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Dear Client:

**Wind energy, one of the most desired alternative energy sources, hasn't generated much controversy in Central Texas. But, hang on. The complaints may soon reach gale force.**

Those wind propellers way out in windy West Texas have been generally accepted by landowners, who are used to windmills and oil wells piercing the endless sky. And the money paid for lucrative land leases is really appealing to the ranchers. **But all that West Texas electricity generated by wind power has to be delivered to the state's bigger cities. And the way it gets from there to here is stirring up a whirlwind of controversy.**

Right now, as part of the state's \$2.9 billion initiative to deliver power from the wind farms to the city slickers, the proposals call for most of that **electricity to be delivered by above-ground power lines. And most of those lines will be strung along huge, really huge, lattice towers.** Some of those big block towers can be up to 185 feet tall. You've seen them, usually sitting atop high points of land.

While the power towers are not proposed to cut across Travis County, they are currently planned for adjacent Burnet County and Gillespie County (home of the popular Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, near Fredericksburg), in addition to several other scenic Hill Country counties. **Opponents fear damage to the views of the Hill Country, property values and to the recreation industry.**

The Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) has a contract through its Transmission Services Corp to plan and build hundreds of miles of this delivery system. **If the lines were buried in the rocky Hill Country terrain, the LCRA estimates the cost at more than \$40 million a mile. The overhead lines are estimated to cost about \$2 million a mile.** And the LCRA favors the bulky lattice towers, instead of monopoles because they are less expensive and can be built further apart.

So, where does this project stand? **The Public Utility Commission has the final say on routing and structures.** Other agencies, such as the US Fish and Wildlife, may weigh in. Recommendations are being made as we speak and public hearings are slated throughout the Hill Country. The LCRA, though, has the trump card: if it decides to use it, the LCRA can invoke eminent domain and "take" private land, at fair market value, for the public good.

**The Austin vision, as well as those of Texas bigger cities, may help define a new urban future for the US. This is the view of an “urban futures” expert.**

The executive editor of [www.newgeography.com](http://www.newgeography.com), **Joel Kotkin**, has written about the forecast that the US will grow by roughly 100 million people by 2050. The title of his new book is *The Next Hundred Million: America in 2050* (Penguin Press).

To get a glimpse of that future, Kotkin suggests that **city planners “need to get beyond their nostalgic quest to recreate the highly centralized 19<sup>th</sup>-century city.”** Instead, Kotkin says those planners “should hop a plane” to **key cities in Texas “where the outlines of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century American city are already being created and exuberantly imagined.”**

According to Moody’s Economy.com, **Texas big cities are entering economic recovery mode well ahead of almost all the major centers along the East or West coasts.** Kotkin points out that this represents a continuation of longer-term trends, both before and after the economic crisis. He singles out for particular mention Austin, Dallas and Houston.

**“This leads me to believe that the most dynamic future for America urbanism – and I believe there is one – lies in Texas’ growing urban centers,”** Kotkin writes. “To reshape a city in a sustainable way, you need to have a growing population, a solid and expanding job base and a relatively efficient city administration.”

Kotkin points out that nationally **“urbanists have not embraced the remarkable growth in the major Texas metropolitan areas.”** Although he makes note of the fact Austin has received much more national attention than other Texas metros.

**“Only Austin gets some recognition, since, with its hip music scene and more liberal leanings, it’s the kind of place high-end journalists might actually find tolerable,”** said Kotkin. “The three other big Texas cities have become the Rodney Dangerfields of urban America – largely disdained despite their prodigious growth and increasingly vibrant urban cores.”

“Part of the problem stems from the fact that all Texas cities are sprawling, multi-polar regions, with many thriving employment centers. **This seems to offend the tender sensibilities of urbanists who crave for the downtown-centric cities of yesteryear and reject the more dispersed model that has emerged in the past few decades,**” he theorizes.

“Yet, despite planners’ prejudices” ... the bigger Texas metros “are more than collections of pesky suburban infestations.” Then he stresses his thesis: **“They are expanding their footprints to the periphery and densifying at the same time.”** There’s more.

**Austin's focus on development of its downtown, as well as its emphasis on suburban centers such as The Domain — where you can find residences, retail operations and jobs, is at the heart of the successful metros of the future.**

As the Austin metro has grown in recent years, you have seen a **strong emphasis on both downtown and suburban development** for residents of Austin – as opposed to other US areas where suburban development has been strangled in favor of pushing people downtown. This, city expert **Joel Kotkin** points out is why Texas metros are providing a vision for the nation.

You know what is happening here in the Austin area. But examples abound in Dallas and Houston as well. Houston is a city with no zoning and a reputation for “sprawl.” Yet, Kotkin notes that **“over the past decade the central core of Houston – inside the boundaries of the 610 Freeway Loop – has experienced arguably the widest and most sustained densification in the country.”** He further points out that “this growth has largely resulted not from planning but from infrastructure investment, job growth and entrepreneurial venturing.”

The process he says is also evident in the Dallas area, which has experienced a surge in condo construction near its urban core and some very intriguing “town center” developments. **“In Big D,” he says, “developers generally view densification not as an alternative to suburbia but another critical option needed in a growing region.”**

He says **Texas cities substitute the narrow notion of “or” – that is, cities can grow only if the suburbs are sufficiently strangled – with a more inclusive notion of “and.”** His summary: A bigger, wealthier, more important region will have room for all sorts of grand projects that will provide more density *and* urban amenities.

**Coincidentally, Austin was the country's 6<sup>th</sup> most moved-to destination in 2009.**

At least this was the report from the national do-it-yourself moving giant U-Haul. It analyzed travelers moving more than 50 miles last year and found that while Austin was #6 on the list, Austin fell behind Houston (#1) and San Antonio (#4).

**If you want to see how the Austin area has grown, updated aerial photography is available.**

You can get it through the Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG). It's free. It roughly covers an area that extends from Round Rock to San Marcos and other areas. Call CAPCOG's **Linda Crouch** at 512-916-6041 for info on how to get the photography.

**It's payback time. After being snubbed as a location for filming an Oscar winning film, the Austin area will soon be home to what could be a blockbuster movie shoot.**

As we reported 2.12.10 (click the "archives" button at the top to go to Volume 31, Number 44), **the Academy-Award winning film "Crazy Heart" was filmed in New Mexico** – even though the Austin area and other locations in Texas were much more fitting and several Austinites were instrumental in the movie's success.

Well, what goes around comes around. **The re-make of "True Grit" will soon be shooting in Central Texas.** Remember, "True Grit" won an Academy Award for **John Wayne**, who played the boozy lawman **Rooster Cogburn**. Now the famed brother team of **Ethan** and **Joel Coen** will produce and direct the re-make. And the Central Texas town of Granger will be used to depict Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Star power will abound in the Austin area during filming. Ironically, **Jeff Bridges**, who won the Best Actor award for "Crazy Heart," heads up a cast that includes two other top movie stars – **Matt Damon** and **Josh Brolin**. Those who enjoy well-directed and well-acted westerns will eagerly await the release of the "True Grit" re-make.

**The Pflugerville Chamber is re-branding itself now that the city has passed a milestone.**

As we reported 2.5.10, (Volume 31, Number 45 in our "archives"), Pflugerville moved from a "rural community" to "small urban city" classification when its population surpassed 50,000. **Now the Pflugerville Chamber of Commerce has come up a new logo to reflect its maturation and is expanding its services and activities.**

Noting that Pflugerville has long been overshadowed by its larger neighboring cities of Round Rock and Austin, **Dr. Louis Overholster** stuck his tongue in his cheek and suggested a new slogan for the re-branding: "Pflugerville – between a Rock and a Weird Place!"

Sincerely



Editor/Publisher