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Casa de Carmen and the Oxnard Navigation Center break new ground in the region's approach to homelessness

By combining emergency shelter with permanent supportive housing, the future downtown campus at 2nd & B streets aims to move people from crisis to stability

OXNARD, Calif., December 19, 2022 — The Oxnard City Council, County of Ventura, and their nonprofit and private partners are breaking new ground, literally and figuratively, in their response to homelessness. Casa de Carmen and the Oxnard Navigation Center [are now taking shape](#) in downtown Oxnard and will combine 56 permanent supportive housing units (including one manager unit) and a 110-bed, 24-hour emergency shelter. The facilities are expected to open early 2024.

Co-developed by [Mercy House](#), a nonprofit housing services organization that has operated the current Oxnard shelter since 2019, and [Community Development Partners](#) (CDP), a mission-driven affordable housing developer, the campus will use a relatively new and ambitious shelter-with-housing model to provide a realistic path out of homelessness — one that starts next door to City Hall and is designed to move people from crisis to stability with efficiency, dignity and compassion.

“After a long process and community input, we have the first major site for our homeless,” shared Mayor John C. Zaragoza. “As a community, we must not neglect the human side of homelessness. These are our neighbors, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters who’ve lost the hope, comfort and dignity of having a guaranteed place to rest their heads at night.”

“In Oxnard, we only have a homeless shelter right now — not a full service navigation center,” said Alexander Nguyen, Oxnard City Manager. “It’s really important to have a proper facility to serve homeless individuals and families humanely and respectfully. We could not have done this without great partners, like Mercy House and Community Development Partners. We are so grateful.”

The “shelter-with-housing” model is an innovative, new concept — and a first for Oxnard and Ventura County. The \$42.6 million project leverages funding from multiple local, state and

federal sources, requiring the City of Oxnard to contribute only \$1.5 million and a parcel of city-owned land.

“Casa de Carmen and the Oxnard Navigation Center will be more than a homeless shelter, more than new housing. It’s a promising, powerful combination of both,” said Larry Haynes, CEO, Mercy House. “What makes the campus innovative and ambitious is that it will provide immediate relief to unhoused people in Oxnard and give them a path to achieving long-term stability — all in the same location.”

Over the past decade, CDP and Mercy House have collaborated to create several permanent supportive housing developments throughout southern California, but the new Oxnard facility is the first time they are combining a shelter with housing on the same site.

“It was important for Mercy House as the service provider to be deeply involved in the building and site design,” Kyle Paine, president, Community Development Partners. “We took a vacant, boarded-up building and are replacing it with a beautiful, colorful, hopeful place. We are creating something that everyone — shelter guests, supportive housing residents, and neighbors who live and work nearby — can embrace and be proud of.”

CDP and Mercy House co-designed the new facility to be responsive, innovative, dignified and attractive, encouraging a healthy flow of people from outside into the ground-floor shelter and ultimately (depending on their eligibility) to the supportive housing units on the upper floors:

- The shelter provides beds, bathrooms, showers and a kitchen to serve 110 adults.
- Four upper floors contain 56 supportive housing units (including one manager unit); community room with kitchen; computer workstations; and office spaces where residents can receive private case management and services.
- Pets are welcome; shelter beds were designed with pet sleeping space underneath.
- Guests and residents share access to a rooftop deck with BBQ and pet exercise areas.
- The 22,000-square-foot building will feature a large mural on the exterior and will inject color and beauty into Oxnard’s downtown, replacing an unused city building.

Mercy House will operate the shelter and provide residential services for people in the supportive housing units. Wrap-around case management services will be provided by Ventura County Behavioral Health.

“Supportive housing is really a game changer,” said Dr. Sevet Johnson, County Executive Officer for the County of Ventura. “Not only are people housed and have a roof over their heads, but they are also receiving the full continuum of services and care. It’s this link to services that helps people maintain their housing.”

“We are thrilled to be part of this project,” said Scott Gilman, Director of Ventura County Behavioral Health. “We know for some individuals simply placing them in a room without

support services doesn't work. Having treatment and support available at the Navigation Center will significantly improve long term housing success."

The name of the supportive housing section, "Casa de Carmen," honors Carmen Ramírez, former chair of the County of Ventura Board of Supervisors and longtime Oxnard City Council member, who died in August 2022. Ramírez was beloved for her devoted service to Oxnard, especially its most vulnerable members. She continuously fought for the underserved prior to her untimely death at age 73, when she was struck by a car and killed while crossing a street in downtown Oxnard.

"Carmen always supported Housing First initiatives, and she was passionate about this project in Oxnard," shared Roy Prince, Carmen's husband. "I am grateful for Carmen to be honored by this project that provides affordable housing in Downtown Oxnard. This is a model for providing our community with pathways out of homelessness, and inspiring innovative housing solutions throughout Ventura County."

Funding for Casa de Carmen and the Oxnard Navigation Center is supported by a 4% Low Income Tax Credits (LIHTC) allocation with a \$17M equity investment by Red Stone, \$7.2M of No Place Like Home program funds from the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), a \$1.5M investment from the City of Oxnard, a \$1M investment from the County of Ventura, and a Section 8 contract for 55 project-based vouchers administered by the Housing Authority of the City of Oxnard. Construction financing and permanent financing is being provided by Citi. The project was designed by Architecture Design Collaborative and is being built by Walton Construction. FPI Management will be the property manager.

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[City of Oxnard](#)

As Ventura County's most populous city, Oxnard is home to more than 200,000 community members that celebrate the city's vibrant multicultural heritage. Since its incorporation in 1903, Oxnard has operated as a full-service city. The local government is responsible for providing many services necessary to daily life, ranging from public safety, trash, water and sewer, to planning and building, parks, libraries, youth and senior recreation programs, housing authority, and maintaining the city's streets, sidewalks, and public parks.

[About Mercy House](#)

For over 25 years, Mercy House has provided supportive services and comprehensive resident services to families, individuals, homeless, chronically homeless, and disabled individuals in California. Their mission is to be a leader in ending homelessness by providing a unique system of dignified housing opportunities, programs and supportive services. Mercy House staff has extensive knowledge of needs and barriers faced by the families and chronically homeless in our community, and they utilize a variety of resources and service coordination partnerships imperative to their success.

[About Community Development Partners](#)

Founded in 2011, Community Development Partners develops and operates sustainable, life-enhancing affordable housing with a focus on long-term community engagement and innovative design. As a mission-driven, forward-thinking organization, CDP is focused exclusively on creating vibrant affordable housing communities that incorporate art, public parks, gardens, fresh food, and cultural and social programming. Today, CDP has successfully built or preserved 44 unique projects comprising over 3,500 units throughout Oregon, California, Nevada and Arizona.

[Ventura County Behavioral Health](#)

Ventura County Behavioral Health (VCBH) envisions a community where their diverse residents are respected and empowered so those impacted by mental health and substance use can heal, thrive, and lead a healthy, engaged life. VCBH is committed to reducing stigma and discrimination. They promote wellness through a whole-person care approach where clients and families are empowered by appropriate, accessible, timely, culturally sensitive, and collaborative behavioral health services.

VCBH plays an important role as an integrated component of the Ventura County Health Care Agency. The Crisis and Referral Line is the entry point for access to all Ventura County Behavioral Health services. VCBH is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and provides support for individuals and families who are in crisis, people considering suicide, and those struggling with mental illness, substance use, or both.