



PRESERVATION | COMMUNITY ASSETS | DEVELOPMENT

[www.urbanlandc.org](http://www.urbanlandc.org)

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### Urban Land Conservancy E-Newsletter

*Our mission is to acquire, develop, and preserve community assets in urban areas for a variety of community needs such as schools, affordable housing, and office space for nonprofits.*

ULC is a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit supporting organization to the Denver Foundation.

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#### Staff

Aaron Miripol  
President and CEO

Debra Bustos  
Director of Real Estate

Ben Gordon  
Associate

Mary Janiszewski  
Office Manager

Jan Nevers  
Accountant

## Prez Notes

Welcome to the first edition of the quarterly ULC e-newsletter, "Cornerstones," our effort to keep you up to date on the real-estate work we are doing in the Denver-metro area. Two exciting developments you will learn more about in this newsletter are the Phillips Center and the Jody Apartments. Both are recent acquisitions that support low-income families and nonprofit organizations and provide needed economic benefits to the neighborhoods they operate in.

With the workload increasing, the ULC staff has grown to include Debra Bustos, Director of Real Estate; Ben Gordon, Associate and our TOD expert; and most recently, we added Mary Janiszewski as our Office Manager who brings excellent paralegal in experience in real estate. I would also like to add my thanks to The Denver Foundation and Jan Nevers, for her work on our behalf. Of course, none of this great work would be possible without our dedicated and highly skilled board members (see a list of our board members to the left of this story).

I feel very fortunate to work with such a talented board and staff. I am excited to share our many success stories with you. In addition, I would like to get your comments about "Cornerstones." Please feel free to send them to me via e-mail, and happy reading!

Aaron Miripol  
E-mail: [admin@urbanlandc.org](mailto:admin@urbanlandc.org)

The Denver Foundation)

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Staff (left to right)

Ben Gordon

Mary Janiszewski

Aaron Miripol

Jan Nevers

Debra Bustos

## *New Concept Comes to Life*

A brand-new concept has come to life in a 115-year-old northeast Denver building thanks to the Urban Land Conservancy (ULC) and its partners, Gary Williams Energy and Chuck Phillips (see story below).

The ULC is looking to re-develop the historic Denver Tramway Company building, known as the Phillips Center, into a home for nonprofit educational organizations. Already, there are four organizations sharing the space, which covers an entire city block, all serving low-income and at-risk kids and families. The arrangement results in more families finding out about more services, which they can access conveniently.



"It's an amazing example of nonprofit capacity building and community building," said Read McCulloch, founder and former executive director of cityWILD, which provides outdoor adventures for at-risk youth in the Cole neighborhood. Finding an affordable, long-term location is the biggest challenge for most nonprofits, he said, and ULC has given his organization a solid sense of security.

"I don't think people realize how damaging it is to be distracted by that sense of insecurity," he said, adding that it is difficult to instill a sense of normalcy in a child's life amid the chaos of constantly having to move. At one point, cityWILD was forced to move five times in less than a year, once with only 24 hours notice.

The networking and sharing of resources provided by the arrangement at the Phillips Center is good for staff and volunteers, as well, said McCulloch, noting that nonprofits working in isolation often have a sense that they are butting their heads against a wall.

"It makes it that much easier for our staff to feel like they're part of something larger," he said.

Hugh Brown, who manages the building, says the energy throughout the building is very positive, and the cultural and economic mix of people it serves is healthy for the city.

"Thanks to Gary Williams and the ULC for stepping in and saving the building and trying to put it to good use, because there's nothing like it near the center of the city," said Brown, a former city manager who lives in Curtis Park and has long been active in the community.

Brown said that when the redevelopment is complete, it might include some housing, retail space and other mixes. Final design will take the best interest of the tenants and the community needs into consideration, but Brown said the exterior will likely be kept mostly original.

"It's in the early talking stages about how the building can be best used for the community," he said, while noting that maximizing profits is not the primary motivation.

Current nonprofit organizations at the Phillips Center:

- A Brand New Start - an online charter school
- cityWILD - provides at-risk youth with wilderness experiences and leadership education
- Early Excellence at Wyatt LLC - an early childhood education program
- Focus Points Family Resource Center - provides young, low-income immigrant families with family-literacy programming



**The Phillips Foundation**

### **About Chuck Phillips**

The Urban Land Conservancy's (ULC) development of the Phillips Center is a lifelong dream come true for Chuck Phillips, who sold ULC the building.

"Coming from Oklahoma, I had very little chance to get the education I would have liked," he said. "None of my people were really educated people. I always thought that if I ever had money and could take care of my family, I would buy a large building and put a school in it. I just ran out of time agewise. I'm 72 now."

Fifty-four years ago, Phillips arrived on a bus in downtown Denver with \$3. He remained homeless for three years afterward, working odd jobs to sustain himself. He eventually wound up at the Emily Griffith Opportunity School, which led to a one-year unpaid internship at an auto-body shop.

"I've been blessed in a lot of ways," he said. "The opportunity school gave me a chance to find out how qualified I could be."

Working his way up to foreman, he discovered within himself a great entrepreneurial spirit. He eventually opened his own body shops and a wrecking yard, which he ran for 35 years. The success of those ventures allowed him to fulfill his hope of buying a big building - more than one, in fact.

The Phillips Family Trust also owns the Wyatt Edison Charter School building, to which ULC has first right of purchase, across the street from the Phillips Center. It leases the building to the school for just \$1 a year - and will for 40 years. The school serves more than 700 inner-city kids who often enjoy field trips to the Phillips Ranch near Denver International Airport. There they get a little taste of the rural America Phillips grew up in, in a setting designed just for them, with farm animals and a playground.

"I did what I promised the Lord I would do, and it opened a lot of doors for a lot of children," said Phillips.

Dave Youngren of Gary-Williams Energy Company, which purchased the Phillips Center property from Phillips and donated it to ULC, has known Phillips for about 13 years. They met when Youngren's company helped transform the charter school from a dilapidated, abandoned building that was "nothing but trouble" for the neighborhood, he said. The two have stayed good friends ever since.

"He really cares about the people and doing the right thing," Youngren said of Phillips. "He's a great asset to the community."

Everyone who has met Phillips agrees his big heart is evident in the community.

"It is a pleasure to be a part of developing a property with such a rich history and to play a role in Mr. Phillips' initial vision to impact the neighborhood in a positive way through this building," said Debra Bustos, ULC's director of real estate.

Phillips is pleased ULC is continuing his vision for the Phillips Center.

"It's changed the whole neighborhood," he said. "What they're doing is amazing. I'd say in three or four years you won't recognize it. In the 19 years I was there, I met a lot of good people. Back in '89 it was pretty rough. It's just been fantastic to have something change the whole face of it."

The Phillips Family Trust also has programs for job training, vehicle and land donations and affordable housing. For more information, visit [www.phillips-foundation.org](http://www.phillips-foundation.org).

## ULC and Transit-Oriented Development



Like most organizations involved in real estate, the Urban Land Conservancy (ULC) is very interested in acquiring land surrounding future light rail stations in order to use real estate to preserve community assets.

Unlike most, ULC is not interested in making a large profit off of the real estate.

"We're excited," said ULC associate Ben Gordon. "We hope to do good by preserving real estate that would otherwise be market-rate based and using it for community purposes," like affordable housing and day cares for nonprofits.

An example is the purchase of Jody Apartments, an affordable-housing apartment complex near the future Sheridan light rail station (see the following story).

According to a 2007 report by the Center for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), "Incorporating affordable housing into TOD presents opportunities to meaningfully address the region's growing affordability crisis by tackling housing and transportation costs simultaneously-while expanding access to jobs, educational opportunities and prosperity for the many households living in the Denver region."

Basically, the problem is that while light rail holds the most benefits for those in lower income brackets, the advent of light rail itself prices nearby housing out of their reach.

"The potential demand for housing in TOD is likely to exceed the number of homes that can be developed in transit districts," reads the report. "Consequently, there is considerable risk that virtually all new development near transit in the region will be unaffordable to lower income households. Additionally, new or enhanced transit service could displace existing residents of currently low-income and mixed-income neighborhoods as transit proximity makes those neighborhoods more desirable."

ULC is striving to ensure that housing and other services needed by lower-income people have a