

Bill proposes tiny homes for unhoused

Advocates say measure would expand services, add beds in small towns

By Alison Cross
Hartford Courant

Nearly 1,000 Connecticut residents, including toddlers and the elderly, have spent the winter living in cars and tents without access to shelter. In response to the growing crisis, lawmakers are considering legislation that would allow religious organizations to temporarily house individuals experiencing homelessness in non-permanent tiny homes installed on their property.

Advocates say House Bill 5174 would provide much-needed shelter beds and expand home-

less services in small towns by allowing religious organizations to bypass zoning regulations that have historically prevented houses of worship from offering shelter.

Opponents argue that the proposal fails to address key concerns and gives too much power to religious entities while sidestepping community input.

In Connecticut, the number of people experiencing homelessness has reached historic levels.

According to the most recent data from the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, 940 people in the state are living outside, without shelter. Approximately 4,954 people are connected with a homeless

Turn to Tiny homes, Page 2

Tiny homes

from Page 1

program — a number that does not include individuals and families who are “doubled up” or “couch surfing.”

“There’s an opportunity for us to address this challenge by multipronged approaches,” Sen. Saud Anwar, a sponsor of the bill, said.

Anwar said that while many towns have failed to address homelessness within their communities, religious congregations have recognized their role in mitigating the crisis.

“Being a student of all different faith communities, they speak about this as a priority in every one of the pulpits,” Anwar said. “This would be their opportunity to be able to put their beliefs into action.”

“We have to look at how we can bring the people back into society,” Anwar added. “We have to make sure that we create policies to help people achieve that rather than have policies where the larger community can hide behind to refuse treatment for people who really need help.”

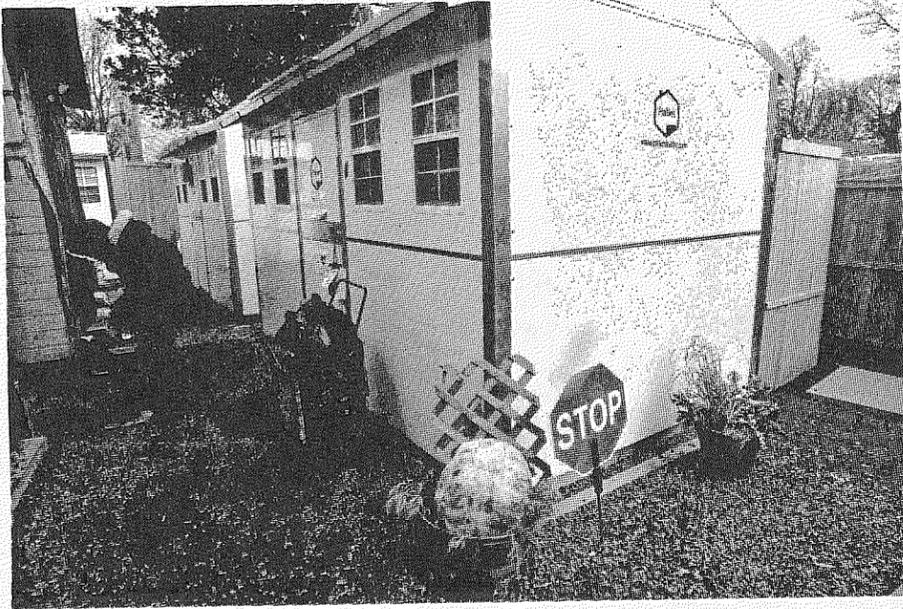
The bill, raised by the Planning and Development Committee, would grant religious organizations the right to install temporary shelter units on their property.

Under the proposal, religious organizations must submit an as-of-right permit application to their town’s zoning commission. All shelters must adhere to building and fire codes.

The language of the bill allows municipalities to impose a handful of specified regulations. For example, towns may opt to “prohibit the installation of more than eight temporary shelter units on any single lot,” limit units to a maximum of 400 square feet, restrict occupancy to one family or two unrelated individuals, and cap shelter stays at 12 months per occupant.

Towns may also impose requirements for heating and cooling, electricity, exterior lighting, toilet and shower facilities, and personal storage at installation sites.

Additionally, the bill allows towns to “Prohibit the installation of any temporary shelter unit within 1000



Suki Godek gets ready to head out as she leaves the pallet shelter that she shares with her husband, Todd Godek, at the Rosette Neighborhood Village on Rosette Street in New Haven on Tuesday. AARON FLAUM/HARTFORD COURANT

school” and “Require that any temporary shelter unit be set back not less than ten feet from any adjacent real property not owned by the religious organization.”

Rep. Eleni Kavros DeGraw, a chair of the committee, said she hopes the initiative will create more shelter space in rural municipalities and small towns — something that would reduce the burden on urban shelters and allow individuals and families who fall into homelessness to stay connected with their communities and local support networks while they get back on their feet.

“When we are trying to concentrate all the services in our cities, it doesn’t really reflect the needs of the people,” Kavros said.

Kavros said Connecticut’s “religious organizations are already doing a great job” serving people experiencing homelessness and other poverty-related situations.

“(This) is one more way that they can extend what they consider to be their good works,” Kavros DeGraw said.

Rep. Doug Dubitsky, a member of the committee said he opposes the proposal, which he referred to as a “fairly dangerous bill.”

Dubitsky said the bill would allow religious leaders to circumvent local regulations and install shelters with little to no community input. Dubitsky said such initiatives could result in “chaos” for small towns with limited resources.

three or four adjoining parcels and they put eight housing structures on each one. ... Perhaps that town has no sewers, no water service, no transportation. Where are these homeless people going to go? What are they going to do all day?” Dubitsky said. “They’re going to stay right there. ... There will be dozens and dozens of homeless people, in the middle of perhaps a historic district in a little town with no services.”

Dubitsky described the proposal as “short-sighted” adding that “the ramifications have not been thought through.”

Dubitsky expressed concerns that the bill does not specify what materials shelters can and cannot be made out of. He said the bill, as written, would greenlight any prefabricated structure, including shelters made out of shipping containers.

The defines a “Temporary shelter unit” as “a nonpermanent commercially prefabricated accessory structure that is designed to be easily dismantled or removed, but does not include tarps, tents, other nonrigid materials or motor vehicles.”

Dubitsky added that shower and toilet requirements in the bill could result in the installation of outdoor portable toilets, which residents may be opposed to.

Dubitsky said the bill’s language does not go far enough to define who could occupy the shelters.

uilding hous-
million people

must and it’s not saying that every single community across the state has to make this decision,” Fox said. “It just allows churches to be part of this process and this conversation and make decisions to serve people.”

Fox said the current crisis requires “different innovative solutions” to providing shelter that expand “the current capacity in every community across the state.”

Fox said the coalition supports the initiative, but they are also advocating for changes to the bill language that would require participating religious organizations to work with the state’s Coordinated Access Network to connect those in need with services.

Additionally, Fox said provisions of the bill should apply to existing church facilities, like rectories and accessory buildings, that could serve as warming shelters. Fox said that zoning restrictions have blocked churches from opening up their space for this purpose.

“When I’m talking about this proposal, I’m thinking about a tool in our toolbox,” Fox said. “We have to rethink resources. This just is a tool and a means to an end to keep people safe when severe weather arises, which we do not have in our toolbox today.”

Fox said that this year, front-line workers in the fight against homelessness saw demographics shift dramatically, revealing an unprecedented number of individuals over the age of 55 and moms with toddlers and young children.

“The fact that leading into winter, we had moms with toddlers sleeping in tents is not something that should be passed by quickly. That really speaks to the state of the challenge that we’re facing,” Fox said. “It’s very much a different world than what we knew in regards to the people becoming homeless at this point in time.”

Fox said that as people come to recognize homelessness as a regional issue, and not just an urban one, she is hopeful that more towns have come to understand their role in addressing homelessness at the local level.

“I think so often when people think about homelessness, they very much are just thinking about the people who are stereotypically homeless, people who are long-term homeless with substance abuse and mental

health challenges,” Fox said. “It’s easy to not recognize the fact that anyone can become homeless and that people, our neighbors, are falling into homelessness every day.”

Sen. Ryan Fazio, a ranking member of the committee, said the tiny homes proposal “is not necessarily a one-size-fits-all solution” to the varying needs and challenges of the state’s diverse homeless population.

“My concern about the bill in question is that by having an extraordinarily liberal policy towards setting up temporary, outdoor makeshift homeless shelters, as of right, (is) that we aren’t balancing those considerations and we might not actually be helping all the people we’re trying to help,” Fazio said.

“You need to be able to precisely target and alleviate the different challenges that various homeless populations are facing, whether it’s economic purely or related to psychiatric problems or related to chronic substance abuse problems,” Fazio added.

Fazio echoed concerns that the current proposal does not offer enough restrictions in terms of occupancy and geographical placement.

“We could be putting people with severe mental health or substance abuse problems in a dwelling next to a single mom with two kids who isn’t in the same situation. We could be putting people within 10-foot proximity of residential neighborhoods, backyards where kids are out and about playing, without any sort of community buy-in and regulation,” Fazio said.

While Fazio said the bill could be improved with tightened regulations, he said it would be better to leave decisions up to “communities and religious houses of worship to collaborate and come to agreements on their own.”

Overall, Fazio emphasized the need for balance.

“I think we all have the same goal here,” Fazio said.

“I don’t think we want policies that bring us in such a liberal direction. ... But I think we can find a kind of middle ground here that both improves the well-being of our homeless population in Connecticut, which is sadly increasing, and also protects the health and safety of every community.”



Sheri Koones, of Connecticut, has a new book coming out: "ADUs, The Perfect Housing Solution." It looks in detail at the nature and benefits of accessory dwelling units. This one is in Portland, Oregon. COURTESY PHOTOS

Not a fan of tiny homes? There's another solution.

Woman's book details **Accessory Dwelling Units** — ADUs — built on property of a main house

By Helen I. Bennett
Hartford Courant

The houses can be on the small side but they should never be called tiny homes.

They are, in fact, Accessory Dwelling Units, and come in a variety of shapes and sizes in Connecticut.

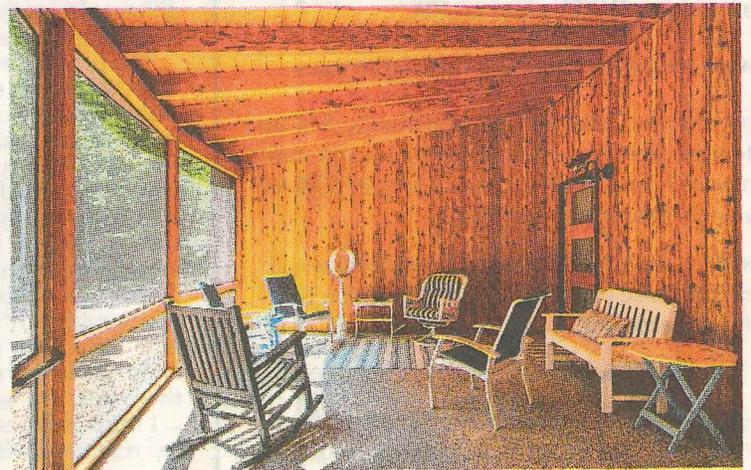
To look at Sheri Koones' new book on such structures is to enter a trip that can start in Mystic, zoom up to Avon and then take you across the country, with stops at ADUs in Minnesota, Washington State, Texas, Oregon, Denver, California and elsewhere. They

are homes added on the property of a main house.

Koones studied and writes about the structures for several reasons, including that she sees them as part of the solution to the lack of housing nationwide, and that she sees them providing advantages for green living, privacy, multigenerational opportunities, keeping neighborhood style intact, offering rental income and providing outdoor space and more.

Koones chooses the locations she shares carefully, focusing on what is unique in each location.

Turn to ADUs, Page 3



ADUs

from Page 1

The book "ADUs, The Perfect Housing Solution," recounts that a 790-square-foot Mystic ADU, for example, has green features the owners wanted, such as large triple pane windows, and underwent a blower door test so the home would be properly sealed. It is designed by Unity Homes. The couple who had it built has another home on the site, which is rented out, Koones wrote.

The 1,316-square-foot Avon home also is designed to be green, or net-zero, but also has the goal of being a space three generations can live in, with a separate but attached ADU. The architect/planner was James Wolf of Wolfworks Inc., according to Koones.

Koones notes that, in general, fewer older adults today want to live in senior facilities and that the generation of boomers is more active than previous generations, participating in sports and more interested in traveling than maintaining a large house.



Koones

"Living in an ADU is a wonderful solution for them. They can live close to their adult children and can help with childcare," she said. "If the parents need additional help later in life, their family is close by."

Regarding the Avon multi-generational house, Koones said, "The main house and ADU are connected with a porch giving both the parents and adult children the privacy they may want."

"The older parents can feel comfortable traveling without worrying about their home; the older parents can spend quality time with their grandchildren," she said.

The ADU housing style, on average running 600 to 1,200 square feet, also can have benefits for other generations, including millennials, Koones said.

"Millennials are facing a much more difficult situation than in previous years. They are graduating from college with massive loans and a difficult housing market," she said. "Many of them are not able to purchase homes until much later than previous generations did."

However, in communities where zoning permits it, "some of them would like to live in a home close to where they grew up but are priced out of that market," she said.

"If they build an ADU on their parents' property, they can live much more affordably and stay in the area they prefer," Koones said. "If they have children and outgrow the ADU, in some cases they can switch residences with their parents; with the young family moving into the main house and the parents into the ADU."



Sheri Koones, of Connecticut, has a new book coming out: "ADUs, The Perfect Housing Solution." It looks in detail at the nature and benefits of accessory dwelling units. COURTESY PHOTOS

Not universally accepted in Connecticut

The Connecticut Association of Realtors, notes that an ADU "can provide options for children returning from college or seniors wanting to be close to family. They can also provide rental income to homeowners, which can be applied to mortgage payments."

But the association also warns: "The requirements vary greatly from town to town."

Koones does not address zoning in depth, as rules differ so widely, even across Connecticut. She said the homeowners she featured also do not share specific costs, but all sought not to "be excessive" with expenses. Costs vary widely depending on location, materials, permits, local labor and more, according to Koones.

The CT Mirror has reported that more than two-thirds of Connecticut towns opted out of a 2021 law on streamlining regulations about Accessory Dwelling Units, but "most towns still allow units of this type in some form, citing a report from advocacy group Desegregate Connecticut."

The Mirror story notes that 54 towns did not opt out and are subject to state law, and 115 opted out. It cites the report as noting many of those that opted out set up their own regulations for the units and that a "majority of Connecticut towns — 67% — allow accessory dwelling units that at least partially satisfy the state law's requirements," also citing the report.

Bloomfield is one of the Connecticut towns that rejected state rules on ADUs, or so-called in-law apartments. Officials in Bloomfield, however, said they were not trying to avoid more non-traditional housing but sought



'A great opportunity'

Given the housing shortage in Connecticut and many areas across the country, Koones said she believes "ADUs are a perfect housing solution."

Other advantages, she said, can include adding housing units that don't alter the nature of a community, as most ADUs are built in the rear of the main house and typically are "hardly visible, if at all to passersby," she said.

ADUs can also offer more outdoor space and privacy than apartment houses or multi-

includes for people who work at home, Koones said.

Koones noted that the possibility of adding income is an advantage to ADUs, as the couple who built the Mystic structure does, by using it and renting out the home on the site.

"Many people rent out their ADU for added income and to help pay their own expense," Koones said. "This has been particularly advantageous for homeowners that want to retire; the added income from the ADU makes this process easier."

"ADUs would provide a great

to return to the state after they graduate and would allow some seniors to remain in their homes after retiring, with the money they receive from renters," she said.

Koones said ADUs have other purposes, including when homeowners don't want to build a larger house on their lot but need extra space. "The ADU can then function as a comfortable place for visiting relatives and friends, as a place to entertain or just relax in a quiet space, or as a place to work from home, away from the activity in the main house."

The housing style can also help people who can't afford to live in the communities where they work, with a smaller more economical residence closer, and resort communities, such as ski areas, that need temporary affordable housing during the season. There also are companies that can provide predesigned ADUs, she said.

Koones said ADUs also generally take less time to build than many other housing structures. Those featured in her book seem to meld with the local landscapes in style, color choices and settings.

"It's one of the hottest topics in home construction right now," she said.

Koones said she has been writing books about ADUs for several years and also has spoken in public about them and audiences were very interested in the housing style, seeking more information for their personal use.

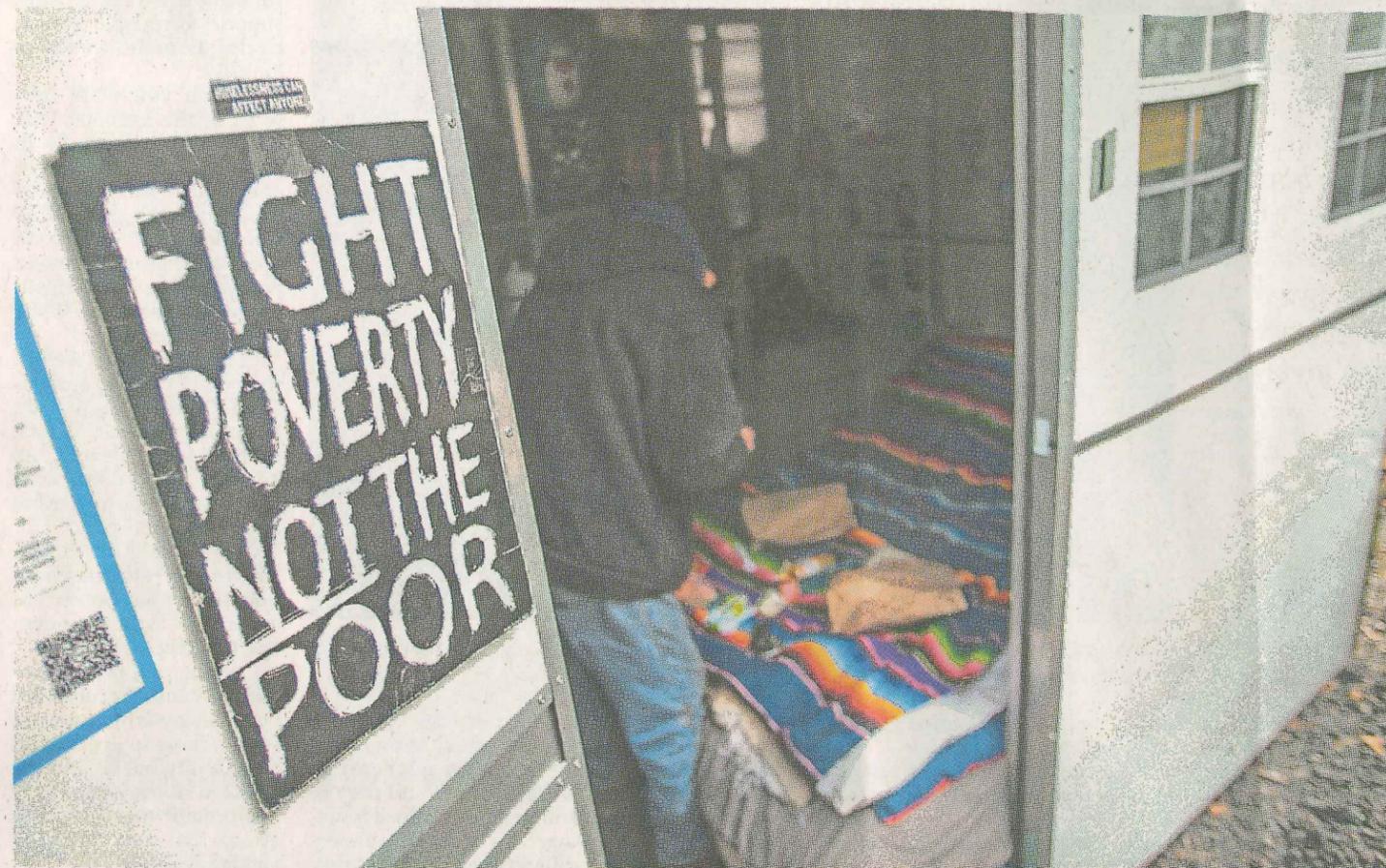
"When I consider the shortage in affordable housing, I think there is a great deal of interest because of the practical implications of incorporating an ADU into one's main home."

Koones said she wrote the book to provide "information and inspiration to anyone who is thinking about building an ADU or dreaming of one in the future." There are an estimated 1.5 million ADUs in the U.S. and that number grows by about 9% annually, she said.

"This is an opportunity for (people) to see what an ADU can look like and what they can aspire to," Koones said. "All of these are great examples of the possibilities."

Regarding Connecticut, Koones said, many houses are on large parcels of land, "providing plenty of space for additional housing units." She said she has found many of the people she speak to are not aware of the existence of the ADU styles of housing, but "when they get information about them, they begin to think of all the ways they can benefit from building one on their property."

"The 25 examples in the book demonstrate the vast design possibilities, the many ways they can be built, and the methods of making the smallest of spaces feel larger than they are," she said. "Included is information about some of the products and design possibilities that can also help to maximize the space. At the back of the book is a listing of resources — professionals to help design and build the units



Todd Godek gets lunch ready before heading to a dairy farm to work on Tuesday. Godek and his wife, Suki, live in a pallet shelter at the Rosette Neighborhood Village in New Haven. The village has six shelters, with two providing double occupancy. AARON FLAUM PHOTOS/HARTFORD COURANT

SMALL HOUSES THAT 'MEAN HOPE'

Village hopes project is a model for helping homeless 'fight their own way out'

By Alison Cross | Hartford Courant

Suki Godek watched as her husband packed up his lunch on the bed of their tiny home before he headed out for work at his family's dairy farm.

Just months earlier, the couple lived in a tent.

Today, the Godeks reside in one of six tiny homes that compose the Rosette Neighborhood Village, a "Human Rights Zone" carved into the backyard of the Amistad Catholic Worker house of hospitality in the Hill neighborhood of New Haven.

The community is the first of its kind in the state, and it could serve as a model if lawmakers greenlight a proposal that would allow religious organizations to install tiny homes on their property to shelter individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

The village contains six units in total, two 100-square-foot double units for couples and four 64-square-foot single units. Amistad said the entire project, which was financed through private fundraising initiatives, cost

Turn to Homes, Page 2



A Rosette Neighborhood Village resident's dog walks around the row of tiny prefabricated homes at the village on Rosette Street in New Haven on Tuesday. Residents are allowed to have their pets stay with them at the village.

Unpaid taxes in Hartford piling up

Property owners owe more than \$40M in delinquent payments

By Kenneth R. Gosselin
Hartford Courant

In a city where exemptions already take a huge bite out of the tax base, property owners in Hartford owe more than a stunning \$40 million in delinquent taxes, more than half of that on land, residences and commercial buildings.

Property owners are \$22 million behind in paying real estate taxes — some of the delinquencies stretching back years — while separately, personal property taxes going unpaid on furniture, fixtures and equipment at businesses came in a close second at \$19 million as of Jan. 24, according to city reports obtained by the Courant through a Freedom of Information request.

Topping a list of the properties with the 10 largest delinquent real estate tax bills as of that date are Immanuel Church Housing Corp., low-income housing for seniors, at 15 Woodland St., \$2.9 million; Shelbourne Axela LLC, The Millennium apartments at 50 Morgan St., \$1.1 million; and 200 CP Holdings LLC, the owner of 200 Constitution Plaza, where a plan to convert the structure to apartments fell apart last year, \$893,000. Hundreds of assessments are being appealed.

Also on the list are two apartment properties — 249 Sisson Ave. and 16 Girard St. — owned by Paxe Hartford Portfolio LLC of Lakewood, New Jersey.

Paxe Hartford, which owed \$286,000 for the two properties, was recently highlighted by Hartford Mayor Arunan Arulampalam for failing to maintain its properties as the mayor launched a multi-pronged initiative to crack down on landlords.

But Paxe Hartford's overall real estate tax bill delinquency is more than \$1 million spread out over 14 properties in the city and 270 units.

The delinquent bills can be equally as high on the personal property side.

According to the city reports,

Homes

from Page 1

about \$123,000 and took a team of 20 volunteers less than a day's work to install.

The prefabricated homes, designed by the for-profit company Pallet, are best described as free-standing dorm rooms.

The shelters have no in-house bathroom or kitchen — that is located steps away, in the main Amistad house — but there is a bed, ample storage, heating, cooling, electric outlets, a fire alarm and a carbon monoxide detector.

According to Pallet, each unit should last more than 10 years and is designed to withstand 110 mph winds, 25 pounds per square foot of snow and temperatures as low as 40 degrees below zero. They are also resistant to mold, rot and pests.

But the tiny homes violate local building ordinances.

Days after the homes went up in late October, New Haven served the village with a notice to cease and desist.

The tiny homes are currently operating on a 180-day temporary use permit from the city's Board of Zoning Appeals. What will happen to the village once that permit expires is unclear.

"That's why we really need 5174," said Colleen Shaddox, a member of the Rosette Neighborhood Village Collective, which serves as a fundraising and volunteer arm of the village's main mission.

Shaddox is referring to House Bill 5174, a proposal introduced by the Connecticut General Assembly's Planning and Development Committee that would give religious organizations the right to install prefabricated, temporary shelter units on their property.

Without the legislation, Shaddox said the village is "always going to be vulnerable" to local zoning laws, which have historically prevented faith communities from offering shelter.

While H.B. 5174 would authorize shelter installation as of right, it requires all units to adhere to applicable building and fire codes.

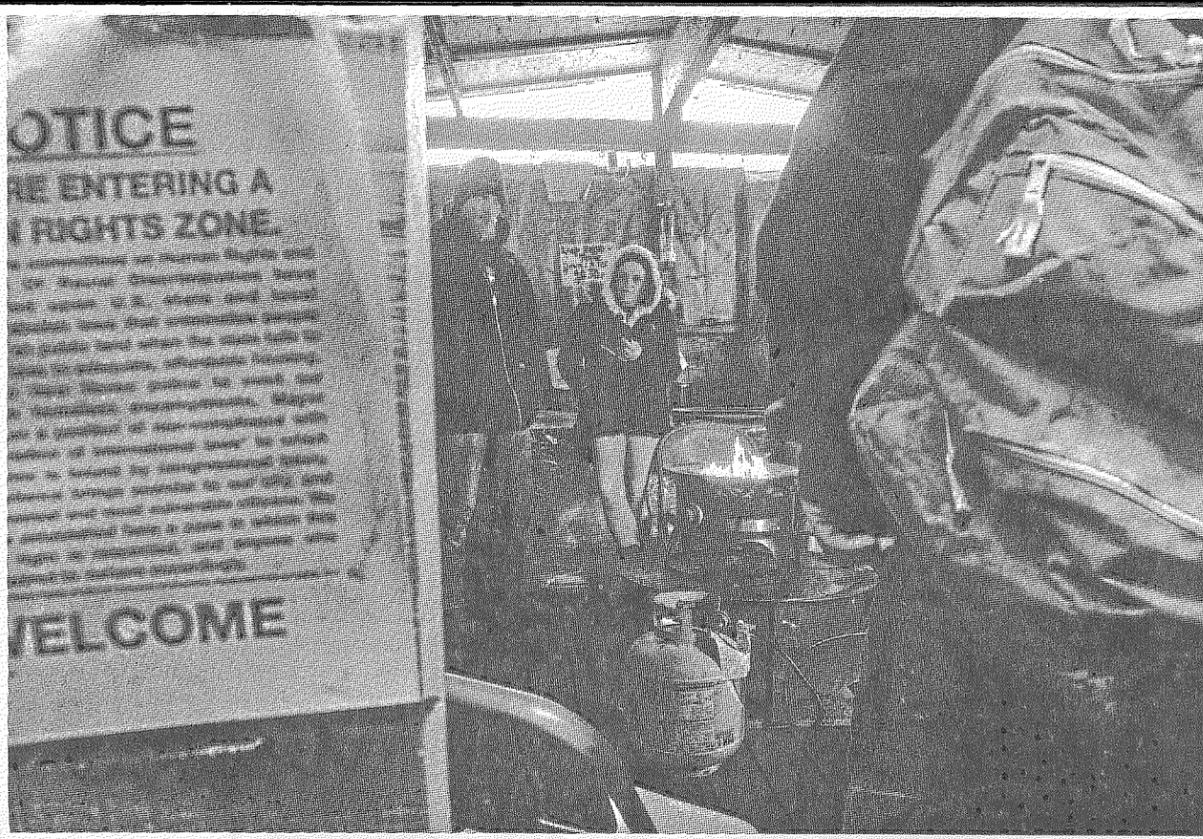
The bill also provides a short list of conditions municipalities can opt to regulate. That list includes prohibiting "the installation of more than eight temporary shelter units on any single lot," limiting units to a maximum of 400 square feet, restricting occupancy to one family or two unrelated individuals and capping shelter stays at 12 months per occupant, among other specified requirements.

Advocates see H.B. 5174 as a crisis response that would add much-needed shelter beds to the state's overflowing system, particularly in suburban and rural municipalities that currently lack emergency shelter for their residents.

Opponents have criticized the bill saying its broad nature gives religious organizations too much power to install shelters without community input, oversight or services.

As the legislative session progresses, members of Amistad, the village and the collective are praying for H.B. 5174's passage.

"If you put people first, you should allow communities like this," Shaddox said. "I'm not saying that this is the only solution, but it's a solution and it's working pretty well for a lot of people."



Todd Godek stands next to his wife, Suki, as she leads the resident meeting inside a shelter at the Rosette Neighborhood Village in New Haven on Tuesday. AARON FLAUM PHOTOS/HARTFORD COURANT

"When I came here, it actually made me a neighbor and it made me back to being part of a community instead of shying away from people and not being involved."

— Suki Godek, who shares a tiny home with her husband at Rosette Neighborhood Village in New Haven

'It gave me a sense of purpose'

On a chilly Tuesday in late February, the village's residents trickled into "the Hut" for their weekly meeting — one of the few hard-and-fast rules for living in the backyard community.

Notices tacked to a beam of the Hut, as well as the entrance to the Amistad's backyard, declared that entrants had crossed into a "Human Rights Zone."

Inside, a wood-carved statue of the Virgin Mary watched from the corner as clouds from steaming coffee mugs and foggy yawns mingled in the morning air.

Residents sat around a propane fire, breakfasts in hand, while Godek led the discussion about chore rotations, laundry schedules and an upcoming pea-planting action for the community garden.

In the village, residents govern themselves and take care of themselves. Everyone is expected to contribute, whether it be cooking meals, cleaning the shared bathroom, maintaining the backyard property, or caring for members of the surrounding community who go to Amistad for food and other services.

That morning the village had 17 residents, although Godek said the number fluctuates often. In addition to the eight tiny home residents, several others live in tents in an auxiliary section of the backyard known as the garden.

Godek said that she and other neighbors often liken the village to "summer camp."

"It's sort of just a big family-type environment," Godek said. "I have lots of siblings, so I'm used to being in a home with a lot of moving parts. So for me, it's pretty comfortable. Some people when they first come,



Suki Godek shows the inside of the 100-square-foot shelter that she shares with her husband at the Rosette Neighborhood Village.

have an adjustment period where they're just getting used to being around so many people in such a small area."

In the encampment community where Godek previously lived, Godek said she "kind of took on the mom role for everybody." The village cemented her role as a leader.

Godek is a voice for her community, speaking at fundraising events, hosting youth group tours and advocating for the village in the Connecticut State Legislature.

"For me, it gave me a sense of purpose that I had not previously sought," Godek said. "When I came here, it actually made me a neighbor and it made me back to being part of a community instead of shying away from people and not being involved."

Before Godek and her husband came to Connecticut, they lived and worked on a dairy farm in Ohio.

"When COVID hit, the farm went under and they fired all their employees," Godek said. "We had a house through the farm. All our vehicles were through the farm. So we ended up losing everything."

Godek said they decided to move to Connecticut to take care of her father-in-law, who was in poor health.

"We just ended up kind of stuck," Godek said. "I think we stayed in hotels for almost a year, but then once our savings ran out, it was just like, where do you go from there?"

For a while, Godek and her husband lived in New Haven's Tent City. When the city bulldozed the West River encampment last spring, they moved to the

Amistad's backyard.

"There was only one other couple in a tent at that time," Godek said. "Then from the two of us, we started making our community back here."

In October, after the tiny homes were built, Godek and her husband moved in.

"In a tent, you can't even stand up," Godek said. "If you can imagine going into your home and just sitting all the time. ... I was always completely sore. My back was so messed up from laying on the hard ground. And just everything you own is always damp or wet."

"Once you get into the house, it's amazing to have warm dry clothes," she said.

In a tent, things like heat, privacy, even a key, were not possible.

"I know it sounds silly, but a lock on a door, it makes a big difference," Godek said.

As someone with bipolar disorder, Godek said that sense of security and comfort improved her mental health.

"It helped a lot with my depression, just having a stable place, knowing that I could get up every day and go to work and not have to worry about where I'm going to be sleeping or be eating," Godek said. "It makes a big difference having your own actual space."

Godek said she "was surprised at how many people have never been in this situation until recently."

"Homeless faces aren't the same as they were 10 years ago. Ultimately, now we have more college students who are homeless. We have a lot of people that live out of their cars," Godek said, adding that she has two college degrees and her

husband works seven days a week as a dairy farmer.

"We have people here that work full time and they're still unable to afford housing. So it's just completely different than just the 'traumatized veteran' or the 'crazy bag lady' who's standing on a corner," Godek said.

Godek described the village as "a testament to how diverse our actual society is."

Godek said it offers an "actual working model" that is "more realistic" and attainable for individuals experiencing homelessness.

"When you go to a shelter, if you're married, you can't be together. If you have your children, you can't be in the same area. You can't have visitors, friends, more property than two small bags, a job that will make you work longer than 8 p.m. at night. And you have to be out at like five, six in the morning," Godek said. "Here we don't have those restraints."

Godek said she thinks of the village and its tiny homes as a "transitional space" and a "stepping stone" toward finding an eventual home.

"We like to say tiny homes, for us, means hope and it does," Godek said. "(It's) the hope that everybody can have their own place as a neighbor in a community."

As for Godek and her husband, their dream is to one day run their own farm again.

"My husband wants another dairy farm so bad," Godek said. "So we're just going to keep saving and working towards that, it's all you can do, you know?"

"After years of things not being so good after COVID," Godek said the village community offered "a

reason to think that maybe tomorrow is going to be better."

'We will not stop doing it'

Mark Colville, whose colorful and at times controversial history of activism has gotten him in trouble with the law, has operated the Amistad house out of his home for the last 30 years.

Colville said he opened up his backyard in the summer of 2022 "to model what a supported tent city could look like."

Colville said he sees the tiny homes as a vehicle for policy change.

"What we're doing in the backyard is not recognized as legal. And that's what needs to change," Colville said. "Part of what we're doing here is confronting laws, municipal laws, that exclude the possibility of people from asserting their human right to take refuge."

Colville explained how the village and Amistad are flipping the idea of what support for people experiencing homelessness can look like.

"When you walk into most of the agencies that help unhoused people in our city, basically, you're obligated to prove helplessness in order to get service," Colville said. "You have to approach these agencies in a posture of disempowerment in order to be helped. We're trying to change that."

"The tiny homes are not the point," Colville emphasized. "The point is privacy, autonomy, human rights, agency, independence. ... As a city, we simply do not trust unhoused people to exercise any of those things."

Colville said the village aims to help residents channel "their own power" to eventually "fight their own way out of homelessness."

Colville said the culture and methodology cultivated by the village is by no means, transferable to every faith community, but he said the Amistad House is "uniquely positioned" to guide other groups that want to take on similar projects.

"We've been at this work for quite some time and we have learned a few things about what works and what doesn't work," Colville said.

Colville described churches as an "untapped resource" in the fight against poverty and homelessness. He called H.B. 5174 a "no-brainer."

"Go back as far as you want, hundreds of years even. The only real institution that you could kind of call a 'friend to the poor,' has been the church and the churches have not left, they're there," Colville said.

"The government should just get out of the way and let churches do what churches do," Colville added. "People are trained by their faith to take care of other people. Let churches do that in the neighborhoods. Let us do it."

Colville said he has every intention for the village to continue its operation.

Regardless of if H.B. 5174 passes, or what New Haven orders after the expiration of the temporary permit, Colville said the village has no plans to remove the tiny homes.

"We simply are not going to cease and desist," Colville said.

"Whether it's legal or not is irrelevant to the question of whether or not I am obliged to do it by virtue of my faith," Colville said. "What we're doing in the backyard is a faith-based response based on deeply held religious principles. ... We will not stop doing it."



The Melody, seen April 12, is made from shipping containers for Atlanta's homeless population. JOHN BAZEMORE/AP

Micro communities for unhoused sprout up

Some cities eager for small, quick, cheap solutions as rates rise

By R.J. Rico and Jesse Bedayn
Associated Press

In a dreary part of downtown Atlanta, shipping containers have been transformed into an oasis for dozens of previously unsheltered people who now proudly call a former parking lot home.

The gated micro community known as The Melody doesn't look like a parking lot anymore. Potted plants and red Adirondack chairs abound. There's even a dog park.

The shipping containers have been divided into 40 insulated studio apartments that have a single bed, HVAC unit, microwave, small refrigerator, TV, desk, sink and bathroom. On a recent afternoon, a half-dozen residents were chatting around a table in The Melody's smoking area.

"I'm just so grateful," said Cynthia Diamond, a 61-year-old former line cook who uses a wheelchair and used to be chronically homeless.

"I have my own door key. I ain't got to worry about nobody knocking on my door, telling me when to eat, sleep or do anything. I'm going to stay here as long as the Lord allows me to stay here."

Faced with years of rising homelessness rates and failed solutions, city officials across the U.S. have been embracing rapid housing options emphasizing three factors: small, quick and cheap. Officials believe micro communities, unlike shelters, offer stability that, when combined with wraparound services, can more effectively put residents on the path to secure housing.

Denver has opened three micro communities and converted five hotels for people who used to be homeless. Austin, Texas, has three villages of "tiny homes." In Los Angeles, a 232-unit complex features two three-floor buildings of stacked shipping containers.

"Housing is a ladder. You start with the very first rung. Folks that are literally sleeping on the ground aren't even on the first rung," said Denver Mayor Mike Johnston, sitting in one of the city's new micro communities that offer tiny

first rung.

More than 1,500 people have been moved indoors through the program, with over 80% still in the housing as of last month, according to city data. The inexpensive units are particularly a boon for cities with high housing costs, where moving that many people directly into apartments wouldn't be financially feasible.

Atlanta's and Denver's programs act as a stepping stone, working to get people, working to get permanent housing; Denver aims to move people out within six months.

That includes Eric Martinez, 28, who has been in limbo between the street and the bottom rung for most of his life. At birth, Martinez was flung into the revolving door of foster care, and he's wrestled with substance use while surfing couches and pitching tents.

"It's kind of demeaning, it makes me feel less of a person," Martinez said, his eyes downcast. "I had to get out of it and look out for myself at that point: It's fight or flight, and I flew."

Martinez's Denver tent encampment was swept, and he and the others were directed into the micro communities of small

cabin-like structures with a twin bed, desk and closet. The city built three such communities with nearly 160 units total in about six months, at roughly \$25,000 a unit, Johnston said.

The 1,000 converted hotel units cost about \$100,000 each.

On site at the micro community are bathrooms, showers, washing machines, small dog parks and kitchens; the Salvation Army delivers meals.

The program represents an about-face from policies that for years focused on short-term group shelters and the ceaseless shuffle of encampments from one city block to the next. That system made it difficult to keep people who were scattered through the city connected to services and on the path to permanent housing.

Those services in Denver's and Atlanta's micro communities are largely centralized. They offer case management, counseling, mental health and substance-abuse therapy, housing guidance and assistance obtaining anything from vocational skills training to a new pair of dentures.

"We're able to meet every level of the hierarchy of needs — from security

and shelter, all the way up to self-actualization and the sense of community," said Peter Cumiskey, the Atlanta site clinician.

The Melody, and projects like it, are a "very promising, feasible and cost-effective way" to tackle homelessness, said Michael Rich, an Emory University political science professor who studies housing policy. Rich noted that transitional housing is just the first step toward permanent housing.

The programs in Denver and Atlanta, taking inspiration from similar ones in Columbia, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia, offer a degree of privacy and security not found in congregate shelters or encampments.

Giving each resident their own bathroom and kitchen is a crucial feature that helps set The Melody apart, said Cathryn Vassell, whose nonprofit Partners For Home oversees the micro community in Atlanta. Aside from a prohibition on overnight guests, staff emphasize that tenants are treated as independent residents.

Vassell acknowledged that it's unclear how long the containers will last — she's hoping 20 years. But, she said, they were

the right choice for The Melody because they were relatively inexpensive and already had handicapped-accessible bathrooms — many were used by Georgia hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project, which took about four months to complete, cost about \$125,000 a unit — not "tremendously inexpensive," Vassell said, but less than traditional construction and much quicker. Staffing and security operations cost about \$900,000 a year.

The scars of life on the street still stick with Martinez. All his belongings are prepped for a move at a moment's notice, even though he feels secure in his tiny home alongside his cat, Appa.

The community has been "very uplifting and supporting," he said, pausing. "You don't get that a lot."

On his wall is a calendar with a job orientation penciled in. The next step is working with staff to get a housing voucher for an apartment.

"I'm always looking down on myself for some reason," Martinez said. But "I feel like I've been doing a pretty good job. Everyone is pretty proud of me."

Goodbye carport, hello ADU

A small parking spot is reborn as a stunning live-work studio

By Lisa Boone
Los Angeles Times

"This is the backyard of which dreams are made," the 2017 listing read. "Relax or entertain in your covered outdoor dining area beside the swimming pool and lush bamboo, creating a tranquil privacy. California living at its finest."

Included among the listing's photos: A simple A-frame carport standing next to a kidney-shaped swimming pool.

Three years after they purchased the Los Angeles home, Leslie-Anne Huff and her husband, Reggie Panaligan, were less interested in entertaining poolside and more concerned with how to live, work and parent their daughter.

"We were knee-deep in taking care of our infant daughter and working from home," says Panaligan, a Google executive. Meanwhile, when Huff, an actor, wasn't taping her auditions in a closet, she stored her film equipment in their daughter's bathtub.

They needed more space. The couple, who are both 40 and met while students at UC Berkeley, considered getting rid of the pool to make room for an accessory dwelling unit. But bids to remove the pool were expensive; as high as \$15,000. The couple turned their attention to the carport, hoping to transform the simple dwelling into a dynamic, multifunctional space for themselves and their extended family.

The pair had a strong sense of what they were looking for when they hired architect Lisa Little of the LA firm Vertebrae to help them design an ADU.

"We wanted an office, a self-tape studio, a gym, a pool house, housing for grandparents and storage," says Huff.

Although they needed more space, they also wanted to add a second dwelling that was modern and unobtrusive.

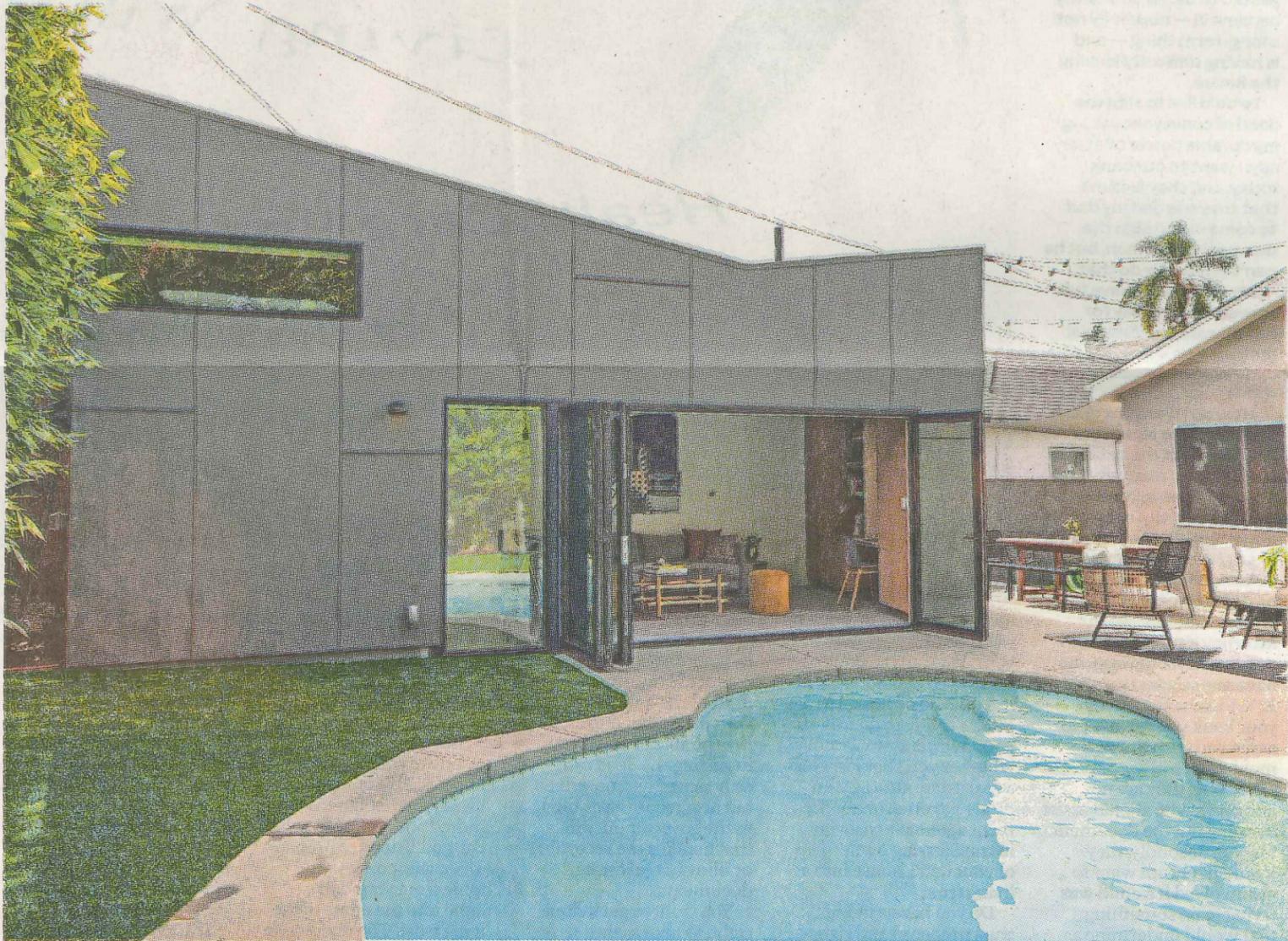
So when it came time to add a 380-square-foot ADU for about \$300,000, Panaligan envisioned a modern dwelling that wouldn't overwhelm the tight space.

"That was part of the challenge," Little says. "The main house was fairly plain. So my thinking was 'How do we create something new that is a contemporary partner with the 1923 house?'"

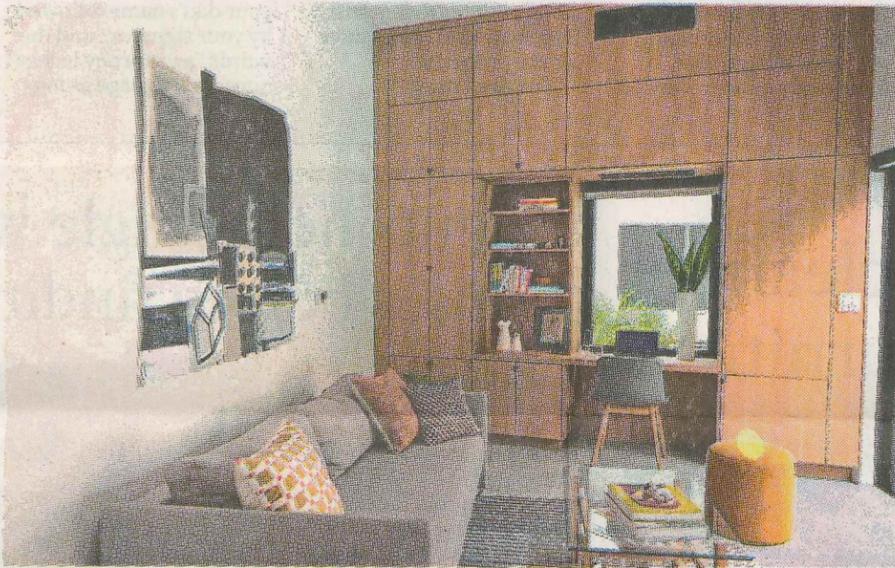
Little came up with what she calls "a trapezoid"; the ADU has an asymmetrical butterfly roof clad in gray fire-resistant fiber cement siding.

The sculpted roof lines create a simple but striking geometry that allows anyone to occupy the open floor plan effortlessly, Little says.

As with many garage conversions, demolition



The ADU, left of the main house, is accessed pool-side and features a kitchenette, living room, office area and loft. JAY L. CLENDENIN/LOS ANGELES TIMES PHOTOS



Floor-to-ceiling custom millwork provides a well-lit office space and conceals the mini-split HVAC system.

was straightforward but site preparation came with unforeseen headaches: The necessary foundation and plumbing work was much more extensive — and costly — than anyone had anticipated.

"When building an ADU from the ground up, you still have to do everything: the foundation, utilities, electrical, plumbing," Little says. "The foundation under the carport was unnecessarily deep — there was a massive amount of concrete — and it had to be demolished to make room for the new ADU foundation."

For Little, making the most of the constrained site proved to be a challenge that pushed her creatively. "Site constraints are productive," she says, noting the swimming pool. "They push you to create something unique. Constraints also keep us from building more than we need."

Opening onto the pool, the ADU is divided into two spaces: a public area consisting of a kitchenette with a cooktop and mini refrigerator, a living room and office area, and an 80-square-foot loft that is accessed by a powder-coated metal-fabricated ladder and can accommodate a queen-size bed.

Little designed abundant storage in the tight setting to allow potential tenants to live comfortably in a clutter-free environment.

On one wall, a built-in desk with a picture window overlooks the patio, surrounded by a wall of floor-to-ceiling custom-built cabinets in white oak. "I was trying to lessen the visual noise," Little says of the floor-to-ceiling custom millwork that provides soft light and conceals the mini-split HVAC system. "Reggie works in that space, and he needs the space to be calm and quiet."

The long solid wall

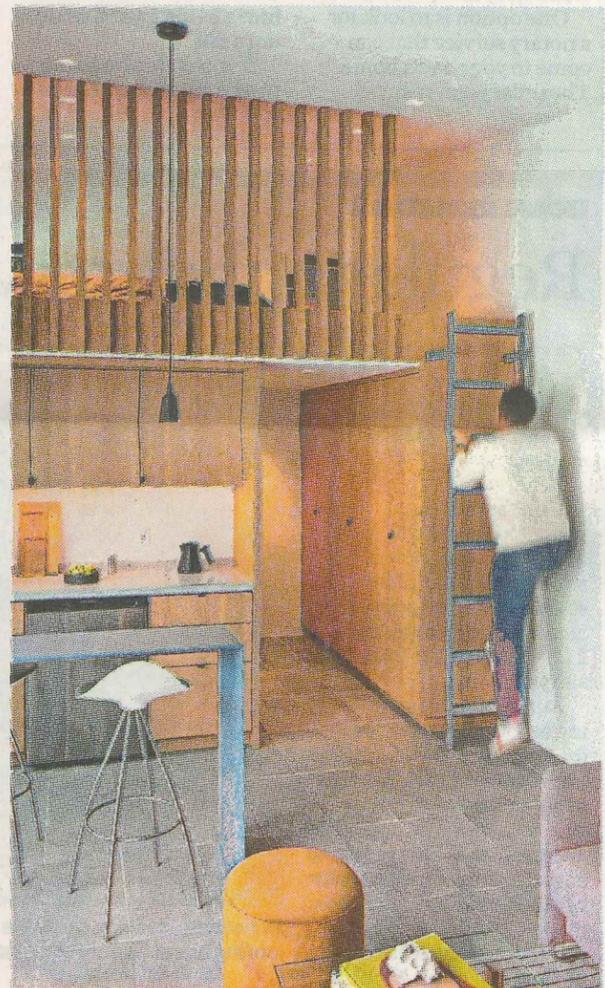
closest to the property line provides privacy from next-door neighbors. Doors and windows face the pool and home, or, as Little says, "the parts you want to connect with."

No one can look into the ADU from the house or neighboring homes. The central opening, outfitted with a glass accordion door, faces the pool, not the main house.

Now that the ADU is complete, the couple is happy they didn't remove the pool. There's still patio space for them to enjoy the outdoors, a play area for their daughter on the side of the house and parking for their two cars.

"There's something so nice about having a pool as our daughter gets older," Huff says. "Her friends can come here and swim. We've already hosted some swim lessons."

Huff adds that the lighting is sensational at night. "I was picturing what the



Reggie Panaligan climbs to the sleeping loft inside the ADU.

ADU would look like at night before it was built," she says. Now, family members can enjoy the ADU at all hours, even when they're inside the main house.

The pair says their ADU has increased their options regarding potential rentals or providing housing for aging parents or family members just starting their careers. They have already put their ADU to good use as occasional housing for a friend who lives

in San Diego and works at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center three times a month. "It's nice to be able to give that kind of flexibility to a friend," Panaligan says.

It has also influenced their desire to stay put. "The ADU extends our lifetime here," says Huff. "It would be hard to let go of this place. We've built a lot of friends in the neighborhood, so we decided to trick out the house as much as we could."