



# Think Oakland First





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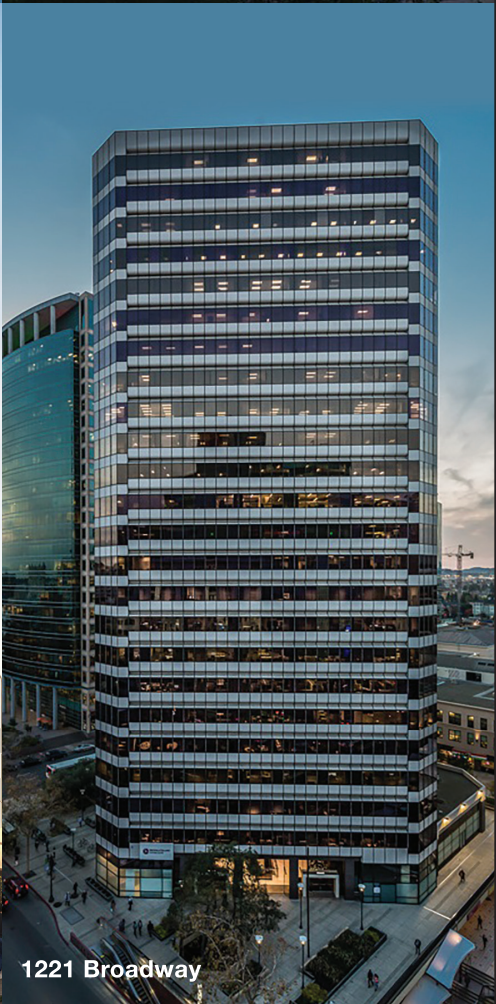
300 Lakeside



Lakeside II



Telegraph Tower



1221 Broadway



1330 Broadway



Breuner Building



▲ A LETTER FROM OAKLAND'S MAYOR

# Reasons to Think Oakland First

**O**akland's reputation as the quiet powerhouse of the Bay Area has newfound resonance as we emerge from a pandemic year. Our community demonstrated great resilience in the face of economic, social, and public health challenges. New outdoor settings allowed businesses to operate under local and state health orders. Businesses pivoted to keep afloat and even thrive. Restaurants pulled together to ensure our community was fed.

Even in this challenging environment, investments continued to flow into Oakland. Our distinctive skyline added new towers, and infrastructure improvements will nurture future economic growth. Commercial real estate transactions remain at record prices. Some of the region's largest employers have opened Oakland offices or have moved their headquarters here to be closer to where their employees live. And as the *San Francisco Business Times* recently noted, Oakland will open twice as many new apartments this year than our neighbor across the bay.

These projects reflect the market's realization that Oakland's fundamentals remain strong. Our beloved city has a skilled, diverse workforce; a transportation network that quickly moves goods by road, rail, sea, and air; and an incredible location in the heart of the Bay Area (without the famous fog from across the bay, and without the heat like that other city in the south). Our housing and commercial space is more affordable, too. That temperate climate combined with abundant green space, rolling hills, lakes, and the estuary allow year-round outdoor recreation that helps day-time workers and residents find that ideal live-work balance.

Lake Merritt—often thought of Oakland's front yard—has become a centerpiece of vibrant urban life following a transformation funded by Measure DD, a \$200 million voter-approved measure focused on waterfront improvements. From its modest start as a tidal slough to being named the nation's first designated wildlife refuge, the lake has grown to become a shared gathering spot for Oaklanders and visitors. Stroll the lake and you may hear drummers playing, browse markets with vendors selling homemade wares, and, at night, take in the "Necklace of Lights" reflecting off the lake, outshining the glow from downtown office and residential buildings. Runners, walkers, and cyclists make their way around its 3.4-mile path, while boaters enjoy sunny excursions

across the waters. Soon, renovation of the Kaiser Convention Center, now to be known as the Oakland Civic, will improve another cultural amenity on the lake's southern shore. This project complements the adjacent world-class Oakland Museum of California, which gathers together art, history, and natural science on three different levels. Its innovative architecture was lauded in the *Wall Street Journal* this summer following a \$20 million renovation. All this, just steps from downtown Class A office space.

Our cultural offerings—cuisine, music, theater, dance, live entertainment, art, bookstores—showcase not just our famed diversity, but our inclusiveness as well. We uplift and celebrate our diversity as a city formed of many, and we extend a supportive hand to entrepreneurs who want to make Oakland their home. Our recovery efforts are rooted in equity – we're not just rebuilding our economy as it was but are working to make opportunity available to all entrepreneurs and business owners. This will make our business community even more resilient in the future.

Proudly home to innovative industries, we're growing our hotel space to amplify our convention space and tourism. As part of a transportation chain through our international airport and our world-renowned port, we are working to increase our acreage and transit speed to continue to compete at the highest level.

Oakland is a city of many neighborhood hubs that operate as their own little villages, with walkable retail corridors with restaurants, bespoke stores, access to public transportation, and the regular services you might want to walk to from your home. These neighborhoods radiate out from Oakland's vibrant downtown, which is well served by bike, bus, ferry, BART, and Amtrak routes to bring workers, visitors, and customers into the core of our city.

And in the future, we hope to add another amenity to downtown—a new waterfront ballpark neighborhood that will keep our A's rooted in Oakland and create 18 acres of new public parks along the water.

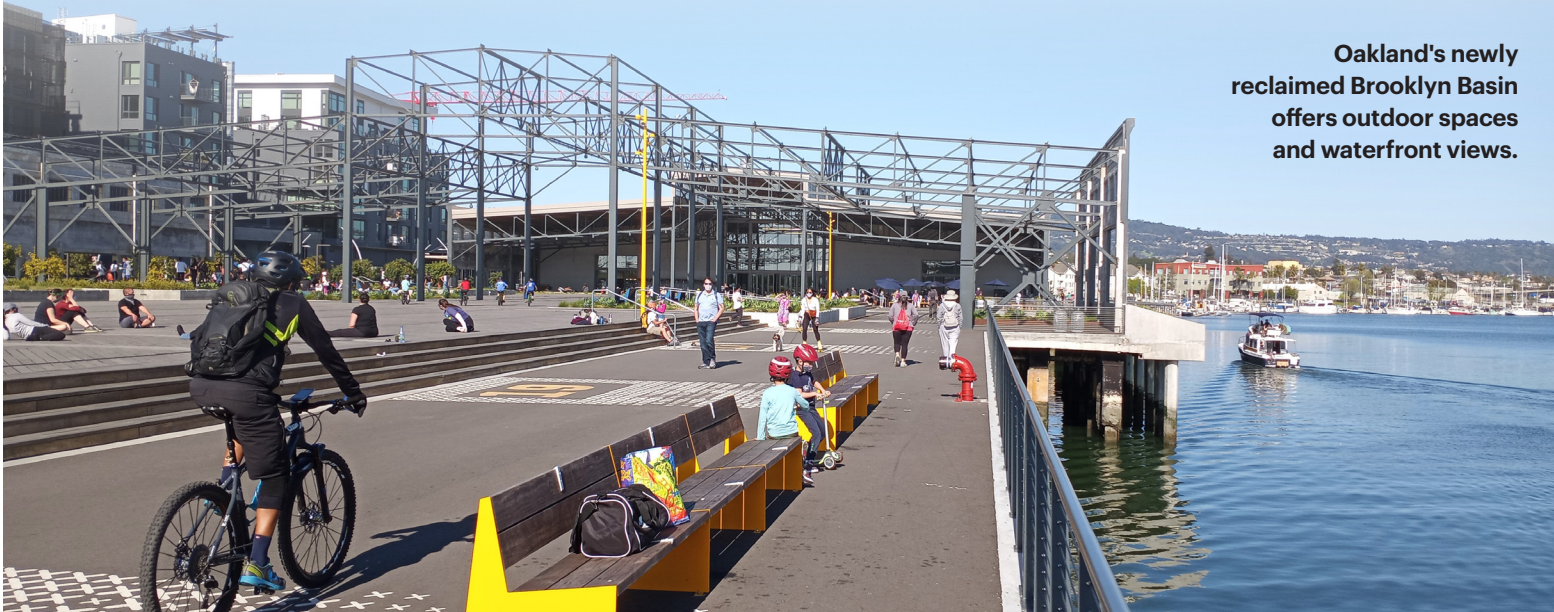
Whether you're starting a business, relocating, or looking to invest in one of America's most diverse and dynamic business centers, we encourage you to "think Oakland first!"



**“Oakland is looking forward to economic recovery that builds our network to be even stronger than before.”**

**Libby Schaaf,**  
Oakland mayor

**Oakland's newly reclaimed Brooklyn Basin offers outdoor spaces and waterfront views.**



"Think Oakland First" stories by Erika Mailman / Produced by San Francisco Business Times and City of Oakland

**Cover photos:** (insets clockwise from top left) Earl Brown and Dan Wright of Wright & Brown Distilling Co. (courtesy of Wright & Brown); Dancers at the Indigenous Red Market (courtesy of Indigenous Red Market); A street scene in Oakland's Chinatown (City of Oakland); Oakland chef Reign Free (LiPo Ching / SFBT); Volunteers distributed food and raised awareness during the pandemic (courtesy of EAT.LEARN.PLAY. Foundation). Oakland skyline (J.P. Dobrin)





Port Product Lab used its equipment to manufacture low-cost PPE in the early days of scarcity during the pandemic.

PORT PRODUCT LAB

▲ COVID-19 RESPONSES

# Pandemic resilience

## Oakland businesses that survived—and thrived—in the face of crisis

Oaklanders have always pivoted to extend a helping hand. After the 1906 earthquake and fire, our population expanded as we welcomed those fleeing San Francisco—it’s a point of pride that many chose to stay. During the pandemic, some of our industries altered their operations to support fighting Covid-19 (or just to keep themselves afloat), while others were brave enough to open up shop in the midst of a worldwide health crisis. Here are a few examples of how businesses got creative to survive and thrive.

### Cooking for community; planning for the future

**B**oth a nonprofit and a building, **Restore Oakland** pulled out the stops to provide mutual aid during the pandemic. A joint initiative between the **Ella Baker Center for Human Rights** and **ROC The Bay** (Restaurant Opportunities Centers), Restore Oakland opened up its parking lot to give out diapers, fresh produce, chicken, and “high quality, high nutrition food that is really rare,” says Tash Nguyen, program manager. Pre-pandemic, the organization focused on the race-wage gap in the restaurant industry as well as housing assistance, job training, and a “jobs not jails” initiative. “The pandemic has been really rough on the Fruitvale community we immediately serve,” says Nguyen. A restaurant that was supposed to open in April 2020 got put on hold, as did an in-person job training

program. Instead, a commissary kitchen opened in the beginning of the pandemic that served 800 meals a week to community members and to a nearby homeless encampment, funded by the **World Central Kitchen**. The meals were prepared by cooks and chefs taking advantage of Restore Oakland’s big commercial kitchen space. Now, in the summer of 2021, Nguyen is excited about the launch of a new community loan fund, the **Real People’s Fund**. “We want to provide equitable access for small businesses to keep our local economy vibrant and make sure folks of color have access to capital to grow their business on fair terms. Entrepreneurs of color have been locked out of these opportunities,” says Nguyen. Six nonprofit organizations will govern the fund: not banks.

“We want to provide equitable access for small businesses to keep our local economy vibrant.”

**Tash Nguyen**  
program manager,  
Restore Oakland



## Prototyping lab zooms in on PPE shortage

**A**nother company transitioned its ordinary business day to create valuable gear in the Covid fight: **Port Product Lab**, housed at 300 Lakeside Drive. Pre-pandemic, the company worked to guide entrepreneurs in product development, including prototyping in the shop, determining their target market, and coaching with an established businessperson. “We don’t want anyone to take out a several hundred thousand dollar loan before they’re ready,” says program manager Ari Takata-Vasquez. “It’s disappointing when entrepreneurs give up and go to an office and have a boss and a job. That’s a sad story,” says Sal Bednarz, managing partner. And then Covid hit. The lab started making face shields and sneeze guards, the plastic barriers that protect essential workers engaging with the public, like grocery store cashiers or classroom teachers. “Immediately after shelter in place, there was a recognition that facilities didn’t have the things they needed, like emergency personal protective equipment (PPE)...we saw a need for low-cost, temporary sneeze guards. We developed them.” Bednarz understood that the sneeze guards would be temporary since the pandemic would not last, and should therefore be made cheaper than typical sneeze guards available at the time.

### Kudos to problem solvers

As a nice aside, Senator Elizabeth Warren sent a June 2020 letter congratulating a Port Product Lab customer, RespiraWorks, for working on an open-source ventilator at the lab. RespiraWorks’s design had been picked for a finalist in the CoVent-19 Challenge, a global mission to find ventilation solutions that could be rapidly deployed to developing nations—and in July 2021, it was announced that RespiraWorks won third place out of 213 entries from 43 countries.



BASSLINE

From beats to beans at Waveworks.

## No matter what happens, we’re not giving up coffee

**P**re-pandemic, **Waveworks’s** Bradley Katz and Greg Pescheret were used to engineering the grinding dance beat behind many a party or show. But when the parties came to a halt, Katz found newfound interest in something else to grind: his beloved coffee beans. He had already been a connoisseur who spent time thinking about the bean’s profile and terroir, as profiled in *The Oaklandside*. Now, with time on his hands, he decided to start roasting on a professional level and invited Pescheret (who had previously left a cafe job to join him at Waveworks) and another friend Aaron Ballard to launch the entrepreneurial endeavor. The company name, bassline coffee, beautifully harks to Waveworks’s origins. The website home page currently shows all three principals, masked, with text repeated behind them, “Find your rhythm. Feel the vibe.” Each Tuesday, the group roasts and then ships. A typical listing is for a light roast with beans from the Kintamani Highlands of Central Bali, with notes of macadamia, strawberry and...Kit Kats. Party on!

## You have a laser cutter? Let's get together and work on this problem

**W**hile industrial maker space **m0xy** closed in December 2020, it did a lot of good before it closed its doors. Its executive director Atticus Wolf says a new organization is forming, though. What is its name? “Good question!” he says with a laugh. “We’re trying to figure out what to call it... We still have the building and we’re still doing things.” That’s the kind of fluid flexibility that was in full force starting March 2020, when the shelter in place mandate ended m0xy’s offering affordable studio space to artists, creating paying work through outside contracts, and providing educational sessions like finance classes for artists. Wolf got a phone call from a friend, who asked, “Do you have a laser cutter?” Soon six people were on a call, which grew to what Wolf calls, “a 1,000-person coordinated effort across the bay.” That laser cutter was put to use creating 50,000 face shields for healthcare workers. “We’re problem solvers, creators, inventors...fundamentally, that’s what artists do: we create things,” says Wolf. “We had access to machines to produce things on an industrial scale.” Plus: a motivated force of creative thinkers who collaborated on design and engineering, figuring out supply chains, and sourcing materials.

He received thank-you letters from San Quentin

Prison, where a prisoner outbreak of Covid-19 from transferred detainees from another prison had led to 2,200 cases and 28 deaths among the 3,300 inmates. “Within 24 hours, we got face masks and face shields to everyone over there,” says Wolf. The PPE was funded in a number of ways, he says, by working to create nonprofits or getting help from existing ones, grant writing, and collectively fundraising. Some big names stepped in, too: “Coca-Cola sent plastic,” he says.

Some may not remember, but in the early days of the pandemic, PPE was hard to find. “I talked to front line workers who were issued a paper bag with a single N95 mask inside,” he says. One of the groups that leased space from m0xy shrugged at the critical stop-gap of N95’s needing to be certified by the FDA and NIOSH. “We circumvented the entrenched system,” he says, to get 8 million uncertified facemasks distributed. “People were getting sick; people were dying.” Now that demand has subsided and larger manufacturers have been able to shift to create face shields and masks, a return to art is possible. But perhaps the PPE were a form of art as well. “Math is the universal language of science, and art is the universal language of emotion,” says Wolf.

**“We’re problem solvers, creators, inventors... fundamentally, that’s what artists do.”**

**Atticus Wolf,**  
executive director,  
m0xy

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WRIGHT & BROWN DISTILLING

### Distillery shares much-needed ingredient

Following the altruistic lead, a distillery that pivoted to making hand sanitizer is West Oakland's **Wright & Brown Distilling Co.** This artisanal whiskey maker uses centuries-old recipes and methods to create a "grain to glass" experience. Founded by Earl Brown and Dan Wright, it operates out of a small industrial space at 2715 Magnolia Street. Their 250-gallon still was purchased in—where else?—Kentucky. Brown told the magazine *CompanyWeek* that, "We were actually the first distillery in Oakland since Prohibition. It's quite possible it was the first legal whiskey ever made in Oakland."

Production began in 2015, and the first bottle

was sold in 2016 after luxuriating for 13 months in the barrel. Now the liquors repose a little longer, for two years. Changes in state regulations because of Covid-19 allowed distilleries to sell directly to customers (and curbside pickup is for now the only way to bring home a Wright & Brown bottle), but distribution to restaurants and stores still requires an outside distributor. When the company learned that their mix could be used for making hand sanitizer, they donated hundreds of gallons to Highland Hospital, the Oakland Fire Department, Asian Health Services, Self Help for the Elderly, and several homeless service agencies, as reported in *Oakland Voices*.

### Adapting production to make PPE

For over five decades, **Mettler-Toledo** has been the leading provider of liquid handling solutions through its Rainin brand headquartered on Edgewater Drive near the Coliseum. That means that life scientists daily use its pipettes to draw up solutions, including difficult or viscous liquids. But when laboratories fell vacant during the pandemic, Rainin expanded its operations to make face shields. On June 8, 2020, a Rainin crew delivered more than 10,000 face shields to the city of Oakland to be used by firefighters and healthcare professionals on the front lines.

**Rainin** also expanded its factory to produce more pipettes and pipette tips, needed for Covid testing and vaccine research. "Rainin was able to respond quickly by hiring up to 350 temporary workers, most of them focused on tip production," says Werner Maas, general manager at Mettler-Toledo Rainin. "In addition to this rapid expansion, we teamed up with our sister company in San Diego in producing face shields, responding to the shortage in PPE at the onset of the pandemic, and we donated about 100,000 of them to the City of Oakland and to the Partnership HealthPlan of California, amongst others."

Maas says that the company also increased its pipette tip capacity with additional machines and tooling. "Late in 2020, and with demand remaining elevated, we decided to expand our clean room facility," he says. "We collaborated closely with Micah Hinkle, business development manager of the Economic & Workforce Development Department of the City of Oakland, in fast-tracking the various approvals and permits ... This expansion will result in additional jobs in Oakland, in particular for production associates and automation and molding technicians and engineers."

## Oakland al fresco

### Parklets keep businesses operating in the outdoors

**C**reativity ruled the pandemic, as restaurants configured new ways to get food into the hands of customers. Sometimes it was a plexiglass wall with a pass-through for bagged food, sometimes a table pushed in front of a door which provided the necessary six feet of separation, and often a parklet built onto the sidewalk created or expanded outdoor seating. Suddenly, many more diners felt the joy of al fresco dining—and with our Mediterranean climate, we've got the ideal warmth to sit outside most of the year.

Valentino Carrillo, owner of La Frontera and ¡Que Rico! restaurants, acknowledges gratitude towards the **Flex Streets Initiative** which allowed Oakland restaurants, retailers and personal care service providers to build parklets to operate outdoors. This City of Oakland program streamlined the permitting process to use sidewalks, parking lanes, and even streets for dining, and provided a map for diners to find those restaurants. All permitting fees were waived. Some restaurateurs used the extra space to make social distancing easier when customers picked up take-out orders, while others put out tables



COURTESY OF VALENTINO CARRILLO

**The Oakland Flex Street Initiative allowed businesses to create parklets to operate outdoors.**

to encourage diners to stay close to the premises to eat. The program also allowed hair and nail salons to operate outdoors. Flex Streets was later expanded in July 2020 to allow retailers or restaurateurs to use vacant outdoor city-owned properties at fair market value (or reduced fees if the site was in an impacted neighborhood) if they could not otherwise expand their normal operations in a way that met social distancing requirements. The Flex Streets Initiative has been extended until March 31, 2022.

At La Frontera, Carrillo's Mexican restaurant on International Boulevard, a recently graduated UC Berkeley architectural student built his parklet. "It was a great thing for the restaurant. You could get food fresh off the grill, and when you do take-out,

you lose that experience. There were people who used it every day," says Carrillo.

At Almond and Oak restaurant on Grand Avenue, chef-owner Rico Rivera, who attended Skyline High School and whose wife is an OPD officer, built an extensive, roofed parklet. It resembles a long cabana with curtains that provided a bit of privacy from cars zooming by on the street. "It was our only means of income other than to-go food, which was minimal at best," says Rivera. "It literally helped pay bills. And it gave us a glimmer of hope, not so much financial, but... people." He says he'll keep the parklet up as long as he can because, "We're still not 100 percent on the inside. Laborwise, we're just so short. We can't do more than we're doing now."





Oakland chef Reign Free founded The Black Culinary Collective to help emerging Black food and beverage entrepreneurs gain access to commercial kitchen space and professional support. She is the founder of The Red Door catering company, in business since 2006.

LIPO CHING | SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS TIMES

▲ NEW BUSINESSES

# Leap of faith

## Oakland entrepreneurs start new enterprises in the midst of difficult times

Even in a business climate that was less than ideal, businesses have opened. **Low Bar** illustrates that a strong sense of humor gets you through anything. “Whether it be a night out with the homies, a happy hour with coworkers, dinner alone on your birthday, or just a nightcap, we’ll make sure you leave happier (or at least less sober and hungry) than when you arrived. Also we play really good music,” reads the website. This cocktail bar at 23rd and Webster has fun menu options like mezcal chocolate churros, or “an impossible hamburguesa.” For house cocktails, it’s worth ordering the Crikey Caramba! just to say the name aloud.

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**The Black Culinary Collective (BCC)** opened in May to help emerging Black food and beverage entrepreneurs gain access to commercial kitchen space and supportive coaching, partnering with the Oakland Black Business Fund and the Oakstop Alliance. Oakland chef Reign Free created the collective; she’s the founder of The Red Door catering company, which has been in business since 2006. The BCC has a 5,000-square-foot commercial kitchen and popup space, cold storage, shared use of pots and pans, a popup retail space, and more. For an additional fee, collective members can get help with other aspects of the business like recipe development or label making.

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Vinyl is back! **Storefront Records** sprang up in West Oakland, a record label established by Fantastic Negrito after winning his...wait for it...third Grammy. He’ll be releasing his next album through this label housed at 3431 San Pablo Ave. He’ll also work with other artists, start an internship program for high school students, and produce events for the community spotlighting small businesses, including vinyl swapmeets.

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**DEEP Grocery Co-Op** opened in April 2021 as an online grocery store that is worker-owned, aiming to uplift the Black and brown economy with healthy food like organic produce (DEEP stands for Deep East Oakland Empowering the People). You can order online for pickup or delivery, and the goal is to open a brick-and-mortar store.

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The magazine *High Times* which prides itself on being the “oldest name in cannabis” opened its first brick and mortar store in Oakland in April 2021, the **High Times Cannabis Market** at 7817 Oakport St. The store carries everything from pre-roll to flower to ingestibles to topicals.

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**Moments Cooperative and Community Space** opened in January 2021 as a bookstore, paid residency space, community fridge, and more, for QT/Black, Indigenous, People of

Color on occupied Lisjan Ohlone land (Oakland). The fridge includes prepared meals, water bottles, fruits and vegetables, free for anyone who is BIPOC; a note on the door says, “This isn’t charity; this is mutual aid.”

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And now for a selected wrapup of the many eateries and beverage spots that opened within the last year, we’ll start with **Bombera**, whose much-beloved chef/owner Dominica Rice recently closed Cosecha in Swan’s Market. In May, she opened Bombera in a shuttered fire station in the Dimond District at 3459 Champion St. “Bombera” means female firefighter, Rice’s pushback against “an era where the paid city jobs were only for men.” The fire station had been used for storage until the city invited bids for its reuse, and Rice’s plan for a full-service restaurant won. As the fire station sits in a neighborhood center mixed use area, its use as a restaurant maintains the goal of a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented business district.

Rice employs three women who have been doing masa for over 25 years and have been with her for eight. “They’re not taco ladies; they’re not tamale ladies. Always when it is women, people don’t see them as a chef. They are sous-chefs. They see them as grandmas or housewives; they see them as aunties. It gets dumbed down especially for Mexican food and for Mexican women. But they are tortilla masters.” Rice says it is this change of attitude that got the attention of the James Beard Foundation; she was a 2019 award semifinalist.

At Bombera, she’s been settling in and enjoying the mesquite grill. “I’m trying to teach the younger staff to maintain the fire and coax the best out of it,” she says.

*continued on next page*





**Chef Dominica Rice (right) recently opened her new restaurant, Bombera, in an old fire station.**

BOMBERAOAKLAND.COM



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Let's go.



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**The Alice Collective**, an event space at 272 14th St., launched the Alice Market within its walls as a pandemic pivot where small businesses can sell their food and drinks for a few hours, a few times a week. Vendors include the popular **Edith's Pie**, **Bolita**, and others. There's a dazzling array of food to pick from the **Oakland Food Hall's** ghost megakitchen overflowing with 50 small food vendors. Formerly known as Jingletown Eats, it's so populated that there are two mac and cheese spots—**Oak-Town Mac & Cheese** and the **Mac N' Cheese Shop**—and everything from the fancy **Left Bank Brasserie** to the silly **Happy Moose Juice**. All food is order for pickup at 2353 E. 12th St.

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A pop-up operating out of the closed Ninna restaurant at 4066 Piedmont Avenue, **Yilan Foods** makes Taiwanese bowls and soups on Sundays for preorder pickup and delivery. The small sampling of staple dishes regularly sells out. Someday the crew hopes to open their own brick-and-mortar site.

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Beautiful ceramic vessels and trays can be purchased at **Asha Tea House** on Grand Avenue, which also supplies, of course, a curated selection of tea. "Asha" is Taiwanese for "someone that enjoys life," and this tea house provides a thoughtful place to ruminate on life's pleasures. This site joins the Asha group with a Berkeley and San Francisco presence as well.

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Another success story is **La Perla**, which served Puerto Rican food out of a liquor store in the Dimond District until gathering enough momentum to open a brick-and-mortar location at 3409 Fruitvale on Valentine's Day 2021. With so few Puerto Rican restaurants, people drive from as far away as Sacramento to get the food they crave.

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For an aesthetic treat for the eyes and palate, Ayesha Curry's store **Sweet July** at 455 23rd St. is a combination cafe, bookstore, and décor emporium that was featured in *Architectural Digest*. The cooking personality with her own Food Network show launched a magazine with the same name as the store, in honor of the year of her wedding and her three kids' birthdays.

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**Los Kinjas Fusion Eatery** opened at 366-A Grand Avenue to serve a streamlined sushi menu, across the street from its previous Japanese restaurant Kinja, which caught on fire and closed in April 2020. The plan is to move back to the original spot once repairs are completed. In the meantime, *Berkeley-side* reported that playfulness met fusion in the Los Cantaros roll, named to honor the restaurant's taqueria neighbor.

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In a former auto dealership on Auto Row, a Caribbean beach club and cocktail lounge named **Sandbar** opened with sand on the floor, palm umbrellas, and dedicated indoor bike parking at 2418 Broadway.

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A vegan-friendly worker-led restaurant, bar, and commissary **Understory** combines food with community advocacy. For instance, all throughout June if you ordered the mochi donut of the day, 100 percent of that donut's profits were donated to support queer and trans asylum seekers. With advance order, Understory can accommodate one group at a time with indoor dining at 528 8th St., with limited seating at the parklet outside, and plenty of takeout.

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A West Oakland breakfast and lunch restaurant, **Nib's**, is devoted to classic diner food. Run by a husband-and-wife duo, the place opened in February 2020 at 3112 Market St. Fill your plate with burgers, teriyaki, sandwiches or big breakfasts at this family-style restaurant.





# ELEVATE YOUR WORKDAY EXPERIENCE

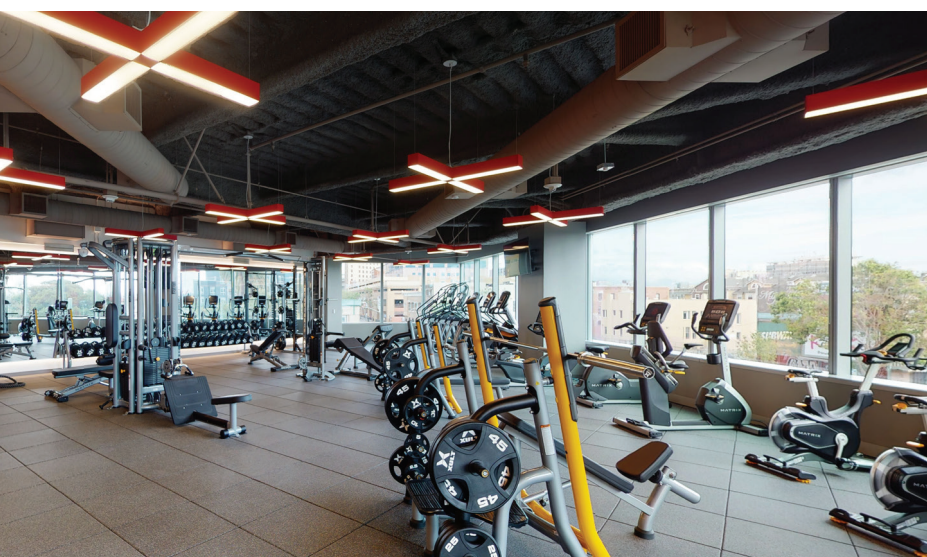
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Oakland restaurants stepped forward to distribute meals during the pandemic.

DR. G PHOTOGRAPHY

## ▲ NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

# Food is for sharing

**W**hen the shelter-in-place health orders were first announced in March 2020, many restaurateurs were worried. But a beautiful solution arose that helped restaurants thrive and helped the homeless as well.

Maria Alderete, manager and co-owner with her husband of **Luka's Taproom & Lounge**, was on the forefront of this pivot. She says that the day after the shelter-in-place mandate was announced, someone from the Berkeley Free Clinic knocked on the door at Luka's. They were seeking food for a homeless encampment. "Maybe they thought we had extra food in the walk-in," she says, "but my husband and I thought we could do better."

In response, Alderete formed the organization **Community Kitchens**. This gathered together 50 different restaurants to create meals, with community partners, including the Berkeley Free Clinic, coming forward to deliver them. This program kept restaurant staff employed doing what they do best: making food. Alderete was mindful of her employees, some of whom had been with her since the taproom's start 16 years ago. She kept them on the payroll to make the Community Kitchens meals; she also launched delivery platforms that allowed Luka's to stay open for customers throughout the entire pandemic.

Financial support for Community Kitchens came from **EAT.LEARN.PLAY.**, a foundation which also collaborated on the meal plan. "We thought we had enough money for six weeks," she says, then starts laughing at the initial idea that the shutdown was only supposed to last that long. "We laugh now."

Luka's also participated in the **World Central Kitchen** program, a similar program which provided meals, including for passengers on the *Grand Princess* cruise ship, docked in Oakland. Alderete says that program involved 150 different restaurants in the East Bay and provided 1,500 meals a week between April and December of 2020. **EAT.LEARN.PLAY.** was also involved in this pilot program.

"Luka's is an epicenter of Oakland," says Alderete. "Everyone walks through our doors: developers, the mayor, celebrities. We have a network of people we know that we reached out to raise money [for Community Kitchens]. There are a lot of unsheltered people who are part of the neighborhood and aren't able to shelter in place. They live in tents or on the street. So we were feeding people right from our doorway."

In these early days of the pandemic, downtown and Uptown were deserted.

Today, Luka's is back to offering indoor dining as well as takeout. And while World Central Kitchen is disbanding because its work was relief-focused and temporary, Alderete is excited that Community Kitchens is in the process of building a self-sustaining funding model. One idea is that participating restaurants might add a 1 percent surcharge to the bills of full-paying customers to support community meals. "The one thing we've learned from the



EAT.LEARN.PLAY.

Distributing food, encouraging reading for kids, and raising awareness about the census—all in one encounter.

“The silver lining of the pandemic, which obviously was a terrible period for so many, was how Oakland as a community came together to say, ‘We’re going to take care of our own.’”

**Jose Corona**  
vice president of programs and partnerships,  
**EAT.LEARN.PLAY.**



pandemic is that it brought the community together: organizations, restaurants, and philanthropic donors,” she says.

Jose Corona, the vice president of programs and partnerships of EAT.LEARN.PLAY., agrees with that sentiment. “The silver lining of the pandemic, which obviously was a terrible period for so many, was how Oakland as a community came together to say, ‘We’re going to take care of our own.’ It was beautiful to see how so many stepped up to the plate.”

The foundation, founded in December 2019, focused on addressing food insecurity for kids and families, Corona says. “It was the largest activation of any city in the U.S.A. while working with World Central Kitchen to reopen these restaurants in Oakland.” He says World Central Kitchen served 2.5 million meals and created \$25 million in revenue for the participating restaurants. Those meals fed the homeless, seniors, people living in affordable housing developments, and people living in foster homes. With 18,000 kids no longer attending school who depended on the provided lunches, EAT.LEARN.PLAY. partnered with the Oakland Unified School District to get those families fed.

World Central Kitchens faced a gigantic task in terms of organizing the restaurants, forming partnerships with the meal recipients, and distributing the food. “As with many things during the pandemic, it had to be done, so we rolled up our sleeves,” says Corona.

Now that World Central Kitchen is drawing to a close, EAT.LEARN.PLAY. is doing literacy work, providing access to team sports for kids, and creating safe places for them to play. “We refine our efforts and



EAT.LEARN.PLAY.

Stephen and Ayesha Curry started the EAT.LEARN.PLAY. Foundation to fight childhood hunger and support education and health.

adjust,” Corona says.

Of course, the city of Oakland provided a role in making sure food still flowed to seniors during the pandemic, through its Great Plates Delivered program. This program partnered with World Central Kitchen, FEMA, and the state of California to deliver up to 12 locally prepared meals a week to qualifying seniors. The Great Oakland Check-In identified the seniors who needed

meals and also made sure seniors and vulnerable families were connected to necessary city services. Meals were delivered by city staff or available at distribution points at three branch libraries.

Although people had to meet certain age, income, and other requirements to receive the meals delivered to their home, the library meals were available to anyone. This program ended July 9.

# PROSPER TOGETHER



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PHOTOS: GOODGOODEATZ

## ▲ COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

# Growing our own

**The Black-led Akoma Outdoor Market features vendors selling produce, crafts, artisan foods, body care items, and much more.**

### Black Cultural Zone outdoor market is a thriving hub

One of the most joyful aspects of the **Black Cultural Zone** is the Akoma Outdoor Market, held the first and third Sundays, weather permitting, at Liberation Park across from the Eastmont Town Center on a city-owned parcel. This Black-led farmers market features Black and brown vendors selling produce, honey, crafts, baked goods, teas and coffees, body care items, and much more. Food trucks, music, dance performances, and outdoor group fitness classes make it a gathering place, as well as the spot to pick up locally-sourced items, or to donate a market bag filled with these items to an elder. Carolyn Johnson, the Black Cultural Zone’s executive director, played a huge role in bringing positivity and power to Liberation Park.

The Black Cultural Zone began in 2014 as a grass-roots coalition to help keep Black people in East Oakland. Its three-pronged approach focuses on place-keeping in an era of high rents pushing out long-term residents, strengthening the area’s economy, and maintaining quality of life. An official nonprofit since 2019, the collaborative partnership depends on sharing of culture and hard-earned knowledge of successful community service, with partners such as churches, youth centers, arts groups, businesses, and public agencies. Over fifty organizations are involved in the Black Cultural Zone.

**The Akoma Market** was a natural offshoot of this mission, especially with the use of Liberation Park during the pandemic as a massive food distribution site for World Central Kitchen. Ndidi



**“They have things you wouldn’t get even in a grocery store... It’s been immensely fun to test and try new things.”**

**Ndidi Okwelogu**  
Akoma Market economic development manager

Okwelogu, the market’s economic development manager, says that volunteers worked to get hot meals into hands through a drive-through set-up that, at its height, gave out 10,000 meals a week.

Since so many people had lost their livelihoods during the pandemic, the idea arose to create a certified farmer’s market onsite. Such a market was considered an essential service, which allowed the vendors in this open-air market to keep selling. “East Oakland is a notorious food desert,” says Okwelogu, “so this was a great opportunity for Black and brown farmers to be able to sell and provide fresh produce to the community.” No-swab Covid-19 testing was also available to the public. Later, Akoma became a vaccination site.

After its September 2020 opening, Akoma quickly became “the hub for East Oakland Black culture,” Okwelogu says.

Many vendors are Oakland-based, such as Pound Bizness. “If you’re not from the American South, you might not know how great pound cake is,” she says. “My mother is a pound cake lady from Louisiana, and [Pound Bizness’s cake] rivals hers. You eat it any time of day.”

Another vendor is Raised Roots, a farming company started by Jamil Burns that grows crops in vacant lots throughout the county. It’s Raised Roots that actually kept Akoma open by undergoing the official USDA process to become a certified farmer’s market. The stand sells hand-harvested celery, broccoli, various lettuces, chard, and more. “They have leafy greens affordably priced, squash...They recently had okra. We buy that every December for gumbo for Christmas and New





Year’s, and sometimes fry it in the summer,” says Okwelogu. “And they have things you wouldn’t get even in a grocery store, like fresh black-eyed peas. It’s been immensely fun to test and try new things.”

Burns of Raised Roots also helped students garden at Castlemont High School, and those students were able to exhibit, but not sell, their produce at the Akoma Market.

It’s heartening to see so much high energy at Liberation Park, which for 13 years had been a vacant lot.

“The new element that everyone’s excited about is the roller skating rink,” says Okwelogu. “There’s a family skate time during the day, and at night there are adult skating parties.”

Armed with \$36.9 million of CARES Act funding, the City of Oakland funneled \$150,000 into supporting the **Black Cultural Zone Community Development Corporation** in operating the Akoma Market. “Altogether, the BCZ estimates the markets and its functions served more than 90,000 people,” reports a city of Oakland memorandum from April, summarizing the CARES Act expenditures. There were 35 food distribution days, nine markets held, four community events, three Covid testing days, and the distribution of PPE to 170 businesses, according to the City of Oakland website.

The Akoma Outdoor Market has become a gathering place as well as the spot to buy locally-sourced items.

# A cultural magnet

## Native and Indigenous vendors gather to share community

A gathering so needed by its community that it brought people from as far away as Oklahoma and the Dakotas, the **Indigenous Red Market** has made its mark in Oakland. Despite a 14-month pandemic hibernation, it’s gaining momentum again with quarterly markets and controlled attendance capped at 600.

“Nothing in this area has been done before where Native and Indigenous vendors can meet on a consistent basis,” says Noah Gallo (Ysleta Pueblo tribal member), who is the social and human service coordinator for the Native American Health Center and the market’s manager. “During Covid, people wanted to practice culture, but it was difficult to do with everyone at home, so the red market coming back gives people a chance to hear the drum, try the food.”

The market includes food and craft vendors, dental screenings, Covid testing and assistance in making vaccination appointments, youth dancers from the Intertribal Friendship House, music, and a component Gallo is especially proud of: promoting entrepreneurship. Square, which recently opened an office in Uptown Station, has been providing business workshops. “Entrepreneurship is big,” Gallo says. The market is free and held at the Native American Health Center parking lot on 3124 International Boulevard.

Another way vendors come together in Oakland is around the shores of Lake Merritt. In the fall of 2020, \$50,000 in CARES Act and City funding were provided to A2Z Media Group to coordinate the pilot Lake Merritt Vending Program. The program supports Covid-impacted vendors by giving them a City-sanctioned space to sell handmade goods. This year, City Council funded and the Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission authorized a continuation of the Lake Merritt Vending Program until the end of November.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF INDIGENOUS RED MARKET

Traditional dancers at the Indigenous Red Market.



Mural art celebrates community.





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▲ WATERFRONT

# Brooklyn Basin

Revitalization creates an energetic, walkable urban neighborhood

**F**or decades, Oaklanders have not had access to a portion of their own waterfront that was used as this industrial maritime area, then abandoned. Now, a 64-acre mixed-used neighborhood development called Brooklyn Basin is reuniting Oaklanders with their estuary.

Through a public/private partnership with the City of Oakland, Signature Development Group is transforming an industrial site into a place of thriving growth. It's also providing hundreds of units of affordable housing for families and seniors at a newly reopened waterfront built by union labor.

"We wanted this to be a walkable neighborhood," says Michael Ghielmetti, president of Signature. "We have a few anchors—a necklace of parks will run along a mile and half of shoreline and include the Bay Trail." Additionally, three residential towers, multiple retail spaces and restaurants, promenades with incredible views, and lively street life will be part of new life for this old area. Thirty acres of public parkland will host playgrounds, concerts, open-air markets, and festivals, as well as space to plunk down on a blanket and have a picnic. The development will also bridge one of the gaps in the Bay Trail, a planned 500-mile biking and walking circuit around the bay that is presently at 356 miles.

Brooklyn Basin Way will effectively be a Main Street for the development, with retail, restaurants, cafes, dry cleaners, and other services. "It's going to be an energetic, urban neighborhood," he says.

Ghielmetti describes what was previously on the site. "PG&E had a power plant out there, there was a lumberyard, the Port had break bulk storage, a place for storage containers, and a truck driving school. It had fallen into a state of disrepair and it wasn't worthy of Oakland or Oaklanders."

Remembering the site's cultural and historical heyday is an important component of the development. The 1930 Terminal Building was once a busy break-bulk (cargo that doesn't fit into shipping containers) shipping facility, and controversy over its use was resolved by compromise. The building was demolished except for its facade, and some framework from its furthest end. "We saved, in essence, the skeleton or ruin of it. We'll grow ivy or vines up and

over the rafters and uplift it so it should look really cool. It'll give the general public an idea of how big it once was," says Ghielmetti. Additionally, the existing deck was the foundation of the original building. Plaques explain the shipping history of the remaining terminal infrastructure, which is now known as Township Commons. Landscape architects Einwiller Kuehl Inc. won the American Society of Landscape Architects Northern California Chapter Honor Award - Urban Design Category, 2021 for their work on the 8-acre Township Commons.

For those who want to turn a day trip into a lifestyle, Brooklyn Basin offers both affordable and market-rate housing. "The affordable housing was front-loaded in the first phase of the project," says Ghielmetti. When we spoke in July, 465 units of affordable housing

were in the process of being built, market-rate housing was under construction, and people had already started moving into Orion Apartments, the first residential tower. The second building is underway, and a third will begin construction later this year. MidPen Housing is the affordable housing operator. Upon opening for applications, 8,000 flooded the project with over 50 percent Oakland residents and others vying to live in the first two buildings, Paseo Estero and Vista Estero. To be eligible, families could only earn up to 60 percent of the Area Median Income (Paseo Estero), or seniors at 60 percent (Vista Estero). The two projects represent

the City's ongoing efforts to build and preserve affordable housing for Oaklanders.

The development creates a destination for dining, roller blading, kayaking, biking, or just enjoying the wind off the water. "I'm surprised so many people are already using the park at this early stage," says Ghielmetti. "There are hundreds of people there at a given time, and thousands over a weekend. It's crazy good."

The Brooklyn Basin project has been in the making since 2001, with important issues taking a while to iron out—with some continuing to this day. "Many of us have been working on this for 20 years," he said. "Our whole team is proud...Hopefully it will become a treasure for Oakland the same way Golden Gate Park is a treasure for San Francisco."

465

units of  
affordable  
housing under  
construction in  
Brooklyn Basin

SIGNATURE DEVELOPMENT GROUP





## ▲ FINDING A SILVER LINING

# Affordable housing

## Funding programs put buildings into service to address homelessness

**S**ometimes in the midst of hardship—such as the pandemic—silver linings gleam. That was the case with two different solutions for Oakland's unhoused residents.

The state's **Project HomeKey** program was put in place to provide shelter for those experiencing homelessness who were made further vulnerable by the threat of Covid-19. Although the program was intended to help cities purchase vacant hotels, the City of Oakland got the green light instead to buy an old dormitory from the California College of the Arts. Announced by Governor Newsom in June 2020, City staff moved with speed—by the end of December, residents were already moving into Clifton Hall at 5726 Broadway.

Where art students once filled sketchpads, previously unhoused people find deeply affordable sanctuary. In a press conference, Mayor Libby Schaaf said that for the seniors moving in—which constituted two-thirds of the new residents—“This will be their permanent, forever home, where they can remain free of fear of eviction or displacement, knowing that they can age in dignity and comfort with supportive services, and wonderful company around them in the beautiful asset-rich neighborhood of Rockridge.” The top two floors of the glassy, modular four-story building provide 42 units of permanent housing for seniors. The other third of the new residents consists of families; Clifton Hall's second floor hosts a 20-household family



**“It's amazing to be able to house people in this beautiful location who were experiencing homelessness on the street.”**

**Lara Tannenbaum**, manager of Community Homelessness Services

**In response to Covid-19, Oakland has new programs in place to provide housing for seniors.**

shelter. Overall, more than 100 residents found housing in the 63-unit former dormitory.

The supportive services Mayor Schaaf referred to include Family Front Door, the county's one-stop program for families experiencing homelessness, which is located on site. The project was a massive interdepartmental, interagency, and community collaboration and represents an investment in people and a huge step forward on the path to ending family homelessness in Oakland.

Project HomeKey monies were also used to buy the Inn at Temescal hotel at 3720 Telegraph Ave. and some private houses throughout the city, reported *The Oaklandside*.

Another housing solution was found at the Lake Merritt Lodge, which the city rents and is reimbursed for by FEMA monies. “Lake Merritt Lodge is a Covid responsive hotel for people who are at high risk of serious illness or death from Covid,” says Lara Tannenbaum, manager of City of Oakland Community Homelessness Services. She says these residents must meet the CDC criteria that make them at risk, including being over the age of 65. Although this housing was temporary and funding is supposed to end in September, she says the City Council has identified some fiscal year 2021-22 funds that could be moved into housing.

“This building is just beautiful,” says Tannenbaum. “It's amazing to be able to house people in this beautiful location who were experiencing homelessness on the street.” The Lake Merritt Lodge at 2332 Harrison St. started life as the Blue Triangle Club in 1926, a YWCA residence for young, single, working women. Economic setbacks led to different incarnations for the building over the decades, including the name change to Lake Merritt Lodge. It had been used as an SRO hotel and a dormitory for the Hult International Business School's international students, until today's use as a hotel for protecting unhoused residents at risk of Covid.

“People always do better when they're inside, have nursing care on site, have three meals a day, and are safe and secure of knowing that their belongings are locked in their room so they can focus on other plans and moving forward with their lives,” says Tannenbaum.

**The Lake Merritt Lodge has been made a residence hotel for people over 65 who are most at risk of serious illness from Covid-19.**



PHOTOS / LAKE MERRITT LODGE





Mandela Station TOD at West Oakland BART - An emerging biotech cluster - at the intersection of life sciences and technology, Mandela Station sits between 400+ leading biological companies as well as several world-renowned research institutions. The central location also sits on top of an exclusive fiber band of high-speed connectivity running beneath the BART infrastructure.

# EQUITY IS A “LIFE SCIENCE”

By Alan Dones

**“Life Science” A branch of science (such as biology, medicine, and sometimes anthropology or sociology) that deals with living organisms and life processes - (Merriam-Webster Definition)**

Even prior to the rapid development of vaccines to fight the Covid 19 virus, the biotechnology industry in the Bay Area and around the US was experiencing unprecedented growth. The industry expansion has been fueled by the convergence of the rapidly evolving sciences of supercomputing, artificial intelligence, and genetic engineering. The Covid 19 pandemic has only served to accelerate what was already a budding industrial revolution.

But as the biotech economy swells, communities of color, who have suffered the negative effects of the digital divide and its associated displacement, are now for the most part being left out of the biotech economic expansion. Sadly, these communities are finding themselves at even greater risk of losing their wealth and falling farther behind in their fight for achieving social and economic equality.

Fortunately, however, the unprecedented growth of life-science industries holds a potential cure for inequality. Furthermore, the Covid 19 crisis serves to demonstrate what is possible when society is motivated to take on threatening problems that require challenging and complex solutions.

Like with the rapid development and deployment of multiple vaccines, stemming the harmful ravages of accelerating inequality requires “intentionality”. Society must be motivated to embrace a multi-disciplined array of means and methodologies, and undertake the skillful implementation of complex, but viable, strategies. And we must be willing to commit the time and resources necessary to do so.

### THE BIOTECH GROWTH PARADOX

Numerous small startups and large established biotech companies are taking advantage of the



**ALAN E. DONES**

Managing Partner  
Strategic Urban Development  
Alliance, LLC

Bay Area’s wealth of life-science industry drivers to bring new products to market and grow their companies. These key regional drivers include a continuous flow of academia based scientific research and intellectual property, and the region’s highly educated population.

But real estate developers are not currently keeping up with the resulting new demands for housing as well as R&D labs and production facilities. This is placing further stress on the already tight inventories of the residential markets, driving up home prices - and squeezing more people out. This paradox also poses the greatest risk to the health and security of our beloved Bay Area region.

Sprawling homeless camps are only visual markers of an economic decline that also portends rapidly increasing crime rates and mounting health vulnerabilities. Moreover, the current exodus of an underutilized and under compensated workforce could set our region on course to become irretrievably dysfunctional in ways that will ultimately negatively impact wealth and quality of life, for people of ALL income levels.

### LESSONS OF COVID 19 – THE SILVER LINING

The recent value-chain of processes that resulted in vaccines developed in record time - from laboratory to actual shots-in-arms provides an excellent example that explains the multifaceted efforts needed to successfully address societal inequality.

Because of the extreme nature of the Covid19 crisis, companies and governments embraced the range of science, technologies, and engineering necessary

***The continued acceleration of bioscience industry growth provides a perfect platform for curing, or at least reducing inequality.***

- Alan E. Dones

to bring several vaccines to market. They also quickly took on the unprecedented levels of investment risk (in the billions of dollars).

Unprecedented levels of research cooperation and coordination occurred across a range of scientific disciplines. New logistical distribution networks have been established and public awareness/information campaigns were successfully initiated. A similar level of commitment and effort is now needed to effectively address the growing inequality crisis.

### A CURE FOR INEQUALITY

The continued acceleration of bioscience industry growth provides a perfect platform for curing, or at least reducing inequality. But inequality can only effectively be reduced if the key stakeholders choose to embrace and prioritize equity outcomes as a part of meeting their workforce and facility needs.

The “equitable” growth of any industry cluster must include specific skills and activities that:

- Create vocational and professional career opportunities for historically underutilized people.
- Facilitate equitable small business participation,
- Facilitate equitable participation in commercial and residential real estate development and ownership.
- Achieve wealth creation and intergenerational transfer.
- Address the healthcare needs, both mental and physical, of people suffering from the traumatic stress(es) of homelessness and economic insolvency.
- Provide the “ability-to-afford”, as well as affordability in meeting workforce housing needs.

To achieve the above we must embrace a multidisciplined approach -adopting best practices and programs that promote early community outreach/ engagement, training and education, transactional structuring, and the strategic deployment of cutting-edge technologies.

The Leadership in Engineering Equitable Participation (LEEP) initiative is an example of one such program that provides a framework for achieving sustainable social equity outcomes in the built environment.

*(For more information on LEEP please visit <https://www.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/news/paid-content/the-upside-of-equity/2020/what-is-leep.html>)*

### DIVIDENDS FOR ALL RACES

Going forward we must prioritize and code into the DNA of industry growth equity-oriented outcomes. And we must do so with the same level of intentionality that we apply to environmental sustainability, ADA compliance, and seismic safety.

In addition to helping those most in need, overcoming inequality will bring about a stronger economy, and help assure a healthy future for everyone. This is truly the “Upside of Equity”

*For more information on how to incorporate measurable and sustainable equity standards and programs, and realize the “Upside of Equity” – please visit -<https://www.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/news/paid-content/the-upside-of-equity/2020>*





A visualization of the Mandela Station project.

STRATEGIC URBAN DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE

## ▲ OAKLAND GROWTH

# A changing skyline

## Housing, offices, public space planned with community benefit in mind

As with any major city, Oakland's skyline is in flux. Our two major silhouettes, the "wedding cake" City Hall and the oxidized bronze-roofed clock of the Tribune Tower, have become dwarfed by taller structures. And now a new building will significantly up the height game: the 622-foot skyscraper at 415 20th Street, towering over its next competitor, the Ordway Building, at 404 feet.

Approved by the Oakland Planning Commission in May, **415 20th Street LLC** replaces a four-story building, the Oakland Scientific Facility, with a 38-story office tower with 862,000 square feet of office space. There will be retail at the lobby level and four above-ground levels of parking with a half-acre garden atop it. This Hines Development project would be built one block from Uptown Station.

The next big skyline change is one that will forever change West Oakland and bring it the economic fortitude it deserves: **Mandela Station**. This incredible 5.5-acre design straddles the West Oakland BART station with transit-oriented mixed-use development of housing and commercial space. It will include up to 500,000 square feet of office space, more than 240 affordable housing units, approximately 500 market-rate housing units, and 94,000 square feet of retail. Regina Davis, partner at Strategic Urban Development Alliance (SUDA), extends an invitation for people to invest in Mandela Station. "I'd like to see who is bringing their capital to Oakland, and West Oakland specifically," she says, asserting that that would be a form of economic justice.

"Seventh Street is pretty desolate," she says. "We'd like to fill in this hole that's been there literally for five decades...Right now, we have to go outside the community for services, and literally millions of dollars are going outside the neighborhood."

One striking example: Mandela Station will take the place of the BART station's parking lot, where many park to ride to San Francisco, a much-touted seven minutes away. "As banal an activity as parking may be," says Davis, "Did you ever wonder what else could be here besides your parked car while you go elsewhere to spend your money?"

In the gorgeous simulation video that gives a "drone's tour" of the proposed buildout, real people appear as visitors to the complex of the future. Davis, a Black woman who is one of those sims, says the company that made the video had no stock photos of "people who look like me." So she set up a pop-up photo studio for West Oaklanders to come and be photographed to become "residents" of Mandela Station. While the fun photo shoot took place with neighbors, she informed them about the plans for the site. "It was really fun. We can solve a problem and also reach people," she says.

Ultimately, Mandela Station will return vibrancy to a once-thriving neighborhood of Black culture and economy, split by an unfortunate highway placement and the building of the BART station and a post office that required homes to be razed. "We need a center with the services that we deserve. The important thing is to look at the results of this being a realized development," say Davis.

Seventh Street, where Mandela Station will be built, is part of the City's TOD (transit-oriented development) program, which increases development opportunities for cultural arts preservation and community goods and services.

Another group that is working to return success to Seventh Street and West Oakland is the East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative, which aims to bring racial justice to real estate with collective ownership. One such project is Esther's Orbit Room, once a well-known jazz and blues club that hosted famous artists like Etta James. It closed in 2009 and has been abandoned since. EBPREC envi-



**“We can solve a problem and also reach people.”**

**Regina Davis**

Partner, Strategic Urban Development Alliance





Big plans are in the works for the Kaiser Convention Center, at left.

CITY OF OAKLAND

sions restructuring Esther’s as a cultural arts center and residential space for people of color.



Another project that takes on a site with a former heyday is the renovation of the **Kaiser Convention Center** at the edge of Lake Merritt, now to be known as **The Oakland Civic**. There, thousands would gather to watch circuses, annual Christmas pageants, rock concerts...and even a 1962 visit from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. But the center had sat dormant awaiting the proper reuse. Now, Orton Development, Inc. will reopen the smaller 1,900-seat Calvin Simmons Theatre, and the 6,000-seat arena will become commercial space. “We made a commitment to the city that it would be an arts center,” says partner Nick Orton. “So we wanted not only the theatre but also the arena to be arts-related as well.”

As background, following an RFP process, the City of Oakland granted a long-term ground lease and the right to redevelop the stately building to Orton Development, and the two entities signed the lease in late 2020. The project will restore a once-vibrant entertainment and municipal events venue, in keeping with recent, significant Measure DD improvements at the lake. The Beaux Arts exterior’s seven arched insets hold stunning bas relief carvings by A. Stirling Calder, father to the artist Alexander Calder, known for his modern mobile installations. On the other side of the building is easy walkable access to the Oakland Museum of California. The city will always own the building; Orton will be responsible for tenanting and operating it. Part of this mutually-beneficial adaptive reuse project includes obtaining National Historic Landmark status for the structure, and ensuring its rehabilitation follows standards established by the Secretary of the Interior.

Local arts groups will be able to use the center for performance and rehearsal space, and a place to do set design, store things and have offices. The arena space will be divided into units with a long corridor down the middle. “A portion of each unit will be open,” says Orton, “and can be closed temporarily by the tenant with walls or bookshelves.” The circular wall where the stands or bleachers cantilever over the space will be enclosed, while the upper balcony seats will remain “just basically as a work of art, or a free space for a meeting or to eat lunch,” he says.

Three 15’ x 10’ skylights will be added, and

the boarded-up windows will again let in sunshine. “The aesthetics are very cool, and arts groups tend to like more unconventional spaces. It will maintain its historical aesthetic of openness,” he says.

Now, the financials. The pandemic did delay things and force the project to be recapitalized. Of the project’s \$50 million budget, half is for the theater and half for the arena. The arena renovations were funded upfront by Orton family equity, commercial debt, and tax credits. Construction, as well as demolition of some interior elements—such as the mechanical ducting required to circulate air for the vintage 6,000 people who won’t be there—started in July.



Some other notable projects will change the skyline. For instance, **1510 Webster St.**, proposed to be made of mass timber by developer oWow, would be the west coast’s tallest wooden building. The tower would rise 19 stories. The **Eastline** project proposed by the Strategic Urban Development Alliance, Lane Partners, and an investment team would sit on a 3-acre, one-block site near the 19th Street BART station at 2100 Telegraph Ave. Plans include office and retail spaces, community arts spaces, open space, and three levels of parking. **The Telegraph Tower** by TMG at 2201 Valley will be a 28-story state-of-the-art office

building with 15’ floor-to-floor windows and 30,000 square feet of private terraces and balconies with bay and hill views. An Intercontinental Real Estate Corporation project at **1919 Webster** would involve an office tower on a .60-acre plot with a vacant six-story building already on it. At **1900 Broadway**, a 39-story residential tower known as the Stak Site is under construction next to the 19th Street BART. This Behring build will include 452 residential units, 50,000 square feet of commercial space, and 6,700 square feet of retail. A four-story historic Beaux Arts brick building built in 1922, the Tapscott, is being incorporated into the design. Finally, **1750 Broadway** by Rubicon Point Partners will rise 423 feet with 307 housing units in 38 stories, with ground-floor retail. Upper levels will include pools, dog runs, play areas, and landscaping.

One tower that is already in place is Oakland’s tallest residential building, **The Atlas**. At 40 stories atop a seven-story podium, it took the place of the Merchant’s Parking Garage at 1314 Franklin St. Built by Carmel Partners, it includes 633 residential units and 17,350 square feet of retail space at 385 14th St. It was completed in 2020 and includes a rooftop deck, a fitness studio, pool terrace, dog park, and more. A year after opening, demand is robust, and the developer recently announced the building is more than 50 percent leased.

Up the hills from downtown, development is underway where the **Oak Knoll Naval Hospital** once tended servicemen wounded in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. It closed in 1996 and was vacant until its demolition in 2011. The Oak Knoll site has been graded for its Phase I buildout. Nine hundred townhomes and houses are planned for the 183-acre site, which will include 67 acres of open space, 72,000 square feet of retail space, a restored creek, and miles of biking and walking trails. Developer SunCal paid \$20 million in impact fees for its decision not to include affordable housing. A 5.4-acre parcel of City-owned land surrounded by Oak Knoll but not part of this development is known as the Barcelona Parcel; affordable housing is planned for this area. The City has been working on developing the historic Oak Knoll site for many years, with both the economic recession of 2008 and the bankruptcy of SunCal’s original partner Lehman Brothers causing significant delays.



TMG PARTNERS

The Telegraph Tower.



## ▲ OAKLAND HOTELS

# A place to lay your head

There's no place like home away from home

**W**hile sleepers dream, empires grow. Or at least that's the hope! Oakland's growing its hotel room capacity, to support the conferences and conventions that bring thousands into the city for the first time...and to support the tourist who may take one look at all Oakland has to offer and make plans to extend their stay permanently. And while pandemic data continues to change nearly daily, the city did experience a travel bounce back in the summer of 2021 that brought some needed tourism. The Oakland International Airport reported that with travel restrictions rolled back, it was operating at 100 percent of flights as of July 1, although the number of travelers were nowhere near the 2019 pre-pandemic bookings. But for those who fly, drive, or train in, the trip is worth it.

Visit Oakland, the city's destination marketing organization (DMO), is ready to embrace both the opportunity and responsibility of reshaping the city's tourism economy.

Peter Gamez, Visit Oakland's new President & CEO, is eager to help get Oakland back on the map. "This city has so much to offer visitors—vibrant arts, culture, museums, sports, recreation, beautiful hotels, dynamic meeting facilities, and a mind-blowing culinary scene—but it's about more than just things on a map. Through our diverse cultures, people, and thinking, Oakland can inspire, challenge, and change the way people see things," Gamez says.

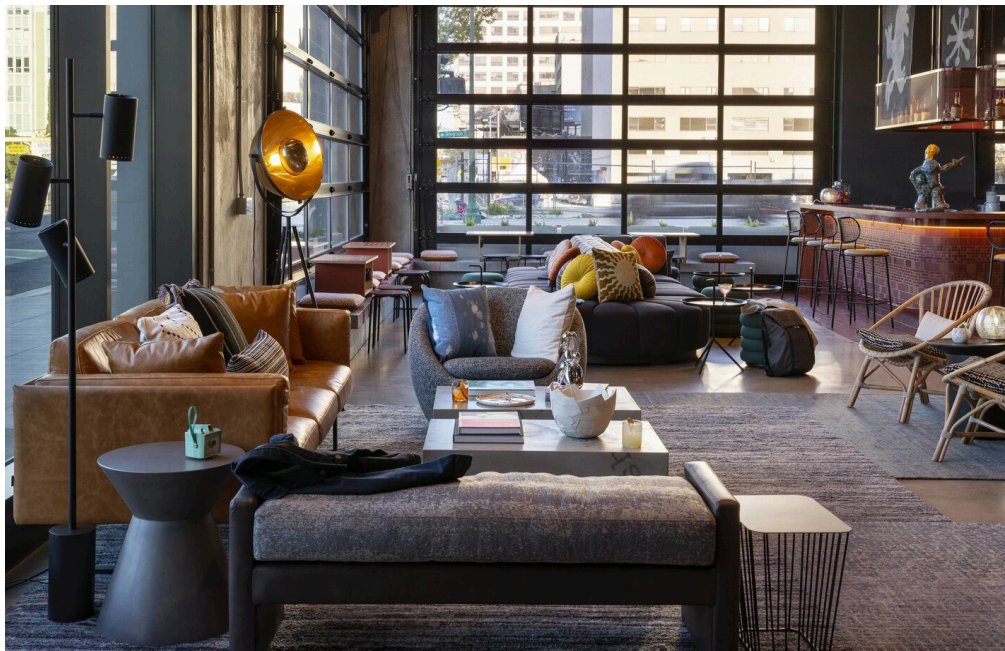
In early September, Visit Oakland launched a new brand awareness campaign encouraging visitors to 'See Things From Our Side'; not just in position to our well-known neighbors across the bay, but also in addressing misconceptions and preconceived notions people may have about Oakland. The goal of this campaign is to spread awareness of Oakland as a leisure destination through video, display, and innovative storytelling.

Gamez also plans to amplify the tourism voice of Oakland via strategic partnerships with Visit California and neighboring destination marketing organizations like San Francisco Travel. Visit Oakland will also create relationships that will encourage lodging stays in Oakland.

New hotels are rising. Here's a look at a few of the new builds.

## The Moxy Hotel

A Marriott property, this new hotel's modern décor and furnishings include Oakland love, with the iconic fiercely-rooted oak tree emblem used throughout on pillows and wall art. The neon sign above the bar at Bar Moxy Lounge reads, "Life is not



MOXY HOTEL



**Above: The new Moxy Hotel in Oakland's Arts & Entertainment District. Left: The exterior mural is their required public art element.**

## The Kissel

A four-star independently operated boutique hotel will offer 168 hotel rooms, 72 residential units, retail space, and a restaurant at 24th and Broadway. Its modern architecture will incorporate a historic 1910 Beaux Arts facade. Additionally, its aesthetics and design elements will honor American car culture, since the hotel sits in what is known as Broadway Auto Row. The hotel is being built on what was once an auto showroom, with an anticipated opening this winter.

## Marriott Residence Inn + AC Hotel

a dress rehearsal," and communal tables, a hospitality suite, an outdoor patio, and a library (!) encourage thoughtful engagement with others. Some of the 172 rooms offer partial bay views or city views, and so me have bunk bed lofts for families. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are available in the dramatically-lit lounge/lobby, or great options are available in walking distance. It's located at Telegraph and West Grand avenues and opened in April 2021. Upon check-in, guests receive a key—and a cocktail or non-alcoholic beverage of their choice.

Sited at Jefferson and 14th streets, a hotel is underway that will rise 18 stories and contain two hotels in one: a Marriott Residence Inn and an AC Hotel. This will add close to 300 hotel rooms to Oakland's stock. The Residence Inn rooms will be on the lower levels and cater to people staying longer with the need for a more apartment-type housing. On higher levels, the AC Hotel rooms will be for shorter stays and include a bit more razzle dazzle in their furnishings/amenities. The hotel is in an Opportunity Zone, one of several around the country where investments of this type are rewarded by tax benefits, including deferral of capital gains taxes. The pandemic temporarily halted construction, but the building is now going up quickly. Learn more about Opportunity Zones in the Business Solutions article on page 27.



SIGNATURE PROPERTIES

**The new Kissel hotel will incorporate a historic building facade on Broadway Auto Row.**





The Key's 18-story office tower includes a large skydeck.

ELLIS PARTNERS

## ▲ OFFICE AND RETAIL

# A place to work and shop

## Find your work/life balance in Oakland

**T**he pandemic did a number on office space rental, but Oakland bounced back better than other cities in the Bay Area, according to commercial real estate surveys in May of this year, reported the *East Bay Times*. Of course, office vacancies soared during the shelter-in-place year but to a far lesser degree in the East Bay (16.2 percent) and South Bay (18.2 percent)—whereas San Francisco saw a horrifying 93.1 percent rise. That means Oakland is a strong contender for the office market.

One of the more interesting office solutions in Oakland is The Key, a new 18-story office tower adjoining the historic, seven-story Key System Building at 1100 Broadway. These are named for the once-thriving Key System of streetcars which connected Oakland's neighborhoods and even ran to San Francisco on the lower deck of the Bay Bridge. The historic 1911 building with ornate Beaux Arts architecture was seismically strengthened by "leaning on" the newer structure.

The Key has prime placement to transit corridors, with immediate access to the 12th Street BART station, an AC Transit bus stop, and the Broadway Shuttle stop. It's kitty-corner to the Oakland Marriott & Convention Center. Taking advantage of its height for bird's eye views of the city, The Key's large skydeck also provides access to the even larger skydeck at 1111 Franklin, where the University of California Office of the President is housed, for a combined nearly 18,000 square feet of vista gazing. The copious amounts of office space are 100 percent leased as of this writing, but businesses can still hone in on the 10,770 square feet of retail space. With bike parking and basement shower facilities, The Key encourages workers to cycle to work and spare the air.

**“This shows how strong the interest is in the Oakland market.”**

**Steve Golubchik**

vice chairman and head of capital markets, Newmark commercial real estate

Similarly, the Uptown Station at 1955 Broadway merges office and retail space on top of the 19th Street BART station. Restaurants and shops will join Shake Shack to fill the ground floor plaza, while workspaces are available on floors 2-8. In the workspaces, 16-18 foot ceilings provide an airy place to focus one's energies, with original brick facades and an 85-foot atrium. This building was opened in 1929 as the H. C. Capwell Company, a grand department store. Many Oaklanders remember it as "the Emporium" or as Sears, from its different iterations over the years. In early 2020, Square moved in... and news of Uptown Station's sale in March 2021 shows that Square's instincts to expand in Oakland were spot on.

Uptown Station sold for \$419 million, in cash, to Mapletree Investments of Singapore. "This deal validates the Oakland market," Steve Golubchik, vice chairman and head of capital markets with global commercial real estate firm Newmark, told the *Bay Area News Group* in March. "This shows how strong the interest is in the Oakland market."

The Uptown Station deal was one of three office building sales in downtown Oakland totalling \$1 billion, just in the last two years. The other two were a 15-story office tower at 180 Grand Ave. (\$175 million) and a complex involving a 28-story office tower at 300 Lake-

side Drive and the adjacent retail building at 344 Thomas L. Berkley Way (\$449.8 million).

As proof of Oakland's allure, several other San Francisco-based firms are relocating to the sunnier side of the bay: PG&E, moving to 300 Lakeside near Lake Merritt; Blue Shield of California, moving into City Center; and Credit Karma, moving into The Key.

### Whole Foods Comes to Temescal

One of the ideals for urban living is a grocery store in walking distance. Soon, residents in the Temescal neighborhood will have another, perhaps closer and larger, option, with the Whole Foods that will be opening later this year at 5110 Telegraph Ave. This new store will provide expanded options for Temescal and be a vital part of growing the goods and services available to residents of this historic and culturally-rich neighborhood.

The store will be incorporated into the mixed-use development building known as The Logan, a live-work-play apartment building with a 25,000-square-foot rooftop farm. Apartment dwellers can stay; the grocery store will settle into the two ground floor levels, split by an interior courtyard.

This is Oakland's second Whole Foods. And like the one near Lake Merritt situated in a former Cadillac dealership, this store will enter a territory with some fascinating history.

The vacant lot—a theater was torn down in 1998—became a weed-filled eyesore until developer RAD Urban quickly transformed the prime parcel using innovative modular construction techniques. Prefabricated off-site, the modules were quickly assembled with a crane once the foundation and frame were in place. More than 570 modules were stacked to create the 204 apartments.





TODD JOHNSON / SFBT

## ▲ TRANSPORTATION AND FREIGHT

# On the move

As a transport hub, Oakland enjoys a prime situation



COURTESY OF PORT OF OAKLAND

Passenger and cargo growth is rebounding at Oakland International Airport.

Oakland's integral status as a transportation hub is undeniable—hey, we got the transcontinental railroad terminus in 1869 and have never looked back, only forward. With rail lines, a dynamic and ever-expanded shipping port, an international airport that broke new ground in passenger amenities during the Covid crisis—including on-site testing and a new park with incredible views of the bay and its bridges, we will always think Oakland first.

### Warehousing and logistics

For warehousing to meet growing ecommerce fulfillment demand as well as more traditional shipping and air transportation, **Prologis Oakland Global Logistics Center** is perfectly situated to solve supply chain logistics and is continuing to grow.

Being only a block away from the fifth busiest container port in the nation is only one fact Prologis employees can proudly spout. This hopping distribution center is also one block from the Union Pacific and BNSF rail hub, has immediate access to the extensive freeway system, is 8 miles from San Francisco, not far from Central Valley agribusiness, and is within arm's reach of not one but two international airports within twenty minutes drive time. Prologis also has direct access to the overweight corridor, a system of roadways designed to handle overweight loads without fees paid for heavy containers.

Its three-building complex offers square footage of 286,216 in Building 1, fully leased; 232,785 in Building 2 with half its space still available; and 189,038 in Building 3, fully leased. In the future, a fourth spec building will be a 74,4113-square-foot warehouse with the U.S. Green Building Council LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified gold designation, while Center 5 will be a 58,530-square-foot build.

In a June report from *Freightwaves*, Prologis reported that it was seeing further tightening in the real estate supply for logistics, with facility replacement costs up 60 percent in the last five years, meaning even these two new builds may not

Port of Oakland's 50-foot depth means even the largest container ships can call.

“Oakland's premium location results in lower drayage costs and is an ultimate cost-benefit.”

**Greg Woolway**  
vice president,  
Bridge Industrial



be enough to supply demand over the next decade. Industrial-zoned land is sparse and expensive in areas of dense population that have chosen to convert industrial space to offices and residence towers, and more yard space is required for warehouses which in the past may have simply been for storage but now are “high volume throughput facilities.” The Prologis report states, “The rise of e-fulfillment operations, which require three times the headcount of traditional warehousing and have four times the turnover rate, remains a headwind.”

### Supply chain solutions

Another supply chain solution is proposed by **Bridge Point Oakland**. A new 534,208 Class A Industrial Development facility at 5441 International Blvd. will offer 85 exterior dock positions for trucks and 129 trailer stalls. It’s aimed for completion in first quarter of 2022. The building will be built on a 24-acre site, the old General Electric site where a power plant closed in 1975. This is a win after 45 years after trying to contend with PCBs and other contaminants. “Tenant demand has been remarkable this early in the development process, which is a testament to the demand of quality companies wanting to operate in Oakland,” says Greg Woolway, vice president of Bridge Industrial. “Bridge is focused on finding infill development sites like this site in Oakland as we specialize in acquiring sites that have complicated development issues including environmental considerations.”

Drayage—the process of moving freight between different modes of transport—is much more affordable through Oakland (\$335 per container versus, say, Sacramento’s rate of \$633). “Oakland’s port proximity is an ideal location for occupiers. This premium location results in lower drayage costs and is an ultimate cost-benefit to the occupier. I expect to see even greater demand for Oakland real estate in the coming months,” says Woolway.

Of the 20 buildings which once stood at the buzzing electrical site, now only eight remain and only one will make the cut, a historically important façade of Building 1, which has an A+ rating from the City’s Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey. Building 1 once housed the KGO radio studio building. As pointed out in the *Oakland Heritage Alliance News*, KGO stands for K-General Electric-Oakland.

### Cold is gold

Dreisbach Enterprises has been in operation since 1953, and it’s been a very chilly family business indeed. Dreisbach offers cold storage solutions for freight that has to be refrigerated or frozen. This may include international cargo coming through the Port of Oakland, or vegetables and fruit coming up from the Central Valley for distribution and export. There’s a lot more to it than that, with on-site blast freezing, drayage, shuttle services, third-party logistics services, and more.

In 2018, Dreisbach teamed up with Lineage Logistics to open **Cool Port**, “the world’s latest next-generation cold store



TODD JOHNSON / SFBT

Port of Oakland has a growing demand for yard space, warehousing, and logistics management.

## The seaport is breaking records, processing 631,119 shipping containers in the first quarter of 2021.

and logistics facility” says *Businesswire*, on 25 acres at the Port of Oakland waterfront. Cool Port creates a more efficient connection between U.S. producers and Asian markets for safe, fast temperature-controlled storage, a “gamechanger,” president Jason Dreisbach told *Businesswire*. Cool Port’s 280,000-square-foot depot has 90 truck dock doors and 20,000 pallet positions to process 1 million tons of perishable product each year. The facility’s design permits 36 refrigerated rail cars to be loaded and unloaded within a cold storage environment to further reduce promote assurance of product kept at a consistent temperature.

Cool Port’s equipment is 100 percent electric powered for an environmentally cleaner process that is estimated to prevent nearly 9,000 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions in its first five years of operation. Cool Port added approximately 200 new jobs, pulling from Oakland and Bay Area workforces.

### Deep water access

**CenterPoint Landing** is an exciting \$52 million multi-phase project at Oakland’s **Seaport Logistics Complex** for supply chain management, to unfold across 123 acres at the Port of Oakland. CenterPoint Landing is the first facility at the complex and has taken 15 years of development planning to culminate. According to CenterPoint, no other American port has access to the land to duplicate Oakland’s combination of transportation and logistics capabilities, where shippers move cargo from ships to trucks in the process known as transloading.

Here, the 50-foot depth of water means even the largest container ships can call,

with off shipping of goods in a single day, and off-terminal in one to three days. Centerpoint’s website offers a Drayage Calculator to determine how much less expensive (up to 150 percent dray savings over other West Coast ports) it is to operate out of CenterPoint. Oakland’s prime global location means vessels can arrive here from Asia in just 13 days.

Phase 1 was completed this year, with phases 2 and 3 in the works, seeking LEED silver certification. Built by Fisher Construction Group, Building 1 is a 466,437-square-foot Class A industrial facility with 148 loading docks and ample vehicle parking. There is possible rail service with UP and BNSF, as the \$100 million railyard completed in 2016 is adjacent to CenterPoint. As of this writing, CenterPoint is considering a tenant for the warehouse and will make final interior adjustments once that tenant or tenants is identified.

Fisher Construction Group has been in charge of stabilizing a portion of the site which was once the Oakland Army Base, in use from 1941 to 1999 as a key cargo installation. The army base was decommissioned in September 1999. About 240 acres of the property were turned over to the Port between 2003 and 2007. Redevelopment has been discussed and planned for since, with federal economic downturns and other delays affecting movement forward.

Fisher also manages the Port of Oakland’s MAPLA “Maritime and Aviation Project Labor Agreement” program. This is set up to ensure that, among other things, subcontractors comply with the social justice program and local hiring goals of the Port. For instance, the **Social Justice Trust Fund** requires all contractors and subcontractors to contribute 30 cents of every craft hour worked, to support programs to assist local impact area residents working in the building trades.

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### Port of Oakland update

Danny Wan, the Port of Oakland's executive director, announced in February's State of the Port message that although the pandemic had caused an anticipated \$60 million shortfall, finances are stabilized because of a hiring freeze, debt refinancing, and employee cost savings. The Port's three-pronged purview is the airport, the seaport, and Jack London Square and 20 miles of waterfront, including parks and open spaces. The Port is in the midst of its five year strategic plan called Growth With Care, begun in 2018 and ending in 2022.

The Port's experience of the pandemic began with the docking of the *Grand Princess* cruise ship at the Port on March 9, 2020, with some Covid-19 positive passengers. The Port organized logistical support for passengers and crew, with over 2,000 passengers disembarking to quarantine sites.

Cranes are in plentiful supply now, adding to the enjoyable "flock" already visible at the Port. In December 2020, the nation's three tallest cranes made their way to Oakland from China by ship under the Golden Gate Bridge and the Bay Bridge, providing a dramatic photo opportunity as they passed with scant room to spare. These were purchased for \$300 million by Stevedoring Services of America from ZPMC in Shanghai. In the raised position, the cranes' boom arms soar 442 feet above the wharf and at the level where they reach horizontally across a ship's deck, they are 372 feet high. Each crane weighs approximately 1,600 tons and is shipped in pieces to be assembled, which takes about two months, including inspections, to become operational. All cranes are electrically powered and release zero emissions.

And as if that wasn't enough, another ZPMC crane arrived in late June: slightly smaller, but still considered "giant." Altogether, these four cranes add to the infrastructure that makes Oakland competitive in the race to attract the largest vessels. Three older cranes will be dismantled to make way for the new ones.

Jaw droppingly big stuff on the water continues, with the arrival of the *MSC Anna* in April 2020, one of the largest vessels to call at a U.S. port. This grande dame required planning on a simulator at the California Maritime Academy to figure out how to properly maneuver her 19,200 TEU—twenty-foot equivalent units, a measurement to determine cargo capacity—into San Francisco Bay and into the Oakland Estuary. *Anna* is 1,312 LOA (length overall), another nautical term. The process required two pilots, specialized gear with GPS technology, and a slack tide.

The seaport is breaking records, as the first quarter of 2021 registered movement of 631,119 20-foot shipping containers. This shattered the previous record, set before the pandemic in the first quarter of 2019, of 612,151 containers. Trans-Pacific trade with Asian nations is growing as the U.S. economy recovers from the pandemic; fully-loaded ships at West Coast ports sometimes wait days for a berth, and freight rates are high.

Once goods make it off the ship, the next challenge is trucking and storage. The Port unveiled a \$32 million program called the **Freight Intelli-**



Port of Oakland is home to the nation's three tallest cranes.

COURTESY OF PORT OF OAKLAND



TODD JOHNSON / SFBT

**“We’re everyone’s port ... Our mission is to help our business partners and our communities thrive.”**

#### Danny Wan

executive director, Port of Oakland, in his State of the Port 2021 address

**gence Transportation System**, which is intended to decrease congestion and improve traffic flow for truckers. Additionally, a communication platform for first responders, strengthened by better Wi-Fi in areas where cell coverage could previously drop calls, will allow for contact in critical situations. Changeable message signs will be installed to provide information to truckers about wait times at the terminals or railroad crossings.

Efforts to move towards zero emissions resulted in the Port debuting 10 battery electric trucks in July to haul cargo through the Shippers Transport Express operation. The trucks cost \$5.1 million, funded by grant monies, and the Port invested \$1.7 million for electric charging stations for them. An electrical power substation and power line connections between the stations are underway.

In May, the Port and others sent a letter to Gov. Newsom requesting \$2.25 billion to be spent on emissions-free freight hauling for trucks and

cargo handling equipment, charging stations, and staff training. Through clean trucks programs, the Port has been able to reduce harmful emissions from diesel trucks by 98 percent.

Over at the airport, aging infrastructure is being addressed. The first step towards the **Terminal Modernization and Development Project** involves an environmental impact report as required by the California Environmental Quality Act, which the Port announced in May it was preparing. The airport is exploring the possibility of, among other updates, building a third passenger terminal.

Quick pivoting was necessary to ensure people's safety while keeping essential businesses open. Oakland International Airport was the first in the country to offer Covid-19 testing for employees, passengers, and the public, and the first to offer tests in vending machines for passengers.

The airport is growing, as evidenced by the arrival of Frontier Airlines as a new airline operating here. Additionally, Volaris added a new destination, Mérida, Mexico, while Southwest now flies to Tucson, Arizona, and Santa Barbara down the coast. Certainly, air travel declined during the pandemic, but a robust return is expected. Already, passenger and cargo growth is rebounding, with July's passenger traffic increasing 9.5 percent over June's (and for purposes of rueful comparison, 161.5 percent over July 2020). More than 117 million pounds of air cargo was transported in June, up 6.4 percent in a year-over-year comparison.

For those ready to fly, one change makes going through security checkpoints a breeze. The CLEAR system of identity technology uses passengers' eyes to confirm their identity and speed them through the airport. This touchless system makes engagement with airport personnel unnecessary—no need to hand over your I.D. card or travel documents—a benefit at a time when everyone is soaking in hand sanitizer, concerned about germs. The technology is double-encrypted and costs \$15 a month.

Finally, a new park offers new views of the dynamic bay. In October 2020, the 22.47-acre **Judge John Sutter Regional Shoreline Park** opened at the old army base, at the foot of the Bay Bridge. Its name honors an influential City Councilman, Superior Court Judge, and board-member of the East Bay Regional Parks District.





Mighty Buildings uses 3-D printing to construct low-cost housing.

MIGHTY BUILDINGS

## ▲ CREATING FOR THE GREATER GOOD

# Innovation at home

**O**akland's a city of people who see opportunity where others often don't. From coming up with new solutions to old problems, to devising products or services that increase our enjoyment of daily life, these entrepreneurs are at the forefront of innovation—and often with a healthy dose of social conscience.

### Lithium for the future

At **Lilac Solutions**, a new lithium extraction process has been developed, which fulfills several needs: lithium is used for medication for bipolar disorder and the manufacture of lithium batteries. Using older processes, lithium extraction could take two years to recover 40 percent of the available lithium. With the new method that is down to two weeks, and results in 80 percent recovery.

Given the demand for lithium batteries to power electric vehicles, Lilac is poised to be busy for years to come. Lilac's CEO Dave Snyder, who started his career in electric vehicle batteries, says, "It's incredibly exciting to see all the progress in electric vehicles...The biggest problem facing the industry is the supply of raw materials to make the batteries. Lithium in particular is the bottleneck." He says the industry needs to grow by "3x" for a 100 percent electric vehicle future.

Snyder moved to Oakland from Chicago to hire, he says, "the most innovative employees working in this industry." Lilac Solutions is headquartered at 1700 20th St. "Oakland is at the center of the Bay Area and full of people who are passionate about clean energy and cleaning up the air from smog and protecting the climate," he says. "The most exciting part of the business is...[creating] jobs for people who want to contribute to improving the environment and protecting the world from fossil fuels."

### 3-D printed houses. Yep.

Another powerhouse of using more environmentally-friendly processes is **Mighty Buildings**, which uses 3-D printing to create housing. Helen Chong, head of Public Relations and Marketing for Mighty Buildings, says, "When Covid happened, everyone was worried, concerned. But Covid helped our business because everyone wanted a backyard home." When suddenly stuck at home, for many people it seemed to be time to focus on a pool house, art studio, or in-law unit. Mighty Buildings made that construction almost impossibly easy with 3-D printed panels, including full-sized walls. Some have referred to their builds as "Lego buildings" because of the nature of putting together the panels.

The company moved to Oakland in November 2019 to a 79,000-square-foot facility. The manufacturing process involves zero waste, is cheaper than traditional construction, and circumvents the need for a site inspection. "We are turnkey," Chong says; Mighty Buildings takes care of everything from pulling the proper permits, to delivery and installation. She said it's the only company in the state whose structures are pre-approved for Underwriters Laboratories certification.

They have two product lines. Mighty Mods is the ADU (accessory dwelling unit) line, which is fully printed and assembled in the facility, put on an oversized trailer, and craned into the customer's backyard. And the Mighty Houses Single Family Home product line utilizes the Mighty Kit system designed by EYRC Architects.

Mayor Libby Schaaf visited Mighty Buildings to investigate how it could be used to help with Oakland's affordable housing crisis. In a video on the company's website, Schaaf is kitted out in a pink hard hat and safety vest, and says, "We see [the housing crisis] on our streets. It's a moral outrage, and this innovation is

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**“Oakland is at the center of the Bay Area and full of people who are passionate about clean energy.”**

**Dave Snyder**  
CEO, Lilac Solutions



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something we've been waiting for. We know that housing construction has not gotten any more productive or efficient for years, and so this is a quantum leap toward really making the supply and affordability of housing change overnight."

Since launching out of stealth in August 2020, Mighty Buildings has delivered seven ADU units to homeowners across California and has over 60 in contracted revenue in the pipeline.

Interested persons can book a free private 3-D printed ADU tour.

Since construction is an essential business, Mighty Buildings continued working throughout the pandemic. "We raised our Series B in the middle of the pandemic, and we have raised a total of \$100 million of funding to date," says Chong. The company was about to announce another round when we spoke in July. At first it was forced to downsize half the employees, but then hired back and doubled again and are still hiring. Mighty Buildings is planning to have microfactories outside of Oakland to add to their manufacturing capability: "When you buy a BMW, you don't get it in Germany. You get it in a dealership nearby."

CNN reported in March that the nation's first 3-D printed community was being created in Rancho Mirage, with 15 homes made of modular panels printed by Mighty Buildings, situated on a five-acre lot.

### Getting in the game

Much has been made of the fact that the tech and video game industry often leaves behind the Black and Latinx communities and women, while catering to the white and Asian community. But that's changing, says Damon Packwood, the founder and CEO of **Gameheads**. Besides a more inclusive thrust based on race, he says "A lot of data shows that women are the fastest growing number of video game players." His company Gameheads helps low-income youth and youth of color ages 11-25 years thrive and succeed in technology and video game industries with a tech training program.

Packwood says the thing he's most excited about with his company is that the program works. "Thirty-nine percent of our students are employed part-time, full-time, or with contract work or interning at video game and tech companies right now," he says. "That's the thing I'm really juiced about. When we started the program, we didn't expect that."

He says some are already making \$150,000 a year or got \$10,000 signing bonuses to work on Call of Duty. "I have students now, they're making more than me! I don't say that out of jealousy; I'm quite happy with how I get paid, but that's cool." Gameheads is free for participants; Packwood says there are currently 150 active students in the program.

### Building a stronger commercial district

In a unique private-public partnership, a community-led initiative resulted in the formation of the **Chinatown Business Improvement District 2021**. Forming a BID had been under discussion for years as a way to generate revenue for this cultural asset as merchants organized to protect and highlight this important commercial area that dates to the 1850s. In late July, the formation was approved by City Council resolution following the property owner ballot count that saw more than two-thirds casting their vote in favor of BID formation. BID funds will pay to beautify the area, clean sidewalks, and make the area safer by hiring security services.

### Investing for community

At Oakland-based **CNote**, investing can be a mutually beneficial win/win that feels like more than just a financial high. This fintech streamlines community-centered investment in companies owned by women or BIPOC-led. "We're on a mission to close the wealth gap. Join us," reads the website. CNote, which itself is women founded and women led, states it has creat-



LAYLA CRATER / GAMEHEADS



**“Thirty-nine percent of our students are employed or interning at video game and tech companies right now.”**

**Damon Packwood**  
founder and CEO,  
Gameheads

ed or maintained over 4,000 jobs, that over 50 percent of its capital has been invested into BIPOC-led small businesses, with over 40 percent going to women-led small businesses (it notes that this is eight times the national average), and all of this with zero losses since Catherine Berman and Yuliya Tarasava opened CNote in 2016. The co-founders also express a commitment to funding affordable housing. Tarasava first emigrated to the United States from Belarus in 2004 with \$300 in her pocket and not much more to her name. A friend later connected her with Berman, and CNote was born.

CNote partners with federal certified commercial lenders to funnel money into CDFIs (community development financial institutions). Companies can participate in a Promise Account with a minimum of \$250,000, which earns interest to benefit the donor while achieving important racial equity and social justice goals. Mastercard has pledged \$20 million. As of this summer, CNote had 16 employees and was adding more, to their headquarters at 2323 Broadway.

### Thrifting for sustainability

And finally, if someone says they'll give you the clothes off their back, you might be talking to a **thredUP** customer. This company has taken the sometimes-iffy, sometimes-treasure-filled clothing racks from a thrift store and put them online, then multiplied them by thousands of closets. You can browse the clothes individually or take your chances with a 10-item "goody box," hand-selected for you by a stylist after you fill out a quiz on your taste in clothing. But there's

no risk, really; returns are accepted for seven days with a prepaid shipping label; the \$10 fee for the styling quiz is applied to any items that you keep.

You can shop by brand, season, or mood. ThredUP's focus is on finding an appreciative body for a garment that still has many more wearings to give—like a rescue shelter for clothes. The company's socially-conscious mission is to upend the throwaway culture that plagues our western world, where much is made of a princess donning the same outfit twice. According to thredUP, one in two people throw clothes into the trash rather than donating or reselling them. Most of those aren't pulled out and go to the landfill or the incinerator, when they could be reworn by a new owner. A new garment takes 77 gallons of water to make, says thredUP, which makes one shudder in a drought year. Want to understand more about the carbon footprint you personally are creating with your shopping choices? Try the fashion footprint calculator on the website.

Celebrities have gotten in on "climate change meets Coco Chanel" education. Actor/director/gorgeous person Olivia Wilde teamed up with thredUP to create a secondhand T-shirt collection, while the aptly-named designer Zero Waste Daniel made a couture collection out of recycled clothes and remnants.

Since its 2009 founding, thredUP says it has processed 100 million garments. It can list 2.4 million items at any given time, and 5.5 million can fit in the distribution centers. The company's headquarters are in the beautiful Old Oakland Delger Block building, at 969 Broadway.





Horn BBQ expanded its seating outdoors through the Flex Streets Initiative.

CITY OF OAKLAND

“Doing business in Oakland is lovely because you have so many amazing, educated, professional people who are well-traveled and have a great sense of taste.”

Dominica Rice  
chef/owner of Bombera

▲ RESOURCES

# Support for business

## Starting a new business? Think Oakland first

The pandemic was not experienced by all in the same way. While some retreated to safe, comfortable homes to shelter in place with stockpiles of food, some were laid off from their jobs and others were unhoused and did not have resources to protect themselves from the threat of Covid-19 and take care of basic needs.

The City launched the **Oakland Economic Recovery Advisory Council** to identify short-term steps to help Oakland’s economy reopen and recover, as well as longer term strategies for systemic change to build a more equitable economy. Other valuable insights on vulnerable populations came from the Covid-19 Racial Disparities Task Force. This collective work created short-term policy recommendations that Oakland followed. In some cases, the City was able to use CARES Act funds to support these initiatives. Some of the short-term steps included health and safety measures, the Oakland Resilient Families guaranteed income pilot program run by the Family Independence Initiative (since renamed UpTogether) and the national Mayors for a Guaranteed Income through philanthropic contributions, and the Flex Streets Initiative which allowed restaurants, retailers, and other businesses to use public space to expand their operations outdoors to comply with health orders.

Building off of these early efforts and with additional stakeholder input, City staff crafted **Oakland’s Economic Recovery Plan**. Released this month, it was meant to ensure that our economy is more equitable and inclusive, with the goal that long-term business recovery will benefit all Oaklanders.

In addition, grant programs supported by CARES Act funds received from the State of California provided \$6.8 million in direct financial assistance to small businesses,

### The five priorities of the Oakland Economic Recovery Plan

1. Financial Readiness & Stability  
—Equitable Small Business Support
2. Equity in Contracting & Grant Making
3. Social Cohesion  
—Youth Engagement & the Creative Economy
4. Growing Demand & Investment
5. Workforce Development

Learn more at:  
[oaklandca.gov/economicrecovery](https://oaklandca.gov/economicrecovery)

home-based businesses, nonprofits, and individual artists with a focus on low-income census tracts. CARES Act funds also allowed the City to engage business support partners to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach and support services which served over 1,600 small businesses in accessing financial and technical resources, and hosted technical assistance webinars that drew nearly 1,100 registrants.

One business sector that continues to bloom in Oakland is the cannabis industry. In spring 2017, the City Council enacted an Equity Permit Program that addressed disparities in the cannabis industry by prioritizing the victims of the war on drugs and minimizing barriers of entry into the industry. The industry is nurtured through technical assistance, loans, grant programs, and incubators. Learn more at [oaklandca.gov/cannabis](https://oaklandca.gov/cannabis).

As businesses, nonprofits, and artists continue to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the City posts information on grants, loans, technical assistance, and other resources at [oaklandbusinesscenter.com](https://oaklandbusinesscenter.com).

### Access business support services at neighborhood libraries

Whether you’re starting a new business or just need business support, make an appointment for the Remote Business Assistance Center (BAC) pilot program through December 2021. City staff will be available for 30-minute appointments at five library locations:

- West Oakland
- 81st Avenue
- César E. Chávez
- Golden Gate
- Eastmont

Visit [oaklandca.gov/RemoteBAC](https://oaklandca.gov/RemoteBAC) or call (510) 238-7398.

Can’t make it to one of the City’s neighborhood locations? Fill out the online request form at [oaklandbusinesscenter.com](https://oaklandbusinesscenter.com), and you’ll be contacted within two business days.

### Opportunity Zones

Thirty different opportunity zones have been designated throughout the city, in East and West Oakland and downtown. Along with incentives for property owners, investment in these designated areas—whether the investor lives in the zone or not—can stimulate equitable economic development. The zones are intended to spur economic development and new jobs in distressed communities by providing tax benefits to investors. These zones, created in 2016, time out in 2026. For general questions, visit [oaklandca.gov/oppzones](https://oaklandca.gov/oppzones).





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