

A ULI ADVISORY SERVICES PROGRAM REPORT

**The Strawn Site  
Charlotte Housing Authority  
Charlotte, North Carolina**

# The Strawn Site

## Charlotte Housing Authority

### Charlotte, North Carolina

Transforming a Project into a Neighborhood

June 2–4, 2008  
An Advisory Services Panel Report

ULI—the Urban Land Institute  
1025 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W.  
Suite 500 West  
Washington, D.C. 20007-5201

# About ULI—the Urban Land Institute

---

The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI is committed to

- Bringing together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs;
- Fostering collaboration within and beyond ULI's membership through mentoring, dialogue, and problem solving;
- Exploring issues of urbanization, conservation, regeneration, land use, capital formation, and sustainable development;
- Advancing land use policies and design practices that respect the uniqueness of both built and natural environments;
- Sharing knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, and electronic media; and

- Sustaining a diverse global network of local practice and advisory efforts that address current and future challenges.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 40,000 members worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. Professionals represented include developers, builders, property owners, investors, architects, public officials, planners, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academics, students, and librarians. ULI relies heavily on the experience of its members. It is through member involvement and information resources that ULI has been able to set standards of excellence in development practice. The Institute has long been recognized as one of the world's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

©2008 by ULI—the Urban Land Institute  
1025 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W.  
Suite 500 West  
Washington, D.C. 20007-5201

All rights reserved. Reproduction or use of the whole or any part of the contents without written permission of the copyright holder is prohibited.

# About ULI Advisory Services

---

The goal of ULI's Advisory Services Program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 400 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfields redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's Advisory Services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda for a one-and-a-half-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; interviews with community representatives; and time for formulating recommendations. On the final day, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. At the request of the sponsor, a written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, participants in ULI's panel assignments are able to

make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academics, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this Advisory Services panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

## ULI Program Staff

Marta V. Goldsmith  
Senior Vice President, Community/  
Education Provost

Thomas W. Eitler  
Vice President, Advisory Services

Matthew Rader  
Manager, Advisory Services

Caroline Dietrich  
Panel Associate, Advisory Services

Gwen McCall  
Administrative Manager, Education and Community

Nancy H. Stewart  
Director, Book Program

Laura Glassman, Publications Professionals LLC  
Manuscript Editor

Betsy VanBuskirk  
Creative Director

Martha Loomis  
Desktop Publishing Specialist/Graphics

Craig Chapman  
Director, Publishing Operations

# Acknowledgments

---

The panel wishes to thank the Charlotte Housing Authority (CHA) board and staff for inviting the ULI panel to comment on this important and timely issue. Specifically, the panel thanks Chairman David A. Jones and Board of Commissioners members Montega Everett, Chris E. Moffat, Rodney Moore, Dan Page, Sandra H. Peters, and Will Miller for their input and involvement in the panel process. The panel also extends thanks to Executive Director Charles Woodyard of the CHA.

The panel extends special thanks to Jeffrey Meadows who acted as its primary contact point with CHA and was responsible for organizing the CHA and stakeholder interviews. He was extremely knowledgeable and helpful both before and during the panel's visit.

# Contents

---

ULI Panel and Project Staff	6
Foreword: The Panel’s Assignment	7
Observations and Recommendations	9
Conclusion	13
About the Panel	14

# ULI Panel and Project Staff

---

## Panel Chair

Michael Banner  
President/Chief Executive Officer  
Los Angeles LDC, Inc.  
Los Angeles, California

## ULI Project Staff

Thomas Eitler  
Vice President, Advisory Services

## Panel

Gary Okerlund  
Principal  
Okerlund Associates  
Charlottesville, Virginia

Lyneir Richardson  
Vice President of Urban Land Development  
General Growth Properties, Inc.  
Chicago, Illinois

# Foreword: The Panel's Assignment

This Advisory Services panel was organized to provide strategic advice to the Charlotte Housing Authority (CHA) regarding the disposition and future use of the Strawn site on South Boulevard, just south of downtown Charlotte. The sponsor provided the panel with a series of questions; in essence, the CHA asked the panel to suggest appropriate future uses for the subject site, given the site constraints, the neighborhood opportunities, and the CHA's dual mission of maintaining fiscal sustainability and providing safe and affordable housing to various members of the city's population.

The panel first studied and discussed the information provided by the sponsor in the briefing book. Following a sponsor briefing, the panel toured the project area and conducted a series of stakeholder interviews. The panelists then met to debate the issues and frame recommendations. The panel reported to the sponsor the next morning, followed by an extensive question-and-answer period.

## The Site and the Neighborhood

The Strawn site consists of 16.67 acres on the southeast side of South Boulevard in the Dilworth community. It contains three basic land uses: a

190-unit multifamily structure that houses seniors, 121 cottage units that contain housing for both able-bodied seniors and seniors with disabilities, and the offices for the Charlotte Housing Authority. The site abuts South Boulevard, a corridor currently experiencing huge growth and revitalization because of its proximity to downtown Charlotte and the recently opened light-rail line (the LYNX system). Two LYNX stations are located within walking distance of the Strawn site. The Bland Street Station is located only 1,000 linear feet from the closest residential structure on the Strawn site.

The site is located in the northeast portions of the Dilworth neighborhood. The historic Dilworth neighborhood is one of the most prominent and successful housing revitalization areas in the city. Dilworth has a variety of older homes in traditional colonial and bungalow-style architecture. A classic gentrification area, Dilworth boasts some of the city's best schools, enlightened neighborhood involvement, and intense curiosity regarding not only the Strawn site but also the other redevelopment issues confronting the South Street area. For the last 20 years, Dilworth has been one of the most popular locations for young profession-



Location map.



als and families; it has excellent access to services and downtown.

## The Questions

The ULI panel was provided with four questions that acted as the scope for its assignment. The focus of the four questions was

- Value;
- Intensity and density;
- Disposition approach; and
- The tower.

These questions were interrelated and the panel chose to answer them with a series of land use and policy recommendations, taking the perspective that CHA must ask itself the following question: What is the development objective for the Strawn site?

## Summary of Recommendations

The panel recommends developing the Strawn site into an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable mixed-income community. All development must address and meet the needs

of the current residents, the adjacent community, and the long-term goals of the CHA. To accomplish this goal, the panel recommends that the CHA take the following steps:

- Divide the site into zones for evaluation, planning, and decisions on a variety of financial, land use, and public responsibility issues.
- Retain portions of the site to ensure that the CHA meets the broader social goals of its charter.
- Select and engage an experienced development adviser to assist staff in (a) overseeing the design and development program, (b) overseeing the selection of development team for each zone, and (c) managing the disposition of each zone to achieve the CHA's development objective.

# Observations and Recommendations

---

The CHA must begin to think about the Strawn site as a neighborhood, not as a project. For too long, the Strawn site has been seen as a blemish on what is otherwise a classic success story for neighborhood revitalization. The site design is inward looking and contributes to the sense of isolation from both Dilworth and the South Boulevard corridor.

## Guiding Principles

Three guiding principles helped the panel's thought process as the members debated alternative land uses. Each principle played off the other as a new paradigm for the site emerged.

### Connectivity

Pedestrian connectivity is important to the successful redevelopment of the site. The perimeter sidewalks should provide excellent access to the commercial corridor of South Boulevard and access to the light-rail system for residents of both the site and the greater Dilworth neighborhood. Furthermore, the pedestrian systems through the internal part of the site should be used as a vehicle to open the site to the greater public and to better integrate the site socially and economically to Dilworth.

To a lesser extent, good vehicular access should be considered, with a focus on providing cross movement from Cleveland Street to Caldwell Street.

### Mixed Income

A CHA goal should be to have a well-stratified mixed-income neighborhood, with different income-level housing opportunities in proximity to each other. The panel was amazed at the unique position that the Strawn site occupies. Compared to other locations in Charlotte and other cities with similar public housing, the Strawn site has characteristics that are at once beneficial and laudable.

The site is located between two successful, high-value areas, Dilworth and the South Street corridor; its residents have access to some of the best public schools in the city; it has good access to public transportation; it has favorable topography; it is a relatively large assemblage of parcels located close to the downtown business district. Usually public housing sites would be lucky to have one or two of these attributes. It is no wonder that the development community sees this site as an opportunity.

With the site's favorable conditions, redeveloping with a variety of unit styles, ownership types, and income levels will be a valuable experiment that could provide a model for other places in the city and around the country for successful mixed-income neighborhoods. For that reason, the panel felt that CHA must retain some of the site to be part of this potential success story.

### Good Design

The panel noted that an important part of any successful revitalization project is good design. Everything from building locations, landscape, signage, and hardscape to architecture, street furniture, and wayfinding will affect the feel, convenience, and perceived safety of the site. These characteristics in turn will determine (a) whether residents (both subsidized and market rate) enjoy their living experience and (b) whether residents from the adjacent neighborhoods feel comfortable entering the site.

One of the panel's key recommendations is redevelopment of a portion of the site into a "neighborhood green" extending from South Boulevard to Templeton Avenue in an L-shaped pattern. This green will act as the central organizing feature for the entire site, providing (a) pedestrian connections through the site from Dilworth to South Boulevard and the transit stops, (b) recreational space for residents and neighbors, and (c) a frame

for the various zones mentioned in the panel's recommendations. The panel believes that a well-designed neighborhood green can provide a physical as well as a social and psychological common space for interaction among the mixed-income groups.

## Issues and Solutions

The questions provided to the panel were inter-related, focusing on the future use of the property and on how the CHA could best leverage the property to meet its overall organizational goals. Each of the following sections addresses the panel's observations and recommendations in light of the CHA's questions.

### Value

In determining the highest and best use for the 16.67-acre site, how can the value of the site be maximized? If CHA can identify appropriate replacement housing sites for current residents, what is the value of the site without affordable housing? If replacement sites cannot be acquired cost-effectively and within board policy, what is the appropriate mix of affordable to market units?

*Panel's Observations:* The panel felt that the greater goal of providing the city's less fortunate citizens with good housing was the primary purpose of the CHA. As noted previously, the site has unique attributes that would make most public housing agencies envious. The panel believes the appropriate application of land uses, types, and densities, with a mixed format of ownership (some being retained by the CHA) is the best "real" value for the city and the CHA.

An appropriate redevelopment scheme, including some increased density and careful coordination of existing residents, should allow the CHA to provide housing on site.

*Panel's Recommendation:* Develop a mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood using the zone approach as outlined below.

### Intensity and Density

The site has two transportation-oriented development zoning designations with an existing 190-unit tower of housing for seniors and 121 units of

housing for seniors and persons with disabilities in scattered cottages in pinwheels. How can the redevelopment of the site strike a balance between mixed-income and mixed-use development? What is the most appropriate mix of uses and housing types? What is the best design approach in relation to adjacent properties, particularly on the edges of the site?

*Panel's Observations:* A variety of unit types can be used as an appropriate transition from the avenue area to the more intense uses along South Boulevard. The area with the existing tower should be considered for additional multifamily affordable housing uses. The edges adjacent to Euclid Avenue should be developed at a lower density and use similar architecture. Subsidized units should be intermingled with for-sale and for-rent market-rate units.

*Panel's Recommendations:* Develop a mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood using the zone approach outlined below. Introduce "family" housing options into the new mixed-income neighborhood.

### Disposition Approach

What is the best approach for selling the parcel to ensure the desired mix of uses and mix of affordability and to maximize return to the owner? Should the city sell the site as one parcel, master plan the site and sell it in pieces, procure a master developer to develop the overall site, joint venture in phases, or adopt another approach?

The panel recommends the following:

- Develop a mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood using the zone approach outlined below.
- CHA should select and engage an experienced development adviser to (a) oversee the design and development program, (b) oversee the selection of a development team for each zone, and (c) manage the disposition of each zone to achieve the CHA's development objective.

### The Tower

Should the tower stay, or should it go? How does the tower relate to the highest and best use for the site? If it stays, is housing for seniors the best use for the structure? How should the parking for

the structure be addressed? What direction should the tower feature as its primary address?

*Panel's Observations:* The existing tower should be retained and renovated. The CHA should analyze the cost of combining single-room units into a series of one- and two-bedroom units and weigh the resulting loss of units against the availability of additional units proposed in the zone system.

*Panel's Recommendations:* Develop a mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood using the zone approach outlined below. Retain and remodel the existing tower (pending the outcome of the cost/benefit study), and build one or more new affordable towers. To the extent possible, retain the component for seniors as a separate structure.

## Planning and Design

The panel divided the site into five separate zones with specific ranges of land use, unit types, and density. The panel believes this approach makes the planning and consideration of the entire 16.67 acres more digestible and allows a phasing technique that could keep existing residents on the site, rather than temporarily relocating them to an area outside their neighborhood.

While the one-and-a-half-day advisory panel process is intense and thorough in its deliberations, specific site issues and local concerns may exist that have not been considered while the panel was on site. The panel has suggested certain conceptual unit types and density ranges for each zone. It is possible that the final specifics can only be determined after a more thorough site analysis is conducted by the CHA.

### Zone 1

This area is located along Euclid Avenue, roughly from Butternut Court to Templeton Avenue, equivalent to the existing lot depths along Euclid Avenue. The panel estimated this area as approximately three acres in size. The panel recommends the following:

- Develop single-family detached, townhouse, duplex, or triplex residential units compatible with Dilworth neighborhood architecture.

- Achieve densities of three to eight dwelling units per acre, for a total of nine to 24 units.

### Zone 2

This area is located along Templeton Avenue and Caldwell Drive, north of Butternut Drive and south of the existing parking area for the tower. This area would include most of the newly proposed neighborhood green. The panel estimated this area at approximately five acres. The panel recommends the following:

- Develop walk-up, mid-rise, and high-rise buildings.
- Use rental and fee ownership types of units.
- Create an affordable, workforce, and market-rate mix.
- Provide family housing and housing for seniors.
- Center the development on major open space.
- Achieve densities of 25 to 55 dwelling units per acre for a total of 125 to 275 units.

### Zone 3

This area is located south of the tower and west of the proposed neighborhood green. The panel estimated this area at approximately 1.5 acres.

The panel recommends the following:

- Build walk-up and mid-rise buildings.
- Use rental and ownership units.
- Create an affordable, workforce, and market-rate mix.
- Provide family housing and housing for seniors.
- Center development on major open space.
- Target densities of ten to 30 dwelling units per acre for a total of 15 to 45 units.

### Zone 4

This area is located adjacent to the existing tower between Cleveland Avenue and South Caldwell Street. It includes most of the site's current parking as well as the recreational center. It also includes a portion of the proposed neighborhood

green. The panel estimated this area at approximately six acres.

The panel recommends the following:

- Complete additional analysis to determine cost-effectiveness of adaptive use of the tower.
- Incorporate a new community center.
- Develop an additional tower.
- Allow 321 to 521 units.

### Zone 5

This area is located adjacent to the existing tower along South Boulevard. It also includes a portion of the proposed neighborhood green. The panel estimated this area at approximately 1.2 acres.

The panel recommends the following:

- Develop professional offices and services focused on the needs of the residents and broader Dilworth community.
- Include street-level, neighborhood-serving retail.

- Consider connectivity to and from transit and the neighborhood.
- Explore redevelopment options for the adjacent shopping center.
- Consider a three- to eight-story building including structured parking (150,000 square feet total office and retail).

### Next Steps

The CHA needs to continue the dialogue with interested parties and to rigorously examine options to sell, hold, lease, joint venture, or use other methods for development. To help buoy this process, the panel suggests that the CHA initiate a Request for Qualifications or other approved selection process to select and engage an experienced development adviser. This adviser would focus on the necessary rigorous examination as well as oversee the design and development program and the selection of a development team for each zone to achieve CHA's development objectives.

# Conclusion

---

The Strawn site has many attributes not typical of property owned by a public housing authority. The success of the Dilworth neighborhood, the growth of downtown Charlotte, the excellent school district, the revitalization of the South Boulevard corridor, the location of nearby transit, and the relatively large size of the parcel all combine to make this site a truly unique land use opportunity.

The interest of the development community confirms this position. The panel recommends that this site become a mixed-income community with

a variety of uses and housing types that accommodate economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable development. It also must meet the needs of the current residents and the adjacent community, and the long-term goals of the CHA.

The panel believes that the CHA needs to be strategic and sensible about the future disposition of the site. The panel hopes its recommendations provide the CHA, the nearby community, and the current residents of the site with some options that will move all concerned in the right direction.

# About the Panel

---

## Michael Banner

*Panel Chair  
Los Angeles, California*

Banner is president and chief executive officer of Los Angeles LDC, Inc., a community development financial institution and commercial finance company created in 1980 with a mission of providing capital and advisory services to foster positive community development in distressed neighborhoods by aligning the needs of borrowers and investors. Since 1995, Banner has been responsible for the delivery of \$200 million in financing and investments to distressed communities. Successful results have been achieved by managing multi-million-dollar relationships with a growing cadre of investors and borrowers that includes financial institutions, government agencies, community development capital providers, socially responsible investors, community-based organizations, small to medium-sized businesses, and urban-focused real estate developers.

Banner has an extensive background in commercial banking and real estate finance with a special emphasis in community and economic development finance. Before entering the field of community development finance in 1988, Banner was vice president of a \$35 billion commercial bank headquartered in Los Angeles.

He is active in many community reinvestment initiatives and serves as a board member of national, regional, and local mission-driven nonprofit organizations. Active in the leadership of the Urban Land Institute, the New Markets Tax Credit Coalition, the California Reinvestment Coalition, and the Community Reinvestment Fund, during the past six years, he has served as inner city adviser for ULI and has been an active participant in ULI's Advisory Services Program panels. He also led the Great Streets Symposium for the

Office of the Mayor and District Department of Transportation in Washington, D.C.

In Los Angeles, Banner served during Mayor Richard J. Riordan's administration as a member of the Office of Economic Development and is a former member of the Board of Commissioners of the Los Angeles Housing Authority and City of Los Angeles Business Tax Advisory Committee. Currently, he is the financial adviser to the Los Angeles Industrial Development Authority and holds other board or advisory positions with the Los Angeles River Revitalization Ad Hoc Committee and the Community Development Technologies/Merrill Lynch Minority Business Research Advisory Committee. Banner is a lecturer in the Los Angeles Trade-Tech College Community Planning and Economic Development program.

Banner is a graduate of the Ross Minority Program in Real Estate at the University of Southern California and holds a degree in business administration from Loyola Marymount University.

## Gary Okerlund

*Charlottesville, Virginia*

Okerlund, an architect, landscape architect, and urban design consultant, is principal of Okerlund Associates in Charlottesville, Virginia, and teaches courses in urban design in the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia.

His research, projects, and publications include *Transit-Oriented Communities for Northern Virginia*, proposing strategies for transit and community development; *Washington, DC/Richmond Rail Corridor Study: Community Development Strategies*; *Brooke Station Community Plan for Stafford, Virginia*; and *New River Valley Rail Corridor Plan*—all for the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation; *Public Improvements on Main Street*, for the National



Main Street Center; *Streetscape: A Search for Appropriateness*, for the National Endowment for the Arts; *Visual Values for the Highway User*, for the U.S. Department of Transportation; and *A Network of Livable Communities* and *A Better Way to Grow* for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. He served on the Mayors' Institute for City Design. He has also participated in the development of numerous other urban design plans and projects.

He has received a Design for Transportation National Award from the National Endowment for the Arts and U.S. Department of Transportation; several Excellence in Architecture Awards from the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects; and Meritorious Professional Planning Project Award from the Virginia Chapter of the American Planning Association.

Okerlund holds a master of landscape architecture degree from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design and a bachelor in architecture degree from the University of Washington. He has taught at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, Washington University in St. Louis, and Salford University in England as a visiting fellow. He served as president of the Virginia Downtown Development Association, chair of Charlottesville's Urban Design Committee, and vice president of the Alliance for Community Choice in Transportation.

## Lyneir Richardson

*Chicago, Illinois*

As vice president—urban land development of General Growth Properties, Richardson heads its initiative to undertake retail and mixed-used development projects in cities across the country. The Urban Land Development Group targets opportunities that have a retail component of at least 100,000 square feet and are located in densely populated cities, gentrifying communities, and downtown redevelopment districts.

Before joining General Growth Properties, Richardson held positions as president of LakeShore Development Co., vice president of Thrush Construction Co., and attorney at the First National Bank of Chicago.

Richardson is a graduate of Bradley University and the University of Chicago Law School. He is a member of the International Council of Shopping Centers and the Urban Land Institute. He also serves as vice chairman of the Illinois Housing Development Authority Trust Fund Board and is a member of the board of directors of the Boys and Girls Club of West Cook County.





**ULI—the Urban Land Institute**

1025 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W.  
Suite 500 West  
Washington, D.C. 20007-5201



Printed on recycled paper.