



Oakland adds four more hotel projects to growing list, moving people from the street into permanent housing

Hailey Wang on November 18, 2023

As Oakland confronts an ongoing [homelessness crisis](#), one strategy that has shown promise is buying hotels and motels and converting them into permanent housing.

Oakland received \$31.5 million from California's Homekey program, a statewide initiative that supports this strategy, in March 2022. The city has used the funds for the conversion of the Piedmont Place Hotel, the Kingdom Builders Transitional Housing and the Inn by the Coliseum into permanent housing for homeless people. While the first two projects have successfully been completed, the third is experiencing delays. In the

meantime, Oakland found out this month that the state is supporting the conversion of a fourth hotel.

Oakland's Homeless Commission, a civilian-led body that advises and oversees the funds received by the city, said at its September meeting that transforming hotels into housing is a successful solution to address homelessness.

Janny Castillo, director of community outreach and services at St. Mary's Center, an Oakland nonprofit that provides services for homeless people, said the program was more effective than other strategies because it offered residents a room of their own.

"Residents are able to have a space that is not a shelter with multiple beds and a lot of people beside them," she said.

James Vann, a steering committee member of the Homeless Advocacy Working Group of Oakland, agreed that the city's Piedmont Place Hotel, at 55 MacArthur Blvd., is a successful project.

"The whole purpose behind the project is to quickly get people off the street and into facilities that have a roof, out of the weather, and out of the elements, and being less available to crime and drug dealers," Vann said.

The 45-unit Piedmont Place Hotel received \$14.8 million and was converted to permanent housing in the fall 2022. A counselor from Bay Area Community Services is on the site 24/7 to provide help, including assisting residents to apply for public assistance and look for jobs.



Louie Pando in his new home at Piedmont Place (Hailey Wang)

Louie Pando, 66, has been staying at Piedmont Place for a year and is paying 30% of his income from Social Security for rent each month. In his room, a dark gray velvet sofa serves as his bed and a black leather armchair sits in front of a light-green wall. The room was fully furnished when he moved in, with a microwave and television.

Pando had served 40 years in prison. After he was released, he became homeless for three years until he moved into Piedmont Place.

“Getting a place here gave me a feeling like getting out of prison. I finally got a home to lay my head on. I got the security. I got a door that I can lock,” Pando said.

Residents can stay as long as they pay the monthly rent of 30% of their income. Residents can keep their pets and invite friends to stay for as long as 10 days.

Tyson Errero, 65, also a resident at Piedmont Place, lives with his dog, Dudu. Errero moved from Arizona to California for a woman he met online. The relationship failed and he ended up living at People’s Park in Berkeley for three months before moving from

shelter to shelter for another eight months. He heard about Piedmont Place at a shelter and applied. Now, he has been there for nine months.



Tyson Errero does laundry with his dog, Dudu (Hailey Wang)

“It is like a starting point. We learn to take care of ourselves, go to grocery shops and do laundry all over again. It leads us back to normal,” Errero said.

While unhoused residents urgently need more such projects, one, the Inn by the Coliseum, is experiencing a significant delay. The site should have started taking in people last fall, according to the city. However, it remains unoccupied, and the developer has pushed back the opening to February.

Hundreds more units on the way

The variety of funding sources for the project is one reason for the delay, the city’s public information office said in an email response to Oakland North’s questions. Oakland is supporting the project with \$11 million from Project Homekey, Measure KK, and other money, according to a city news release.

On a weekday in late October, there was a security guard at the Inn by the Coliseum, but no construction was underway.

The developer for the project, The Danco Group, said that the process was delayed because it was still waiting for a building permit from the city. Danco filed the application in January, but the city did not get the document due to a system error. Danco filed the application again in June and paid the permitting fee in mid-July.

The project has met Homekey regulations and deadlines, and has received a demolition permit, the city public information office said.

California awarded Oakland another \$15.5 million on Nov. 7 to transform a motel on West MacArthur Boulevard and Telegraph Avenue into homeless housing. Imperial Inn will be done in 12 months, offering 47 units of permanent housing, the city said in a news release.

“I’m incredibly grateful for Gov. Newsom’s partnership and leadership as we work together to end the crisis of homelessness,” said Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao in a public statement.

“Homekey funding is an important part of our strategy to end homelessness in Oakland and across the region.”

Thao said Homekey has so far awarded Oakland funds for seven projects, totaling 323 housing units. The city has four other Homekey applications with the state that, if granted, would give Oakland another 222 units.

(The headline on this story was updated for clarity.)

(Top photo: The Inn by the Coliseum, by Hailey Wang)