

THE Vision's Voice MOVING FORWARD

presented by The Cliffs Communities
by Becky Mann

As the Vision 2025 process continues, many people involved in the plan for Greenville's future see that if the plan is confined only to Greenville rather than taking a broader view of where we are headed, it will be shortsighted. That's why the word "regionalism" has been used in conjunction with many different aspects of the Vision 2025 plan.

To understand regionalism, it is important to take a look at what happens in the absence of regional planning. According to Dr. Barry Nocks, Associate Dean for Research and Outreach for the College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities and a professor of the City and Regional Planning Program at Clemson University, if our area ignores regional cooperation and planning, we may see greater levels of scattered development that focuses on available, rural areas; a strip mall environment; infrastructure shortages in transportation, schools, water and sewer systems; unprotected environmental areas and habitats; and excessive traffic congestion. If that sounds a lot like Atlanta or Washington, D.C., it should.

Among the many areas that have suffered the effects of ignoring regional planning, Nocks said, south Florida serves as a prime example. That area saw a surge of unplanned growth from the 1960s to the 1980s, with disastrous effects on the environment, congestion and resources.

south Florida has since become better at regional planning and thinking, but the past has a strong stamp on the present.

How do we avoid that outcome? People who attended "Upstate Together: Grow by Choice or Chance," presented by the University of South Carolina Upstate and the Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce in October, where Nocks and other experts spoke, concluded that a first step is to form an umbrella organization for the 10 Upstate counties to bring people together to discuss and act upon regionalism.

Conference attendees were polled on what they believe our area's number one barrier to regional thinking and cooperation may be. Their answer? Twenty-nine percent said turfism, parochialism and keeping with the status quo.

Those narrow ways of thinking have been around as long as regional planning, first attempted in the modern era in the early 1900s. Now, however, regional planning is becoming more popular. Nocks attributes its acceptance to the fact that we are feeling the effects of continuing to make independent decisions. "Citizens want quality of life, and our current trends are presenting crowded roads, ugly vistas, long commutes and rising costs of public services," he says.

Where can we turn for a good example of growth? Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, cited Salt Lake City and its award-winning "Envision Utah" program as a lead we should follow when he spoke at the Upstate Together conference. As a first step in Salt Lake City's process, planners invited area residents to sit down with a map of the region and figure out where they might place the one million people expected to come to the area in the next 20 years. The next step used that input to map

out what the region would look like if development patterns stayed the same and what it would look like if development became more compact and walkable. The result was support for a less sprawling, less land consuming, more fiscally-responsible and a more pedestrian-friendly approach.

Getting to where Salt Lake City is, or even taking steps in that direction, will be challenging.

"Regional planning is not an easy thing to do. It requires a strong interest in working together to understand complex problems among many jurisdictions," Nocks says. "My advice is to begin conversations among leaders and various interested parties in the Upstate about the trends, issues, challenges and opportunities we face. That conversation would logically lead to some general sense of what we

want to be as a region, and what service and other needs we have to reach that 'vision.'"

Regionalism is an important part of the Vision 2025 plan unveiled in 2005. The process is now being steered by Greenville Forward, an organization intended to make sure that the Vision becomes a reality. For more information, go to www.greenvillevision2025.com or call Russell Stall, executive director of Greenville Forward, at (864) 233-8443. ■



As Vision 2005 paved the way in the 1980s for the incredible quality of life Greenville enjoys today, Vision 2025 spearheads projects that will further elevate our city, culturally and commercially. The Vision's Voice is one of the many ways that The Cliffs is committed to promoting growth in Greenville.

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