

A WALK IN THE PARK:
Dubai investor purchases former River Ridge Safari Park site/PAGE 2A



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Innovative housing model changing view of affordable communities

Guy Rankin, CEO and executive director of Harris County Housing Authority, says the long-time perception of affordable housing developments in the county is undergoing "an appealing image transformation like we have never before seen."

A leading reason, he says, is that public-private partnerships are making it possible for affordable housing communities to provide desirable homes and an enhanced quality of life for families with limited economic means.

"We are demonstrating that clean, safe and desirable affordable housing is indeed achievable with innovative thinking and joint efforts on both the public and private development side," he says.

Through public-private partnerships, HCHA has been able to develop affordable communities that are "comparable with even the nicest high-end properties," Rankin says.



Rankin

"These properties inevitably foster better citizenship and serve to bridge the quality-of-life gap traditionally found between high- and low-income communities," he adds.

Since it began using the public-private housing model three years ago, the HCHA has partnered with area developers to construct six affordable housing developments, addressing the needs of senior citizens and single families with children.

"The developments not only offer an appealing home but state-of-the-art amenities, which until now, were typically reserved for families in higher income brackets," he says.

Waterside Court was constructed on a 24-acre site in North Houston by HCHA and private developers in response to the county's demand for large-size rental units. The new affordable housing community is a gated neighborhood

with 118 four-bedroom single-family homes and full-service amenities.

Unlike standard single-family affordable-housing developments, which have one- and two-bedroom homes, Waterside Court is specifically tailored for larger families with children. All of the homes are now occupied.

"The community and local civic groups have enthusiastically embraced Waterside Court — along with local organizations, businesses and academic leaders," Rankin says.

He lists as the key benefits of public-private partnerships:

- Helpful tax incentives.
- Attractive communities available to mixed-income families.
- Civic support.
- An increased stock of affordable housing.

• A snowball effect.

"Such collaboration results in market-driven solutions and accelerated response at the local level," Rankin says.

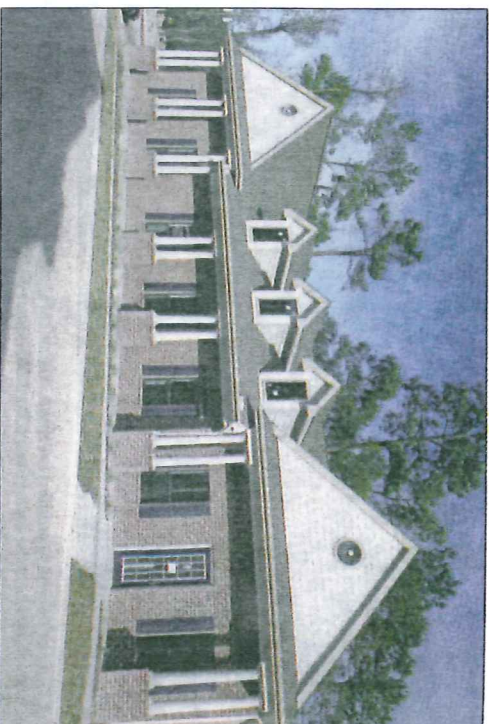
"Waterside Court, which is among the first to offer single-family homes in the region, is just one marquee example of how local governments and private developers can work together to create desirable affordable housing in Harris County."

The HCHA plans to debut another property known as Magnolia Estates in East Houston later this year. It will have 160 units.

Harris County is the third-largest county in the United States, Rankin notes.

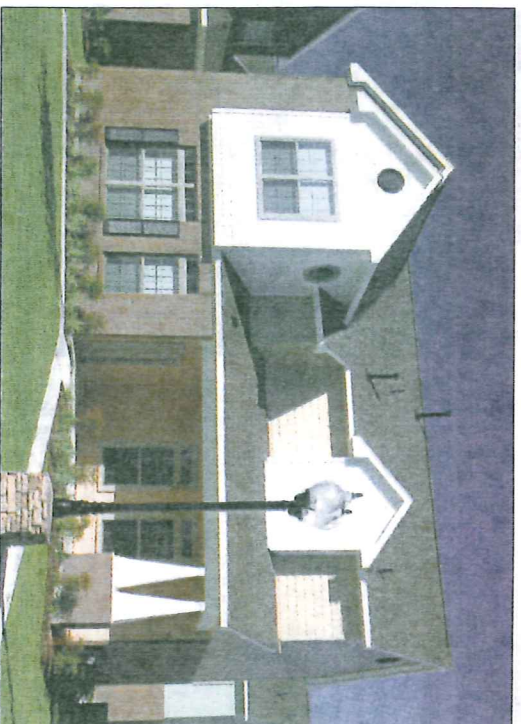
"The fact that the HCHA is a small housing authority with only about 20 on the staff has not hindered us from creating successful partnerships that have led to significant improvements in our community," he says. "The US Department of Housing and Urban Development has recognized the HCHA as the highest-performing housing authority, making it a model for innovative affordable housing development throughout the US." ■

Thana Qadumni



Construction is under way at Magnolia Estates in East Houston.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARRIS COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY



Waterside Court in North Houston includes apartments for larger families.