

TCRPC

Planning Toolkit Fact Sheet



INTRODUCTION

What is a tiny house? There is no universal definition. The desire for smaller, sometimes mobile dwelling units first planted its seeds in the early 2000s and has steadily grown more popular in the intervening years. The “Tiny House Movement”, as it is referred, is being embraced for different reasons. Some people look at tiny homes as a means of downsizing. Others look at them for their environmental benefits, or as a way to break free of the constraints and financial responsibilities that come with traditional housing. Some local governments see them as a potential part of an affordable housing strategy, or as a means to aid in social issues like homelessness or emergency housing.

Most people involved in the tiny house movement agree that a true tiny home must be 600 square feet or less. While some tiny homes have a foundation and are permanent, many are mounted on trailers or wheels and are mobile, thus requiring them to conform to very specific dimensions for navigating streets. The movement is not without its detractors. Some local governments have zoning that actively excludes tiny homes by requiring certain base floor sizes. Many dislike the “grey” area of housing that tiny homes represent, or do not feel that are appropriate for livable dwelling units.

BENEFITS

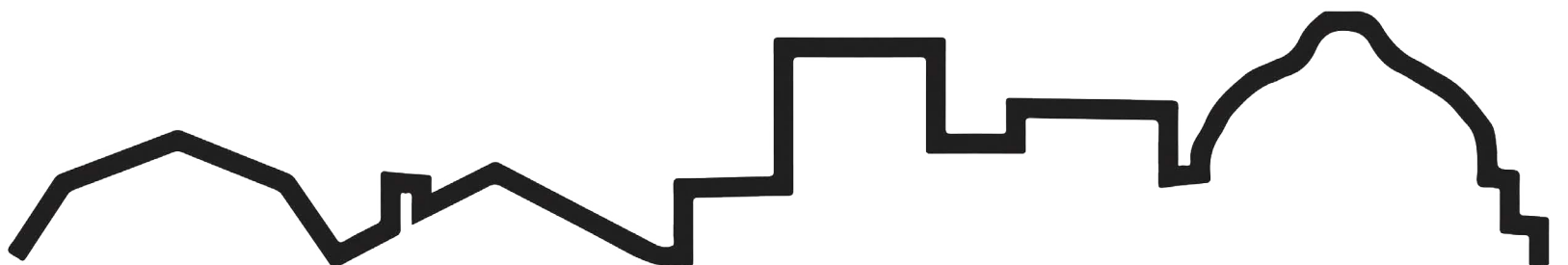
- A flexible housing option that looks beyond traditional housing
- Greater affordability than traditional housing options
- Can be a viable source of senior/family housing, or emergency and temporary housing
- Provides an alternative means of accommodating higher density housing
- Typically more energy efficient than larger homes

However, some municipalities in Pennsylvania have fully embraced the inclusion of tiny homes. Philadelphia, for example, does not require any regulations on tiny homes beyond an adherence to the **International Residential Code**. In Lancaster County, Mount Joy Township is considered a bit of an oasis for tiny homes with the “Tiny Estates” resort existing as a rental community. The blog, **Tiny House Society**, has rated Pennsylvania an 8/10 in overall adaptability to tiny house living.

As populations continue to grow, change, and age planners should be looking for different solutions to housing issues. The inclusion of tiny or micro-homes into municipal zoning as part of an overall housing strategy is one that municipalities should consider.

DRAWBACKS

- Limited capacity to accommodate larger families within the same unit
- Mobility of some units leading to impermanence - neighborhoods that move or change frequently
- Possible issues with wastewater management and other utility connections
- Varying laws and requirements can be confusing, sometimes resulting in legal challenges



PRACTICAL TIPS

- Identify areas of land that would be suitable for denser housing development
- Determine if there are any tiny or micro homes already existing - legally or illegally
- Outreach to citizens to determine interest in tiny homes
- Look at tiny homes as part of a varied solution for affordable housing, accessory housing issues
- Learn from other counties/municipalities that have successfully incorporated tiny homes in to their zoning ordinances

RESOURCES

- **Lancaster County Planning Commission Tiny Home Guidebook**
- **Chester County Planning Commission – Mini Homes**
- **Denver Borough – Zoning Ordinance**
- **Tiny Homes: Understanding and Overcoming Zoning Obstacles**
- **Tiny House Laws in the United States; States that Allow Tiny Homes**
- **American Planning Association – Zoning Practice – Tiny Homes**



RELATED TOOLKIT FACT SHEETS

- **Accessory Dwelling Units**
- **Affordable and Attainable Housing**
- **Short-Term Rentals**
- **Traditional Zoning Ordinances**

