

Omni Commons: Background



Inspired by the Occupy Wall Street movement of the early 2000's, a group of over 200 residents of the SF East Bay came up with the idea that there should be a brick and mortar location where independent creative spirits gather to further creative humanitarian causes. A collective of non-profit collectives. Omni Commons: the concept was born.

Omni Commons, a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization established in 2014, is both a collective of community-facing organizations and the building – an 22,000+ square-foot community space and cultural center – that houses and nurtures those organizations to organize, collaborate, learn, celebrate, and develop networks of mutual aid. The organization is proud to be one of the largest community centers and venues in the Bay Area, providing space and resources to organizations and individuals who share values of inclusivity, social justice, radical generosity, and community empowerment.

In October 2013 the opportunity to lease an 11,000 square foot building in Oakland's Temescal arose. The two originating groups invited other aligned organizations to develop a plan to lease the building, and in 2014 they put the plan successfully into action, including forming a nonprofit organization, negotiating a "first option to buy" into the lease with the landlord, establishing a robust digital platform for transparency and communication, and successfully raised funds through a kickstarter campaign to finally open the doors as a community center.

Omni Commons has kept its doors open since then (except during the Pandemic), staying true to its roots as a mostly volunteer-run social center focused on popular education, arts, activism, and community organizing.

In 2014, thanks to an anonymous donor and lender, the Mulberry Trust, Omni was able to purchase the building. While Omni was paying its monthly mortgage payments, it failed in finding a new loan or raising funds to cover the whole loan amount, which was due as a balloon payment in 2023. The trust warned of foreclosure, but did not take immediate action.

Omni began discussions with [CAST](#) in December 2023 about a potential partnership to help Omni create a new organizational structure and secure funding to pay off the balloon payment. In April, CAST's role pivoted to solely focus on securing funds, because Mulberry announced they were pursuing foreclosure.

On May 17, 2024, Omni received a notice of default on the loan. As per the notice, the building can go for sale as soon as 90 days after May 14. Unless funds are delivered to the trust by August 15 (5 days prior to the earliest date set for sale), we expect to lose the building. At the end of July, CAST informed Omni that their funding prospects fell through. Suddenly we need to pivot to find additional potential lenders.

Though time is short, we are hoping to quickly forestall foreclosure, giving us some time to reimagine the organization with the help of CAST (who can take on the professional management). Omni has run as an almost all-volunteer nonprofit organization since its inception. Volunteers have tirelessly put in countless hours to keep the

building operational. Collective members have acknowledged that paid staff and more operational organization are needed to continue our operations and avoid volunteer burnout.

For more on the history of the building itself, see https://omnicommons.org/wiki/Omni_History

Our Programs and Impact

We are providing an affordable office and event space:

With many nonprofits pushed out of office spaces in recent years due to astronomical rent prices, Omni has been able to provide affordable spaces to some of the East Bay's most dynamic community-based organizations. Omni also hosts numerous events each month at an affordable rate for rehearsals, performances, meetings, and fundraisers to emerging artists and nonprofits.

The organizations housed at the Omni Commons are doing inspiring frontline work to support some of the East Bay's most vulnerable and underserved communities. Each collective brings something unique to the whole; from arts to science, from technology to food justice.

The organizations include:

- [Counter Culture Labs](#) is a citizen science organization where anyone can learn about a wide range of biological sciences, laboratory techniques, and the intersection of science and art. They have ongoing research projects to develop the first [open source protocol to produce insulin](#) simply and economically, and to produce [real vegan cheese](#), an alternative to resource intensive dairy cheese.
- [Food Not Bombs](#) addresses the problem of food insecurity by linking food producers with consumers who can't access adequate nutrition due to poverty and marginalization. Their staff, members, and volunteers integrate affected people who develop new skills, and more importantly, become part of an organized community. FNB is aligned with and supports progressive direct action and radical arts programs.
- [Sacred Maker Art Collective](#) (SMAC) is a community of artists, educators, and organizers dedicated to the transformative power of art. SMAC supports a decolonized fashion and art curriculum, providing a platform for marginalized voices and interdisciplinary creativity in a communal setting. The Sacred Makerspace includes a sewing lab, screen printing shop, jewelry studio, looming corner, computer lab, and more!
- The hackerspace [Sudo Room](#) manages our servers and information technology, and offers free training on electronics repair, coding, and other IT subjects. Sudo Room hosts weekly events including a Women + non-binary coding group, hardware hacking meetup, and [Fixit Clinics](#).
- Sudo Mesh is bridging the digital divide by building a free, city-wide, peer-to-peer [wi-fi network](#).
- The film collective, [Liberated Lens](#), has low-cost film showings, helps groups make great crowdfunding and documentary videos, and provides free training in video production. Currently they are in production on two documentary films: (1) a one hour centennial documentary of a Japanese American language school and cultural/social club in Concord/Tri-Valley (completion 2026); and (2) a documentary about the Mapuche (indigenous) land back struggle in Southern "Argentina" and "Chile."
- [Wood St. Commons](#) is an internally organized, cooperative marginally housed community in Oakland working to radically reimagine the whole-scale approach to homelessness.
- The [Free Store](#) at Omni Commons is open 5 days a week, and provides free clothing, hygienic products, and household items to whomever walks through the door.

For more information, or to find out how you can help, please get in touch.


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See also:

 [Omni Commons Executive Summary](#)