

Debra Thompson

From: Cindi Lagoudakis <trembladakis@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, September 2, 2022 12:05 AM
To: Assembly
Subject: Tiny house proposal for upcoming Assembly discussion

Re: Tiny house proposal

I am writing to you about the proposal to build tiny houses in Petersburg as an answer to housing needs here. I applaud the Assembly for looking into this issue and for trying to work toward solutions. At the same time, I feel strongly that "tiny houses"--while a trendy idea--are not the answer to a community need for additional and affordable housing. By "tiny house", I am using the generally accepted size of 500 sq. ft. or less. To be clear, I previously had thought tiny homes were a clever solution to rising housing costs. Over time, that thinking has changed.

Many of these structures are attractive for short-term occupation, or for a single individual. For young families, couples or roommates, things get more complicated. Storage, including that for all the clothing needed in our variable-weather locale, is extremely limited. Places to stash gear and garbage are practically non-existent in a dwelling of this size. Entertaining in such a small space is also impractical to impossible, as is having any private space. And as [realtor.com](https://www.realtor.com) notes, you will necessarily need to be ok with being literal inches away from someone in the bathroom while you are in the kitchen, or vice versa.

A serious challenge of this type of dwelling in our northern climate is limited indoor space when rain, wind, snow and freezing temperatures make outdoor living and entertaining difficult, if not impossible. Most tiny houses are depicted in sunny photos, often with lovely decks, outdoor furniture and amenities that make it clear much of the actual living does not occur within the dwelling. In considering overall square footage, it must be remembered that most of the limited space will be occupied by some sort of stove and refrigeration, food, dish and utensil storage space, a kitchen sink as well as a bathroom sink, water heating unit, shower and toilet, towels and toilet paper, a bed, and at least some storage for the aforementioned clothing, as well as a place to sit and to eat. Some people will do fine with this type of housing, but as a general rule it has limited application in Southeast Alaska as a full-time residence option.

I mentioned to Thomas Fine-Walsh that I had recently seen plans for a modest structure having a one-car garage below and a living space located above. Small studio-type dwellings such as this would allow for a little more living space, a spot for a vehicle and/or gear and utilities such as a washer, as well as a secure place to store refuse until it can be taken to the dump. Certainly, the last thing we need is to create more bear attractants in town!

A local entity partnering with Habitat for Humanity could help get the ball rolling, but at some point the Assembly will also need to authorize moving ahead with installation of the infrastructure necessary to have adequate additional building locations. It's important that wherever and whatever we invest our efforts in, it is a reasonably attractive situation for new residents and for any neighbors, while keeping affordability in mind. Zero lot line homes are one possible answer, as are small cottages and the previously mentioned garage/apartment combination. The airport subdivision area seems like a good option for expansion of this type.

An additional challenge to consider is financing of a dwelling. Though I have not had the opportunity to speak with local banking officials, research indicates that tiny home prices are often below the mortgage minimums banks have set as thresholds for financing. Any effort to move this type of project forward should involve banking professionals, and take their suggestions into account where possible.

Whatever is decided, before we change any housing regulations or lot size limitations, let's think carefully about the long-term appeal of any type of dwelling, its livability, and make certain we don't invest in a "one size fits all" answer. Zoning restrictions or other limitations will also be necessary to ensure that small dwellings don't get converted to short-term housing such as vacation rentals, thereby defeating the whole purpose of the proposal.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns,

Cindi Lagoudakis