Construction and development is definitely not a bad thing. Who knows where we would be today if somewhere along the line someone decided that enough was enough and our towns and cities didn't need to grow anymore.

But at what point do we stop constructing big buildings in order to preserve the small-town feel that is becoming increasingly rare these days?

Normal is a pretty cool place, and I'm sure many agree. There's a nice balance of a modern college town and a homey small town. Uptown includes a wonderful stretch of local shops and the Normal Theater, which gives us a taste of what towns were like when life was simpler. But why are we trying to change that?

In case you haven't noticed — and I don't see how you wouldn't — this area has been under construction for quite some time, and that's not exactly unique. Places are constantly growing and changing, but what gets me is how different Normal is becoming.

Every day when I go to park my car in the parking garage off of College Avenue, I'm greeted by the construction that will eventually become Uptown North, also known as more fancy student apartments. Let's set aside the fact that a year or two of rent for most off-campus housing at ISU now costs more than tuition.

Besides these new apartments and the recent construction of Uptown Station, which was definitely needed, the Town of Normal has approved the new construction for a seven-story Hyatt Place hotel, which according to Normal's Newsline newsletter includes "113 guest rooms, a six-story residential tower with luxury apartment units and a ground floor fine dining restaurant." Wait … what? Are we still in the land of cornfields?

When did Normal become a city that needs two expensive high-rise hotels within a block of each other? Why do we need a fine dining restaurant when there are wonderful local restaurants right there?

This upcoming restaurant isn't the only one that will be bringing competition to our one-of-a-kind local stores. Our Chill Out frozen yogurt shop is now in competition with franchises CherryBerry and, later this month, Cocomero. College students love their froyo, but having three frozen yogurt shops is a bit excessive.

Normal isn't the same as it was when I first came to ISU, and it would be naïve to think it will be the same if I visit after I graduate. I'm all for this area booming and being successful, but it makes me sad to think that all the small-town character and unique shops may be overpowered by big buildings and corporations. It will also be unfortunate if students are unable to have the ISU experience because they are unable to afford our luxurious and impractical housing.

While I can't predict how beneficial this construction will be to the area, I will be really surprised if I'm the only one who is sad watching Normal lose its charm and grow into a city that it's not.

Maybe I'm just old fashioned and hung up on the memories of sitting in The Cage II in the Bone Student Center or waiting for the train in the awfully small Amtrak station. But to me, Normal is a

cup of coffee from The Coffee Hound, a book from Babbitt’s Books, a record from North Street Records and a quiet patch of grass in Uptown Circle — not a four-course fine dining experience.

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