

Kaufman residents voice concerns over growth

By April Marie
Herald Reporter

The regular Kaufman City Council meeting on the evening of March 24 included a public hearing concerning the annexation of an approximately 132-acre property known as The Trails. The property is located on the west side of FM 2727 and south of County Road 143.

If the property were to be annexed, it would become part of the Kaufman city limits, which would allow the council some measure of control over it. Were the property not to be annexed, "It might as well be in Montana," said Mayor Jeff Jordan, concerning how the city council would have no control over what happens on the property.

Many residents in the area of The Trails and beyond gathered in the council room

to share their concerns about the city's growth. Their worries included increases in traffic, potential crime rate, property taxes, and whether or not current infrastructure can handle more people.

"The main issues I've got is the traffic," said Larry Hampton. "I moved to the country to be in the country. Not next to a housing addition."

"I tell people I live on the racetrack known as Highway 34, because it is," said Patsy Branscum. "I'm also concerned about water and electric grid. I understand there's water issues as well as electric issues and that's going to increase the pull on those items."

"I love Kaufman. It's a great town," said Sky Twilighen. "My only concern is just from what I've seen and I think we

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ought to grow, but I think we ought to grow constructively and productively."

"With Kaufman being the fastest growing county in Texas, we need to be conscientious of the quality of people that are coming in," she said.

"I think there's great concerns here, people talking about utilities, traffic, all that sort of stuff," said Robert Chalk. "I'm here because I think those are symptoms of the disease. I think the disease is the urbanization of rural areas."

"I don't want to live in a Forney. I don't want to be another Rockwall," Chalk continued. "I moved here, raised my family, raised my grandkids here. We want to live in the country. We want to stay a rural area. There's plenty of undeveloped areas inside the city limits. These folks can come in, develop it up, do what you want to do and let the rural areas stay rural areas."

After everyone who had requested to speak to the council got to do so, Mayor Jordan began to share answers to some of the concerns. When it came to growth in general he said, "We don't get to put up a sign that says we're full, no room. We don't get to do that."

Days after the meeting, city officials reflected on growth in Kaufman.

Anne Glasscock, CEO of the Kaufman Chamber of Commerce, said concerns about growth depends on what the person is worried about.

"If they're concerned because it's a small town," she said. "That's 100% understandable, but we can't stop the growth. What we can do is control it, and that's what the city is doing."

Glasscock also said that it's important to look at the

growth of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex as a whole. It grew to the northwest, northeast, southwest, and now it's growing to the southeast, she said.

"I think the city of Kaufman is doing a great job, being very mindful of how they're managing development," Glasscock said. As an example, she pointed to the fact that smaller pockets of land are being developed as time goes on rather than large swaths. 63 homes here and 80 some there is preferable to 10,000 homes going in all at once, she said.

"The Kaufman City Council has been steadfast in welcoming 'managed growth,'" said Mike Holder, Kaufman city manager in an email. "We work diligently with developers to ensure that growth within the city of Kaufman fits the culture of the city, enhances amenities and aesthetics, and is high quality."

During the March 24 meeting, Jordan said, "If we annex this property we can work with the developer to ensure that you have quality development, that you have good homes coming in, that you have kids that aren't going to be a burden on the school district, that you have lower crime rate. It will be in the city limits so we can control it with our police department."

Holder said increases in population haven't necessarily translated to higher crime rates. "Crime in Kaufman continues to be almost non-existent," he said. "Our dedicated staff work tirelessly to keep it that way."

"We have established partnerships with our community that ensures Kaufman will continue to be one of the safest communities in the region," he continued. "We are confident we have adequate staff-

ing to address the immediate growth coming to the city of Kaufman."

When it came to residents' concerns about traffic during the city council meeting, Jordan said, "No doubt traffic is an issue everywhere. No one will deny that. No one will pretend that's not the case. I will say that any development that goes in the city of Kaufman, a traffic impact analysis is required for the developer to do."

He also reminded council meeting attendees that some roads are handled by the city, some by the county, and others still by the Texas Department of Transportation.

The best way to determine which is which is to check city limit maps (often available on city websites) or to check with county commissioners, says Holder. "Street signs often designate CR which stands for county road," he added.

When it comes to roadways that are handled by TxDOT, Holder said it's important for residents to "utilize their voice. Make their concerns known and take advantage of public comments opportunities when available."

The ordinance that would annex The Trails into the Kaufman city limits was not approved or denied by the city council on the evening of March 24. Instead, council members chose to table it until the next regular meeting in April. Jordan stated that the public hearing on the topic will be considered open from March 24 until the meeting on April 28.

According to Jordan, property can only be annexed if the property owners ask for it and if it is contiguous with the current city limits. He stated that no property owners have to annex their property unless they want to.