



Newspaper survey to help launch regional planning effort

By Dave Munday
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A survey in Friday's Post and Courier will kick off a \$1.5 million, two-year effort to clarify what's most important to the community as the Charleston area keeps growing.

It's being hailed as a significant step in regional planning.

Strong schools, efficient roads, natural beauty, a healthy business climate, good jobs, affordable housing — how can all these priorities be kept in balance as more people move into the Lowcountry?

The Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments hopes the survey will let residents guide planners.

"Planning should be a democratic process," COG Assistant Planning Director Alec Brebner said.

The survey, a four-page insert being printed at cost, launches an effort called "Our Region, Our Plan" that involves leaders of all three counties and 27 municipalities around Charleston.

"I have seen more cooperation for regional planning in the last two years than in the previous 20 years," said Dorchester County Council Chairman Larry Hargett, who is leading the COG committee. "Everybody seems to be coming together instead of doing their own thing. There is a new spirit toward joint planning to improve our roads, our traffic, the environmental situation."

Hargett talks more about the project in a column scheduled for Friday's Commentary page.

COG will continue to take surveys for several months, Brebner said. A community meeting is scheduled for July 26 at the North Charleston Convention Center.

Outside planning experts will help guide the two-year effort. COG spent \$1.5 million to hire HNTB Corp. of Kansas City, Mo.

Local leaders have talked about the need for more regional planning for years. Cooperation accelerated after the newspaper ran an article two years ago saying that 135,000 new houses were planned in the Charleston area, Brebner said.

The discussion intensified last year after the newspaper published a series of reports by syndicated columnist Neal Peirce and urban affairs expert Curtis Johnson of the Citistates group.

The Urban Land Institute kept the momentum going by bringing leaders of all the counties and municipalities together in a planning exercise called Reality Check in December.

The institute and COG are following up those results with a project called See 2030.

"There's been a lot of demand in the last couple years for better regional coordination and planning," Brebner said.

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