

## ENTREPRENEUR WANTS TO BRING A TEXAS-THEMED AMUSEMENT PARK TO HOUSTON

Houston is currently the largest city in the U.S. that doesn't have an amusement park. Lizzy McGee is hoping to change that.

By Renee Yan,

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A rough draft of a TexasLand map shows what the theme park could have.  
Edward Dinzole/TexasLand

A businesswoman from Houston is hoping to gift her hometown with a Texas-themed amusement park that pays tribute to some of the Lone Star State's most famous and beloved cultural touchstones.

Lizzy McGee, a sixth-generation Texan and recent graduate of Stanford Graduate School of Business, recently spoke with Texas Monthly's Emily McCullar about her plans to create TexasLand, a theme park that speaks to the state's larger-than-life identity. "You could have the Towns of Texas Pavilion, and

have a Matt's El Rancho in the Austin part, and Lonesome Dove and the Stockyards in the Fort Worth pavilion, and a haunted house in the Marfa pavilion," McGee said in Texas Monthly, which likened the project to EPCOT in Disney World.

The **27-year-old entrepreneur** also spoke with Houston Public Media's Adam Zuvanich of a park laden with Texas history and symbols—a replica of the Alamo; attractions that pay homage to the state's vast landscape, NASA, rodeo arenas, and famous sites; and concession stands stocked with barbecue, Dr Pepper, tacos, and beer. TexasLand will be built out and developed in phases, McGee said. She estimated that the startup cost will be less than \$250 million.

McGee said the idea is what drove her to enroll in business school, and her resolve only grew during the COVID-19 pandemic when she was working remotely from her childhood home. As a former market analyst for Disney attractions, McGee was uniquely positioned to bring her vision to life.

"I realized that Texas broadly, and Houston specifically, has all the metrics that my team look[ed] for: a massive and burgeoning population, a business-friendly environment, and, from the content side of things, a unique identity," McGee said. Beyond that, she also saw what was missing. As Zuvanich reported in January, Houston is the biggest American city without an amusement park—a distinction it earned when Astroworld closed in 2005.

"That's one of the biggest mysteries, I think, in all of the industry," said Christopher Penney, a business professor at the University of North Texas who used to work in the amusement park industry, in January. "How you can have a market that's the largest metropolitan area in Texas, how you could have that and not have a single theme park? It's very surprising on many levels," he told Zuvanich.

It's an oversight that McGee hopes to correct. While she hasn't written off other metros like Austin, San Antonio, or Dallas-Fort Worth, she said her ideal location is the Greater Houston area.

McGee and her team launched a Kickstarter campaign earlier this year to raise money to commission a "demand study." In her pitch, McGee described the study as "an industry 'must-have' to prove what we already know—that Texas is an ideal market for a new park, with its size, expanding population, and unique cultural heritage." As of July 15, 2023, the Kickstarter has collected almost \$82,000.

What will set TexasLand apart from competitors McGee told reporters, will be its attractions and price point. "This is much more story-driven, and you don't even necessarily need rides," she said in Texas Monthly. If all goes according to plan, McGee predicted that the park could open in summer 2026.

To Houston Public Media, she also expressed her belief that TexasLand should be family-friendly and accessible to everyone. It will be a theme park "by Texans, for Texans that won't break the bank," McGee said. "We've got people of all different religions and sexualities and political opinions, but we still all come together in the seventh inning of an Astros game and sing 'Deep in the Heart of Texas.'"