



FOCUS GROUP MEETING SERIES

Commercial Development & Business Creation, Expansion & Retention

Brief Meeting Summary

Attendees:

- ❖ Reno Deaton – Greer Economic Development
- ❖ Carter Smith – Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce, Economic Futures Group
- ❖ Jack Snedigar – Spectrum Commercial Properties
- ❖ John Warner – Innoventure
- ❖ Alex John – Greenlink Transit
- ❖ Danny Balon – Civil & Environmental Consultants, Inc.
- ❖ Gresham Barker – S&ME, Inc.
- ❖ Karyn Page-Davies – Stone Soup Storytelling Institute

Overview:

On September 20, 2016, the project team for Shaping Our Future met with Commercial Developers and Business Leaders to gather information regarding site selection criteria that makes one area – or one type and style of development – more attractive to grow and develop compared to others in the Upstate Region. The group also discussed industries the Upstate is currently targeting and those they hope to attract in the future.

A brief presentation by the project team was followed by a group discussion. The presentation can be found at www.ShapingOurFutureUpstateSC.org (in the Community Engagement section).

Growth Drivers for the Region

Growth drivers represent physical or policy conditions that make one parcel more desirable to develop over others in the region. Meeting participants worked with the project team to identify a comprehensive list of growth drivers and rank their relative importance for influencing commercial growth. A quick review of data collected during the focus group highlighted that the following factors were reported by at least half the participants as “required” (almost a must-have) when considering future locations for commercial, office or mixed-use development:

- ❖ Proximity to Major Thoroughfares
- ❖ Proximity to Major Intersections
- ❖ Inside Existing or Emerging Growth Areas
- ❖ Inside Sewer Service Area



- ❖ Inside Water Service Area

Factors noted as discouraging the location of future commercial, office or mixed-use development included:

- ❖ Presence in a Watershed Protection Area
- ❖ Presence in a Floodprone Area
- ❖ Steep Slope Areas

Data collected during the session will be further reviewed and analyzed to identify current trends driving growth in the region and inform the development of scenario planning tools.

Target Industries for the Upstate

Target business and industries for the Upstate were noted as automotive and advanced material manufacturing, as well as distribution and logistics. Health care providers, universities and local governments are major employers in the area as well. It was also noted that there is a concerted effort towards recruiting corporate headquarters to the region.

Challenges & Opportunities

One of the challenges noted was the airport. Additionally, wages are a problem. It was noted that the Upstate does not do as good of a job as it should promoting universities as a magnet. On the other hand, the region does a good job highlighting the skilled labor force coming out of our technical colleges. Finally, the lack of land use controls in place are quickly leading to arterials such as Pelham Road becoming the next Woodruff Road (i.e. highly congested) of the region.

Right now we are competitive recruiting branch manufacturing. An opportunity noted was attracting North American Headquarters, especially those that have branch operations. For instance, a model is how we were able to attract all phases of Michelin: headquarters, manufacturing, research and development, distribution, etc. The region also has an opportunity to shift at least some energy to recruiting outside the common target of the manufacturing industry.

Finally, it was noted that another opportunity often overlooked is the tourism potential of the Upstate. Some discussions have taken place regarding positioning our cities as “launching points” for vacations in the foothills and mountains.

General Comments

Several comments were voiced during the meeting that will also be taken under consideration as the effort moves forward. A brief summary of the comments offered by participants follows:

- ❖ **Study Area Size** - One participant expressed concern over the large size of the study area.



- ❖ **Baby Boomers** - By 2020 one of the largest – if not the largest – age sector will be baby boomers, yet we are not doing a good job developing for their future (or increasingly current) needs. For instance, we need for senior living centers.
- ❖ **Mixed Use** – Mixed use as escalated – not only in downtown Greenville but in other areas of the Upstate as well – Spartanburg and Greer, for instance. Some of this mixed use is due to the repurposing of existing facilities – example: Drayton Mill in Spartanburg.
- ❖ **Success of Private/Public Partnerships** – The growth of downtown Greenville was discussed as a model private/public partnership. The Greenville Health System Swamp Rabbit Trail was also noted as a good example highlighting such partnerships. It was acknowledged, however, that many of these projects – including the Swamp Rabbit Trail and taking down the vehicular bridge where the Liberty Pedestrian Bridge now stands – were controversial at the time they were implemented.
- ❖ **More Robust Transit** – One participant noted the need to consider more robust transit options connecting mixed use centers in the Upstate.

Announcements:

Meeting participants are encouraged to stay involved in the project! If you are interested in receiving more detailed data collected at this focus group meeting or have other questions about the Shaping Our Future project, please contact Lisa Hallo, Sustainable Communities Program Director, at lhhallo@upstateforever.org or (864)250-0500 ext. 33.

Thank you for your participation!