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Charleston Mayor Urges Graduates to Get Involved

Winthrop University

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Charleston Mayor Urges Graduates to Get Involved

Quick Facts

- Riley told students that they have the power and the duty to shape growth, to set the rules. "It is all about excellence, embracing excellence and rejecting mediocrity in our built environment."
- As Riley concluded his speech, he urged graduates and fellow students to be engaged in these decisions in their town and city.

ROCK HILL, S.C. - **Charleston Mayor Joe Riley** urged Winthrop students at the May 7 spring commencement exercises to get involved in their communities to help save what is special and unique about South Carolina.

"South Carolina is growing at an unprecedented rate. By 2025, another 1.1 million people will be added to the population of South Carolina. That means in less than 25 years, we will add more citizens to our state than we had in its first 200 years of existence. This growth means we will have 743,000 new housing units, 44 million square feet of new retail space, 20 million square feet of office space and 23,000 new hotel rooms," said Riley, **mayor of South Carolina's most historic city**.

"Or will we just become a substantially paved over Anyplace U.S.A.? We have the power and we have the duty to shape it, to set the rules. It is all about excellence, embracing excellence and rejecting mediocrity in our built environment."

In his work in Charleston, **Riley said his job requires eternal vigilance**. "Right now, we are fighting a huge, out-of-scale development that will overwhelm the oldest, most historic and scenic highway in South Carolina and one of the most in America – the Ashley River Road where the Magnolia and Middleton Gardens, Drayton Hall are. The scenic, tree-lined road will now fight an out-of-scale development that would make this place indistinguishable from other roadsides anyplace in America."

"That kind of question will increasingly be posed to you, citizens of South Carolina. The question is what will we pass down to our grandchildren? These are public decisions because we are a democracy. We the people - you – we are in charge. We should increasingly be creating a beautiful public realm. As we worked to restore downtown Charleston, it was the understanding we were doing that for everyone. It wasn't just a building to be restored, or some new jobs for our tax base. We were creating a place that everyone owned – the sense of pride when you are in a place of beauty that belongs to you."

So what do citizens do to get involved? Riley said South Carolinians should demand a state vision. "We should inventory our special assets. Get an understanding of those, the rivers, our steams, our scenic areas, our farmlands. We are working in the Charleston area to protect the farmlands near our metropolitan area. If we don't, the John's Island tomatoes which are right now at our Farmer's Market in downtown Charleston being sold, will be no more.

"We are creating a sense of place for those who follow us so they can feel a sense of tradition and a celebration of the place that they own."

As Riley concluded his speech, he urged graduates and fellow students to be engaged in these decisions in their town and city. "You must be in control," he said.

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