 report, contact Art Braswell at DHEC at 803-896-4000.

8. *Lots o’ Links.*

New Website about Trees in the Upstate—Check out this phenomenal new website about trees in the Upstate. By using over 1,500 color photos (most from the Upstate), Greentree Technologies explains the leading causes of urban tree loss and provides viable solutions to these problems. Anyone who cares about trees will enjoy this website!

<http://www.greentreetech.com>

Disposable Planet: Special Report from BBC Online—The Earth's population is soaring, but its resources are finite. Can we provide food, water, energy—and televisions, cars and holidays—for everyone, and leave future generations more than a planet-sized landfill? Be sure to take the quiz and measure your own impact.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/world/2002/disposable_planet/

County Works on Cutting-Edge Effort to Measure Development—NASA and the University of South Carolina are bringing space-age technology to bear on Beaufort County's struggle to understand and control future development.

<http://www.islandpacket.com/news/local/v-print/story/1688076p-1707179c.html>

Here Comes the Neighborhood—Where strip malls once reigned, new housing is springing up.

http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/northwestlife/134520288_hometransform25.html

Proposals Pouring in for WTC Site – Artists, architects and others submit their visions for rebuilding the World Trade Center. Be sure to view the slide shows on the sidebar.

<http://www.newsday.com/news/local/longisland/ny-bzplans0829.story?coll=ny%2Dtop%2Dheadlines>

Patio Man and the Sprawl People – Humorous look at America's new suburbs, by the author as “sprinkler cities.”

<http://www.weeklystandard.com/content/public/articles/000/000/001/531wlvng.asp>

How To Make Cell Towers “Vanish”—Great Britain is concealing cellular phone towers in Great Britain with fake chimneys, flagpoles, and other structures.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/sci_tech/2000/dot_life/2261039.stm

Upcoming Area Events

Back to the Future in the Carolina Low Country, October 10-13. National Association of Home Builders has chosen Charleston as the site for its seminar on Traditional Neighborhoods, “where everything old is new again.” Includes tours of I’On, Daniel Island, Newpoint, Broadstreet, and Port Royal.

<http://www.nahb.com/tnd.htm>

Sustainability: Today's Strategy for North Carolina Business, October 23, Chapel Hill, N.C. Learn how sustainability practices offer significant competitive advantages to business. Paul Hawken, noted author of the popular best sellers *Natural Capitalism*, *The Ecology of Commerce*, and *Growing a Business* and founder of Smith & Hawken, will deliver the keynote address. Presented by Save our State.

<http://www.sosnc.org/conference.html>

9. *Quote of the Month.*

“If you are a landowner in this country today, and if you care about your land, you cannot sit back and do nothing.”

Stephen Small, Preserving Family Lands, Book III (2002), page 27.