

Message from Rockwall Mayor, Trace Johannesen – Local Control: The Foundation of Good Government

Blue Ribbon News, February 7, 2025 1:23 PM

Rockwall, TX (February 7, 2025) – As mayor of Rockwall, I've consistently advocated for a simple principle: the government closest to the people governs best. Recently, however, we've seen concerning trends from Austin that threaten this foundational concept of local control.

The state legislature continues to propose bills that would strip municipalities of their ability to make decisions that best serve their communities. From mandating what we can and cannot do with zoning to attempting to control how we manage our growth, these efforts represent a troubling shift toward centralized control that ignores the unique needs and character of individual communities.

Let me be clear: I'm a limited-government conservative who believes strongly in private property rights. But I also understand there's a crucial difference between limited government and no government. Our city council, composed of your neighbors who volunteer their time and energy, makes decisions based on intimate knowledge of our community's needs, not based on one-size-fits-all mandates from Austin.

Consider zoning decisions. In Rockwall, we use zoning thoughtfully to ensure sustainable growth while protecting property values and quality of life. We carefully plan where to place water treatment plants, schools, and industrial developments. These aren't arbitrary decisions – they're based on years of careful planning and direct input from our citizens. Yet proposed legislation would override local zoning authority, potentially forcing changes that could dramatically alter the character of our neighborhoods.

The same applies to property taxes. While I appreciate Governor Abbott's focus on property tax relief, the solution isn't to impose rigid restrictions on local governments. Instead, we need meaningful reform that addresses the root causes of rising property taxes, including unfunded state mandates and a broken school finance system.

Here in Rockwall, we've demonstrated responsible fiscal management. We maintain one of the lowest tax rates in the region while providing high-quality services our citizens expect. We've achieved this through careful planning and by balancing residential and commercial development – exactly the kind of local decision-making that state mandates would compromise.

The irony isn't lost on me that many of the same voices in Austin who rightfully criticize federal overreach into state affairs are now advocating for state overreach into local affairs. This isn't about whether you agree or disagree with specific policies – it's about who should make these decisions.

As we move forward, I urge our state legislators to remember that Texas's strength lies in its diversity – different communities with different needs requiring different solutions. What works for Loving County, TX (pop. ~65; least populated in the US) or Harris County, TX (pop. 4.9M; 3rd most populated) might not work for Rockwall. One-size-fits-none policies from Austin won't serve Rockwall any better than one-size-fits-all mandates from Washington serve Texas.

Let's preserve meaningful local control and trust communities to make their own decisions. After all, nobody knows better how to run Rockwall than the people who call it home.