Office of the City Manager

October 2, 2024

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

Re: Berkeley's Response to Homelessness: New Materials Tell the Story of the City's Success

We are pleased to provide an update on our continued efforts to address homelessness in Berkeley, emphasizing both our progress and the enhanced communication strategies we've implemented to share information about our work with the community.

Data from the federal Point-in-Time Counts in 2022 and 2024 show that overall homelessness is declining in Berkeley, with a particularly significant reduction in unsheltered homelessness. While there is still work to be done, these trends clearly demonstrate that our City's approach is impactful and delivers meaningful results.

On July 9, 2024, City staff presented a comprehensive analysis of our homeless system's performance to the Council,[1] demonstrating key successes and future challenges. However, that report was dense and technical, making it difficult to fully understand the impact of our work to date. Recognizing the need for clearer communication, this summer, Neighborhood Services contracted with Berton Media to create materials that better inform residents of our continued progress.

Working closely with Berton Media and Health, Housing, and Community Services, we developed three deliverables that will help convey our successes:

- An overview summarizing our homelessness response.
- A slide deck highlighting key focus areas.

[1] See: https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2024-07-09%20Item%2016%20Referral%20Response%20%20Gap%20Analysis%20of%20Berkeley%E2%80%99s%20Homelessness.pdf

- Vignettes that illustrate key successes in expanding non-congregate shelters and enhancing outreach to break barriers to housing.

These materials reflect the principles guiding our Homeless Response Team (HRT) as we work to reduce street homelessness by 75%, in alignment with the All Home Regional Action Plan. Our approach follows three core principles:

1. **Housing First**: We prioritize outreach to encampment residents to connect them with housing resources, aiming to transition individuals from the streets into safe, stable housing whenever possible.

2. **Health and Safety**: While services remain our priority, we also address health or safety risks posed by certain encampments, striving to protect both encampment residents and the broader Berkeley community.

3. **Maintaining Clean Streets**: Homeless encampments can accumulate debris, impacting public spaces. The City is committed to keeping our streets clean and accessible for all.

These resources will help us communicate the City's ongoing efforts and demonstrate the impactful work we are doing to address homelessness. We hope they will be useful. For more information contact Peter Radu, Assistant to the City Manager, at 510-981-7045 or pradu@berkeleyca.gov.

Attachments:
1. Coordination and Compassion: Berkeley's Response to Homelessness (three-page report)
2. Coordination and Compassion: Berkeley's Response to Homelessness (slide deck)
3. With More Privacy, a New Incentive to Move Indoors: Why Berkeley is Increasing Private, Individual Units for Homelessness
4. More Outreach Improves Odds for Housing: Two-Thirds of People Served by Berkeley's Homeless Response Team Move into Interim or Permanent Shelter

cc: Peter Radu, Assistant to the City Manager
LaTanya Bellow, Deputy City Manager
Anne Cardwell, Deputy City Manager
Scott Gilman, Health, Housing and Community Services Director
Matthai Chakko, Assistant to the City Manager
Jenny Wong, City Auditor
Mark Numainville, City Clerk
Farimah Brown, City Attorney

COORDINATION & COMPASSION

BERKELEY'S RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS

In 2024, **the City of Berkeley saw a 45% decrease in people experiencing unsheltered homelessness**. It was the largest reduction of street homelessness for a city of our size in the Bay Area and a ray of hope in the humanitarian crisis that continues to unfold on our streets and across the region. Berkeley's progress is due to **our coordinated strategy** to reduce homelessness in our city, and the generous support and investments from the **compassion** of our residents. **In Berkeley, we center our response to homelessness on "coordination and compassion."**

In Berkeley, we center our response to homelessness on "coordination and compassion."

POINT-IN-TIME COUNT

Alameda County's Five Largest Cities

CITY	2022	2024	# OF INDIVIDUALS	CHANGE
Berkeley	**803**	**445**	**-358**	**-45%**
Fremont	866	614	-252	-29%
San Leandro	312	227	-85	-27%
Hayward	267	278	+11	+4%
Oakland	3,337	3,664	+327	+10%

Coordination

In 2021, Berkeley's City Council voted[1] to adopt a three-pronged coordinated strategy outlined in All Home's Regional Action Plan. First, we aim to prevent homelessness before it happens by helping our residents avoid eviction, pay their rent, and keep a roof over their heads. Second: We have dramatically increased – and improved – our private interim housing units to move people off sidewalks and into the safety and dignity of their own personal unit. Finally, we offer a wide array of permanent affordable housing options. We've built more new affordable housing units and provided more vouchers and subsidies compared to other jurisdictions our size that have allowed our residents to remain in their homes. **All three strategies – prevention, interim housing, and permanent housing – must work concurrently to reduce homelessness.**

Compassion

Our coordinated strategy only works with the continued support of Berkeley's residents, who have generously and compassionately provided funding for our homelessness response mainly through Measures O, P and U1. Perhaps most critically, **Measure P, a tax on the highest-value homes sold, provides more than 65% of the $35 million Berkeley spent last year on homelessness**. With the passage of Measure P back in 2018, Berkeleyans foresaw the scale and severity of the crisis at its onset and acted with conviction. Measure O, also passed in 2018, has increased permanent affordable housing in Berkeley. Berkeley has committed Measure O funding to build 1,050 new units, of which 240 units (+44 shelter beds) have already been constructed. The remaining units are at various stages of development. Measure U1, passed in 2016, creates funds for eviction defense to keep our residents housed, as well as contributes to affordable housing production. And although we are committed to working with "coordination and compassion," we understand that if we let up on investments into any one of our strategies right now, our gains are at risk, and street homelessness and encampments will likely spike again.

HOMELESSNESS SERVICES FUND SOURCES, FY 2024

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Homelessness does not respect city limits. And while Berkeley has recorded a 45% drop in street homelessness due to its disciplined approach of "coordination and compassion," our residents are always vulnerable to the region's ongoing affordability crisis. Simply put, our Bay Area region remains unaffordable for many families and continues to see people forced into homelessness at an unacceptable rate: **For every person who exited homelessness in 2023, nearly three others in the Bay Area experienced homelessness for the first time**. Until the region slows the rate of those who fall into homelessness, Berkeley and every other city will continue to witness the human tragedy on our streets. And due to historical and present institutional racist policies – including redlining and housing segregation – close to 60% of Berkeley's homeless population identify as Black, a dramatic over-representation of our population, where just 8% of the City's residents are Black. Berkeley must commit to centering racial equity by finding solutions that meet the unique challenges faced by unstably housed and unhoused Black and Brown people.

Additionally, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Berkeley who report having a disability is growing, and they are more likely to wait longer on lists for limited permanent supportive housing – and far more likely to return to the streets. Serving this vulnerable population will require close collaboration with other systems of care across many levels of government.

Although Berkeley has managed to "bend the curve" by decreasing overall homelessness and the number of large encampments since 2019, our greatest challenge may be the immediate risk of back-sliding if we lose the local sources of funding that have been critical to our success. In November 2024, Berkeley residents are expected to be asked whether they will extend Measure P through a ballot initiative. **Since Measure P provides roughly 66 percent of Berkeley's funding for homelessness services, and has helped permanently house over 1500 people since its passage, losing these revenues will inevitably result in cuts to affordable housing, interim housing, and prevention funding.**

1 https://bit.ly/3S57DpJ

WHAT'S WORKING

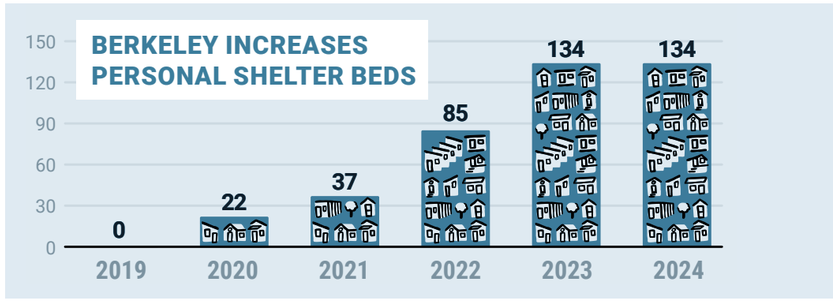
Private Interim Housing

Since 2021, **Berkeley has more than tripled the number of beds in private interim housing units**, where residents sleep in a personal space rather than dorm-style shelter. The individual housing units are far more appealing to those moving off the streets: In January and February of 2024 – during the height of a rainy and cold winter season – just 82% of available shelter beds at Berkeley's typical "dorm style" shelters were occupied, compared to 93% of our city's private interim housing units. Our unhoused neighbors report they are reluctant to enter dorm-style housing, where they have experienced theft or traumatizing interactions, and they prefer to move into spaces where they can stay with a partner, retain their privacy, their pets, and their possessions. The increased intake into interim housing also gives us a greater opportunity to connect individuals with the critical services they need, and greatly improves our ability to match them with permanent housing.

Thanks to our residents, and their support of Measure O, P and U1, **Berkeley has been able to open more than 10 new facilities – like the Dorothy Day House's Berkeley Inn program and Insight Housing's Hope Center, which includes transitional housing specifically for our veterans**. Since the inception of Measure O, P, and U1, more than 650 interim housing beds and permanent housing units have been funded and have served over 2,000 residents.

Innovative + Expanded Prevention Efforts

Stopping homelessness before it starts is critical to reduce homelessness, and between 2020 and 2024 Berkeley expanded its homeless prevention efforts – **serving more than 900 households with rental assistance and eviction defense funds.** Voter-approved Measure P and U1 provided a $4.25 million investment and leveraged more than $3 million in federal funds that helped prevent our fellow Berkelyans from falling into homelessness. These efforts combined with Berkeley's extended eviction moratorium, helped ensure we had the lowest eviction rate of any city in Alameda County [insert chart here]. In 2022, the City also began a pilot rental assistance program that provides up to $1,800 a month for up to 3 years to some of our most at-risk residents and some unhoused people who are ineligible for permanent supportive housing. Although the "shallow subsidy" pilot is relatively small and limited to just 49 people right now, the subsidy provides a safety net for those who are most likely to return to our streets.



Stable Funding Attracts More Funding

Thanks to Berkeley's residents, and particularly their support of Measure P, Berkeley creates more revenues to address housing and homelessness than many other cities. For instance, while Berkeley spent $35 million on homelessness last year, Fremont – a city nearly double Berkeley's population – allocated less than half that amount ($15 million), despite having about the same number of people experiencing homelessness.

Providing a stable funding source actually creates more opportunities for Berkeley, as partners at the State – like the successful HomeKey effort that converted two motels into permanent housing in two years – sought out cities that could cover funding gaps and collaborate quickly on new projects. In the past three years, the City of Berkeley received over $40 million in State funds to create 134 private units for our residents, far exceeding what cities of similar size were prepared to accept.

BRINGING HOPE TO BERKELEY

The third week in July 2024 marked a momentous occasion at Berkeley's Hope Center according to Kyomi Williams, a senior program manager at one of the city's newest and most innovative facilities that assists people experiencing homelessness.

A record four people moved out that week and into permanent housing of their own, and one of them – Milton Thomas – took a moment to pose proudly for a picture with the keys to his new apartment.

> After living outside off-and-on for 10 years, I've now got a place of my own that I can call home.
> *—Milton Thomas*

"The staff at the Hope Center did just that – they gave me hope," said Thomas, 63. "After living outside off-and-on for 10 years, I've now got a place of my own that I can call home."

Thomas was just one of Berkeley's formerly unsheltered residents who moved into the Hope Center six months after it opened in Sept. 2022. The Hope Center integrates multiple housing types – an overnight shelter for 32 people, transitional housing for veterans, and 53 permanent affordable housing units – along with daily meals and support services for residents.

The community is designed, as Williams put it, "To get people back on their feet and provide the care they need" – people like Milton Thomas.

Thomas had been evicted from his apartment and struggled with alcohol and drugs. By the time he arrived at Hope Center, he needed help attaining medicine to ward off seizures and getting access to benefits that he was unaware of.

He needed a coordinated and compassionate response, which Hope Center provided over the course of eight months.

"We nursed him back to health," Williams said. "Because he didn't have a chance to last much longer on those streets."

Today, Thomas has his health issues under careful watch and has been reunited with his family.

"It's rewarding to see people like Mr.Milton move on," Williams said. "He had his ups and downs, but no one gave up on him. He knew he could always find us at the Hope Center."

LOOKING AHEAD

Thankfully, more local cities and counties have formally adopted All Home's Regional Action Plan, as Berkeley's City Council did in 2021, and moved toward a unified homelessness response system.

But to see real change across the Bay Area, where homelessness is "brief, rare, and non-occurring," it will take an urgent and comprehensive regional effort with significant investments.

Using All Home's solutions modeling, **Berkeley could see a 75% reduction in homelessness in as soon as five years with an investment of $294 million.**

The model shows Berkeley would need to double the number of households we prevent from falling into homelessness every year (up to 750), build 270 additional interim housing units, and create 910 permanent affordable housing options, including building new units and providing vouchers and subsidies to keep people housed.

The projections show that homelessness is a not an intractable problem – and though we have more work to do, the path to ending homelessness in Berkeley is clear.

CITY OF BERKELEY

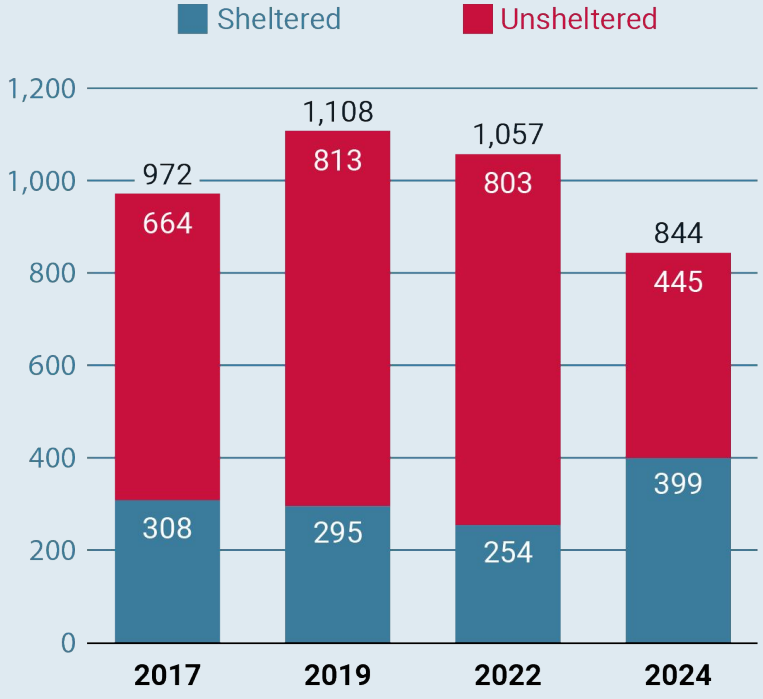
BERKELEY'S

COORDINATED & COMPASSIONATE

RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS

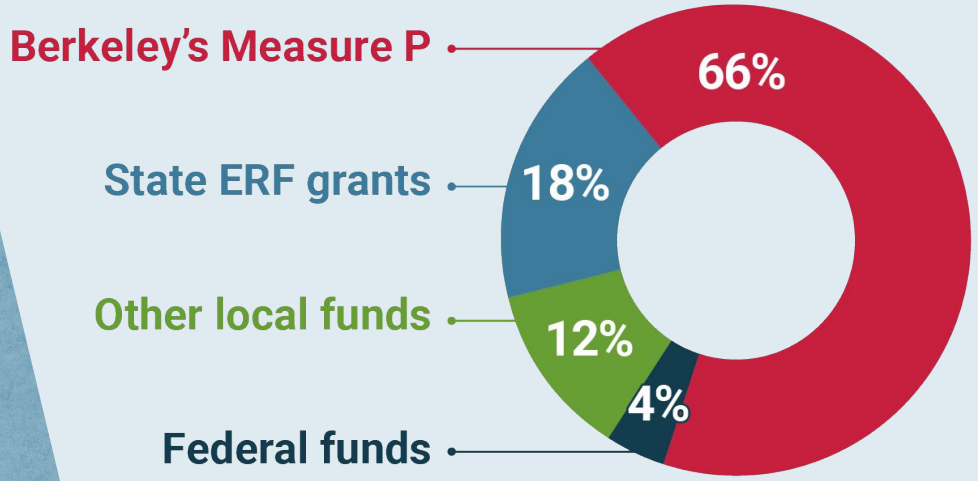
THE PROBLEM

Homelessness in Berkeley
Sheltered vs Unsheltered



THE PROBLEM

Berkeley Faces a Fiscal Cliff for Homeless Resources



Berkeley Experiences 45 Percent Drop in Unsheltered Homelessness

CITY	2022	2024	# OF INDIVIDUALS	CHANGE
Berkeley	**803**	**445**	**-358**	**-45%**
Fremont	866	614	-252	**-29%**
San Leandro	312	227	-85	**-27%**
Hayward	267	278	+11	**+4%**
Oakland	3,337	3,664	+327	**+10%**

COORDINATION

Innovative + Expanded Prevention Efforts

Private Interim Housing

Stable Funding Attracts More Funding

COORDINATION

PREVENTION

Between 2020-2024 Berkeley

Served Over

900 Renter Households

with rental assistance and eviction defense funds

Served Over

50 Households with up to $1,800 per month

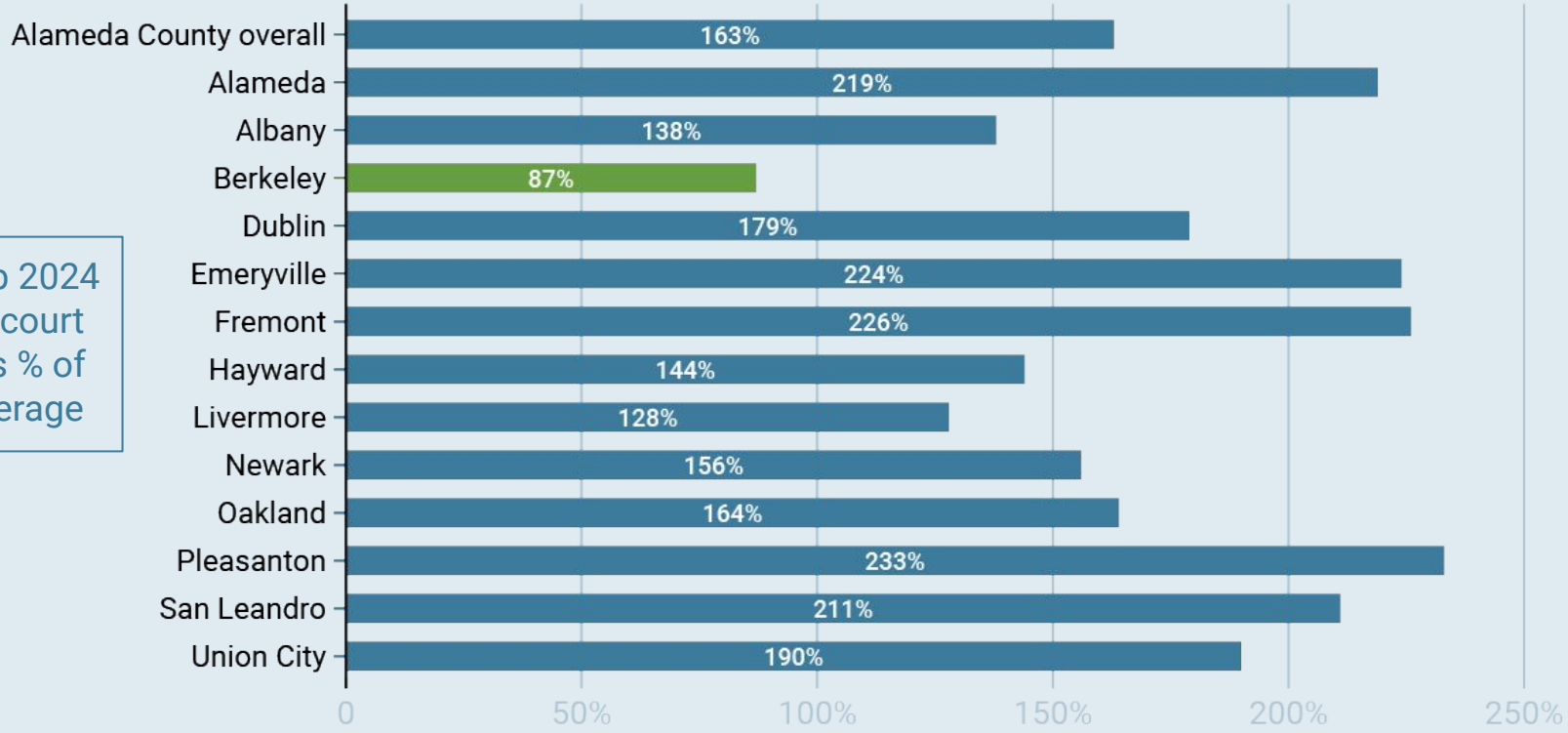
for up to 3 years

to our most at-risk residents and some unhoused people who are ineligible for permanent supportive housing

Berkeley: Eviction Rates Lowest in Alameda County

Variation in eviction wave across jurisdictions

Jan & Feb 2024 eviction court filings as % of 2019 average



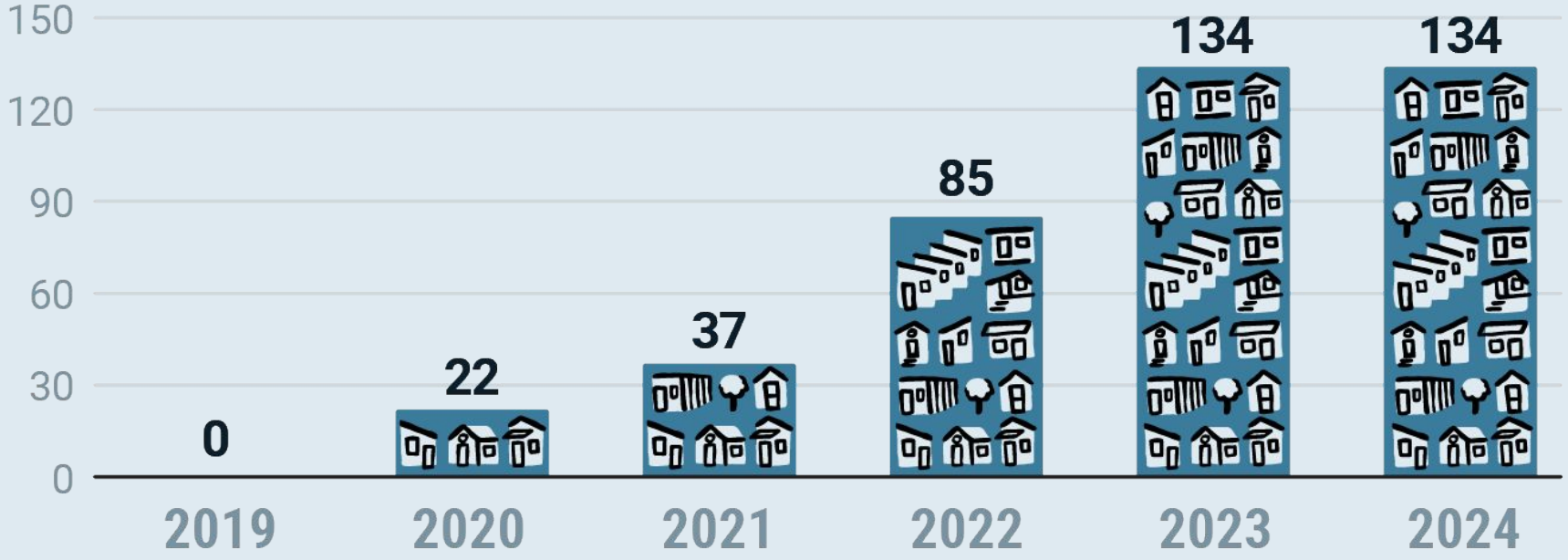
COORDINATION

ENCAMPMENT RESOLUTION

⅔ of residents served by the Homeless Response Team **move into permanent or interim housing**

COORDINATION

Increased Interim Housing Units



COORDINATION

Increased Interim + Permanent Housing

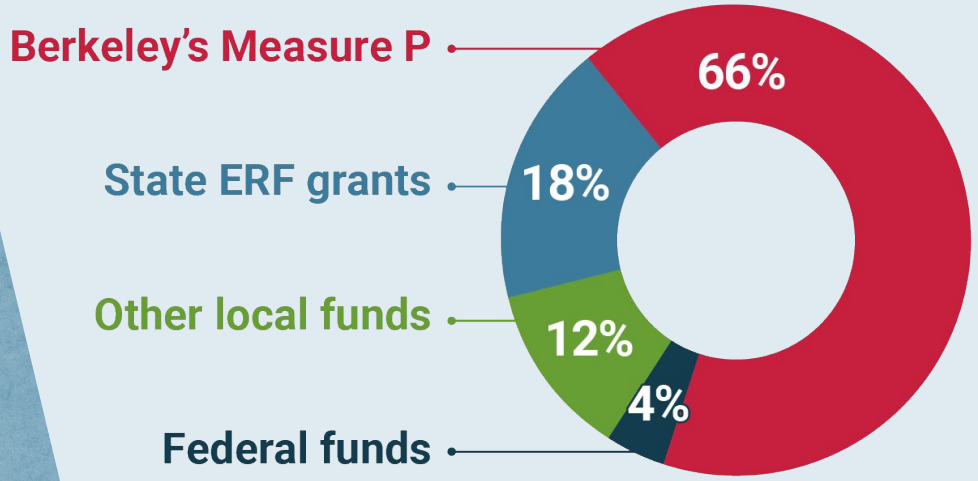
Insight Housing's Hope Center

Over 10 new projects with **more than 700** interim housing beds and permanent housing units completed.

These projects have served **over 2,000 residents**.

COMPASSION

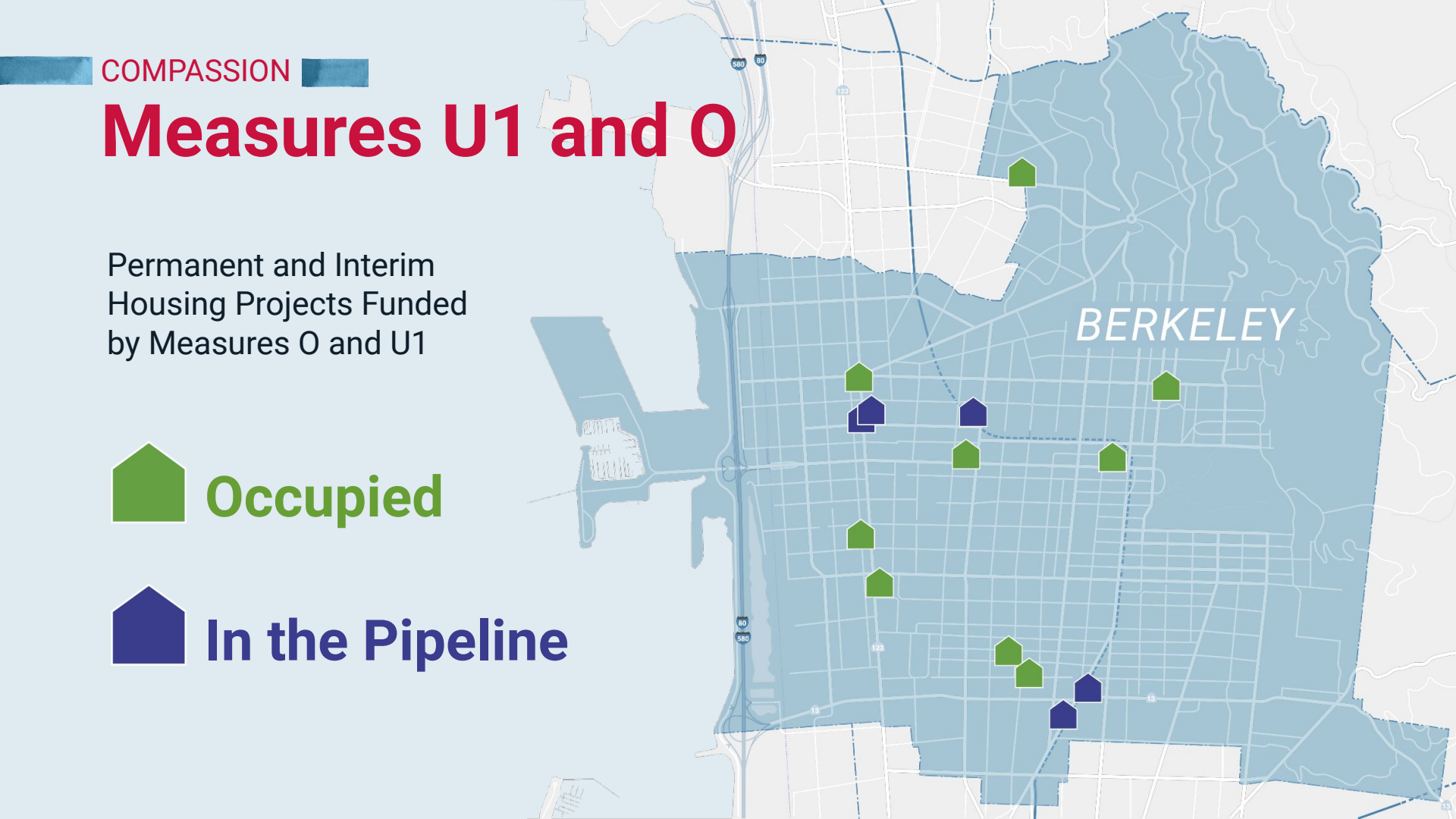
How Berkeley Residents Provide Resources



COMPASSION

Measures U1 and O

Permanent and Interim Housing Projects Funded by Measures O and U1



Occupied

In the Pipeline

COORDINATION

Permanent Affordable Housing

Berkeley committed Measure O funding to build new units

240
UNITS
COMPLETED
(+44 shelter beds)

1,050
UNITS
IN THE PIPLINE

Milton Thomas

"The staff at the Hope Center did just that – they gave me hope. After living outside off-and-on for 10 years, I've now got a place of my own that I can call home."

WITH MORE PRIVACY, A NEW INCENTIVE TO MOVE INDOORS

Why Berkeley is Increasing Private, Individual Units for Homelessness

City of Berkeley outreach worker Okeya Vance-Dozier (right) makes daily rounds into encampments to offer services and shelter to those experiencing homelessness.

Just a few minutes into her outreach rounds at an encampment on Harrison Street in Berkeley, Okeya Vance-Dozier spotted a woman she's been working with to move out of a tent and into a private room at a local hotel.

"You know we got a room with your name on it," Vance-Dozier said to the woman who goes by "T" and has lived on-and-off the streets for several years.

"I am ready," T responded with some exhaustion. "And you know I prefer that hotel room any day of the week over those crazy shelters."

The preference for a private unit over dorm-style congregate shelter is a frequent request outreach workers like Vance-Dozier hear on the streets – and it can serve as the key incentive for residents to move indoors.

"It's the one thing all of them say they want," Vance-Dozier said. "Everyone needs a little something different to finalize the deal, but they all seem to want their own place."

Interim housing units that offer privacy – in converted hotel rooms, cabins, or trailers on secured lots – have dramatically increased in Berkeley in recent years, from zero units in 2019, to 134 in 2024.

Thanks largely to funds provided through Measure P passed by Berkeley voters in 2018, Berkeley has been able to increase all forms of shelter, while reducing street homelessness by 45% in just the last two years.

This steep decline marked the largest reduction of unsheltered homelessness in Alameda County's five largest cities.

In part to further address demand for the highly-sought private interim housing units, in the fall of 2024 the City will begin the process of converting the STAIR Center – a large congregate shelter that opened in 2018 – into more private units.

"They're far more likely to take our offer for help if we can say, 'We've got a place just for you."

"People have had bad experiences in the big shelters, and they don't want to go back," Vance-Dozier said. "And they're far more likely to take our offer for help if we can say, 'We've got a place just for you."

For T., her experiences at dorm-style shelters left her overwhelmed each time. Staff at the shelters were often outnumbered by residents experiencing mental health crises, she said. One man, she added, went through her laundry and she's been robbed of possessions countless times as she slept. Visitors are barred from most congregate shelters, and many also ban pets and have strict in-and-out rules.

"It's just too chaotic in those places," T. told Vance-Dozier. "And it doesn't feel like you have any freedom."

Once residents move into the private units, city data shows, they are also more likely to access the services the City of Berkeley offers them.

"The outreach doesn't stop just because they got a room," Vance-Dozier said.

Vance-Dozier visits five encampments every weekday with her outreach team to make constant contact with dozens of people each day – and offer services every time.

It's a pitch that, more often than not, can take weeks or months, before it gets accepted. The key, Vance-Dozier said, is to stay consistent.

"I tell them, 'I'll be back here tomorrow to check in on you' and sometimes it's just a 'hello' and sometimes I sit down with them for lunch."

As Vance-Dozier continued her visit through the encampment, a woman living in an RV stepped outside and said she was interested to learn more about what it would take to get housing.

But the woman was most concerned that if she moved off of Harrison Street, she'd lose all of her possessions in the RV, including some family heirlooms and her electric bicycle.

"I can do (private unit) housing," the woman stressed, "but I can't go into those shelters."

MORE OUTREACH IMPROVES ODDS FOR HOUSING

Two-thirds of people served by Berkeley's Homeless Response Team move into interim or permanent shelter

City of Berkeley outreach worker Christina Murphy (left) consistently meets with residents experiencing homeless to help them transition from the streets and into shelter and services.

Everyday, outreach workers with Berkeley's Homeless Response Team visit encampments throughout the city to knock on RV doors, peek into tents, and connect with residents experiencing homelessness to offer two things: services and shelter.

"What we try to do is take all the steps out of the way for them to make it easy to get indoors," said Christina Murphy, a member of the outreach team as she walked through the Harrison Street corridor recently. "We try to give them a one-stop shop for services."

The city's outreach team has shown encouraging signs of success since it formed in 2021, thanks to an annual investment from Measure P, a measure passed by Berkeley voters. Since the Homeless Response Team formed, which brings together several departments across the city, two out of every three people they've served have either moved into interim shelter or permanent affordable housing.

The Homeless Response Team's persistent outreach has contributed to Berkeley's remarkable 45% decline in street homelessness over the last two years, down from 803 individuals living on the streets in 2022, to 445 in 2024.

Unlike other cities, Berkeley does not contract-out its encampment management-focused outreach work to third party vendors, and its team leader, Okeye Vance-Dozier, grew up in Berkeley and attended Berkeley High School. The commitment to the community is clear.

"We all know everyone out here," Vance-Dozier said. "I went to high school with some of these folks. We notice when a new tent pops up, and we want to know right away where they're from and what they need. We pay very close attention to everyone."

The daily work to move people out of their make-shift communities in the encampments and into shelter, where they can receive services and assistance for long-term housing, can take time – and requires a lot of trust.

"We're upfront, honest and direct," Vance-Dozier said. "We don't over promise what we can't give, but we will go out of our way to help them and do what it takes to help them transition them indoors."

The stories of "what it takes" varies for each individual. Getting to a "yes" can be the most rewarding part of the work, said Joshua Jacobs, homeless services coordinator.

Jacobs worked directly with a man in his 60s who had lived in an RV on Harrison Street since 2019. For months, Jacobs tried to ensure the man had everything he needed to accept an offer to move into a hotel room.

"It's identifying each of their concerns and then working through each one of them to come up with solutions," Jacobs said.

After overcoming several deal-breakers and making progress, Jacobs took the man to visit the hotel room, but another barrier quickly sprouted up: The man's cat, who liked to roam freely in-and-out of his RV, would have to make a dangerous jump from the hotel's window sill to the street below. The man feared, if he moved in, his long-time companion could get stuck outside.

Together, Jacobs and the man agreed they needed a "cat tree" that ramped up to the window so the feline could enter and exit without hassle.

Relieved, the man agreed to move out of his RV and into the hotel room.

"It cost us $20 to purchase the cat tree," Jacobs recalled, "but it took us a long time to get to that moment. But all along the way, he knew I was there to help him figure it out."

POINT-IN-TIME COUNT: Alameda County's Five Largest Cities

CITY	2022	2024	# OF INDIVIDUALS	CHANGE
Berkeley	**803**	**445**	**-358**	**-45%**
Fremont	866	614	-252	**-29%**
San Leandro	312	227	-85	**-27%**
Hayward	267	278	+11	**+4%**
Oakland	3,337	3,664	+327	**+10%**