

Upstate Update

NUMBER 44

M A Y
2 0 0 3

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

1. SCDOT Rescinds Commitment to Fund Pedestrian Coordinator.

In response to the shocking and disappointing news that the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) has rescinded its commitment to fund a Greenville County Pedestrian Facilities Coordinator, *Upstate Forever's* Diane Eldridge sent the following letter to Elizabeth Mabry, the Executive Director of SCDOT:

"For the past two years, I have served on the Greenville County Pedestrian Task Force, which was originally organized by SCDOT following the Pedestrian Road Show in Greenville. I am also the Director of Education and Advocacy for Upstate Forever, a non-profit organization committed to promoting sensible growth and protecting special places in the Upstate region of South Carolina. Both organizations have strongly advocated for policies that promote sensible growth and pedestrian-friendly development - two critical components of a sustainable future.

The Pedestrian Task Force has worked for two years to develop a plan that addresses pedestrian issues in Greenville County. We were delighted when SCDOT committed to fund a full time Pedestrian Facilities Planner here, and we worked together with your agency and the Greenville County Planning Commission to establish goals and objectives for this position, which would become a part of the Planning Commission staff. An excellent candidate was identified and hired, and contracts were written and signed. However, just before the final signature was obtained, the funding for the position was eliminated by SCDOT.

This decision came as a complete shock to us and to everyone who has worked so hard to establish this position. To say we are disappointed would be an understatement. We urge you to restore funding for this position immediately.

South Carolina badly needs more, not less, emphasis on pedestrian issues. Here are some of the reasons:

People do not have enough safe places to walk in our state.

- South Carolina has the 4th highest rate of pedestrian fatalities per 100,000 residents in the nation. ¹
- The number of pedestrian fatalities in South Carolina increased by 32 per cent from 2000 to 2001. ²

The pedestrian is a second-rate citizen in South Carolina when it comes to transportation funding.

Promoting sensible growth and protecting special places in the Upstate

- South Carolina ranks second to last among all states in the percentage of federal transportation dollars invested in pedestrian and bicycle safety (0.2%).³
- The national annual average (1998-2001) of expenditures on bicycle and pedestrian safety is 87 cents per person. In South Carolina, it is only 22 cents, and in the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson region, it is an abysmal 2 cents per person.⁴

South Carolinians are nearly totally dependent on the automobile for transportation.

- Only 2.3 per cent of all commutes are made on foot in South Carolina.⁵
- South Carolina's population increased 18 per cent from 1988 to 2000, but the number of miles driven by South Carolinians increased approximately 47 percent.⁶
- The average South Carolinian spends 74 minutes in the car every day, the equivalent of more than 18 days annually.⁷
- 58 per cent of all trips under one-half mile are made by car in South Carolina.⁸

The health of our residents could benefit from walking more and driving less.

- Among women, walking 10 blocks per day or more is associated with a 33 percent lower risk of cardiovascular disease.⁹
- Obesity rates in South Carolina are among the highest in the country, with 23 percent of the adult population considered obese.¹⁰
- The incidence of cancer is 52 per cent higher for obese men and 62 percent higher for obese women than those of normal weight.¹¹
- More than 40 per cent of Greenville County's population is at-risk for respiratory problems on high-ozone days,¹² which are more frequent in areas where automobile congestion is greater.

What these statistics tell us is that we overemphasize the automobile and underemphasize the pedestrian in South Carolina and the fatality rate, as well as our health and our waistlines, show it.

We recognize that the automobile has been, and will continue to be, our principal mode of transportation, but our state's agencies and leaders should strongly promote and encourage alternatives. One way to do that is to place more emphasis on funding pedestrian planning and infrastructure. It is my sincere hope that you will take the lead in this effort, and an excellent first step would be to restore the funding for Greenville County's Pedestrian Facilities Planner."

- ¹ *The \$300 Billion Question: Are We Buying a Better Transportation System?* Surface Transportation Policy
- ² *Mean Streets 2002*, Surface Transportation Policy Project.
- ³ Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration Databases, FY 1998-2001.
- ⁴ *Mean Streets 2002*, Surface Transportation Policy Project.
- ⁵ United States Census, 2000.
- ⁶ South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, *Cleaner Air Sooner*.
- ⁷ U. S. Department of Transportation, National Household Survey, 2001.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ Sesso, H. D., et al., *Physical activity and cardiovascular disease risk in middle-aged and older women*. American Journal of Epidemiology, 1999; 150:408-16.
- ¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2002. Project, January, 2003.
- ¹¹ Calle, Eugenia E., et al, "Overweight, Obesity, and Mortality from Cancer in a Prospectively Studied Cohort of U.S. Adults," New England Journal of Medicine, April 24, 2003.
- ¹² American Lung Association, "State of the Air: 2003."

2. Americans Want More Places to Walk and Bike.

And speaking of pedestrians, two recent surveys show that Americans want more places to walk and bike and are willing to divert federal transportation dollars from roads to make it happen.

In a poll conducted last month by the firm Belden Russonello and Stewart, 53 per cent support increased federal spending on bicycle facilities, even if it means spending less on building new roads. Fifty-two per cent say they want to be able to spend more time biking, and half the respondents say they support requiring roads to include bicycle lanes or paths, even if it means less space for cars and trucks. For more information, visit the League of American Bicyclists website at <http://www.bikeleague.org/mediacenter/medprs050503.htm>

A report released last month by the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) reports that 68 per cent of Americans favor putting more federal dollars toward improving walkability, even within a constrained budget, and 84 per cent support using part of the transportation budget to design streets with sidewalks and safe crossings, even if it means driving more slowly. The same report found that only 25 per cent of Americans favor building more roads to reduce traffic congestion, while 66 per cent think the best solutions are to improve public transportation and build communities where people do not have to drive long distances to work or shop. You can download the entire report at STPP's website: <http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=205>

What both of these and other reports make very clear is that Americans are frustrated with the lack of emphasis on walking and biking facilities and want more of our transportation budget devoted to improving existing facilities and building new ones. Let's hope our decision makers are listening!

3. *Lake Robinson Area Project Encounters Heated Opposition.*

Upstate Forever strongly advocates for community-based planning programs where citizens discuss how they would like to see their area grow and develop in the future. So we were delighted when a group of citizens asked for our assistance in undertaking such an effort in the Lake Robinson area in northeastern Greenville County, one of the most beautiful but rapidly developing areas of the Upstate.

We applied for and received a \$10,000 grant from John I. Smith Charities to be used primarily to pay for the services of Arnett Muldrow, a consulting firm with considerable expertise in community planning. This firm would research existing land uses, study growth trends, and conduct several public meetings to discuss the future of the "Lake Robinson Area," which was defined for purposes of the study as a 28-square mile area bounded by Highway 11 to the north, Highway 101 to the east, Milford Church Road to the south, and Highways 253 and 290 to the west.

A broad-based steering committee was established which included, among others, residents and landowners in the area; a representative of the Commission of Public Works, which owns Lake Robinson; and a representative of North Greenville College.

Arnett Muldrow completed its research on existing land uses and population and development trends. It concluded that from 1990 to 2000, population in the area had increased by 42 per cent, more than twice the county's growth rate. Nearly 7,000 people now live in the area, and in just four years there will be another 1,000. From 1994 to 2001, traffic on Highway 101 and Groce Meadow Road increased by 44 per cent and 69 per cent, respectively.

The steering committee reviewed the results and decided to move forward with presenting the information to the public. Three meetings were scheduled at the Greer campus of Greenville Tech during the last week of April. Flyers were prepared and widely distributed throughout the area inviting the public to attend. The Greer Citizen newspaper gave good coverage to the meetings.

The flyer could not have been clearer about the purpose of the project. This was not a "pro-zoning" or "pro-annexation" or "anti-private property rights" initiative. It truly was to find out what the people in the area thought about growth and change and whether they wanted to do anything about it.

So far, so good, but the bomb dropped at the first public meeting on April 28. There was a standing room only crowd of over 300 people in the room, and many of them were angry. Sandy Lipe, a resident of the area and a member of the steering committee, called

Upstate Update

NUMBER 44
M A Y
2 0 0 3

the meeting to order, explained the purpose of the project, and introduced Tripp Muldrow to present the results of his research. He was only able to get through about 10 minutes of his presentation before the attacks began. One man proclaimed that, "this is nothing but an attempt by a bunch of outside liberal elitists to come into our area and try to tell us what we can do with our property." Another said, "The best thing you all can do for us is to go home." Each exclamation was greeted with loud applause. The Director of the South Carolina Chapter of the League of the South was particularly outspoken. The interruptions and jeering made it impossible for Mr. Muldrow to complete his presentation, and the meeting was adjourned.

At the meeting the next night, most of the same people were back again. One man was handing out a sheet that said the project was part of a conspiracy by the United Nations to take over private property. Steve Lipe opened the meeting and said he saw no reason to proceed if the group did not even want to talk about different ways of addressing growth and change. He explained that the purpose of the project was to determine the desires of the citizens in the area and if everyone was happy with the way things are going, then so be it. Mr. Lipe asked how many were content with the status quo, and nearly every hand in the room went up. He asked that those who wanted to consider different approaches to raise their hand—three people responded. Mr. Lipe adjourned the meeting.

The crowd, however, wasn't finished with us yet. Just when we thought we had heard it all, a woman said that the project proponents are just as evil as Saddam Hussein. We appreciated the offer from Greenville Tech's head of security to escort us to our cars! The next day, The Times-Examiner newspaper published a grossly biased article about the meeting, making the outrageous—indeed, libelous—assertion that *Upstate Forever* "attempt[s] to impose their wishes on unsuspecting citizens by deception."

To be sure, land use and growth issues are often contentious, but we were stunned that the citizens did not even want to hear what we had to say. We had hoped to present the information about population growth, development patterns, and traffic increases in the area. We had hoped to engage the citizens in a discussion on what they like and don't like about the area and what kind of development they would like to see in the coming years. We had hoped to explain that while comprehensive zoning is certainly a tool to address growth issues, it is not the only tool. There are several other measures that other communities can and are using—transfer of development rights programs, purchase of development rights programs, stronger development standards, zoning that is limited to commercial and industrial uses, and so forth. But no one wanted to listen.

Perhaps the people who attended the meetings do not represent the views of the majority of the residents in the Lake Robinson area, but with limited funds we did the best we could to get the word out and invite people to participate. If there is a "silent majority" out there, they need to speak up. Otherwise, there will be no planning for growth and change in the Lake Robinson area any time soon.

4. Legislative Update.

In last month's Upstate Update we summarized several important bills relating to land use and conservation that are pending in the South Carolina General Assembly and Congress. Here is an update on three of the bills that have received considerable attention this month:

**A. ACTION ALERT! We Need Your Help!!
Local Authority to Regulate Hog and Chicken Farms and
"Any Activity", H. 3555.**

Things are going from bad to worse in the South Carolina General Assembly, and we urgently need your help!!

Last month the House of Representatives passed a bill (H. 3555) that would prohibit counties from enacting ordinances (other than zoning) on hog and chicken farms that are more stringent than state regulations. This was bad enough, but *on May 15 a Senate subcommittee approved an amendment to the bill that would extend this prohibition to "any activity" in South Carolina!!* While the amendment does not apply to zoning ordinances, all other types of local regulations appear to be covered, such as setback and buffer requirements, subdivision regulations, signs and billboard ordinances, sexually oriented business regulations, scenic highway protections, historic preservation ordinances, litter control programs, and on and on and on.

The amendment is a brutal and totally unjustified assault on the Home Rule doctrine, which has been firmly established in South Carolina for over 30 years and gives local governments the right to enact the ordinances and regulations that they believe are necessary to protect and improve the quality of life in their communities. The South Carolina Association of Counties has come out strongly against the legislation. You can read their comments at: <http://www.sccounties.org/Friday.report/current-report.htm>

Testimony about the amended bill was heard before the Senate Judiciary Committee on May 20, but no action was taken. It will be on the committee's agenda for Tuesday, May 27. The following Upstate Senators serve on this committee: John Hawkins (Spartanburg), Mike Fair (Greenville), Danny Verdin (Laurens), Bob Waldrep (Anderson), Larry Martin (Pickens), Ralph Anderson (Greenville) and Jim Ritchie (Spartanburg). *Please contact these senators today and any other senators on the committee whom you know and urge them to reject not only the amendment but the entire legislation.* Here is the link that will give you the contact information:

<http://www.scstatehouse.net/html-pages/senatecommlst.html#jud>

XUpstate Forever's position on the bill: Oppose.

The entire bill can be read online at:

http://www.lpittr.state.sc.us/sess115_2003-2004/bills/3555.htm

B. *The South Carolina Neighborhood and Community Schools Act, H. 3863.*

A new bill has been introduced that is similar to H.3608, which we covered in *Upstate Update 43*. Like H.3608, the bill removes the minimum acreage requirements for new schools, a change that will allow school districts to select smaller sites in more urbanized areas and thus reduce "school sprawl" into undeveloped, rural areas. The legislation also places caps on the number of students each school can have. However, a House subcommittee recently weakened the bill with an amendment that merely "recommends" maximums for student populations rather than placing legal limits on them.

✓ ***Upstate Forever's position on the bill:***
Support in its original form, without the amendment.

You can read the entire bill at:

http://www.lpittr.state.sc.us/sess115_2003-2004/bills/3863.htm

Contact Your Representatives: Please let your representatives in the General Assembly know your position on these important bills. You can find the contact information for your elected officials by entering your zip code at: <http://capwiz.com>

C. *Federal Tax Incentives for Conservation.*

In *Upstate Update 43*, we reported on the major new tax incentives passed by the U.S. Senate as part of the 2003 "CARE" (Charities Aid, Recovery, and Empowerment) Act. This Act would make conservation easement deductions more equitable for "land rich, cash poor" landowners who frequently can only deduct a fraction of the value of their qualifying easements. Conservation incentives in the Senate bill include increasing the annual deduction ceiling for donations of land or easements for conservation purposes from 30 to 50 per cent of adjusted gross income and increasing the "carry forward" period from five to 15 years. In addition, the bill excludes from taxation 25 per cent of the gain on the sale of land to a conservation organization or a government conservation agency (President Bush supports an exclusion of 50 per cent) and authorizes tax-exempt bonds to be used for the purchase of forestlands.

Unfortunately, when a similar bill was introduced in the House of Representatives (H.R.7, the Charitable Giving Act), it did not include these important conservation measures. The bill will be considered by the House Ways and Means Committee and then by the full House. You can help by contacting Upstate Representatives Jim DeMint, 504 Cannon

House Building, Washington, D.C. 20515 (202-225-6030) and Gresham Barrett, 1523 Longworth House Office, Washington, D.C. 20515 (202-225-5301) and asking them (1) to add the omitted conservation measures to H.R.7, and (2) to increase the capital gains tax exclusion from 25 per cent to 50 per cent, as President Bush has proposed.

For more information, see the Trust for Public Land's Washington Watch website: <http://www.tpl.org/qsearch.cfm?RequestTimeout=120>

5. Greenville's Main Street Wins National Award!

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has awarded the 2003 Great American Streets Award to Greenville for its outstanding Main Street revitalization. Work began in the 1970s when the street was narrowed from four to two lanes, street parking was added, shade trees were planted on both sides of the street, and sidewalks were widened. The transformation continued as the Hyatt Hotel was completed at one end of the street in 1980 and the Peace Center opened in 1990.

Since then, a whirlwind of construction and redevelopment is bringing new offices, shops and residential living to the downtown. The monolithic Camperdown Bridge is now gone, and exciting plans are underway to improve and enhance Reedy River Falls Park, construct a graceful pedestrian bridge across the river, and revitalize the West End. Congratulations to the City of Greenville and its leaders (past and future) for their hard work and tenacity and for receiving this prestigious award!

6. Highway 11 to Have Its First Official Scenic Overlook.

The Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Biway Association has been awarded a \$25,000 federal grant to construct a scenic overlook along Highway 11 where visitors can stop to photograph and enjoy breathtaking views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It will be the highway's first official scenic overlook. Highway 11 extends 112 miles through the Upstate from Cherokee to Oconee Counties and offers some of the region's most spectacular vistas, including Hogback Mountain, Table Rock, and Lake Keowee.

The Association hopes to construct the overlook near Highway 11's intersection with either Highway 14 or Highway 101. Property first must be secured from willing land-owners through purchase or long term lease. After the site has been selected and obtained, construction will be completed according to South Carolina Department of Transportation standards for overlooks. If plans go well, it will be completed within six months.

7. Upcoming Events.

Affordable Housing Conference. September 16, Palmetto Expo Center, Greenville. Presented by *Upstate Forever* and the Greenville Home Builders Association. For more information, contact our office by phone at (864) 250-0500, or by email at info@upstateforever.org

Master Gardener Conference - June 12-14, Ramada Inn, Clemson, S.C. For more information, call Bob Polomski, Department of Horticulture, BOX 340375, Clemson University, S.C. 29634-0375.

16th Annual Edisto Riverfest - June 13-15, Colleton State Park, SC. This three-day event features canoe and kayak excursions, overnight trips, paddling skills enhancement, nature and cultural interpretation, and a fish fry on the banks on the longest free-flowing blackwater river in North America. For more information, contact the South Carolina State Park Service at (888) 887-2757.

TrailLink 2003: Designing for the Future - June 26-29, Providence, Rhode Island. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's International Trails and Greenways Conference <http://www.railtrails.org/traillink2003>

Institute of Transportation Engineers Annual Meeting - August 24-27, Seattle, Washington. <http://www.ite.org/AnnualMeeting/>

8. Lots o' Links.

Spartanburg Herald-Journal Features Two Articles by Upstate Forever Staff. The "Perspective" page of the Spartanburg Herald-Journal's May 18 issue focused on "preserving our quality of life" and featured two articles by *Upstate Forever* staff members Brad Wyche and Diane Eldridge. Another article was written by Ken Jackson, the Co-Chair of Governor Sanford's Quality of Life Task Force. Here are the links to all of the articles: (must register to log on - no fee)

<http://www.goupstate.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20030518/NEWS/305180301/1023/OPINION>

<http://www.goupstate.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20030518/NEWS/305180303/1023/OPINION>

<http://www.goupstate.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20030518/NEWS/305180302/1023/OPINION>

Virtually Fly Over Your House or Anywhere Else in the U.S. with TerraFly0. Simply put in an address and you can have a bird's eye view of any place in the country, including your own house! This high-tech interactive website is sponsored by NASA, USGS,

IBM the National Science Foundation, and others. <http://www.terrafly.fiu.edu/>

Breathing Dirty Air? Find out in the American Lung Association's *State of the Air 2003*. Click on the map to find out about the air where you live. <http://lungaction.org/reports/stateoftheair2003.html>

Planning for Growth Pays Dividends. Arlington, Virginia is the envy of its Northern Virginia neighbors, with the lowest property tax rate and highest office occupancy in the region. It has sought-after neighborhoods and an economy so sound it has lowered taxes twice in two years. Arlington is also an example of how smart planning can make the difference between a sleepy suburb and a major metropolis. <http://www.planetizen.com/news/item.php?id=9511>

Affordable Housing in the Crosshairs. Growth and scarcity of land are putting stress on the social divide. www.dfw.com/mld/startelegram/5890012.htm

America's Ten Most Endangered National Parks. Our nation's parks are in danger from serious threats both inside and outside of their borders. The National Parks Conservation Association hopes to draw attention to the problems facing all of our parks by highlighting ten most in need of immediate attention. http://www.npca.org/across_the_nation/ten_most_endangered/

Closing the Diesel Divide: Protecting Public Health from Diesel Air Pollution. Diesel engines are the workhorses of the American economy, providing power to almost every type of vehicle used in commerce, as well as to electrical generating equipment used for a variety of applications. The diesel exhaust produced by these engines is among the most dangerous and pervasive sources of air pollution. This 52-page report from the American Lung Association and the Environmental Defense Fund examines two sources of diesel pollution that represent holes in the regulatory patchwork. <http://www.environmentaldefense.org/pdf.cfm?ContentID=2738&FileName=DieselDivide.pdf>

Campaign Slams U.S. Automakers for Gas Guzzlers. The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Detroit Project say U.S. automakers and their political allies are determined to fight off any fuel economy increases, even though the technology exists to raise the fuel efficiency of cars and sport utility vehicles to 40 miles per gallon. <http://ensnews.com/ens/may2003/2003-05-07-10.asp>

9. Quote of the Month.

"We really just don't have this [in California], this land and this kind of beauty."

Kevin Costner
Participant in BMW Charity Golf Tournament
Greenville News, 5-1-03