



# THE *Oak Park Regional* HOUSING CENTER

*Investment without  
displacement through  
housing, equity, and  
leadership.*

THE STORY AND VISION BEHIND THE  
REDEVELOPMENT OF THE HISTORIC AUSTIN  
LARAMIE STATE BANK BUILDING





## About Us

### *Advancing housing equity since 1972*

The Oak Park Regional Housing Center (OPRHC) is a 53 year old nonprofit and HUD approved housing agency serving Oak Park and Chicago's greater West Side. Our mission is to drive equitable development without displacement by promoting stable, inclusive communities through housing access, education, and advocacy.

### *Athena's Story*



A lifelong resident of the West Side, Athena Williams brings more than 25 years of experience in housing, organizing, and community development. Athena has previously served as an assistant to the late Reverend Dr. Lewis Flowers of the Westside Ministers' Coalition, was a Chicago Public School Local School Council member, Associate Director of the Monroe Foundation, and an Administrative Assistant to 37th Ward Alderman Emma Mitts.

As Executive Director of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center, Athena leads efforts that connect housing access to opportunity. Her vision is rooted in lived experience and driven by a belief that development should serve the community, not replace it.

We believe stable housing is the foundation of opportunity, and that every resident deserves access to quality homes, economic security, and a community they are proud to call their own. We strive to support inclusive, integrated communities through access to housing, financial education, and advocacy. We believe development should build community power, not erase it.

## We directly impact the region by:



Expanding housing access through education, counseling, outreach, and free rental listings.



Helping individuals and families achieve stable housing and long-term economic mobility.



Supporting building owners in maintaining high quality, inclusive rental units through education and updated policy support.



Championing racial and economic integration through direct services, public advocacy, and municipal partnerships.



Leading development projects driven by community needs to increase affordable housing.

## ATHENA'S TRACK RECORD INCLUDES:



Building 32 townhomes in Summit, Illinois with a private developer.



Renovating nearly 50 homes in Suburban West Cook County through the West Cook Advantage Program.



Reclaiming 20+ vacant units in Austin through the Austin Ascending Program.



Leading the mixed-use redevelopment of the historic Laramie State Bank site.



Athena believes development should reflect the voices of long-term residents and create lasting pathways to ownership and stability. Her leadership is built on trust and proven through decades of community-centered work.

# A Community Vision, Realized

In 2020, the City of Chicago released a call for proposals to redevelop the long vacant Historic Austin Laramie State Bank building. Oak Park Regional Housing Center, through its Austin United Alliance initiative, responded with a strategic vision rooted in community input and long-term equity.

Once a neighborhood landmark for financial access, the building had become a visible marker of disinvestment and stalled progress.

## What it was:

The Laramie State Bank building had been vacant for decades. Located along a key corridor in the Austin community, it reflected a pattern of neglect that mirrored the loss of services and investment in the area.

To local residents, the building represented both the challenges of the past and the potential for meaningful reinvestment. It was a chance to restore access to capital, safe gathering spaces, and pathways to ownership.



*“We need housing that supports long term stability, spaces that celebrate culture, banking we can access, and real chances to become owners.”*

— Community priorities shared in early listening sessions



Long before submitting a proposal, OPRHC as a developer community lead, met directly with residents, pastors, entrepreneurs, and neighborhood leaders. These conversations shaped a redevelopment vision centered not only on design and construction but rooted in the values of those who live nearby and the outcomes they hope to see.

### What it could be:

OPRHC's proposal focused on:

-  New, permanently affordable housing rooted in long term stability.
-  Commercial space that supports local businesses and cultural connection.
-  A financial institution that improves access to banking in a largely unbanked area.
-  A redevelopment structure that creates pathways to ownership and anchors existing residents.

**In 2021, OPRHC was selected to lead the redevelopment of the historic Austin Laramie State Bank project, bringing new housing, restored commercial space, and lasting investment to strengthen Chicago's Greater West Side.**

**This \$80 million redevelopment combines more than \$10 million in public funding, \$3 million in tax credit equity, and \$5 million in private dollars. It marks one of the most significant investments in this corridor in decades.**

# Redevelopment Overview

## *A “Historic” Restoration*



### **BANK BUILDING**

The restored 1929 Laramie State Bank (approx. 10,000 square feet) building will feature a street-level café and gathering space, a small business incubator, community program space, and a financial institution.



### **HOUSING**

The new 5-story residential building will offer 78 rental units, including 51 affordable apartments - the first major housing development in the 37th Ward in four decades.



### **ARTS & CULTURE**

The site will feature public green space and community-curated arts programming, with local art, exhibits, and events anchoring the block along the Soul City Corridor.

# Impact Overview

## *The “Corridor” of Opportunity*

This redevelopment is not only a construction project. It is an engine for economic opportunity and neighborhood stability. The project brings new investment and inclusive growth to the West Side, creating new opportunities for housing, business growth, and financial stability for residents, entrepreneurs, and partners.

### BY THE NUMBERS



**127 permanent  
jobs created**



**140 new adult  
residents**



**\$2.7 million in annual  
spending power from new  
residents**



**\$3.6 million in annual retail  
activity added to the Soul  
City Corridor**

### COMMUNITY SUPPORT & PROGRAMS

*The project will offer direct services and long-term resources:*



Rental Counseling and Homeownership Education.



Financial Education/Foreclosure Prevention support.



Community participation through Arts, Culture and Public Safety.

# Timeline

## PRE-2020

Laramie State Bank building sits vacant for decades; historic designation earned in Site stabilization by City of Chicago in 2019

## LATE 2020

OPRHC and Austin United Alliance submit proposal to City of Chicago

## OCT 2022

Official ground-breaking

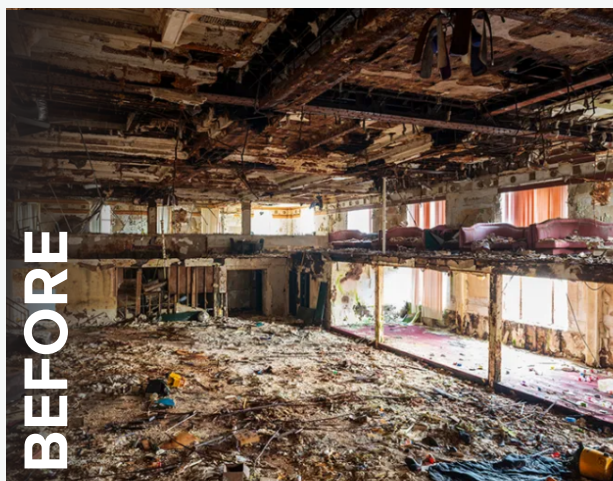
## EARLY 2020

OPRHC begins community engagement

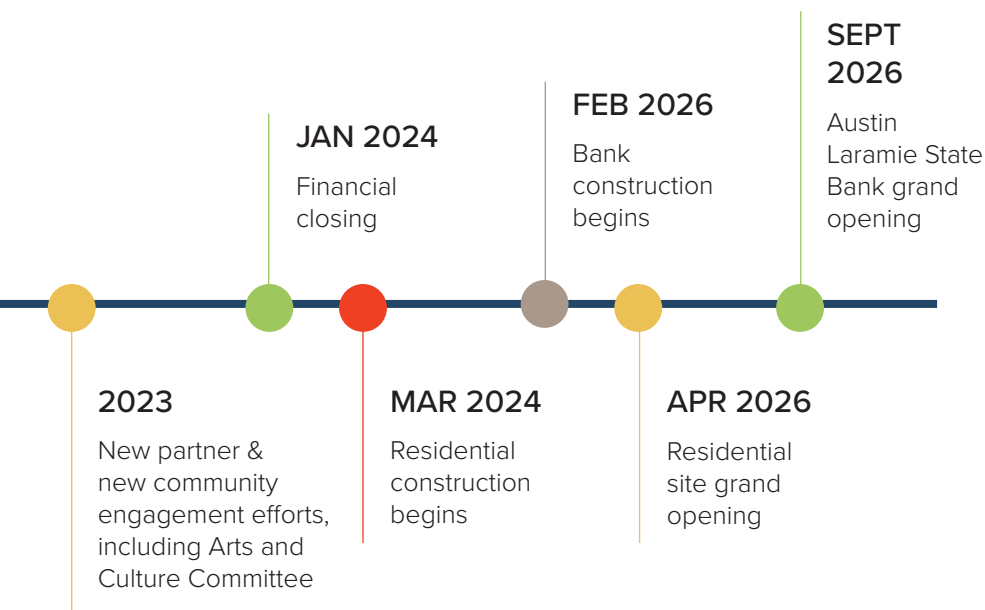
## APR 2021

Project awarded through City's Invest South/West initiative

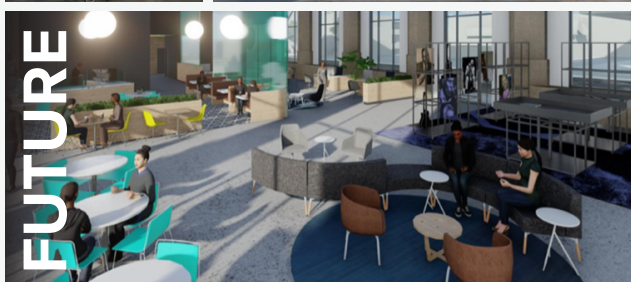
## A New Chapter...



*"We are not just restoring a building."*

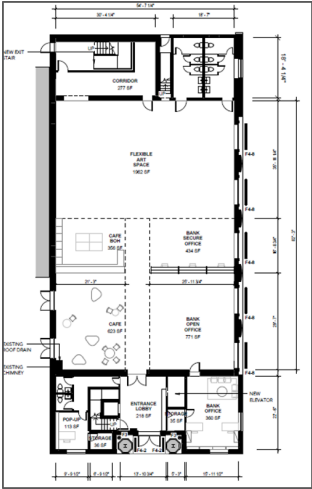


## ...for a Historic Corner



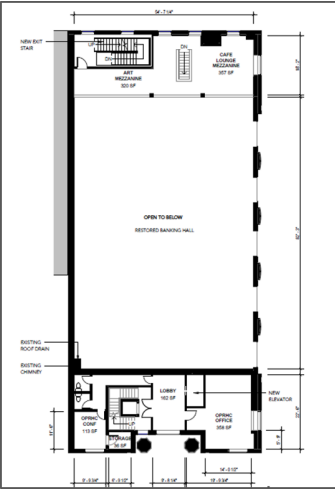
*We are restoring access, trust, and opportunity.”*

# Austin Laramie State Bank Floor Plans



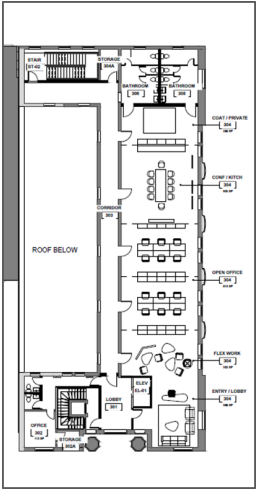
## First Floor:

Space is planned for a café, a financial institution, an art showcase, as well as collaborative workspace.



## Second Floor:

Space is planned for onsite office of OPRHC/AUA staffing.



## Third Floor:

Space is planned for a small business incubator.



# Where Community & Design Meet



## **COURTYARD PLAZA**

The plaza's open design and lush foliage will be an ideal gathering place for visitors and residents alike, also linking the residential space bank building and commercial corridor.



## **ROOF DECK**

Residents will have views of the city, plaza, and events taking place in the courtyard below.



## **BUSINESS INCUBATOR**

Austin's entrepreneurs and business owners can work, connect and innovate in a space designed for their success.



## **ARTS & CULTURAL EXHIBITS**

The exhibit will host rotating art from local artists showcasing Chicago's talent and vision.



## **COMMUNITY SPACE**

The residential space will include two large community rooms, including one open to the public.



# Be Part of the Future Taking Root in Austin

The Laramie State Bank redevelopment is more than new construction. It is a long-term investment in housing, culture, and economic mobility. From the institution that anchors the bank building to the teams that support operations, this is an opportunity to lead with purpose.

We are inviting value-aligned institutions, businesses, and service providers to join the vision. From infrastructure to finance, every layer of this project offers space to contribute.

## *Bank Institution Commitment*

Oak Park Regional Housing Center is seeking a financial institution to occupy the restored landmark bank. The right partner will share our vision for access, community wealth, and long-term stability. A minimum contribution of **\$5 million**, disbursed over ten years and renewable in year eight, is required.

## Opportunities for Involvement

We welcome aligned partners across sectors, including:



Technology, security,  
& operations vendors



Legal, accounting, &  
financial services



Waste, cleaning, &  
facilities providers



Naming rights sponsors  
for key spaces



Design & construction  
collaborators



Foundations & funders  
supporting long term impact

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*If your work belongs here, we want to hear from you. With public funding secured and redevelopment underway, we are now building a team of institutional and community-aligned private partners that will bring this space to life.*

**Contact Athena Williams, Executive Director | e-mail: [awilliams@oprhc.org](mailto:awilliams@oprhc.org)**