




**ULI
Reality
Check**

A collaborative
regional visioning process
of the Urban Land Institute

ULI South Carolina

BERKELEY-CHARLESTON-DORCHESTER

Event Report



Regional Visioning Begins in the BCD Region!

Regional visioning began in the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester region on December 3, 2007, when ULI South Carolina and its partners brought together more than 250 regional, state and national leaders in the area's first-ever region-wide dialogue about how it should grow.

This was Reality Check, led by the South Carolina District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI South Carolina) in partnership with the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Government (BCD COG) and 20 other planning partners. Leaders came together from the political, business, environmental, real estate and civic realms in a unique visioning and dialogue process aimed at helping the region decide how to accommodate growth in ways that are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable so that every new resident, new job and new household enhances the quality of life of every citizen in the region.



These disparate stakeholders demonstrated broad agreement on several key points, including where new growth should be located and how it should be supported in terms of infrastructure. Most agreed that new growth should be primarily focused within existing population centers, all close to existing transportation corridors. There was widespread agreement that multi-modal transportation infrastructure should be built in support of these densified or newly-dense areas, and that natural and historical resources must be preserved, enhanced, and managed. Importantly, most stakeholders felt that a regional approach to growth management was key to good outcomes.

At no time in our recent history has this common ground been more important. The historic wave of growth that has characterized the BCD region for the past 30 years continues, presenting unique opportunities for a bright future even as it threatens our renowned quality of life. At this critical time the region is embarking on a regional planning process, led by the BCD COG, with the intent of establishing a "blueprint" for the future growth of Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester counties. This blueprint will tie into the COG's regional transportation planning effort, a process that provides a great starting point for a broader regional planning process. ULI South Carolina and its Reality Check partners will continue education and outreach efforts in support of this work and of ULI South Carolina's statewide goals.



The December 3rd Reality Check event was a resounding success. This brief report summarizes the early findings from the event, relates the history of Reality Check in the region, and points to next steps. The BCD Reality Check has set a high bar for several other Reality Check events now being planned in South Carolina regions. However, it is just the start of the process. We are grateful to all of you who participated in Reality Check, and to the many who contributed to its tremendous success. To you, our partners, and to all will join us as we move forward, we say thank you for taking this opportunity to build a great future-- together.

Executive Summary

Reality Check was an opportunity for hundreds of leaders from the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester region to take stock of the of the region's ongoing growth. In doing so, many participants were newly-reminded of the implications of the pace and magnitude of that growth, rendering "Reality Check" a fitting name for the process. In a very interactive, multi-disciplinary and non-advocacy setting participants talked about how and where to locate the 265,000 people, 186,000 jobs, and 128,000 households expected in the region by 2030, and how that growth can be accommodated in ways that are socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable.

Background

The Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester County Reality Check was seven busy months in the making, but years of work nationally and at the state level enabled the event's success. Reality Check was developed and is supported by the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and led by ULI South Carolina, the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Government (BCDCOG) and twenty other planning partners (a full list of partners is included in this report).

As an organization with a diverse membership, one of ULI's greatest strengths is its ability to tap into the expertise and experience of its members. ULI has identified regional cooperation and coordinated regional planning as a priority. This is a timely issue as the global competition amongst regions becomes more pronounced. Virtually all growth-related issues, from how to achieve economic diversity to how to integrate land use and transportation planning in order to accommodate growing populations, are regional in scale. Recognizing the importance of regional cooperation to the future economic competitiveness and livability of metropolitan regions, ULI works with District Councils and ULI members on regional efforts that will enact change on the regional and local levels. The primary ways that ULI accomplishes such regional visioning and cooperation is through programs such as Reality Check.

ULI leadership has been instrumental in several successful regional visioning efforts, including Envision Utah, Sacramento Region Blueprint, and Chicago Metropolis 2020. Many smaller communities have also undertaken visioning efforts with strong citizen involvement and support. Chattanooga, for example, can now point to more than \$2 billion in new investment over 20 years for projects and initiatives identified in its vision plan.

In 2004, the national ULI organization joined with the South Carolina Real Estate Center (SCREC) Advisory Committee at the University of South Carolina's Moore School of Business to coordinate a statewide initiative to study South Carolina's quality of life in the face of its current and projected growth and development. This initiative worked to identify and address the growth challenges that face the state. The 36-member steering committee included representatives from the development community, civic and environmental organizations, and government agencies.

The committee's recommendations were released in the 2004 report "Growing by Choice or Chance: State Strategies for Quality Growth in South Carolina." A key takeaway from the Quality Growth Initiative was that to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number of people, growth planning should take place at both the local and state levels.



OFF AND RUNNING!

On December 3, 250 local, regional, state and national leaders came together for ULI South Carolina's Reality Check, a unique, collaborative visioning and dialogue process developed and supported by the Urban Land Institute. Their mission? To decide how we accommodate the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester region's coming growth in ways that are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable so that every new resident, new job and new household enhances the quality of life of every citizen in this region.





In part from the momentum of the Quality Growth initiative, the South Carolina District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI South Carolina) was formed in 2005 to encourage further dialogue on land use and planning throughout the state and to provide tools and a forum through which the state can become better connected. It is led by an executive committee with statewide and regional representation, as well as by steering committees in each of state's three regions.

Primary focus points for ULI South Carolina's work include furthering the work of the Quality Growth Initiative, weaving together a statewide vision for responsible land use, and helping build capacity to put that vision in place. The Reality Check process, having achieved success nationally in furthering such goals, was a natural choice for the South Carolina district council. In early spring of 2007, the 20-member executive committee was formed and planning for the event began.

The Challenge

The Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester region includes 30 local governments, including three counties and 27 towns and cities. Little coordination typically occurs among these governments as they undertake comprehensive planning and zoning decisions. But that's just the start of an incredibly fragmented political landscape. Other political entities make decisions that impact how the region develops include numerous school districts; water, sewer and other utility providers; the State Ports Authority; the Department of Transportation; the Charleston Area Regional Transit Authority; and many others.

Public sector leaders and agencies in each jurisdiction face fiscal realities when they make land use decisions for their individual jurisdictions. Each strives to balance its books and weigh investment in jobs and housing, schools, and public services against expected revenues. The private sector, too, faces the fiscal realities of land costs and public process, and goes where the bottom line makes sense.

So-called "siloe" decision making may have more to do with fiscal realities and the press of day-to-day decision-making than with public sector leader's unwillingness to work with each other.

Both private developers and public sector leaders face the reality that local decisions impact regional trends. Regional job growth and the housing demands that follow are turning once rural areas into housing hot spots. Impacts on taxpayers don't stop at jurisdictional lines as residents across the region are called upon to fund considerable local investment in roads, sewers, or schools. Lacking that investment, residents across the region must endure crowded schools, congested roadways, and impacts to public service providers such as fire, EMT, and police services.

Air, water, and human health impacts related to development decisions don't stop at jurisdictional lines either. Increased runoff from development and roadways degrades the waterways we all fish, swim, and boat in. Increased vehicle traffic impacts the quality of the air we all breathe. Even the quality of our children's education is impacted by where within the region we choose to locate schools.

The development of a consensus-based regional vision can provide us with a touchstone, one we can hold each regional decision up to ask... does this decision support our vision?



The Reality Check Game

More than 150 leaders took part in the morning's regional visioning exercise, which was held at the Complex for Economic Development at Trident Technical College. To help envision the region's future, participants were assigned to 15 working tables, ten people per table, to think about how and where the region should grow. Speaker Ed McMahon, the Charles Fraser Senior Resident Fellow for Sustainable Development at ULI, spoke to participants, framing the task before them within the context of regionalism and choice.

At each table was a five-foot by six-foot map of the region, as well as large-format photographs illustrating different housing and jobs densities. After deciding on key principles to guide regional growth, each table then "built" a growth scenario, placing different colored Legos blocks to represent jobs and households and different-colored ribbons to locate new transportation and green space. Participants were also asked to define changes necessary within the region to allow implementation of their preferred scenario. The focus at each table was on fostering a productive regional dialogue, with trained facilitators moving participant's discussion forward on neutral lines and ensuring that all voices joined in the discussion.

In the afternoon, an audience of about 250 heard a summary of the morning's work, voted to choose scenarios most reflective of their own "guiding principles for growth" and provided more input on the morning's questions.

Consensus Guiding Principles Encouragingly, participants found a great deal of common ground. Though wording varied, almost without exception all tables and individuals identified these principles to guide future decisions on how to accommodate growth coming to the region:

- Preservation of the region's unique and treasured natural and cultural resources should be an integral part of all growth management discussions and development decisions.
- The region should focus on the development of "live-work-play" communities with a mix of housing types, jobs, and recreational and civic amenities.
- More emphasis should be placed on providing affordable housing within the region.
- The region should promote urban infill and development and encourage higher-density development along existing and augmented transportation corridors.
- Major transportation corridors should become inter-connected, multiway corridors with a mix of vehicle, transit, bicycle and pedestrian mobility options.
- Housing and jobs should be better balanced through the region to allow more people to work and shop at places closer to their homes.
- A regional visioning, cooperation and coordination process should be developed in support of these goals.

Consensus Transportation Principles Participants identified a broad array of transportation improvements. Much consensus existed on general approaches to regional mobility; less on specific roadway improvements and widening, which varied widely among tables. Broad consensus was reached on these principles:

- Build a transit network throughout the region, including on the existing railway corridor paralleling I-26 through the region; through the 526 corridor from West Ashley, Mount Pleasant, Daniel Island; and from North Charleston to Goose Creek and Moncks Corner.





- Maximize existing transportation corridors through the addition of multi-modal options, including mass transit and bike and pedestrian ways.
- Focus households and jobs near along existing or new transportation corridors.
- Maximize use of existing railways for cargo and human movement.
- Bring a new regional focus to means and paths for port cargo distribution; make cargo distribution considerations and integral part of all growth management discussions and decisions.

Consensus Green Space Principles Reality Check players generally focused on a regional, integrated approach to natural and cultural resource preservation. There was a great deal of consensus on these principles:

- Use the area’s well-defined ecological network, coastal areas, and waterways as bases for conservation planning.
- Preserve the area’s unique plantation, other historic and cultural, and agricultural resources; make natural and cultural resource preservation an integral part of all development discussions and decisions.
- Protect the existing green space corridors and cultural assets outside of urbanized areas, particularly west of the Cooper River and east of the Ashley River.
- Create green buffers between urban and open space areas; integrate and connect green space and active and passive parks at all scales, including state, regional and local and projects levels.

Regional Growth Scenarios Almost without exception, event participants focused most new households and jobs in and around existing population centers, with the primary differences being the extent to which they also distributed households and jobs within those part of the region now less populated.

Broadly speaking, the growth scenarios developed by the fifteen working tables can be grouped into three generic groups, broken out of a continuum of emphasis upon existing population centers. Five tables opted for “corridor infill” scenarios which utilized existing and augmented transportation corridors. Six laid out “corridor infill with new communities” – scenarios with a primary focus on existing communities, but allocating more households and jobs to selected centers throughout the community, in effect creating new central live/work districts. Finally, four tables opted for “extended development patterns” employing moderate corridor infill, but spreading housing and jobs throughout the region in extended development patterns.

Further Growth Scenario Analysis In the first few month of 2008, the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Government (BCDCOG) will undertake extensive spatial mapping using the growth scenarios developed at the working tables. Each growth scenario created at the event will be analyzed. To the extent possible with existing county and regional data (data availability varies among the three counties), these analyses will include comparing the tables’ aggregate household and jobs densities compared to existing households and jobs densities; the individual table’s household and jobs densities compared to existing densities; and the individual table’s household and jobs densities compared to the mean and medians of the aggregate densities.

Afternoon Survey Session About 250 people participated in the afternoon’s wireless survey session, which allowed instant response tabulation. The survey was intended to gain more information and allow broader public input on the questions posed in the morning’s work. Five of the table’s growth scenarios, selected for their diversity, were presented by their tables to the afternoon audience, and the audience polled about them. 69% of those polled felt the scenarios presented

reflected a good range of growth options for the region; 28% felt more dramatic change was necessary. Each of the “consensus guiding principles” noted in this report was rated as “essential” by 90% or more of those polled.

Participants were asked to vote to choose two growth scenarios to be considered for further analysis. These scenarios will be fine-tuned to serve as a starting point for the BCDCOG’s “Community Viz” analysis, their new software program that will enable analysis of infrastructure impacts and potential costs associated with them. Both the scenarios chosen by the approximately 250 afternoon participants focused on higher-density, mixed use development near existing population centers and existing transportation corridors. They differ in other ways, with the one scenario adding mixed-use centers at several points within the region, and substantially increasing the jobs-to-housing ratio in Mount Pleasant. One of these scenarios fell within the “corridor infill” category; one fell within the “corridor infill with new communities.”

While the results of the exercise are significant, it is important to remember that the three-hour long Reality Check event was just that—not a three-year planning effort. It was intended to spark a creative dialogue, to identify early areas of consensus, and to establish a platform of support for next steps. Above all, it was a successful effort to begin a regional dialogue among people about ways to manage growth that are economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable.





Next Steps







Though the Reality Check “event” is over, Reality Check is far from over. In fact, the process of moving this region toward a shared vision for 2030 is just beginning. ULI South Carolina and the many partners participating in this effort will maintain and build upon the event’s momentum and dialogue and continue to work toward a multi-sector partnership that will define that vision and help put it in place.

In the weeks following the Reality Check event, Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (COG) will analyze scenarios selected by the audience members and develop information about infrastructure implications and costs associated with them.

Over the next year, ULI will continue outreach and education efforts to help stakeholders understand growth issues, best practices, and the importance of regional visioning and coordination. The aim will be to help establish guiding principles for growth and a broad, consensus-based platform for quality growth among stakeholders, including public officials, the business community, the nonprofit community, and residents. The partnerships and relationships developed during the Reality Check planning process will continue to strengthen as **See 2030**, a multi-sector alliance to support quality growth in the region.

After the shared goal of establishing a regional vision among public and private partners is reached, much work remains to be done in the way of implementation. At this point, See 2030 partners will work together to help develop and put in place tools to help implement the regional vision.



<p>BERKELEY COUNTY</p> 	 <p>GREEN SPACE</p>	 <p>GREEN SPACE</p>	<p>VISION</p> 	 <p>GREEN SPACE</p>	 <p>SCHOOLS</p>	<p>2007 START DECEMBER 3, 2007</p>
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REALITY CHECK PARTICIPANTS



Reality Check Participants: Players

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Reality Check Executive Committee

The Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Reality Check would not have been possible without the generous contribution of time, knowledge, resources, and personal energy on the part of many people and organizations.

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Reality Check Executive Committee

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