

Modular apartments give renters a new, greener option in Seattle 🏠

04:32 PM PST on Tuesday, November 6, 2007

http://www.king5.com/localnews/stories/NW_110607WAB_modular_apartments_TP.1e5627ae4.html

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Unico CEO Dale Sperling takes us on a tour of two of the apartment prototypes.

SEATTLE - A smaller, modern, greener way of living may be coming to Seattle neighborhoods. A local real estate and investment company is introducing compact, stackable, futuristic apartments aimed at people who want to live in Seattle but want something different than the traditional wood frame apartments.

Dale Sperling, CEO of Unico Properties which is introducing these modular apartments to the Pacific Northwest, compares it to the iPod or iPhone - everything you need in a very compact space that can be built in an urban community.

Sperling says these apartments, which are built in a factory as opposed to on-site, are more geared towards people who would rather rent than own, be energy efficient, and want to live in a higher density area and closer to work to cut down their commute time.

"Any place where urban professionals want to live, where they can have ready access to the neighborhoods, ready access to downtown, ready access to transportation solutions, entertainment, restaurants, you name it," said Sperling.

Your initial reaction might be that these rectangular-shaped apartments are just made-up double-wide trailers. Not so.

Among the modern amenities are a computer which controls the lights, television and audio system. There's also a way to track your energy usage if you want to budget how much electricity you use every month. Appliances are modern and designed for low space and energy efficiency. There's also an all-in-one washer and dryer - throw the clothes in to wash and they come out dry.

One version of the apartment even comes with a deck, which is covered on two sides and separated from the main home by soundproof windows. The dwellings also have floor-to-ceiling windows.

The one drawback for a potential renter is space. These apartments utilize the lack of space amazingly well, but if you are a packrat, finding a place to put your stuff will be an issue if you don't want a detached storage area.



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One of the unique features is a control pad that controls everything from lights to TV and sound system to buzzing in people at the front door.

While this may sound like a great option for the low income housing crunch in the area, let's go back to Sperling's comparison to the iPhone - just because it's smaller doesn't mean it's going to be cheaper to live in. While it can save costs in energy consumption and commuting, the real cost-cutting comes in manufacturing, which is done in a factory and can be more precise than on-site. Whether those lower costs are passed on to consumers remains to be seen.

But will it fly? In green-happy Seattle, will people be willing to trade home ownership and space for a smaller, more environmentally friendly, computer controlled lifestyle?

Sperling thinks it can, especially for what he calls the Baby Boom echo.

"They are urban, they are tech-savvy, they are well informed, they are design conscious and they're anxious to live in close-in neighborhoods," said Sperling.

Unico has set up two prototype apartments in Downtown Seattle to find out what the public thinks. The company wants people to visit and give them feedback to see if there is a market for these European-style dwellings in the Northwest. Tours are available from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. weekdays through mid-November. To get there, go up the stairs between the Rock Bottom Café and Rainier Tower along Fifth Avenue between Union and University streets.