

MICHAEL S. DAVIDSON

BIO AND RESUME

Michael S. Davidson is the President and CEO of Openlands, where he leads a team of nearly 50 at one of the nation's first metropolitan-scale land conservation organizations, which is also an accredited land trust. He is responsible for strategy, organizational health, fundraising and board relations, and long-term financial strength. Since joining Openlands in 2023 as its first new leader in 35 years, Davidson has guided the organization through a period of change, including growing the budget and endowment, launching the first new strategy in seven years focused on land, and achieving major land and policy milestones such as a landmark analysis of protections for the Chicago Lakefront, the region's largest land conservation acquisition in nearly 30 years, and the close of the O'Hare Wetlands Mitigation Project, a 20-year, \$30 million restoration of five major landscapes in northeastern Illinois.

Davidson brings more than 25 years of experience in mission-driven organizations. Before Openlands, he served as Senior Director of Community Impact at The Chicago Community Trust. Over 12 years and under three CEOs, he helped shift the foundation from a traditional grant maker to an active civic leader focused on closing the region's racial and ethnic wealth gap. From 2019 to 2023, he led the Trust's \$100 million Catalyzing Neighborhood Investment strategy to improve economic and development opportunities in majority Black and Latino communities. He helped launch initiatives including Elevated Chicago, the region's first coalition for equitable development near transit; Community Desk Chicago, which brings skills, capital, and shared ownership opportunities to commercial corridors across Chicago's South and West Sides; and the Pre-Development Fund, providing capital to Black and Latino developers and business owners navigating the pre-development phase of projects.

Davidson also has deep experience in environmental initiatives. At the Trust, he launched Food:Land:Opportunity – Localizing the Chicago Foodshed (FLO), the region's largest funder of local and sustainable food systems and seed investor in Proofing Station, a non-profit impact fund where Davidson served as the first board president. He also led the Trust's sustainable development portfolio, helping catalyze the *Next Century Conservation Plan* for the Forest Preserves of Cook County and *Our Great Rivers*, Chicago's first comprehensive river vision, investing over \$5 million to improve health and access across the river system, particularly in underinvested neighborhoods.

Earlier, Davidson served as a program officer for the Great Lakes Protection Fund, Midwest Director for ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, and manager of the Campaign for Sensible Growth, where cross-sector partners secured major legislative wins to curb urban sprawl, including establishing the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. He spent the first decade of his career in the research department of the American Planning Association, which he credits with instilling a deep passion for urbanism.

Davidson founded the Prairie State Local Government Sustainability Network and is a founding member of the Sustainable Communities Division of the American Planning Association. He holds a graduate degree from DePaul University's School of Public Service, has authored more than 30 articles and technical reports on planning issues, and serves on the board of the Cook County Land Bank Authority. Davidson is also a member of the Lambda Alpha Land Economics Society.