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Roseland Initiative Works to Promote Homeownership, Revitalize Communities Using Modular Homes

[Emily Soto \(/stories-by-author/Emily Soto\)](/stories-by-author/Emily Soto) | December 5, 2023 8:26 pm

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Community members on the Far South Side hope they're laying the foundation for a new approach to homeownership by using modular home construction, a process in which large segments of a house are built elsewhere and then assembled at a site in just a day.

The Hope Center Foundation (<https://hopecenterchicago.org/>) said getting house keys

to new homeowners is crucial to revitalizing the Roseland community.

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Linda Brown-Wilson is one of the first homebuyers as part of the Reclaiming Communities initiative. After losing her home in a fire and her son not long after, this new approach made homeownership possible for her.

“If it was not for this program, I would not be able to afford a new home,” she said. “I’m so excited to be going back at Roseland. That’s my home. ... I’m glad I’m gonna be one to help rebuild my community.”

Geoff Smith, executive director of the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University, sees the modular homes as an innovative approach to generating homeownership for moderate- to low-income families.

“One of the key challenges that many historically disinvested communities face is a limited supply of move-in ready housing that’s also affordable for modest-income residents,” he said.

Smith added that disinvestment in a community can lead to homes that are in need of major repairs or are just demolished, becoming vacant lots. This means fewer homes are affordable or even available — which are key barriers to creating new homeowners.

“So modular housing takes advantage of the sort of abundance of vacant lots and also creates a home that may be more affordable than other types of new construction,” Smith said.

The initiative is part of a greater network of local organizations with the goal of building 1,000 homes on the South Side. There are 10,000 city-owned vacant lots in the city of Chicago, and Shenita Muse, executive director of the Hope Center Foundation, said the work is just beginning.

“It is really about reclaiming our communities, revitalizing the city of Chicago,” she said. “There are a number of residents that have been lost. Over 60,000 residents have moved out of the Far South Side, and so if we are to reclaim our communities and our neighborhoods, then we need to build homes.”

Wraparound services are also provided by the organization. From financial literacy to homebuyer education and youth mentorship or workforce development, efforts are made not only to sell homes but also to keep people in them.

Now, despite the struggles she faced, Brown-Wilson is excited about how owning a home will impact not only her and her husband, but her granddaughter as well.

“It’s also an opportunity for me to step up and be something to her because (my son’s) no longer here,” Brown-Wilson said. “So I’m very excited and overwhelmed and emotional.”

Stories about Chicago homeownership are supported by funding from The Chicago Community Trust.

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