



Resilient by Design. Optimized for Efficiency.

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Alabama Habitat for Humanity's Resilient & Affordable Housing Convening, sponsored by Carrier and in partnership with Auburn University's Rural Studio and The Front Porch Initiative, brings together statewide partners, affiliate leaders nationwide, Habitat construction leaders, and other field expertise for a day and ½ of learning and discussion focused on resilient housing, energy efficiency, solar solutions, and innovative building practices that help create more affordable, sustainable homes, *stronger communities* and improve long-term housing affordability.

***Lunch and Next Day Extended Tour of Auburn University's Rural Studio included.**

Registration Link (Deadline 9/7/2026):

<https://alabamahabitat.org/news-events/resilient-by-design-optimized-for-efficiency.html>

Date: September 16, 2026.

Time: 8:30 AM (CT)- 5:00 PM (CT).

Place: Town Hall | 7777 AL-61, Newbern, Alabama 36765

[\(https://ruralstudio.org/project/newbern-town-hall/\)](https://ruralstudio.org/project/newbern-town-hall/)

8:30 AM – 8:45 AM

Welcome & Opening Remarks

Speakers:

Carmen Smith, Vice President- U.S. Affiliate Services, Habitat for Humanity International
Brandon Dixon, Executive Director, Alabama Habitat for Humanity

8:50: AM – 9:20 AM

Rural Studio and the Front Porch Initiative

"Rural Studio[®] is an off-campus design-build program, rooted in Hale County and part of the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture of Auburn University. Our core mission is the education of our students, coupled with research on sustainable, healthful rural living through both housing and the vital systems we foster to ensure our communities thrive. We are committed to cultivating students who are both local architects and citizens of the world." © <https://ruralstudio.org/about/>

Speakers: Rural Studio's Faculty & Staff



9:25 AM – 10:20 AM

Motive and Method-Climate Resilient Construction as Affordability

Climate resilient construction isn't an add-on or a luxury; it's central to long-term housing affordability and equity. This session details the why and the how of creating energy efficient, hazard resilient, healthy homes. We will also discuss how construction *program* resilience and sustainability is as important as any material or method used to build or repair a home. Come prepared with your examples, recommendations, questions, and big ideas for building homes - and construction programs - that are as resilient in 30 years as they are today.

Speaker: Molly Berg, Sustainable Building Director, HFH of Minnesota

10:25 AM – 11:20 AM

Resilience Starts at Home: Weatherization, Energy Use, & the Power of Partnership

Home resilience begins with understanding how a house uses energy and where energy is being lost. This session will explore how weatherization, practical customer tools, and community-based education can help families reduce wasted energy, improve comfort, and better manage monthly bills. It will also highlight Alabama Power's work with the Alabama Resiliency Fund, ADEN, and trusted local partners in the Black Belt, and how that partnership model can inform broader statewide collaboration.

Moderator: Anita Archie, Area Manager & Assistant to Senior VP, Alabama Power

Panel Speakers:

- Emefa Butler, Executive Director C.H.O.I.C.E. <https://ruralstudio.org/project/c-h-o-i-c-e-house/>
 - Candyce Monroe, Head of Learning Programs, Ed Farm <https://www.edfarm.org/>
 - Chase Burnham, Strategic Implementation, Alabama Resiliency Fund <https://strongeral.org/>
 - Chad Garretson, Program Management & Support, Alabama Power
<https://www.alabamapower.com/company/community-projects-and-programs/education.html>
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11:25 AM-12:20 PM

Enhancing Housing Affordability through Solar Energy, the HFH Solar Collaborative

Access to affordable housing extends beyond the cost of a mortgage—it includes the ongoing cost of utilities. This presentation explores how the Habitat for Humanity Solar Collaborative is helping reduce energy burdens for low-income homeowners through the integration of solar energy solutions. Attendees will learn about the collaborative's approach to expanding solar access, overcoming policy and financial barriers, leveraging partnerships, and creating long-term savings for Habitat families. The session will highlight successful projects, lessons learned, and opportunities for affiliates and community partners to advance housing affordability, energy resilience, and sustainability through solar energy.

Speaker: Jeff Heie, Director of Habitat for Humanity Solar Collaborative; Founder and Director of GiveSolar <https://www.give.solar/>

12:25 PM – 2:25 PM

Networking Lunch & Guided Campus and Rural Studio Projects Tour

**Hosted by Auburn University's Rural
Place: White-Morrisette House |
of Auburn Rural Studio, 8448 AL-61,
Newbern, AL**



**©Rural Studio
Headquarters**

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/NyMm7eQmQt9VCLZL8>

Attendees will enjoy a delicious, healthy lunch prepared by Rural Studio's chef. The experience will continue with a guided tour of the campus and projects currently underway.

2:25 PM – 2:35 PM

Afternoon Reconvening

Place: Town Hall | Newbern, Alabama 36765

2:40 PM – 3:35 PM

FORTIFIED Standards: Beyond Code Construction Benefits

Attendees will gain familiarity with general principles of building codes, resilient construction, and the levels of FORTIFIED designations (Roof, Silver, Gold.) Attendees will also learn how a FORTIFIED designation delivers lasting value, including insurance premium discounts and lower repair costs after severe weather. The course shows that building beyond code is an affordable investment in stronger, more sustainable, more resilient homes.

Speaker: Candace Wheat, Technical Outreach Specialist, Smart Home America

[\(https://www.smarthomeamerica.org/\)](https://www.smarthomeamerica.org/)



3:40 PM – 4:40 PM

Fireside Chat

Common Barriers & Creative Bridges: The Road to Promising Practices

Moderator: Carmen Smith, Habitat for Humanity International

Featured Participants

- Molly Berg, Habitat for Humanity Minnesota
- Jeff Heie, GiveSolar
- Candace Wheat, Smart Home America
- Alabama Power Panel Cohort
- Mackenzie Stagg, Rural Studio & The Front Porch Initiative
- Brandon Caster, Habitat for Humanity of Tuscaloosa

4:45 PM-5:00 PM

Closing Reflections

Speakers

- Carmen Smith, Habitat for Humanity International
- Brandon Dixon, Alabama Habitat for Humanity
- Rural Studio & The Front Porch Initiative

Day 2: *See itinerary next page*



(Optional) Rural Studio & The Front Porch Initiative's Extended Projects Tour on *Thursday, September 17, 2026*

Attendees wishing to **extend their visit** are invited to participate in an **optional guided exploration** of additional **Rural Studio projects** and community design initiatives throughout Alabama's Black Belt.

**RURAL
STUDIO®**

8448 AL Highway 61
Newbern, AL 36765
ruralstudio.org
ruralstudio.org/blog

Thursday, September 17, 2026

7:30 a.m. The Stable (<https://thestablecoffeepub.com/>) opens if you'd like to grab coffee, tea, or breakfast and mingle with visitors. (The Stable is located at 1120 Main Street, Greensboro, AL)

8:30 a.m. **Walking tour departs** from **The Stable**.

8:35 a.m. Visit **Horseshoe Farm Courtyard** at 1202 Main Street, Greensboro, AL.

8:55 a.m. Walk to cars and then caravan to **Lions Park** located at Hall Street in Greensboro, AL.

9:10 a.m. Meet at the front gates of **Lions Park** for walking tour of the park.

9:50 a.m. Return to cars and drive by **Greensboro Boys & Girls Club**.

10:00 a.m. Visit **Rural Studio design studio** on Whelan Street in Greensboro (*bathroom break!*).

10:30 a.m. Drive to **Perry Lakes Park** (Park entrance begins at 2200 Hwy 175, Marion, AL): (<https://perrylakes.org/>)

12:00 p.m. **Tour concludes**

***If you're interested in having lunch before you get on the road, meet us at The Shack just a few miles from Perry Lakes Park. (The Shack is located at 20555 Highway 183, Marion, AL.) <https://www.facebook.com/TheShackMarion/>*



LODGING OPTIONS NEAR NEWBERN, ALABAMA

Newbern, AL

[*Woods Loop Cottage*](#)

4 guests max, 2br, 2beds, 1ba

Closest rental to Morrisette House, only 1-min drive or 5-min walk

[*The Rusty Brick Studio*](#)

2 guests max, 1br, 1bed, 1ba

About a mile away from Morrisette House in Newbern

Cozy cabin located on a nearby farm with a wonderful family

Greensboro, AL

[*Contentment*](#)

10 guests max, 4br, 5beds, 2ba

Early 20th century, one-story home on 80 acres

12-min drive to Newbern

[*Evelyn B&B*](#)

10 guests max, 5br (all kings), 5ba

Less than a mile north of downtown Greensboro, along Hwy 69

12-min drive to Newbern

[*Country Cabin on Rosemary Road*](#)

4 guests max, 2br, 2beds, 2ba

6-min drive to Newbern

[*Camelia Cottage*](#)

4 guests max, 1br, 2beds, 1ba

Near Main Street and Magnolia Grove's 4-acre grounds next door

Marion, AL

[*CHOICE Hotels--Sleep Inn & Suites Marion*](#)

20-min drive to Newbern

Demopolis, AL

[*Best Western Plus Two Rivers Hotel & Suites*](#)

30-min drive to Newbern

Selma, AL

45 min-drive from Newbern

[*Woolworth Lofts in Selma*](#)

Several options on Airbnb. (I think 5 lofts are available.)

Suite A: 4 guests max, studio, 1bed, 1ba (linked above)

Suite C: 2 guests max, 1br, 1bed, 1ba

Suite D: 6 guess max, 2br, 2beds, 1ba Suite E: 2 guests max, Studio, 1bed, 1ba

Suite F: 2 guests max, 1br, 3beds, 1ba

Tuscaloosa, AL

Many options but it's a 60-min drive from Newbern