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Tiny homes in Stratford Building Corp.'s new line of modular accessory dwelling units are manufactured in weeks and can be occupied within days of installation.

TINY HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE

Housing shortage inspires Stratford Building to prefab accessory dwelling units

By Erica Bullock

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Stratford Building Corp., a Rathdrum-based custom modular builder, has launched a new product line of accessory dwelling units, dubbed Living Small by Stratford, aimed at providing an alternative solution to housing shortages in the Pacific Northwest region.

David Endy, president of Stratford, says he's been following the ADU market in urban centers in California, Oregon, and Seattle and decided that Stratford could develop an iteration of tiny homes to offer the Inland Northwest market.

The 30-year-old company manufactures and ships residential and commercial modular buildings to sites in Idaho, Washington, Montana, Oregon, Wyoming, and Alaska.

The new brand of tiny homes is

a, "creative way to increase housing stock without putting more pressure on land development," he says. "The manufacturing process can go much quicker and in areas where there's been housing shortages for workers and residents. That's an attractive option for cities and communities to bring some housing in quickly."

Residential shortages have been impacting housing availability in the Inland Northwest since the pandemic, and municipalities such as the cities of Spokane, Post Falls, and Coeur d'Alene have responded by updating and amending zoning codes over the last few years to ease code restrictions and allow ADUs in neighborhoods in which they typically wouldn't have been permitted in the past.

Stratford's new line of ADUs launched in July. As awareness of tiny homes grows among builders and homeowners, demand for Stratford's

new brand of ADUs is expected to also increase, Endy says.

Stratford manufactures its modular homes at a 54,000-square-foot, climate-controlled facility, at 7628 W. Boekel, in Rathdrum.

The Living Small by Stratford product line includes five floor plans that range in size between 450 square feet for a one-bedroom ADU up to 840 square feet for a two-bedroom unit, according to the company's website.

In cities that impose size restrictions for ADUs, Stratford's range of floor plans can accommodate many space constraints.

"We started with what we think will be the most useful sizing,"

Endy says. Stratford's construction timeline for a modular ADU is four to six weeks, Endy says.

Construction of a residential modular home starts with cutting materials, which are purchased in bulk

and stored indoors. Next, crews begin framing the floors, which are assembled on a special template called a jig that's intended to keep the floor square and straight. After the floor is framed, the assembly is moved to another station on the production line and lifted for easier access for crews to install plumbing, electrical, and heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems.

Meanwhile, another team of workers starts building the walls that will be installed on the floor of the module. A roof system is installed once the walls are complete, then crews finish the electrical, plumbing, and heating systems followed by insulation and drywall.

At the end of the manufacturing process, doors and windows are placed on the exterior, and cabinets, countertops, other fixtures, and flooring are installed inside the module. Quality control inspections are performed throughout the process, he says.

The method allows for parallel construction at the jobsite where crews lay the foundation for the module.

Manufacturing an ADU is similar

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Cost of base models start just under \$100K

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to a single-family modular home, yet the process is easier since an ADU is a single module, Endy explains.

"You still need to have a foundation system upon which this module will sit," he says. "Once there, within two to four days, somebody should be comfortably moving into this (home)."

Comparatively, a larger modular home can take crews between two and four weeks to connect and install all of the modules together before the home is completed at the job site.

The faster timeline creates savings in labor costs, he says.

Base model prices range from about \$94,000 for a 530-square-foot ADU to about \$130,000 for a 650-square-foot unit. Base model prices exclude any customizations, taxes, and freight costs.

"By bringing in a product that's manufactured elsewhere, we can help alleviate some of that worker pressure and also do it at a cost structure that's lower," Endy says. "If we can eliminate some of that on-site work, ... we can save them money. Especially in remote areas or highly labor-impacted areas."

Stratford has about 60 full-time employees who perform the majority of the work on the modules, outside of landscaping systems or complex HVAC systems, he says.

"We would bring in an outside con-



—RENDERING BY STRATFORD BUILDING CORP.

Stratford's modular Vale floor plan for accessory dwelling units, shown above, offers 650 square feet of living space.

tractor to do that work," adds Endy.

Stratford has a fleet of transport carriers with framed platforms that hold the modular units. The company hires common carriers to transport the modules on the carriers. The common carriers have drivers with the skill set that Stratford requires for hauling its modular units, explains Endy.

Shipping the modules can contribute significantly to the overall expense of the project. Shipping costs will vary based on an end-user's location and accessibility of a job site, but generally, modules save money compared to site-built units, he contends.

"We're shipping products via barge up to Alaska, which some would say has got to be expensive, and it is, but at the same time, they'd be shipping most of

the materials via barge to Alaska then have it constructed up there, so we're eliminating some of that on-site work and saving money. When you get into the remote areas or highly labor-impacted areas, modular construction has a true time and cost savings."

Depending on the style, size, and location of the home, Stratford's ADUs can provide 5% to 15% cost savings compared to a site-built home, he says.

Overall, the biggest savings that modular construction offers is saving time, Endy says.

Since the new product line was launched last month, Stratford has seen some interest. As the public and municipalities become more educated and aware of the benefits of ADUs, demand is expected to increase, he says.

Stratford's line of tiny modular homes could grow the business by 15% to 20%, Endy says.

For now, Stratford is helping educate clients through facility tours and by raising awareness of the differences between modular units and mobile and manufactured homes.

While all three options are prefabricated structures, Endy says the distinction is that an ADU is built to the same standard as a site-built home and is anchored to a foundation, whereas manufactured or mobile homes can be moved.

"(ADUs) are built to the exact same codes that any single-family home is. Our goal now is to spread the word that they're multiple uses for these," Endy says.