

MINUTES
LAURENS COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
TUESDAY, APRIL 19, 2016 – 5:30 P.M.
CHURCH STREET OFFICE COMPLEX

ATTENDANCE: **MEMBERS PRESENT** - Kay Weeks, Chairwoman; Commission Members Bob Brewington, Posey Copeland, and Sam Peden.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Commission Members Beth Holmes, Michael Smith and Randy Bishop (resigned).

COUNTY STAFF: Chuck Bobo, Laurens County Building Codes Official; Betty Walsh, Laurens County Clerk to Council; Sandy Cruickshanks, County Attorney; Rob Russian, Public Works Director; Ernie Segars, Laurens County Administrator.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: County Councilman Garrett McDaniel.

GUESTS: Laurens County Chamber of Commerce Past Presidents Council – A. King Dixon and Lumus Byrd.

PRESS – No Press

SCHEDULED AGENDA ITEMS – 1.) Call to Order; 2.) Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance; 3.) Approval of Agenda April 19, 2016; 4.) Approval of minutes from February 16, 2016 and March 15, 2016; 5.) New Business: **A.)** Let’s Grow Laurens County, Together” – Presented by A. King Dixon, on behalf of citizens for Growth (Smart Growth) of Laurens County; **b.)** Next Ordinance to be reviewed by the Planning Commission – Nuisance Ordinance; **c.)** New appointee to the Planning Commission; Old Business: a.) Update of proposed Junkyard Ordinance – Kay Weeks, Chair; 6.) Public Comment; 7.) Administrative Reporting; 8.) Commission Member Comments; 9.) Adjournment.

CALL TO ORDER – Chairwoman Weeks called the meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 5:32 P.M. in the Conference Room of the Church Street Office Complex on April 19, 2016.

Chairwoman Weeks asked for all to stand for the invocation delivered by Vice Chairman Brewington and was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance by everyone.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA – The April 19, 2016 agenda was approved by CONSENSUS.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – The February 16, 2016 and March 15, 2016 minutes were approved by CONSENSUS.

NEW BUSINESS:

- a.) **“Let’s Grow Laurens County, Together”** – Representing former Chamber of Commerce President’s, Mr. A. King Dixon, presented to the Planning Commission information towards Smart Growth of Laurens County that they had developed.

Mr. Dixon said, “We thank you for allowing us to come before you and we thank you for your service for Laurens County by serving on the Planning Commission. We, the Laurens County Chamber of Commerce Past Presidents Council, started looking at this project about two (2) years ago and have followed your activity since then. It all derived from discussion of how we can grow Laurens County. One thing that surfaced quite frequently was that there was not enough dollars – renewable dollars – to even grow Laurens County. We turned to the County Comprehensive Plan to develop a lot of the criteria for this proposal. Our mission is to stimulate economic. Industrial, retail, job and residential growth in Laurens County through a comprehensive strategy that encourages expansion of the County’s tax base and job opportunities, protects the value of resident’s property and improves residents’ quality of life”.

Continuing Mr. Dixon said, “It is known that Laurens County does not have a Planner nor can this department be afforded by the County. The people of Laurens County know the County the best. Economic Development statistics rate South Carolina as the most popular State in the Union right now. The last Census shows that Laurens County has lost population and is falling short of the surrounding areas that are growing in leaps and bounds. Retail sales is one major reason that this County is losing in growth. Certainly, new industry is booming here but it is also taking some of the retail employees as they come here”.

Continuing Mr. Dixon presented the following information from a PowerPoint presentation.

- 1.) Two areas of focus:
 - A.) Protect the value of residents’ property by recognizing existing clusters of activity and encouraging the growth of similar activities with those clusters.
 - B.) Drive the efficient growth of appropriate infrastructure in Laurens County to support that growth.
- 2.) Priority: Economic Growth
 - A.) Greater employment opportunities;
 - B.) Higher wage rates and income levels for residents;
 - C.) Increased sales for local small businesses;
 - D.) Broader tax base to support county services;
 - E.) Higher standard of living for all – “a rising tide lifts all boats”
- 3.) Laurens County Comprehensive Plan:
 - A.) State law requires every County to create a comprehensive plan and update it every ten (10) years
 - B.) State law also requires the County to review its Plan every five (5) years.
 - C.) Laurens County Comprehensive Plan contains nine (9) areas of focus.
 - a.) Populations
 - b.) Economic Development
 - c.) Natural Resources
 - d.) Cultural Resources Community
 - e.) Facilities
 - f.) Housing -
 - g.) Land Use
 - h.) Transportation
 - i.) Priority Investment
- 4.) Housing goals:
 - A.) Work with...the Chamber of Commerce to encourage increased housing options;
 - B.) Encourage housing developments in areas with public water and sewer capacity;
 - C.) Work to encourage developers to build a greater variety of housing in all income groups.

Number of housing units:

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
30,372.0	13,955.0	30,951.0	17,834.0	198,234.0	2,158,652.0

Home ownership rate (%)

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
71.7	73.1	66.0	71.5	67.0	69.1

Median Home Value:

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
81,800	74,000	104,900	107,400	153,600	137,400

Housing tax base implications

\$2,484,429,600 - VS - \$3,246,759,900

Although Greenwood has about the same number of housing units as Laurens, the value of Greenwood's homes is \$762,330,300 more or, 30.7% more

Income and Poverty Levels

Median Household Income:

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
\$ 37,383.00	\$ 32,556.00	\$36,540.00	\$ 41,718.00	\$ 49,022.00	\$ 44,779.00

Percentage of population below poverty level:

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
20.6	20.1	23.1	17.2	15.8	18.1

Per Capita Income in 2013

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
\$ 19,153.00	\$ 19,037.00	\$21,053.00	\$ 21,591.00	\$ 26,643.00	\$ 23,943.00

Percentage of Population Below Poverty Level:

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
20.6	20.1	23.1	17.2	15.8	18.1

5.) Education goals:

- A.) Improve technical education opportunities in the County;
- B.) Study the expansion of technical educationwith Piedmont Tech;
- C.) Work with School Boards to determine location of potential new schools; Work with school districts, Chamber of Commerce, Piedmont Tech and the Higher Ed Center to track, place and retain local young people in jobs in Laurens County.

High School Graduate or Higher for those 25 or older:

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
78.2	78.1	80.4	76.9	85.7	84.5

Bachelor's Degree or Higher for those 25 or older:

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
14.5	12.9	22.1	18.9	312.0	25.1

- 6.) Land Use goals:
 - A.) County Council and the Planning Commission must remain alert to insure that (planning) tools are sufficient for the long term development of the County
 - B.) In the end, it is the responsibility of the County to take these needs and implement them in a comprehensive plan of action.
- 7.) Population Trends:

Population growth in 2013

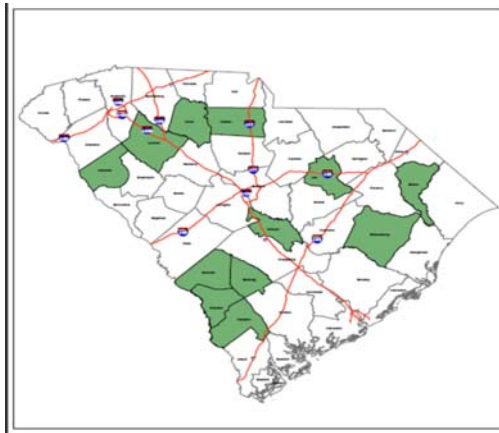
Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
66,229	28,030	69,723	37,521	474,266	4,771,929

The last Comprehensive Plan estimate a population of 76,120 in 2015; 87,660 by 2030. This is an aggressive growth rate and is probably not achievable

Population Changes 2010-2013

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
-0.5	-3.2	0.1	0.0	5.1	3.2

South Carolina Counties that have lost population since 2000



- 8.) Retail Sales:

Population in 2013

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
66,229	28,030	69,723	37,521	474,266	4,771,929

Retail Sales, 2007

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
\$ 370,058.00	\$ 192,164.00	\$ 774,268.00	\$ 369,861.00	\$ 6,036,638.00	\$ 54,298,410.00

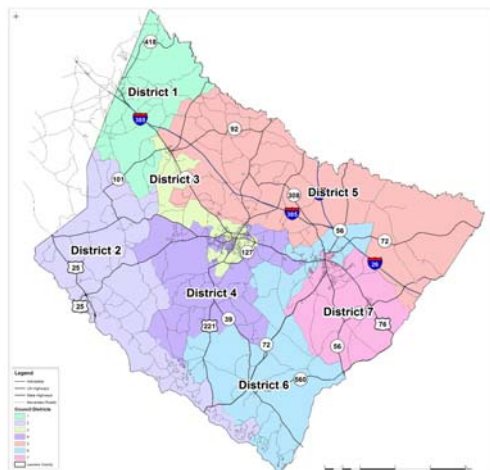
Retail Sales Per Capita, 2007

Laurens	Union	Greenwood	Newberry	Greenville	SC
\$ 5,315.00	\$ 6,936.00	\$ 11,313.00	\$ 9,707.00	\$ 13,999.00	\$ 12,273.00

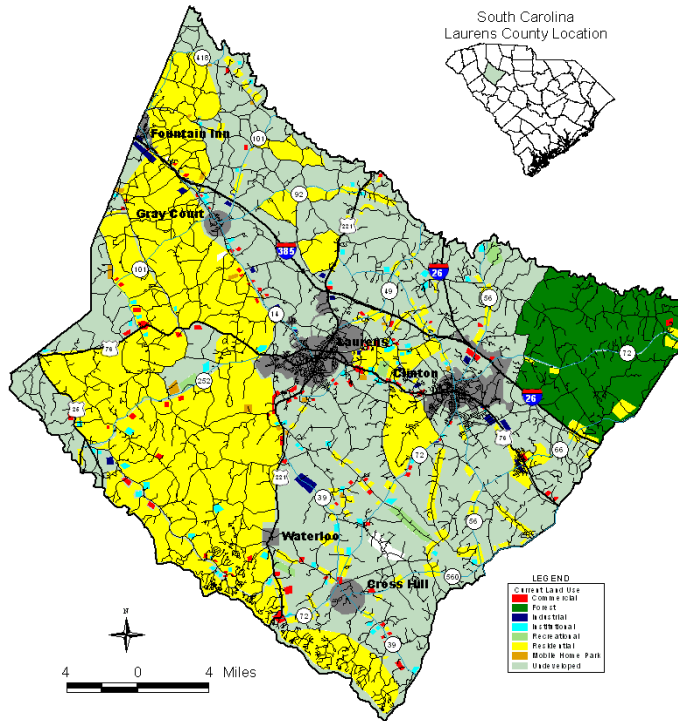
Although Greenwood County has roughly the same population as Laurens County, retail sales per capita there are 2.1 times greater

- 9.) Summary:
- A.) Danger – population growth; education levels; aging workforce; home values; household incomes; poverty levels; retail sales and health
 - B.) Warning – Economic Development Planning and crime rates
 - C.) Positive – Home ownership rate; business climate; infrastructure; location; quality healthcare facility and some success in business recruiting.
 - a.) How can we reverse these troubling trends?
 - 1.) Create a comprehensive strategic plan designed to capitalize on the County’s unique strengths and to enhance its growth;
 - 2.) Land use planning will encourage economic development in Laurens County;
 - 3.) With the help of land use planning, economic development will halt the decline in population;
 - 4.) Land use planning will expand the County’s tax base;
 - 5.) By increasing economic growth in the County, land use planning will produce tangible benefits for small business owners throughout the County.
 - 6.) Create a land use plan:
 - Land use planning will protect the value of citizens’ land. Land use planning is not designed to tell people what they can and cannot do on their land; it is designed to tell other people what they cannot do to citizens’ land.
 - Land use planning will avoid future “bad neighbors” and the “NIMBY” syndrome scares that residents have experienced in recent years.
 - Land use planning will improve the quality of life in Laurens County.

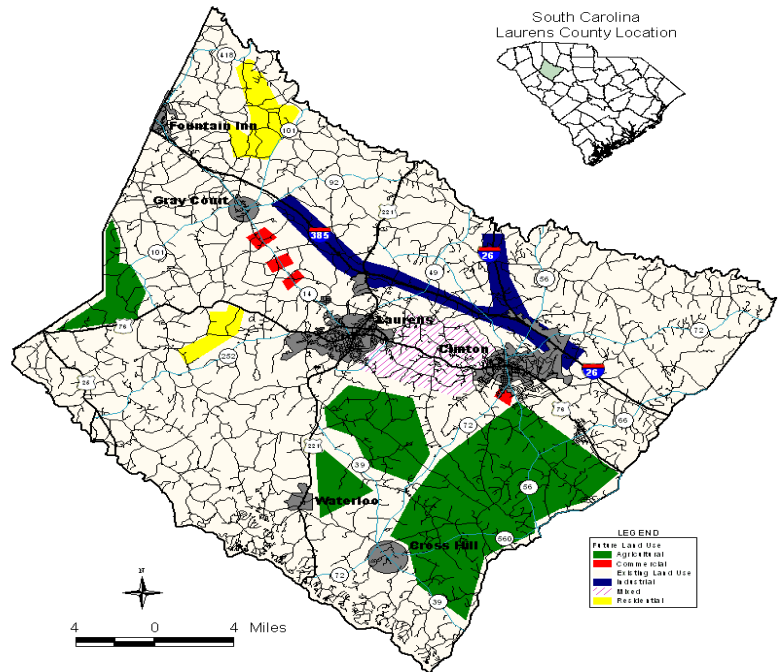
County Council Districts with Planning Commission Appointees



Laurens County Comprehensive Plan
Laurens County Current Land Use



Laurens County Comprehensive Plan
Laurens County Future Land Use



Commissioner Copeland expressed his opinion by saying, “I am a long standing proponent to private property rights. My problem is that the private property rights have been eroded a lot over the last several years by all forms of government.”

Vice Chairman Brewington said, “Protecting the human property rights is great and you do have a good skeleton in place with this. But what is the next step?”

Mr. Dixon replied, “With protective rights, it only proves to enhance existing property values because it tells others coming in to Laurens County what they cannot do. The Upstate is growing and prospering all around us. The question is will Laurens County be a part of the growth or will Laurens County be the dumping grounds for all the other Counties?”

Acting County Administrator, Ernie Segars said, “Several of us were around with the last Comprehensive Plan. The thing that scares me is a catastrophic event – a battery industry, more landfills or a hog farm – coming to Laurens County. We have no control of what and where things like this can go. Michelin just bought property to protect themselves from a poultry industry. I caution that without something in place, this County is going to get hurt or have a severe eye sore created. If we don’t take care of ourselves, no one else is going to do it. DHEC will say upfront that it is a local problem and will not regulate it beyond their control”.

Mr. Dixon stated, “This group has talked with two (2) of the most steed fast opponents of land use in the County and what they relayed to us was that they want the people to decide what is best for Laurens County...the individual rights. If we don’t start generating more revenue we are going down fast. If this happens, we should be ashamed of ourselves for letting things go downhill. This is reality folks. Why aren’t houses being built here; why aren’t people coming here? When one hears or reads the Council Chairman say that we may have to cut county services or lay off employees to keep the County running because the County does not have any money... that is a wakeup call. The Planning Commission needs to look at the geographic areas.”

Acting Administrator Segars, said “During the last Referendum for zoning, there were so many untruths spreading around that created unjust fears of the citizens. As I have gone to out of county meetings, Laurens County is seen as an undeveloped County. I’ve heard others talking about Laurens County. Others have said that coming into Laurens County is like going from San Diego to Tijuana”.

Vice Chairman Brewington said, “The thing that is really bugging me is putting in these regulatory ordinances, trying to make the County better and still not have enough force in them. We have put a lot of time into these regulatory ordinances”. Acting Administrator Segars replied that without land use, anyone can put anything anywhere. The problem is mixed use.

Chairwoman Weeks thanked Mr. Dixon for his presentation.

NEXT ORDINANCE TO BE REVIEWED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION – NUISANCE ORDINANCE. This was put on hold until the next meeting due to time restraints.

NEW APPOINTEE TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION – Chairwoman Weeks informed the members that the County Council had appointed a new member – Sylvester Grant of Cross Hill.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – Chairman Woman opened the floor for any public comments. Having none, she continued with the agenda items.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTING - Chairman Woman opened the floor for any public comments. Having none, she continued with the agenda items.

COMMISSION MEMBER COMMENTS – None.

ADJOURNMENT - Having no further business, there was a CONSENSUS to adjourn at 6:57 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted

Betty C. Walsh
Laurens County Clerk to Council