

North Texas builders scramble to tie up home lots in new projects

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Patrick T. Fallon/Staff Photographer

Earth movers recently hauled tons of dirt from the drained lake at the Viridian development under construction in North Arlington. Plans call for the 2,300-acre project, the largest new community under construction in North Texas, to have more than 3,500 houses when it's fully developed.

In the 1840s, pioneers parleyed with Indian tribes on the banks of the Trinity River's west fork. Today, huge excavators are carving out new [Arlington](#) residential neighborhoods just yards from where a frontier fort once stood. The 2,300-acre Viridian development is the biggest new community under construction in North Texas.



*Patrick T. Fallon/Staff Photographer
Bob Kembel, president of developer Huffines Communities*

And the huge project is already a big hit with homebuilders. “All 400 lots in the first phase are sold,” said Bob Kembel, president of developer Huffines Communities. “We have eight builders signed up. “And I have five more builders I don’t have lots for.”

While the local homebuilding business is in its worst downturn in decades, demand for new home lots in some areas is booming. “In North Texas there are plenty of lots, but many of them are not in the right locations,” said David Brown, who heads the Dallas office of housing analyst Metrostudy Inc. “In high-demand areas, prices for lots are really going up. “In some cases, the prices are back to where they were at the peak of the market.”

Even a few years ago when the Dallas-Fort Worth home market was booming, Huffines Communities’ Viridian development would have been a big deal. The land between North Collins Boulevard and U.S. Highway 360 has been one of the last large undeveloped properties in the mid-cities.



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It was one of the first areas settled in North Texas, when the Texas Militia built a wooden stockade in the area called Bird's Fort in 1841. Because much of the Viridian land was in a floodplain, many developers balked at the construction challenge because of the earth moving. "Over 1 million yards of dirt must be moved in the first phase," Kembel said. "It's usually over \$3 a yard to move that much dirt." Kembel said the first phase of the project, which will include a commercial "town center" district, entryways and park land, will be valued at about \$200 million when it's finished. "We'll start paving roads next month," he said. "We'll deliver the roughly 90 lots in the spring."

A bevy of builders

Builders including [Toll Brothers](#), Darling Homes, David Weekley Homes, Drees Homes, K. Hovnanian, McGuyer Homes, Cambridge Homes and CB Jeni Homes have already spoken for the first wave of lots. More than 3,500 houses are ultimately planned in the development. "We have 200 people on a potential buyers list with no marketing yet," Kembel said. While lot development has slowed to a trickle in the D-FW area during the last couple of years, Kembel says Viridian's timing is perfect.

'The best time'

"It's death to open a master-planned community at the top of the market," he said. "When we are at or near the bottom is the best time to open one of these." Developers and builders who want to put more home lots on the ground in areas where they are needed don't get much support from lenders. "It's very difficult to finance lot construction," Brown said. "The banks are not — on a broad basis — real interested in land development. "We are going to see some severe restrictions in supply of lots in some areas."