

# The Gateway Transitional to Permanent Housing Project

**Oregon Housing and Community Services**  
Special Achievement

**HFA Staff Contact**

Sarah Neitzert

[Sarah.neitzert@hcs.oregon.gov](mailto:Sarah.neitzert@hcs.oregon.gov)



## 2022 Annual Awards for Program Excellence Entry

# The Gateway Transitional to Permanent Housing Project Oregon Housing & Community Services Special Achievement

## Background

In September 2020, after weeks of dry weather, unusually high winds caused multiple wildfires to expand and spread throughout different regions across Oregon rapidly. When the fires finally subsided, 1 million acres burned, and over 4,000 homes were destroyed, leaving thousands of Oregonians suddenly homeless. Oregon was already in a housing crisis, with limited vacancies. The devastation was significant, leaving thousands of people unhoused and at various stages of rebuilding their lives. Like most disasters, low-income, and communities of color were disproportionately impacted and struggled the most to access resources to recover.

Talent, Oregon, is a small town of roughly 6,500 that the Almeda Fire heavily impacted. Thousands of Talent residents had to flee their homes at a moment's notice, many seeking refuge with family, friends, or an emergency non-congregate shelter. The Almeda Fire was carried, in part, by the Bear Creek Greenway; more than half of all housing units destroyed were manufactured homes in the parks adjacent to the Greenway, in relatively low-lying areas.

## An innovative response to a crucial need

With few local housing options, many residents, including about 700 students and families, were displaced from the community they called home. Many farmworker families lived doubled- or tripled-up in these manufactured homes, sometimes in informal living arrangements without leases or rental agreements. The residents and leaders in Talent came together to brainstorm ways to bring residents back, particularly families with kids in the local schools. School district officials immediately went to relief sites with bilingual staff to check in with as many families as possible. The district superintendent





approached local leaders to explore options to offer local temporary housing solutions. Knowing that children are more successful when they have stable housing and a supportive school environment following a traumatic event was one of the driving forces for local leaders to find a way to offer local temporary housing solutions.

Discussions between local agencies led to the Gateway Project. This innovative, locally driven, and state-supported effort that provides temporary housing for fire survivors who may not be eligible to receive federal support. The Urban Renewal Agency of the City of Talent owned a piece of land near downtown Talent, envisioned for use as a catalyst for mixed-use housing and a commercial center. With the destruction of the wildfires, they repurposed it for temporary travel trailer housing for families with children in the school district. The Urban Renewal Agency executed an intergovernmental agreement with the Phoenix-Talent School District to prioritize school district families for placement at the Gateway site.

The Urban Renewal Agency requested \$1.7 million from OHCS to pay for installing infrastructure such as utility lines, water, sewer, and sidewalks. OHCS made this investment through different funding sources, including a grant and a loan from the Oregon Rural Rehabilitation Loan program. This critical infrastructure laid the necessary groundwork for temporary housing at the site. It was also a long-term investment in a future mixed-use affordable housing development on this site once impacted families have transitioned to permanent housing. OHCS invested an additional \$1.7 million to purchase 53 travel trailers, which became home to 53 households in late 2021 and early 2022.

## Providing urgent housing and wraparound support for wildfire survivors

Through a three-party memorandum of understanding, the Urban Renewal Agency and the Phoenix-Talent School District agreed that nonprofit Rogue Retreat would oversee the property and case management of Gateway site residents.

Rogue Retreat provides affordable housing/shelter and case management to homeless individuals and families in Jackson and Josephine counties. The Urban Renewal Agency executed a lease agreement with Rogue Retreat that allows the nonprofit to enter into temporary accommodation agreements with Gateway residents. Rogue Retreat will oversee the application process with close coordination with school district personnel to ensure district families are prioritized in the residency selection process.

Oregon Housing and Community Services procured RV trailers for Gateway residents and transferred the vehicle titles to Rogue Retreat. During the lease agreement, Rogue Retreat will oversee the property and work with disaster case managers to ensure that families located on the site can find permanent, long-term, and safe housing within the Rogue Valley. Rogue Retreat will repurpose the travel trailers to support other emergency housing needs when the disaster-impacted families are rehoused. These strong partnerships have helped realize a nation-leading fire recovery project within Talent.





Although much work is to be done as Oregon recovers from these devastating fires, a genuinely collaborative effort has brought these families back home and kept children in their school districts with their peers and teachers. Utilizing these local assets in the short term while long-term rebuilding occurs, is not only efficient but also innovative. This creative, community-driven approach to housing families with school-age children who would otherwise have to move out of the district demonstrates how community, government agencies, and nonprofit partners can rebuild when working together. Oregon Housing and Community Services is honored to work alongside our partners as we rebuild our communities.





## Media coverage

[NPR's All Things Considered: A small town in Oregon is trying to keep its residents from leaving after wildfires](#)

[OPB: Transitional housing opens for wildfire survivors in Talent, Oregon](#)

[KDRV: Talent prepares to unveil the 'Gateway Project,' transitional housing for Almeda Fire survivors](#)

[KDRV: First fire survivor moves into the Gateway Project](#)

[Jefferson Public Radio: Gateway Project unveiled with initial batch of transitional housing for wildfire survivors in Talent](#)

[Mail Tribune: Gateway to home](#)

[Mail Tribune: Talent Transitional Housing Proposal Receives Grant](#)

[Mail Tribune: Gateway to Inspiration](#)

[Daily Yonder: After 2020 Wildfire, An Oregon Town Helps Ensure Residents' Return through Affordable Housing Initiative](#)

## Photos

