

# Promoting Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and Affordable Housing

## Region 8

With a mission of preserving urban community real estate assets, the Urban Land Conservancy (ULC), a Denver, Colorado based non-profit organization, is a natural partner for the EPA Brownfields Program. Indeed, brownfield assistance offered by the EPA has allowed ULC to acquire and clean up land for transit oriented development (TOD) and affordable housing projects throughout Denver. As an example, the EPA conducted Targeted Brownfields Assessments (TBAs) at more than 10 properties for ULC and provided funding to clean up and redevelop former abandoned and underutilized properties.

### Mile High Vista: EPA Funded Cleanup Leads to Affordable Housing and New Community Library

In 2011, ULC purchased a two-acre parcel of the former Festival Plaza at Avondale in west Denver. The property was an underutilized parking lot with previous commercial uses that included a gas station and a dry cleaner. Assessments found petroleum contamination and dry cleaning solvents that required cleanup prior to moving forward with a mixed-use redevelopment.

The Colorado Coalition Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) provided \$500,000 in EPA Brownfields funds to the ULC to remediate over 6,800 tons of contaminated soil. The Colorado Coalition's funding package included a \$200,000 subgrant and a \$300,000 low-interest loan. The ULC only needed to use the \$200,000 subgrant funds to address the petroleum contamination because the seller assumed responsibility for the first \$200,000 in cleanup expenses. This paved the way for ULC and the City of Denver to begin developing the Mile High Vista project including the construction of a new 28,000 sf Denver Public Library, 80 affordable housing units (serving families below 60% of the area median income), and a commercial lot (yet to be developed).

The prime location along West Colfax Avenue helped ensure redevelopment success and the fact that this project is a quarter mile from two light rail stations (Knox and Decatur-Federal), as well as high frequency bus stops, ensures that this will truly be transit-oriented development. In August 2014, the 80-unit Avondale Apartments opened and marked the end of the first of three phases of development. The units are all dedicated to workforce and affordable housing along with 10,000 sf of commercial space. In February 2015, the [Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales Library](#) opened to the public, marking the end of the second phase of development. ULC continues to work with developers to complete the third phase for commercial use. The EPA's investment of \$200,000 helped leverage approximately \$37 million in economic development at the Mile High Vista site alone.



The grand opening for Avondale Apartments.



The 80-unit Avondale Apartments after renovation.

*“The resources provided by the EPA are a critical component to the success of ULC’s real estate work, and Mile High Vista was made possible by our partnership. Our access to grant and loan funds for brownfield remediation helped create a transit oriented community where families have a beautiful, safe, and affordable place to live, and the community has a new state-of-the-art library that generations of residents will enjoy.”*

**—Debra Bustos**  
Vice President of Real Estate

## Holly Square: Community-oriented Development Achieved

The intersection of Denver's 33rd Avenue and Holly Street continues to grow into something the community can be proud of, with more development opportunities coming in the near future. The 2.6-acre property operated as a shopping center from the late 1950s until May 2008 when gang-related arson destroyed the remaining businesses. In early 2009, the EPA Region 8 conducted a Targeted Brownfields Assessment (TBA) of the property on behalf of the ULC to identify any contamination concerns and assist ULC in fulfilling its pre-acquisition environmental due diligence requirements. The Phase I assessment revealed manageable environmental conditions and allowed the ULC to acquire the property later that same year.

ULC, along with the community, created a set of Good Neighbor Principles and broad design concepts that focus on using the site to anchor reinvestment in the entire surrounding community. In 2012, the Anschutz Foundation pledged \$5 million to build the [Jack A. Vickers Boys and Girls Club](#), which opened in 2013 and now serves the area youth. ULC invested in excess of \$1 million (including property purchase) and leveraged over \$7 million from several different entities (Anschutz foundation, City of Denver, The Denver Foundation and others) to complete the project. As of June 2015, Roots Elementary Charter School was selected to be the next development partner and construction of the school will begin in 2016.

## Evans Station Lofts

In 2011, the ULC acquired a 0.96-acre property across from the Evans Light Rail Station on Denver's southwest light rail line. Before purchasing the property, the ULC used the EPA's Targeted Brownfields Assessment Program (\$47,300) to conduct due diligence and reduce environmental uncertainty via Phase I and II environmental assessments. In 2012, ULC sold the land to Medici Communities for the Evans Station Lofts development.

In 2013, the [Evans Station Lofts](#), a mixed-use, transit oriented development that includes 50 workforce housing units and 7,100 feet of retail and commercial space, opened and received the Mayor's Design Award for place making. This was the first low-income family housing tax credit project at an existing light rail station along the Denver Regional Transportation District's (RTD) FasTracks. The project leveraged nearly \$11 million for the redevelopment of the property.



*The Roots Elementary Charter School at Holly Square.*



*Roots Elementary School playground at Holly Square.*



*Evans Station Lofts, a mixed-use, transit oriented development that includes 50 workforce housing units.*