

Teacherages in the Arizona White Mountains of Navajo County

Introduction: In 2022, the Blue Ridge Unified School District (BRUSD) and the Show Low Unified School District (SLUSD) in the White Mountains embarked on collaborative ventures with Vitalyst Health Foundation and Sitgreaves Community Development Corporation, alongside their respective town and city authorities. Their shared objective was to establish proof-of-concept projects for teacher housing, "Teacherages." Within this partnership, BRUSD has identified a parcel of district-owned land covering nearly an acre and has secured Vivablox as a developer to provide container homes for affordable teacher housing. The comprehensive development plan and budget for this endeavor have been incorporated into this funding proposal. Conversely, SLUSD has pinpointed a two-acre area on school district property, although specific plans for its development are still in progress.

The impetus for enhancing housing options for both incoming and current district staff is to establish a robust foundation for sustainable housing solutions. Through the implementation of temporary and supportive housing initiatives, which seamlessly integrate various programs and pathways to secure long-term accommodations, rural school administrations throughout Navajo and Apache County can significantly bolster their capacity to attract and retain proficient educators and support staff. This multifaceted strategy holds the potential to not only create an environment that prioritizes the well-being of rural teachers and staff but also fosters a more wholesome and fulfilling lifestyle for them and their families.

Narrative: The teaching profession is witness to a significant shortage of qualified educators, compounded by a decline in new teachers entering the field. The pandemic has further exacerbated this trend, leading to strained relationships with parents and students, reduced autonomy in classrooms, and heavy workloads, ultimately affecting job satisfaction.

In economically challenged and high-poverty rural areas like the White Mountains in Navajo County, the impact of teacher shortages is particularly pronounced, with escalating youth issues such as substance use and suicide straining local school resources. A recent local survey highlights the seriousness of the problem: more than seven teachers had to say no to job offers because they couldn't find suitable housing. The situation becomes stark when you consider that one teacher is living in their car while another is in an RV parked at another teacher's driveway. On top of that, a lot of educators have had to travel 30 to 50 miles every day just to teach. Making things tougher, low pay and rising fuel and grocery prices have pushed families to make hard decisions, like giving up basic needs to cover housing and utility bills.

In response to these compounded challenges, innovative solutions like "teacherages" emerge as a potential remedy. Teacherages proposes housing units for educators, located on school-owned land, have the potential to bypass zoning restrictions in rural areas. This approach offers a promising avenue to tackle the housing difficulties experienced by teachers and support staff throughout all our rural communities within the Arizona Balance of State Continuum of Care.

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Prefabricated housing solutions represent the potential for further innovation within the teacherage concept. At a time of universally higher construction costs, the remote and rural nature of the White Mountains means that there are even more acute issues with construction availability and costs in this area. Materials have to travel longer and can cost more, and the labor pool is small and can vary significantly on a seasonal basis. All of these lead to more uncertainty and often more cost when it comes to developing housing.

Prefabricated housing insulates the project from those risk factors and provides a much greater degree of certainty on the cost of the units. By purchasing units that are self-contained and ready to be installed, the “vertical” construction costs are known ahead of time. While there are still unknowns on the “horizontal” construction, including site work, utilities, landscaping, etc., as with any project, overall, this project will have much less variability in cost due to the use of prefabricated units with a fixed price that is agreed upon at the start of the development.

Further, by using shipping containers, this project showcases the different technologies that can be brought to bear in addressing Arizona’s housing crisis, which is a plank of Governor Hobbs’s housing plan. It also provides a relevant use case example for groups considering purchasing some of the roughly 2,000 border wall containers that the Arizona Department of Administration is working to sell.

Our hope is not only to solve our community’s immediate need for more qualified educators by providing them with quality, affordable housing, but to become a model for other rural school districts in our area and around the state. Moreover, the school district's property we have designated for this initiative is shovel-ready for the implementation of a child development center. By potentially incorporating eight housing units on this site and establishing a childcare center, our project could pioneer an inventive approach to bolstering accessible housing options and top-notch childcare facilities in collaboration with our public school districts. This endeavor would not only provide effective resolutions for our district's workforce but also have a positive impact on the wider community it serves.

Teacherages in AZ White Mountains Budget

Property Purchase	\$0
Utility Tap and Development Fees	\$85,000
Professional Services - Testing and Engineering	\$45,000
Construction	\$390,000
Factory Built Homes	\$476,000
Subtotal	\$996,000
Contingency (10%)	\$99,600
Total	\$1,095,600
Total Units	8
Development Cost Per Unit	\$136,950

We have reviewed the open parcel of district-owned land and have put together a budget to purchase and develop the aforementioned prefabricated housing. The total budget for building 8 of these units is \$1,095,000, or \$136,950/unit. A breakdown of the budget can be seen below.

This budget has been developed based on the conceptual design on the following page, with the overall goal of providing available housing for teachers and other BRUSD staff.

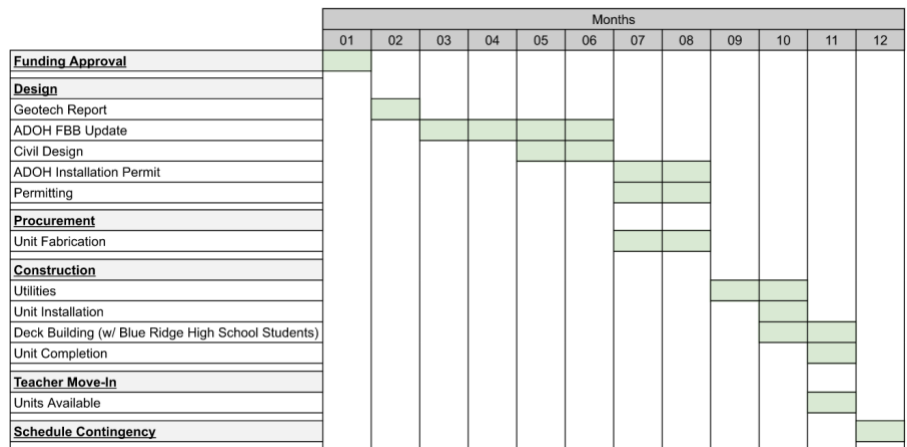
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Vivablox has a unit design approved through the Arizona Department of Housing (ADOH) as a Factory Built Building (FBB). However, given the different design conditions of the parcel, Vivablox would revise the design for local site conditions and submit a new set of plans for this particular parcel. This process and the permitting process through ADOH have been accounted for in the overall schedule of the project.



The school district’s ownership of the parcel and the use of residential FBBs helps to provide significant de-risking of the project schedule.

The team is exploring the possibility of partnering with Blue Ridge High School students to learn construction skills and complete certain tasks related to the project. The timeline for the project is outlined below, and the goal is to provide housing for the 2024/2025 school year.



We are submitting this proposal for the Arizona Housing Trust Fund as a project where the land is secured, and the project's design and development can proceed once funding is approved. We appreciate your consideration for the Arizona Trust Fund funding.