

4 tiny houses designed by Auburn students bring affordable housing initiative to Nashville

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Can micro homes be a solution to Nashville's affordable Housing problem

Eddie Latimer of Affordable Housing Solutions sees micro homes as one of the answers to Nashville's affordable housing problem. *George Walker IV / The Tennessean, Nashville Tennessean*

You could pay \$600,000 or more for a new home in Nashville's hot [Wedgewood-Houston](#) and Chestnut Hill neighborhoods, but four lucky buyers will pay around a quarter of that amount.

For about \$150,000 or possibly less, they will get a new one-bedroom, one-full-bath single-family house with about 550 square feet of living space, a large front porch and a metal roof. The all-electric homes will be energy efficient, with monthly bills expected to be around \$25.

The [need in Nashville for affordable housing](#) "is just growing," said Barbara Harper Latimer.

Her company, Honeybee Builders, is building the homes for Affordable Housing Resources (AHR), a nonprofit organization that creates affordable housing throughout Middle Tennessee.

"They create a little community," AHR CEO Eddie Latimer said of the four homes, located at 41 and 43 Wharf Ave., a street on the edge of Wedgewood-Houston and Chestnut Hill. Construction will wrap up in January. The houses are available for purchase now.



Micro homes similar to these are available near downtown Nashville thanks to a relationship between Affordable Housing Resources and Auburn University's Rural Studio. The homes are being built by Honeybee Builders. The homes in Nashville have porches but do not have the deck shown in this example. *Photos By Jessica Ashley Photography*

Designed by students

The homes were designed by students at Auburn University's School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture. Working through the University's Rural Studio program and Front Porch Initiative, they have designed and built more than 200 similar micro homes and other projects in rural Alabama, including a fire station.

"The program in Nashville is an important outcome of their work. If you get people fed and housed with dignity, you can begin to address other issues," said Rusty Smith, associate director of Rural Studio.

Nashville is the first large city to be included in the program. It was selected after Regions Bank, which has relationships with AHR and Rural Studio, made introductions.

When Rural Studio and Front Porch Initiative launched the program 15 years ago, their goal was to provide homes in rural Alabama for \$20,000. The price of materials has soared since then, and the cost of building in Nashville is higher, as well.

To be affordable in Nashville, housing should have a mortgage of no more than \$180,000 to \$190,000, said Eddie Latimer. Otherwise it could be out of reach for buyers with other bills to pay.

“They’re carrying a car note and have student debt,” he said of many home buyers. “If we keep it at \$150,000, they’ll be paying \$200 less than your average rent for a studio” apartment.

AHR can provide down payment assistance of \$15,000, which homeowners repay if they eventually sell the house.



Interiors have about 550 square feet. The homes were designed by students. *Photos By Jessica Ashley Photography*

Compact, energy efficient

The lots in the Wedgewood-Houston Chestnut Hill area were made available at no cost by the city’s Barnes Fund affordable housing initiative, said Barbara Harper Latimer.

Those neighborhoods, located a few minutes south of downtown, are especially popular with young homebuyers who don’t need a large house, said Eddie Latimer.

“We have so many singles moving to town, we’re looking at the one-bedroom (design) being the staple” for future construction, he said.

Energy efficiency is an important goal for the homes, said Mackenzie Stagg, a project manager for the Front Porch Initiative and assistant research professor at Auburn. The cost of a mortgage is just part of the expense of owning a home. High heating and cooling bills can be a burden.



Interiors have about 550 square feet. The homes were designed by students. *Photos By Jessica Ashley Photography*

The homes are thoroughly tested to prevent air leaks.

“Along with a set of drawings, that’s the kind of assistance we provide,” said Stagg.

The homes will meet the standards of the federal Energy Star program, said Barbara Harper Latimer, who has a longstanding interest in energy-efficient construction. She is a graduate of Lipscomb University’s graduate-level sustainability program.

Neighbors around Wharf Avenue have welcomed the project, said Barbara Harper Latimer.

“When I explained the project, they were very excited,” she said.