

12/11/24

# County makes a step in the right direction

**W**hy should you care about county subdivision rules?

The Gillespie County Commissioners will be considering a change to the Subdivision and Manufactured Home Rental Community Regulations this month. The changes decrease the density of future subdivisions and manufactured home rental communities (MHRC).

Are these changes important? We believe they are, we support these changes and we urge you to support them, too.

The Texas Hill Country is one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation. Population in Gillespie County has grown by nearly 50% in the past 20 years and is expected to grow another 35% in the coming 20 years.

In Gillespie County alone, a staggering 7,588 new lots or units are currently proposed or under construction, according to the Gillespie County Economic Development Commission.

Where will all these new folks live? Increasingly, subdivisions and manufactured home rental communities (MHRC) pop up in unincorporated areas, where there is almost no land use planning authority to help guide and manage growth.

In Gillespie County, it is estimated that from 1990-

## Guest column

By Katherine Peake



2020, growth in unincorporated areas was 50%.

Why do developers target unincorporated areas?

Lower land prices, lower taxes, and the appeal of "country" living drives much of this growth.

Further, for developers, the lack of county regulation is attractive.

Counties cannot zone for land use or set development standards, such as requiring sewer and wastewater system performance or fire suppression systems to the same extent as municipalities.

Counties also cannot require buffers between incompatible neighboring land uses (such as mining or battery energy storage systems next to residences) nor can they require residential developers to preserve open space for recreation and environmental protections.

Nor can they charge impact fees to cover the costs of services that the new home buyers will expect.

Of course, the ability to employ any of the tools mentioned above would be helpful to rapidly growing counties but would require changes to state law that

are unlikely in the near future.

The Gillespie County Engineer and County Commissioners may not have many tools to work with, but one tool they do have the authority to change the density of lots and spaces in new developments.

These proposed county rule changes will not solve the problems we face with a burgeoning population, but they are definitely a step in the right direction.

We urge you to let your county commissioner know you support reducing the density of subdivisions and manufactured home rental communities. We also urge you to attend the Commissioners Court meeting at 9 a.m. on Monday, Dec. 23 at the Gillespie County Courthouse to show your support.

For questions or more specific information, please visit [pedernalerriveralliance.org](http://pedernalerriveralliance.org) for our contact information.

Peake is a former Fredericksburg resident and municipal judge, now residing in Blanco County. She has been active in conservation-related causes. She wrote this with Pedernales River Alliance steering committee members Deb Youngblood, Kris Weidenfeller and Ryan Behrends.