

Experimental housing on tap

By Koalani Roberts
Emerald Contributor

A group of University professors has designed three experimental housing units it hopes will serve as models for Oregon's wood industry as well as inexpensive student housing.

The duplex-type units were designed at the Center for Housing Innovation, a faculty research group begun four years ago. All will be experiments in building different types of factory-produced homes.

"Our goal is to help Lane County develop a pre-fabrication industry to build homes here and ship them elsewhere," said David Corner, CHI director. "I think this absolutely will happen."

Corner cited Japan and Hawaii as excellent potential markets because land and home prices there are so expensive. Buyers could save money purchasing a house shipped from Oregon.

"CHI in general is interested in finding ways to support a sustainable wood products industry that doesn't exploit resources," said Will Sturges, a research assistant at the center. "We're working on material efficiency and ways to get more housing with less wood."

CHI created the University Experimental Housing Project to research and design different types of industrialized housing.

All units are designed to be inexpensive, energy efficient, accessible to the physically disabled and built on small lots to increase land use density, Sturges said.

The three units were designed as part of the Student Housing Project, which includes building 20 apartments at 18th Avenue and Agate Street and eventually rebuilding Amazon family housing.

Each of the three buildings consists of two small two-bedroom, one-bath-

room apartments — 750 square feet measured from outside the walls. They will be built on a vacant lot in the East campus area near Villard Street.

A one-story building will use single stressed skin closed panels. This means one solid material with both structural and insulating properties would be used for a wall, instead of the standard stud and frame construction that would require added insulation.

A one-and-a-half story building will use conventional wood framing, but all the parts will be factory assembled then constructed on site.

The third building will be a two-story modular home, completely built and assembled in a factory like a mobile home, but set down without the wheels or trailer. This allows the home to meet building code and neighborhood zoning requirements of almost any city.

The modular second story of this third unit will be set on a first story of concrete blocks insulated on the outside and exposed on the inside. The blocks will increase energy efficiency by radiating heat collected during the day into the apartment at night.

However, Eugene's mild climate will make the actual energy efficiency of this construction difficult to determine, Corner said.

In addition, Corner said the pre-fabricated housing is a design experiment more than it is a great financial savings. He said building 100 units would be very efficient, but building only three is not.

One lesson the designers learned is they can build an affordable and economical house, but outside costs quickly add up, Sturges said.

"It's not as much the design or the product that affects the cost so much as the planning and infrastructure," he said.

For example, the city requires they have a concrete alley access poured to each unit. This driveway will cost as much as one of the six apartments, Sturges said.

Also, although housing density is increased, EWEB still requires there be six separate water meters on the street with six separate water lines. Multi-unit buildings often have one line on the street, branching off to feed the individual units.

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— Will Sturges,
Center for Housing
Innovation research
assistant

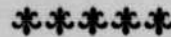
"We need a lot of redundant systems," Sturges said. "There are over-engineered requirements we can't find a way of avoiding."

The cost of the three buildings, including construction, materials, engineering and permits, is expected to be \$300,000, Corner said.

University Housing officials do not know how much the units will rent for. Current family housing occupants must first agree on how much of the project's cost they will absorb in rent increases, said Nancy Wright, University director of facilities and capital improvements.

All of the new East campus housing will be rented to single graduate students as well as to student families.

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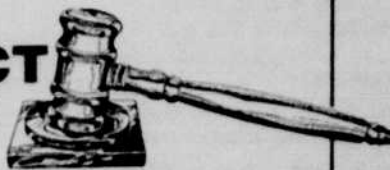
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