

## URBAN EDGE

# Master-planned community in northeast Houston puts affordable housing within reach

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JOHN BRANNEN



Last year, Nura Jemal, her husband and two sons lived in a two-bedroom apartment in southwest Houston. But with a third son on the way, they began to reconsider their living

arrangement.

“We were growing as a family, and we thought about moving into a house,” Jemal said.

“Instead of paying rent every month, we thought, ‘Why don’t we pay down on something that’s going to be ours?’ It makes more sense to put that money toward something we could give to our boys and have more space.”

The concept of purchasing a home, however, felt like a pipe dream.

*This post is part of a series highlighting the findings from the 2024 State of Housing in Harris County and Houston.*

The family was confronted with the same challenge faced by so many Houstonians: affordability. A key finding in the Kinder Institute’s [2024 State of Housing in Harris County and Houston report](#) was that “homeownership is increasingly out of reach to those who live here - — particularly for renters looking to become homeowners.”

“Homeownership seemed like a far-away dream because of the financial aspect,” she said.

As Jemal pondered her family’s next move, she suggested to her husband that they contact [Houston Habitat for Humanity](#). She had familiarity with the organization, as her parents were the recipients of a Houston Habitat home, where they still live.

“That’s where our journey started,” Jemal said. “Houston Habitat offers affordable housing within our budget, and enough space for us and the boys. So, we thought why not take that route?”

Jemal’s inquiry led her to discover Houston Habitat’s [Robins Landing](#), a 127-acre development in northeast Houston on Tidwell Road. The community includes 468 single-family houses. Of those, 100 are Houston Habitat homes for residents earning at or below 80% of the median income for the Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land metropolitan area, as determined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

CastleRock Communities and Chesmar Homes are responsible for building and selling the other 368 units. In an agreement with Houston Habitat, both developers will sell 300 units to homebuyers whose incomes are at or below 120% of the area's median income. Sixty-eight homes in Robins Landing will be sold at market price.

"The need for affordable housing is so dire," said Houston Habitat CEO Allison Hay. "We know we can't build our way out of this affordable housing crisis. But we can definitely role-model good behavior for others to be able to do it. Our mission is about the homebuyer. Our mindset is that if Habitat can do it, others can do it."

Houston Habitat bought the land that became Robins Landing in 2008. In the 77078 ZIP code, it sits between the Greens and Halls bayous, and was among the hardest-hit areas by Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

With \$4.8 million in Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone funding from the city of Houston, the power infrastructure in Robins Landing is buried underground in an effort to avoid outages during storms. To support flood mitigation, the homes are built at a heightened elevation and the neighborhood includes a 20-acre detention area.

"One of the pieces that we think is really important is we built our resiliency in," Hay said. "If Harvey hadn't hit, we would have been starting in 2018. Harvey hit, and we stopped everything to repair homes. That gave us time to look at what things can we put into our homes, into our products that will make them more resilient and resistant."

Jemal and her family moved into their home in Robins Landing on Dec. 30, 2023. After the derecho in May and Hurricane Beryl in July, Jemal said the investments in resilience proved to be worthwhile.

"With it being a new neighborhood, we just didn't know," Jemal said. "But from the looks of these last two weather events that we had, I'm pretty confident in the area's ability to withstand a storm. It held up pretty well."

In addition to more homes, Robins Landing will eventually include access to fresh food, child care, health care and job training. Amenities already in place include bike and hiking trails, half of what will eventually be a 12-acre park, a pavilion and a playground.

“I’m very excited about the upcoming amenities. It feels very convenient. I’ve been told we’re going to have a library, community center and a lot of retail businesses coming,” Jemal said.

“I’m very excited for all of that in the future, and it’s definitely a plus.”

## CONTRIBUTOR

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### ABOUT JOHN BRANNEN

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