

WOOD STREET COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

UFAD members and Wood Street Community residents remove 400 bags worth of garbage from Caltrans land in a weekend.



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TRASH PICKUP AT WOOD ST

The city of Oakland's contempt for our houseless community members is perhaps most evident in its unwillingness to provide clean and sustainable spaces for people to live. Libby Schaaf and other city leaders are more than willing to shell out thousands of dollars to post signs encouraging people to snitch on illegal dumpers, but they take no action when local slumlords and contractors dump into people's living spaces. In order to actually improve living conditions at Wood Street, a number of UFAD members and Wood Street Community residents recently picked up trash throughout the Wood Street Community.

TRASH PICKUP AT WOOD ST CONTINUED

The operation was one of the most ambitious projects that the UFAD has undertaken. A group of around thirty people, comprised of housed and unhoused community members, spent the last weekend of August clearing out a massive amount of unwanted debris. The group bagged over 400 bags of trash, filled a twenty-yard dumpster and removed various larger appliances like refrigerators. Additionally, a backhoe was used to haul off over a dozen abandoned vehicles.

This operation was incredibly important for the health and wellbeing of residents. While residents sometimes find useful tools and supplies from the trash build-up, in general, the massive mounds of garbage are a dangerous burden and health risk to residents. And, since the city continues to conduct unlawful evictions and direct people to Wood Street, space is filling up and trash must be removed to accommodate more residents. Additionally, unaddressed trash piles invite rats, lead to unwanted health problems, and become eyesores for residents.

Though the action was a huge success, it is an unsustainable model for maintaining a clean environment at Wood Street. The City of Oakland must finally provide proper trash disposal options for residents and prevent commercial contractors and other individuals from illegally dumping at Wood Street.



TINY HOMES: A SOLID FOUNDATION OR UNSTABLE GROUND?

The last decade has sparked a booming interest in the dainty dwellings colloquially referred to as tiny homes. This style of home was initially solely considered a form of “alternative” lifestyle. A more extreme option for those looking to down-size, travel more, live more sustainably (or with less debt). However, as homelessness and poverty grow across the country many are looking to these alternative dwellings as a means of housing the homeless. In recent years tiny homes have been touted as a solution to housing homeless people.

There are many types of tiny home projects. There are notable examples of cities turning to tiny home projects to house the homeless like in San Jose and Seattle. City run projects are presented to the public as providing many services to the communities that they supposedly serve. Often these programs tend to have serious strings attached, and stringent criteria for eligibility; sometimes including background checks, curfews, or even imposed participation in treatment programs and often lack work opportunities and access to stable long-term housing. In some cases residents are placed in these situations with little regard, in congregate settings.

The city of Oakland has created a series of “Community cabin” sites. The cabins are individually often no bigger than a large garden shed and lack many of the amenities of even the normal shelter system. These sites have earned an informal name, “the tuff sheds”. Many people who have lived in the tuff sheds describe them as being like concentration camps.



On the other hand, many folks on the street have worked to build tiny homes in informal settlements of homeless people. These can be seen sprinkled right here in Oakland. On a slightly larger scale, nestled within a crux where E 12th St splits into one-way sections, residents have predominantly organized themselves, though utilizing the help of outside support and fundraising, to build a tiny home village complete with community kitchen, and porta-potties. With the help of other community groups, they govern and manage themselves, a vastly different scenario than the city-lead initiative’s “Tuff Sheds”.

TINY HOMES CONTINUED

An added consideration to the mix is the more than a few cases of folks organizing these communities for the wrong reasons. Take the recent debacle at the 37MLK Garden village. This community of long time residents and their support network of housed neighbors had been approached by an individual and their “organization” to build a series of tiny homes on the 37MLK lot. After months of fundraising and publicity, the build event was suddenly canceled the night before, leaving the residents with no more than piles of scrap lumber and a slough of horror stories of disrespect and belittlement from that project’s coordinator (with none of the raised funds to show for it).

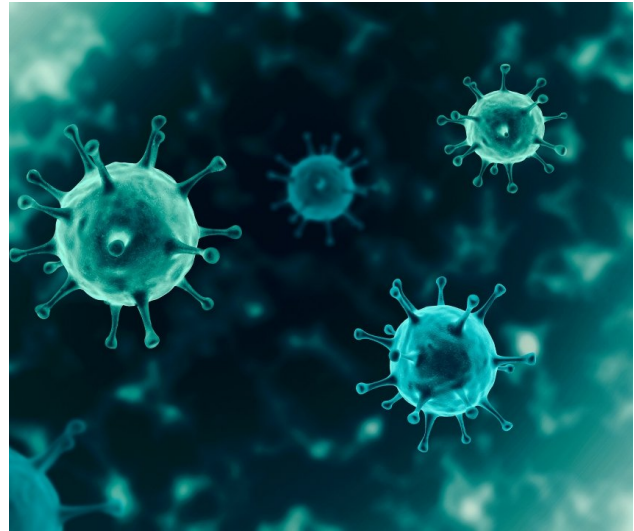


It's a charming idea at first, but in the end the tiny home solution, even in its most successful iterations, is a band-aid fix for a much bigger, messier issue. Are these settlements a transitional stage into housing or are they just a new type of low income housing? Homelessness is only rising in the United States and with the current financial recession, millions more are likely to be thrown out on the streets. If people are just shut out of traditional housing, then they will seek/build whatever kind of shelter is left available to them.

The dire situation of working people should not serve as an “opportunity” for nonprofits and small businesses to make a name for themselves. If local governments are going to continue to build and sponsor tiny homes for working people then it ought to be designed to be an actual step up from living in a shanty, with full amenities and recognize their basic rights as tenants.

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC RAGES ON

For over the past 6 months, the coronavirus SARS-COV-2 has been infecting millions of people across the globe with the deadly disease COVID-19. Worldwide the virus has infected over 27 million people and around 900,000 people from countries all across the world have died from the severe respiratory virus, the likes of which most people have not seen in their lifetimes. The United States has been arguably the hardest hit country, with over 6 million confirmed cases and close to 200,000 deaths to date.



Some of the symptoms of the virus are scarily similar to those people experience during flu season: coughing, fatigue, sore throat, loss of appetite, even vomiting and diarrhea. However, what makes this virus more serious is the fact that within two weeks of developing symptoms, those who have died have suffered from complete respiratory failure.



Some of the most common symptoms of Covid-19. Note that many people who get Covid-19 don't show any symptoms.

Although California has been presented as a nationwide leader in its response to the virus, it still accounts for over an eighth of the total confirmed cases. Even though local and state government officials have worked to “reopen” parts of the economy, they have still failed to address the underlying conditions that leave many working people susceptible to contracting the virus. Many people on the streets have received little to no access to sanitation services that could prevent the spread of the virus while still facing the threat of displacement and criminalization by the local government and police forces. The government is putting working people's lives at risk of contracting the virus at their place of work due to lack of proper protective equipment and safety measures.

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC RAGES ON CONTINUED

In the Bay Area, Alameda County has the highest amount of cases out of any of the surrounding counties. There is a severe lack of testing in certain neighborhoods, and those who have been able to find a testing site sometimes either have had to wait for hours in line or wait a couple of weeks after scheduling an appointment remotely. There is a great need for more free and comprehensive testing in all neighborhoods.

We are still within the first wave of infections, and at the rate things have been going, it could be a few years before the full threat of it has subsided. In order to address the issues that working people experience that have only been magnified by the virus, it is important for people to come together to demand changes be made to ensure that many more people don't needlessly die before the necessary change are made.

County	Cases ▾	Deaths
Alameda	18,445	257
Santa Clara	17,465	248
Contra Costa	14,035	179
San Francisco	9,544	83
San Mateo	8,260	132
Sonoma	5,800	80
Solano	5,512	47
Marin	3,927	70
Santa Cruz	1,755	7
Napa	1,444	13
Mendocino	704	17

Bay Area Covid-19 cases by county, as of September 1st. Alameda County leads the bay in both cases and deaths.

How COVID-19 spreads and how to protect yourself:

The virus spreads mostly from person-to-person, through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. These droplets can infect other people who inhale them or who touch surfaces with droplets and then touch their nose or mouth. This happens most between people are in close contact, within 6 feet of each other. It is possible for people to have COVID-19 but not show any symptoms, and they can pass the virus to others without knowing it.

Protect yourself and others by doing these things when possible:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others - this stops your droplets from spreading. If we all wear masks the chances of spreading the virus goes down dramatically.
- Keep about 6 feet between yourself and people you don't live with.

WEST OAKLAND SOLIDARITY MARCH

When nationwide protests erupted in June over the murder of George Floyd, members of the Revolutionary United Front and the United Front Against Displacement decided to start organizing community meetings in Willow Park located in West Oakland about the emerging movement against police brutality and white supremacy. It was clear to folks that the protests, while unprecedented in scale and militancy, were pretty disorganized, and that it was crucial for folks to get together and strategize a way forward as protests died down and politicians worked to co-opt the movement for their own agendas.



Protesters march down Mandela from the West Oakland BART Station. About 100 people were present.



Organizer Dayton Andrews addresses the crowd in front of the West Oakland BART Station.

Over the following weeks, as the meetings continued and efforts expanded to get more residents of Lower Bottoms involved, the focus of these meetings shifted toward uniting with the daily struggles of the people of West Oakland. From the beginning, participants in these meetings had wanted to plan some kind of action. After weeks of collective discussion, study of the philosophy of the Black Panthers, and outreach in the neighborhood surrounding Willow Park, participants in these meetings laid out a plan for a march in West Oakland to draw attention to the issues residents were facing. The three main demands were: reliable access to coronavirus testing sites in West Oakland, cancellation of rent, and an end to police brutality.

WEST OAKLAND SOLIDARITY MARCH CONTINUED

On August 1st, protesters gathered in front of the West Oakland BART station and then marched ten blocks to Willow Park. As they marched, drivers honked their horns and neighbors stood in their doorways to show their support. Some residents of the neighborhood joined the march as they saw it passing by. At the height of the march, over 100 people were present. When the protesters arrived at Willow Park, an open mic was set up for people to speak. One speaker, a minister from the Tenderloin, said “I never thought that I would live to see the day that I would be sitting in a park in West Oakland surrounded by Black kids, white kids, Asian kids, people from all over the world who believe in the principle of Justice”. Another speaker, a member of a local tenants union, urged members of the crowd to organize their neighbors and go on strike if they couldn't pay rent.



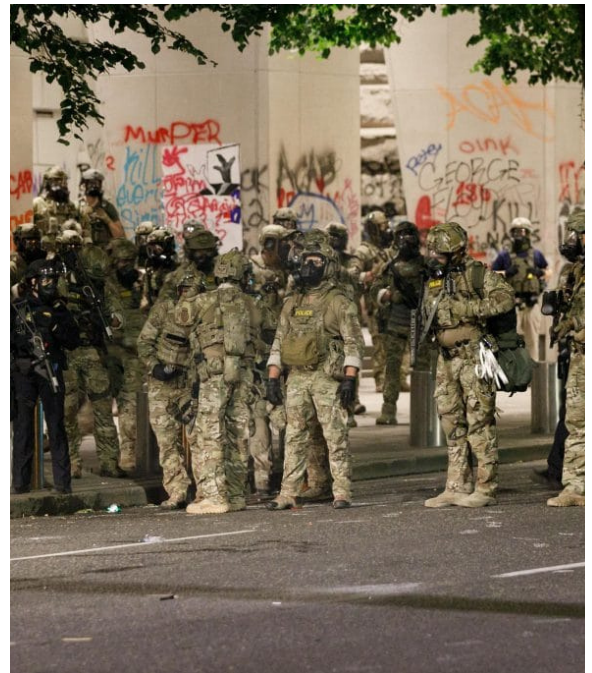
Reverend Harry Louis Williams III, a minister in the Tenderloin, speaks to the crowd at Willow Park about the inspiring display of racial solidarity at the action.

Although over a hundred people joined the march and it received some news attention, an action like this cannot be judged on attendance alone. It needs to be assessed by how it concretely advances the political goals of the movement. This action's most important successes, therefore, are evident in the increased attendance at recent community meetings and an overwhelming consensus to plan similar actions. This march has shown that local grassroots organizing can invigorate community members! Organizers with the United Front Against Displacement and the Revolutionary United Front are committed to continue holding community meetings, planning similar actions, and struggling in West Oakland against the capitalist, white supremacist system.

PORTLAND ANTI-POLICE BRUTALITY PROTESTS

In Portland, Oregon, for three straight months protestors have taken to the streets to hold demonstrations against white supremacist police terror. These protests are in solidarity with the broader movement across the U.S. and the globe following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police where hundreds of thousands of people across the U.S. have demonstrated against police brutality. Portland has taken the spotlight as federal authorities were deployed to occupy the city supposedly to quell the threat of “violent anarchists” who seek to create chaos and destruction. Other cities across the country have held solidarity protests with Portland and have demanded the removal of federal authorities occupying Portland while also advancing the ongoing movement against white supremacist police terror.

For example, Oakland, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Austin have held protests in solidarity with Portland. In Oakland, hundreds of protestors marched in the streets to condemn the deployment of federal authorities in Portland and some demonstrators set fire to the Alameda County Superior Courthouse. Several people were eventually arrested by Oakland police. Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf condemned the protests, claiming that certain protestors give “Donald Trump the images he wants and the justification he seeks to send federal troops into American cities.” Schaaf’s comment rings hollow as she has no problem overseeing the daily terror that Oakland’s majority Black homeless population must live with.



Federal troops occupying Portland .

Schaaf represents a broader trend amongst the Democratic Party to claim support for the protests without taking any real action that would end police brutality. Ultimately, though this party touts itself as progressive and for the people, it is no different from the Republican Party in that it exists to serve the interests of the wealthy U.S. elite. Agents of the state like Mayor Schaaf have a vested interest in maintaining the police as they currently exist, because police are there to protect property, which is also the top priority of politicians. While some within city, state, and federal government might advocate for mild police reforms, they mainly do so in order to quell unrest, allowing the people to believe that they are winning real change by working within the system. The truth is that as long as the white supremacist, capitalist U.S. state exists, working within its system will never bring about lasting change.

Submissions:

The West Oakland Community Newsletter is a collaborative project by the United Front Against Displacement (UFAD) & the Wood St. Community, in an effort to spread news about the neighborhood and the struggle against the pigs & developers.

If you would like to submit something, see something added to the next newsletter, or if there is something we got wrong,
LET US KNOW!

Find someone on outreach, shoot us an email [wewontgo@riseup.net],
or call/text (510) 815-9978



A Publication of the
UNITED FRONT
AGAINST DISPLACEMENT



**General meetings, outreach,
and community dinners
happen weekly.**

General meetings:

Wednesday, Sep 2nd @ 7PM

Wednesday, Sep 16th @7pm

Outreach:

Please contact us via email for
exact time and location.

Community dinners:

Wednesday, Sep 9th @ 7PM

Wednesday, Sep 23rd @ 7PM

Contact info:

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