

# POPULATION GROWTH IN PICKENS

In an effort to inform and engage the public, the Pickens County Planning Department offers the following thoughts and overview of recent and ongoing activities related to growth. It is our hope that citizens will participate in the meetings, share your thoughts with your representatives, and otherwise become a part of this process.

The Planning staff welcomes your input as well and comments can be sent to your County Council representative ([https://www.co.pickens.sc.us/government/county\\_council/index.php](https://www.co.pickens.sc.us/government/county_council/index.php))

or you can send comments to Trad Julian via email at: [tradj@co.pickens.sc.us](mailto:tradj@co.pickens.sc.us) or US Mail at:

Trad Julian at 222 McDaniel Avenue, B-10, Pickens, SC 29671.

The “Upcoming Events” calendar on the County website is a good way to stay informed regarding upcoming meetings.

## SOME THOUGHTS ON GROWTH

Planning staff is here in a support role. We are here to help you, the citizen, and both the Planning Commission and County Council make the best decisions for all the people of Pickens County. Our primary objective is to provide information so Council can form their own opinions and make their own decisions.

When it comes to the recent influx of development and *interest* in development and the concerns expressed by the citizens as a result of that development, asking the following questions may help articulate a plan of action:

1. Does the concern have to do with the fact that there is growth at all?
2. Is the concern over the type of growth we are seeing – developments of 200 or more homes?
3. Or is the concern not so much the growth or even the type of growth but where that growth is occurring?

The answers and solutions to each of those scenarios is different.

If the goal is to stop this type of growth or the pace of growth in general, the way to do that is to remove major subdivisions, open space subdivisions, and master planned developments from the UDSO and no longer allow them in the County. And/or the UDSO could be further amended to limit subdivision to 10, 20, or any number of dwelling units. This would allow “smaller” subdivisions to continue and would likely result in all lots being at least 1/2 –acre in size.

We could also look at ordinances for things such as townhomes or tiny homes or - a much bigger issue – using an RV as a permanent dwelling.

On the other hand, if the concern is not so much growth or the type of growth but the concern is more about where this development occurs, the only way to manage that is through overlay districts or zoning. This would mean the County decides to allow a particular type of development in a particular location or disallow a particular type of development in a particular location.

There are pros and cons to all of these scenarios and outcomes. But all of this is governed by the UDSO so let’s talk about that for a minute.

### The Current UDSO:

No one on staff was around when the current UDSO was originally drafted and adopted in the 1990’s and it has been updated many times since. However, from a planning perspective, it is a good ordinance and when it comes to standards for residential development, the current language offers a menu of options and reflects good planning principles. As a result, it

does not seem that there are any unintended consequences as a result of the current UDSO. Which is not to say it can't be improved upon.

But the fact is that the planning community in the Upstate is not surprised about the wave of growth we are experiencing. It has been predicted as far back as 2000 by the likes of the Strom Thurmond Institute and Clemson University and then later added on to by Ten at the Top, Furman University, Upstate Forever, and the Urban Land Institute. That is a mixed bag of folks - but they all saw it coming. They knew that any way you slice it we are living in a highly desirable part of the world (as you well know) and the word is out and growth was and is coming our way. In fact, SC is the third highest state in the nation behind Texas and Florida in one way U-Haul and Budget truck rentals. People are moving in.

Regardless, this mix of entities did some remarkable modeling and the growth and type of growth and location of growth they predicted 20 years ago is happening today.

The good news is we have the same reliable projections that we can use for the next 15-20 years - and a reason to trust that data.

So, the authors of the current UDSO had all of this information available when drafting the document. And the growth that is occurring is also aligned with the recently adopted Comprehensive Plan. The Comp Plan recognizes the likelihood of growth in our area. It calls for creating an economic and regulatory environment conducive to housing investment, housing quality, and housing affordability. The Comp Plan discourages high-density development in the majority of the County and moves it closer to larger population areas. As an aside - in planning terms - low density is 1-4 homes per acre. Medium density is 5 to 10 units per acre and high density usually means apartments - typically in the 50-100 units per acre. And the Land Use Element shows that the areas where most of the development activity is occurring is slated for residential growth of .5-acres density with higher density being appropriate when public water and sewer is available.

It is a reasonable assumption that the inclusion of Open Space Subdivisions and Master Planned Developments in the current UDSO was done to encourage development that does not gobble up land the way a Conventional Subdivision does. These types of developments - Open Space and Master Planned - also provides the County with more open space, protected water ways, preserved lands and preserved tree canopy.

Developing neighborhoods on ½ to 1-acre lots is popular in theory (and in the mind's eye of many). It's how many of us grew up and it's what a lot of folks like. But, the fact is that it is the least financially sustainable type of development a jurisdiction can promote. Unless individual assessed property values are approaching the million-dollar mark or higher, this type of development simply does not pay for itself and each new home actually costs the jurisdiction - or its citizens - out of pocket in order to service. That shortfall in revenue is typically offset by the higher revenues generated by commercial and high-density housing.

In short, more concentrated development - the kind that has been presented for most of the larger projects over the last year or so - with home lots in the 6000 square foot range begins to break even. Even though they are categorized as low to mid density they represent fewer miles of road, sidewalks, drainage features, and utility lines and they are easier to service via emergency services and transit. It's all formulaic and measurable.

On the other hand, moving towards having all development be ½ - 1-acre lots or larger will result in three consequences - whether intended or not:

1. Taxes will have to go up if we want to maintain some level of the services we already provide to our citizens.
2. Paralleling an increase in taxes the quality of services will go down because taxes will simply not be able to keep up - even if the will to raise them is there.
3. The County will become a more and more exclusive location with only the most affluent being able to afford to live here. This means young people move away. Rental properties sell out to developers and/or rental rates go up. And

marginal income folks may have to sell due to not being able to afford the taxes or rent. Many of you may have heard the adage of being land rich but cash poor.

Again, staff's job is to provide citizens and Council with information so good decisions are made and we felt that this information needed to be shared. We know this is complex and we have been working on solutions for some time now.

Starting at the first of the year staff presented Council with a broad stroke proposal for a plan of action.

## PLAN OF ACTION

1. Follow the Comprehensive Plan and encourage/allow high density (50 or more units per acre) only in areas closest to Easley, Liberty, Central, and Clemson and the 123/93 corridors.
2. Meet with those four municipalities to discuss their desires and concerns related to growth and express ours. Use this meeting to further our growth conversations and talk about our joint capacity for sewer, fire/rescue, schools, land fill, etc.
3. See if we can collectively create a *"capacity for development map"* which will largely be driven by access to or potential access to sewer and transit. This may mean that most of the intensive growth will not be in the unincorporated County and that due to limitations based on infrastructure there may well be less potential for growth in and around the cities than some may think.
4. Propose that we either continue to NOT allow high density in the County and therefore encourage municipal annexation if the cities will agree to our "terms" (which will include municipalities taking over any County roads on land the cities annex).

### OR

5. Develop standards for *"transition zones"* that are comparable to developing within the various city limits and, therefore, a.) address some of our concerns and b.) dissuade developers from first building in the County and then leaving to join a city.
6. Consider an overlay district or districts that include properties touching or close to the 123 and 92 ROW's and/or touching or close to the municipal boundaries of Easley, Liberty, Central, or Clemson.
7. These districts would allow for higher density growth with suitable standards.

The effect of these changes would be to provide the County with a mechanism to determine where certain activities were allowed and to allow the Comprehensive Plan to be a guiding document and protect the County from high density housing and to honor the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan by strengthening our relationship with the municipalities within the County.

**STATUS:** Staff and Council are looking at items 1-7 as a "unit" with the first step being to meet with the surrounding municipalities to discuss matters of annexation, sewer capacity, transit, and growth in general. These meetings have occurred and staff is in the process of drafting ideas to share with Council.

8. Regardless of if Council elects to pursue #4 or #5 above (or something else Council wishes to employ) ensure that all developments over 50 homes or units have potential through incentives to include an attainable/workforce housing component. We can use standard measures for what is “affordable”. For example: In order for a housing unit to be considered affordable its cost (rent, mortgage, taxes, insurance, and utilities) must not exceed 30% of a person's annual income of a resident who earns between 40% and 80% of Pickens County's average median household income, which was \$53,188 in 2020 according to the Census Bureau. Tax abatements are one traditional method of providing incentives for affordable housing. The effect of this change is to acknowledge that South Carolina does not have an inclusionary zoning act and, as such, jurisdictions cannot require affordable housing. In light of that limitation, the County can provide incentives to entice developers to electively include workforce/attainable housing under certain circumstances

**STATUS:** Staff has prepared a one-page document that outlines how the County could introduce an incentive program to promote more attainable housing. If this is something Council wishes to pursue, then staff is prepared to take the feedback and craft this into an ordinance/resolution.

9. Leave the rest of the basic content of the UDSO as it is in regard to Open Space, Planned Developments and Conventional Subdivisions with a few exceptions:

- A. Limit conventional subdivisions to 10 units. This promotes Open Space development.

The effect of this change would be to allow families and smaller developments to continue under the existing standards while promoting more sustainable Open Space Subdivisions for larger developments.

**STATUS:** This recommendation was unanimously passed by the Planning Commission. The next step is a public hearing.

- B. Modify the Open Space ordinance to require 40% open space (up from 20%) of which 75% has to remain fenced off during construction and considered as “protected” moving forward.

The effect of this change would be for the County to better ensure that the intentions behind an Open Space Development are actualized.

**STATUS:** This recommendation was unanimously passed by the Planning Commission. The next step is a public hearing.

- C. Develop some sort of easier to read/follow matrix that addresses setbacks, lot sizes, frontages.

**STATUS:** This is a work in progress.

- D. Review with DHEC any changes in standards for minimum area needed for septic. This will tie in to lot sizes. And it may not be any different than the ½ acre standard we are currently using.

The effect of this change would be to see if our 14-year old document is in keeping with best practices.

**STATUS:** This matter was investigated and, after speaking with DHEC and reviewing our existing standards staff does not recommend making any changes to our current standards for minimum lot sizes.

- E. Review County ordinances for ways to strengthen our protection/replacement of our tree canopy and strengthen our standards for protecting our waterways.

The effect of these changes would be to protect our waterways, help prevent erosion and downstream flooding, avoid “heat sinks” by shading our parking lots, and replenishing the tree canopy that is being removed due to development

**STATUS:** Tree canopy protection and replacement language is included in the proposed Open Space Subdivision language, Townhome Development language, and a proposed ordinance for canopy coverage in parking lots is included

here. These recommendations were unanimously passed by the Planning Commission. The next step is a public hearing. Waterway protections are proposed in an updated addition to the Stormwater Ordinance.

10. Refine and submit the current drafts of our townhome, RV and Tiny Home ordinances with clear definitions of what we mean by these terms.

The effect of these changes would be for the County to better ensure that the intentions behind an Open Space Development are actualized, to provide standards and guidelines for the heavy influx of people wishing to live in a camper or RV year-round, and to ensure that everyone is on the same page regarding what a tiny home is and to introduce standards or guidelines for building a tiny home development.

STATUS: These recommendations were unanimously passed by the Planning Commission. The next step is a public hearing.

11. Establish clear and realistic standards for the specific type and scope of traffic studies required based on a project's size and road type adjacency.

The effect of this change is that it provides consistency for staff, the Planning Commission, Council, citizens and developers and ensures the County is obtaining the most meaningful data regarding the traffic impact a project has on the surrounding area and beyond.

STATUS: This recommendation was unanimously passed by the Planning Commission. The next step is a public hearing.

12. Make clear when and at what scale a traffic study will automatically be required to make it less emotional and/or subjective and also make clear that any recommendations that the County Engineer makes as a result of a traffic study will have to be implemented by the developer if they want to proceed.

The effect of this change is to ensure that all developers know from the outset that they will be responsible for helping to mitigate any negative traffic impacts their project will have on the community.

STATUS: This recommendation was passed by the Planning Commission. The next step is a public hearing.

Review UDSO Section 10 (Roads) for improvements with specific attention being paid to the common, shared private drive language and standards.

The effect of this change will be to bring the current Road Ordinance into line with best practices.

STATUS: The County Engineer and Roads and Bridges are in the process of reviewing this ordinance.

13. Work with GPATS, SCDOT and others to maintain a thorough plan of action for roadway repairs, improvements, and additions, alternate transportation features such as bikeways, transit, and general mobility throughout the County.

The effect of this would be to plan and budget for a healthy transportation system within the County. This would include standards and conditions by which curb cuts are allowed and/or frontage roads are required.

STATUS: This will be a year-long process (or longer) and is in the very beginning stages.

14. Encourage a County-wide fee study of all existing fees and explore the introduction of impact fees. This would include each department reviewing their entire fee structure and when it was last updated and compare it to local (Upstate) counties as well as national averages and trends.

The effect of this will be to allow Council to better evaluate if our current fees are in line with our current needs and to see

what – if any – financial role developers should play in mitigating the financial hardships the County may face due to rapid growth.

STATUS: A Request for Proposals was completed and a consultant has been awarded the project.

## TIMELINE

The following actions/activities have already occurred and include 5 public meetings which were advertised and attended by members of the public.

- Revise UDSO text and format it for a Commission vote
- Schedule meetings with the municipalities, Council, and Commission
- Work on the housing ordinance with an emphasis on demonstrating the need for affordable housing
- Refine ordinance changes 9 – 13
- Schedule input sessions from various departments
- Two workshops with County Council
- Request maps
- Have first meeting with cities
- Host input sessions with various departments
- Submit draft Housing Ordinance to Council
- Continue to work on overlay concepts
- Planning Commission meeting to go over ordinance changes 9 – 13
- Have second meeting with cities
- Continue working on overlay maps and text
- Planning Commission workshop to prepare for vote on UDSO items 9 – 13
- Advertise public hearing on ordinance changes 9 – 13
- Planning Commission votes on UDSO Items 9-13

The following actions are yet to occur:

- Put the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading on UDSO changes and public hearing on Council agenda
- Put discussion of overlay concepts on Planning Commission agenda
- Staff holds public listening sessions (June 1<sup>st</sup>, July 11<sup>th</sup>, July 18<sup>th</sup>)
- Council holds public hearing and second reading on items 9-13
- Planning Commission and Council has joint workshop on overlay concepts
- Continue to work on overlay concepts
- Put overlay on Council agenda for public hearing
- Council has 3<sup>rd</sup> and final reading on UDSO changes 9-13
- Council has public hearing on overlay concepts
- Council advertises first reading on overlay concepts
- Planning Commission votes on overlay concepts
- Council has 1<sup>st</sup> reading on overlay concepts
- Council has 2<sup>nd</sup> reading on overlay concepts
- Council has 3<sup>rd</sup> and final reading on overlay concepts