

# Developer bets that home buyers trade space for energy efficiency

Developer Randy Chastain calls it “biggie-sizing.” Americans’ propensity to choose ever-larger homes.

“We’ve had cheap materials, cheap land, cheap gas, and we’ve biggie-sized ourselves into oblivion,” Chastain said. “America has hit the wall with respect to proper balance.”

Chastain, based in Cool Springs, has spent 30 years in the homebuilding industry, and it wasn’t until two years ago that he began thinking about efficiency. That was when he started to draw up plans for his next project, Cambridge Park, on 19 acres off Barnes Road in Antioch.

“I realized, for most people, the market’s really beginning to change and outstrip their ability to afford a home,” he said.

Chastain’s solution was to build smaller and more efficiently. He registered the 77 homes in Cambridge Park in the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program, becoming one of the



first homebuilders in the state to do so.

LEED, which uses a point system to determine whether a project is environmentally sound, is quickly gaining favor locally. Most of the factors that will earn Chastain’s homes LEED certification — such as efficient windows and outdoor ventilation — should be familiar to anyone who’s followed commercial building. Throw in a few added touches aimed at the home, such as nontoxic pest control and radon mitigation, and you have a LEED-certified residence.

## Green practices add cost

Sounds simple. But will

home buyers bite?

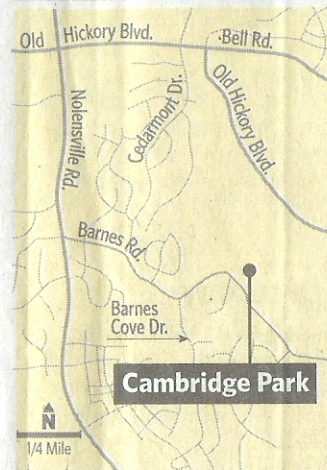
Chastain estimates good environmental practices will add \$8,000 to \$9,000 to the cost of a home in Cambridge Park. Most will be priced at \$250,000 to \$270,000, about par for Barnes Road these days.

But there’s a catch: Cambridge Park’s homes will be 1,300 square feet to 2,100 square feet, a good 10 percent smaller than a comparably priced house in the area.

Chastain believes buyers will trade extra space for lower operating costs. Others aren’t so sure.

A recent National Association of Home Builders survey found that most buyers would trade space for higher-quality products and amenities. But the typical buyer would spend only \$5,000 upfront, a markup of about 2 percent, to save on utility costs.

Having efficient windows, one of the most basic ways to reduce a home’s environmental impact, was no more important than having a din-



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ing room or a linen closet, the NAHB report found.

As gas prices rocket toward \$4 a gallon, though, more irate consumers may try to save on energy costs at home. Chastain is gambling that before long more buyers will turn their words into actions.

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