

## Riceland community brings 4,500 homes to Mont Belvieu east of Houston

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*June 16, 2022*

Riceland, a proposed 1,500-acre master-planned community in Mont Belvieu, will break ground this month on one of the largest residential developments on the east side of Houston.

The \$400 million development, going up on family-owned farmland northeast of Interstate 10 and the Grand Parkway in Chambers County, aims to meet the growing demand for houses in a region with a tight supply of lots for new construction. The community, located 34 miles east of downtown Houston in an area where new large-scale residential developments are rare, is planned for 4,500 homes upon completion in the next 10 to 15 years.

Trez Capital, a real estate investment firm based in Vancouver, Canada, provided \$25 million in financing to family-owned developer Michael S. McGrath of McGrath Real Estate Partners for the initial phase of the development. The initial phase, planned on 150 acres on the northern portion of the tract, will deliver 417 lots to builders in the first or second quarter of 2023, according to Randy Hopper, vice president of acquisitions at McGrath Real Estate. The builders consist of David Weekley Homes, Highland Homes, Chesmar Homes and Perry Homes. Pricing has not been announced.

"We're pleased to provide financing for Riceland, a new master-planned destination that will attract families of all stages of life due to its natural setting, heritage, extensive amenities and its location just outside Houston," John Sullivan, vice president of Trez Capital in Dallas said in a statement. "The fact that Mont Belvieu is only 35 minutes away from downtown Houston and is along the recently opened Grand Parkway eastern sections makes it easily accessible to the northern Houston metro area and a desirable place to live."

An expanded town hall at the center of the development at FM 565 and Eagle Drive/FM 3360 will incorporate new commercial buildings with restaurants and retail to complement city hall and other municipal buildings, which are undergoing upgrades and redevelopment, according to Hopper. Mont Belvieu's town center, which sat on a salt dome, an underground cavern used to store petroleum products, relocated to its current site in the 1990s for safety reasons.

"We're trying to recreate the original center of town as you would define a small Texas town," Hopper said. "We're trying to have connectivity with walking and biking to the existing city amenities and the amenities that we deliver." Residents of Riceland will be able to connect with the downtown city center by bike or foot, Hopper said. The community is designed with 30 miles of hiking and biking trails connecting with the town center, a fully-stocked 10-acre lake with fish camp, resort-style pools and multiple parks.

The Riceland name is a nod to the heritage of the land, which has been used for agricultural purposes such as rice farming, cattle grazing, cotton, crawfish ponds, bees and hay production for more than a century, Hopper said. Land clearing has begun on the initial 150 acres with a focus on saving as many trees as possible to incorporate into the development.

"We're looking forward to working with the City of Mont Belvieu and Barbers Hill ISD to bring long-term value and a sense of close community to the city, the school district and the county," Hopper said.

It will be the largest project to date for McGrath Real Estate, which has acquired, developed, managed, and leased more than \$2.5 billion in real estate, including apartments and other sectors, across the United States over the last 36 years.

The development positions Mont Belvieu for future growth. The population has more than doubled in the last decade to more than 8,300, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Riceland will offer a large scale community with lots of varying sizes in the highly regarded Barbers Hill Independent School District.

"There's still market-wide a shortage of lots, and east Houston is not immune to that," said Lawrence Dean, senior vice president of advisory—Texas at Zonda, a housing information company.

The supply of developed lots which are ready to build upon is about 10 months, compared to a normal supply of 20 to 24 months, Dean said.

Riceland will be the largest community to be developed in the Mont Belvieu, Baytown, La Porte, Deer Park and Pasadena areas in recent years, Dean said.

"One thing that's exciting about Riceland, because they've been able to create a PUD (planned use development) with the city of Mont Belvieu, they'll be able to have a broader diversity in the types of homes, sizes of homes and lot sizes," Dean said.

That means the new homes will not be limited to 80-foot lots, as is common in much of Mont Belvieu, a move-up community in the region, Dean said.

"They'll be able to have small houses and big houses and in between houses," Dean said. "They'll be able to satisfy a broader array of demand."

*By Katherine Feser, Houston Chronicle*

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/business/real-estate/article/Riceland-community-brings-4-500-homes-to-Mont-17243886.php>