

Features

Affordable Housing Also Looks to Quality of Life

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By **Lisa Brown** | October 14, 2018 at 10:00 PM



Avenue Terrace is a 192-unit multifamily complex in the historic Near Northside community.

HOUSTON—Avenue, an affordable housing nonprofit, has been chosen as a winner of the 2018 Jack Kemp excellence in affordable and workforce housing award given by the Urban Land Institute Terwilliger Center for Housing. The award honors exemplary developments that **preserve affordability** for people at **multiple income levels**, specifically households earning less than 120% of the area median income.

Avenue has been recognized for two affordable communities in its development portfolio—Avenue Place, a 95-unit single-family subdivision, and Avenue Terrace, a 192-unit multifamily complex—both situated on a 20-acre parcel in Houston’s historic Near Northside community.

“We are honored to be awarded by ULI for our work to preserve affordability in our communities. Although Houston has developed a reputation as one of the more affordable major metros in the country, Houstonians continue to face escalating housing costs that are compromising affordability for low- and moderate-income families,” said Mary Lawler, executive director at Avenue.

Located just minutes from downtown, Avenue Place and Avenue Terrace provide working families safe, quality affordable homes in the urban core. At Avenue Place, 49 of the 85 homes currently sold are restricted to homeowners making 120% or less of the area median income, while 162 of Avenue Terrace’s 192 units are restricted to renters making 80% or less of the area median income. Low- and moderate-income homebuyers at Avenue Place may also be eligible to receive down payment assistance through Avenue, which is available to income-eligible families earning 120% or less of the area median income.

In addition to affordable living, Avenue Place and Avenue Terrace also offer residents access to a variety of on-site support services, including after-school programs and community enrichment initiatives. The communities are also situated in close proximity to several neighborhood landmarks including the community park and walking trails at Avenue Place, MD Anderson YMCA, Carnegie Library, Irvington Park, Moody Park and Recreation Center, and the METRO North Corridor rail line, which connects the Greater Northside community with key districts including downtown, the Museum District and Texas Medical Center.

The development of affordable homes moving forward is critical to Houston’s short-term and long-term success, as well as the health and well-being of its communities. Lawler says the development of quality affordable homes has never been more important for the area. Even before Hurricane Harvey, Houston was in the midst of an affordability crisis, with rapid redevelopment in and around the city’s urban core escalating housing costs. While new homes were being built, a significant portion of homes were out of reach for many Houstonians, especially low- and middle-income families.

“In the communities we serve, we saw residents who had spent decades in their communities at risk for being pushed out due to a dwindling stock of quality affordable homes—a risk is still prevalent today,” Lawler tells GlobeSt.com. “This crisis was only exacerbated by Hurricane Harvey, which had a devastating impact on the Houston housing market and compromised the existing stock of naturally occurring affordable homes. That’s why the development of communities like Avenue Place and Avenue Terrace is so important for our city. These communities offer families access to safe, quality affordable homes that provide a wide range of supportive services to help families not just keep their homes, but

also to grow and thrive.”

In announcing the finalists earlier this year, Terwilliger Center founder and chairman J. Ronald Terwilliger highlighted the significant role that affordable development plays in strengthening communities and emphasized the benefits that these developments offer the surrounding neighborhood.

“Through the Kemp Award, we are raising awareness of the critical role that affordable housing plays in creating successful communities,” Terwilliger said. “These are the types of real estate projects that are often the hardest to pull together, but at the same time, the most inspiring to complete. The finalists for this year’s award demonstrate that affordable and workforce housing is achievable in a wide range of markets, providing economic and social benefits that extend far beyond the developments.”

Established in 2008, the Jack Kemp award is named in memory of Jack Kemp, a former secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and national advisory board member at the Terwilliger Center. The annual award is given to affordable and workforce housing communities that demonstrate outstanding achievements in a variety of areas, including innovative financing and building technologies, affordability, quality of design, proximity to employment centers and transportation hubs, involvement of public/private partnerships and replicability of the development. Specifically, jurors evaluating submissions focus on targeted factors in selecting finalists and winners for the award, GlobeSt.com learns.

One factor is the degree to which the development creates mixed-income housing or contributes to the creation of mixed-income communities through development or preservation of affordable or workforce housing. For example, developments may include preserving or developing affordable, workforce or mixed-income housing in areas with increasing rents and/or other indicators of impending or worsening affordable housing needs; areas with demonstrably high-quality education, employment and/or transportation options; or a distressed area as a component of a broader community revitalization plan.

Another factor is the degree to which the financing, partners, design, technologies and/or regulatory/policy support reflects innovations that increase affordability, reduce costs and/or gain project approvals. And the final factor is the degree to which the development can plausibly serve as a model for other developers.

In recent years, Avenue has constructed several affordable homes in Houston—specifically the greater Northside community. In Near Northside, Avenue has also developed Fulton Gardens I and Fulton Gardens II, senior apartment developments with a combined 88 units

that are situated along the METRORail and Avenue Station, a 68-unit multifamily complex. In the adjacent Northline neighborhood, Avenue recently announced Avenue Meadows, a new 10-unit single-family development targeted to low- and moderate-income homebuyers. These developments offer Houstonians affordable housing prices, as well as access to a variety of amenities, including after-school programs and community enrichment opportunities.

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Lisa Brown is an editor for the south and west regions of GlobeSt.com. She has 25-plus years of real estate experience, with a regional PR role at Grubb & Ellis and a national communications position at MMI. Brown also spent 10 years as executive director at NAIOP San Francisco Bay Area chapter, where she led the organization to achieving its first national award honors and recognition on Capitol Hill. She has written extensively on commercial real estate topics and edited numerous pieces on the subject.



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