

The Portland Tribune

PICTURE TINY HOUSES IN BIG NUMBERS

By Jim Redden

April 20, 2017

Portland is a hotbed for the tiny house movement, and scores of people have towed them onto residential lots here and moved in.

But they're all illegal.

"I count my blessings every day that we're allowed to stay," says one tiny house resident living in Northeast Portland, who knows one neighbor complaint could require him and his partner to pack up and leave. "We've got to be on great terms with the neighbors and the other people who live on the property."

Tiny house activists, who convened earlier this month for a national conference in Portland, say it's time to legalize them, and Portland is a logical place to do that.

The Rose City already is the national leader in promoting accessory dwelling units, or ADUs — secondary homes on people's lots, garages, attics and basements. New ADU building permits issued by the city in 2016 approached the number granted for regular single-family homes.

Advocates say if the city could embrace tiny houses on wheels, it could help relieve its housing affordability crisis — with little to no city spending.

Tiny houses could "take off" if Portland homeowners, residents and entrepreneurs knew it was legal to site them in people's yards, says Eli Spevak, a member of the Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission who has developed tiny homes, ADUs and co-housing projects.

"It benefits the homeowner (who can collect rent), and it benefits the person living there," says Eric, a tiny house resident and activist in Northeast Portland, who asked that his last name not be used so he won't get evicted.

Cheaper, smaller than ADUs

The typical ADU built in Portland at the maximum 800 square feet now costs about \$180,000, says Kol Peterson, who operates the accessorydwellings.org blog and is working on a book on ADUs.

A typical tiny house on wheels has about 120 square feet of floor space, plus the sleeping loft(s), and can cost as little as \$30,000, Peterson says. He and his wife own one of the few places where it's legal to stay in a tiny house in Portland because it's commercially zoned — Caravan, the Tiny House Hotel, on Northeast Alberta Street. The newest arrival there, a fashionable tiny house on wheels built by Colin Bardon, cost about \$50,000, Bardon said.

Ironically, banks will loan money to build a tiny house on wheels but not ADUs, because tiny houses can be repossessed if the loan isn't paid off. Portlanders building ADUs must scrounge up the cash or borrow against their home equity, if they have enough.

Though ADUs could be built smaller and more cheaply, it's hard to pay for today's construction costs by charging rents under \$1,000.

Having tiny houses available for rent "would open up a whole market in the \$300 a month to \$800 a month range for a lot of people" who have nowhere else to go, says Eric, who has built four of them.

Tiny houses also could help counter the gentrification and displacement that's rapidly reshaping the city. Tiny houses in Portland's closer-in neighborhoods could enable artists, twentysomethings, low-income folks and people of color to live closer to jobs and in neighborhoods otherwise out of their price range.

"There are people who Portland would love to have living in our city, but they can't afford it any more," Spevak says.

Portland needs tiny houses "to keep its own identity in place," says Michelle Boyle, who lives in a tiny house outside Sherwood and hosts the Tiny House Podcast. "In order to encourage diversity in your population, you have to encourage diversity in your housing stock."

Not just for hippies

Many obstacles remain before tiny houses on wheels get the same treatment as ADUs here and elsewhere, but many say it's inevitable, given spiking house and rent prices and the growing popularity of tiny houses.

"City by city, slowly but surely, they've got to understand we've got to do something," says Dan Fitzpatrick, the California chapter leader of the American Tiny House Association. It's not just hippies living in tiny houses any more, he says.

"The tiny house movement has exploded since 2014," says Boyle, who gives much of the credit to "Tiny House Nation," a cable TV series on the FYI network. Now there's a bona fide tiny house industry and seven different TV shows cover the subject, she says.

Fresno, an agricultural community in California's Central Valley not known for being hip or cutting-edge, led the way nationally by legalizing tiny homes last year. The new city ordinance treats tiny homes on wheels the same as small ADUs, allowing one on each residential lot if they're connected to city sewer and water systems and utility lines. The ordinance also spells out safety and design requirements, such as skirting to cover up the wheels.

Fitzpatrick, a former Fresno redevelopment director, knows a tiny house builder in town and urged the mayor and City Council to legalize them.

Few Fresno residents have sited tiny houses yet, he says, but other California cities, such as Ojai, are poised to follow Fresno's lead.

Building code issues

One complication is that tiny houses on wheels are treated under law like recreational vehicles — which are illegal for habitation in residential zones — and subject to less-rigorous building code standards. The size of tiny houses on wheels is limited so they can be towed on highways; as a result, they don't meet residential building code requirements for wall thickness, insulation, head room and other provisions. Many people use ladders to get to sleeping lofts in tiny homes on wheels, which don't meet fire safety regulations.

But Fitzpatrick says there's lots of movement to modernize residential building codes to adapt to the new tiny house format. "The various codes are all coming together," he says.

Late last year, Ashland tiny house activist Andrew Morrison led a successful effort to get the International Residential Code updated by adding Appendix V, specifically written for tiny houses. The new language takes effect next year, though it generally takes a few years for states and cities to adopt it, Boyle says.

Morrison and other advocates recently spoke to Oregon lawmakers about adopting the new international code language.

Models for Portland

Some local activists say Portland could legalize tiny houses by adapting Fresno's ordinance, which would require sewer, water and electrical hookups that meet code.

Peterson, the ADU expert, suggests a simpler idea of adapting Eugene's camping ordinance, which allows residents to offer space on their property to people in tents, RVs or tiny houses, as long as they don't charge rent. The rent prohibition would have to be lifted to enable people to finance new tiny houses here on a large scale.

Some tiny house owners suggest the city legalize them as "detached bedrooms," where residents share use of the main house's kitchen and bathroom.

Several activists suggest tiny house advocates be enlisted to sit down with Portland city officials and hammer out changes to city regulations to legalize the units.

Spevak and other advocates tried to do that with former Mayor Charlie Hales, and prepared a draft proposal called A Legal Path for Tiny Houses on Wheels. That suggested that sewer, water and electrical hookups be required, or that tiny homes be allowed as accessory bedrooms. Their proposal called for changes to the property maintenance code so that tiny-house living would be legal if specified safety provisions were met, relating to emergency exits, handrails, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and weatherproofing.

Hales and his aide said they'd work on the idea, Spevak says, but "it didn't happen."

Now up to Wheeler

Last August, when the city Bureau of Development Services demanded that a Northeast Portland couple vacate their tiny house in a family member's yard, Mayor-elect Ted Wheeler told KGW News he sympathized with the couple and wanted to do something about the problem.

Wheeler's general goal is that there should be more opportunity for tiny houses as a place to live legally, says Nathan Howard, a policy adviser to the mayor. "We're not yet ready on specifics," Howard says, though he's been following news of the Fresno ordinance.

Wheeler supports increasing density via infill with duplexes, triplexes, garden apartments and ADUs, says Michael Cox, the mayor's spokesman. But so far, tiny homes have been viewed more as an "alternate shelter option," Cox says. One example: Wheeler is supporting a tiny house "pod" village for homeless women in North Portland's Kenton neighborhood as a pilot project, which could be replicated.

Wheeler wants more "flexibility" to site tiny houses in neighborhoods where they are welcomed, Cox says, but notes they may not go over well in some areas.

The Bureau of Development Services is discussing ideas for permitting and inspecting tiny homes, but that relates specifically to a Blanchet House project to train people how to build 30 homes, says Matt Wickstrom, a senior city planner for the bureau.

There don't appear to be any broader efforts underway by that bureau or the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability to undertake the kind of effort needed to rewrite city codes to legalize tiny houses on wheels.

Eric, the tiny house resident and builder from Northeast Portland, says he's "disappointed that Portland is dragging its feet" on legalizing them.

"Portland is supposed to be a very progressive town," he says. "This is about as Portland as it gets."

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What is a tiny house?

There is no widely accepted definition of a tiny house. Small accessory dwelling units, for example, may be labeled tiny houses.

But the majority of tiny houses are built on travel trailers so they can be towed. Such units, known as tiny houses on wheels, aren't placed on permanent foundations, and their heights, widths and lengths are restricted for safe towing on highways.

Find out more:

- American Tiny House Association: americantinyhouseassociation.org
- Living Tiny Legally videos:
- Part one: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfLAKgJGc2g
- Part two: www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qDG8X83auU&feature=youtu.be
- Michelle Boyle's Tiny House Podcast: tinyhousepodcast.com
- Kol Peterson's ADU blog: accessorydwellings.org
- Andrew Morrison's blog: tinyhousebuild.com
- Michelle Boyle's blog: mytinyemptynest.blogspot.com/2015/11/a-letter-to-my-tiny-house.html
- Caravan, the Tiny House Hotel in Northeast Portland: tinyhousehotel.com
- Tiny Digs, another tiny house hotel in Southeast Portland: www.tinydigshotel.com
- Eugene nonprofit working on tiny house villages: www.squareonevillages.org

Willamette Week

Report on Uber Executive Shows What Portland Regulators Are Up Against

*By Rachel Monahan
April 23, 2017*

The Sunday [New York Times](#) profiles Uber chief executive Travis Kalanick, attributing the company's pattern of defying regulations and industry standards to the man who founded and leads the company.

Uber is currently under investigation in Portland for using a high-tech tool the company called Greyball to help unlicensed cars evade regulators. The company has admitted Greyball exists; it's unclear how long the company continued to use it here after Portland legalized the ride-sharing app in 2015.

But Greyball is not the only time the company has crossed a line with its use of technology, the Times reports.

Uber employees, at the direction of chief executive Travis Kalanick, also defied Apple's privacy policies for a time, tracking iPhones even after the company's app was deleted.

Unlike Portland regulators, the technology giant Apple was able to figure out how Uber was using technology to evade its rules. Apple handed Kalanick an ultimatum in 2014 to follow privacy rules or it would bar the Uber app from iPhones — a prospect that could have destroyed Uber's business.

"In a quest to build Uber into the world's dominant ride-hailing entity, Mr. Kalanick has openly disregarded many rules and norms, backing down only when caught or cornered," writes Times reporter Mike Isaac, who broke the story in March on the company's use of [Greyball](#) technology to evade Portland and other regulators. "Mr. Kalanick was also responsible for risk-taking that pushed Uber beyond the pale, sometimes to the very brink of implosion,"

The results of Portland's investigation are due out later this week.

The Portland Mercury

Californians Are About to Spend Millions On A Byproduct of Portland's Excrement

*By Dirk VanderHart
April 21, 2017*

Everyone in City Council Chambers had themselves a nice chuckle Wednesday, when an item came up about turning the emissions from Portland's collective shit into natural gas that can fuel vehicles—"poop into power" as Commissioner Nick Fish put it.

The deal is that Portland will stop burning off more than 100 million cubic feet of biogas—mostly methane because, you know, shit—that it can't use. (Hundreds of millions more cubic feet are already used to generate electricity at the city's Columbia Boulevard Wastewater Treatment Plant, or to help make shingles [at a local roofing company](#).)

Rather, the city will spend \$9 million to build a facility that can turn the waste in to renewable natural gas (RNG), which can then be sold on the market to power vehicles that otherwise might run on high-polluting diesel.

Portland will also spend about \$3 million more building a local fueling station to distribute the gas to a city fleet that currently has no vehicles that run on RNG, and to connect its methane processing facility to the gas distribution system of NW Natural.

All told, the city plans to spend about \$15.5 million on the project, which it's [been considering for years](#). But officials' estimates suggest that money could be made back fairly quickly.

"At the current market prices of RNG for the volume range, the gross revenue to BES [the Bureau of Environmental Services] would be \$3 million to \$10 million a year, and the payback would be less than 3 years," reads an "impact statement" submitted to council members. That estimate differed from a presentation BES gave Wednesday, which said the project would be paid off in between 4 and 8 years.

The gas the city plans to sell, of course, will still be burned in vehicle engines, and therefore still find its way into the atmosphere. But the city says it's making a big difference for fossil fuel emissions because those engines might otherwise be running on diesel fuel, a problematic pollutant.

According to figures presented to the Portland City Council on Wednesday, the natural gas Portland sells could eliminate 21,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions per year, and supply enough gas to run 154 garbage trucks.

"Diesel fuel is particularly a problem in North and Northeast Portland in terms of particulates," Susan Anderson, director of the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES), said at a council meeting on Wednesday.

One thing that wasn't much pointed out during the presentation? Most of those emissions reductions aren't going to benefit Portland—at least in the near term.

"We do need some more activity in the Northwest with respect to CNG [compressed natural gas] fueling," BES engineer Paul Suto told council.

Not enough companies have vehicle fleets that run on natural gas in the Portland area for the majority of the RNG to be used here. Suto says the city hopes to sell "up to 30 percent" of the gas locally, when the project is completed late next year, and hopefully work toward 100 percent in coming years.

The rest will likely be sold in California (which, like Oregon, has a renewable fuels program that make it more lucrative to sell there).

"The whole point is to have the air quality benefits locally," Suto says.

There's also the matter of Portland's vehicle fleet. The city is planning to build an RNG fueling station near the wastewater treatment plant, but currently doesn't have vehicles that run on the fuel.

How the city moves its fleet toward natural gas is unclear. Suto says some of the conversion occur as vehicles are cycled out of use, but that "there are some vehicles we've identified we'd like to do sooner than later."

Portland officials will need to decide how much revenue from RNG sales they should use to convert vehicles to run on the fuel, Suto says. And there could be trickier questions around converting vehicles that don't belong to BES. The utility bureau faces strict limitations on how it

can use ratepayer money, so officials need to figure out what, if any, revenues could be spent creating a cleaner city fleet for, say the Portland Bureau of Transportation.

"That's where it's been tricky," Suto says. "The attorneys need to get together and say what's in the code."

Daily Journal of Commerce

Volkswagen taps Portland, Seattle for big electric-vehicle charging investment

By Pete Danko

April 21, 2017

Electric vehicle infrastructure in the Northwest is about to get a big boost from Electrify America, the Volkswagen subsidiary created as part of the automaker's diesel-scandal settlement.

Portland and Seattle are among 11 metropolitan areas named as priorities for investment from Electrify America, which will pour \$300 million over the next two years into increasing adoption of zero-emissions vehicles outside California. The Golden State is getting its own, separate program.

Electrify America didn't reveal how much money would be going to specific cities, but [Jeff Allen](#), executive director of Drive Oregon, called it "a large and even transformative investment in electric mobility in this region."

Drive Oregon played an informal advisory role for Oregon and Washington in the solicitation process,

Oregon and Washington had collaborated on efforts to convince Electrify America the region could make significant EV inroads with more investment here.

Allen said it was his understanding that groundbreaking on new charging infrastructure in the region could begin as soon as this summer.

Broadly, Electrify America will put about \$250 million toward installing charging infrastructure. That will result in 2,500 new EV chargers at more than 450 individual stations, the company said. The rest of the money will be split between a public education campaign and operational expenses.

It's important to note that although Electrify America grows out of the diesel-scandal settlement, it isn't a charity from Volkswagen. The automaker is building a charging company and making investments in it, not handing out grants.

Electrify America hasn't outlined what it will cost to charge at its stations, but did say "the Electrify America network is being designed to ensure that the network is economically viable and can be operated and maintained for the long term."

The \$300 million in spending is the first tranche of Electrify America's agreed-upon investment, which will total \$1.2 billion outside California over 10 years. California will get \$800 million in EV investment through the settlement.