



Urban Land Institute *developing leaders,* *drawing attention* to land use issues

Even though Blythewood is a small town, it has big plans for the future.

Tucked away in a rural part of Richland County, Blythewood is situated near Interstate 77 and has experienced residential, industrial and commercial growth. Local leaders have taken a thoughtful approach to this growth and developed a master plan to move Blythewood into a green, sustainable city.

"We will adopt in our ordinances the principles of sustainability and low impact development practice," said Blythewood Councilmember Ed Garrison. "This program will not only benefit us by making our community unique but will also be building value into our community for the future."

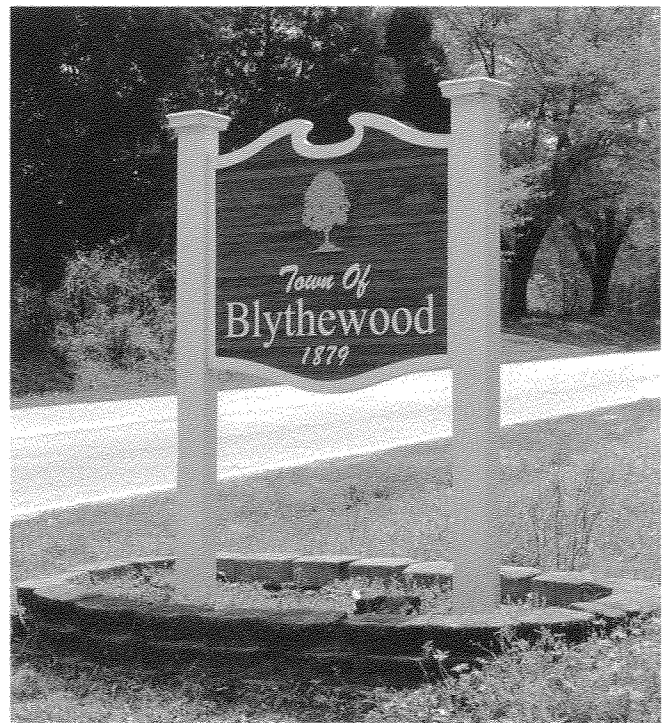
Garrison is well-versed in the issues of sound planning and sustainable communities, having participated in the Urban Land Institute South Carolina Center for Sustainable Leadership program. The program was developed to educate and engage leaders from the private, public and non-profit sectors and to address responsible growth in the state.

South Carolina has experienced tremendous growth in recent years, and more is coming. By the year 2030, more than a million new residents are expected in the Palmetto State, according to Paige King, executive director of the Urban Land Institute.

"We want quality growth, so we need to think about how we can accommodate these new residents," King said.

ULI has spent the past two years creating a forum for regional dialogue on smart growth and coordinating tools and resources to make the state better connected, King said. As part of its efforts, ULI has been doing "Reality Checks" around the state. The first session was held in 2007 in the Lowcountry, which is forecasted to have 265,000 new residents, 186,000 new jobs and 128,000 new homes by the year 2030. The outreach project involved nearly 200 regional stakeholders, including elected officials, business people, developers and conservationists. Members participated in a creative exercise involving a game board that represented a regional map and Lego bricks that represented the region's population, housing and job growth projections. Participants designed visions for the region's future development, including green space and public transit additions.

Charleston's "Reality Check" led to a quality growth coalition that is working with the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments to create a regional plan. A second "Reality Check" event was planned for April in the Upstate, which is expected to add 234,000 new people and 203,000 new jobs by 2030. A Midlands "Reality Check" also is in the works for next year, King added.



ULI's work has raised awareness for the need for more regional cooperation and leadership, King said.

Garrison said his experience also opened his eyes to the severe lack of understanding and planning in many communities.

"Many decisions being made in communities today are based on past experience and not the new methodologies or techniques that may be available," he said. "Many of my peers in the development community are still clear-cutting land to do development. Totally out of synch as to what should be done. They are not using best practices and sustainable principles because they think it costs too much money to use these. It's the old-thinking syndrome."

Good land planning and use are critical as land is being consumed at an ever increasing pace, Garrison said. The public and government officials need to be better stewards of the land and natural resources, he said.

With these changes, Garrison predicts communities in the future will look much different from the ones we have today.

"They will be more user-friendly with more vertical density and more features that will address the needs of our senior citizens," he said. "I look for better things to come. Communities like Blythewood, with enlightened leadership, will help lead the way."