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I appreciate the invitation from the LCRA to contribute a guest editorial to the Water Forum. I'm writing on behalf of the Hamilton Pool Road Scenic Corridor Coalition (HPRSCC), a neighborhood organization that was formed in response to the proposed water line for Hamilton Pool Road and the proposed subdivision developments that would be enabled by the availability of LCRA water. The LCRA's special Board meeting on December 7th means a lot to us.

The LCRA Mission Statement alludes to providing services "in cooperation with our customers and communities" while using the LCRA's environmental authority to "ensure the protection" of the area's natural resources. We believe that in the absence of adequate regional planning and protective measures, the LCRA's vision for supplying water to Hamilton Pool Road and large swaths of the Hill Country will be detrimental to both our communities and natural resources.

Protecting Natural Resources

Two facts: first, the availability of piped-in water fosters high-density development. It actually *requires* high-density development to cover the infrastructure costs. Second, the Hill Country is considered "environmentally sensitive", which means that the terrain is so rugged and the soil is so thin that the land cannot tolerate much development without degrading the quality of streams, lakes and rivers. Together, these observations define the perfect storm for impacting water quality.

Development is not the problem. The destruction of a major branch of Lick Creek was recent evidence of what *irresponsible* development in this area can do. It will not be the last example. The eastern portion of Hamilton Pool Road lies in the Barton Springs watershed. The western portion lies in the Hamilton Pool watershed. Both watersheds are threatened by the prospect of dense developments that go well beyond the carrying capacity of the land.

A case in point is the Rocky Creek Ranch subdivision plan for 468 acres of hilly terrain with poor soil conditions, which proposes to cluster 468 homes on 60% of the acreage while using much of the remaining 40% to spray treated wastewater from the on-site treatment plant. By some estimates this is double what the land can bear. Rocky Creek, which runs through the middle of Rocky Creek Ranch on its way to Barton Creek, will be at great risk regardless of the best intentions of the developer.

Protecting Communities

The Hamilton Pool Road area has a distinct, eclectic "character" that we believe adds a great deal to our property values and quality of life. The ambiance of any unique community, be it Lakeway, Westlake Hills, Fredericksburg, or Hamilton Pool Road, is valued by its residents and property owners.

Of course, in unincorporated areas the opportunities for preserving character are limited. Just like the land itself, the character of the Hill Country is fragile and at risk. Once again, development is not the issue; it is the *kind* of development that matters most. Beyond a doubt, LCRA water will spur the rapid evolution of Hamilton Pool Road into a sequence of dense master-planned subdivisions that will be difficult to distinguish from other upper-middle-class suburban communities.

Frankly, what we don't need and don't want is the LCRA actively contributing to transforming *our* community against our will. Based on petitions, letters, and door-to-door interaction with our neighbors, we know that the vast majority of property owners in our area do not want the impact that the LCRA-enabled subdivisions will have on water quality, traffic, safety, taxes, quality of life, and property values. The message is loud and clear.

The LCRA is quick to point out that growth is inevitable. But only the LCRA has the power to make its growth projections a self-fulfilling prophecy. The LCRA also says that if they don't provide surface water to developers, somebody else will. That is only true some times and some places. Only the LCRA can make it happen quickly, anywhere and everywhere. This power to reshape communities should be used with extreme caution.

Regional Planning

We are asking the LCRA to suspend its plans to provide water to Hamilton Pool Road (and beyond) until a number of regional planning efforts, now underway, reach their conclusions. Our hope is that these planning efforts will include rules and incentives for responsible development, specifically limiting densities to sustainable levels commensurate with the challenges of developing in the Hill Country.

We are also asking the LCRA to formulate non point source (NPS) pollution ordinances with real teeth. The legislation that created the LCRA gives the agency considerable authority to protect water quality. The LCRA should put strict protective measures in place as well as an effective enforcement capability. That way, water quality will be protected no matter who supplies utilities to new subdivisions.

No planning (or poor planning) won't protect our communities and natural resources. We are asking the LCRA to give smart planning a fair shot.