

Modular Houses Prompt Zoning Concerns

The tremendous demand for housing has attracted several alternatives to traditional construction. But some local governments are having to tweak zoning laws to accommodate those options.

Modular or factory built homes are a prime example. Harrison County is considering a zoning change to allow such houses.

A family wanting to replace their storm destroyed home with a modular house were surprised to learn that their zoning designation doesn't allow such structures. But supervisors are looking to change that law.

"We're R-1. My neighbor is actually something else because he's got more land," said Ken Reaver, as he gave a tour of his bayou front property.

Reaver never gave the zoning of his property much thought. Until now. He was surprised to learn R-1 zoning doesn't allow modular houses, which is exactly what Reaver wants to see built on his Bayou Portage property.

"If you could find a contractor now, you're still talking nine months to a year before getting your house, and to be honest with you, when you're living in an RV with youth, wife and four dogs, it gets kind of tight in a hurry," said Reaver.

A factory built home on display at Prime Outlets is the kind of house Reaver would like to put on his land.

"Once you walk through the home, unless you're told it's a modular home, you will not know the difference," said the president of New Gulf Homes, which has the house at Prime Outlets.

Ryan Nance says the zoning restriction was intended for something much different.

"A lot of these codes were written several years ago, a modular home was very similar to a mobile, manufactured, trailer home. Technology has changed and we want people to come out and see the home for themselves," Nance said.

Supervisor Marlin Ladner has not only seen this home, he's toured the Midwest factory where these homes are built. He's leading an effort to change the zoning law to allow such construction.

"This is something I think that will be very beneficial. It will serve as another niche for our rebuilding process in Harrison County. This will expedite, I believe, the rebuilding process for people to move into their homes," said Ladner.

The county planning commission will consider the change next month. After that, it will go before the board of supervisors.

Meridian-based firm builds homes and hope for Coast

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GULFPORT — A Meridian-based systems-built housing company erected its first home on the Mississippi Gulf Coast on Wednesday in what could be a perfect fit for Katrina victims still without permanent housing.

The home was delivered to Prime Outlets of Gulfport and placed on a temporary foundation. Two other models will be put in place, with an open house set for March 17-18.

Meridian physician Randy Nance is founder and chief executive officer of New Gulf Homes. Award-winning Meridian architect B.B. Archer serves as senior vice president of the company.

"This is going to be quite a sight. We are so excited this day has finally come," Nance said. "Aside from the need for family and God, the most important ingredient in returning to life as these residents may have known it is to re-establish homes and feel some sense of security and wellbeing. That's what New Gulf Homes is all about."

President Ryan Nance said the delivery is just the first step in what he hopes will be a long relationship between New Gulf Homes and the Gulf Coast.

"We've had a tremendous response from folks here, and we're ready to get these houses on the ground, get people moved out of trailers and into a real home," Nance said. "While the company was founded out of Meridian, we have a strong presence on the Coast. I'll be working out of our offices here to make sure it stays that way."

All American Building Systems, a manufacturer based out of Decatur, Ind., serves as the company's supplier. All American is a subsidiary of Coachmen Industries, a publicly traded company on the New York Stock Exchange with six building facilities across the United States.

While All American manufactures the systems, the homes are designed specifically for the Southern coastal area by Archer himself.

"We wanted our homes to feel like the South, homes that would feel like they belonged here in the South," said Archer, who has four designs to date, each fitting the lifestyle and culture of the Gulf Coast. "We've outfitted these homes with big porches and windows, given them garage space, not only for two cars, but a bass boat or ATV, and lots of common space to bring the family together. These are the things important to us in the South, and they make a house feel like a home. Individual choices — that's what it is all about."

Archer has customized five designs for the Southern region, including the Bayou House, the Carriage House, the Country Squire, the Sea Breeze and the Tidewater.

The company grew out of a medical mission trip to the Coast shortly after Hurricane Katrina came ashore. The team was led by Nance and organized through First Christian Church of Meridian. After seeing the tremendous pain and suffering of those left in Katrina's wake and the magnitude of destruction, Nance decided to take measures into his own hands.

"I founded New Gulf Homes in direct response to the needs of our citizens on the Gulf Coast," he said. "We're just Mississippians helping fellow Mississippians. We were here before the storm, during the storm and we'll be here long after the storm."

"Mobile homes are not the long-term solution to housing for our people. We can provide a quality product, built to the highest standards at an affordable price in a fraction of the time it takes for

brick-and-mortar homes."

New Gulf Homes provides houses that can be inhabitable within four to eight weeks, not nine months to a year. The homes are capable of withstanding 150 mph winds due the strength and durability of the exterior walls and provide increased energy savings over the lifetime of the home.

Modular Home Popularity Grows

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Many South Mississippi homeowners who lost their homes to Hurricane Katrina are rebuilding, but they are choosing a different option.

Modular home buying is becoming a popular trend on the coast.

"From start to finish, it's a quicker process than site building a house," says Ryan Nance.

Nance is the president of New Gulf Homes. He says while his company may be new, the idea of modular housing has been around for a long time.

"In Mississippi, there has never really been a need for it. But the situation we are in right now, we need to get houses that are built stronger than your site built home, and homes that can get done quicker as well," says Nance.

The homes sit on concrete barriers and can withstand wind speeds up to 160 miles an hour. That's reason enough for homeowner Mary Bailey to buy a modular home. She lost her first home to Hurricane Camille, rebuilt, but lost it again to Katrina. Now Bailey is back in the same spot for a third time, but she's doing things a little differently.

"I decided at my age, I didn't have time to fool with an architect for a year and trying to find a contractor and all that," says Bailey.

Once the home is ordered and delivered, it typically takes about 30 days before the homeowner can move in.

"When this one came in, all the cabinets were hung and the fireplace in my bedroom was installed," Bailey said.

She also added hardwood floors, custom cathedral ceilings, and an elevator. Now that she's settled, this homeowner says modular housing is the best way to go.

"I have about four friends who have bought homes based on seeing mine," says Bailey.

Ryan Nance with New Gulf Homes says modular home buying is growing on the Coast. He says his company has brought in more than 25 new homes since last September.

Putting the Mod in modular

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Clark Bearden of Gulfport lives near Brickyard Bayou. After his apartment in a nearly century-old house, just down the street, took on 3 to 4 feet of water in Hurricane Katrina, he got a FEMA trailer.

"I had had this lot since the early '90s but I just hadn't done anything with it," he said.

He lived in the trailer from October to June, and in June, he became a homeowner for the first time by buying a modular home from Safeway Homes in Hattiesburg. Safeway's corporate office is in Pearl, and the manufacturing facility is in Lexington.

"I had seen their ads and decided I might as well look into it," he said. "Between Christmas and New Year's, I drove up to Hattiesburg, and I liked what I saw."

Safeway had two model homes for him to view, and Bearden chose the 3-bedroom, 2-bath, 1,450-square-foot model.

"I was going to do a stick-built home here eventually, but by December, there had been nothing done on the house where I had been renting, and I knew I would have to do something," he said.

Bearden signed the contract on March 17, and within the three-month guaranteed arrival time, he had his home.

"I can't say enough good things about the crew that worked on the house," he said. The structure arrived in two parts, as well as the separate rooftop. A friend took sequential photos of the process, and Bearden has created his own desktop slide show from the pictures.

Today, Bearden is settled into his home with three cats and a dog.

"What I really liked - and this might be a guy thing - is that with a modular, all I had to pick out was the flooring, the paint color and the exterior. I had my choice of vinyl or brick, and I chose brick," he said. "The Sheetrock is all done, the baths come to you all finished with the cabinets. The crown molding is a nice touch. And it came with the dishwasher, range and microwave. I bought the refrigerator and washer and dryer. And, of course, you supply your furniture."

All American Homes is another company which manufactures modular homes. The company has construction facilities in Colorado, Iowa, Indiana, Ohio and North Carolina and has been in business about 35 years. **New Gulf Homes, based in Meridian**, focuses on providing homes for a region that is having to

rebuild in a hurry, **said Walt Hill, account executive**, and Winston Jackson, project manager. All American manufactures homes for New Gulf.

The Mississippi Gulf Coast's need for new homes had become apparent to executives at New Gulf when they had come to South Mississippi on a mission trip through their church just after Katrina, Hill said.

All American has created a line of homes especially for the Coast called the Gulf Coast Collection. The brochure shows six homes with vernaculars familiar to residents of the region.

"The Gulf Coast Collection was modeled after the guidelines set forth in 'A Pattern Book for Gulf Coast Neighborhoods,'

" states the brochure. "Every effort was made to stay true to the style and tradition of the Gulf Coast."

"The Bayview has been available to view at Prime Outlets," said Hill, referring to a three-bedroom, two-bath, 1,400-square-foot cottage model that is part of the collection.

While modular homes are prebuilt, modifications are possible, he said. "We like to do homes out of the book, but anything can be done with time and money."

Custom touches can include see-through fireplaces which can be shared by two rooms, and central vacuum systems.

Turnaround time is one of the benefits of modular homes, Hill and Jackson said.

"Right now, once it goes through the production line, it will take about a week to get there," Hill said.

"First, we take care of the foundation, the prep and the utilities," Jackson said.

Once the house is in place, it's strapped to the foundation to help it withstand winds to around 140 miles per hour, he said.