

# Oak Cliff Dallas, Texas

**A Strategy for the Oak Cliff Gateway District and Trinity Place**

October 14–19, 2001  
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

**U**LI—the Urban Land Institute is a non-profit research and education organization that promotes responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment.

The Institute maintains a membership representing a broad spectrum of interests and sponsors a wide variety of educational programs and forums to encourage an open exchange of ideas and sharing of experience. ULI initiates research that anticipates emerging land use trends and issues and proposes creative solutions based on that research; provides advisory services; and publishes a wide variety of materials to disseminate information on land use and development.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 17,000 members and associates from 60 countries, representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. Professionals rep-

resented 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 America's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

This Advisory Services panel report is intended to further the objectives of the Institute and to make authoritative information generally available to those seeking knowledge in the field of urban land use.

Richard M. Rosan  
*President*

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ULI Catalog Number: ASD038

Cover illustration by panelist Laurin McCracken: The panel's vision for the new Trinity Place in the Oak Cliff Gateway District.

# 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 panel teams are interdisciplinary and typically include several developers, a landscape architect, a planner, a market analyst, a finance expert, and others with the niche expertise needed to address a given project. ULI teams provide a holistic look at development problems. Each panel is chaired by a respected ULI member with previous panel experience.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; a day and a half of hour-long interviews of typically 80 to 100 key community representatives; and a day and a half of formulating recommendations. Many long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, 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 stake-

holders in the project under consideration, participants in ULI's five-day 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, academicians, 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 our environment.

## ULI Project Staff

Rachelle L. Levitt  
Senior Vice President, Policy and Practice

Mary Beth Corrigan  
Managing Director, Advisory Services

Nancy Zivitz Sussman  
Senior Associate, Advisory Services

Jason Bell  
Panel Coordinator, Advisory Services

Nancy H. Stewart  
Director, Book Program

David James Rose  
Manuscript Editor

Betsy VanBuskirk  
Art Director

Martha Loomis  
Desktop Publishing Specialist/Graphics

Diann Stanley-Austin  
Director, Publishing Operations

# Acknowledgments

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**T**he panel would like to extend its appreciation to the city of Dallas for asking the ULI panel to assist in its efforts to revitalize Oak Cliff. Specifically, the panel thanks Laura Miller, Elba Garcia, and the other 13 members of the Dallas City Council at the time of the panel; and Ryan Evans and Jill Jordan, deputy city managers.

The panel was supported by the efforts of the Planning and Development Department: specifically, director Sherrell Cockrell, planning manager David Cossum, and senior planner Michael Finley. Other representatives of agencies and organizations providing support include Stanley Prichard of the city's Economic Development Department, Rebecca Dugger of the Trinity River Project office, and Karen Walz of the Dallas Plan.

Financial assistance for the panel was provided by the following organizations:

- Hicks/Blackard
- Mary Kay Foundation
- Methodist Hospitals of Dallas

- Park Investments, Ltd.
- Oak Farms Dairy
- JPI Lifestyle Apartment Communities, LP
- BELO
- Southwestern Bell
- Texas Utilities
- AT&T
- Lone Star Consolidated Foods, Inc.
- Good Space, Inc.
- Isenberg Management Associates
- Pan American Capital Corporation.

Special gratitude is given to the interviewees and all those who participated in the interview process for openly sharing information about the Oak Cliff neighborhood.

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# ULI Panel and Project Staff

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## Panel Chair

J. Kevin Lawler  
President  
J.K. Lawler Associates  
West Palm Beach, Florida

## Panel Members

Susan Campbell  
Vice President  
Campbell Tiu Campbell, Inc.  
Chicago, Illinois

William Eager  
Cofounder and President  
TDA Inc.  
Seattle, Washington

Ray Forgianni  
Director  
Kenosha City Plan Commission  
Kenosha, Wisconsin

Jeanne Giordano  
President  
Jeanne Giordano, Ltd.  
New York, New York

Ron Golem  
Senior Associate  
Bay Area Economics  
Berkeley, California

Laurin McCracken  
Marketing and Strategies Officer  
Looney Ricks Kiss Architects  
Memphis, Tennessee

Peter A. Liebowitz  
Principal  
Allee King Rosen & Fleming, Inc.  
White Plains, New York

Nathan Watson  
Founder  
Watson Developements  
New Orleans, Louisiana

## ULI Project Director

Mary Beth Corrigan  
Managing Director, Advisory Services

## On-Site Coordinator

Rina Agriss  
Consultant

# Foreword: The Panel's Assignment

The Oak Cliff area, located on the south side of the Trinity River, has been seen as far removed from downtown Dallas, even though it lies only about a mile from the convention center, Reunion Area, and other downtown attractions. While parts of Oak Cliff are viewed as desirable, most of the area has been ignored by the city and has not benefited from the recently strong economy.

In addition, the city and the region have been working on a variety of projects that would affect Oak Cliff, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Trinity River Project, which would involve a series of drainage improvements along the Trinity River resulting in the creation of a large lake between downtown and Oak Cliff, and a proposed parkway project along the river.

A series of other private initiatives have been happening in Oak Cliff: An apartment complex comprising more than 600 units is under construction there, several neighborhoods are experiencing redevelopment, plans are underway for the redevelopment of Cliff Towers, and Jefferson Street is undergoing significant revitalization.

Because of these and other factors, in June 2001 the city asked ULI to convene a panel of unbiased experts to help it evaluate the development potential of approximately 48 acres immediately adjacent to the Trinity River. The area is bounded by Beckley Avenue on the west, the Trinity River on the north, Zang Boulevard on the east, and Greenbriar Avenue on the south. The 1997 Strategic Planning Study by the Dallas Plan, a nonprofit organization formed to create a partnership among the city of Dallas, local organizations, and private citizens, identified this site as part of a general gateway to Oak Cliff.

The panel was asked to address issues related to the market potential, planning and design options, and development and implementation strategies

for the area. The essence of these questions was twofold: First, what is the most desirable development plan for this parcel? And second, what appropriate public actions are needed to achieve the timely realization of the development plan?

## Previous Plans and Studies

There have been a lot of previous planning efforts for Oak Cliff and the panel used this information as an important point of reference, but not as a point of departure, in its efforts. It took a fresh look at the assumptions and principles underlying prior plans and studies and reached independent conclusions that are reflected in the findings and recommendations in this report. On balance, the panel's recommendations follow the same general ideas presented in prior general planning "visions" for Oak Cliff, but materially depart from them in their physical form and development strategy.

## Relationship to Current Planning: The Trinity River Corridor

In addition to its previous planning studies, the region is in the middle of a multiyear planning and



Location map.

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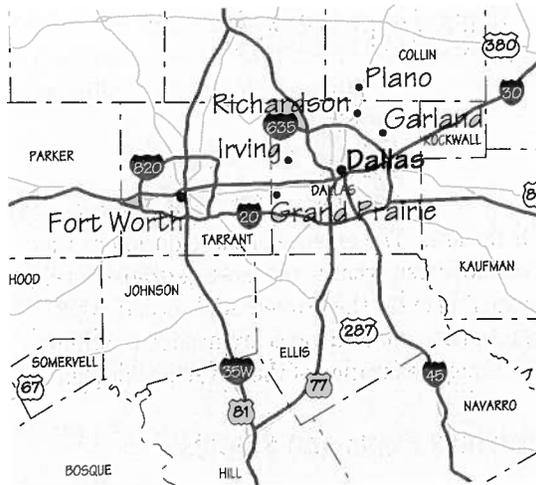
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Location map.

Dallas is an anchor of the growing Dallas–Fort Worth Metroplex.



However, the panel's recommendations are not predicated on a specific set of plans for the Trinity River Corridor, nor are they dependent on the timing and specific configuration of the improvements. Where appropriate, the panel has made specific recommendations with regard to the Trinity River Corridor Plan as it affects Oak Cliff. These recommendations are focused solely on the enhancement of the development potential of the Oak Cliff study area and not the Trinity River Corridor as a whole.

design process for the Trinity River Corridor—the parcel's largest single boundary. The panel was highly cognizant of the importance of improvements in the Trinity River Corridor to the city of Dallas and to the Metroplex as a whole. The panel views the Trinity River Corridor Plan and eventual improvements to be highly beneficial to the Oak Cliff area in general.

# Overview and Summary of Findings and Recommendations

**O**ak Cliff, over the past several decades, has not participated proportionately in the robust development and growth of the Dallas Metroplex as a whole. However, reinvestment and diverse, multicultural growth are occurring, and visibly so.

The panel strongly endorses the concept of a “gateway” to Oak Cliff. The gateway is not a singular point of access, but rather comprises the entire northern edge between Interstates 30 and 35. It involves not only multiple conventional transportation access points, but also signature design features, into and within the area’s boundaries. The gateway also includes the 48-acre parcel that is prime focus of the panel’s assignment. The panel has named this entire area the Oak Cliff Gateway District.

Once it toured the study area and its surroundings, the panel elected to look slightly beyond the 48-acre study area, believing that it can be the centerpiece of the overall development of the Gateway District. The 48-acre parcel, as a stand-alone development, has a low probability of success. When the parcel is incorporated into an overall gateway program, however, its development potential is unlocked. Therefore, the panel focused its attention on the development of the entire geographic area it defined as the Oak Cliff Gateway District.

The plans for and eventual improvement of the Trinity River Corridor undoubtedly will have a beneficial impact on Oak Cliff. However, to wait for the final determination of these plans and the commencement of improvements would be short-sighted.

The panel’s assignment started with a singular focus—the development opportunities inherent in and the attendant public/private strategies for “unlocking” the potential of a 48-acre parcel.

The parcel is situated in a geographic area described by earlier planning studies as the “gateway” to Oak Cliff and was named appropriately “The Oak Cliff Gateway Special Purpose District.” The 48-acre parcel is sandwiched between two main thoroughfares: Beckley and Jefferson. Beckley does not connect directly to downtown Dallas, and the Houston-Jefferson viaduct couplet was characterized by several of those interviewed by the panel as the “back door” of downtown Dallas.

The city staff described the 48-acre parcel as bordered on the west by Kessler Park, on the south by new multifamily development, and on the northeast by the Trinity River Floodway and the central business district (CBD) just beyond the floodway. Currently, the study area is an industrial/commercial district with little substantial development; open storage yards, light assembly, and warehousing are the primary uses there.

Immediately south, a 1,200-unit multifamily development is under construction; the site where it is

The signage that visitors and residents see when entering Oak Cliff does not “announce” that they have arrived someplace special.

