

Council on Vertical Urbanism Names SJ Group's David Seel Board Chair, SOM's Scott Duncan Vice Chair

New leadership to guide CVU's continued work on tall buildings and sustainable, high-density urban development

CHICAGO—The [Council on Vertical Urbanism](https://www.cvu.org) (CVU) today announced a new chapter in its board leadership: David Seel (SJ Group) will become the organization's next board chair, and Scott Duncan (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, or SOM) will serve as vice chair. The transition will take effect at the board's annual meeting, held in conjunction with the organization's 2026 VU Summit, Oct. 26-29 in London. Seel will replace outgoing Chairman Shonn Mills.

The appointments come a year after CVU renamed and rebranded from the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat to reflect the broadening scope of its work and its role in defining the burgeoning practice of sustainable vertical urbanism worldwide.

"Throughout my career, I have been privileged to work around the world and see how cities are regenerating and adapting by building ambitiously for the future, both vertically and as part of broader urban development," said Seel. "Each follows its own path, but many face similar challenges: strengthening resilience and productivity, embracing digital technology and creating places future generations can enjoy. CVU plays a pivotal role in bringing planners, policymakers and investors into the conversation, alongside architects and engineers, translating shared knowledge into lasting urban value. Its new name reflects the growing breadth of that work."

David Seel is chief operating officer, Buildings + Cities, at SJ Group. A structural engineer, Seel has built his career on complex projects across the buildings and infrastructure sectors, with specialist experience in high-rise buildings, over-site developments and large urban renewal projects. He is known for his focus on digital technology, structural optimization, construction methodology and design leadership, and for a collaborative, hands-on approach with the teams he leads. Seel has been an active member of CVU's board of trustees since 2023 and part of its Executive Committee since 2025.

"Verticality, sustainability, livability and innovation are central to vertical urbanism, underpinning the work of our members and partners," explained Seel. "As chair, my priority will be to ensure CVU remains rigorous, relevant and useful by advancing knowledge, encouraging exchange across disciplines and helping new and existing members respond to the practical challenges that cities face. None of this could have happened without the foundation that outgoing Chair Shonn Mills built. I'm grateful for his leadership, and pleased that the organization will continue to benefit from his experience as a trustee."

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Scott Duncan is a design partner at SOM, where he leads large-scale and high-rise projects worldwide. Since joining SOM in 1998, he has championed the firm's interdisciplinary approach, bringing engineers, planners and specialists into the earliest stages of design. He has led the design of more than 30 tall and supertall towers, including 400 Lake Shore Drive, WeBank Headquarters and One Bangkok. Beyond SOM, Duncan teaches studios for Illinois Institute of Technology's Master of Tall Buildings and Vertical Urbanism program, has served as a CVU trustee since 2020, and sat on the committee that guided CVU's rebrand.

"The way cities build vertically is changing fast, and CVU strives to be a protagonist in that shift," said Duncan. "Being on the committee that oversaw the renaming and rebranding meant sitting with hard questions like what does 'vertical urbanism' actually mean, and how do you get a name, a set of programs and a public identity to all say the same thing at once? As vice chair, I want that same discipline to show up in what CVU produces: our research, our standards, our programs and our vision for the future. I want CVU to be the place people look to as vertical urbanism comes into its own."

CVU also welcomes two new members to its board of trustees: Ilayda Oner Mermerbas and Olivier Vassart.

Ilayda Oner Mermerbas is deputy country manager at Turner International Türkiye, shaping the company's growth strategy across Europe and Central Asia. She leads Turner's digitalization, DEI and ESG initiatives in Türkiye and oversees marketing, human resources and finance. Oner Mermerbas holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Boğaziçi University and a master's degree in construction management from Columbia University. Beyond Turner, she is president of the Istanbul Project Management Institute, serves on the board of buildingSMART and is regional representative and advisory board member of CVU, where she also chairs the Future Leaders group.

Olivier Vassart is CEO of Steligenç, ArcelorMittal's business division dedicated to advancing steel-based construction solutions across the building lifecycle, a role he has held since 2018 after more than a decade in the company's global R&D leadership. He has taught steel structures, composite construction and fire engineering at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium for more than 16 years and holds a Ph.D. in structural fire engineering. Since September 2026, he has also served as honorary professor at the University of Luxembourg, teaching structural and fire engineering for steel and composite high-rise structures.

"Ilayda and Olivier both bring exactly the kind of depth we need on the board right now: one grounded in the realities of building in fast-growing markets, the other in the materials science that makes taller, more sustainable buildings possible," continued Seel. "I'm glad to be welcoming them into this critical work."

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About the Council on Vertical Urbanism

The Council on Vertical Urbanism (CVU) is the leading nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing tall buildings and responsible density in cities across the globe. Its extensive network of members worldwide spans nearly every discipline essential to constructing, connecting and sustaining the built environment—from architecture, engineering and real estate development to planning, policy and public investment—driving engagement, innovation and the meaningful transformation of urban areas. CVU disseminates industry-leading knowledge through hundreds of multidisciplinary programs each year: conferences, awards, funded research and academic partnerships, all anchored by a rich repository of publications and online resources, including the most comprehensive database of detailed information and images for 45,000+ tall buildings internationally. Best known as the global arbiter of building height, conferring the official title of “world’s tallest building,” CVU is headquartered in Chicago, with offices in Toronto, Shanghai and Venice.

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