

BRINGING FLEXIBILITY TO PAVING STANDARDS

Consensus-Building for Low-Impact Development in Greenville and Pickens Counties

THE PROBLEM:

TOO MUCH STORMWATER

Over the last few years, flooding has become an all-too-frequent occurrence in – and downstream of – rapidly developing communities in the Upstate. In spite of mandated standards for stormwater detention, it is obvious that floods are larger and more frequent than they used to be. This increase in flooding has significant economic impacts – not only for individual affected property owners, but also for local governments. Replacement of washed out culverts, expansion of stormwater systems, and compensation of affected landowners can be expensive, and are growing concerns for cities and counties across the region.

A MAJOR CAUSE:

TOO MUCH PAVEMENT

One of the major causes of flooding problems is conversion of surfaces that absorb rain – primarily forest and pasture – to surfaces that are designed to shed water as rapidly as possible, such as pavement and rooftops. While impervious surfaces are integral and essential to the developed landscape, their undesirable side effects for downstream neighbors mean we ought to seize upon every reasonable opportunity to reduce the amount of impervious cover we create during the development process. Good stormwater detention systems are essential as well, but the less stormwater we create in the first place, the better.

THE SOLUTION:

FLEXIBILITY AND INNOVATION

The easiest – and most profitable – place to look for opportunities to reduce impervious cover is in the paved landscape. Asphalt and concrete are not only primary contributors to the stormwater problem – they are expensive as well. Therefore, less pavement means bigger profit margins as well as less stormwater, creating benefits for the environment that actually save developers money.

Unfortunately, municipal standards for street width, parking lot ratios, and sidewalk and driveway specifications often require more pavement than a given development actually needs. While there are good reasons for these standards – emergency vehicle access, for instance – there is generally room for introducing flexibility that allows developers to adjust their paving plan to the specific needs of their development without compromising essential functions. In fact, a number of municipalities around the country (including several in our region) have begun to incorporate this kind of flexibility into their codes, often through a broadly collaborative process designed to ensure that the new standards work for a broad range of interests.

HOW TO GET THERE:

A CONSENSUS-BUILDING ROUNDTABLE

It is with this model in mind that the Upstate Forever is initiating a Low-Impact Development Roundtable project in Greenville and Pickens counties as part of the Saluda-Reedy Watershed project. The process will begin in late fall 2005 with a detailed assessment of local ordinances governing all aspects of paving in new developments, with an eye towards identifying opportunities for introducing flexibility as outlined above. Concurrent with this assessment, Upstate Forever will meet one-on-one with a wide range of community leaders to develop a project framework and strategy and to discuss participation in the process.

The results of the assessment will then be presented in early summer 2006 to a roundtable of leaders from the development, local government, and nonprofit conservation communities. The goal will be to produce a consensus set of specific recommendations for introducing flexibility into paving standards in Greenville and Pickens counties and in their respective municipalities.

For more information about the project, please contact Jason Van Driesche at 864-250-0500 ext. 22, or at jasonvand@upstateforever.org.