

Dealing with growth: Conference aimed at conservation in Comal County

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Growth Conference

Attendees use cell phones and other devices to share input on land conservation and water quality during Thursday's conference addressing growth in Comal County. The conference continues Friday at the McKenna Events Center.

Day one is in the books and organizers said much of the work began well enough. But there is still more to achieve at the "Planning for Growth in Comal County" two-day conference in New Braunfels.

“The main goal is for people to be aware of some opportunities to preserve water quality and land in this rapidly growing area and come up with a shared plan,” facilitator Gina Amatangelo said Thursday near the end of the conference’s first day.

She said attendees are expected to attend today’s sessions to share their goals and formulate action steps after Thursday’s group discussions and polling of important topics. Presentations and table discussions today begin at 1 p.m. and conclude about 5 p.m. after break-out sessions. The entire community is invited.

The event is being held to help direct the constant growth in Comal County. It is sponsored by the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance, which is made up of 52 member groups that go throughout 21 counties in the Hill Country area and Central Texas dedicated to preserving the Edwards and Trinity aquifers and their watersheds.

GEAA Executive Director Annalisa Peace said the alliance came up with the idea for the conference as a way of addressing impacts of different developments coming to Comal County. She said talks went really well on Thursday but she hopes it gets even better. “I’m hoping we gave people good ideas and we can come back Friday and talk about where do we go from here,” Peace said. “And we want to talk about what specific steps we can take.”

Larry Shumway of Bulverde attended Thursday’s sessions and said he was pleased with the information imparted. Shumway said he has lived in this area for 12 years and he continues to witness the county’s explosive growth.

“I’m very interested in being able to manage and control the growth just for quality of life,” he said.

Without control, the county could “end up with traffic congestion, you end up with loss of property value, you end up with negative impacts on water,” he said.

Shumway said he walked away from the conference with more knowledge and resources to gain even more. He said he hopes to share what he learned with his neighbors and thinks that everyone who attended should do the same.

That is the point, Peace said.

She said it shouldn’t be government, government officials or city leaders taking charge of what happens or directing all of the progress. Citizens are the cornerstone of it all.

“It has to come from the citizens,” Peace said. We had a few elected officials here but it’s getting together and getting organized. They had a lot of good ideas. This should be led by the citizens of Comal County.”

Topics at the conference will include preservation of open space, protection of water resources, and how local governments in Comal County can work together on county-wide issues. The hope of the conference is for people to convene and join in a discussion

of next steps needed to preserve the quality of life and natural beauty that make Comal County such a desirable place to live.

Along with the GEAA, organizers include the Hill Country Alliance and the League of Women Voters-Comal Area who received funding from the McKenna Foundation.

The event is free to attendees. For a full agenda or to pre-register online, visit <http://www.aquiferalliance.net/comal/>. Walk-in registration is at 12:30 p.m. today.