

http://katytimes.com/news/article_126f0ca2-02ce-11e9-a039-0b9c73dbbcf3.html

TOP STORY

Katy adapts to Fulshear growth

Claire Goodman

Times Contributor Dec 25, 2018 Updated Dec 25, 2018



Fulshear mayor Aaron Groff discusses the expansion of Fulshear at the 'Fulshear Find Your Future' event.

As Fulshear continues to grow at a furious pace, the city of Katy is adapting to accommodate the growth and development of its neighboring city. Katy has grown steadily; the Katy Area Economic Development Council estimates there has been a consistent 4 to 6 percent population increase since the 1990s.

The city of Fulshear, however, has seen a sudden population boom. Aaron Groff, mayor of Fulshear, estimates that the city of Fulshear has had a 700 percent population increase since 2013.

Katy and Fulshear share more than just adjacent borders. The Fulshear-Katy Area Chamber of Commerce serves both cities, and 89 percent of Fulshear students attend Katy ISD schools. Fort Bend County emergency services like the fire department, Emergency Medical Services and the police department serve both Katy and Fulshear.

As neighbors, Katy and Fulshear have overlapping Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ), which means that the two cities have the authority to operate outside their incorporated borders. Essentially, Katy can exercise municipal authority up to five miles into the city of Fulshear and vice versa.

Katy mayor Chuck Brawner cited the ETJ as one of the most important reasons Katy and Fulshear have to work through Fulshear's expansion together. "(Fulshear and Katy) butt up against each other, so sharing an ETJ makes it important that we have an open line of communication."

To address the growth of Fulshear, Groff and the Fulshear-Katy Chamber of Commerce hosted a banquet Dec. 7. Organizations and representatives from across Fort Bend County attended the event to learn more about how Fulshear will be bolstering its infrastructure to adapt to its expansion and what that means for the neighboring cities.

Joe Zimmerman, mayor of Sugar Land, noted that 16 cities comprise Fort Bend County, making open communication and coordination essential to the functionality of all the cities. "(The cities) are all connected, and we all help each other out. (The mayors) all have each other's cell phone numbers so that we can call if there's ever a need. Fort Bend County is different from other counties because so many cities have to work together in the area, and we're always looking out for each other," Zimmerman said.

Former mayor of Simonton Lou Boudreaux added, "The cities next to Fulshear work together all the time. For instance, in the 2017 flood we thought our city hall was going to flood, so we moved our emergency operations to their city hall. Especially because we share a police force. What happens in one city directly impacts every other city."

Fulshear city officials are working closely with Katy ISD to ensure that the needs of all Katy ISD students are met as residential development in Fulshear and Katy continues to expand. Maria DiPetta, Communications Manager for Katy ISD said, "Katy ISD incorporates three cities which are Houston, Katy, and Fulshear. Currently Katy ISD is seeing an increased growth of families in the southwest quadrant and northwest quadrant of the district with the development of new communities and commercial locations. The district makes it a priority to collaboratively partner with city officials and engineers as well as developers when new communities are being built and those communities require the planning and development of a neighborhood school."

Cross Creek Ranch is one of the largest residential developments in Fulshear, and nearly half the students in the subdivision attend Katy ISD schools. Katy ISD's newest building, "Junior High #16," as it is currently designated, will open in the Cross Creek Ranch subdivision for the 2019-2020 school year.

"Growth in the southwest quadrant of the district continues on an annual basis. This junior high will provide relief to existing campuses that currently house students in surrounding attendance boundaries," said DiPetta.

Municipal services like EMS, the police department and the fire department are currently hiring new staff and officers to meet the needs of the increasing population in both Katy and Fulshear. It has proven a challenge to hire so many officers so quickly without compromising the high standards of the police force in the Katy-Fulshear area.

Captain Mike McCoy of the Fulshear Police Department said, "As the city of Fulshear continues to grow at a rapid pace and the population increases, we must strive to stay ahead of the curve when it comes (to) police personnel. As the nation struggles to hire police officers, the police department does as well. It takes about twenty-five applications to find one qualified applicant. We will never lower our hiring standards, which can make our job in recruiting officers much more difficult. We currently have four openings in our department and anticipate growth every year, which in turn will mean we will need to hire on a yearly basis to make sure we have adequate personnel to maintain the safety and welfare of our community."

Daunting as the tasks may be, Brawner remains confident that the expansion of Fulshear will continue without complications. "I've gotten to know Mayor Groff well since he's been in office, and I really believe he's the best man for the job. We're working together to make sure our area

continues to be the great place that it is," said Brawner.