

Significant regional planning step*[FINAL Edition]*

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Continual conflicts over growth and development in the Charleston metropolitan area underscore the necessity for regional planning by local leaders. A bill approved by the House last week offers an avenue for local governments to limit disputes and resolve their differences.

Rep. Ben Hagood, R-Sullivan's Island, says the primary goal of his bill is to limit the public expense of infrastructure needed for new development. Counties would be required to plan 10 years in advance for schools, roads, water and sewerage.

The bill also requires local governments to give notice and invite comment on projects in the planning stage. It doesn't require regional planning, but certainly opens the door.

The value of a regional approach to planning was evident in a recent accord among local leaders to limit development around the Francis Marion National Forest.

The problems created by the absence of regional planning have been most evident in the proposed development of Watson Hill. In that instance, the city of North Charleston jumped the Ashley River to annex property along Ashley River Road. In response, the town of Summerville has challenged North Charleston in court.

Numerous other examples come to mind, including an annexation dispute between North Charleston and Goose Creek. Lincolnville recently objected to development in nearby Summerville that will create road congestion. The town of James Island, in its various incarnations, was continually at odds with the city of Charleston over planning and zoning decisions.

Rep. Hagood cited Carolina Park, a large-scale development east of the Cooper that Mount Pleasant officials took issue with, but that Charleston County Council approved.

The list goes on and conflicts will intensify among jurisdictions given the boom in new development. While cooperation isn't mandated in Rep. Hagood's bill, local officials would do well to consider it a requirement.

Developers shouldn't be allowed to play off one local government against another to get the zoning and infrastructure they want. Heedless development in one jurisdiction can make careful planning by another nearly meaningless.

Rep. Hagood's bill also is notable for its attention to affordable housing. Rising property values are continually reducing the availability of housing to working people. The ongoing trend of turning apartment complexes into condominiums threatens to further limit the affordable housing stock.

Rep. Hagood's bill assumes the broad view in planning and takes a frugal approach to the public cost of private development. Both are needed for responsible growth management.

The bill has been endorsed by the governor, who says it will help preserve "the way we look and feel as a state." The Senate should give its approval.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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