**A Challenge Awaits Us All
August 4, 2019**

Those of us who live in Comal County face a challenge that will not disappear. How can we live with significant growth while maintaining the things that brought us to the county in the first place? The Comal County Conservation Alliance was formed to help answer this challenge.

We could all identify many reasons for coming here, but the following would probably be on many of our lists.

• Proximity to San Antonio and Austin. Many people want to enjoy the benefits of a larger city without dealing with the problems and cost of living in a large city.

• Small town feel and nice people. New Braunfels continues to have the feel of a small town with friendly people and many opportunities for civic involvement.

• Great public services. Good schools, libraries, medical facilities, parks and many other services improve our quality of life.

• The natural environment. Clean air, flowing water, trees, hills and wildlife make this a unique place to call home.

Which of these draws will remain if our population grows by 40% over the next 10 years, as it did in the last 10 years? How will we provide housing, utilities, schools, parks, stores and other basic services for another 60,000 people? As importantly, how will we provide those services without harming the things we love about the county?

Considering the four draws that are listed above, we can assume that we will always have proximity to our neighbors to the North and South, but, even if we are not moving geographically, will we have the same real proximity if traffic on I-35 grows by 40%?

Our small-town feel might also be difficult to maintain. How will we welcome 40% more people to the festivals that are a source of pride in the community? Will the venues for those events even accommodate more people?

Public services can be expanded. We can build parks, schools and libraries. Just as we can build larger venues for festivals or bigger roads to relieve congestion.

What we cannot build more of are the elements of our natural environment. In fact, adding all of the things that will be needed for a larger population will require taking some land, endangering some water, disrupting some wildlife habitat, and cutting some trees. These things will happen. Will they happen haphazardly or with the guidance of an informed citizenry and thoughtful public policies?

CCCA supports the informed, thoughtful approach. This will require action while we have the time and ability to effect change. Some key features of the county require protection. For example, the recharge zones of the aquifers must be preserved so that our ground water can be replenished and continue to supply our needs. Similarly, key environmentally sensitive areas, such as caves and springs, should be protected.

Unfortunately, the time for action is now and it is short.

If you like living in this community and want to retain its unique natural and rural character, get involved, learn about the issues, and the policy options that are available. And then, make your views known to your elected policy makers, your neighbors, and write letters to the editor.