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Construction starts soon on state's tallest mass timber building

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The building industry in Washington state has been making strides on construction of cross-laminated timber (CLT) structures, and the next milestone will come when work begins on the eight-story Heartwood apartments on Seattle's First Hill.

It's believed it will be the tallest CLT structure in Washington state, and to the knowledge of developer Community Roots Housing, the 126-unit project is the first workforce housing project of its size in the country to use CLT, a mass



COMMUNITY ROOTS HOUSING

The Heartwood apartments project in Seattle is believed to be the state's tallest mass-timber project to date. Construction is

timber product made from carbon-sequestering renewable wood. scheduled to start in early 2022.

Community Roots Housing (CRH), a nonprofit developer and operator of affordable housing, expects construction of the Heartwood, at 1323 E. Union St., to start in February.

Heartwood architect Susan Jones of Seattle-based Atelier Jones, said it's "a breakthrough" project.

CRH calls the project a step toward trying to address the "missing middle" in Seattle's housing affordability crisis. Thousands of middle-income people who make too much to qualify for housing subsidies but not enough to pay market-rate rents have been displaced from the city.

CRH, a city-chartered public development authority, hopes the Heartwood will serve as a model for sustainable housing to close the middle-income housing gap.

In addition, the privately financed Heartwood circumvents the long wait times associated with low-income housing financing pipelines at the state and local levels to bring these homes online more quickly.

The units will be for people who make 60% to 100% of area median income (AMI.) In Seattle, AMI is \$81,000 for one-person household and \$92,600 for two-person households.

When onsite construction is completed in a little over a year, residents will occupy 113 studio and 13 one-bedrooms with the warm aesthetic of wood ceilings.

William Silva, director of pre-construction at project general contractor Swinerton Builders in Bellevue, said an eight-story building would typically be built with the concrete in the living areas painted.

"Because Heartwood is built with wood columns, beams and a CLT structure, you have an exposed wood structure and ceilings that bring all of that warmth into the living areas," he said.

Studios will be around 400 square feet and one-bedrooms will be around 500 square feet.

The CLT panels are being assembled off-site, which helps reduce the length of on-site construction. The panels will come from Kalesnikoff Lumber Co. Ltd., about 400 miles from Seattle in Castlegar, British Columbia.

This is the first mass timber building this tall permitted under the tall wood building code updates through the city of Seattle.

Jeremy Wilkening, CRH's vice president of real estate development, said getting through the city review process was a challenge. The key to succeeding was hiring Swinerton and Jones, "the premier expert architect in the city of Seattle on CLT projects," he said.

Swinerton affiliate Timberlab has built 10 mass timber projects over about the last four years. On Heartwood, timber engineers designed one of the first U.S.-permitted wood-to-wood glulam connections, which does not require connector steel.

"This greatly reduced costs, speed of erection and the overall carbon footprint of the materials," said Silva.

According to Swinerton, there are 10 CLT structures in Washington, including the Catalyst in Spokane and a Candlewood Suites at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, both of which are five-stories tall.

CRH did not answer questions about the project cost other than to say it's "very similar" to a comparable project.

Heartwood, an Opportunity Zone project, is being financed by Pinnacle Partners and with a construction loan from Heritage Bank that converts to a Freddie Mac loan, which Berkadia placed.

Other members of the Heartwood team are Skipstone, DCI structural and civil engineers and BlueLineGroup, landscaping.

Opportunity Zones are designated under a federal program created as part of the 2017 tax cut. Opportunity Zone investors receive tax breaks in return for revitalizing low-income areas.

Editor's note: This story has been updated to clarify CRH's status as a public development authority and to correct both the name of the group financing the

project and the number of CLT buildings in Washington.

Marc Stiles

Senior Reporter

Puget Sound Business Journal

