Aging Against the Machine
Our project builds on historical and ongoing local initiatives

Along with the whole region, West Oakland has been a testing ground for civil rights movements and counter-culture communities. While the neighborhood lacks the same levels of investment and amenities as other surrounding cities—residents have historically worked to build alternatives through mutual aid and solidarity networks. Programs by the Black Panthers Parties and resources by the Center for Independent Living filled in for needs not being provided by the government and institutions.

Clockwise:

- Black Panthers Free Breakfast Program, at St. Augustine’s in West Oakland
- Ed Roberts and The CIL team at the original Center for Independent Living office on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, California. Photo: Ken Stein
Connecting to local partners

More recent individual and collective initiatives have responded to the crisis of affordability currently affecting the region and continue to shape the neighborhood. Those include the community development work of the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (EBALDC), the initiatives of the San Pablo Area Revitalization Collaborative (SPARC) as well as West Oakland Cultural Action Network (WOCAN) and the Black Liberation Walking Tour (BLWT). Working with these community partners grounded and tailored the project to local issues and conditions while building upon ongoing initiatives.
Walking Tour Film as Alternative Mappings

As part of the project, the team worked closely with a film director and David Peters, founder of the Black Liberation Walking Tour, to produce a film that connects viewers to narratives, stories, issues and inspiring work within the community. It was important for the team that the neighborhood’s voices are captured and offer an understanding of West Oakland that would not be captured in traditional methods such as mapping.
Process: Designed in Solidarity with Local Residents

Our project was developed in solidarity with local residents, through a series of roundtables and conversations with older West Oaklanders, neighborhood librarians, housing advocates, and pastors, unveiling resident goals and struggles for justice.

Our design proposals build on long-standing neighborhood engagements of local partners. Conducting historical and place-based research, we incorporated resident experiences revealed through a walking tour with David Peters. Our interdisciplinary team includes a local creative community development lead, an aging specialist, an environmental psychologist and public health expert, and designers with diverse perspectives and expertise.
Installation photo showing our design proposals and narratives alongside historical and contemporary artifacts that capture diverse sources of knowledge and action.

Aging Against the Machine was displayed in New York in the nationally juried exhibition, open to the public without charge. A robust version of the show is available online and we plan to bring the material to West Oakland.
Community Vans
In a neighborhood where 26 percent of residents rely on public transport, older neighbors can have a hard time getting to medical appointments and performing daily activities. Inspired by Seniors Against A Fearful Environment (SAFE), a 1970s non-profit founded by the Black Panthers that offered free transportation to older residents, local community groups have come together to operate a fleet of vans that host services and provide no-cost rides.
San Pablo Avenue Transformation

Though Damon, an older resident, is an avid biker, he finds it difficult to navigate West Oakland’s busy streets, particularly San Pablo Avenue. Getting around is that much harder for those who have difficulty walking; at night, many residents do not go out at all because of safety concerns. As a step toward ending traffic violence, San Pablo Avenue has been transformed with three medians, which also improve neighborhood connectivity. Pedestrians never have to cross more than twelve feet of roadway before getting to a place to rest.
Shared Ramps
Everyone wants to stay in their homes, but getting around has become increasingly difficult. The neighbors applied together for a City grant to make their homes accessible. They built a large porch across three existing houses and added a shared ramp for people who have a hard time with stairs and for visitors with strollers. They used a simple, inexpensive design inspired by an old Center for Independent Living publication.
Shared Ramps
Large scaled models were employed to make the content accessible to a wide audience.
West Oakland Community Land Trust

[Redacted community partners] have created a temporary community gathering space and business incubator on the site of a future community-led development. At the same time, Moms 4 Housing is working to create a “female owned and operated co-op that can rehab residential space for families in need of housing.” Building on this work, a new West Oakland community land trust (CLT) is starting to acquire vacant and undervalued sites using City funding, credit union loans, and donations.
New Housing Developments

Derek has struggled to afford rent at times and is concerned about his unhoused neighbors—many of them older—and his aging father. He heard about the National Homes Guarantee, a platform developed by a multiracial coalition of more than a million grassroots leaders – and a West Oakland plan, aligned with the Guarantee, to produce 1,600 healthy, carbon-free homes in new and renovated buildings.
New Housing Developments
Underwater sites (those with loans larger than their value) are targeted for densifying the neighborhood (above); Prototype building along San Pablo Avenue (left).
Intergenerational Housing

[Local partner, redacted] has a long history of creating and managing mixed-use affordable housing in the neighborhood. After seeing caregivers commuting for over an hour to West Oakland, as well as a rise in grandfamily households, [redacted] has decided that its next building will be intergenerational. A proposed design for the project offers opportunities for collective affiliations beyond the nuclear family, across generations, and with caregivers and their families.
As her mom, Janet, became more frail, Sarah considered moving her to a nursing home, but it didn't feel right. Following instructions from an aging-in-place guide, Sarah and her family retrofitted Janet’s house with grab bars and slip-resistant flooring to help prevent her from falling. Funded through a City grant, a local architecture firm made some more substantial accessibility upgrades, including thickening the hallway wainscoting so that it could double as a handrail. The firm also carved out space for Sarah, built an accessory dwelling unit for a roommate to help cover the mortgage, and built a nook to display Janet’s favorite Motown posters.
A projected design for the Community Cohousing operation for collective affiliations beyond the nuclear family, across generations, and with caregivers and their families. It mixes different kinds of apartments in one building, allowing older residents, people working as caregivers, and anyone else to choose either a more traditional unit or one where cooking and social life happen in shared spaces. Those who choose the collective apartments live in homes arrayed around courtyards. The spaces between apartments host shared programs that change over time.

Ms. Comiskey loves to sit in the semi-enclosed entrance to her bedroom and do her crossword puzzle. From this intimate space, she likes to watch the activities that Saint Mary’s Center organizes in the common area outside her unit. She loves it when Paul’s dog comes to sit by her chair.

Caregiving was becoming difficult to manage, and family learned that Medield would cover ah home through the Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), which started in San Francisco. His son, Sarah, can take some time off. A UC Berkeley and placed through a student-senior roommate match moved into the accessory dwelling unit — it can be at times, but mostly the household gets along.
Aging in Place
Transformations
Interior adjustments to typical West Oakland Housing typologies consider how to keep community thriving in place.
Installation View

The installation links the site's history with contemporary precedents/community initiatives and transcalar design interventions.