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Urban Land Conservancy sets new course for future

Denver Business Journal - by [Paula Moore](#) Denver Business Journal

The **Urban Land Conservancy** has a new leader and a new strategic plan in the works.

After being run by directors since its founding in 2003, the conservancy hired Aaron Miripol as its first outside president and CEO in mid-May. Miripol added two staffers early this month, and expected to launch the group's revamped Web site the week of July 23.

The Urban Land Conservancy (ULC) also is working on a new governing plan, including broadening its reach to projects such as transit-oriented developments (TOD) and environmentally friendly "green" building.

The nonprofit group works to preserve Denver-area land and buildings for the public good. The conservancy buys properties and develops them -- with or without partners -- or just owns property and brings in an outside developer.

"What we'll focus on in the plan is still evolving, but we're looking especially at real estate transportation -- transit-oriented development sites," Miripol said. "We're looking at how to preserve TOD sites."

"We can make sure those light-rail stations get things like affordable housing, which makes sense to put around them," said Susan Powers, ULC board member and president of developer **Urban Ventures Inc.** of Denver.

TOD projects have become one of metro Denver's hottest types of real estate development, with the recent completion of the area's massive T-REX highway/light-rail program and the buildup of the FasTracks commuter rail, bus and park-n-ride program. Infrastructure improvements have created new transit stations, with more planned -- and opportunities for office, retail and housing development near those stations.

"We're looking at the most strategic and important things we can do. ... Our list of community benefits is getting much broader," said Tom Gougeon, ULC board member and chief development officer at Denver-based **Continuum Partners LLC**. "We're looking at educational programs, health care and wellness -- neighborhood kinds of issues."



Kathleen Lavine | Business Journal

Aaron Miripol (left), president and CEO of Urban Land Conservancy; Ben Gordon, associate; Edward Swapp, VP of Gary-Williams Energy Corp.; and Jon Buerge, associate, at the old tramway building in Denver.

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The ULC's current, \$15 million portfolio of projects includes the Tennyson Center for Children child-abuse treatment center, The Phillips Center office building for nonprofit groups and the Habitat for Humanity Home Improvement Center, all in Denver. The group is helping to convert the old Budget Motel at 40th Street and Colorado Boulevard to a Colorado Coalition for the Homeless housing project.

The conservancy also has a property under contract for purchase in northeast Denver.

"We nonprofits are often pioneers in a community," Miripol said. "The market-rate developers follow the nonprofits, which take the initial risk."

Initially called the Denver Urban Land Conservancy, the ULC is a 501(c)3 organization supported by The Denver Foundation. The foundation is Colorado's oldest and largest community-oriented foundation, helping businesses and individuals contribute to charities through more than 660 donor funds.

Other funding partners include the **Denver Urban Renewal Authority** and New York-based **Seedco Financial Services Inc.**, which manages the city of Denver's nonprofit Community Development Financial Institution.

Members of the ULC's 15-person board include Inverness office park developer George Beardsley of Inverness Properties LLC and Dave Younggren, senior vice president of finance at **Gary-Williams Energy**. The privately held independent oil and gas company has been a strong driving force behind the conservation group.

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