

Draft of an article for AI powered fact check of the report on the topic linked below.

Wall Street Journal on ‘Disaster Ravaged Areas and the Rush to Take Modular Homes Mainstream’ – Insights on What Was and Wasn’t Reported; Modular and Manufactured Housing Hot-Takes with FEA

There are several insights that can be applied to both HUD Code manufactured housing and to modular or prefabricated housing construction. Starting with the obvious, each of them originate in a factory. But modular homes are built to state or local building codes that mirror requirements established for conventional single-family conventional ‘site built’ housing builders. That said, in the 6.2.2025 [Wall Street Journal](#) (WSJ) report by Rebecca Picciotto and Nicole Friedman that will be unpacked herein from the source at this link [here](#), their relatively brief some 876 word report including the headline, bylines, and captions begins with this seemingly provocative hook. **“The Rush to Take Modular Homes Mainstream in Disaster-Ravaged Areas.”** But that "rush" they are reporting on is by the "offsite builders" and 3d printing companies like ICON and ends with what may be the sobering reality for those who understandably promote other forms of factory building. *WSJ* quoted home builder Williams Rebuild, who they said will be constructing about 120 to 150 homes a year and is exploring using wall panels in the process said this. “I think the adoption rate is going to be substantially less than the excitement that’s going behind it.”

Part I

1) Per Picciotto and Friedman via the WSJ.

“Homeowners in a moment of crisis want to try something different,” said Jason Ballard, chief executive of ICON, a company that makes 3D-printed homes.

2) *MHPProNews* has previously reported on 3D printed homes company ICON.

[caption id="attachment_126919" align="aligncenter" width="575"]



<https://www.manufacturedhomepronews.com/media-claims-new-story-icon-builds-3d-printed-housing-for-4000-fact-check-analysis/> [/caption]

3) But despite the hype, 3D printed housing, while promising in some respects, has not begun to break out of the low numbers it has endured in the U.S. Picciotto and Friedman don't cite ICON's production numbers. According to Gemini on 6.9.2025, here is the snapshot and it cited its sources.

ICON, a 3D-printed home builder, has produced a significant number of homes in the U.S. and Mexico since 2017. While the exact annual production isn't specified, they have built **more than 170 homes** across four states and two countries [according to USA Today](#). They have also built more than 140 homes and structures in the U.S. and Mexico. One of their notable projects is a partnership with Lennar to build 100 3D-printed homes in Georgetown, Texas, with 75% of them already sold.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

- **Total Homes:** ICON has printed over 170 homes in four states and two countries.
- **Lennar Partnership:** They partnered with Lennar to build 100 3D-printed homes in Georgetown, Texas, with a significant number already sold.

- **Project Scope:** ICON's projects range from individual homes to entire residential developments, including projects for affordable housing and homeless communities.

The annotated screen capture documenting the accuracy of the above with [Google's AI](#) powered Gemini is at this link [here](#).

4) *MHProNews* notes that 170 homes in four years may be fine for ICON. But that is nothing like the excited hype and promotion that followed in the wake of the media reports on 3D printed housing, is it? Here is the math: $170/7 = 24.285714285$. So, about 2 homes a month. There are production site builders that obviously do more.

5) That *WSJ* [article](#) also said this.

Modular builder Samara is working with billionaire developer Rick Caruso's rebuilding nonprofit, Steadfast LA, to offer dozens of free modular homes to low-income residents who lost their homes in the Los Angeles fires. And the Los Angeles Mayor's office is having conversations with more than a dozen alternative builders to explore nontraditional construction options.

6) *WSJ* reporters Picciotto and Friedman also said this.

"Disasters are actually going to be the turning point" for the wider adoption of factory-built housing, said Vikas Enti, chief executive of Reframe Systems. "That's what we're betting on."

7) Under a photo of burned out cars and houses, they reported this.

Demand for housing after the Maui wildfires prompted Hawaii to become more open to companies that offer alternative-construction methods.

8) But missing in that article in the *WSJ* was mention of the scale of the problem.

Reason Magazine said on 1.22.2025 that some 18 months after the Maui wildfires, on 3 homes had been rebuilt. That was 3 out of over 2000 lost housing structures that displaced over 5,000 souls.

Clearly part of the problem is governmental. Issues such as zoning, permitting and regulatory red tape. The question of the impact of cronyism may also be lurking in the background too, which Picciotto and Friedman may hint at when they cited "billionaire developer Rick Caruso" cited above. While not specifically mentioned in their article, the insights in the document [linked here](#) said that Caruso: "his recent actions suggest a tilt

toward supporting Democrats." Caruso's past support also included "establishment" Republicans like "George W. Bush, Mitt Romney, and Kevin McCarthy."

Caruso: "has given to Democrats such as Xavier Becerra and [current L.A. Mayor] Karen Bass." The mention of Caruso by Picciotto and Friedman in the WSJ article was useful but left arguably relevant factual insights and other potentially significant implications unstated.

9) It should be noted that centi-billionaire Warren Buffett has directly invested in modular and manufactured housing. Yet neither of those distinctive aspects of the factory-built housing industry have broken out to larger scale. In the case of HUD Code manufactured housing the direct entry of Warren Buffett into the manufactured housing industry in 2002 and 2003 witnessed a drop in manufactured housing production. Based on those insights, it is NOT a given that billionaire Caruso means that modular or other forms of prefab housing will break out. There are years of clear evidence from Buffett and Berkshire Hathaway (BRK) that 'support' or investing may not yield the outcome that some might superficially believe.

[caption id="attachment_173974" align="aligncenter" width="600"]



Warren Buffet and a prototype of a MiTek and Danny Forster & Architecture building. (MiTek, Getty)

<https://www.manufacturedhomepronews.com/wall-street-journal-media-reveal-warren-buffetts-modular-building-move-modular-not-manufactured-housing-berkshire-mitek-danny-forster-dfa-plan-ohio-mha-backstory-deploy-r/> [/caption]

Modular Home Builders Association (MHBA) Executive Director Tom Hardiman told *MHProNews* on 3.26.2025 this about the total national production of modular single-family housing.

That's a safe estimate (under 20,000). There are other "panelized" homes built but even combining modular + panelized its still around 25,000 total annually.

[caption id="attachment_184964" align="aligncenter" width="600"]



<https://www.manufacturedhomepronews.com/warren-buffetts-pledge-to-kevin-clayton-you-can-access-plenty-of-capital-for-projects-quotes-facts-video-transcript-and-implications-for-manufactured-housing/> [caption][caption id="attachment_203966" align="aligncenter" width="600"]



<https://www.manufacturedhomepronews.com/masthead/loper-brights-light-on-fhfa-fannie-mae-freddie-mac-duty-to-serve-manufactured-housing-and-a-pimple-on-an-elephants-ass-eye-opening-warren-buffett-dts-for-manufactured-homes-wit/> [/caption]

10) The question isn't if modular or prefabricated construction could benefit such areas. The obvious answer is that they can.

But when local officials, perhaps for reasons that are not always clearly disclosed, fail to make factory-building a reasonable option, the advantages in terms of construction time, less waste, or lower cost can be limited or lost.

[caption id="attachment_215518" align="aligncenter" width="617"]

Google search results for "how many housing units were lost due to the Maui wildfires in Hawaii?". The AI Overview states that the Maui wildfires, particularly those that devastated Lahaina, resulted in the loss of over 2,200 structures, including rental homes. Roughly 2,000 homes in Lahaina were lost, representing 3% of Maui's entire residential housing stock. This equates to over 5% of the island's total housing stock, according to Acura of Maui. A report from the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization estimates that 5,000 people were displaced by the disaster, which also resulted in the island's highest rate of homelessness in the nation.

Clearly part of the problem is governmental. Issues such as zoning, permitting and regulatory red tape. The question isn't if modular or prefabricated construction could benefit such areas. The obvious answer is that it can. But when local officials, perhaps for reasons that are not always clearly disclosed, fail to make factory-building a reasonable option, the advantages in terms of construction time, less waste, or lower cost can be limited or lost.

News results include:

- After the Maui wildfires: The road ahead. - UHERO Hawaii. Aug 31, 2023 — * The economy. The inferno that ravaged Lahaina wrought tremendous...
- Only 3 homes rebuilt 18 months after Maui wildfires. Jan 22, 2025 — Over 2,000 properties with residential structures were either destroyed or...
- Hawai'i's homeless rate soars to worst in nation after Lahaina ... May 14, 2025 — The deadly Maui wildfire disaster displaced 5,000 people and has now...

Note: depending on your browser or device, many images in this report and others on MHPProNews can be clicked to expand. Click the image and follow the prompts. For example, in some browsers/devices you click the image and select 'open in a new window.' After clicking that selection you click the image in the open window to expand the image to a larger size. To return to this page, use your back key, escape or follow the prompts.

[/caption]

11) The WSJ cited the Los Angeles area wildfires but again failed to mention the scope of the problem. Per CalMatters.org.

"Paradise lost about 15,000 homes in the fire. So far, only about **2,900 single-family homes and 550 multi-family units** have been rebuilt, according to Mayor Steve Crowder. The loss had a large ripple effect."

12) To be clear, though Hawaii and California are clearly 'deep blue' Democratic states, that doesn't automatically mean that if something similar happened in a 'red' or swing state that the solution would come more swiftly. Post disaster recovery simply tends to be slow, *despite* the potential of factory-built housing more broadly, or manufactured housing more specifically being capable of rapidly ramping up production to meet a given need.

13) That said, CA Gov Gavin Newsom (D) in an appearance with Bill Maher in later March 2025 pointed to the problem of "localism" as a barrier for more housing construction. Newsome said 'Democrats "own" the lack of housing production.' The specifics and related issues are found in the report linked below.

[caption id="attachment_212606" align="aligncenter" width="600"]



<https://www.manufacturedhomepronews.com/were-trying-to-address-dominating-issue-of-localism-gov-gavin-newsom-ca-d-said-dems-own-lack-of-housing-production-newsom-v-hud-sec-turner-plu/>[/caption]

14) To rumored Democratic presidential hopeful Newsom's point, even in "red" states, often larger cities tend to be Democratic. So, perhaps in that sense Democrats "own" the lack of housing production. Newsome is hardly the only person from the political left who have pointed out the problems that Democrats have had in the 21st century with the chronic lack of affordable housing. Two examples of others from the left ripping on Democrats as part of the problem are provided below.

LEFTIST MICHAEL WEINSTEIN

'TENS OF BILLIONS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX WASTED'

'ON HOUSING, TRICKLE DOWN DEMOCRATS HAVE FAILED AMERICANS IN NEED'

'TENS OF BILLIONS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX WASTED'

'ON HOUSING, TRICKLE DOWN DEMOCRATS HAVE FAILED AMERICANS IN NEED'

- Facts w/Analysis; plus MHMarkets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNDgcjVGHIw>

"It's easy to blame the other side. And for many Democrats, it's obvious that Republicans are thwarting progress toward a more equal society. But what happens when Republicans aren't standing in the way? In many states — including California, New York and Illinois — Democrats control all the levers of power. They run the government. They write the laws. And as we explore in the video above, they often aren't living up to their values. In key respects, many blue states are actually doing worse than red states. It is in the blue states where affordable housing is often hardest to find, there are some of the most acute disparities in education funding and economic inequality is increasing most quickly. Instead of asking, "What's the matter with Kansas?" Democrats need to spend more time pondering, "What's the matter with California?"

That said, as was noted above, [HUD researchers Pamela Blumenthal and Regina Gray pointed out that for decades leaders in both major parties share responsibility for the lack of affordable housing.](#)

16) With the above in mind, back to the [WSJ article](#).

That is a stark pivot from the decadeslong reputational problems plaguing the alternative-building industry.

Off-site factory home construction has historically been used for lower-budget homes, leaving many people with the preconception that it tends to be of lesser quality. That stigma has been compounded by high-profile failures.

“Large companies have come out with really big promises,” said Michelle Boyd, the chief strategy officer at Turner Labs, a housing research nonprofit affiliated with the University of California, Berkeley. “And then they go belly-up.”

In 2021, the tech construction startup Katerra [filed for bankruptcy](#) after raising nearly \$3 billion from a host of notable backers such as SoftBank Group. Katerra vowed that it could use manufactured construction to turn home-building into a 30-day, assembly-line process. But the company had yet to figure out the nuts and bolts of that mass production before committing to projects.

Some alternative builders are going to great lengths to rehabilitate their image. Hapi Homes, for example, invited Camarillo to tour the company’s Utah factory that helped close the sale.

“I had to go see if this was real or just a scam,” he said.

Still, the problems of alternative building stretch beyond a bad rap. Expanding these businesses to a national scale is difficult because of the expensive transportation costs that come with shipping entire homes from one place to another.

There is no specific mention in that WSJ article of manufactured housing.

17) There is no mention by the WSJ in that article about the research by James "Jim" Schmitz Jr. and his colleagues on 'sabotaging monopoly' tactics deployed by builders and HUD *against* factory building, specifically, HUD Code manufactured homes.

[caption id="attachment_169670" align="aligncenter" width="619"]



"Monopolies sabotage and destroy markets.

Monopolies also use their weapons to manipulate and sabotage public institutions for their own gains..."

~ James A. "Jim" Schmitz
Senior Economist and his antitrust research colleagues, cited by economist John Cochrane, Senior Fellow of the Hoover Institution at Stanford. Note: their term 'monopolies' should be understood to include 'oligopolies.'

John H. Cochrane



The Grumpy Economist



<https://www.manufacturedhomepronews.com/grumpy-economist-cochrane-sun-communities-sui-favorable-demand-drivers-with-supply-constraints-investor-data-yields-quick-case-study-in-buffett-moat/> Several of the illustrations shown in this report can be opened in many browsers to reveal a larger size. To open this picture, click the image once. When the window opens, click it again to reveal the larger size photo. [caption][caption id="attachment_169622" align="aligncenter" width="617"]



"Monopolies [oligopolies] are difficult to detect...they form power relationships of infinite complexity that are hard to untangle..." ~ "Sabotaging Monopolies" researchers.

<https://www.manufacturedhomepronews.com/sabotaging-monopolies-minneapolis-fed-researchers-charge-hud-collusion-w-builders-to-sabotage-manufactured-housing-independents-created-u-s-housing-crisis/> [/caption][caption id="attachment_208281" align="aligncenter" width="600"]



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Mass Production of Houses in Factories in the United States:
The First and Only "Experiment" Was a Tremendous Success*

Mass Production of Homes in U.S. Factories 'First and Only Experiment Was Tremendous Success' by Elena Falcettoni-James A. Schmitz Jr-Mark L. J. Wright;

PLUS

SUNDAY WEEKLY MHVILLE

HEADLINES RECAP

<https://www.manufacturedhomeprnews.com/mass-production-of-homes-in-u-s-factories-first-and-only-experiment-was-tremendous-success-by-elena-falcettoni-james-a-schmitz-jr-mark-l-j-wright-plus-sunday-weekly-mhville-head/>[/caption]

18) Perhaps the only time that the Manufactured Housing Institute (MHI) has deemed it worthy to raise the subject of Schmitz and various his colleagues online was to attack them for the [tone](#) of how he and Lee Ohanian expressed themselves in a *Washington Post* op-ed that supported a position [that MHI claims to support too](#). Per MHI's CEO Lesli Gooch.

Mr. Ohanian and Mr. Schmitz rightly acknowledged the important role manufactured housing has in addressing the country's housing supply shortage. It's a shame that their argument was so negative about the very homes they wanted to champion.

For greater context see the article linked below. See what Gemini said about MHI on this topic in the document at this link [here](#).

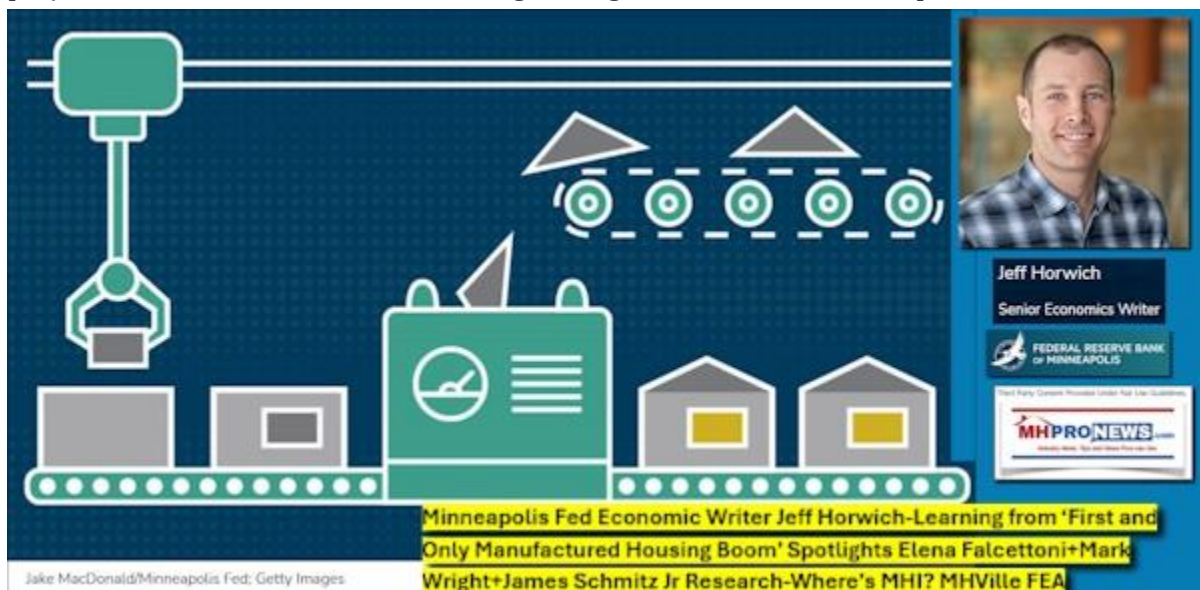
[caption id="attachment_202058" align="aligncenter" width="600"]



<https://www.manufacturedhomepronews.com/want-affordable-housing-take-the-chassis-off-manufactured-houses-and-dont-call-them-mobile-homes-prof-lee-ohanian-and-james-a-schmitz-wapo-op-ed-echoes-andrew-justus-a/>[/caption]

Note that MHI CEO Gooch's specific remarks were previously highlighted in the report linked here and below.

[caption id="attachment_212150" align="aligncenter" width="600"]



<https://www.manufacturedhomeprnews.com/minneapolis-fed-economic-writer-jeff-horwich-learning-from-first-and-only-manufactured-housing-boom-spotlights-elena-falcettonimark-wrightjames-schmitz-jr-research-where/> [/caption]

19) Rather than focusing on or applauding years of efforts by James "Jim" Schmitz Jr. and his colleagues on the plight of manufactured housing at the hands of what they say are 'sabotage monopoly' tactics by conventional site builders and HUD (see article linked above) that have hobbled manufactured housing for decades, in [this post on their website](#) MHI CEO Lesli Gooch focused instead of the "tone" of their argument in favor of the removable chassis.

Instead of teaming up with MHARR to get the "enhanced preemption" provision of the Manufactured Housing Improvement Act or the Duty to Serve (DTS) provision of HERA 2008 federal laws fully and robustly enforced to benefit manufactured home industry growth, they are teaming up with NAHB and conventional builders who are competitors of manufactured housing. See Gooch's specific remarks with analysis in brief at this [link here](#).

Instead of deploying a full court press to get *existing* federal laws enforced, MHI is pursuing *new* legislation that MHARR said has risks as they are currently worded. See more in the recent AI fact-checked and human expertise hybrid report at this [link here](#).

20) In fairness, one could move toward a close in this article by noting that writers for any publication that only opt for about 900 words of content can only say so much. That said, the article by Picciotto and Friedman don't mention some important topics. James Schmitz and his colleagues have been writing and publishing on this topic since at least 2018. Why no coverage by the WSJ on the years of research by Minneapolis Federal Reserve economics researcher James Schmitz and his colleagues work exposing apparent antitrust concerns impacting the lack of affordable manufactured housing? See the [Gemini fact check that reflects that linked here](#).

21) That said, one more point raised by Picciotto and Friedman merits emphasis. They said this.

In 2021, the tech construction startup Kattera [filed for bankruptcy](#) after raising nearly \$3 billion from a host of notable backers such as SoftBank Group. Kattera vowed that it could use manufactured construction to turn home-building into a 30-day, assembly-line process. But the company had yet to figure out the nuts and bolts of that mass production before committing to projects.

MHProNews has for years reported on factory-built housing alternatives deployed that were meant to compete with conventional construction and manufactured housing. The report linked below, citing sources as shown, said that nearly \$2 billion dollars had been raised by such alternative factory-built housing options.

[caption id="attachment_195145" align="aligncenter" width="600"]



<https://www.manufacturedhomepronews.com/nearly-2-billion-for-startups-butcrunchbase-ai-why-factory-building-newbies-struggle-during-affordable-housing-crisis-good-bad-or-meh-for-manufactured-housing-plus-mhville/> [/caption]

Rebecca Picciotto and Nicole Friedman for the Wall Steet Journal on 6.2.2025 reported that part of the problem was getting the concept of factory-built housing to achieve its potential by actual performance and successfully scaling the factory home building process. Those investment dollars, had they been deployed into HUD Code manufactured housing which at least on paper enjoys "[enhanced preemption](#)" could have produced numerous factories, retail outlets and potentially hundreds of thousands of new HUD Code homes.

Google

How much money did Katerra raise before filing for bankruptcy?

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AI Overview

Katerra raised **over \$2 billion** from investors before filing for bankruptcy in June 2021. This included significant funding from SoftBank, [according to Reuters](#). Other investors included Soros Fund Management, the Canadian Pension Plan Investment Board, and Khosla Ventures.

Show more

It had raised around \$2 billion from investors — mostly SoftBank — before filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and announcing it would shut down earlier this month amid investigations into its accounting practices and reports that it burned through cash and missed its financial goals.

Jun 15, 2021

Crunchbase News
<https://news.crunchbase.com/venture/katerra-construc...>

What Katerra's Collapse Means For Construction Tech Investment

Jun 15, 2021

Crunchbase News

What does Katerra's demise mean for the contech and ...

Oct 13, 2021 — What followed was a meteoric fall by one of the most promising construction...

Construction Dive

The Wall Street Journal puts this figure as to how much Katerra raised before filing for bankruptcy at around \$3 billion dollars. These sources put it at around \$2 billion dollars. Whatever the specific dollar amount might be, this is significant for manufactured housing in several ways.

Rebecca Picciotto and Nicole Friedman for the Wall Street Journal on 6.2.2025 reported that part of the problem was getting the concept of factory built housing to achieve its potential by actual performance and successfully scaling the factory home building process. Those investment dollars, had they been deployed into HUD Code manufactured housing which at least on paper enjoys "enhanced preemption" could have produced numerous factories, retail outlets and potentially hundreds of thousands of new HUD Code homes.

That has numerous implications for publicly traded HUD Code producers and others. Clearly, the money is there for investing into affordable housing solutions. But as clearly, those investment dollars have been properly attracted into the manufactured housing space. That merits a separate report, but for now, consider the items linked [here](#), above and below.

[caption id="attachment_215193" align="aligncenter" width="600"]



<https://www.manufacturedhomepronews.com/grok-ai-insights-on-cavco-industries-cvco-champion-homes-sky-and-stock-volatility-investor-concerns-raised-by-mhpronews-legal-risk-reporting-plus-sunday-weekly-mhville-headlines-recap/>[/caption]

22) Per the new report [linked here](#), MHI said this.

"FEMA had no home shipments in April. FY2025 total [of FEMA orders for new HUD Code manufactured homes] was 169 homes (excluding adjustments)."

That too might have been useful insights for the WSJ article. Chasing emergency housing orders may be understandable and perhaps even laudable in several ways. However, the 21st century history of how [FEMA](#) orders have played out in practice for manufactured housing is often not a pretty picture.

Per the WSJ.

"SoLa CEO Martin Muoto said the acute housing shortage exacerbated by the wildfires could boost support [for factory-built modular housing]."

"Never let a crisis go to waste," he said."

23)

