

Affordably modular
Pre-fab dwellings helping to fill need for low-priced housing in Utah

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The need for affordable housing along the Wasatch Front is growing, and a local nonprofit is attempting to address the problem by installing pre-fabricated homes. Community Development Corp. of Utah on Monday placed two new modular homes at 248 and 256 South Navajo Street in Salt Lake City's Glendale neighborhood. The group believes that modular housing makes efficient use of the limited space often found in many older neighborhoods and provides a quicker turnaround time for resale than conventional construction, because the homes are nearly complete when they arrive to be placed on their foundations. "We're always looking for cost-effective ways to provide affordable housing," said Community Development's executive director Darin Brush. "It's getting harder and harder to do, because property values and construction costs are going up faster than incomes."

Originally founded in 1990 by the Salt Lake City Council, Community Development Corp. was created as a nonprofit organization to relieve blighted downtown neighborhoods. Today, the group's mission is to develop affordable housing statewide in order to promote strong families and stable neighborhoods. The group has aided more than 1,700 families to become homebuyers. Brush said the purchase price of the modular homes in Glendale will likely be in the \$170,000-\$180,000 range. He said his group already has a list of about 200 families who have contacted the organization inquiring about affordable home-buying programs.

The group provides down-payment assistance to potential homeowners if their income is below 115 percent of the area's median income. Community Development also helps homeowners gain access to low-interest mortgages and provides homeowner education and counseling, he said.

In the case of the Glendale homes, however, Community Development will offer them first to schoolteachers, police officers and emergency-medical workers who need affordable housing. Upon completion, the houses will be marketed for one week solely to those groups, allowing them to have the right of first refusal, before Community Development markets the homes to others whose income levels are below 115 percent of the area's median.

The homes are being constructed on large lot purchased from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, with funding from various sources, including Salt Lake City, the Spence and Dolores Eccles Foundation and Morgan Stanley Bank. Part of Community Development's agreement with HUD requires that the group offer the homes to people who meet the income and occupational requirements.

Because of the high initial capital investment required, Brush said this project will likely be the last of its kind for his organization for the foreseeable future. However, his group is considering the creation of a large-scale affordable development of condominiums in Glendale, near 900 South and 200 West.

Brush said the quality of the modular houses replicates that of traditionally constructed homes and is compliant with the International Residential Code. The modular houses also are energy efficient.

"These are all Energy Star-rated," he said. "They are going to all be highly energy-efficient homes, which will keep utility costs down."

The houses were designed and built by Guerdon Homes of Boise. The modular homes are built on a large assembly line in a factory in a process that takes about six weeks. The houses are then transported to the job site, where they are positioned by crane onto their foundations.

Crews then complete the assembly on-site, which typically takes about six weeks before the houses are ready for occupancy, Brush said.

"This concept is new to Utah affordable housing and should prove to be the best immediate and long-term way to keep construction costs to a minimum and still provide an outstanding and affordable product," his group said.

For more information on the Community Development home-buyer program, visit www.cdcutah.org or call 801-994-7222.