

LaVon M. Johns

Partner

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Clients engaged in complex commercial real estate and corporate finance transactions count on LaVon M. Johns' experience, insight, and commitment to help them anticipate issues, address challenges, and, ultimately, get to "yes." A consummate dealmaker who balances business savvy and legal know-how with outstanding communication skills and a deep commitment to building long-term client relationships, LaVon focuses her practice on complex commercial real estate and finance matters with a particular emphasis on public/private partnerships and the not-for-profit sector.



LaVon represents commercial and industrial clients in multimillion-dollar commercial real estate transactions, including acquisitions, dispositions, real estate-based financings, workouts, development transactions, and complex commercial retail, office, and industrial leasing transactions in the United States and abroad. She has deep experience on counseling clients on the real estate aspects of corporate mergers and acquisitions transactions. She is certified as an Energy and Environmental Design Accredited Professional (LEED AP) by the U.S. Green Building Council.

When it comes to real estate-based financings, LaVon advises borrowers and lenders in a variety of secured and unsecured financing transactions, including lines of credit, credit enhancement, and conventional mortgage loans. She is also well versed in governmental incentive-based transactions using vehicles such as tax credits, TIF, LIHTC, and NMTC to achieve her clients' goals.

LaVon has been engaged to act as counsel in some of the nation's largest public/private partnership infrastructure transactions. She served as lead real estate counsel to the City of Chicago in a \$1.8B transaction in the privatization of the Chicago Skyway Toll Bridge, a \$563M transaction in the privatization of the Chicago Parking Garage System, the initial \$2.8B proposed privatization of Chicago's Midway International Airport, and multibillion-dollar projects like the Obama Presidential Library and O'Hare Airport Redevelopment.

LaVon's experience with nonprofit and faith-based organizations includes advising on issues relating to federal and state law governance, local governmental politics and relations, governmental compliance and 501 regulatory issues, commercial real estate development (including expansion and leasing), real property gifts issues, unrelated business income, real estate property tax issues, foreclosure, and workouts. In addition, she has represented numerous faith-based lenders in connection with loans to faith-based borrowers and in the execution of loans for charitable purposes and missions.

Adept at handling the challenging crisis situations of her clients over the past 20 years, LaVon is an effective crisis management lawyer for public executives, professionals, governmental officials, not-for-profits, and business entities facing challenging circumstances in high-profile settings.

LaVon is the Lead of the firm's Business Transactions Practice Team.

EXPERIENCE

Representative Engagements

Acquisitions & Disposition Transactions

- \$49M – Seller’s Local Counsel in the sale of a 221-unit apartment building located in Evanston, Illinois to The Bascom Group LLC and Spirit Investment Partners.
- \$23M – Purchaser’s Counsel to an Educational & Economic Development Corporation in the acquisition, leasing, construction, and development of a LEED certified office complex located in Chicago, Illinois. The client is seeking LEED Silver Certification by the U.S. Green Building Council. Our LEED AP designation and experience have been instrumental in the Project.
- \$10.6M – Purchaser’s Counsel to a national fuel multi-site operator in the acquisition of various Shell gas stations within the Chicagoland area.
- \$15.6M – Seller’s Counsel to the Chicago Housing Authority in connection with the sale of its real estate assets located in Chicago, Illinois.

Complex Commercial Leasing

- Tenant’s Counsel to a Fortune 25 financial institution in connection with a commercial lease and construction build-out of a call center space having approximately 130,000 square feet. Project included acting as counsel in connection with client’s Cook County 7(b) Incentive Application and construction compliance issues related to a Redevelopment Agreement between client and City of Chicago.
- National Tenant’s Counsel for a Fortune 25 Insurance Company in connection with numerous leasing and construction build-out of commercial office spaces throughout the U.S. Projects currently include approximately over 3M square feet of office space.
- Landlord’s Counsel to the City of Chicago in connection with the negotiation of a Redevelopment and Concession Management Agreement with Westfield in connection with Terminal 5 of O’Hare International Airport.
- Tenant’s Counsel to an international not-for-profit corporation in connection with the Green leasing of its headquarters located at 101 N. Wacker Drive, Chicago, Illinois. The new space is seeking LEED Silver Certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. Our LEED AP designation and experience have been value-add to our client.
- Tenant’s Counsel to the Chicago Housing Authority in connection with the leasing of its new headquarters to be located at the CNA Building, Chicago, Illinois.
- Tenant’s Counsel to a Concession Tenant in connection with the retail leasing of four commercial spaces located at Chicago’s Midway Airport, O’Hare International Airport, Navy Pier, and Northwestern Station, Chicago, Illinois.

Public/Private Partnership Transactions

- \$1.83B – Lead Real Estate Counsel to the City of Chicago Department of Finance in connection with the privatization of the Chicago Skyway Toll Bridge, located in Chicago, Illinois. The Project consisted of the privatization of a public asset to a private consortium via a Concession Lease Agreement having a 99-year Term. The Lease Agreement provides the Concessionaire (Tenant) with rights to all toll revenue and all rents payable by certain other businesses located on the Skyway Toll Bridge during the Term. The rent in the amount of \$1.83B was paid in a single upfront payment at closing.
- \$563M – Lead Real Estate Counsel to the City of Chicago Department of Finance in connection with the privatization of the four publicly held underground parking garage structures, located on Chicago’s

famous Michigan Avenue underneath Chicago's highly acclaimed Millennium Park. The Project consists of the privatization of the public assets to a privately held company via a Concession Lease Agreement having a 99-year Term. The Lease Agreement provides the Concessionaire (Tenant) with the rights to all revenues from parking during the Term. The rent in the amount of \$563M is to be paid in a single upfront payment at closing.

- \$2.8B – Lead Real Estate Counsel to the City of Chicago Department of Finance in connection with the privatization of Midway International Airport. The Project consists of the privatization of the largest FAA approved airport in the nation to a privately held company via a Concession Lease Agreement having a 75-year Term. The Lease Agreement would provide the Concessionaire (Tenant) with the rights to all revenues from Midway Airport during the Term. The rent in the amount of \$2.8B is to be paid in a single upfront payment at closing.

Development & Construction

- Developer's Counsel to a national not-for-profit organ procurement organization in connection with the acquisition, construction, and leasing of a commercial office building. The Project required the negotiation a Grant Agreement between the client and the City of Chicago Department of Planning utilizing Community Block Grant Development CARES Act funds and the leasing and construction of a new educational facility to be occupied by Chicago State University.
- \$250M – Represented a public owner/transit agency in a very complicated land exchange, and joint development of a mixed-use transportation, retail, and office complex including a 28-story headquarters tower and multi-modal transportation facility. Exclusive right to negotiate, development agreement, reciprocal easement and operating agreement, access and easement agreements, master construction contract, construction management agreement, and other documents were drafted and negotiated.
- \$120M – Developer's Counsel in connection with the redevelopment, including demolition, zoning, infrastructure, and construction, of approximately 100 acres of land currently known as the ABLA Homes public housing development, located in Chicago, Illinois. The project involved (i) state, local, and federal government regulation, including zoning and land use; (ii) financing, including the use of public/private funds, tax increment financing (TIF), HOPE VI/Public housing capital funds, public housing operating subsidiaries, affordable housing development subsidies, and infrastructure resources; and (iii) real estate development, including issues of condominium law and land acquisition and condemnation strategies.
- Outside General Counsel for a minority-woman owned concrete construction company. Projects include the Obama Public Center.

Real Estate Backed Financing Transactions

- \$22M – Lender's Counsel to a national institutional investment firm in connection with the financing of a commercial office building located in Baltimore, Maryland.
- \$100M – Lender's Counsel to an International Banking Institution having a Chicago presence on the issuance of various financing development transactions, including construction loan financings and revolving lines of credit to Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation, Hispanic Housing Development Corporation, Resurrection Homes; loan participation facilities to CommunityReinvest IV and Oakwood Shores Development; and revolving lines of credit to Planned Parenthood.



CREDENTIALS

Education

Northwestern University School of Law, J.D., 1996
Creighton University, B.A., Philosophy, 1993, *cum laude*

Bar Admissions

Illinois

Professional Memberships

Law360, Real Estate Authority Editorial Board (2025)
Illinois State Bar Association (1996-1999, 2007-2009, 2020-present)
National Bar Association (2016-present)
Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education (IICLE)
Board of Directors (2012-2023)/Presiding President (2022)
Chicago Committee on Minorities in Large Law Firms
Board Member (2000-2006)
Cook County Land Bank Advisory Committee/Committee Member (2012-2013)
Lambda Alpha International
Ely Chapter (2007-present) and Board of Directors (2010-2011)
American College of Mortgage Attorneys (ACMA)
Economic Club of Chicago
Urban Land Institute
Cook County Minority Job Fair, Co-Chair (2003-2005)

Teaching Appointments

Adjunct Professor of Law, Northwestern University School of Law (2009-present)
Structured Transactions/Commercial Real Estate Transactions

Honors & Awards

The Best Lawyers in America, *Best Lawyers*® (Real Estate Law, 2010-2011, 2024-2026)
The Chicago Leadership Circle (CLC), *Crain's Chicago Business* and the University of Chicago
Graham School, Fellow (2024-2025)
America's Best-in-State Top Lawyers, *Forbes* (2025)
100 Top Women in Real Estate, *Illinois Real Estate Journal* (2006-present)
Illinois Leading Lawyer in Association & Non-Profit Law, Land Use, Zoning & Condemnation Law,
Public Finance Law, Real Estate Law: Commercial, Real Estate Law: Finance, *Law Bulletin
Media Leading Lawyers* (2010-2025)
Illinois Super Lawyer in Real Estate, Banking and Business & Corporate, *Thomson Reuters* (2006,
2008, 2011-2021, 2023-2025)
Women of Influence Diversity Champion, *ALM | GlobeSt.* (2024)
Chicago Notable Black Leaders, *Crain's Chicago Business* (2024)
Chicago Notable Women in Law, *Crain's Chicago Business* (2024)
Woman of the Year, *Illinois Real Estate Journal* (2024)

Top Women in Law, *Law Bulletin Media* (2023)
Commercial Real Estate Hall of Fame, *Midwest Real Estate News* (2023)
The National Black Lawyers Top 100 (2022)
Chicago Defender Women of Excellence Award Honoree (2019)
Top Real Estate Attorney, *Leading Lawyers Magazine* (2011-2016)
Leading Women in Real Estates, *Real Estate Publishing Group* (2005-2016)
LEED Applied Professional Certification, *Green Building Certification Institute* (2009)
40 Illinois Attorneys Under Forty, *Law Bulletin Media* (2004)

PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS

"Notable Women in Commercial Real Estate," (moderator and co-panelist) Illinois REjournal 6th Annual Women in Commercial Real Estate Summit, Chicago, IL (April 16, 2025)
"President Trump's Executive Orders on DEI and Their Potential Impact on the Private Sector," (co-author) *RSHC Client Alert* (February 25, 2025)
"Legal Challenges and Opportunities at the Intersection of AI Data Centers and Power Infrastructure," (co-author) *RSHC Insight* (February 20, 2025)
"IICLE Real Estate Litigation 2024 Edition," (general editor) Illinois Institute of Continuing Education (IICLE) (July 2024)
"IICLE Real Estate Litigation 2024 Edition: Chapter 7 - Loan Commitment Litigation and the Illinois Credit Agreement Act," (co-author) Illinois Institute of Continuing Education (IICLE) (July 2024)
"IICLE Real Estate Litigation 2024 Edition: Chapter 9 - Real Estate Broker Litigation," (author) Illinois Institute of Continuing Education (IICLE) (July 2024)
"Recruiting, Raising and Retaining the Next Generation," (co-author) *Best Lawyers*® "Women in the Law" Summer Business Edition (June 2024)
"Navigating Board Room Crises," (co-panelist) Northwestern Law 63rd Corporate Counsel Institute, Chicago, IL (June 6, 2024)
"COVID-19: Accelerating the Evolution of the Commercial Real Estate Industry," (panelist) Illinois Institute of Continuing Education (IICLE) Commercial Real Estate Basics Webcast Series (March 4, 2021)
"COVID and Property Management," (moderator) RE Journals Chicago 2nd Annual Women in Commercial Real Estate Summit (January 21, 2021)
"IICLE Handbook and Supplement on Real Estate Litigation," (general editor) Illinois Institute of Continuing Education (IICLE) (2011, 2013, 2016, 2020)
"Real Estate Short Course: Commercial Leasing," (speaker) IICLE (2016-2019)
"Disruptive Inclusion," (moderator) Chicago United Annual Meeting (2016)
"Real Estate Short Course: Real Estate Development," (speaker) IICLE (2015)
"Nonprofit Law," (speaker) Faith-Based Counsel (2013)
"Real Estate and Land Use Litigation," (speaker) Law Seminars International (2012)
"Commercial Leasing Issues," (speaker) National Business Institute (2011-2012)
"Law School Orientation Professionalism Program," (speaker/facilitator) Commission on Professionalism of the Illinois Supreme Court (2009)



"Title Insurance, Closing Issues and Ethical Considerations in Commercial Real Estate Transactions," (speaker) National Business Institute's Real Estate Transactions Made Painless and Efficient (2008)

"Commercial Real Estate Transactions," (speaker) Diversity Symposium (2004, 2006)

"The Skyway Transaction - How it Happened, What it Means for Privatization in America," (speaker) IICLE (2005)

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Greater Chicago Food Depository

Commercial Real Estate Awards Steering Committee, Member (2023-2024)

Monarch Award Foundation Inc. (1997-present)