

May 10th, 2024
Project #191756

Katie Scott
CAO/Clerk
Town of Blind River
11 Hudson Street
Blind River, ON
P0R 1B0

Re: Tiny Homes Memorandum

Dear Ms. Scott,

The enclosed memo responds to the Town's request to investigate 'tiny homes' as a potential means of creating smaller and more affordable housing options in the Town of Blind River. Outlined below is a brief introduction to tiny homes, an analysis of how other municipalities have 'responded to' tiny homes, an overview of relevant OP policies and zoning provisions currently in place in the Town of Blind River, as well some recommendations for short-term and long-term avenues to explore that may facilitate the future development of tiny homes in Blind River.

1. BLIND RIVER CONTEXT

Presently, the Town of Blind River does not have policies in place to specifically address the development of tiny homes. However, section 5.2.4 of the Town's Official Plan states that '*innovative housing types that will facilitate affordable housing will be encouraged where consistent with the intent of the Official Plan and in accordance with good planning practice*'. When staying consistent with the Town's Official Plan and the provincial planning framework, tiny homes represent an innovative and effective way to diversify housing options in a Municipality.

The Town of Blind River's current Zoning By-Law contains minimum lot areas, gross floor areas, frontages and yard setbacks to permit single detached homes and other forms of housing/development. Considering the compact form of a tiny home, a lot would require less frontage, area, and potentially reduced yard setbacks than a traditional single-detached home. The minimum gross floor area restrictions for residential development in the Town's Zoning By-Law do not allow for any detached house with a gross floor area of less than 1,184 square feet (see *Figure 1*), which is a significant constraining factor limiting the establishment of tiny homes in the Town. Additionally, the by-law having a maximum residential density for single detached

dwelling also limits the viability of 'tiny home' subdivisions given the need for larger lot areas for smaller structures (and the infrastructure inefficiencies that come with such subdivision design).

6.2 - R1 Zone Regulations			
Maximum Lot Coverage	30%	40%	10% included in total
Minimum Gross Floor Area	110 m ² [1,184 ft. ²]	n/a	n/a
Maximum No. Dwellings per lot (excluding a Garden Suite)	1	n/a	n/a
Separation Distance between the main building and any accessory building	2 m [6.56 ft.]	2 m [6.56 ft.]	2 m [6.56 ft.]
Separation Distance between any permitted main building or accessory building and any storage container (see 4.1.10)	4 m [13.1 ft.]	4 m [13.1 ft.]	4 m [13.1 ft.]
1. Zone regulation does not apply to a park, playground or community garden.			

6.3 Additional Regulations

1. A **garden suite** shall be subject to a Temporary Use By-law under Section 39 of the *Planning Act* and shall only be **permitted** as an **accessory use** to a **single detached dwelling**.
2. All applicable provisions of **Section 4 – General Provisions** shall apply.
3. All **development** shall be serviced with **municipal sewage services** and **municipal water services**.
4. The maximum **residential density** for single detached dwellings shall be 12.8 **dwellings** per gross hectare.

Figure 1: Blind River Zoning By-Law Section 6.2 – R1 Zone Regulations

2. TINY HOMES IN ONTARIO

In Ontario, a tiny home must have the following to be considered legal per *the Ontario Building Code*.

- A square footage of over 188 square feet (or 17.47 square metres);
- A living/sleeping area;
- A bathroom with a shower or bath;
- A cooking area with running water; and
- A building permit from the municipality.

Additionally, tiny homes must be built to meet all other Ontario Building Code standards. For example, sleeping lofts are not permitted to be lower than 6'10" and cannot be accessed via a ladder (staircases only). Other standards include fire safety, insulation, etc.

Tiny homes can be considered dwelling units if they are on wheels or a foundation. However, seasonal dwellings such as cottages or campers are not considered tiny homes. Tiny homes may

also be primary or secondary dwellings (i.e. second units), which are also referred to as Additional Dwelling Units, Secondary Dwelling Units, Coach Houses, etc., depending on the municipality.

Tiny homes are generally considered a more affordable housing option than typical single detached dwellings.

3. ANALYSIS OF OTHER ONTARIO MUNICIPALITIES

A scoped review of best practices and trends related to small and tiny homes was undertaken, as outlined in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Other Municipalities Response to Tiny Homes

Municipality	What	Actions Taken
Kingston	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zoning By-Law Changes Pilot Project with Habitat for Humanity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amended zoning by-law in 2022 to include 'tiny homes' as a permitted residential building and residential use accessory to a principal residential building. Amended zoning by-law to include the following definition of tiny homes: <i>Tiny House: means a detached residential building containing one dwelling unit that is accessory to a principal residential building and that is designed to be portable and provide year-round living accommodations in accordance with the garden suite provisions of the Planning Act, but does not include recreational vehicles, travel trailers, tent trailers or motor homes.</i> The City of Kingston gifted a parcel of land to Habitat for Humanity Kingston to construct eight tiny homes that would be offered for rent on a geared-to-income model. Each home is 276 square feet.
Elliot Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership with Tiny Towns Association Zoning By-Law Changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2023 Council approved a motion to develop a proposal for a partnership with the Tiny Town Association to develop a Tiny Town of 82-units in the City of Elliot Lake. Amended zoning by-law to include the following definition of tiny home: <i>Tiny Home: a small, private and self-contained dwelling unit that meets the minimum dwelling unit size as per the Ontario Building Code. A tiny home shall be considered a single detached dwelling, unless it is on wheels, in which case it shall be considered a mobile home</i>
South Bruce Peninsula	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zoning By-law Changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2021, the Town amended zoning by-law to remove 1000sq/ft minimum gross floor area for all single detached dwellings beyond what is set out in Ontario's Building Code.

<p>Prince Edward County</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning By-Law Changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2022, Town amended their zoning by-law to do the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove the minimum dwelling unit size requirements to allow for smaller homes. • Create a new Urban Residential Type 4 (R4) Zone which allows for more compact and varied developments. Such zone allows for reduced lot areas, frontages, and setbacks.
<p>Sudbury</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning By-Law Changes • Small and Tiny Home Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City amended their zoning by-law to create a new Low Density Residential One (R1-7) Zone which permits smaller lot sizes and frontages. • Council directed staff to evaluate options for encouraging the development of small and tiny dwellings. Recommendations of such report included further research on educational programs, amendments to the Zoning By-law, a barriers and demand review, development of an EOI process for an affordable housing land bank site, and amendments to the density maximums in the OP. • Collège Boréal and City of Greater Sudbury partnering on comprehensive study assessing tiny home viability in Northern Ontario: https://collegeboreal.ca/en/actualite/college-boreal-secures-new-funds-to-support-research-in-northern-ontario/
<p>Norfolk County</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiny Home Report • Official Plan and Zoning By-Law Changes • Amendments to the Norfolk County CIP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council directed staff to evaluate options for encouraging the development of small and tiny dwellings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations included amendments to the Zoning By-law regarding accessory dwelling units, Official Plan amendments related to Urban and Hamlet designated areas, and changes to the Community Improvement Plan to allow for grants or incentives related to accessory dwelling units and tiny homes, further public consultation, and investigating the possibility of creating a tiny home subdivision on County owned lands.
<p>Ontario Wide</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second and Third Unit Policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On November 28, 2022, the Province of Ontario changed the Planning Act to permit additional residential units as-of-right in urban areas that have municipal water and sewage servicing.

Key Themes:

Laneway Houses/Additional Residential Units/Secondary Dwelling Units

- Planning Act requirement to allow second and third units.

- Many municipalities are adopting policies to permit these forms of housing. Standards vary by municipality.

Eliminating Minimum Floor Area Requirements

- Many municipalities and builders cite that one of their key challenges is zoning by-law minimums required ground/gross floor area for residential dwellings.

Decreasing Minimum Lot Area

- To reduce sprawl and keep homes affordable and economically viable, municipalities such as Sudbury, Prince Edward County, among others, have supported the development of tiny homes by introducing zones with smaller lot areas (under 300.0m²).

Decreasing Lot Frontage and Setback Requirements

- Given that the built form of a tiny home is small and compact it is not necessary to be subject to the same frontage and setbacks as larger built forms require.

Pilot Projects

- Partnerships with tiny home builders and associations to begin construction of tiny home developments.
- Municipalities are exploring the option to allow for 'tiny towns', a group of tiny homes on a single lot.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section outlines policy updates and actions that could be explored in order to encourage development in the form of tiny homes in the Town of Blind River.

SHORT-TERM

1. Undertake market research (i.e., Complete a Demand Analysis/ Market Analysis)
 - Complete a demand/market analysis to determine the potential demand for Tiny Homes in Blind River as compared to other housing types and tenures
2. Review potential amendments to the Official Plan to facilitate tiny home development and report back with findings and recommendations.
 - Investigate amendments to the density maximums set out in the Official Plan as a means of facilitating alternative housing built forms
 - Incorporate verbiage into the Town's Official Plan that specifically supports the creation of alternative built forms such as tiny homes, micro-apartments, tiny houses on wheels (THOW), modular dwellings, etc.

3. Review potential amendments to the Zoning By-law to facilitate tiny home development and report back with findings and recommendations.
 - Potentially add a definition of 'tiny home' to the zoning by-law
 - Remove minimum gross floor area requirements
 - Decrease minimum lot area requirements or create new residential zone requiring such
 - Decrease minimum lot frontage and setback requirements or create new residential zone requiring such
 - Increase the maximum residential density for single detached dwellings from the existing 12.8 dwellings per gross hectare

LONG-TERM

- Complete an Education and Outreach Program, including a User Guide for Small and Tiny Homes and alternative forms of housing.
 - Increasing demand and awareness of this type of built form as a viable option for housing
 - Creating an environment where the builders in Algoma District are encouraged to construct tiny homes on-site, supporting the local economy while decreasing the cost of transporting pre-built homes
- Pilot Programs for Tiny Homes
 - Identifying locations suitable for development, and partner with reputable tiny home builders or non-profits to pilot a tiny home project.
 - Consider incorporating different tenures such as rent-to-own agreements.
- Reach Out to Tiny Home Builders to Explore Partnership Opportunities
 - Partner with leading tiny house manufacturers to develop models that are building code compliant and suitable for the municipality's northern climate
- Affordable Housing Community Improvement Plan
 - To encourage Tiny Home development in the Town, an affordable housing community improvement plan could be adopted. The community improvement plan would be used to:
 - Support the development of affordable housing by providing incentives that support the creation of a diverse type of housing units such as tiny homes.

- Facilitate development of more affordable housing units and direct those units to locations where they will benefit from proximity to public and private facilities and services as well as maximize the use of existing infrastructure.
- Incentives and grants could include Tax Increment Equivalent Grants Planning and Building Rebate Programs, Feasibility Grants, Residential Incentive (Per-Door) Grants, and Second Unit Incentive Grants etc.

5. CONCLUSION

Fostering the development of alternative housing types in Blind River holds promise for addressing housing affordability and diversifying housing options. Building upon the legal framework for tiny homes in Ontario, there are changes that can be made to both the Official Plan and Zoning By-law that more easily facilitate the development of small dwelling units in a greater range of locations throughout the Town. Education and outreach can form a key component in informing the public as to what is permitted. Short-term actions should focus on implementing changes to the Zoning By-law and Official Plan to accommodate smaller built forms. In the long-term, the Town of Blind River could undertake pilot projects and investigate partnership opportunities to ensure the Town is promoting more affordable housing and meeting the diverse housing needs of its residents.

Respectfully submitted,



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Project Manager | Land Use Planner