

▶ ONE STEP UP HOUSING

SHIPPING CONTAINERS CONVERTED INTO EXTREMELY LOW-COST TEMPORARY HOUSING FOR THE WORKING HOMELESS ON OAHU

Honolulu City Councilman Tom Berg's proposed One Step Up Housing system is comprised of shipping containers converted into a variety of homes that can be rapidly and effectively deployed to deal with homelessness and even disaster relief. Working with sponsoring landowners in five year increments, this private sector solution is part of an integrated strategy to address the virtual nonexistence of truly affordable homes to shelter the working homeless. Hawaii's existing reliance on high cost single family homes and apartment buildings has thus far precluded innovation with lower-cost housing approaches which can meet the needs of individuals and families who could afford to pay rents which are closer in cost to car payments than mortgages or typical apartment leases.

Using easily transported and rapidly deployed, standardized shipping containers as a basis for truly affordable housing is sustainable because there are hundreds, if not thousands, of such containers sitting unused at ports across Oahu. Upcycling these containers and giving them a second life as a house for someone may require some changes to City land use ordinances and regulations (building and residential codes, plus the housing code) which currently favor more traditional, expensive building approaches. At a minimum, each home is like a studio apartment, outfitted with a bathroom containing a shower, toilet, and sink. More deluxe homes can accommodate families through provision of additional bedrooms and kitchenettes. These are modular, efficient spaces which can be readied for occupancy for a fraction of the typical cost of labor and materials for a standard dwelling unit.

Villages can be organized into units of several dozen attractive container homes, much like mobile home parks, grouped into subgroups of ten to fifteen dwelling units. Units would be spaced out sufficiently in order to provide space for privacy of occupants and for expansion. Centralized modular utilities to support these groupings of homes will be located in each village. Such modules would include connections to water supply, sewer, and electricity. Garbage collection and launderette are options being considered. The sponsoring landowner would provide the land for the village, the container homes, and the support services. The entire project would be eligible for a substantial tax deduction in line with the sponsor's investment.

The City's Department of Community Services which currently administers Section 8 housing seems ideally suited to administering the One Step Up Housing system, helping to ensure that the working homeless are properly vetted and routinely monitored for the duration of their stay. Though these villages are intended to have a life of five years at a particular location, it is expected that occupants would stay for no longer than two years before being able to pay market rates in the rental housing market.

