



Mass timber superstructure under construction at Heartwood. Courtesy photo by atelierjones, llc.

Mass Timber Housing Realized Through Extraordinary Community-Centered Collaboration

Like many communities, Seattle is experiencing an affordable housing crisis, pricing out many working people. However, through the exceptional teamwork of community organizations, building industry partners, and a \$250,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service’s Wood Innovations Program, the city’s Capitol Hill neighborhood will soon welcome the 67,500 square-foot Heartwood Building.

The eight-story structure is the first Type IV-C multifamily mass timber housing project in Seattle. Compared to steel and concrete, integrating mass timber lowers construction costs, speeds construction, and enables design flexibility.

Heartwood provides significantly more units than would be possible with traditional construction methods. Its mass timber elements sequester carbon dioxide and markets for wood products support forest management, providing affordable housing that is also environmentally beneficial.

When completed, Heartwood will provide 126 apartments alongside retail space and other amenities. The project owner, Community Roots Housing, is a nonprofit dedicated to developing and managing affordable housing for more than 2,000 residents in 45 apartment buildings across the city.

From Inception to Reality

According to Susan Jones, founder and lead architect at atelierjones llc, the Forest Service grant was originally awarded for another project. “At the eleventh hour, that project’s developer dropped out, leaving us with no site and no development partner.”



Cross-disciplinary, experienced team collaboration—from the inception of a project to its completion—was essential for Heartwood’s success. Courtesy photo by atelierjones, llc.

Undeterred, Jones captured the support of A-P Hurd, founder and president of SkipStone Development and long-time collaborator with Community Roots Housing. “The Forest Service also recognized our plight and quickly agreed to modify the grant. In 2019, Heartwood was born,” she says.

Jones says that the project team fast-tracked cost estimates, complex design schedules, and entitlement timetables. To augment support from the Forest Service, Community Roots Housing, atelierjones llc, and SkipStone Development, Jones recruited Swinerton Builders, DCI Engineers, TimberLab, Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Greenbush Group, and WoodWorks. “This incredible team, all of whom have experience with mass timber structures, was willing to work within the parameters of the grant and dedicate their design time.”

Through her earlier work with the International Code Council, Jones was instrumental in adoption of new building codes that allow for the construction of mass timber structures like Heartwood. “Because we were working within the existing code structure, we were able to quickly obtain the city’s approval of our drawings and a building permit.”

Crafting a Playbook for Others

Jones notes that the exceptional teamwork of the Heartwood partners is an example for creating beautiful, affordable, cost-effective, and ecologically responsible housing. In fact, the lessons learned through the project led to a second grant from the Forest Service, which Jones is using to craft a playbook for other cities, sites, and programs, based on the Heartwood model.

Beyond engagement and collaboration, Jones says that a key to duplicating the success of Heartwood is that design and construction may not require special exceptions for constructing mass timber housing. “Our permitting package conformed to codes and qualified for construction without requiring discretionary approval.”

Jones adds, “Heartwood serves as a fabulous and tested model for replication in cities throughout the country, helping them to meet the critical need and demand for affordable housing by designing and building with mass timber.”

More Information

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FAST FACTS

Heartwood, the first Type IV-C multifamily mass timber affordable workforce housing project in Seattle, was:

- Jumpstarted by a \$250,000 grant from the USDA Forest Service’s Wood Innovations Program.
- Serves as a model for community-centered collaboration.
- The basis for a second Forest Service grant for crafting a playbook for other cities, sites, and programs.
- Was featured in a 2022 National Forest Products week video, available at [Mass Timber Housing - YouTube](#)



The first Type IV-C building of its kind, Seattle’s Heartwood tops out at eight stories. Courtesy photo by atelierjones, llc.