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Growing The Farm

The Farm represents the largest single facilities investment in the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's more than 90-year history, according to a Sept. 17 news release. (Rendering courtesy HLSR)

Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo officials invest in $300M agricultural facility

BY EMILY LARA

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is expanding its footprint roughly three miles south of its home at Reliant Park.

On Sept. 17, HLSR officials broke ground on a historic 1-million-square-foot agricultural complex known as The Farm, which stands for "Furthering our Agriculture and Ranching Mission."

The $300 million project aims to increase the organization's capacity to serve Texas youth, exhibitors and spectators year-round by bringing all horse shows, youth programming, agricultural education and community events under one roof.

Peter McStravick, HLSR'S chief strategic planning officer, emphasized that this expansion will supplement the Rodeo's existing operations by creating more space and more engagement opportunities. It will not, however, relocate the Rodeo or any of its major offerings from Reliant Park.

CONTINUED ON 14



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Market leaders & metro team



Hannah Rodriguez
General Manager
hrodriguez@
communityimpact.com



Cassandra Jenkins
Editor
cjenkins@
communityimpact.com



Jason Culpepper
Houston Market President
jculpepper@
communityimpact.com

Reporters
Ella Barnes
Rhett Brady
Bradley Dountz
Wesley Gardner
Cole Gee
Emily Lara
Rachel Leland
Emily Lincke
Pili Saravia
Michael Slaten
Kennedy Thomason
Catherine White
Kara Willis
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Nicolas Delgadillo
Ellen Jackson
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Managing Editor
James T. Norman

Product Manager
Martha Risinger



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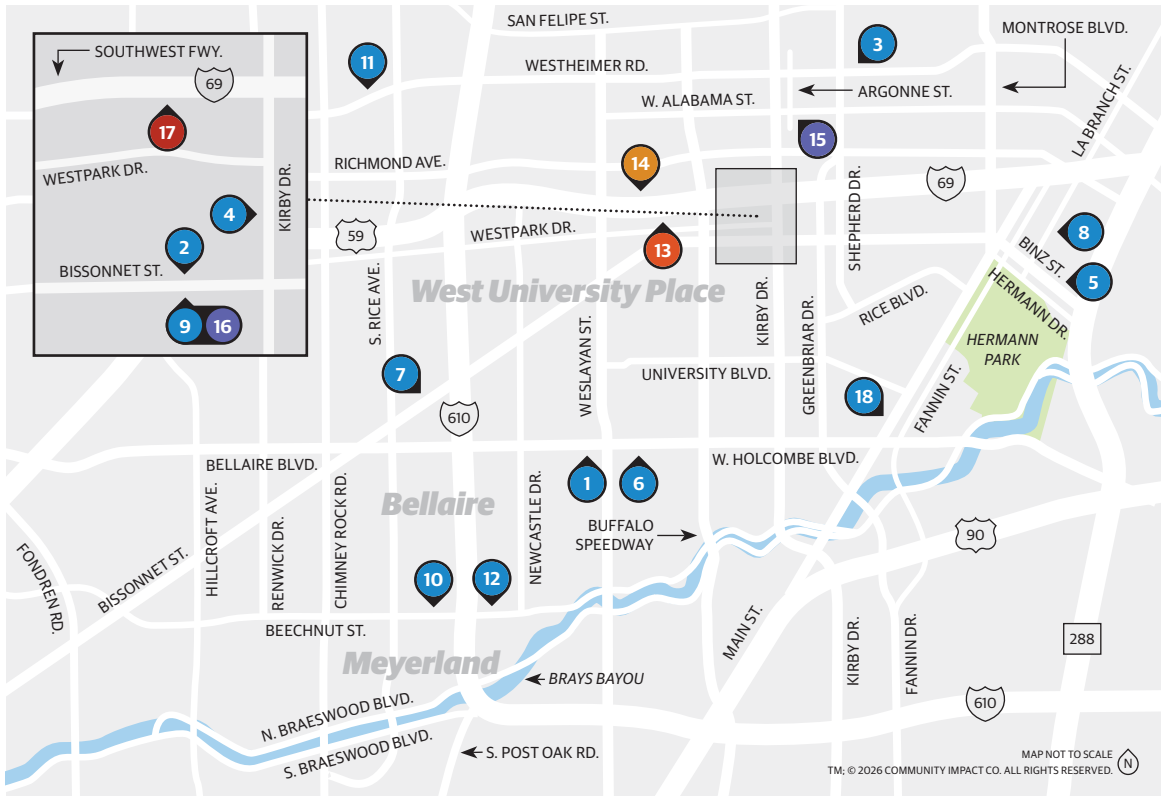
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Now open

1 Whisk Matcha Bar

The new sleek matcha bar specializes in premium matcha and other tea blends sourced directly from Japanese farmers. All drinks are hand-whisked to order.

- Opened in 2026
- 4001 Bellaire Blvd., Ste. G, Houston
- Instagram: whisk.matcha.bar

2 Leemoo Health Bar

Known for its colorful selection of smoothies and juices, this shop opened its second location this year. In addition to its signature beverages, the brand sells healthy food.

- Opened in 2026
- 2720 Bissonnet St., Ste. B, Houston
- www.leemoohealthbar.com

3 Z Cafe

Utilizing dream-like branding, this new coffeehouse offers beverages and light bites, including matcha lattes, hojicha, refreshers, chai, pastries and sandwiches. Its matcha is ceremonial grade and organic.

- Opened Aug. 15
- 2036 Westheimer Road, Houston
- www.zsociety.cafe

4 Otium

This new upscale lounge is inspired by 56 B.C. philosophical writings of ancient Rome through an old-world themed gathering space that showcases the finer side of Italian drinking culture.

- Opened Aug. 28
- 5020 Kirby Drive, Houston
- www.otiumhtx.com

5 Plaza Wellness Med Spa

The new wellness practice offers personalized treatments for clients looking to improve their health and boost confidence through services such as cosmetic injectables, facials and hormone therapy.

- Opened Sept. 14
- 1801 Binz St., Ste. 500, Houston
- www.myplazawellness.com

6 Curate

Local West U residents Allaire Clark and Emily Downs opened this new antique shop that offers a variety of vintage items such as tabletops, rugs, books, home decor and art.

- Opened Sept. 24
- 3859 Bellaire Blvd., Houston
- www.shopcurate.store

7 Connect to Functional Health

A new clinic started health assessments in September to help patients with treatments related to patients' gut, brain, thyroid, metabolism and inflammation issues.

- Opened Sept. 24
- 4900 Bissonnet St., Ste. 204, Bellaire
- www.connecttofh.com

8 The Branch

James Beard Award-nominated chef Chris Williams opened a new food and beverage destination inside the luxury apartment complex Forme. The location serves a wellness-inspired selection of meals.

- Opened Oct. 1
- 5501 La Branch St., Houston
- www.branchhtx.com

9 Flo Dentistry

Dr. Omar Amin opened a new location of its dentistry near West University Place. The practice provides general and preventive treatments such as routine cleanings and oral exams.

- Opened Oct. 5
- 2715 Bissonnet St., Ste. 180, Houston
- www.flodentistry.com

10 Pudgy's Fine Cookies

A local cookie shop serving large, thick gourmet cookies has opened a new location in Meyerland. Customers can order singles or packs of four to 12 of popular flavors such as chocolate chip, red velvet, matcha and Oreo.

- Opened Oct. 25
- 4798 Beechnut St., Houston
- www.pudgysfinecookies.com

11 Arsin Rug Gallery

A premier destination recognized for its selection of specialty rugs expanded this fall with a new 7,000-square-foot standalone venue.

- Opened Oct. 29
- 5346 Westheimer Road, Houston
- https://arsinruggallery.com

12 Ramen Tatsu-ya

Doors opened on Halloween Day to the new noodle shop in Bellaire. The Japanese soul food concept provides ramen bowls such as tonkotsu and dipping broth.

- Opened Oct. 31
- 4672 Beechnut St., Houston
- www.ramen-tatsuya.com

Shef

Functioning as a new online marketplace connecting people with local chefs who prepare and deliver fresh, homemade meals launched in Houston. The website offers users the choice of cuisine, preference and diet.

- Launched in October
- Greater Houston area
- www.shef.com

Coming soon

13 Blanc Nail Boutique

A luxury salon specializing in pedicure and manicure services will open a new location along Southwest Freeway. Clients will be able to choose from acrylic nails, gel extensions and more.

- Opening TBD
- 3233 Southwest Fwy., Houston
- Instagram: blancnailboutique.westu

What's next

PERMITS FILED WITH THE TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND REGULATION

14 Back Nine Golf

The popular indoor simulator franchise is planning another location inside Loop 610. The business operates as an indoor 24/7 golf simulator facility with 250 virtual golf courses.

- 3800 Southwest Fwy., Ste. 136, Houston
- www.thebackninegolf.com

In the news

15 Mia's Table

Following a temporary closure due to a fire, Mia's Upper Kirby began serving customers again in early October.

- Reopened in October
- 3131 Argonne St., Houston
- www.miastable.com

16 Creative Blinds

A Houston-area staple for window treatments and coverings celebrated its 50th anniversary in early October.

- 2715 Bissonnet St., Ste. 130, Houston
- www.creativeblinds.com

Closings

17 Noel Furniture

After a months-long liquidation sale, the iconic Upper Kirby showroom held its last day in October. Owner Tod Noel announced his retirement and sold the 50,000-square-foot showroom.

- Closed Oct. 25
- 2727 Southwest Fwy., Houston
- www.noelfurniture.com



COURTESY AYLA MEDITERRANEAN

18 Ayla Mediterranean Kitchen

Overseen by executive chef Ibrahim Alsharif, this new Mediterranean restaurant will offer classic ethnic dishes for breakfast, lunch and dinner inside the InterContinental Houston hotel near the Texas Medical Center. Examples of dishes include lamb chops, branzino, herbed labneh, scrambled eggs, challah bread, French toast and classic hummus.

- Opened Sept. 26
- 6750 Main St., Houston
- www.aylakitchen.com

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BY ARIEL WORTHY

Future of Flock cameras up in the air in Houston

Some cases of misuse of Flock cameras and their information have prompted privacy concerns from residents. In Texas, officers have been suspended and faced charges for misusing Flock for personal reasons.

However, Mayor John Whitmire's office said those aren't problems for Houston and that Flock cameras "have historically been a valuable crime-fighting tool," but they must be monitored, and those who misuse it held accountable.

In 2025, Hector Soliman-Valdez, a representative from Flock, told Houston City Council that the Houston Police Department recovered $7.4 million in stolen vehicles in Houston using Flock at the time.

HPD declined to provide comment, but in 2022, when proposing a contract with Flock, department leaders said it had success with the technology, noting specific cases of recovering stolen vehicles and a missing minor case where the technology helped track the vehicle she was in.

Whitmire said that "good leadership" is a solution to the concerns around Flock.

"They're a tool of law enforcement that protects the public, and we listen to the community," he said.

Flock statistics

Flock national data

1,500+
businesses protected daily using Flock

2,800+
crimes solved per day

15%
of reported crime in the US solved using Flock*

Flock in Houston

Used daily to help solve cases

Used by 40+ agencies
in Metro Houston

Recovered $7.4M
worth of stolen vehicles* by 2025

SOURCES: FLOCK SAFETY, HOUSTON CITY COUNCIL/COMMUNITY IMPACT

*AS OF AUGUST 2025

What is it?

Flock Safety cameras are automatic license plate readers, or ALPRs. According to the company, the cameras record vehicle sightings at a specific place and time and capture license plates and vehicle characteristics.

While security cameras and LPRs are not new, Flock's networked platform allows participating law enforcement agencies to search and share license plate data across jurisdictions. Traditional closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras, by contrast, often store footage locally or under the control of the camera's owner.

The technology company also keeps data for up to seven days unless an authorized investigation requires them to retain it longer. However, each authorized user, such as a police department, controls the data generated by its cameras, and agencies decide whether they want to share data and with whom, according to Flock Safety.

According to Houston's policy, HPD is allowed to share ALPR data with other law enforcement agencies. However, data collected by city-used cameras must be deleted after one year unless a division requests that it be kept longer for a specific case.

ALPRs vs. CCTVs

A comparison of automatic license plate readers and closed circuit television.

Feature	Traditional CCTV cameras	Flock license plate readers (ALPRs)
Primary purpose	Record activity in a particular area for monitoring or later investigation	Identify vehicles and help track their movements across camera locations
What they capture	Video footage that may show vehicles, people, actions and surrounding activity	License plate images, vehicle make, model, color and visible characteristics
How the information is searched	Investigators review recorded footage, search timestamps or use video analytics	Software makes vehicle information searchable by plate, location and time
Privacy concerns	Can record people going about their daily lives	Can create a searchable history of vehicle movements unrelated to criminal activity

SOURCES: DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, FLOCK SAFETY/ COMMUNITY IMPACT

Cost to the city

In 2022, Houston officials approved a $6.3 million contract with Flock Safety for 318 cameras to be placed in various locations throughout the city.

The five-year contract is set to expire in 2027. Since the initial contract, the city has also accepted grants from the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles over the last five years, with some of the funding going towards purchasing ALPRs, though Flock was not specifically named.

Although the city approved over 300 cameras, users have documented over 1,500 cameras within Houston's city limits, according to DeFlock, a website that lets people report camera locations.

District C council member Joe Panzarella said the discrepancy comes from more private citizens purchasing Flock cameras than city entities.

However, Gov. Greg Abbott ordered the state to halt funding in late August due to rising concerns, leaving Houston to assess how the state funding pause will affect the city.

Houston contributions to ALPRs

This is not a comprehensive list of funding sources. Grant funding was used for other resources, including ALPR technology.

Funding source	Amount
City of Houston	**$6.3M***
Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (2026)	$2.4M
Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (2024)	$1.5M
Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (2023)	$1.2M

SOURCES: TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES, CITY OF HOUSTON/ COMMUNITY IMPACT

*INDICATES FUNDING USED BY THE CITY

On the other hand, Panzarella said District C's office has not purchased Flock cameras and they are not actively considering purchasing any because District C residents have concern about data privacy and malpractice.

BY EMILY LARA

West U ordinance tackles e-bike rules, regulations

City officials are moving forward with an ordinance that would regulate the use and registration of certain electric micromobility devices in West University Place.

In a nutshell

West U officials determined that the draft ordinance will incorporate the following requirements:

- A minimum age of 16 years for electric micromobility device usage
- Required helmet use for users up to 18 years old
- Mandatory registration with the city to operate electric micromobility devices in West U

After some discussion, City Council removed a section related to Neighborhood Electric Vehicles, or NEVs, and golf carts from the draft, as well as content related to impoundment penalties and fees.

Requirements and restrictions for electric micromobility devices

The provisions of the article apply to electric bicycles, motor-assisted scooters and powered boards except where expressly stated.

Device Operation Requirements

- ✓ Devices cannot operate at more than 30 miles per hour
- ✓ Riders must follow traffic rules
- ✓ An operator cannot use a handheld electronic device while driving or wear earbuds or headphones
- ✓ Bicycle helmets are required for all operators under 18 years old

Location Restrictions

- ✓ Electric bicycles cannot be used on City sidewalks or within the grounds of a park

SOURCE: CITY OF WEST UNIVERSITY PLACE/COMMUNITY IMPACT

Next steps

If approved, the ordinance would take effect in 120 days to allow the city to execute an educational campaign and community outreach plan.

Bellaire unveils two new logo designs

Officials with the Bellaire Culture and Arts Board are reviewing a second round of community input on two new city logos.

The framework

The Arts Board collaborated with professional designers to translate the first round of feedback into a design brief outlining areas for exploration while still staying true to the initial concept. The process led to two options put forth Sept. 21.

Concept 1



Concept 2



SOURCE: BELLAIRE CULTURE AND ARTS BOARD/COMMUNITY IMPACT

Bellaire maintains prior year's tax rate

Bellaire City Council approved an ordinance adjusting the tax rate Oct. 5 after a public hearing.

The gist

Officials adopted a tax rate of **$0.4174** per $100 valuation, which will increase the total tax levy for the upcoming year by **2.86%**, Chief Financial Officer Terrence Beaman said in the presentation. This is the same property tax rate that was authorized for the prior year.

The original proposed tax rate was $0.4268 per $100 valuation, a 2.3% increase from FY 2025-26. However, after some push back, city officials opted to adopt the lower tax rate. Under this rate, the city will generate roughly **$25.6 million**.

What residents need to know

The average Bellaire homeowner is expected to pay **$3,789** in taxes under the adopted tax rate.

Bellaire property tax comparison

FY 2025-26 FY 2026-27

$0.4174 Tax rate (per $100 of value) in 2026-27

	FY 2025-26	FY 2026-27
Average homestead taxable value	$866.16K	$907.76K
Tax on average homestead	$3.62K	$3.79K
Total budgeted tax levy on all properties	$24.9M	$25.62M

SOURCE: CITY OF BELLAIRE/COMMUNITY IMPACT





BY EMILY LINCKE

Report issued on HISD takeover

A report released Oct. 8 from over a dozen stakeholders claims the state's takeover of Houston ISD has weakened the district.

The report, which was created by a 14-member commission of local politicians, educators and parents, comes as officials involved in the takeover cite improvements in a number of areas.

The Commission on the HISD Takeover—which has three co-chairs, including State Sen. Molly Cook, D-Houston—was formed in 2025 in response to the TEA's takeover of HISD.

Per the report, the Commission's key findings were that the state takeover:

- Diminished HISD's curriculum to a narrow focus on test preparation
- Dismantled student, teacher and family relationships due to new district policies
- Weakened teachers' professional autonomy
- Included financial waste

Legislative changes

The commission's report also called for legislative changes to the state takeover process. Suggestions include:

- Raising the threshold for the state to takeover Texas public school districts
- Stopping the practice of completely replacing an elected board of trustees with an appointed board of managers
- Setting more power limits on state-appointed superintendents and boards of managers
- Creating more ways to end state intervention instead of leaving the decision solely to the TEA commissioner

The 90th Texas Legislative Session convenes on Jan. 12, 2027 and runs for 140 days through May 31.

SOURCES: COMMISSION ON THE TAKEOVER OF HISD, TEXAS LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE LIBRARY/COMMUNITY IMPACT

The other side

Although the state takeover has been controversial, improvement in some measures has been reported by HISD. In June, when the Texas Education Agency release the spring 2026 State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, HISD saw year-over-year improvement in two-thirds of the exam categories, as previously reported.

In August, the district saw its third consecutive year of overall improvements in the TEA's accountability ratings for school district statewide.

"The transformation of HISD is about fundamentally changing what is possible for students. ...Our work is not finished, and we will continue raising expectations, strengthening instruction and preparing every student for the future," reads an Oct. 13 statement from the district.

However, at the same time, HISD has seen a decline in student enrollment since the state took over the district, while experienced educators are leaving the district at higher rates, per prior reporting.

HISD officials did not respond to a request for comment as of press time.

Keep in mind

Throughout the 2025-26 school year, the Commission collected feedback on the state takeover from teachers, students, parents and community members through in-person events, online surveys and four focus group discussions.

Members of the commission are also expecting to call for legislative changes to be made to the state takeover process during the next session.

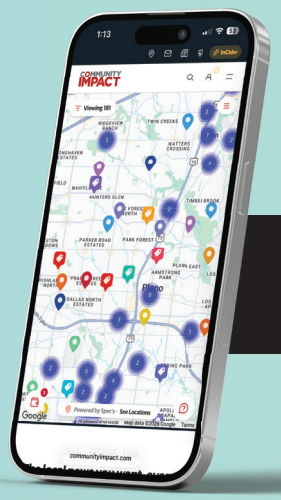
HISD will remain governed by officials appointed by the TEA until at least June 2027.

"The only path forward for our students, parents and teachers is to end this takeover and rewrite our laws, so no district suffers like this again."

MOLLY COOK, STATE SENATOR



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COMMUNITY IMPACT

BY EMILY LINCKE

HISD to potentially cut teachers amid budget trouble

Over one month into the 2026-27 school year, Houston ISD leaders are evaluating campuses to potentially reshuffle staff and funding to better match actual student enrollment.

What's happening?

HISD's board of managers unanimously approved the district's fiscal year 2026-27 budget June 25, using student enrollment projections.

Now that the school year has begun, principals of campuses with lower student enrollment than expected are being asked to cut staff, according to a news release. These employees may be reassigned to other campuses with higher enrollment.

Funding could also be reassigned between campuses based on how actual enrollment compares to projected enrollment, per the release.

By the numbers

HISD did not respond to an inquiry on how many employees are expected to be affected by the 2026-27 campus staffing needs evaluation. However, under the FY 2026-27 budget, HISD originally budgeted for 9,895 teaching positions, according to Aug. 14 data from the district.

As of that date, 9,478 teacher positions were filled, 323 teacher spots were vacant and 94 were in the process of being filled.

"We have to make responsible decisions now so the District remains financially strong and can continue investing in the things that have the greatest impact on student achievement."

MIKE MILES, HOUSTON ISD SUPERINTENDENT



Houston ISD staff numbers



SOURCES: HOUSTON ISD, TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY/COMMUNITY IMPACT

District approves lower tax rate

The average homeowner within Houston ISD's boundaries is expected to see a year-over-year drop in their annual tax bill from the district, according to HISD.

The gist

On Oct. 8, HISD's board of managers unanimously approved a fiscal year 2026-27 total tax rate of **$0.8421** per $100 valuation. The tax rate is $0.0362 lower than the current total tax rate of $0.8783 per $100 valuation.

The median value of a home within HISD's boundaries for FY 2026-27 is $299,166, according to HISD meeting documents. That means a taxpayer with this home value is expected to pay **$2,519** in annual taxes to HISD.

Although HISD's tax rate decreased, homeowners may still see an increase if the land or home value also increased.

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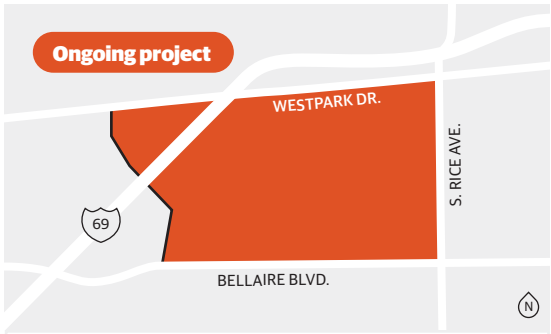
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BY CASSANDRA JENKINS

Bellaire, Gulfton areas see ongoing mobility improvements

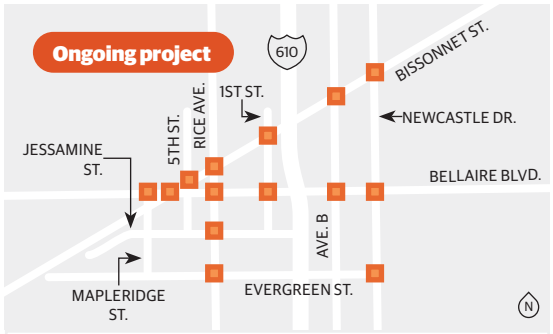


1 Curb2Curb

Project: The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County launched a new curb2curb service in October. The service is an on-demand, ADA-accessible neighborhood rideshare service that operates within specific designated zones.

Update: The 347 Gulfton On Demand Service Zone began operating daily from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. for residents in the Gulfton community.

- **Timeline:** Launched in October
- **Cost:** N/A
- **Funding source:** METRO

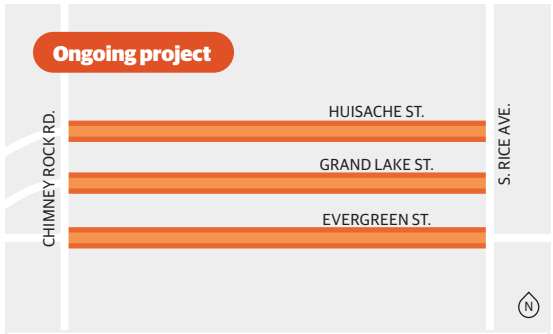


2 Traffic Signal Improvement Project

Project: The city of Bellaire project involves the installation and upgrade of traffic signals at selected intersections to improve safety and mobility along Bellaire Boulevard and Bissonnet Street.

Update: Installation of new pedestrian signal heads is complete citywide. As of Oct. 5, city officials said the city is preparing for installation of new push buttons at pedestrian crosswalks.

- **Timeline:** August-November
- **Cost:** $2.5 million
- **Funding sources:** H-GAC, Bellaire, TxDOT



3 Priority Waterline Replacement

Project: This project will replace aging and undersized water distribution mains in Bellaire to improve system reliability, water quality and fire flow capacity.

Update: As of mid-October, work is continuing down Evergreen Street, Grand Lake Street and Huisache Street. Residents can expect to see further work throughout the next few weeks.

- **Timeline:** July 2026-August 2027
- **Cost:** $5,000,000
- **Funding sources:** Bellaire, EPA





Volunteer Guide 2026

Learn more about volunteer and donation opportunities in Houston. For specific volunteer requirements, contact the organization directly. This list is not comprehensive.

Girls Empowerment Network

Girls Empowerment Network advances self-efficacy—or the belief in oneself to succeed—in girls in grades 3-12 through programs that foster confidence, coping skills, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity and changemaking.

- **Sample activities:** writing Relatable Role Model Letters, creating Bestie Bracelets or serving as a weekly in-school co-facilitator for the Radiant G Circle program
- **Donations accepted:** money, merchandise sales, car donations, stock donations
- No physical office location; donations are accepted online and programming is delivered on school campuses
- www.girlsempowermentnetwork.org

United Way of Greater Houston

The nonprofit organization creates opportunities for people to prosper through financial stability services coupled with youth development programs, healthcare and disaster recovery.

- **Sample activities:** plant a community garden, pack a meal, assist with a book drive, read to students, distribute pantry items, assist with senior programs, build toys for children and more
- **Donations accepted:** money, pledges, check, stocks, cryptocurrency
- 50 Waugh Drive, Houston
- www.unitedwayhouston.org

Workshop Houston

The nonprofit's mission is to provide creative, technical and educational resources to young people who are involved in the arts.

- **Sample activities:** working with students during after-school programs once per week during the semester
- **Donations accepted:** checks, in-kind materials
- 3615 Sauer St., Houston
- www.workshophouston.org

Be a Resource

The nonprofit works to provide resources to support at-risk children in Child Protective Services in Houston as well as children who are referred to the organization.

- **Sample activities:** helping with community events, creating hygiene packs and school bags, hosting donation drives, supporting seasonal initiatives throughout the year
- **Donations accepted:** money, hygiene products for babies and children, toys, books, diapers, clothing and shoes in all sizes, blankets, backpacks and school supplies
- 3572 E. T C Jester Blvd., Houston
- www.bearesourcehouston.org

Plant it Forward

The nonprofit works with more than 60 farmers with refugee backgrounds to support independent farmers in developing sustainable farming businesses that produce healthy food for the community.

- **Sample activities:** helping urban farmers weed, mulch and compost, working at a local farmers market, being



a veggie guide content creator
- **Donations accepted:** Venmo, PayPal, mail, stock
- **Fondren:** 10595 Fondren Road, Houston
- **Westbury:** 12581 Dunlap St., Houston
- www.plantitforward.farm

Houston Area Women's Center

This organization works to end domestic violence, sexual assault and sex trafficking. Services include crisis intervention, support programs and violence prevention initiatives.

- **Sample activities:** joining a committed volunteer fundraising committee; helping at events; offering holiday gift items to survivors and their families; assembling essential supply kits to aid women and children in the HAWC shelter.
- **Donations accepted:** monetary contributions, food items, brand new clothing for women, infants and toddlers; toys, diapers, hygiene products, beauty products, first aid items, luggage, detergent, smaller appliances, Houston Area Women's Center - In-Kind/ Non-Monetary Donations
- www.hawc.org

Second Servings of Houston

The nonprofit rescues surplus perishable food from retailers, distributors and manufacturers, and delivers it to local nonprofits.

- **Sample activities:** assisting drivers with food rescues, helping with PopUp Grocery Stores
- **Donations accepted:** surplus food, money
- 8825 Knight Road, Houston
- www.secondservingshouston.org

Coastal Prairie Conservancy

The organization is focused on conserving the Texas coastal prairie. The work by the organization addresses the need to preserve open spaces.

- **Sample activities:** volunteers can help with various activities throughout the week, as well as planting native plants and keeping up with the nursery
- **Donations accepted:** an online donation form can be found on the website, they also accept check or cash donations mailed to 5615 Kirby Drive, Houston, TX 77005
- www.coastalprairieconservancy.org

Houston Food Bank

The nonprofit collects, inspects, sorts, stores and distributes food to community partners, such as pantries, soup kitchens, schools and multi-service centers.

- **Sample activities:** sorting food, building home delivery kits, assisting with hot meals, distributing food and school supplies
- **Donations accepted:** money, food, vehicles, stocks
- **East branch:** 535 Portwall St., Houston
- **North branch:** 146 Knobcrest Drive, Houston
- www.houstonfoodbank.org/volunteernow



COURTESY BARC ANIMAL SHELTERS AND ADOPTIONS

BARC Houston

The animal shelter is dedicated to helping animals in Houston and provides sheltering and veterinary care for pets as well as adoption, fostering programs and live release initiatives.

- **Sample activities:** animal care, administrative help, facility beautification and construction, working at special events, fostering
- **Donations accepted:** money, personal checks, dog and cat food, toys, treats, leashes and collars, flea shampoo, towels, detergent, litter
- 3300 Carr St., Houston (BARC Adoption Center)
- www.houstontx.gov/barc/



Assessing the need

Before The Farm's inception, McStravick said HLSR leadership had known about "major condition issues" with Reliant Arena for some time that affected the enjoyability of activities hosted there.

This aligned with a facilities condition assessment conducted by the Harris County Sports & Convention Corporation in 2019, which concluded that the arena had exceeded its useful lifespan and should be demolished and replaced by 2026, McStravick explained.

Prior coverage from *Community Impact* in August 2025 also indicated that Reliant Park as a whole was in need of $2 billion worth of repairs, not including the $500 million already in deferred maintenance.

Therefore, when it came time to develop The Farm's layout, McStravick said that improving mobility, connectivity and quality of accommodations through more efficient site access points was the main priority for HLSR leadership.

"Right now at Reliant Park, it's very congested and crowded," McStravick said. "But [at The Farm], we're going to have so much more space and opportunity for people to really enjoy the moment versus having to fight traffic."

The four-quadrant complex is slated to feature enhanced agriculture and equine facilities, dedicated event spaces and interactive program areas, in addition to increased parking around its property along Hwy. 288.



RENDERING COURTESY HOUSTON LIVESTOCK SHOW AND RODEO

While the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's main attractions will remain at Reliant Park, a handful of competitions and events will transition to the new facility to optimize space and improve the guest experience.

What's happening at The Farm?

- All Horse Show Competitions
- Non-haltered cattle sales, including the All Breeds Bull and Commercial Female Sale and the Junior Commercial Steer Auction
- Various Livestock Shows, including the Junior Market Lamb; Goat, Poultry and Barrow Shows; Open and Junior Breeding Sheep; Junior Breeding Gilt Shows; and Rabbit, Llama and Alpaca and Poultry Shows

What's continuing at Reliant Park?

- Junior Market Auctions and Registered Cattle Sales
- Final Judging and Champion Drives
- Fan favorite traditions, such as the RodeoHouston Super Series Competition, Star Stage concerts, carnival, Champion Wine Garden, Mutton Bustin', pig races and more

SOURCE: HOUSTON LIVESTOCK SHOW AND RODEO/COMMUNITY IMPACT

The local impact

Part of the project's agricultural scope involves splitting 900,000 square feet of air-conditioned space between The Farm's livestock wing and equine wing, HLSR Chief Mission Officer Julie Bass said.

The climate-controlled space will include 800 horse stalls, 60 wash bays and more than 200 recreational vehicle hookups to streamline processes related to animal handling throughout the complex.

For Bass, however, the most exciting prospect presented by The Farm is the ability to use its amenities year-round for activities outside of competitions.

By eliminating the time constraints of the annual three-week-long Rodeo, Bass said that HLSR officials will have greater flexibility to create in-depth educational demonstrations for patrons that showcase the work associated with raising an animal.

What the experts say

Educationally, the HLSR distributes millions in scholarships, grants, auction premiums and certificates every year to hundreds of Texas youth, according to the nonprofit's website.

Bass told *Community Impact* that more than 30,000 students participate in the HLSR annually.

Among its current scholars, Texas 4-H scholars alone represent 52 counties, while scholars from the National FFA Organization hail from 57 different chapters.

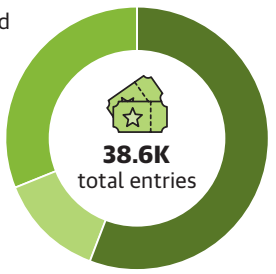
For the past decade, Vanessa Brossman-Collier has served as the advisor for the Bellaire FFA Chapter based at Bellaire High School.

She explained that her organization helps students turn agricultural education into a practical pathway for growth through instruction, hands-on experience, leadership and service.

She believes participation in the HLSR teaches disciplined preparation, consistency, teamwork and recordkeeping on a larger scale.

Breakdown of 2026 Rodeo season entries

The Livestock Show is comprised of both Junior Show entries and Open Show entries. In 2026, the organization recorded a total of 33,513 entries for the livestock sector.



- Junior show: **21,596**
- Open show: **11,917**
- Horse show: **5,087**

SOURCE: HOUSTON LIVESTOCK SHOW AND RODEO/COMMUNITY IMPACT

We want to be a destination for equine programming and competition throughout the state, and even beyond that where people think of this as a state-of-the-art facility where they can come and showcase their animal."

JULIE BASS, HOUSTON LIVESTOCK SHOW AND RODEO CHIEF MISSION OFFICER



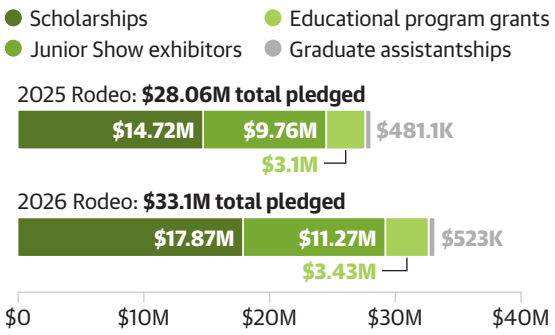
BY EMILY LARA

By the numbers

Brossman-Collier hopes The Farm strengthens the financial pipeline that supports FFA students and has a ripple effect on their ability to obtain scholarships in the future.

"By more students gaining meaningful agricultural experiences, more donors seeing their impact year-round and more FFA members receiving support for college, technical training, or agricultural careers," Brossman-Collier said.

HLSR Educational Commitment



SOURCE: HOUSTON LIVESTOCK SHOW AND RODEO/COMMUNITY IMPACT

The big picture

While it was not specified how many jobs The Farm will create for the city of Houston, upon completion, McStravick anticipates it will employ many people year-round to meet the needs of the vast facility.

The project will be privately funded, mostly by the HLSR. As such, it will place no financial burden on the wallets of Harris County taxpayers, according to The Farm's official website. This commitment by the organization highlights one of the most significant private investments in Texas agriculture to date, project officials said.

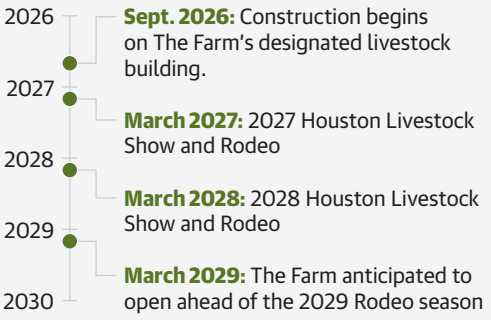
"[The Farm]'s a place where young people will learn, compete and see a future for themselves," Harris County Commissioner Rodney Ellis said in a statement. "I am proud to support this investment, and thankful that the Rodeo chose to build it [in Precinct One]."

Looking ahead

With construction of The Farm's livestock building now underway, HLSR officials estimate the entire project to be completed by March 2029 in time for the Rodeo.

McStravick said the next milestone in the project's timeline involves completing the design process for all four quadrants.

The Road to 2029



THE 21-DAY LIVESTOCK SHOW MAY BE SPLIT BETWEEN THE TWO CAMPUSES, INCLUDING RELIANT PARK AND THE FARM ALONG HWY. 288.

SOURCE: HOUSTON LIVESTOCK SHOW AND RODEO/COMMUNITY IMPACT



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Events

BY EMILY LARA

November

Houston Ballet Nutcracker Market

Locals can let the festivities ring with this curated, 280-merchant market dedicated to holiday shopping. Guests can browse apparel, accessories, toys, gourmet foods and more.

- Nov. 12-15, hours vary by date
- $20 and up (adults and children over 2); free (children ages 2 and under)
- Reliant Park, Houston

23rd Annual Run in the Park

Fitness lovers are invited to explore Hermann Park's shaded trails via its 5K and 10K routes and dedicated 1K kids' route. The event includes a post-run party.

- Nov. 14, 8-11 a.m.
- $45 (adult registration); $30 (child registration)
- 6100 Hermann Park Drive, Houston

The Sound of Compassion

Compassionate Houston will close its annual series with a live music and poetry program in West U. Featured performers include Apollo Chamber Players, tenor Kenneth Gayle and poet Outspoken Bean.

- Nov. 15, 3-4:30 p.m.
- Free (admission)
- 6104 Auden St., Houston

Nature Discovery Center's Twilight Gala

The 31st Annual Twilight Gala will follow the theme "Where Wonder Takes Wing" and present guests with an evening filled with dinner, dancing and entertainment.

- Nov. 20, 6-10 p.m.
- Tickets start at $250 (per person)
- 1811 Briar Oaks Lane, Houston

December

Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony

The city of West University Place is slated to host its annual Tree Lighting Ceremony for local families, residents and visitors.

- Dec. 7, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
- Free
- 6104 Auden St., West University Place

For more local events & information visit: **communityimpact.com/events**



COURTESY CHILDREN'S MUSEUM HOUSTON

Great Gobbler Fest

Join the Children's Museum Houston for its week-long series of Thanksgiving events and activities. Families can join activities hosted throughout the museum such as a Live Turkey Pardon, Turkey Leg Hats workshop, Pumpkin Catapults and a canned food drive.

- Nov. 23-29, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
- $21.95 (adults and children ages 1 and older); $19.95 (seniors ages 65 and older); free (children under 1)
- 1500 Binz St., Houston



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BY EMILY LARA

Magdalena's uses ingredients of 'love' to craft authentic cuisine

Every time Chef-owner Nicolas Nikic walks the food line inside his kitchen, there are four standards each dish must meet before it heads out onto the floor: ingredient quality, technique, presentation and taste.

Nikic's fifth standard, however, is not met by the food itself, but rather, the level of hospitality that comes with delivering it. That is why throughout lunch and dinner service, he, too, finds himself out on the floor, going table-by-table to shake hands with every one of his guests.

Because at Magdalena's Trattoria and Pizzeria, everyone is welcome, he said.

"My business motto is 'Everything done with love,'" Nikic emphasized. "Fresh ingredients, everything made from scratch, preparation, execution and, of course, talent all in place. But, ultimately, it's about love. You have to create everything with love."



Chef-owner Nicolas Nikic named Magdalena's Trattoria and Pizzeria after his mother.

PHOTOS EMILY LARA/COMMUNITY IMPACT

Zooming in

Since opening along the Buffalo Speedway in February 2024, Magdalena's has prided itself on capturing the essence of traditional Italian cuisine through a made-from-scratch, refined approach.

Nikic, whose culinary training spans both Europe and Houston's fine dining scene, said that his philosophy as owner is the culmination of everything he's learned after more than two decades. Not just about leadership and how to prepare food, but about how every role within a restaurant contributes and is crucial to its success.

His appreciation for food, though, began much earlier than that, when he was just a boy in Vienna, Austria, who looked forward to his mother's cooking, after whom his restaurant is named.

"I was really inspired by her beauty when it came to presentation and details. She loved cooking, and making everything fresh," Nikic said.

What's on the menu

Intentionally designed to stretch across all stages of a meal, Magdalena's menu is divided into Antipasti, Primi, Secondi, Contorni, Formaggio and dessert items. Primi dishes are inspired by the Italian tradition of a first course.

The restaurant's Secondi dishes represent the main course, with Nikic noting the Baked Quail with Polenta as a standout from this section.

The Antipasti, Contorni and Formaggio sections showcase appetizers, sides and artisanal Italian cheeses in that order.

What Magdalena's is most known for, however, is its specialization wood-fired pizzas.

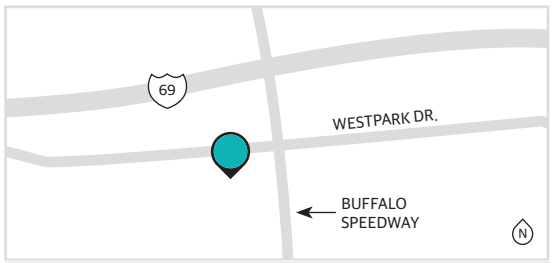
Nikic told *Community Impact* that the restaurant's crisp, thin-crusted pizzas are each hand-crafted and baked to order, utilizing flour and other ingredients imported directly from Italy.

Magdalena's also serves gluten-free and vegetarian options.

Staying local

While he acknowledged the long hours that come with preparing and cooking house-made food, he said that seeing his hard work culminate in the absolute satisfaction of his guests makes every single moment worthwhile.

"At the end of the day... it makes it all worth it. When I see my guests being happy and smiling, that's it. That's the biggest reward for me."



5110 Buffalo Speedway, Ste. B, Houston

www.magdalenasitalia.com



The Sweet Corn Ravioli with lobster, tomato and olive oil is a popular dish at Magdalena's.



The restaurant's sun-drenched outdoor patio area can be used for a range of occasions.

BY CASSANDRA JENKINS



Rice University's chapter of the nonprofit organization involves students helping to write love letters and create book bundles for delivery, as well as attending read-alouds and other events.

PHOTOS COURTESY BUTTERFLY BOOKS

Rice student creates nonprofit for young readers

Lucia Noto started the nonprofit Butterfly Books in middle school, inspired by her love of reading and her community.

"I've been an avid reader my whole life, and books have really shaped who I am as a person," she said. "During the pandemic, I decided to start a business on Amazon selling new and used books from my personal collection that I was finished with."

Noto said that once she started making a little bit of money from the business, she decided she wanted to use the profits to make a difference in her community. A deep dive on the Internet led her to the challenge of childhood literacy.

Why it matters

"I learned that over half of elementary school children nationwide don't read proficiently and that fact just compelled me to take action," she said. "I wanted to share the same joy, imagination and opportunities that reading has given me with children who may not have access to books otherwise."

After operating her online business for a while, Noto said she decided to create her first nonprofit organization to promote literacy for children with medical needs and kids in underserved communities. She called her organization Butterfly Books.

Butterfly Books was established as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2023, with headquarters in the DC area, where Noto grew up.

However, after she moved to Houston to attend Rice University last year to study biosciences, she decided to create a new student chapter at the private university.

The impact

Noto said Butterfly Books currently has four college chapters, including Rice University; the University of California, Berkeley; Washington University in St. Louis; and Brown University.

In Houston, she also partners with other community organizations such as the Rise School of Houston, which serves young children with developmental disabilities.

The nonprofit recently reached the milestone of impacting 49,500 kids, donating over 13,000 books, completing more than 200 read-alouds and installing eight little libraries.

"[Butterfly Books] is continuing to grow and expand in ways that I never could have initially imagined," Noto said. "I am super proud of the impact we are making and also really happy that there are so many young people getting involved and making a difference in their communities."



Lucia reads to children in underserved communities as part of the nonprofit read-aloud program and event.



The Rise School of Houston provides early education for children with and without developmental disabilities.

Read all about it

Butterfly Books promotes its goals through three main initiatives:

Read-Aloud events: Members of the nonprofit team go to schools, community centers and hospitals to read to children and do activities.

Book Bundles: Customized care packages that include a book, a letter and other trinkets for children who are receiving medical treatments.

Little Libraries: The nonprofit builds and installs little libraries in various communities.

"Butterflies symbolize hope, healing and transformation, which I think is important for all of the kids we work with—every kid deserves to have access to books and have that escape, comfort and hope."

LUCIA NOTO, FOUNDER



butterflybooksnonprofit@gmail.com

www.butterflybooks.org

BY HANNAH NORTON

4-day school weeks under review

In 2015, Texas legislators unanimously passed a law changing the amount of time students are required to spend in public schools from 180 days to 75,600 minutes per school year.

More than a decade later, some state senators are considering again mandating the number of days schools are open, citing concerns about student performance in districts that use condensed weekly schedules.

The 2015 policy shift was designed to give school districts more flexibility when extreme weather or other issues lead to school closures and lost instructional time, per legislative documents. Now, state officials and experts said the policy may be contributing to issues with students' academic achievement.

"At least 180 days is the minimum. We've had that before, but allowed flexibility and our days [in school] dropped."



SEN. DONNA CAMPBELL, R-NEW BRAUNFELS

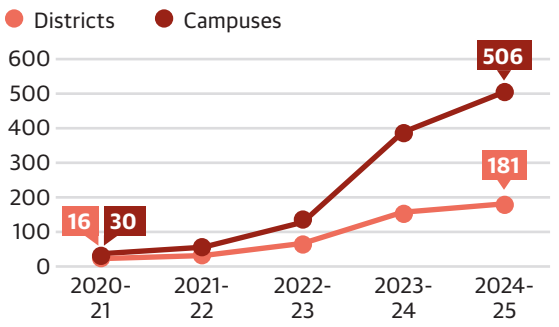
Zooming in

Under the 2015 instructional time law, two Texas school districts switched to four-day school weeks in the 2017-18 school year. By the 2022-23 school year, 62 districts were meeting for four days per week, which grew to 181 districts in the 2024-25 school year.

Generally, districts using four-day school weeks are closed on either Mondays or Fridays, with longer school days during the rest of the week to meet instructional time requirements. Even with longer days, students enrolled in districts with four-day schedules spend an average of 85 fewer hours in the classroom each year than students attending districts with traditional schedules, per a 2021 study on national trends.

A Texas Education Agency study found that during the 2022-23 school year, the percentage of students meeting grade-level expectations on the annual State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness was higher when at schools with five-day schedules than four-day schools.

Use of four-day school weeks by Texas districts



SOURCES: TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY AND UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTER/COMMUNITY IMPACT

Students meeting grade level on STAAR

Exam type	4-day week	5-day week
Math, grade 4	36%	44%
Math, grade 5	42%	47%
Math, grade 6	32%	40%
Reading-language arts, grade 6	45%	53%
Reading-language arts, grade 7	50%	56%
Reading-language arts, grade 8	54%	60%

SOURCE: TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY/COMMUNITY IMPACT

Put in perspective

When districts move to four-day weeks, they typically do so to solve operational challenges, such as staffing issues and budget pressures, experts said during an Oct. 6 legislative hearing.

In *Community Impact*'s coverage areas, Liberty Hill ISD aimed to recruit teachers by moving to four-day weeks in the 2025-26 school year. The TEA required the district to switch back to a traditional schedule for the 2026-27 school year.

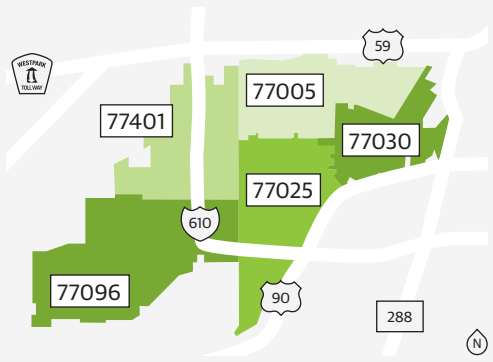
Some schools asked senators to allow districts to determine if a four-day week is right for them.

"I'm not asking you to lower the bar or to require every school district to do a four-day week," Woodson ISD Superintendent Casey Adams said. "I just ask you to ... give successful local communities the flexibility to decide how to get there."



Residential market data

The median price of homes sold in September saw nominal spikes in Braeswood, Meyerland and Bellaire. The median price of homes in the Texas Medical Center area decreased by $585,000.



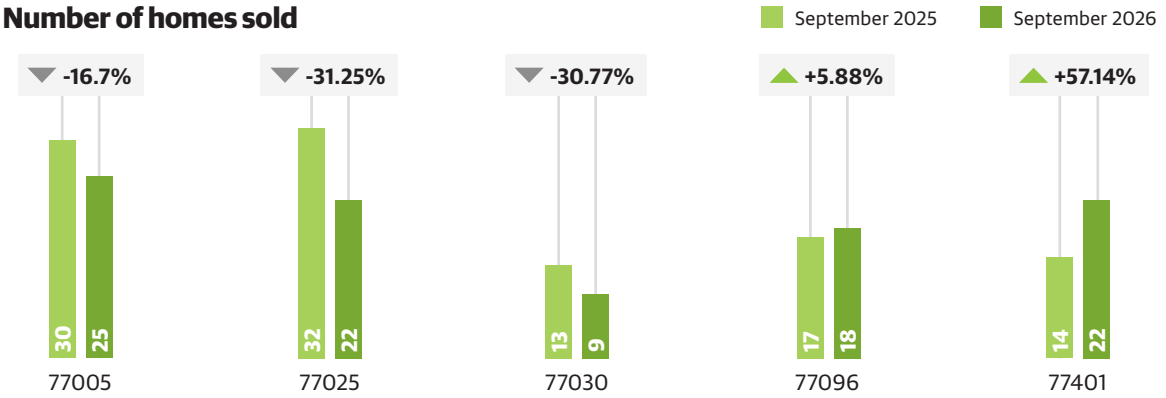
Homes sold by price point

September 2026	
$1 million+	46
$750,001-$1 million	6
$500,001-$750,000	15
$250,001-$500,000	18
<$250,000	11

MARKET DATA PROVIDED BY CB&A REALTORS
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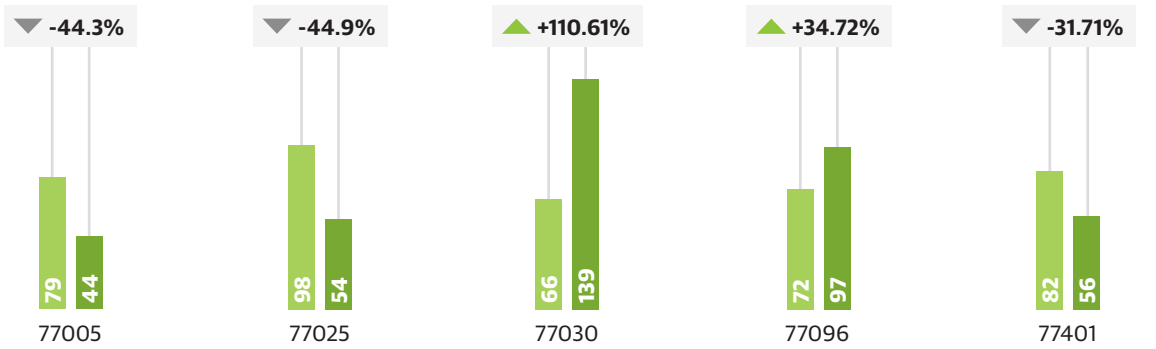
Number of homes sold



Median home sales price

September	2025		2026
77005	$1,665,000	▼	$1,562,200
77025	$492,500	▲	$565,000
77030	$785,000	▼	$200,000
77096	$438,000	▲	$470,000
77401	$889,250	▲	$1,205,000

Average days on market





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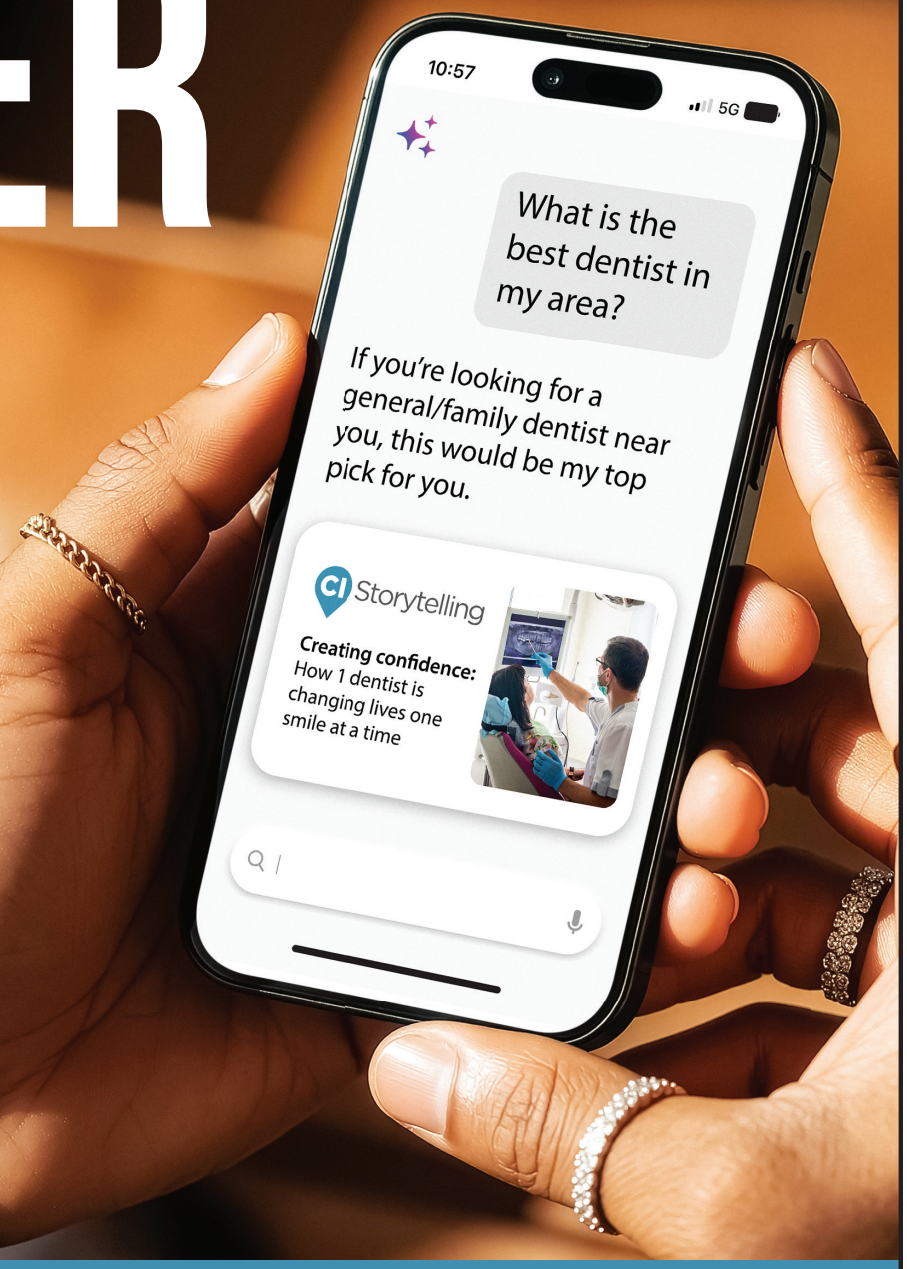
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