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Residential Real Estate

Waller braces for massive growth as developers plan thousands of new homes



Image: Houston Business Journal

Waller Feed Store
FLORIAN MARTIN/HBJ



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Story Highlights

- The Waller area is poised for massive growth.
- Developers see Waller as the next Cypress due to its location and potential.
- There are 27 active and future residential communities in a 7-mile radius around Waller.

Many Houstonians probably know Waller for nothing but having the first Buc-ee's on the way to Austin along U.S. Highway 290.

And at first look, the community of around 4,000 people seems like just another sleepy Texas town, with old one-story houses amid large, grassy yards, some with chain-link fences. Most of the residential streets have no sidewalks.

In fact, those driving between Houston and Austin – or Prairie View or Brenham – are not seeing much of the town at all. It is centered not on Highway 290 but on Hempstead Road, or Business U.S. Highway 290, a bit further south.

Other than Buc-ee's, Waller has no major retail to speak of, just an Arlan's Market grocery store, a meat market, a hardware store and convenience stores.

But things are changing in Waller.

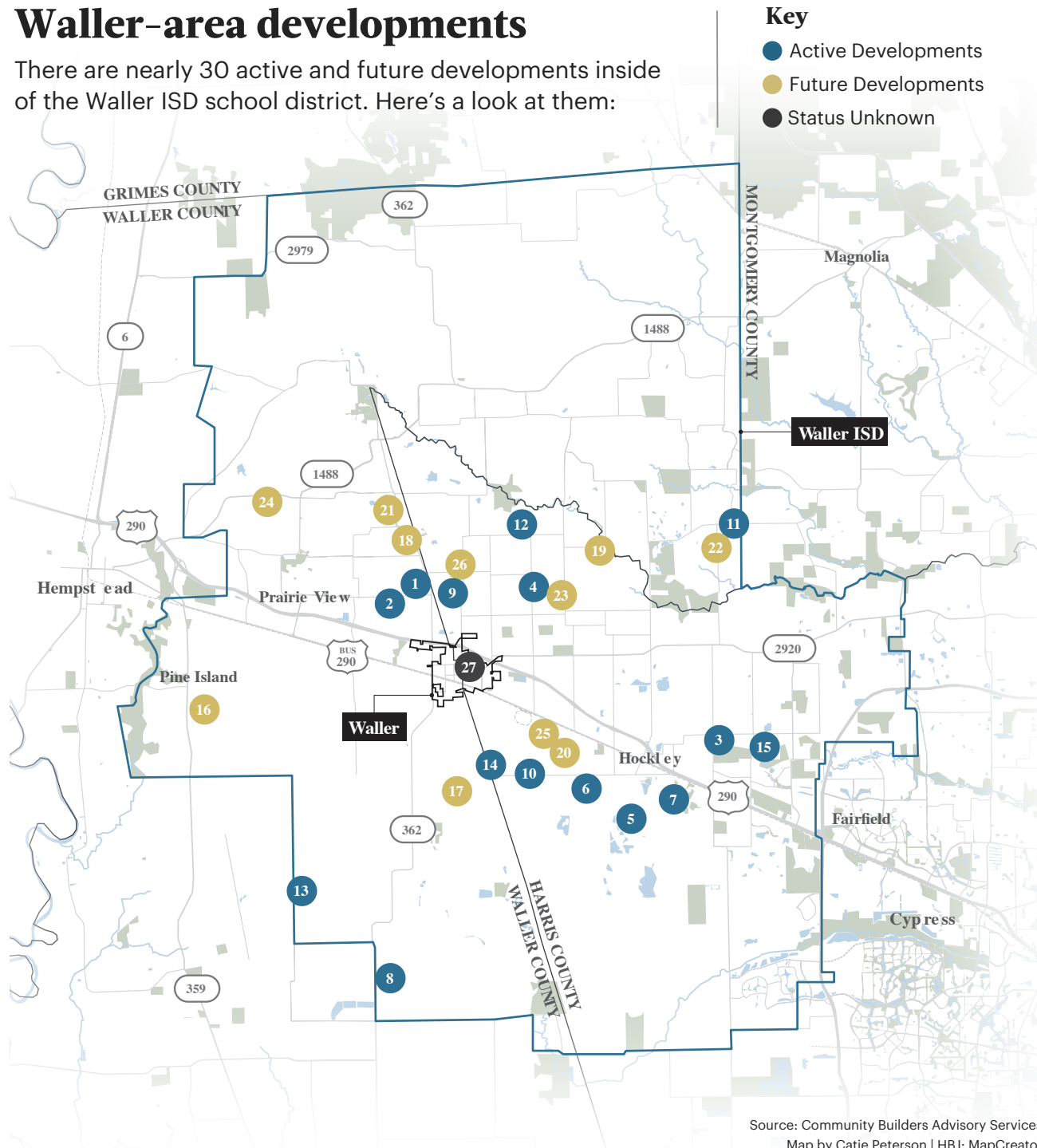
Inside its city limits, developers are working on three residential communities, all of which are already open north of Highway 290: [Long Lake Ltd.'s 270-acre Beacon Hill](#), Ashton Gray Development's 171-acre Oakwood Estates and [Bold Fox Development's 470-acre Attwater](#).

Together, they are projected to bring more than 2,620 new homes to the city, according to Zonda. Assuming an average of three people per household, that's nearly 8,000 new residents, which would roughly triple its current population.

And that's just inside the city. Many more residential communities are underway or planned across the Waller Independent School District, which encompasses 328 square miles from the Grand Parkway to the east, past Prairie View to the west and from the Katy Prairie in the south to close to Todd Mission in the north.

Waller-area developments

There are nearly 30 active and future developments inside of the Waller ISD school district. Here's a look at them:



In the path of growth

On a recent morning, the Houston Business Journal visited Waller City Hall to meet with the town's mayor, Danny Marburger. His family moved to Waller in the mid-1960s, he said.

After first being elected as mayor in 1974, Marburger has served on and off for 47 years. During that time, the town has grown from about 900 residents, but Marburger has no illusions as to why the growth is happening.

"We're in the location that grows," he said. "If we was a little town between El Paso and San Antone, it don't matter who goes there – it's not gonna grow."

Lawrence Dean, president and CEO of Houston-based Community Builders Advisory Services, agrees, saying growth is moving toward Waller from all directions – Cypress from the southeast, Katy from the south and Tomball and Magnolia from the northeast.

"Waller and Waller County are in a position where they just physically lie ... in the path of the line ... from three different growth nodes," he said.

Watershed project

While the population growth has been steady since Marburger's early days – and was helped by the construction of the new Highway 290 in the 1990s – many point to a more recent development as its watershed moment.

“When Wolff bought the Beacon Hill property ... I think that kind of really put the stamp of the future direction on our area,” said John Isom, economic development director for the city.

In 2018, [Houston-based Wolff Cos.](#), owned by David Wolff, purchased 521 acres along the northern side of Highway 290 west of FM 362 from a local family and later [added another unattached 43 acres](#). In 2020, it sold 271 acres to Long Lake Ltd. for the development of a residential community with 867 homes, and in 2022, Wolff Cos. [sold 78 acres to Houston-based Hines](#), which is marketing it for a build-to-suit industrial development up to 1.3 million square feet.

“Probably the first thing that made it happen was really the rebuilding of the freeway, because you had a 10-year period where that freeway, it was killing everything. It was more of a negative than a positive,” Wolff said. “It has made a tremendous difference, but it takes time for that to then cause people to rethink [this corridor](#), because for a while it was just dead, but we went in and bought this property before this rebuilding was finished, realizing if we waited ‘til it was finished, we wouldn't be able to take our time in doing the quality development.”

Wolff Cos. still owns 197 acres of the Beacon Hill property across Beacon Hill Boulevard from the 78 acres it sold to Hines. The vision is for that to be developed into a mixed-use with retail, office, multifamily, hotel and industrial facilities.

“We know, for example, that H-E-B has been looking at here. We've already met with H-E-B. They came to us,” Wolff said.

Since Beacon Hill, a growing number of residential developers have invested in the area.

According to Community Builders Advisory Services, there are 27 active and future residential communities in a 7-mile radius around Waller's center. They include [Johnson Development Corp.'s 1,622-acre Jubilee](#) and [Ember Real Estate Investment & Development's 1,730-acre Grand Prairie](#), both in the unincorporated Harris County community of Hockley off Highway 290, as well as the [528-acre Wildrye, which Hines started developing in 2023 before selling it to Starwood Land earlier this year.](#)

School district growth

The expected residential growth will be felt by the Waller Independent School District, which to date has just one high school, two junior high schools and five elementary schools.

On a percentage level, it's already one of the fastest growing school districts in the Houston area, with 5.1% enrollment growth between 2018 and 2023.

"We're expecting to see that number start to increase. But the good news is, we feel we're well-positioned to deal with that," Waller ISD Superintendent Kevin Moran said. "We're really prepped for the crowding all the way out to 2032. After that, we have to reassess."

A second high school, a third junior high school and two more elementary schools are slated to break ground this fall.

As for commercial development around Waller, so far it's mostly industrial.

Over the past few years, [Houston-based Pagewood has built, leased to Daikin and sold](#) a 500,840-square-foot distribution center off 290 and Field Store Road; the 81-acre Binford Business Park started development; and several companies moved to or expanded their footprints in Waller, including plastics recycler Natura PCR, industrial manufacturer Silverfox, Peerless Pump and Clover Tool Co.

Retail follows rooftops

But retail will inevitably follow the population growth, and Beacon Hill is not the only development where it is already planned. Two local real estate investors are working on the [development of a 350-acre town center, along](#)

with a 100-acre community college, Blinn College, which expects to open its first building in fall 2027.

Peter Terpstra and David Klein assembled the land on the northeastern corner of Highway 290 and FM 2920 between 2006 and 2008.

“We've been holding it up to now, waiting on the outlying development of residential development,” Terpstra told the Houston Business Journal last year. “And it's happening so rapid now that our town center is starting to attract users such as Blinn, and it will attract other large retail users.”

Even in the old city center, there is some change in the air. At 2614 Washington St., an old grain mill and feed store is being transformed into a food and drink hall with arcade and live music. Loren Solis, from Tomball, is close to opening Waller Feed Store.

“Now is the time,” he said about coming to Waller, “because of all the growth.”

Among the early visionaries for the Waller area is Alex Makris, a partner at Partners Real Estate. He has been active in the area since 2014, he said, and represented the families who sold their land to the developers of Beacon Hill and Attwater.

“We just started looking for where the next developments should go,” he said.

“Personally, I live in Cypress, at Grand Parkway and 290, and I figured the best

place to start was in my backyard.”

Not ready to sell

Many landowners are still not ready to sell, Makris said, despite rising land values, which range anywhere from \$55,000 to \$70,000, he estimated.

“Most of the landowners that are still left in Waller, there are a lot of original families that have owned their land for a very long time,” he said. “A lot of it is ancestral land, so they're not always quick to sell the land. And there are still a few families out there that are farming their land.”

In fact, Highway 290 around Waller is lined with cornfields, including the property of the future town center.

But those who know and study the area say it's just a question of time until Waller will be similar to another fast-growing community a few miles southeast.

“I think Waller is the next Cypress,” Wolff said. “It has all the same components. It has (Highway) 290, it has an excellent school district. It has the employment base. It has the land availability.”
