

PRESS RELEASE

Building Affordable Housing Communities Discussed at Event Moderated by Arnall Golden Gregory Partner Orlando Cabrera

ATLANTA – Arnall Golden Gregory partner [Orlando Cabrera](#) moderated the panel discussion “Macro Outlook: Development and Building Communities” at a recent Bisnow Atlanta Affordable Housing event.

Atlanta has a severe affordable housing shortage. Panelist Sara Haas, director at the nonprofit Enterprise Community Partners, said 73 percent of extremely low-income Atlanta residents spend more than 50 percent of their income on rent, which means they are severely cost burdened.

Rent and home-ownership costs have risen significantly but income has not kept pace, Ms. Haas said. She added that up to 20,000 income-restricted units could be lost in the next five years due to demand for market-rate housing.

During his 31 years in affordable housing Mr. Cabrera has served as Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing at HUD and as Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Florida Housing Finance Corporation. He also was president and CEO of a major affordable housing developer.

Mr. Cabrera, a member of Arnall Golden Gregory’s [Housing Team](#), asked City Councilman Andre Dickens about his vision for the city with another 2 million people expected to move to Atlanta in the next 20 years. Mr. Dickens said Atlanta’s diverse workforce requires diverse housing options and that housing for all income levels near employers would lessen the city’s traffic congestion. Teachers who could live close to their schools, he said, would interact with their students as neighbors, strengthening the community.

Mr. Dickens also said that Atlanta also needs more affordable housing and mixed-use development at transit nodes and balanced growth that includes the south side of the city.

But Atlanta’s development could be slowed by Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts, with labor and materials heading to Houston over the next several years, Mr. Cabrera said. “This is going to be a recovery unlike anything we’ve seen in the past,” he said. Mr.

Dickens added, “This is going to challenge us in terms of new construction,” making preservation even more important in creating affordable housing.

Atlanta Housing Authority CEO Catherine Buell said the AHA, a large landowner, is starting to look at more partnerships with private developers to develop mixed-use communities, including near the Georgia Dome and Georgia Tech. The AHA also plans to help redevelop the Boisfeuillet Jones Atlanta Civic Center and is looking at creating housing along Atlanta’s BeltLine. Creating more workforce housing, which has a higher income threshold than affordable housing, is another goal of the AHA.

The AHA serves 22,500 households, 95 percent of which are low income or extremely low income. The agency participates in a federal demonstration project called Moving to Work, which provides flexibility to create innovative affordable housing strategies.

HUD is housing 100,000 families in Georgia, according to panelist Michael German, HUD’s field office director in Georgia.

Eddie Benoit, CEO of The Benoit Group, said his company partners with AHA and Invest Atlanta, the city’s economic development arm, to build and renovate student and workforce housing, especially near transit nodes. Benoit’s renovation work includes a \$25 million affordable housing project for seniors, the Wheat Street Towers on a growth-corridor site easily accessible to The Martin Luther King Center, MARTA and Atlanta’s streetcar.

Benoit said the challenges to building more affordable housing include high land costs, securing tax abatements and the desire by property owners to make a quick profit. Income-restricted housing transactions take longer to close than market-rate deals.

The sixth panelist, Andrew Smith, regional director and principal at Jordan & Skala Engineers, said his company works with HUD on affordable green building programs. Mr. Smith noted that parking will change with electric and autonomous vehicles becoming more popular.

Mr. Cabrera asked about parking structures being converted to housing and Mr. Dickens responded that the city has discussed a future where parking garages are less important and workers are shuttled in autonomous vehicles. Businesses want the city to figure out ways to shorten commutes, he said, adding that the city would like to see lenders de-emphasize parking.

To reduce unit costs, some developers are looking at the feasibility of converting trailer containers to housing and using modular construction. The King Memorial MARTA station transit-oriented development will be modular, Ms. Haas said. She added that her organization, Enterprise Community Partners, uses funds to encourage preservation because often it is cheaper than building new affordable housing.

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