

November 10, 2020

Dear Greenville County Council:

We are writing to you as a united coalition of businesses, corporations, nonprofit organizations, economic development interests, and citizens to urge you to support private and public initiatives to protect more greenspace in Greenville County.

Of the more than 300,000 new residents forecast for the Upstate by 2040, more than half will likely make Greenville County their new home. Already, Greenville County's population is nearly that of Charlotte (Mecklenburg County) just 25 years ago. While growth can lead to positive changes for our community, it does not have to come at the cost of natural areas, farms, forests, historic sites, and other special places.

For these reasons and the ones listed below, we support establishing a program for voluntary historic and natural resources conservation in Greenville County:

- **Our quality of life is tied to conservation.** People are attracted to areas where there is an emphasis on green space protection, historic preservation, and easy access to trails and nature. Greenville's outstanding quality of life is largely dependent on its blend of vibrant communities and special natural character.
- **Conservation is good for the economy** and attracts businesses, jobs, and the talent necessary for a thriving economy. A strong quality of life means a high-quality workforce and better job opportunities.
- Dedicating local funds to parks, historic preservation and open space **attracts additional state and federal dollars** (up to 30% more) to benefit our community.
- It is financially responsible and **consistent with Greenville County's recently adopted Comprehensive Plan** to plan for land protection in suitable areas of the County.
- **Protecting Greenville's watersheds keeps our water clean**, boosts the health of our rivers and keeps the cost of drinking water low. According to the EPA, every dollar spent on land protection saves \$27 on water treatment. Cleaner water is also beneficial to industries, including tourism and recreation.
- There are significant **economic benefits that result from conservation**. Protecting iconic places and expanding existing protections capture substantial tourism and recreation dollars by expanding outdoor recreation access.
- **Farmland protection helps promote agritourism and boosts the local food economy.** If every South Carolina resident purchased \$5 worth of food each week directly from a farmer in the state, the potential economic benefits would be about \$1.2 billion.

A summary document is attached to this letter with more details about the benefits of such a program.

Rapidly growing areas in other parts of the state, such as Beaufort and Charleston Counties, have

been successful in leveraging local dollars to conserve rural and forested lands and water resources by establishing county programs for conservation funding. In the Upstate, the Oconee County Conservation Bank was established in 2012 to help secure some of Oconee's most beautiful and iconic properties, such as the 238-acre Chapman Bridge Oconee Bell Preserve and the 195-acre McKinney Creek Oconee Bell Preserve near Devils Fork State Park. It is time for Greenville County to consider similar initiatives.

In the next 25 years, we are expected to double the amount of land we have already consumed in Greenville County. If we do not take immediate action to balance growth while we protect our historic and natural resources, we could lose the special character of our county, resulting in a diminished quality of life for residents and a decreased ability to attract and retain workforce talent.

Therefore, we are joining together to support the conservation of greenspace and the voluntary protection of Greenville County's historic and natural resources for years to come. Thank you for your service to our County.

Sincerely,

HARPER

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