

CITY COUNCIL REPORT  
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TO: Mayor and City Council Members

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CC: Josh Copley, City Manager; Barbara Goodrich, Deputy City Manager; Mark Landsiedel, Community Development Director

SUBJECT: Tiny Homes in Flagstaff

**What is a tiny home?**

Tiny homes are a phenomenon that have quickly become a desired dwelling unit in the era of the shared economy. Even with familiarity of the term, “tiny home” remains rather ambiguous in the world of planning. As depicted in numerous television programs, the popular definition of a “tiny house” is a small dwelling unit constructed on a rolling chassis that can be pulled behind a vehicle and parked for occupancy. For those who are looking to reduce living expenses by eliminating the costs of land and utilities, the slogan “home is where you park it” is appropriate. Under the zoning code these types of tiny homes are the equivalent of a recreational vehicle, travel trailer or camper model meant to be moved from place to place and licensed with the department of motor vehicles. These types of vehicles may not be occupied in single family neighborhoods.

However, tiny homes have also been developed in more traditional subdivisions, built on foundations with utilities and access to public services. These units are not mobile, but considered tiny due to their size and built in efficiencies. The City of Flagstaff’s building codes do not specifically address tiny homes. However, the 2018 International Residential Code has added Tiny Houses as a new type of single family building with relaxed standards. Tiny Houses are defined as “A dwelling that is 400 square feet or less in floor area excluding lofts”. Although required to be constructed on a foundation, the new standards allow compact stairs including handrails and headroom, reduced ceiling heights in lofts and emergency escape opening requirements in lofts. The City’s adopted Uniform Housing Code specifies efficiency dwelling units shall have a living room, separate bathroom and closet. The average combined total for all three components comes to around 300 square

feet. Small footprint, permanent residential structures are a growing national trend. The below link has a video detailing a tiny home project in Detroit.

<https://detroit.curbed.com/2017/8/31/16235258/tiny-homes-detroit-video-tour>

### **Are tiny homes allowed in Flagstaff?**

Tiny homes are not identified as a use within the zoning code. However, the housing code allows an efficiency dwelling unit as small as approximately 300 square feet. The unit includes a minimum sized common area, bathroom facilities and separate sink for cooking. Compliance with these standards is reviewed at the time of a building permit. Therefore, a “tiny” single family home could be constructed in zones that allow single family homes. This type of home would be required to be built on a foundation and tap into sewer and water services as available.

If a tiny dwelling unit is mobile, mounted on a trailer, the zoning code treats it as a camper or travel trailer. The zoning code does not allow occupancy of campers or trailers in single family districts. You can park and store an RV, trailer or camper on a single family lot, but the vehicle must be stored behind the front setback (not in the front yard), and located in the side or rear yard. The City of Flagstaff only allows occupancy of these types of vehicles within an approved mobile home park, RV park or campground, and in limited situations as a temporary use.

### **Accessory Dwelling Units**

In an effort to create more affordable housing options, the City established Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) in 2011 as a permitted use on lots with an existing single family home. The ADU is not subject to the density or lot size requirements, in other words it is allowed as an additional dwelling unit in compliance with zoning code 10-40.60.030. The code establishes the minimum standards for an ADU and includes a minimum size of 300 square feet to a maximum of 600 square feet, one of the units must be occupied by the property owner or both units leased to the same party, the unit must be hooked up to sanitary sewer and water and may not be mobile (RV or trailers may not be occupied as an ADU).

Property owners are required to execute and record a restrictive covenant which acknowledges the limitations on the use of the ADU. Code Compliance staff has responded to complaints that owners were not in compliance with

the restrictive covenant, specifically that both units were being leased to separate tenants. This is an inherent challenge to any rule regarding occupancy.

### **Lot Size and Density**

The Flagstaff zoning code allows for compact subdivisions using the Planned Residential Design standards. These standards allow for a single family lot as small as 2500 square feet (50' x 50' or 25' x 100') and an attached single-family lot (townhome) as small as 1440 square feet (30' x 48'). One challenge with smaller homes on small lots is finding the correct ratio of land to structure so that financing can be obtained. Staff encourages developers to utilize incentives to create smaller, more affordable housing types in Flagstaff. The zoning code has tools to allow a small lot, tiny home subdivision.

### **Conclusion**

While tiny homes are not defined in the zoning code, nothing prohibits them within the appropriate zone district. Mobile tiny homes constructed on trailers are permitted in the manufactured housing zone and in commercial parks and campgrounds. Accessory dwelling units are permitted in single family districts and the residential planned development option can be used to create a tiny home subdivision. Mobile tiny homes do not have the expense of foundations and permanent utilities, but may not be deemed compatible with established single family neighborhoods. New standards can be considered to further reduce the cost of tiny homes such as allowing alternative utility services, building code and zoning requirements.