**Seeing the complexity**

One of the advantages that I have found of having earned gray hair and lines on my face is that it’s become almost impossible to see issues in only one dimension. Things tend to be complicated. In the case of environmental issues, some people like to set up two opposing positions. You’re either for the environment, or you’re for growth. In fact, we have to be for both.

Most of us who are fortunate enough to live in New Braunfels chose to live here. We chose it because it is a great place to live. We shouldn’t be surprised that others are also choosing it. Our population is growing at a very fast pace. Just like us old hands, these new people need homes, schools, hospitals, stores and all the other things of modern life. They’re good for the community. They pay taxes, buy stuff, and take part in the civic life of the city.

As we welcome these new people and understand the benefits that they bring, we also must recognize the importance of preserving our natural environment. Natural beauty is one of the primary things that draws us to this area. We also each have a need to be able to occasionally rejuvenate ourselves by sitting under a tree and listening to birds or to the sounds of running water. The city fathers of long ago recognized this basic need when they preserved the Boston Commons, New York’s Central Park and our own Landa Park. We must be as foresighted.

We also need some of the basic services that nature provides. We have water in the aquifers under our feet because nature provides a method for the groundwater to replenish itself. The many cracks, sinkholes, caves and caverns found over much of Comal County are the arteries that nature provided for the water to return to the aquifer. If we develop over these arteries, with all of the impervious rooftops, roads, and parking lots that development brings, we will be cutting off our water supply.

We also want clean water. Nature helps with this as well. Grass, shrubs and trees in the path of water as it moves over the contributing zone of the aquifer help to keep the water clean. If the water moves more quickly over manmade or cleared surfaces, the chances for it to pick up particulates and other pollutants is much greater.

Some might argue that we really needn’t be concerned about the water issues because our technologies can solve the problem. We could, of course, pipe water in from other places — if we can find places willing to part with water. We could also treat brackish water to make it clean enough for human use. Both these strategies could be followed, but with significantly higher costs. Why pay for what nature will do if we let it?

Clean air is another service provided by nature. Climate scientists tell us that planting trees, or maintaining trees, is one of the very best strategies for removing carbon from the atmosphere. Nature has blessed us with lots of trees. Let’s try to work with nature for the good of us all.

It really is not the environment or growth. It is both the environment and growth. With thought and a little planning, we can conserve, reduce pollution and enjoy nature as we grow. It’s a matter of finding the right forms of development and the right places for that development. Don’t be a one-dimensional thinker.