

SMALL HOMES, BIG MOVEMENT

Oct 15 at 6 PM | Online event via Zoom
Featuring keynote speaker, author Sheri Koones



“Small Homes, Big Movement” Event FAQ

Q: What are some of the ways to make prefabricated houses more customizable, or fit better with their traditionally built neighbors?

A: Prefabricated houses are extremely customizable! Whether it's a modular, prefabricated box structure or panelized walls, there is plenty of room to give a prefabricated home extra rooms or design features. However, these extra features beyond the base “box” structure also add cost to the build, so budget factors may limit customization especially in the case of affordable builds.

Q: Do homeowners of small homes report challenges with the size?

A: Small homes are not small simply for the sake of building smaller, but rather to encourage “right-sized” construction and building efficiently within the available space to maximize a home's use. For example, PV Habitat's recent homes on Glendale Road are 3 bedroom homes, and while small, they are able to accommodate the families with multiple children who live there. Smart design and access to outdoor space can also make a home feel larger!

Q: Do you find that people are happier in communities (as in small cluster developments)?

A: Anecdotal and survey evidence collected by PV Habitat suggest that the desire for safe neighborhoods is a driving factor for those looking to buy a home. Cluster or cottage developments, where neighbors live in small homes built close together, are great for fostering a communal atmosphere by nature of the development's design. Shared outdoor spaces, safe areas to walk, or even shared mailboxes can all bring neighbors together, create a shared investment in the space.

Q: What are some suggestions for unlocking zoning or making zoning changes to encourage small homes and accessory dwelling units (ADUs)?

A: Many towns are changing their zoning laws thanks to persistent lobbying by ordinary citizens at town or city council meetings or through direct communication (phone calls, email, etc.) to local representatives. Citing evidence of similar towns encouraging development through small lot zoning, small cluster developments, or ADUs can help persuade those who are reluctant, as is the increased demand for homeownership in our area.

Q: Is the Big Enough Project an initiative of Habitat International?

A: The Big Enough Project is a local initiative of Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity, funded by the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, with the goal of finding innovative solutions to affordable homeownership in our area. We do share information and collaborate with other Habitat affiliates and have seen some begin small home initiatives of their own. If you are familiar with another Habitat affiliate who may be interested in working on a similar project, feel free to direct them to our website and share contact information.

Q: What heating system was used in the modular/site built PV Habitat houses?

A: The Glendale Road homes all use ductless air source heat pumps (Mitsubishi mini-split systems) to heat and cool the houses, as well as innovative new ERV systems that include mini-split coils to both filter and warm or cool the air.

Q: Are air source heat pumps viable solutions for heating even in Massachusetts?

A: Yes! While more common in Europe, these systems are able to stand up to cold winters in well-sealed homes (though perhaps not for those who want 80 degree homes with open windows in January). They have been the standard in PV Habitat homes for several years, and are gaining broader popularity in similar small, energy-efficient builds.

Q: If incorporating volunteer labor in a Habitat build adds to costs, could you forego it?

A: In general, using volunteer labor saves huge costs on any build, and is crucial to Habitat's educational mission that allows volunteers and future homeowners to gain construction experience, knowledge, and confidence. In the case of the Glendale Road homes, we asked modular builder Vermod to only half-finish the homes to allow our volunteers to work on them, rather than deliver their usual completed product. Since they changed their usual processes and we were trying to do something entirely new to our affiliate and volunteer team, we incurred additional costs to fix mistakes both on their part and ours. However, this does not discourage our use of volunteers in the future.

Q: Does PV Habitat ever consider doing renovations to old homes instead of building new?

A: Our affiliate does not do renovations, and at this point does not plan to. Other Habitat affiliates (particularly in areas where new building land is expensive or scarce) will renovate existing structures, but we have not encountered any difficulties with acquiring land. Building new houses also generally results in fewer budget surprises than renovation projects, and allows future homeowners to be involved in every step of the construction process.

Want to learn more?

Check out our website: www.pvhabitat.org/big-enough

Join the conversation on our Big Enough Facebook group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/BigEnough>

Check out Sheri Koones' latest books: <https://www.sherikoones.com/>