Pickens awaits census data for growth plan

Council says current information will give process more focus

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PICKENS — County Council members are waiting on data from the 2010 census before tackling what has become a controversial comprehensive growth plan.

Chap Hurst, Pickens County administrator, said Thursday that having the demographic information can help the county better focus its efforts.

At the same time, Hurst said, concerns the plan will undermine property owners' rights are unfounded.

"Instead of focusing on a few words that are in that plan, we need to focus on the direction we're going," Hurst said. "As long as we stay headed in the right direction, then I think that's what this plan needs to indicate."

Hurst said he believes the plan, "Pickens County 2030," should guide county growth "to where our citizens will have the best services for the lowest price in the future and maintain a good quality of life and protect their property rights."

Opponents have been speaking out against the plan at council meetings for more than a year. It's been called socialistic and decried for not promoting free enterprise.

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"We have got to cut out the socialization of Pickens County, if we're not there already," Jim Sheriff said during a meeting.

Later at that meeting, Chairwoman Jennifer Willis reported the plan had been discussed at a meeting of the Committee of the Whole, but no action was taken.

Willis also noted the contributions of residents to the plan during the past two years.

"At this time, we're still looking at all of our options," she said. "We're not trying to discount the work of the citizens group, because there's been a lot of time put into that and we know that. ... But we're trying to make sure that the document that we as a council adopt best reflects the values of the citizens of Pickens County."

Willis also noted there will be "more public hearings and more opportunities for public input."

Hurst said he expects the census will show the county's population has grown to around 120,000; or around 9 percent to 10 percent since the last census.

He said that "modest" rate of growth is healthy for Pickens County. Hurst pointed out that faster growth can cause tremendous strains on a county's resources and infrastructure.