

## Growth: a good thing

PROGRESSIVE VIEWS



Laura Bray

While driving around town, I often see a bumper sticker, "Boerne: Gone Forever." I happen to agree with its opposite, which I sometimes spot on the same drive: "Boerne: Better Than Ever." Here's why.

New residents and their ever-expanding viewpoints and life experiences make everyone's life richer. A growing community expands our diversity and our collective point of view. Living around and getting to know more people whose experiences differ from mine allows me to see the world from their vantage point.

A central tenet of Buddhism is "right view." My perception of reality is just that – my perception. It's not "reality" at all. Learning and appreciating the perceptions of others gets me out of my own head and expands my view of the world.

The Buddhist monk and teacher Thich Nhat Hanh says in his book "Your True Home," that "We are not the same as, nor are we separate from, other beings. We are connected to everything."

Having many new neighbors allows us to experience that connectedness more fully. (I also highly recommend "The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World," co-authored by his holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

We aren't just imagining all these new people. The Boerne city limits sign lists a population of 10,471 (from the 2010 census). Google says we just topped 16,000. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, "Kendall County is ranked seventh in the U.S. among counties showing the largest percentage growth from 2010 to 2018." The growth – with its advantages and disadvantages – is real.

Yes, growth brings challenges. Anyone taking that aforementioned drive knows the nerve-jangled, white-knuckled feeling while navigating I-10 or River Road between Esser and Ammann. Ever-more new housing developments stretch our water resources and create stormwater runoff problems. The

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need for increasing services such as public safety and schools to accommodate all these new arrivals – myself included – stretch city and county budget ever tighter.

But I'll take on those challenges when faced with the alternative – stagnation and decline. Not so many years ago, many storefronts in Boerne's downtown sat vacant in just another harbinger of small-town decay.

But community and political leaders took action to revitalize downtown, and now the Hill Country Mile attracts visitors from across the state and nation. Do those visitors cause excess traffic? Yes. Do those visitors contribute to the coffers of Boerne and Kendall County, funding needed services? An even stronger yes, and I'll take that alternative every day of the week.

We must also work to preserve the character of our community as we grow. From controlling light pollution to limiting retail development along new transportation corridors (do we really need another car dealership?) to assessing impact fees, we must demand of our state lawmakers that they enact laws to increase the ability of cities and counties to govern their own affairs rather than their current modus operandi to consolidate all lawmaking power in Austin. Better yet: let's elect new state leaders.

I applaud the activism and promotion of community awareness of groups like Boerne Area Informed Citizens (on Facebook) and the Hill Country Alliance. We can and should demand that these same elected leaders take steps to protect the charms (our environment, culture, historic buildings, etc.) that drew us here in the first place.

The "Katie, bar the door" attitude is neither practical, legal or even desirable. Pulling up the drawbridge and slamming closed the portcullis simply will not work nor would we want it to.

Your "call to action" today? Get to know your new neighbors. Contact your city councilperson or county commissioner to encourage their efforts to promote sustainable development.

And next November, work to elect local, state and national leaders who commit to supporting local control and sustainable development. To learn more about how to take action, visit [www.kcdems.us](http://www.kcdems.us)

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