



3D housing project clears hurdle

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A rendering shows the layout of part of a subdivision of 3D printed houses proposed for Almeda Fire survivors in west Medford. [Artwork from newspiritvillage.org]

Affordable housing project planned in west Medford will feature 3D printing technology

An affordable housing project featuring 3D-printed homes for fire survivors in west Medford has cleared a major hurdle with the city.

City planners and the developer recently came to an agreement over extending Vick Lane. "It's no longer a street to nowhere," said Barry Thalden, president of New Spirit Village Inc.

He said Vick Lane would be extended from the back portion of his 84-unit project on Meadows Street to West Eighth Street "That was the hurdle we had to get past," Thalden said. "It took longer than expected."

The \$20 million project, located on a six-acre site, would include one-, two- and three-bedroom single-family homes, designed to be energy-efficient, fire-resistant and able to withstand extreme weather and earthquakes.

The 3D-printed walls are formed by robotic technology that squeezes out a cement mixture from a nozzle, creating walls that look something like a layer cake.

The pilot project has gotten attention from IMAX, which has contacted Thalden to produce a video describing the 3D process and to interview some of the prospective New Spirit homeowners. Thalden said the video will be made available to science centers around the world.

New Spirit is designed specifically for fire and other disaster survivors, with a two-bedroom house that would cost an estimated \$185,000 and require no money down, with mortgage payments under \$1,000 a month. According to Zillow, the average home price in Medford is \$416,267.

Thalden said the agreement to extend Vick Lane will cost him \$234,800, which will add an estimated \$2,700 to the cost of each house.

Thalden said he's able to offer the houses to qualified buyers at an affordable price thanks to \$5.5 million in grants, with the biggest being a \$4.3 Oregon LIFT (Local Innovation and Fast Track) grant. "That's what makes these homes affordable, and also requires no money down," Thalden said.

Prospective homeowners still need to qualify for a loan, and ACCESS and United Way are already finding fire survivors and others who could be eligible.

"This is for working families," Thalden said. "Normally their only option is rentals." He said there are still 200 fire survivor families living in FEMA trailers or in local hotels.

Thalden said he will submit plans to the city within two weeks to obtain the necessary permits to begin building. He said he hopes to get started by November, depending on how long the permit process takes.

Thalden said there are a number of unique features of this project, including the use of fire-resistant material using 3D concrete.

He said the 84-units will provide accessible homeownership for people who would otherwise only be eligible for rental housing. "A lot of families have been precluded from the American dream," he said.

The design of the project is community driven, he said, and will meet the needs of larger families. Some 200 children are expected to live at New Spirit.

After discussions with the local community, Thalden said his company will now add carports to the units because a vehicle is often one of the most valuable things a family owns.

New Spirit has four bus stops within two blocks, and nearby are two supermarkets, a convenience store and a Walgreens.

The units will have front porches that provide a clear view of neighbors and create a feeling of safety, Thalden said. Parties can be held at New Spirit's community center or at nearby Lewis Park.

The project also is being designed for permanent affordability. Instead of buying the house and land, the homeowner will own only the house. The land will be held in a trust, and the rights to it can be passed on to children and other family members.

If a house is sold, the homeowner would receive the price of the house plus a portion of the appreciation. Thalden said this idea from Proud Ground in Portland helps ensure the units remain affordable. "It's always going to be sold below market rate," he said.

There also will be a homeowners' association to make sure the common areas and landscaping along the streets is maintained.

The Thalden Foundation is a not-for-profit corporation, established and directed by Kathryn and Barry Thalden. New Spirit Village is a sister nonprofit foundation.

Thalden said the Vick Lane issue took a year to resolve, delaying the start of the project. "We're moving forward," he said. "It's going to be a fabulous project."

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