

A Reprint from *Tierra Grande*

# The 'NEW BURBS

BY JENNIFER EVANS-COWLEY



**S**uburban neighborhoods developed today are different from those of the past in a number of ways. They offer higher densities, a mix of land uses, access to employment centers and a variety of cultural amenities. These changes have come about because homebuyers are demanding more than just a house: they want neighborhoods that meet their needs.

*The New Shape of Suburbia*, a book by the Urban Land Institute, highlights national trends in suburban residential development.

### Changing Suburban Homebuyer

American households have changed over the past 50 years. Families are smaller, and an increasing number of single people are purchasing homes. According to the 2000 Census, the average household size in Texas is 2.74 people. An Urban Land Institute study suggests that by 2010 traditional families will make up only 20 percent of suburban households. Today's suburbs are home to young professionals, families, middle-aged empty nesters and seniors of all races and ethnicities.

More and more minorities are purchasing homes in the suburbs. According to a report by Lend Lease Real Estate Investments, the majority of Asians, half of all Hispanics, and 39 percent of blacks live in the suburbs. International immigrants also are settling in suburban areas.

### Homes Getting Bigger

Despite declining household size, demand for larger houses has increased. Between 1987 and 2003, the median size of new homes increased from 1,755 square feet to 2,320 square feet, according to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB).

What do homebuyers do with this extra space? A growing number use spare bedrooms for a home office (and in some cases, two home offices). While a bedroom can work as an



office, some buyers want homes that have been designed with built-in office space. Builders are responding by adding built-in desks and office areas.

### Mixed Housing Types, Uses

The more diversified population mix in the suburbs has influenced the housing types buyers seek. Many empty nesters prefer to stay in their current neighborhoods but want to downsize. Developments that include smaller homes, particularly senior-friendly smaller homes, are popular. While suburbs of old consisted almost exclusively of single-family homes, modern suburbs are likely to include townhomes or patio homes as well.

**B**ecause it is not unusual for all the adults in the household to work, time is a valuable commodity. Homeowners are looking for low-maintenance homeownership and convenient shopping.

Circle T Ranch, a 430-acre community located between Texas Highways 114 and 170 in Westlake, will have a variety of housing types, including 288 luxury single-family lots and golf villas along with a business park, 128-acre upscale shopping center, golf course and green space. This mix of uses provides residents with convenient access to jobs and shopping.

Greatwood is a 2,050-acre mixed-use community located off Texas Highway 59 and the Grand Parkway in Sugar Land. The development includes single-family homes, townhomes and retail. Homebuyers have the option to move within the community rather than moving away as their housing needs change.

## In Search of Affordable Housing

**A**lthough homeownership rates have risen, those with low to moderate incomes continue to have difficulty finding affordable housing.

In Brownsville, an innovative demonstration program recently completed its first home. The Public-Private Partnership for Advancing Housing Technology (PATH) worked with the Community Development Corporation of Brownsville to build an energy-efficient home as part of a replacement housing project in a colonia.

The home has redesigned framing, which reduces the amount of lumber needed while still meeting the International Residential Code. Features include a steeper roof pitch, elimination of double studs at interior doors and low-E double glazing on windows, which reduces heat transfer. The result is a durable home with a lower purchase price and reduced utility bills. For more information on PATH's program, visit [www.pathnet.org](http://www.pathnet.org).

## Attractive Open-Space Amenities

Homebuyers are attracted to neighborhoods that offer a high quality of life. Communities that preserve scenic and recreational assets — parks, walking and biking trails, gardens, ponds, swimming pools and tennis courts, for example — have an edge over those that do not. Many homebuyers are willing to trade a large lot for more community space. Busy homeowners in many cases prefer homes without labor-intensive yards.

Suburban homebuyers also are looking for a “walkable” neighborhood. That is, they want to be able to walk to parks, schools, convenience stores and other places. They want sidewalks and low speed limits, which make walkers feel safer.

Newland Communities' 325-acre Grayson Lakes development is located south of Interstate 10 and west of State Highway 6 in Houston. When completed, the development will have 550 homes. The community features 30 acres of lakes with fountains, a lakefront recreation center, playground, tennis courts and picnic tables. A series of greenbelt trails and pedestrian walkways are being constructed to provide easy access throughout the development.

## Green Builders Pocket Greenbacks

**H**omes built to “green” building standards are growing in popularity. Homebuyers like purchasing energy efficient homes made with environmentally friendly building materials.

Emerald Homes of The Woodlands won the 2002 Green Building Award from NAHB. The firm applies the principles of resource-efficient design and construction in homes featuring:

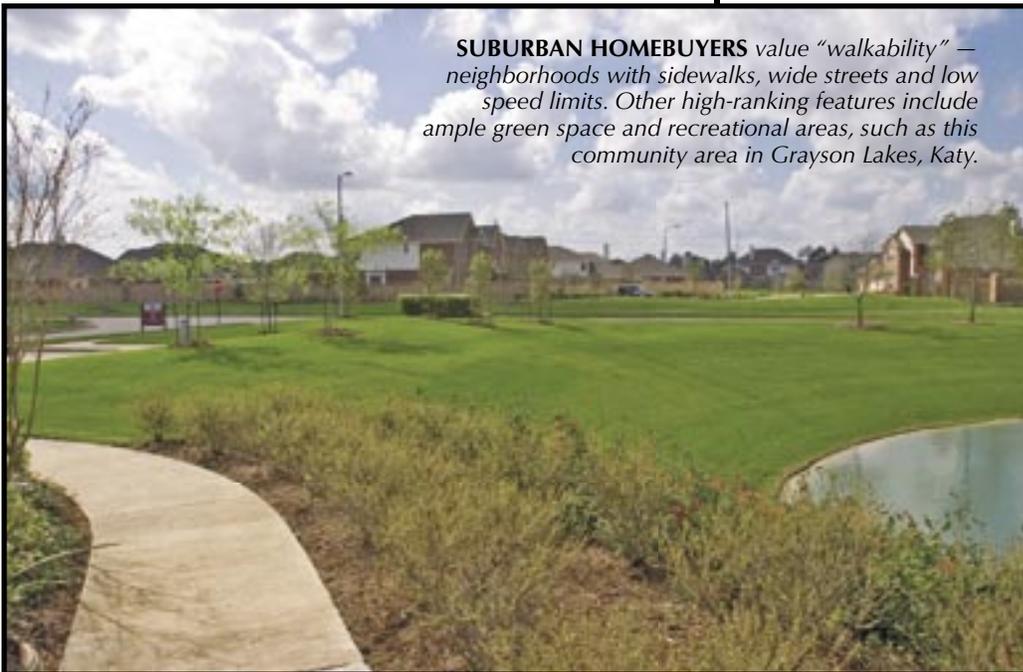
- energy efficiency packages;
- composite, recycled and low-maintenance building materials;
- low-flow plumbing fixtures and xeriscaping to reduce water use;
- low volatile organic compound finishes to reduce harmful chemical emissions; and

- whole-house air filtration systems that increase air quality and HVAC efficiency.

For more information about Emerald's green building program visit [www.emeraldhomes.com](http://www.emeraldhomes.com).

Texas homebuilders are responding to these changing national trends in suburban homebuying. Real estate professionals should be aware of neighborhoods in their local communities that might appeal particularly to the modern suburban homebuyer. For more information on national trends or to obtain a copy of *The New Shape of Suburbia*, visit [www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org). 🏡

**SUBURBAN HOMEBUYERS** value “walkability” — neighborhoods with sidewalks, wide streets and low speed limits. Other high-ranking features include ample green space and recreational areas, such as this community area in Grayson Lakes, Katy.



*Dr. Cowley (cowley.11@osu.edu) is an assistant professor with the Austin E. Knowlton School of Architecture at Ohio State University.*



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