

Managing growth includes aviation

By Angie Juenemann

The future is now. Ennis is on the precipice of extraordinary growth. Developers are moving south out of the Metroplex into Ellis County because land is affordable and the area's transportation infrastructure is undergoing measurable improvements. In fact, Texas is expected to double its population in the next 30 years. Here at home, in 2017, more houses were constructed in that 12-month period than what were built in the previous ten years.

In life, the only constant is change. We must pro-actively manage growth despite how much we love our small-town environment. This hometown girl embraces our Czech heritage and respects our diversity. Wildflowers dot the Texas landscape but none are as beautiful as our bluebonnets in the spring. Rolling hills and rich farm lands are framed with gorgeous sunrises and sunsets.

We proudly show off our photos and videos of our children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren. We'd love to have more jobs and amenities right here so they can proudly, like us, call Ennis home.

The City Commission accepts the responsibility to preserve our legacy, and we are working with the greater community to manage our area's inevitable growth in positive ways. We have been identifying our strengths and weaknesses as well as assessing any threats to our way of life. We are embracing opportunities. No longer are we "reacting" to change; rather, we are standing ready to adapt.

Our research shows that a general aviation airport like ours is incredibly important to communities of all sizes. There is no commercial service; users include those in agribusiness operations and small business owners and managers. Last year, the airport hosted our first "fly-in" during our Bluebonnet Festival, and people from North and Central Texas "flew in" for the revelry. They loved it!

Our airport is part of the nation's overall airport system, sanctioned by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The on-going discussion of how best to address the airport's non-compliance with FAA's safety regulations finally gained traction last year, and the City is working with the Texas Department of Transportation Aviation Department, FAA and an aviation planning consultant to finalize plans for a "replacement" airport.

Many of us hoped the existing airport could be brought up to federal aviation standards, but to do so would cost as much as building a new facility. Moreover, the adjacent

waterways and the widening of US Highway 287 make this location woefully inadequate for safe growth anytime in the future.

A general aviation airport is paid for by a federally-authorized tax collected as part of an airline ticket, not by our income taxes. The City is responsible for 10 percent of any new construction dollars. Our airport's maintenance is funded, in part, through fuel sales.

Currently, our airport design team is studying three sites. Significant factors in the final decision include safety and environmental conditions. It's ultimately the FAA's decision whether a site has "no significant impact" on the area. In depth studies include air quality; biological resources such as fish, wildlife and plants; climate; hazardous materials, solid waste and pollution prevention; historical and cultural resources; noise and compatible land use; visual effects including light emissions; and wetlands, flood plains, surface waters and groundwater.

The City has initiated conversations with property owners as well as the owners of adjacent properties at these sites. These discussions will continue over the next several months, and a public meeting will be held Jan. 30. Meeting details will be advertised in this newspaper as well as through the City's various communications channels. Additionally, information about all aspects of the project will be posted on the City's website as more information becomes available.

I encourage you to ask questions and to be involved. You have my promise to do everything possible to keep our community economically sustainable during these years of growth.