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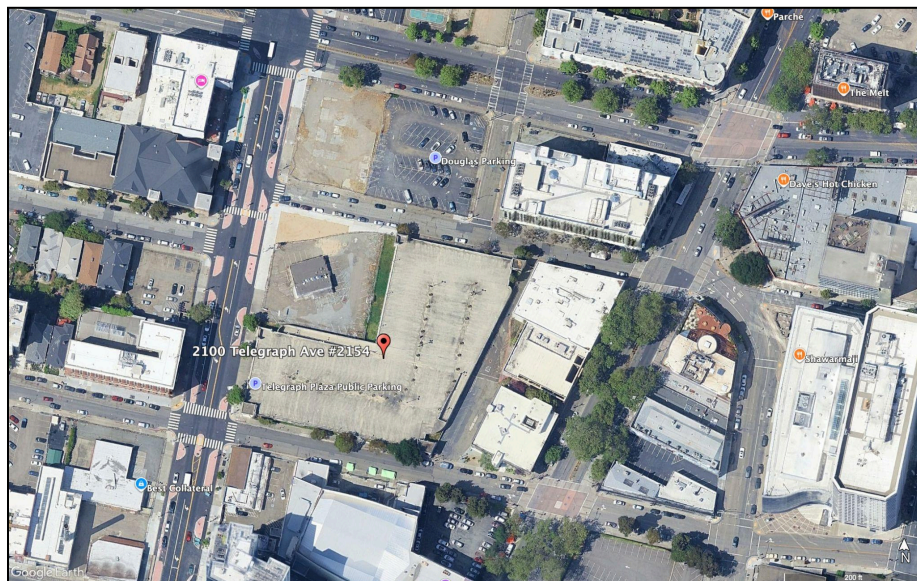
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### **Artist Housing: 2100 Telegraph Ave, Oakland, California**

#### **Abstract:**

This paper details an affordable housing proposal designated for artists in Oakland at 2100 Telegraph. We will cover the history of this site and neighborhood in order to give context to why our design proposal not only fits the social structure of the neighborhood but also supports it. Furthermore, the design, modeled after Kevin Daly's *Little Berkeley*, will be explained in detail to show how it fits the site and the alterations that have been made to it including art studios, gallery spaces, and additional floors. On top of that, choices to increase the site's greenery and add plantings to the structures have been intentionally selected to improve the communities mental health, inspire artists, and increase the sustainability of the build. Lastly, a financial proposal for funding logistics surrounding this site will be detailed as well as ways artists living in the building can sell their art to increase their personal income. Overall, this site is poised to enrich Oakland by supporting the historical artist community and providing a site for mental rest and recovery.

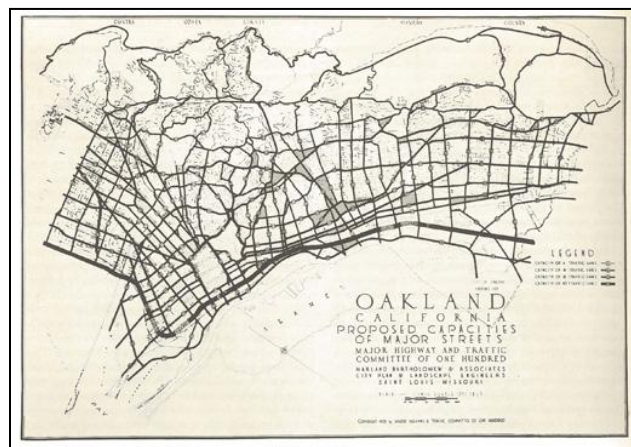
## Introduction



Foot on the gas, 2100 Telegraph Avenue sits on the intersection of Telegraph, Broadway, 21st, and 22nd Streets in Uptown Oakland. The history of Uptown Oakland is layered. It is a city representing a

physical imprint of 20th Century's commercial growth, midcentury decline, and constant redevelopment that led to the rise and eventual displacement of original community members and artists.

Rather than reading the site as an isolated parcel, it is more useful to see it as part of an urban landscape shaped by repeated efforts to convert Oakland's central city into a marketable downtown, often with uneven consequences for existing residents and cultural communities. Early planning frameworks that remain influential to Oakland's form are the Kellersberger Survey, the Robinson Plan, the Hegemann Report, and the Bartholomew Plan. These plans defined Oakland as a center for commercial growth and increasingly automobile-oriented circulation with the larger



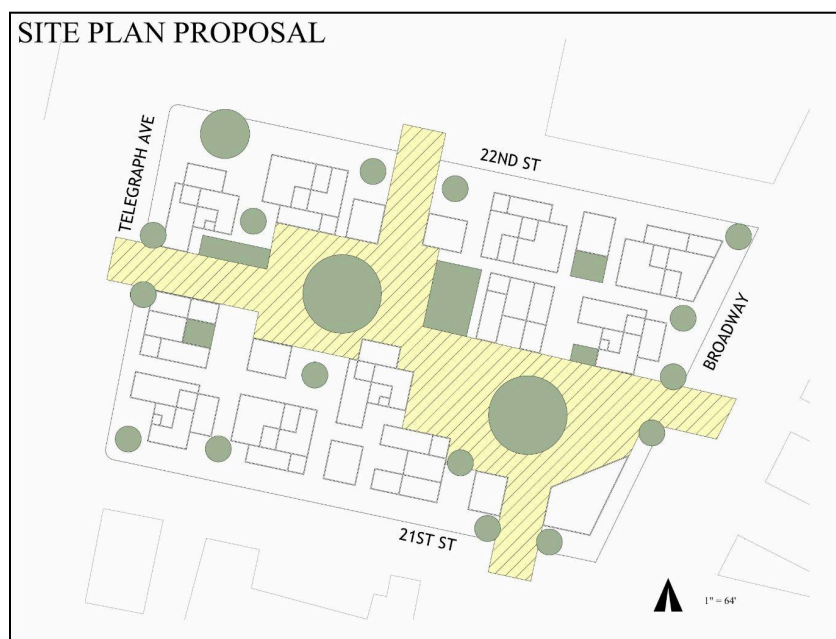
intersections and widening of streets. These plans also reinforced the planning logic that privileged investment into white, middle-class mobility in order to decrease the “white flight” of these community members moving to the suburbs, resulting in conditions that marginalized Black communities (Boustan, 2007). This pattern intensified during the Postwar Era, when urban renewal and freeway construction further fragmented the neighborhood and separated Uptown from adjacent districts especially in West Oakland (Urban Displacement Project, 2021). The Urban Displacement Project’s Oakland research (2021) shows that arts-led revitalization in areas like 23rd and Telegraph emerged alongside rising land values and shifting demographic change that made the arts district powerful but also unstable. Its report on the informal arts district in Oakland is especially useful here because it shows how artists can activate neglected spaces while also helping trigger the very reinvestment that can later displace them (Urban Displacement Project, 2008). With this history in mind, providing affordable housing for existing and displaced Oakland artists is essential to the cultural revival of the space.

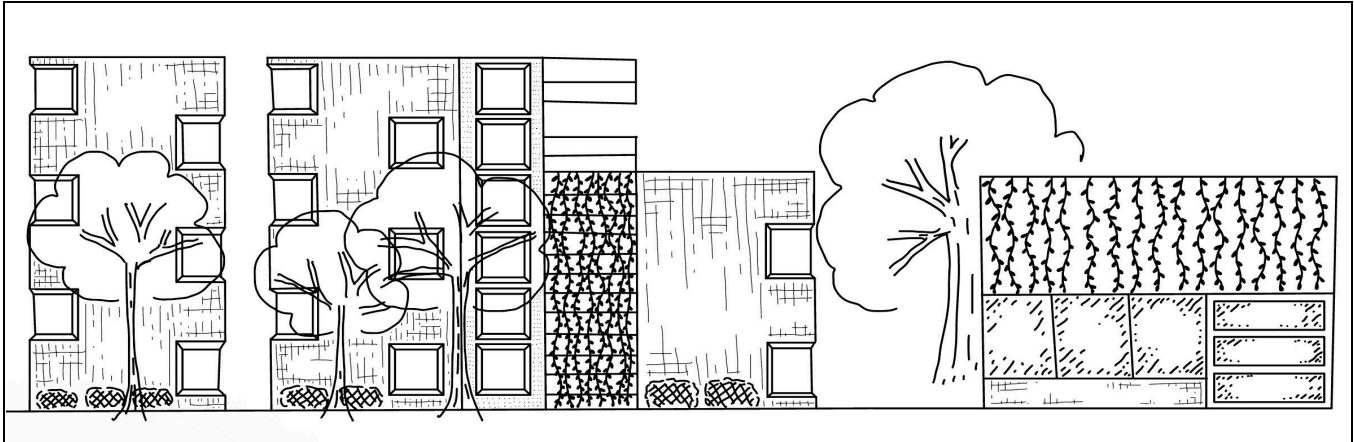
Uptown’s arts identity has continued to develop through the contradiction of fighting displacement with art. On one hand, artists and cultural organizers continue to turn unused spaces into visible arts corridors, including broader events like First Fridays (Swift, 2014). On the other hand, the same visibility contributes to real estate interest and formalization, meaning that the area’s cultural energy has become tied to a cycle of reinvestment that often benefits newcomers more than original community members (Kim et al., 2020).

In the Post-War Era, Uptown and adjacent neighborhoods were then further transformed by urban renewal projects and freeway construction. These clearings of existing land altered the circulation of the area, and created a great isolation within Oakland itself. Uptown was known as

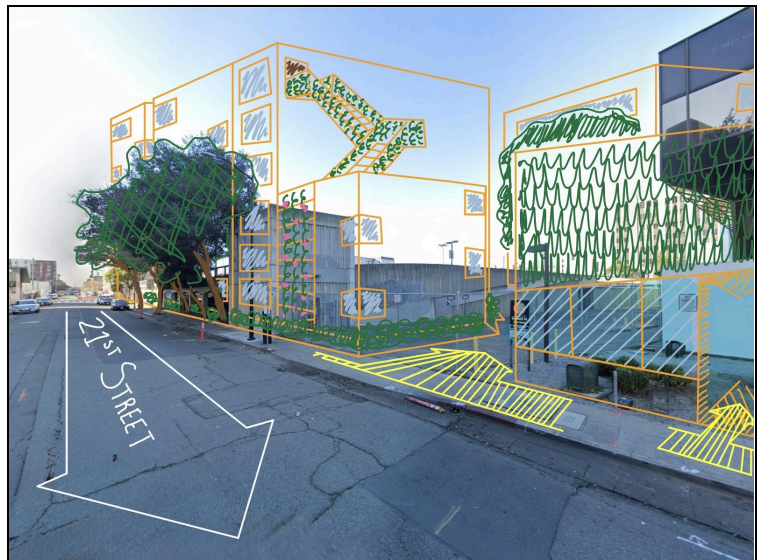
the commercialized area where people were meant to travel, whereas West Oakland was and has continued to be disregarded. Many displaced members were pushed to West Oakland. Specifically, artist communities were displaced despite their dense existence. The underrecognition led to the development of the Arts Murmur movement, taking space through a revival of industrial sites for artists. The paradox laid in the idea that there were layers to the types of artists in Uptown, one group being gentrifiers and the other being existing artist community members. Additionally, the group of gentrifiers were often artists moving in from the rising rents of San Francisco who were displaced themselves. The movement established Telegraph as an arts corridor, with certain traditions continuing such as First Fridays, but has also become part of the broader cycle within Oakland of reinvestment and displacement. The urban fabric of Uptown seems to continuously draw back to displacement and migration, so the question here becomes how to re-invite community members into Uptown to revive the arts movement without pushing for another wave of gentrification.

### Design Proposal

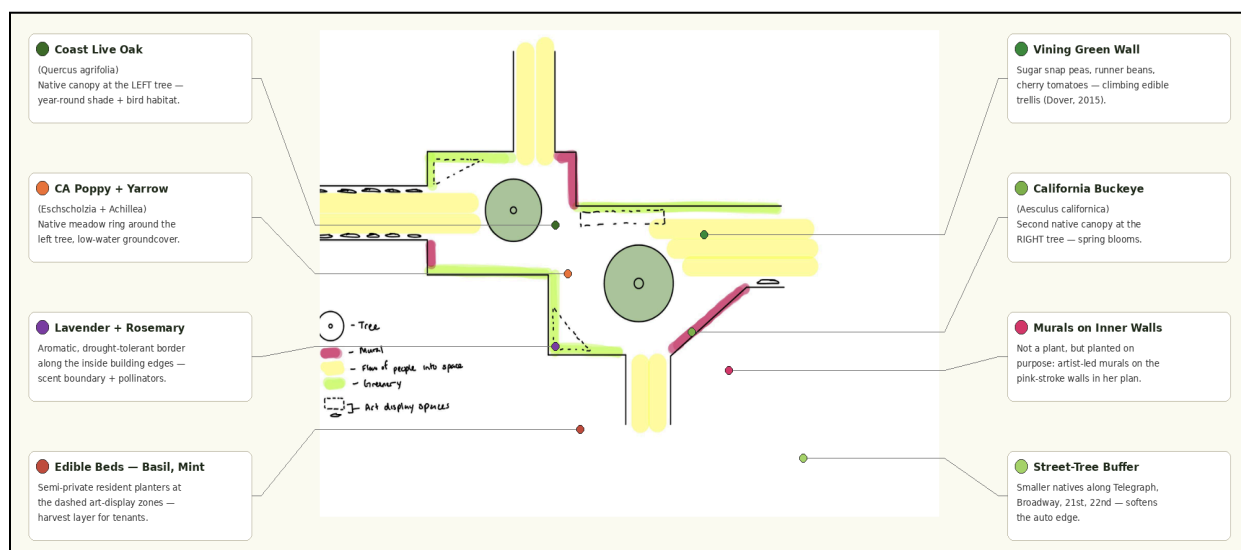




The main key features are adapted from similar precedents of Kevin Daly's Little Berkeley, but with adaptations to suit our affordable housing model. Each unit is configured for varying arrangements. Little Berkeley contains 8 units, where our configuration would be for 40 to 60 units across the four stepped zones, restricted at 30–60% AMI. Little Berkeley has a sleeping loft above a public downstairs. Our adaptation is to keep the loft, but tighten the bedroom envelope and expand the loft floor to provide a quiet "thinking ledge" for artists. The triple-layer, polycarbonate glazing would stay, as it allows for light diffuse without the heat gain that studios often fight. The original design uses factory-fabricated timber modules at grade. Our site would keep the modular grade-level structure, but swap two groundfloor modules per building for an artist-based module. One per building is enough for 384-scale shared use.



The new design would also include shared kitchen, courtyards, full-time social services staffer, and part-time property manager. In addition, there would be a shared dry-storage room for art pieces and material, a flat-file room for works on paper, and a single dedicated gallery floor on the ground of the museum-facing building for First Fridays exhibitions. The social-services staffer role flexes into a part-time artist-services coordinator. Little Berkeley uses site-generated solar canopy, stormwater recovery, hydronic heating from solar hot water, cross ventilation, and meets net-zero. To further adapt this for our site, we would maintain these features and allow for the solar canopy to double as the structural frame with weaving planting of peas, beans, and zucchini. Little Berkeley uses the public downstairs as a shared kitchen for life-skills and cooking classes. Our adaptation would maintain the shared kitchen, but the downstairs would become an open studio bay with sliding partition walls. The same L-shape footprint absorbs four 200 to 250 studios with shared utility cores. Studios open directly onto the public flow corridor, so circulation doubles as a gallery.



## Proposal Reasonings

To start, it is important to understand why we selected Keven Daly Architects's Little Berkeley design as the building blocks for this project. Second, one needs to understand how the site will contribute to the community beyond increasing the number of units available for rent in Oakland. Lastly, to understand the full scope of this project the community should understand why there is such a large emphasis on establishing public private green space at this site and the benefits of landscaping both on the ground and on the buildings.



This design by Kevin Daly Architects (n.d.), titled Little Berkeley, fits the site well and works to achieve our design goals because of its flexibility and community space. The original intention of this design is to be for transitional youth who have recently emerged from foster care and it is meant to be affordable. While the audience we seek to support is different, these

qualities align closely with our goal of creating affordable housing for local artists. Furthermore, when observing the unit's design and the layout of the space, the firm left many open spaces of shaded areas for people to come together in community and collaborate. A strong sense of community and the ability for artists to collaborate or draw inspiration from the outside world was something we also wanted to ensure could happen, hence, another reason why we were drawn to the design of Little Berkeley. Additionally, the buildings have a puzzle piece like structure so we are able to rotate and replicate them in order to fill our site which is much larger than the area Little Berkeley will be placed on in LA. The use of many buildings to create one apartment complex gives us flexibility as planners to maximize this site's contribution to the community. Lastly, placing more buildings on our site to fill the space allows for our design proposal to house more people which is needed due to this area's history of displacing artists (Urban Displacement Project, 2021). Where the design needs a little editing is the height of the buildings. Due to our intentions, local regulations, and desired architectural flow in the neighborhood we need to provide the community with additional units. Therefore, we plan to raise the buildings to six or four floors tall (instead of one or two stories). This will continue to use the same design but integrate better with the preexisting architecture. Overall, we believe due to the previously listed reasons and with the suggested edits Little Berkeley is the perfect design to compliment this site.

Next, this design's value is about more than housing stock, it is a place for people to establish a sense of belonging within Oakland, foster their art careers, and revitalize the local arts culture. As previously established, this area in Oakland used to be a much more prevalent arts district. However, due to large companies coming in and the cost of housing rising all over the Bay Area, artists were displaced. Hence, the artistic nature of the community started to be

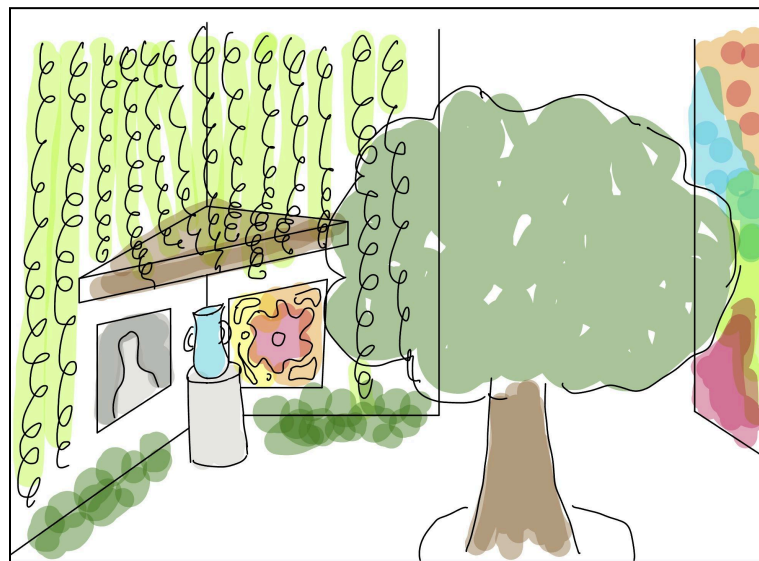
replaced with corporate landmarks. Seeking to safeguard the historical culture and roots of this neighborhood is important. Affordable housing for artists will help to ensure that the arts culture can be supported through the built environment. On top of that, Oakland is a prime location for gentrification, which of course can be undesirable; ensuring a large number of low cost housing is set aside for people central to the culture and history of this neighborhood can be a great step in protecting Oakland from more/future gentrification (Urban Displacement Project, 2021). Additionally, art is an important part of strengthening the opportunities available in an area and regulating the mental health of its residents (Williams, 2018). Art has been shown to have clinical benefits for those struggling with mental health or overcoming traumas and therefore this kind of housing and community center could contribute to a healthier Oakland (Williams, 2018). Lastly, Oakland is home to many future thinkers and social revolutions which is something that is held positively within the community (City of Oakland, 2026), and artists help to encourage this kind of thinking and can even help to foster peaceful revolutions. In the end, this space is projected to foster community and a sense of creative belonging within the surrounding area.

This design is an asset to this area of Oakland because of its immense emphasis on green space and hence its ability to positively impact mental health. This design has many public spaces that invite the neighborhood in to view the work of the artists and partake in the local arts scene. Due to this design choice, which hopes to suck the town into a central point in the site's outdoor space, the greenery is sure to benefit the health of any community member that chooses to take advantage of this resource. Truly, “health goes beyond the mere absence of disease to include physical, mental, and social wellbeing, all of which are greatly enhanced by accessible green spaces” (Russo, 2024). Green spaces are proven to contribute positively to people's mental health and living in urban spaces can make it hard for people to access green areas or feel a

peaceful quiet moment (especially people without easy access to transportation). While there are small local parks around, this green architecture is further enhanced by the layered social contributions that the artists will make. Studies have long shown that artist-based groups (ABG), have helped people suffering from chronic mental health conditions (CMHC) improve their social and mental wellbeing (Williams, 2018). The programs and activities these people who suffered from CMHC participated during this study were community-based and run by artists; showing that this housing design really does have the capacity to positively serve its community.

Humans also often take inspiration from their natural world, which is an important design choice for artist spaces. As planners of the site, we find it important to not only house artists, but inspire them. By inspiring artists who would feel a sense of security and satisfaction in their home space, there is a greater opportunity to bring other people into their community (Guyen, 2011). Hence, together they can reap the mental health benefits that greenery and art has simultaneously. Green spaces and trees have long inspired artists also because of their quiet sense of introspection that allows for imagination to flow. Landscape architect and illustrator Professor Chip Sullivan at UC Berkeley, for example, describes how landscaping is less about decoration but about honoring the “spirit of place” (Sullivan, 2023).

This “spirit of place” showcases how planting designs are not passive, but are actively living structures for storybuilding and creation from the inside. This connects with artists and the site



design, because emphasizing greenery in an urban setting encourages the affordable housing to be an inspiring escape into their art and a place of living. An example of the landscape impacts on artists is how J.R.R. Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit* after waking up from a series of naps beneath a specific tree (Eucatastrophe 2019), reinforcing the idea that moments of immersion in the natural world inspires artistic imagination. Intersecting greenery with housing can generate an environment that supports artists' basic needs while meeting their personal needs of artistic expression.

Lastly, green architecture has many sustainability based benefits in relation to energy and water consumptions as well as fresh air and climate regulation within the building (Dover, 2015). A study observed by Dover and Hornet et al. found that buildings with plantings on the sides can regulate surrounding temperatures and in some scenarios cooled the area as much as seven degrees celsius while also promoting better air flow. This can help to minimize a building's energy expenditure by cooling spaces during hot city days. Furthermore, benefits include the minimization of heat islands in urban environments like that of this site as well as better air flow leading to less spread of sicknesses—something held in at a higher level of importance in a post pandemic world—and more filtered/less polluted air (Gabel, 2024).

However, many skeptics challenge the sustainability and financial exclusivity of green architecture labeling it green-washing (Jeehan, 2024). Despite this stance that green architecture is not as sustainable as it claims, for various reasons like plant maintenance—especially at elevation—or it being more of a band aid to a bigger issue that should be addressed; our site avoids many of these complications (Jeehan, 2024). At 2100 Telegraph, we do not claim that our building is a sustainable solution, instead it is meant to increase creativity in the neighborhood

and improve locals' mental health by giving them an artistic outlet. Furthermore, we merely suggest that there are some green benefits like urban cooling and do not make big claims that this site alone will fix air pollution, although some filtering will occur. Moreover, our site is not a tall structure so common maintenance issues like replacing trees on the 25th floor will not be an issue. Overall, the green infrastructure of this site is meant to target mental health issues and support the historical arts culture of the neighborhood through green design rather than solve pollution based issues. In the end, there is no doubt that a living building design, or green architecture, on this site will create a better environment for living and healing within the city of Oakland. From fresh cooler air, to artistic creativity, and better mental health, adding green components to this design is a clear choice.

### **Financial Model Proposal**

Green space and creativity for artists cannot be the only factors that allow for the feeling of security in this model. Financial security and the desire to reinvent what affordable housing means is critical to reimagining a world where affordable housing projects are not used as bandaids to socioeconomic issues. In a state where renting curbs the ability to accumulate wealth, this model aims to tackle this issue with a new financial model.

Beginning with a case study from Berkeley, California in Adeline Street near Ashby BART Station, the Maudelle Miller Community offers a key precedent for a new governance approach. Developed and managed by a Black-led nonprofit, the project centers long-term Black residents in South Berkeley through a "right to return" policy that has since begun to take over the Bay Area (UDP). This policy prioritizes tenants displaced by previous waves of disinvestment and gentrification, which aligns with the history of Uptown Oakland constant

urban renewal and redevelopment projects that displaced many Black Oakland community members and artists. The Maudelle Miller housing model's units are restricted at a range of AMI levels of 30-60%, which ensures deep affordability for low-income households while still layering multiple financial sources. They have support from LIHTC, city subsidies, and philanthropic fundraising, which could be used similarly for financial viability of the proposed 2100 Telegraph redevelopment. While affordable housing often follows a top-down technocratic model where state developers deliver standardized units at regulated rent levels, there is also a lack of local control and cultural specificity that then causes the feeling of placelessness in these models. By proposing a model that follows an already-successful framework of the Maudelle Miller Shirek Community, there is an improved chance at building a model that re-orient's finance and stability in Uptown Oakland.

The proposal would include a local Black and POC-led community land trust or nonprofit to partner and manage the project, which would help embed the right to return policy for displaced residents. Units would be targeted at similar AMI range, but would not be evicted once they build enough income, as the proposal aims to reimagine affordable housing as a more permanent solution than a transitional space. Additionally, commercial activity on the ground floors of the "museum" and market spaces would be structurally tied to renter wealth-building. Instead of commercial income disappearing into an opaque operating budget, a fixed percentage would be allocated annually into two tenant-directed streams of rent relief and individual savings. Each household would be allowed to elect, through clear policy, on how their share of this surplus is applied. The paved over alleyway would allow for the site block to widen for more open, outdoor spaces. The usage of these spaces would be through flea markets where artists could present their handmade works and sell them to the community during Oakland First

Fridays. Therefore, financial opportunities would intersect with community gathering around supporting each other's interests. Pulling back further, the Maudelle Miller Community offers the governance template, but the longer-running proof that an artist-specific affordable housing model can stay financially upright for decades sits across the country at Westbeth Artists Housing in New York's West Village. Founded in 1970 inside the former Western Electric and Bell Laboratories complex, where Westbeth was the country's first federally-subsidized adaptive reuse project converting an industrial campus into affordable live-work housing for artists. Structurally, it remains the largest of its kind with 384 income-restricted residential units and 64 ground-floor commercial spaces. Though, what makes Westbeth a critical precedent for 2100 Telegraph is not its scale, but its financial architecture. The ground-floor cultural and commercial tenancy model is tied to the residential mission, rather than treated as a separate revenue stream. This is the exact relationship we are proposing between our ground floor programs and the upstairs units. The model has now been stress-tested for over fifty-five years, through two full real-estate cycles and the displacement pressures of one of the most aggressively gentrified neighborhoods in the United States. The success was clear in August 2025, when Westbeth was successfully recapitalized through a \$25.2 million tax-exempt bond placement by Merchants Capital paired with a \$63 million New York State investment, allowing the nonprofit to extend deep affordability for another generation of artists (Merchants Capital, 2025; Hughes, 2025). Westbeth therefore answers the most frequently raised critique of nonprofit-stewarded artist housing, where the housing model fails at maintaining land value. By demonstrating this success with a permanent nonprofit owner and a culturally anchored commercial program, the recapitalization conversation would no longer be about affordable housings' financial survival,

but rather how many households will be able to move in and out of the space. In this case, this design would allow affordable housing to reconcile with permanence rather than transitions.

| Funding Source   | Role in Capital Stack   | Approx. Share | Tied to Tenant Wealth-Building?  |
|--|---|---------------|--|
| Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC, 9%)                   | Primary equity source; syndicated to investors in exchange for ~10 years of tax credits. Sets the AMI floor (30–60%).             | 50–55%        | Indirect — locks in deep affordability for 55+ years.                      |
| City of Oakland soft loans / housing trust funds             | Subordinate, low-interest loans repaid from residual cash flow; fills gap between LIHTC equity and total development cost.        | 15–20%        | Indirect — keeps rents at target AMI.                                      |
| Alameda County Measure A1 affordable housing bond            | County-level capital subsidy specifically for deeply affordable units in transit-rich locations.                                  | 10–12%        | Indirect — supports the deepest-affordability units.                       |
| Philanthropic and arts-focused grants                        | Foundations supporting artist housing and Black-led community development (e.g., Kenneth Rainin, Akonadi, regional arts funders). | 8–10%         | Direct — funds resident-run programming and shared studios.                |
| Ground-floor commercial revenue (gallery, café, maker space) | Operating revenue from leasing ground-floor space at below-market rates to tenant-aligned uses.                                   | Operating     | Direct — preferred leases for resident artists and Black-owned businesses. |
| First Fridays sales and resident maker income                | Revenue residents earn directly from selling work in shared courtyards and ground-floor space during Oakland First Fridays.       | Operating     | Direct — income flows to residents, not the building.                      |

Overall, these mechanisms would reframe commercial space from a pure revenue-maximizing asset into a shared resource that materially supports the people who give the building its cultural value. Tying the two templates together, the model proposes an affordable housing type that not only prioritizes the ability to exist as a tenant, but also with the hope of long-term futures in Uptown Oakland.

### Conclusion

In the end, this site has the potential to be a very exciting development for Uptown Oakland. From a basic human support level of ensuring affordable housing for community members that have historically supported this district's thriving cultural scene to the potential mental health benefits for all who engage with its landscaping and artistry programming. Additionally, the building design's plantings will cool the space, inspire the artists, minimize the building's energy expenditure, and be strategically chosen to benefit the residents/space by being

edible or native. Lastly, the financials of this building could be modeled after the Maude Miller Community, in order to give more power and wealth building potential back to the residents, enabling them to have financial stability and independence. This relates as well to the financial scheme to allow in-house artists to sell their art in the downstairs and outside gallery spaces. Overall, this plan for 2100 Telegraph can do so much more than house people, it can stabilize a community's culture, promote artistry, and give the surrounding people a calm space to exist within.

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