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GULFTON GREENS



LEFT
A mural in Houston's Gulfton neighborhood hints at the multiculturalism there.

A NEW PARK WILL OFFER ONE OF HOUSTON'S MOST DIVERSE COMMUNITIES A MUCH-NEEDED GATHERING PLACE.

Ask a person in El Salvador about Houston, and you may get a blank stare. Ask about Gulfton, and the person will know exactly where you're talking about. Gulfton is a neighborhood in an area known as Southwest Houston. For decades, it has served as a landing pad for new immigrants, who have been drawn to the community by affordable housing—sprawling, low-rise apartment complexes—and familial connections. Today, Gulfton is one of Houston's densest and most diverse neighborhoods. When Anthony Bourdain filmed an episode of *Parts Unknown* in Houston in 2016, focusing on the city's many immigrant communities, a good portion of the show was spent in Southwest Houston.

The community is as park-starved as they come. Despite being five times more dense than the average Houston community, Gulfton is served by a single 33-acre city park called Burnett Bayland Park. When it rains, the park turns “into a little

lake,” says Maria Hernandez, an organizer with Madres del Parque, or Mothers of the Park, which formed in 2016 to advocate for new and better parks in Gulfton.

Thanks to the sustained efforts of Madres del Parque, as well as Connect Community, a non-profit organization that works on behalf of Gulfton residents, the neighborhood will soon see several new or refurbished green spaces. The city, through the mayor's Complete Communities Initiative, has committed to improving access to green space, with the goal of ensuring that 100 percent of Gulfton residents are within a 10-minute walk of a park by 2023. (Currently, the figure is 40 percent.) This summer, 80 volunteers from the community, Madres del Parque, the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, and the Houston Parks Board came together to plant a new butterfly garden in a corner of Burnett Bayland Park. Also in the works are a new three-acre community park