

Hello everyone, and welcome back to another episode of This Is Berthoud. I am Amie, your local librarian, and this is the show where I get to talk about all of the things that you are talking about, so that together we all have something new to think about. On this show I will give you advice about how to think about new information, and since I have a master's degree in information science, I'm qualified to do that. I'm not qualified to give medical or financial or legal advice, so go find a different professional for those needs.

What are we talking about today? This is actually a topic I've thought about covering for a while, because everyone keeps talking about it and debating it and rehashing it. I really wish that we could get together right now, because I think this topic would make for a really great group discussion, but until we can have gatherings again you'll just have to rely on me relaying everyone else's thoughts to you. Are you ready? Today we're going to answer definitively, once and for all, no more discussion needed, that all important question we've all debated before: is Berthoud a small town?

Some of you are perhaps feeling a bit apprehensive because this is a topic where the discussion doesn't always end well, but when have I ever let you down? Let's get right into it with a quick and easy analysis that will answer all of our questions.

Define small. Small is an indication of size, right, so what possible sizes might we be measuring to determine whether or not Berthoud is small? Maybe it's physical space. That's easy enough to look up—we could ask Alexa or Google or someone on the town staff, how many square miles is Berthoud? But wait, hold up—are we only including the actual town limits of Berthoud, or are we talking about pieces of property that might have a Berthoud address but not technically be located within Berthoud? How many square miles can you be and still be considered small?

Okay, we're in trouble right off the bat, so scratch that. Let's look at measuring the number of people in Berthoud instead. And phooey, we run into the same issue of town boundaries—let's just, for argument's sake, include anyone who can reasonably say that they live in Berthoud. What's the number that separates a small town from a large town? Is it 7,521? Is it 15,389? Is it 9,475? If it is 9,475, and we have exactly that many people living in Berthoud, and then there's a new baby born to a Berthoud family and the population goes up to 9,476, what happened? Did we just move from "small town" to "large town?" If the new baby's great-grandparent passes away, and the population drops back to 9,475, are we a small town again?

Okay, never mind, "small" is too complicated. Let's focus on "town," instead. That should be easier and more definitive for us. Unfortunately, that means that any one of you that lives outside of town limits, even if you're still within the library district, has just been eliminated from any consideration. So sorry. For everyone left, maybe we need to consider a new title. My younger brother lives in a small community in Michigan, and they saved themselves what appears to be a lot of trouble by calling their community a township. Maybe that's our solution. No one would have to debate whether or not we're small if we become the Township of Berthoud instead of the Town of Berthoud. Or maybe there's still some room for debate, so we can adopt the title that my older brother's community in New York uses, and we can become a hamlet. The Hamlet of Berthoud—no one could think we're too big to be considered small if we're called a hamlet, right?

Am I being facetious—yes, of course I am. (Side note: facetious is one of the few words in the English language with all the vowels in alphabetical order, which is why I prefer facetious over sarcastic, even

though they mean the same thing.) But back to the topic at hand, why am I being so facetious? Everyone that we speak with on this topic knows that the phrase “small town” is not referring to technical size or to legal description. That’s why I’m not going to try to tell you that there’s a specific number of square miles or a population figure or a legal description that will decide this issue.

A lot of you have told us that you can’t quite put into words what it is that you mean when you say “small town.” You try though, so sometimes we hear “small town feel” or “small town look” or “small town vibe.” The best, in our opinion, is “small town culture.”

Some of you may not like that because the word “culture” has taken on kind of a strange connotation. At this point, many people who hear the word “culture” think of something foreign or different or strange. If you’re an American and I say “Japanese culture” or “Nigerian culture” or “Iranian culture” you may not have a clear idea what I’m talking about, but you probably at least would know that it’s different from what we have here. It’s not just about geography either. If you love country music, “hip hop culture” might make you feel uncomfortable, and we know that “skater culture” and “gamer culture” can be very different from each other. The problem with thinking about culture this way is that it allows us to consider ourselves as the standard for “normal” and any other cultural experience as “other.” We don’t always notice our own culture because it feels like just the way it is, just the way things are. You’ve all heard the one about the three fish right, where the older fish swims by the two younger fish and asks, “How’s the water today guys?” and the younger fish look at each other and ask, “What’s water?” But you can easily shift the blinders off if you consider the way someone from another culture would view your daily life. Figure out what water you’re swimming in. Yes, there might be some stereotyping in this process, but understanding our stereotypes helps us see past them.

So I keep talking about culture—what is culture? Quite simply, it’s the way people interact with each other. That’s why it’s easy to view our local culture as normative, because we only really notice when people break the rules of how we relate to each other here. That’s why listening to opera through headphones in the comfort of your own home might not be considered counter-cultural, but blasting opera on a construction site might be. It’s not as much about your personal choices as it is about interactions between people.

There’s some good news here, but also some warnings for us. What’s good about it? The good news is we create culture, every day, through our choices about how to interact with each other and how to treat each other. We, in a very real sense, control the destiny of our culture. The other good thing is that culture is not static. It’s dynamic, it changes, and so if you’re not thrilled with the way things have gone or the direction we’re headed in, you can do something about it. We’re not locked in here, we have the choice about what kind of culture we want to create.

But yes, there’s a couple of warnings here too. It’s a lot easier to place blame—“we don’t live in a small town anymore because they let too many developers in, because they don’t support local businesses, because they don’t stop for pedestrians who want to cross the street, because they....” Fill in the blank. The reality is, if we all create culture, then we all are responsible for the culture we’ve created, and we can’t pretend we don’t play a part. It’s not about square miles or population size or other factors that we can’t control. It’s about us. It’s about how we treated the person in line at Ace or how we spoke to the other parents at the PTA meeting or about how we posted on the community Facebook page. “It’s not my fault, it’s them” doesn’t fly in this context.

Which brings us back around to where we started. Some of you are waiting for me to give you the definitive, once and for all answer to the question of whether are not we are still a small town, and now you're worried because I've taken the quantitative metrics like square miles and population size off the table. A few of you are probably expecting another "it depends." That's not what I'm going to give you today, though the answer is still conditional. Is Berthoud a small town? Sure, if we make it one.

That's it, folks. The answer truly is our choice. If you want to live in a small town, go make this one. How? Shovel your neighbor's snow. Learn the names of the people stocking your produce at Hays. Cheer on a t-ball team. Buy cookies from every Girl Scout on your street. Introduce yourself to your neighbors, and talk to them if you have something you need to work out together. Pick up a piece of trash and put it in the nearest garbage can, even if you didn't drop it. These things don't have to be profound or splashy to create the kind of culture that will give Berthoud that small-town feel we all want.

I know some of you sit in the cynical corner with me where we suspiciously watch and grumble about the optimists in our midst, and your response to all of this may be, "Great Amie, just great. You know we're never going to be able to get everyone on board with this 'be a good neighbor' plan. That's that, small-town culture is down the drain, out the door, never to return again." I will grant you, fellow cynics, that we will never get everyone on board. There will always be that grumpy person, or that persnickety neighbor, or that bully down the block.

Just make sure that person isn't you.

If you want to talk to us about anything you've heard today, or anything that strikes your fancy, you can get in touch with me, Amie, by emailing [podcast.bclld@gmail.com](mailto:podcast.bclld@gmail.com) or calling the library at 970-532-2757. We love working with this community to solve our problems together, so stay in touch, even though it's weird right now, and as always, I'm proud to say, this is small-town Berthoud.