

## **FREE STORE PROPOSAL**

Proposed by: Vicky

Date: 12/28/20

Revised: 03/26/21

### **Context:**

At the beginning of COVID-19, community members from several different collectives came together to do mutual aid work by distributing hygiene supplies and food to 500 unhoused neighbors roughly once per month, forming North Oakland Mutual Aid. While receiving donations for the distribution, they also received many non-distributable goods such as clothes, bedding, cosmetic products, irregular hygiene products, tents, tarps, shoes, knick knacks, first aid supplies, etc. Those donations were not being organized regularly and became a messy mouse home in one of the storage areas that are designated for NOMA in Omni. Vicky began the process of organizing the donations to be presented to the public in a Free Store on the sidewalk outside of Omni. The Free Store has now been fully incorporated into the functions of NOMA, and currently happens once a month (3rd Sunday). However, Vicky and the rest of NOMA would like to decentralize the Free Store as just a NOMA project, and rather move forward with it as an Omni Commons project in partnership with the NOMA collective.

The community has responded very positively to the Free Store, which encourages us to want to offer access to it more regularly. Now that we have publicly advertised that we receive clothing donations, we have gotten a huge surge that is unmanageable in our current system. If we continue receiving this volume of clothing donations but are unable to manage them, we will attract unwanted mice. However, if we do have a more regular and structured system to our Free Store, we will be able to continuously receive and give access to our donations, creating a more reciprocal system of mutual aid. We have been encouraged by members of Omni to write this proposal to allow for our community to have reliable, regular access to our Free Store supplies and donation windows.

### **Proposal:**

I propose that the Free Store take up permanent residence in a portion of the entryway of Omni, and be open from 3:00-6:00pm Wednesday through Saturday (with potential to expand hours in the future). I propose that we clean and rearrange the entrance so that the store can move out of the ballroom and can be displayed alongside part of the 48th St wall of the entrance. The Free Store will act as a consistent donation windows for both Free Store donations, NOMA-related donation, and potential Town Fridge-related donations, staffed with at least 1 shift coordinator and 1-2 volunteers. It would be a collaborative effort that connects multiple groups, but it would be organized as an Omni Commons project of volunteers.

### **Responsibilities and expectations:**

Coordinating volunteers for hosting the Free Store will be part of the Commons Working Group, and Vicky will take on the logistical upstart of getting this organized. Vicky will coordinate the logistics of regular shift bottomliners who are able to commit to one shift per week, similar to how the Town Fridge cleanings are organized. We will also be inclusive of new volunteers by staff one or two volunteers to work with the shift bottomliner, and the volunteers can have more

flexible commitment. Shift bottomliners who express interest in more background organization will be invited to participate in the Commons Working Group's meetings, generating and revitalizing more energy potential for other Omni Commons projects. Vicky and other interested organizers, as part of the Commons Working Group, will create roles that are easy to train into and easily rotated (or done as a group effort) for coordinating the volunteers and bottomliners for these shifts. These roles will act as **liaisons** with NOMA, the Town Fridge organizers, and the Commons Working Group to communicate about the interdependent elements of these projects, as they all act as facilitators of Omni Commons' role in mutual aid in our community.

The Omni Commons' Free Store will **share volunteer capacity** with NOMA, which currently has a major excess of volunteer energy (roughly 150 people sign up per month, many of whom are not scheduled). Part of liaising with NOMA will be sharing the coordination of the volunteers.

Shift bottomliners and volunteers working a shift will perform the tasks of:

- Receiving & cataloging donations
- Putting donations in their appropriate places
- Tidying & organizing the store's presentation
- Adhering to COVID-19 safety protocol, such as
  - Enforcing mask-wearing
  - Providing guests with hand sanitizer and gloves
  - Making sure the number of people in the entryway is in compliance with the percentage of retail capacity allowed in Alameda County (and organizing and managing a line of people outside if capacity is reached)
- Assisting customers to navigate the store, making sure there is an open pathways for feedback regarding the store's inventory
- Restocking the store from backstock and cataloging that appropriately (especially inventory that is related to NOMA)
- General cleaning of the Omni's entryway as co-stewards of the building

We have consulted with Acta Non Verba regarding sharing space during their CSA pick-up times, and we've all reached the consensus that it would be best to staff free store volunteers during pick-up windows to take an undue burden regarding the store off of ANV. This is addressing the concern that—once word gets out about the Free Store being open regularly—if the doors to Omni are open that people will attempt to access the store. The time slot suggested (3-6pm) is in response to the fact that produce drop-offs for both FNB and ANV generally occur between 12-2:30pm, so to be respectful of that process and not create more traffic than needed in the entryway, we will be open 3-6pm. Also, that time frame is a much more digestible amount of time for recruiting regular volunteers. If anything doesn't seem to be working for any Omni collective, the channels of communication will remain open and we can adapt this project as needed.

### **Finances:**

As an explicitly Omni-related project, the Free Store will not be expecting to pay rent (unlike NOMA, who is planning to pay rent as a collective). The Free Store does not currently

require any money to run itself, as it is just an infrastructure that facilitates the receiving and giving of excess supplies in our neighborhood.

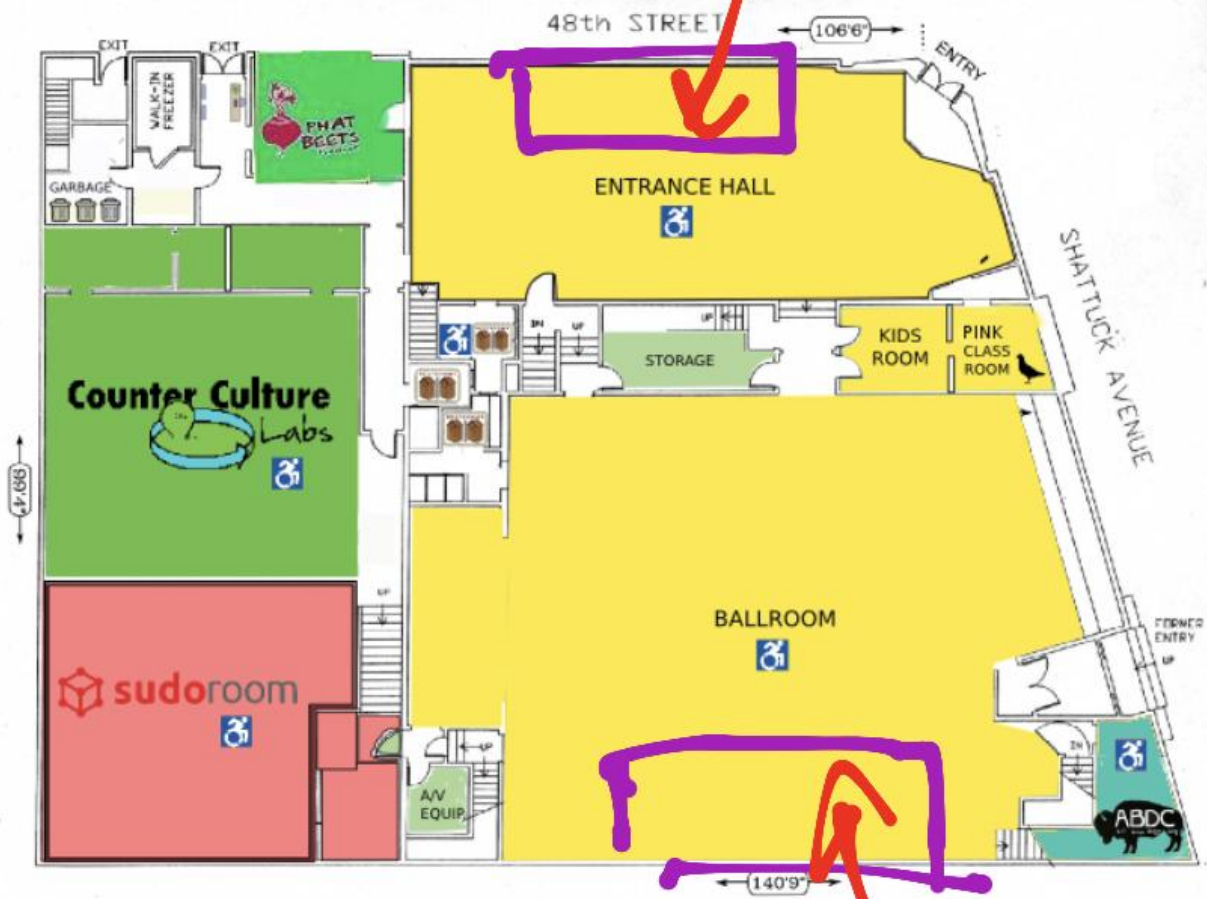
In the past, NOMA has hosted two very successful fundraisers to buy new tents, sleeping bags, tarps, and blankets for the Free Store. Either NOMA could continue to be the fundraising vessel for future Free Stores (if we decide we want to keep purchasing new items), or the Commons Working Group could work with the Finances Working Group to set up a system of receiving fiscal donations through the Omni nonprofit itself. However, this proposal is currently designed around Omni Commons simply creating space for the Free Store project to operate as a money-less project.

**Conclusion:**

Omni Commons will be able to facilitate mutual aid, reciprocity, consistency, and agency within our community by always accepting donations and presenting free goods, working interdependently with other Omni-related projects, and providing a clear channel to the public of how to get involved in working groups. This will be a Omni Commons project-led effort that directly engages with our immediate community to revitalize participation within Omni Commons as a whole.

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proposed Free Store area



GENERAL FLOOR PLAN +/- 12,280 SF  
4799 Shattuck Avenue, Oakland, CA

Current storage area