



# Tiny Houses

## What are Tiny Houses?

Tiny houses have the exterior appearance of a traditional home but are modular and significantly smaller in size. Tiny homes offer people the opportunity of a minimalistic, eco-friendly, and affordable living arrangement.

The International Building Code defines tiny houses as dwellings that are 400 square feet or less in floor area excluding lofts. Tiny homes tend to be manufactured off-site, easily transported, and feature higher-quality interior and exterior building materials than a traditional mobile home. Tiny homes may or may not feature permanently attached chassis or wheels.

Proponents of tiny homes celebrate that tiny homes require less land, building material, and energy for heating and air conditioning. Some advocates see the creation of tiny home villages as a solution to addressing homelessness and increasing a community's subsidized housing stock.

## State Regulations:

In 2019, the Massachusetts Legislature adopted appendix Q of the International Building Code, legitimizing the construction and utilization of tiny houses. The appendix, however, only addresses tiny homes on foundations.

The building code requires that habitable space and hallways in tiny houses shall have a ceiling height of not less than 6 feet, 8 inches. Additionally, bathrooms, toilet rooms, and kitchens shall have a ceiling height of not less than 6 feet, 4 inches.

Obstructions such as beams, girders, ducts, and lighting shall not extend below the minimum ceiling heights. Lofts may have ceiling heights less than 6 feet, 8 inches.

## Benefits of Tiny Homes:

- Low carbon footprint.
- Inexpensive material and utility cost.
- Adds to a town's affordable housing stock.
- Age-friendly option.
- Can fit on vacant lots that cannot accommodate a traditional house.
- Can be used for transitional housing.
- Easily moved.

## Disadvantages of Tiny Homes

- Potential for increased on site outdoor storage.
- Current zoning throughout the Commonwealth is not unified.
- Does not increase urban density.

## BRPC PROGRAM

Community Planning Program  
[berkshireplanning.org/programs](http://berkshireplanning.org/programs)

## Zoning Tiny Houses:



Tiny houses share a significant number of features with existing housing options leaving it to permitting authorities to determine the most suitable classification. Planners typically differentiate between a recreational vehicle, a mobile home, a modular home, or a

traditional single-family home. However, many towns are specifically writing tiny houses into their zoning laws.

A recreational vehicle is designed for camping and is often parked in designated camping locations. However, some owners intend to use the structure as a permanent home and/or want to locate it on property other than a campground. A mobile home is defined as having a chassis permanently attached to the unit. Mobile homes are intended for housing. Some owners choose to place tiny houses on foundations, aligning the characteristics with a modular home. Lastly, some options want to construct tiny houses on the site rather than in a factory.

Additionally, some tiny house owners envision the unit as an accessory dwelling unit, subordinate to an existing home property.

Communities have the option of amending their current zoning to accommodate tiny houses, crafting new regulations specifically for tiny homes, or permitting through the existing definitions. A community should consider the following questions when determining land use controls for tiny houses.

- Does the community want to allow tiny houses for long-term occupancy, and in which are tiny houses preferred?
- Do all tiny houses need foundations?
- Are there locations where tiny houses should be permitted as primary dwelling units?
- Are there locations where a tiny house would be permitted as an accessory dwelling unit?
- Does the community require minimum lot sizes for homes that restrict tiny houses?
- Would a community allow the creation of a tiny house village?
- Would a tiny house make sense on any pre-existing, non-conforming lots?

A community can write tiny houses into its tables of uses and definitions. Some communities adopted new zoning or overlay districts to allow for tiny homes in certain areas.

## Zoning Examples:

**Nantucket** adopted bylaws that: allow one tiny house per lot; specifically note that they are not recreational vehicles; may be primary residences, and require a special permit from the Planning Board if they are located on a lot with already existing structures.

**Great Barrington** added movable tiny houses to its accessory dwelling unit definition, specifically allowed as tiny homes in areas where accessory dwelling units are permitted.

Great Barrington addressed tiny homes in its zoning by defining a "movable tiny house" as "a structure intended for the separate, independent living quarters of one household for year-round residence that meets all of the following; (a) is licensed and registered with the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles; (b) meets the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) 119.5 requirements, and certified by a qualified third party inspector for ANSI compliance; (c) cannot move under its own power; (d) has not less than 150 and no more than 400 square feet of habitable living space, excluding lofts; (e) is designed and built using conventional residential building materials for windows, roofing and exterior siding."