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California gets new push for factory-built housing

Leaders see modular building as key option in shortage



The new apartment building at 825 Drake Ave. in Marin City takes shape on Thursday. The complex includes pre-built apartments. ALAN DEP — MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL

By Ben Christopher CALMATTERS

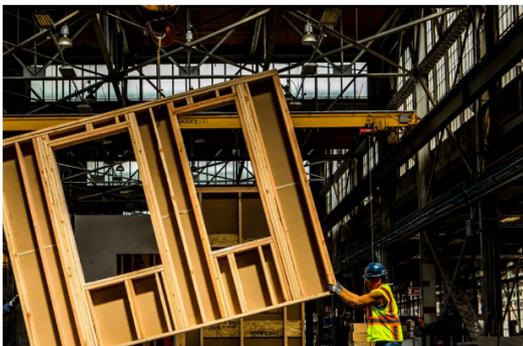
For decades engineers, architects, futurists, industrialists, investors and politicians have been pining for a better, faster and cheaper way to build homes.

Now, amid a national housing shortage, the question felt as pressing as ever: What if construction could harness the speed, efficiency, quality control and cost-savings of the assembly line? What if, rather than building homes on-site from the ground up, they were cranked out of factories, one unit after another, shipped to where they were needed and dropped into place? What if the United States could mass-produce its way out of a housing crisis?

In Kalamazoo, that vision finally seemed a reality. The HUD chief predicted that within a decade two-thirds of all housing construction across the United States "would be industrialized."

The year was 1971, the HUD secretary was George Romney (the father of Mitt Romney), and the prediction was wildly off.

Within five years, Opera-



Workers on a production line build modular homes at a factory in Vallejo. CHRISTIE HEMM KLOK — THE NEW YORK TIMES

"Over the last eight to 10 years or so the Legislature and the governor have really taken a bulldozer to a lot of the bureaucratic hurdles when it comes to housing. But one of the issues that we haven't fundamentally tackled is the cost of construction."

— ASSEMBLYMEMBER BUFFY WICKS, Oakland

tion Breakthrough, the ambitious, but ultimately costly, delay-ridden and politically unpopular federal initiative that had propped up the

Kalamazoo factory and eight others like it across the country, ran out of money. The dream of the factory-built house was dead — not for the

first time, nor the last.

By some definitions, the first prefabricated house was built, shipped and re-assembled in the 1620s. Factory-built homes made of wood and iron were a mainstay of the colonial enterprises of the 19th century. Housing and construction-worker shortages during World War II prompted a wave of unsuccessful attempts to mass-produce starter homes in the United States. The modern era is full of those predicting that the industrialization of the housing industry is just a few years away, only to be proved wrong.

This year, state legislators in California believe the turning point might actually be here. With a little state assistance, they want to make 2026 the year of the housing factory. At long last.

'MODULAR-CURIOUS'

Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, an Oakland Democrat and one of the Legislature's most influential policy makers on housing issues, is leading the charge. Since the beginning of the year, she has

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Builder appeal denied by city

San Rafael upholds housing plan terms

By Adrian Rodriguez ARODRIGUEZ@MARINIJ.COM

The San Rafael City Council shot down an appeal seeking relief from the conditions of approval attached to a planned eight-story complex downtown.

The property owner group, represented by David Wheeler, has been in contract with Monahan Pacific Corp., a San Rafael firm, to develop the 0.6-acre site at 1030 Third St. since 2023. The building address will be changed to 900 A St.

Monahan gained Planning Commission approval for the 131-apartment project in November, but protested nine of the 121 conditions of approval.

The owners objected to conditions involving fees, archaeological and cultural resources, biological surveys and an affordable housing agreement. The appellants argued some conditions violated state laws, while others were

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Trump officials rush to salvage tariff strategy

By Ana Swanson THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration has begun using a patchwork of trade laws to re-create the sweeping tariffs that the Supreme Court struck down as illegal last week.

But the approach will require a more cumbersome set of tariffs, ones that President Donald Trump will not be able to issue quickly or on a whim. The tariffs may be levied by country, trade issue or product and will probably take months to go into effect. The question now is how closely the old structure will be reproduced — or whether the new tariffs could end up creating an entirely different set of winners and losers.

The process is already creating friction inside the administration as officials try to satisfy Trump's desire for swift and punish-

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For Iran rulers, defying US demands could be lesser risk

By Erika Solomon THE NEW YORK TIMES

Facing high-stakes brinkmanship as U.S. warships and fighter jets mass off its shores, Iran has refused to concede to President Donald Trump's demands on its nuclear program and weapons — a stance that has bewildered U.S. officials.

The authoritarian clerics who rule Iran see those concessions — which, in their view, could compromise their core ideology and sovereignty — as a greater threat to their survival

than the risk of war.

A dangerous mismatch in perceptions between Iran and the United States is why efforts to negotiate a deal over Iran's nuclear and military capabilities look increasingly fragile, experts say, and a new regional conflict seems almost inevitable.

"Avoiding war is indeed a high priority, but not at any cost," said Sasan Karimi, a political scientist at the University of Tehran who served as the deputy vice president for strategy in Iran's previous govern-

ment. "At times, a political state — especially an ideological one — may weigh its place in history as heavily as, or even more heavily than, its immediate survival."

U.S. and Iranian negotiators are struggling to break an impasse over their respective red lines.

The Trump administration says it wants Iran to agree to zero nuclear enrichment to ensure it cannot build a nuclear weapon. U.S. officials have also sometimes insisted on limiting the range of Iran's ballistic missiles and ending the coun-

try's support for allied militias across the region.

For Iran, which says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only, nuclear enrichment is a right that the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, upholds and that his officials cannot abandon. And Iran sees possessing missiles that can reach as far as Israel as critical for self-defense.

U.S. and Iranian officials are set to meet in Geneva on Thursday for talks seen as a last-

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Missiles stand on display during a march in Tehran on Feb. 11 to mark the anniversary of the Islamic revolution in Iran. ARASH KHAMOOSHI — THE NEW YORK TIMES

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