

WOOD STREET COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Residents and supporters commemorate those who have passed while homeless



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GARY GARDEN DEDICATED THOSE WHO HAVE PASSED ON THE STREET

On February 15, the West Oakland Wood Street Community and the United Front Against Displacement gathered to commemorate the lives of two former residents, Gary Rosenquist and Benjamin Choyce Jr., who both recently passed away. Those in attendance took turns saying a few words to honor Gary, Ben and others who have passed away while homeless. The ceremony also included the christening of a garden built in memorial of Gary and Ben. Gary's friend Patrick had the idea to use the old train tracks as a frame for the garden box. Participants took turns pouring water into what is now known as "Gary Garden". Gary and Ben are but two of the many who have lost their lives while on the streets. As more people are forced into homelessness and the City continues to prove its incompetence, it is critically important that the community comes together to build solidarity and create safer conditions for all.

The City is in a Terrible State

On February 7th, Mayor Libby Schaff held the annual State of the City address which she had postponed from last Fall. At the event, Mayor Schaff lied to Oakland residents about the policies being implemented to help the homelessness crisis. We could not stand to let her perpetuate these lies. In response, we held a rally in front of the Oakland Museum of California, where the event was being held. This demonstration helped to clarify to the people what is really going on in Oakland. We were able to talk to many people passing by or who stopped and listen to what we had to say about the real state of the city, which is in shambles.



Wood st Resident Cam and supporter, Dayton hold a banner critical of the city's tows of homeless people's vehicles

We then decided to rally in front of the entrance to the auditorium where the speech was being held. Once again, the mayor refused to acknowledge that we were there, despite this being our third attempt to engage with her in person to put forth our demands for the residents of the Wood Street Community. Mayor Schaff's lack of response is indicative of the lack of care and attention that the city gives to homeless people. The fact the the State of the City address was held at a private location with limited seating, and that attendees had to previously register to get tickets to the event further reveals that Mayor Schaff is afraid of facing the people. Nevertheless, we made our message clear and were able to demonstrate to the attendees of the event that what they had just seen was a series of lies meant to sugarcoat failed measures to aid homeless people and to prop up the Mayor's oppressive agenda.

It is important that we continue to come together and not allow the City of Oakland, Gamechanger LLC and their lackeys to spread disinformation and misrepresent their role in the homelessness crisis. **We must stand for the rights of the Wood Street Community and all homeless people to ensure that everyone is able to prosper in their everyday lives. When we fight together, we will win!**

37MLK: An Intentional Homeless Community

There used to be a gas station on the corner of 37th and Martin Luther King Jr Blvd. The lot had sat abandoned for several years before being transformed into 37MLK last September. Housed neighbors put down tents and camping toilets as people came together to habitate on the lot. Now, the community is home to over a dozen longtime Oakland residents that had been homeless in the neighborhood.



Residents plan together how to arrange tents and structures as they grow in size

Organizers with the UFAD have visited the community in recent weeks and got the chance to meet Delores, a founding resident and community leader. Delores has lived in the neighborhood for almost fifty years. She explains how residents and supporters were able to create their community, "We are all struggling together for the same goal". Delores says that the biggest challenge in creating the community was being able to work with other people. Even with all their recent success, keeping their home hasn't been easy. The community is the result of dozens of people working together. Delores says that she wants her community and others to have a future, "I want it to grow from tents to apartment buildings".

A garden sits in the northeast corner of the lot.

Supporters had donated seeds and plants for the plot. Several rows of tents are angled around a communal tent on the west end of the lot. There is a row of labeled garbage receptacles by the gate. Residents and supporters create shifts to take out the trash and provide security in the evenings. Housed neighbors take turns bringing food, they plan to eventually provide food every night! A lot of folks in the community struggle with alcohol and while the camp is not totally "dry", residents have created a more stable, secure sanctuary to get back on their feet.



Delores organizes activities in the community such as sign making and planting in the garden

"Safe" Parking Lots?

The City Of Oakland began implementing new emergency shelters for homeless people two years ago. The City currently has 5 "community cabin sites and 2 "Safe" parking lots. These are shelters that require relatively few requirements for folks to move in but lack many of the amenities of traditional shelters or supported housing units. **While these sites can provide much needed stability for some people, they are not the solution to the homeless crisis as the city of Oakland claims.**



The "Safe" RV lot on Mandela Parkway, the land was owned by the State of CA but was leased to the City of Oakland for a \$1 a month

Organizers with the UFAD spoke with James Freeman Jr. about his experience at the "Safe" parking lot that was opened on Mandela Parkway over 7 months ago. James Freeman has lived in the city site for almost 6 months. He begins the conversation with a basic assessment of the city site, **"It was better here (on Wood st) that it is there"**. The site has a water tower, but lacks pressure so that he cannot use it to sufficiently fill his RV's tank. He was also told that a housing coordinator would visit him and set him up with a job and housing application but after 6 months no one has visited him. He was also promised a social security card and a new ID, after six months he has received neither. The only time that city representatives has spoken to him has been to warn him that he is liable to be evicted if he doesn't speak with the housing coordinator. Freeman said, **"but when you ask who is the housing coordinator, they get stuck because they don't even know who is the housing coordinator"**

Freeman continued to describe his experience with the City and moving off the lot on Wood st. The City of Oakland has been working closely with Fred Craves, a Billionaire medical executive, who recently purchased the abandoned lot at the heart of Wood st, to remove residents from "his" property. Pat Smith, legal counsel representing Fred Craves, and a representative with the Mayor's Office promised Freeman and several others that they would be paid to clean the lot up and leave. **They promised to pay \$15/hour but after logging almost 240 hours, Freeman was paid a meager \$160! That's a pay rate of 0.60 cents an hour!** Freeman also alleges that some people were simply paid cash to do some work and quickly leave the site. Additionally, **when residents move into these sites they must sign away their rights as tenants, giving them few options if the staff want to evict them before their time is up.** All in all, it appears obvious to the UFAD that these programs, are not meant to help everyone off the street, but gives the city an excuse to evict and sweep people from where they are already staying.

Homeless?

Some people say I'm homeless.

Some say it with disdain as though I'm a blight, something they would scrape off their boot, some say it with pity, they feel bad that my life has become this low.

Some say it with sympathy as they try to imagine how bad my life must be.

A few a very few say it with empathy, saying they feel my pain.

I say to all of them "save it" as I need not any of these emotions, these points of view, for I am not homeless, not by any stretch of the imagination as I live in the grandest home all, the cosmos. Yes, it is true that my physical self is corporeal... Is earthbound, my soul & my mind roam free, visiting and living in places of almost unbelievable beauty & grandeur. Yes the cosmos is my home while the Milky Way is my roof & my ceiling is decorated by the ever changing star lit sky.

For a floor who could ask for more than dear old mother earth. Granted she creaks & groans & sometimes shakes but would not your home if it was a few billion years old? My carpet is the fields of green & golden waving grass.

As for walls, I never much cared for them, they tend to keep people apart & in our society, in this day & age, in this space & time there is enough... enough ha! What a euphemism, there is way too much keeping people apart & a listing of them would quickly use up my pen & empty my ink pot. So I use walls sparingly, using them only to keep out inclement weather & the occasional roving mongrel hoard.

So "homeless"?

How could anyone think that?

Houseless perhaps, but they have come on the scene rather recently at least in the history of man.

So save your pity, your disdain which borders on hate & your other points of view or emotions & appreciate my freedom as do I, come visit me some time in my corner of the cosmos, I am not hard to find. Just look for the crazy old man going through the castoff belongings the detritus of our wasteful wonton society, turning one mans trash into treasures.

So I, for now anyway, bid you adieu.

May you find love & the world find peace

Puffy T. Awesomeone

P.S.The "T" stands for "The" as I am the "Awesomeone"... Damn I'm good I said that with a straight face, see you around.



Submissions:

The West Oakland Community Newsletter is a collaborative projects by the United Front Against Displacement and the Wood st Community in an effort to spread news about the neighborhood and the struggle against the pigs and developers.

If you would like to submit something or if there is something we got wrong or something that you would like to see added to the next newsletter.

LET US KNOW!

Find someone on outreach or shoot us an email or call text at (510)815-9978



General Meetings, Outreach, and Community dinners happen weekly.

**General Meetings : First Wednesday
of every month**

Outreach: 3/9, 3/16, 3/23, 3/30
Please contact us via email for exact
time and location.

**Community Dinners: Wednesday,
March 11th @ 7pm
March 25th @ 7pm**

A Publication Of The United Front Against Displacement

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