Snap into reality

Local leaders use LEGOS to plan for area's future growth

By JESSICA SIBLEY
jsibley@dailyjm.com

GREENVILLE — The game centered on a fun children's staple, LEGOS, but the task at hand was no laughing matter.

As hundreds of Upstate community leaders and elected officials ascended on the Carolina First Center in Greenville on Wednesday, a massive vision of the Upstate's future began to take shape.

Dubbed Upstate Reality Check, the event was made possible by the Urban Land Institute and Upstate Together, in an effort to bring leaders together to share opinions on how to handle the area's projected growth in coming years.

An estimated 234,000 new residents, 118,000 new households and 203,000 new jobs are expected to set up permanent shop in the Upstate within in the next 22 years, officials said.

Approximately 37 tables were set up with an outlined map of the 10 Upstate counties spread out on top of them. Each group placed LEGO blocks, representing households and jobs, throughout the mapped area, signifying a vision of future growth.

Jim Gadd, representative from the Oconee Alliance, said his group's vision was familiar.

"We decided that growth would continue along the I-85 corridor," he said. "In addition, we highlighted an effort

Seneca Daily Journal

4/9/09



Jessica Sibley/Staff

During the Upstate's first Reality Check conference, area leaders from 10 counties came to the Carolina First Center in Greenville to discuss how the area should handle future growth. From left are Janet Neville, Walhalla city councilwoman, David Benham, Holland Belue and Diane Anderson.

to build homes close to jobs so the commute would be less intense. We also wanted plenty of green space and bike paths."

By the end of the event, all suggestions and LEGO models were documented and recorded, yielding cohesive results.

Some reoccurring themes were the need to improve regional transportation, leverage existing infrastructure and promote regional linkages, focus on education opportunities and job creation, create diversity of housing and job choices throughout the region, protect community character, reinvest in city and town centers, preserve natural assets and promote sustainability.

But, to be successful at reaching these goal, the groups outlined barriers that stand in their way.

Some examples include, lack of regional leadership, lack of effective regional collaboration, lack of political will, lack of funding, jobs and housing out of balance, community resistance to compact development, resistance to planning, lack of education and lack of qualified work force.