

Managing our local water supply

In the next 20 years, Texas A&M's Natural Resources Institute (NRI) predicts "potentially the largest inter-generational land transfer in (Texas) history."

Nearly 40 percent of current Texas landowners are older than 65.

"The majority of soon-to-be-transferred lands will likely pass through wills, potentially to younger generations who may have less experience or financial capital needed to take over family operations," says the NRI. If those lands are sold to developers, Kendall County will experience major impacts.

During last week's State of the City address, Mayor Tim Handren said, "Water is the most critical natural resource we have."

The Kendall County Water Planning Committee (WPC) is currently at work, with a focus on conservation and consumption. Handren said the No. 1 driver of water use is population, but extended drought (such as the one from 2010-2015) also plays a big role and must be planned for.

A challenge is coming with water, and in fact, is already here. Handren stated that in previous local and statewide water-use studies, Boerne's population growth was vastly underestimated, leading to shortcomings in planning. Per the U.S. Census, the city's 2020 population increased by 70 percent from 2010. Since the 1970 census, it has increased by nearly 700 percent. The mayor said he



expects that Boerne will add 10,000 more residents by 2030.

Our water supply is not unlimited. The city of Boerne obtains its drinking water from surface water (lakes, streams, etc.) and ground water (underground water in aquifers). The city owns and operates the Surface Water Treatment Plant at Boerne City Lake and nine ground-water wells, according to the city of Boerne website. Additionally, the city purchases treated surface water from Canyon Lake through the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority.

Fortunately, some new tools have appeared to help our local leaders plan for these water infrastructure challenges.

As an aid in managing current and future water needs, the city and the WPC are looking at the "Internet of Water" (IOW) project, a comprehensive look at how water is sourced and consumed. According to its website (www.internetofwater.org), the IOW's vision "envisions a nation engaged in equitable and resilient water management and stewardship enabled by shared and integrated water data and information."

The IOW is developing a

data infrastructure to enable more holistic water management rather than forcing stakeholders to seek their data in fragmented silos of information, scattered across agencies, according to the IOW.

Per the IOW, there are 463,591 bodies of water in the United States, but only one Internet of Water. The concept is based on the idea that it's not "North Texas water" and "West Texas water" and "Hill Country water." All of those are connected. It's just one water.

Earlier this year, in partnership with IOW and the Bureau of Economic Geology at UT, the Cibolo Center for Conservation (previously the Cibolo Nature Center) launched the Boerne Internet of Water initiative, the pilot project for the first municipal-level Internet of Water data hub and dashboard. This data hub "will allow community stakeholders at all levels to access water data to inform decisions for years to come," per the Cibolo. With better understanding of supply and demand dynamics, stakeholders will have a better idea of what kinds of businesses can be sustained in the area.

Another new concept is One Water, a "term that refers to an integrated approach to planning and implementation in order to manage finite water resources for long-term resilience and reliability. One Water considers all water resources as potential water supply—rainwater, drinking water, stormwater and waste-

water—and seeks to minimize our overall demand for water resources," according to the "One Water" guidebook published by the Hill Country Alliance.

Conservation is critical. Examples include only watering your lawn on your assigned day and only between 7 p.m. to 11 a.m., and replacing non-native grasses in your lawn with native plants that use less water. In fact, the city of Boerne regulates the types of turf grasses allowed for new residential and commercial development, to minimize impacts on water supply. The city is currently in Stage 2 water conservation.

In addition to explosive population growth, the ongoing effects of climate change – hotter temperatures, more severe storms, increased drought, and the like – will create a real conundrum for our local leaders.

Hopefully these new tools and approaches will help our leaders make effective plans to manage Kendall County's water resources into the future. You can do your part by limiting your own water use and supporting local efforts to understand, plan for, and limit water use. We also need to continue to push our legislators in Austin to provide more tools for cities and counties to regulate development.

For more information on how to get involved, visit www.kcdems.us

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