



FOCUS GROUP MEETING SERIES

Regional Thought Leaders

Brief Meeting Summary

Attendees:

- ❖ Jay Alexander – Farm and Business Owner, Spartanburg County
- ❖ Jon Caime – County Administrator, Laurens County
- ❖ Andrea Cooper – Upstate Forever, Regional Focus
- ❖ Paul Corbeil – Former County Councilman, Oconee County
- ❖ Diane Culbertson – Gray Court-Owings Historical Society and Upstate Forever Board Member, Laurens County
- ❖ Lee Dumas – Greer City Council, City of Greer
- ❖ Lisa Emily – FujiFilm, Greenwood County
- ❖ Michael Forman – Planning Director, Anderson County
- ❖ Phil Hughes – Hughes Investments, Greenville County
- ❖ Wes Hulsey – Hulsey McCormick & Wallace, Anderson County
- ❖ Erwin Maddrey – Ten at the Top and Upstate Forever Board Member, Greenville County
- ❖ Bob Morris – Community Foundation of Greenville, Greenville County
- ❖ Rob Rain – Johnson Development, Spartanburg County
- ❖ RP Rama – JHM Hotels, Greenville County
- ❖ Blake Sanders – Alta Planning and Design and Mayor of West Pelzer, Anderson County
- ❖ Katy Smith – Piedmont Health Foundation, Greenville County
- ❖ Don Walker – Laurens County Trails Association, Laurens County
- ❖ Bill West – Retiree and Former Anderson County Planning Director, Anderson County
- ❖ Gage Weekes – Hollingsworth Funds, Greenville County
- ❖ Mike Winiski – Furman University Center for Teaching and Learning, Greenville County
- ❖ Brad Wyche – Founder and Senior Advisor at Upstate Forever and Ten at the Top Board Member, Regional Focus

Overview:

On September 20, 2016, the project team for Shaping Our Future met with Regional Thought Leaders – community activists and leaders in the Upstate. The goals of the meeting were to introduce these leaders to the Shaping Our Future effort, discuss broad growth challenges facing the region, and identify key quality of life aspects our region must strive to maintain as we grow.



A presentation by the project team was followed by a discussion on topics related to quality of life. The presentation can be found at www.ShapingOurFutureUpstateSC.org (in the Community Engagement section). Attendees brainstormed a list of quality of life factors that should be protected as we grow.

Quality of Life Factors

The group brainstormed a list of factors necessary to protect and maintain the Upstate's high quality of life as the region grows. Each participant was then asked to individually rank the factors on a scale from 1 to 5 – with 1 impacting quality of life to the greatest degree (almost a “must-have”) and 5 being less influential. The consultant then compiled the rankings. The factors below are listed with the most influential (according to the group) at the top of the list.

This information will be provided to the Shaping Our Future Steering Committee and will help inform the project as it proceeds. Specifically, information generated during this focus group session will help inform the selection of up to ten major “themes” representing important growth and development issues and opportunities for Upstate leaders to consider as we grow. After themes are determined, performance measures representative of each theme will be evaluated across four distinct future growth scenario alternatives. A “Growth Choices Report Card” will be prepared to illustrate the impacts and trade-offs associated with each selected theme across four potential future growth scenarios.

- ❖ Strong, Healthy & Resilient Economy
- ❖ Quality of Public Schools (K – 12)
- ❖ Water Quality & Quantity
- ❖ Public Safety
- ❖ Natural Areas
- ❖ Healthy Air Quality
- ❖ Proximity to Employment Centers
- ❖ Available Utility Services
- ❖ Maintain a Low Cost of Living
- ❖ Quality of Colleges & Universities
- ❖ Critical Viewsheds
- ❖ Low Traffic Congestion
- ❖ Housing Choices
- ❖ Outdoor Recreation
- ❖ Active Communities
- ❖ Access to Cultural Resources & Amenities
- ❖ Farmland Preservation
- ❖ Tax Incentives & Tax Structure
- ❖ Proximity to Healthcare
- ❖ Community Vibrancy
- ❖ Access to Public Transportation
- ❖ Proximity to Key Activity Centers
- ❖ Access to Trails
- ❖ Walkable Development Patterns



- ❖ Maintain Rural Character
- ❖ Strong Regional History, Culture & Identity
- ❖ Services for People in Need
- ❖ Community Services
- ❖ Character of the People

Alternative Growth Scenarios:

The consultant noted that this effort will build on past regional efforts which have resulted in the collection of 15,000 opinions/value statements from residents across the Upstate regarding future growth. One of those past efforts was the Urban Land Institute Reality Check facilitated in 2009 with more than 400 Upstate leaders. That effort resulted in the identification of four distinct potential future land use patterns: Dispersed, Compact, Corridor and Rural Village Development. The Shaping Our Future effort will build on these conceptual scenarios to bring them to the level of specificity needed to utilize a model to identify trade-offs and comparative impacts among them. Descriptions of the conceptual scenarios can be found at www.southcarolina.uli.org/upstate-reality-check.

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 Outcomes:** It was noted that many studies/planning efforts fail to get traction that results in meaningful action. Therefore, we must ensure a solid plan for action will come from this effort. The consultant explained that while we are building on many past efforts, this effort is meant to “build the case” for future action and change. It was also brought up that many regional studies of this type focus too squarely on urban areas versus rural, and the group was reminded that we must focus on both as we are truly stronger together. Finally, one participant suggested that the effort remain focused on identifying incentives versus “hard regulations” to accomplish goals.
- **Trend Growth Pattern Identification:** There was concern around how trend growth patterns would be identified in counties lacking updated future land use and comprehensive plans. The consultant explained that in those cases, he would work closely with local planners and other community representatives to identify how and where growth was occurring to inform the trend growth scenario. He also explained that the Technical Advisory Committee for this effort was the Upstate Professional Planners – a group convened regularly by Ten at the Top and composed primarily of planners across the region.
- **Difficulty Quantifying Quality of Life:** There was discussion regarding how to quantify the value of some quality of life aspects – natural beauty for instance – and that doing so effectively will be difficult. It was noted that Upstate Forever is currently working with Furman University to identify Critical Lands for future protection across the Upstate region.



- **Alternative Scenarios Discussion** - The consultant asked the group – in regards to the alternative scenarios that will be developed – how distinct the scenarios should be. It was noted that there would be more value derived from the effort if the alternative scenarios showcased truly distinct patterns of growth (to highlight trade-offs with each scenario). It was also noted – in regards to scenario development – that the group could consider using scenarios prepared as a part of the Strom Thurmond Institute Upstate Growth Study effort.

For More Information:

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!