

News from: **City of Oakland**

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City of Oakland Offers Shelter to Wood Street Encampment Residents

Upcoming encampment closure enables progress on 170 units of 100% permanent affordable housing

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Oakland, CA – This week, the City of Oakland will continue in-person outreach to community members encamped on a parcel of land on Wood Street to provide shelter options and information about programs and services available to them. Outreach teams are offering space at a new cabin shelter program, a safe RV parking site, and various other shelter options. *The City expects to have enough shelter for everyone living at Wood Street who wishes to accept it.*

At a hearing last Friday in the U.S. District Court, Judge William Orrick issued an order for the City to temporarily pause a thorough deep cleaning planned for the area, which will give community members living on the City-owned parcel additional time to decide whether they will accept offers of shelter. The next hearing is scheduled for January 18, at which time the Judge will assess the status of available shelter options, as well as shelter offers made and accepted.

The encampment must be closed so the City can move forward on developing 170 units of 100% permanent affordable housing at 1707 Wood Street.

“The 1707 encampment will close to make room for an affordable housing development planned by the City,” Judge Orrick wrote in his filing. “The development will significantly benefit the public interest.”

“The City of Oakland is committed to addressing both the needs of the unhoused on the lot and other residents needing shelter and housing. We hope the unhoused residents of Wood Street will take advantage of these new programs the City is standing up and seek safety and shelter from the rain, wind and the elements,” said Assistant City Administrator LaTonda Simmons. “And longer term, this much-needed affordable housing project will bring 170 high-quality homes to our community. The longer we delay,

the more this critical project to house vulnerable Oaklanders is put at risk. Ultimately, we know the solution to homelessness is housing.”

Background

1707 Wood Street is a City-owned parcel consisting of approximately 3.12 acres of undeveloped land located between 18th and 20th Streets. The site was purchased by the City for \$8M with the intention of developing affordable homeownership units on the site. The City issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in May 2018 to develop the property as affordable housing and the evaluation panel selected a joint venture between MidPen Housing Corporation and Habitat for Humanity East Bay/Silicon Valley for the development of 170 affordable units (85 rental, 85 ownership) as the winning response.

The developers must be able to safely access the site by the end of January 2023, otherwise the opportunity to win a significant amount of grant funding will be lost.

Once the City closes and secures the site, the developers will be able to begin carrying out predevelopment activities such as soil testing, environmental surveying, and other due diligence. The City has issued two predevelopment loans totaling \$650,000 for this purpose, which have been unable to be used yet. In addition, the developers plan to seek grant funding from the Department of Toxic Substance Control (DTSC) for environmental remediation but are unable to apply until they have safe access to the site.

After the initial predevelopment work is carried out, the City will select a contractor to remove hazardous soil that has been illegally dumped on the site over the last 4-5 years. Concurrently, the developers will start assembling additional financing from local, state and federal sources. That process is expected to take at least 2 years.

Barring unforeseen events, construction could be completed by 2027-2028, bringing 170 units of 100% permanent affordable housing to Oaklanders.

Wood Street Commons

City outreach teams estimate between 20 and 25 individuals are currently encamped on the Wood Street parcel, referred to by the community as the “Wood Street Commons,” although numbers fluctuate day to day. Some report as many as 60 individuals living in and around the Wood Street parcel. Some community members have been living at the site for

approximately three years; others relocated to this parcel when the encampment on the Caltrans section of Wood Street closed in late 2022.

The parcel contains massive amounts of debris, burned-out, abandoned and inoperable vehicles, and has attracted illegal dumping. The recent wet weather has exacerbated existing health and safety hazards, including flooding, blocked access for emergency responders, electrical hazards, and more. The site is on contaminated land that is unsafe, unsanitary and not fit for human habitation in the present state.

Photos of Wood Street taken Friday, January 6, 2023



Community Outreach

The City conducted various forms of public outreach at the time of property acquisition and the release of the RFP. Area residents and the local neighborhood association have consistently expressed strong support for the development of affordable housing at the site.

City outreach teams have been visiting the Wood Street encampment since April of 2022 distributing information and engaging residents one by one to offer a range of housing and shelter options, employment support, and other services and programs available to them. Similarly, the City also facilitated shelter offers to Wood Street residents last September when Caltrans closed the State's portion of Wood Street.

The planning team held two sessions of onsite design meetings, attended by approximately 30 participants, to discuss the award of State grant funds to stand up the new cabin shelter program on Wood Street for the community.

During more than 20 visits, outreach teams and City staff have engaged directly with residents onsite. Under the orders of the court, outreach teams will continue to inform community members of all available shelter options, including cabin communities, safe RV parking sites, and emergency shelter.

What we've heard

In conducting extensive in-person outreach to Wood Street community members, our teams have heard a desire to stay together, to be able to bring pets, to move to sites that can accommodate vehicles and belongings and that have spaces for community activities, and concerns about rules and requirements at the shelter programs. The City has been working to accommodate these needs and requests as feasible.

Some community members have expressed interest in moving to a City shelter program; others have so far declined support. Outreach teams report a common narrative they are hearing is that housing is a right and should be free. Many residents have stated their desire to be provided a parcel of land to self-manage their community as a collective.

Housing and Shelter Options for Wood Street Residents

- **Wood Street Cabin Shelter Program**

The City is completing construction of a new cabin shelter program at 2601 Wood Street using an \$8.3 million grant from the State of California. The cabins will be able to house approximately 100 people, with priority given

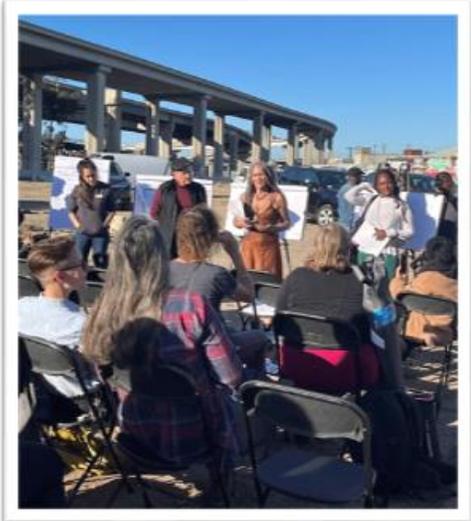
to unsheltered community members living in the Wood Street area. This shelter program will include housing navigation and employment services, and residents will be able to stay for approximately 6 months, with the option to extend.

The program will consist of 70 cabins for individuals, 12 double cabins for couples (housing 24 people total), and six accessible cabins for people with disabilities. Participants in the shelter program will have 24/7 access to the site and are welcome to bring their pets. The site is designed to include bathroom and shower facilities, electricity, community kitchen and eating space, limited secured storage for personal belongings, 24/7 security, parking, and meals. Each cabin includes a secure, locked door and windows, a wall-mounted heater, an overhead light and at least two electrical outlets.

Cabin shelter programs provide residents with basic services as they work with on-site case managers to transition into maximum self-sufficiency and permanent housing. The sites afford a consistency not found in the encampments: a hard roof to sleep under every night; an already established community network of friends and consistent resources; a supportive staff of case managers to connect residents to vital needs such as acquiring California ID, securing benefits, seeking employment, and ultimately getting housed.

The goal is for people to move in, receive services, and move on to the next step on their path to housing in about 6 months. Deciding to enter the program is 100% voluntary; however, residents are expected to work with their care coordinators to craft a plan forward. The sites are designed to be extremely low barrier, with minimal rules. Participants are asked to abide by a Code of Conduct that is designed to maintain a healthy and safe community.

Images of Wood Street Cabin Shelter Design Meetings



- **Safe RV Parking Sites**

The City expects to have up to 29 Safe RV Parking spots available at a new site on 66th Avenue and Coliseum Way by mid-January, with a total of 125 spaces when fully built out. Each RV Parking Space will have electrical hookups and there will be bathroom, shower, and laundry facilities on site for participants.

The City is also offering shelter beds at St. Vincent de Paul and several other sites around Oakland.

The City's Approach to Affordable Housing

Homelessness and housing affordability are top concerns for Oakland residents. The last point-in-time homeless count, conducted in February 2022, estimated that there are 5,055 people experiencing homelessness in Oakland, of whom 3,337 are unsheltered.

To address these challenges, the City is carrying out a multi-pronged approach. The Human Services Department is working to provide transitional housing and supportive services to unsheltered residents. The Housing and Community Development Department is addressing housing affordability issues through its "3P" framework: *Protect* Oaklanders from displacement; *Preserve* the existing affordable housing stock; and *Produce* new, deeply affordable housing units. In addition, the Planning and Building Department, in partnership with other departments, is updating the City's Housing Element to provide a plan to accommodate more than 26,000 new units of housing over the next eight years, in accordance with state requirements.

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