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Background and the Panel's Assignment

THE WORLD'S FIRST MULTIPURPOSE, domed sports stadium, once nicknamed the Eighth Wonder of the World, the Astrodome is a cultural icon and engineering marvel built in 1964. Its legacy extends far beyond its revolutionary structural design as the host to thousands of events from Major League Baseball (MLB) and the National Football League (NFL) to rodeo and live music performances.

Today, however, the Astrodome is a shadow of its former self, and it is a future point of contention for the voters in the region who originally funded its construction. Over the years, the Astrodome has been subject to many proposals—from reuse and revitalization to redevelopment to demolition. Despite dozens of proposals for the Astrodome's reuse as well as previous calls for demolition, to date none has proved functionally or financially palatable. As recently as 2013, a bond referendum for redevelopment was narrowly defeated by voters. Today, the Astrodome lies vacant.



The Astrodome and the adjacent NRG Stadium.

Study Area

NRG Park—NRG Stadium, NRG Center, NRG Arena, and NRG Astrodome—spans 350 acres in the heart of Harris County and provides parking for up to 26,000 automobiles. The complex is located just north of Interstate 610's southern loop, with Kirby Street to the west and Fannin Street to the east, and near the terminus of the Houston light-rail line's southern terminus. To the north is the Texas Medical Center, the world's largest medical center and regional economic driver and employment center.



An aerial view of the Astrodome from the late 1980s.



Regional map.



The other buildings at NRG Park include, left to right: the NRG Arena, the NRG Center, and the NRG Stadium.

The Houston metropolitan area is blessed with substantial resources, both human and financial. It is a city with a deeply committed citizenry, known for having both grand ambitions and grand achievements. One can see some of those ambitions and achievements at NRG Park, home to the NFL's Texans, the Offshore Technology Conference (OTC), and the truly remarkable Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo (HLSR).

The Panel's Assignment

At the invitation of Harris County in cooperation with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a ULI panel was convened to provide strategic advice regarding the reuse of the Astrodome. As noted, the Astrodome was the standard bearer for future domed stadiums, but it has been vacant since 2008. The Harris County Sports and Convention Corporation (HCSCC) asked the panel how the Astrodome could be used as a public park space.

The panel quickly realized that the historic value of the site made retaining the Astrodome structure essential. Also clear was that any reuse of the structure needed to consider the impact on the two primary tenants of NRG Park, the NFL Houston Texans and the HLSR.

Each of the ten experts from around the country who volunteered his or her time for this panel brought a particular point of view that provides a wide range of expertise. The Advisory Services team included a developer, a historic preservation architect, a senior land economist, the vice president of a global entertainment group, an experienced market analyst, a landscape architect, a public administra-

tor, an urban designer, a planning consultant, and a ULI senior resident fellow for urban development.

The panel members spent two days deliberating, framing the issue, and writing their report. A summary of the panel's overarching recommendations was presented to the public at the end of the week's visit, before release of this report. The vision suggested by the panel is a grand civic space that enhances the entire NRG Park complex.

Summary of Recommendations

The panel proposed the following specific recommendations for creating a grand civic space that best complements NRG Park's current and future needs, as well as those of the surrounding community:

- Recognize the Astrodome's history and create a new vision that rehabilitates the dome and the surrounding portions of NRG Park.
- Redevelop the Astrodome as a multiuse facility.
- Develop 1,500 additional parking spaces in the lower levels of the Astrodome.
- Create a new ground floor in the Astrodome interior that can accommodate a variety of uses, including a park.
- Create a new outdoor public space or live oak allée as a promenade between the light-rail station and the east entrance to the Astrodome.
- Construct permanent outdoor covered pavilions along the allée.

- Enhance the outside of the Astrodome with hardscape and landscape features.
- Reuse the various floors of the Astrodome for a variety of programmable space, such as new space to extend the game-day experience for the Houston Texans, new spaces for the HLSR, and added space for the OTC.
- Use these programmable spaces for activities such as community festivals, farmers markets, movie nights, charity events, and private events that will create new revenue streams.
- Identify and tap into a series of sources for new capital and operational funds.
- Create a new leadership initiative to unite vision with action. The panel recommends a new organizational structure that would allow the panel's recommendations to be implemented.

The remainder of this report elaborates on these primary recommendations.