



## **Oak to 9th a success**

By Francis Chang, Leonor Godinez and Chanda May  
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WE want to share some good news with you. The Oak to 9th Community Benefits Coalition represents thousands of working families, most of whom live within two miles of the Oak to 9th project, in some of Oakland's poorest neighborhoods. We are the waitresses, janitors, security guards and parents who keep Oakland running. We have worked for three years to make sure that the Oak to 9th development benefits working Oaklanders. We are very proud to say that our hard work has paid off. We negotiated a historic jobs and housing package at Oak to 9th. And we demonstrated -- to elected officials, the developer and other residents -- that Oakland's growth can and should include opportunities for low-income communities of color.

We negotiated 465 units of housing for our families and seniors - - more than twice the amount of low income housing that is required by redevelopment law. Most of these 465 units will be two bedrooms or more. No other private project in Oakland includes such a high percentage of units for these income levels.

We negotiated 300 entry-level construction career-path placements for Oakland residents, with real penalties for non-compliance. Now, \$1.65 million will be dedicated to training programs to support immigrants and others get a start in the building trades. No other project in Oakland has accomplished this many long-term placements.

And we fought for and won the right of low-income community residents to speak for themselves. Many wrote off our efforts as impossible. People said the developer had too much political clout, that nobody cared about affordable housing and that other issues were more important. But our members did not give up.

People like Evangelina Lara, who lives in a studio apartment with her family of six, or Quan Tat who worked in construction back home in Vietnam but has been unable to find more than day laborer work here, decided to try to change things. They wanted their families to stay in Oakland, not be pushed out by rising rents and bad-paying jobs.

Residents like these were the soul of this campaign, organizing scores of strategy sessions, door-to-door conversations and house meetings. They organized an 800-person town hall forum, took community delegations to City Council offices, and filled the council chambers with hundreds of residents.

And they helped bring about a major shift in Oakland. Other developers are beginning to see that it is in their interests to engage community residents in real, substantive dialogue around issues that matter to working Oaklanders. Because of this and other community benefits campaigns, Oakland's elected officials are considering policies such as inclusionary zoning so that developers pay their fair share in Oakland.

We wish to thank the unions, faith leaders, environmental organizations and elected officials who stood with us. Our accomplishments are yours as well. And we recognize the good-faith efforts of Signature Properties and look forward to implementing our agreements in partnership with them.

Some want to backtrack on Oak to 9th and overturn the City Council's approval. The community members that waged this three- year campaign do not have the luxury of waiting. Let's make these 465 units and 300 jobs a reality. Let's celebrate our accomplishments and hard work. And let's keep working for housing, living-wage jobs and other opportunities for Oakland.

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