

**The Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce
Presents
A Growth Ethic
For the Charleston Region**

**Building on Prosperity
Choice * Balance * Stewardship**

In the three decades between 1970 and 2000, the population of the Charleston Metro Area increased 63 percent from 336,125 to 549,033. The most conservative estimates project that by 2030 the population will increase by another 55 percent, or 300,000 additional residents. The question is not **IF** we will grow, but **HOW** we will grow. How we grow will determine whether the activity generated by these additional residents enhances or detracts from our region's quality of life.

Presently, the prospect of growth is often met with fear. However, there was a time when we greeted growth with enthusiasm – as with the healthy growth of a child or a tree. Growth was the harbinger of new opportunities, better jobs, education and health care and was widely viewed as being positive.

The Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce desires to change the attitude from one where growth is feared to one where growth is embraced. Our vision is to grow in a manner that improves the quality of life for all citizens in the metro area, including those yet to be born or move here.

We live in unprecedented economic good times, which make achieving this vision imminently possible. The Chamber intends to build on our prosperity by promoting a growth ethic embodying the principles of choice, balance, and stewardship. Through this endeavor, we intend to inspire others from across the political spectrum and throughout the Tri-county's urban and rural areas to work together toward innovative solutions that will guide growth as a positive contributor to the quality of life for our region.

The Chamber's Developers Council Growth Ethic Subcommittee involves building on prosperity through the principles of Choice, Balance, and Stewardship.

On the importance of Choice:

Choice provides individuals with a feeling of control of their destiny, which encourages a sense of pride and ownership in the community. The Chamber promotes giving individuals access to a freer market to enhance their ability and variety of options from which to choose.

Sadly, over the last several decades, we have saddled ourselves with growth controls that limit our choices. For example, if price is any measure, the most desirable places to live and work are located in the beloved historic towns and villages of our region. Neighborhoods found on the Charleston peninsula, the Old Villages of North Charleston and Mount Pleasant, and downtown Summerville and Moncks Corner exhibit more compact, mixed-use and walk-able land use patterns. Their mixes of lot sizes and building types offer a greater number of choices in which to live and work. However, such neighborhoods occupy less than 1/2 percent of the 1.65 million acre Tri-county region. Why? Because such traditional walking neighborhoods are virtually impossible to build under modern regulations, which proscribe segregated zones of commercial and residential land uses, which require the use of an automobile to get around.

The point here is not to advocate for more traditional land use patterns, but to promote greater freedom, which absent a material threat to neighbors and the community, can expand an individual's ability to live and work where and how they prefer. Choice is consistent with American values. The Chamber desires to reform our land use regulations to embrace a vision that enables choice.

On the importance of Balance:

Balance involves the harmonious arrangement of parts or elements. The Chamber supports a balance between nature and community in its approach to the growth of our region.

To emphasize the importance of balance, it is helpful to discuss something not currently in balance – housing demand and supply. Over the last decade the average price of a home in the tri-county region has increased 105% from \$126,550 to \$259,176. During this same period, the average annual wages of the area increased 40% from \$23,192 in 1996 to \$32,510 in 2004. In summary, the 105 % increase in housing prices has outpaced the 40% increase in average wage rate of jobs in the region. This imbalance is making it increasingly difficult for much of the population to afford to live in the tri-county area.

To achieve a more healthy balance, the region's local governments must enable and encourage the private marketplace to meet the demand of existing and future citizens for an adequate supply of housing. Failing in this endeavor will make housing even less affordable, which does a disservice to the less affluent of our citizens, and limits our ability to expand economically.

Initiating regulatory reform to alleviate such disparities between demand and supply must however, be balanced with the practical requirements of protecting our natural resources and shared public realm. Economic cost/benefit analyses, which take into account the balance between nature and community should be utilized when auditing any existing or new regulation.

On the importance of Stewardship:

Stewardship is the collaborative practice of caring for the whole. The Chamber believes stewardship involves approaching growth with a full assumption of responsibility for our historic, natural, and economic resources.

The recent passage of sales taxes in Dorchester and Charleston counties provide an ideal opportunity to exercise environmental and economic stewardship. The hundreds of millions of dollars that will be raised can be used to redesign the public realm of areas such as Rivers Avenue, Savannah Highway, and Johnnie Dodds Boulevard, and thereby provide a means of revitalizing the surrounding area to create new places to live and work, which will enhance the tax base and reduce the pressure to expand infrastructure further out into the countryside.

Private and public stewards have a vested interest in working together to provide leadership in various aspects of a community: the preservation of the area's historical significance; the protection & sustainability of its surrounding environment; and the enrichment of its culture. One idea might involve the Chamber partnering with local governments, land trusts and environmental organizations to identify natural areas worthy of purchasing for conservation. Through the incorporation of best practices and a long-term, holistic approach, stewards enhance the business of development in a manner that bestows a better quality of life for future generations.

Conclusion

Choice, balance, and stewardship are interrelated values. They are the three legs of the stool of quality of life. As the driving force of business in a globally competitive region, the Chamber is committed to an open economy – one that guarantees freedom of enterprise, respects individual creativity, and mobilizes public investment for physical and social infrastructure. Shouldering the responsibilities of our region's magnificent cultural, economic, and natural resources, the Chamber aims to leverage our prosperity toward making our region an even better place to live. By exercising such leadership, we will become an exemplary model for other regions of our State, and indeed the United States. It is hoped this will inspire an improvement of the built environment and a conservation of the natural environment for the benefit of ourselves and future generations.

The Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce Developers Council is comprised of members of the Chamber who represent various sectors of the development community - from residential developers and builders to commercial and industrial real estate firms, land planning and environmental engineering firms, bankers, attorneys and others. The Smart Growth subcommittee is co-chaired by Gordon Geer, Centex Homes and Vince Graham, The I'On Group. Members of the committee are Brent Case, Coldwell Banker Commercial; John Elliott, Howell & Associates; Philip Ford, Charleston Trident Home Builders Association; Amy Hill, Verdi Architecture; Jason Hinkel, Cogdell Spencer Advisors; Jimmy Householder, Cummins & Barnard; Tom Hund, LS3P; Lydia Johnson, Stokes Bush Barnes Land Co.; Bill McKenzie, Daniel Island Co.; Angela Musselwhite, S&ME Inc.; Sarah Slaughter, BB&T; Clayton Taylor, Taylor Consulting; and John Templeton, Special Properties Inc. **Adopted by the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors 8/26/05.**

The mission of the Developers Council is to provide leadership to balance between growth and quality of life by utilizing our collective expertise to guide change positively in our community.