

Build or buy a tiny home

Ontario Building Code
Information

Introduction

Are you thinking about having a tiny home on your property? Not only are they a great way to save on housing costs, they are also cheaper to build and maintain than a regular house. If you are interested in building or buying a tiny home, this guide will provide you with useful information as you move ahead with your project.

This guide applies only to newly built stand-alone tiny homes that are separate buildings from existing structures on a property. For the purposes of this guide, the types of tiny homes discussed are new small houses that are either:

- built on site
- built in a factory and then brought to a property

Renovating an existing building on a property to add a dwelling unit is not discussed in this guide.

If you are planning to renovate an existing, separate structure on your property such as a garage, coach house or laneway house, you should contact your local planning and building departments for more information about how to proceed. You can also read the guide “Add a second unit in your house,” with information on what you need to know about adding a second unit inside your house.

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Tiny home

For the purposes of this guide, a “tiny home” is a small, private and self-contained dwelling unit:

- with living and dining areas
- with kitchen and bathroom facilities
- with a sleeping area
- intended for year-round use

A tiny home can be a primary home or a separate structure on a property that already has an existing house. Campers, recreational vehicles, cottages and other structures used on a seasonal basis are not considered tiny homes. On the right are three common examples of a tiny home.

Despite their size, tiny homes must comply with the health and safety requirements of Ontario's Building Code, municipal zoning and other local by-laws. Tiny homes must also have necessary servicing such as water and sewage.

Tiny home sizes

The size of a tiny home varies from municipality to municipality, depending on standards set out in zoning by-laws.

Some municipalities have minimum size requirements, while others have maximum size requirements. For example, some municipal by-laws require a tiny home to be 37 m² (400 ft²) or less.

In all cases, a tiny home cannot be smaller than the minimum required size set out in Ontario's Building Code, which is 17.5 m² (188 ft²).

Add a tiny home to your property

Before you decide to add a tiny home to your property, it is important that you first speak with your local municipal planning and building departments. They can tell you whether you can add or build a tiny home to your property and answer questions related to the Building Code, zoning and other by-laws.



Figure 1: A tiny home on wheels



Figure 2: A site-built tiny home



Figure 3: A shipping container tiny home (not yet located on a site)

Some of the important things you should talk to your municipality about as you consider building a tiny home include:

- municipal zoning requirements that apply to your property
- designing your tiny home to comply with the Building Code
- getting necessary building permits
- required building inspections during construction
- parking requirements
- size requirements for tiny homes, if any
- rules about connecting to municipal services, if available

To help you through the sometimes-complex approval and building process, we

recommend you hire at least one of the following:

- Building Code designer registered with the Ontario government
- professional planner
- architect
- engineer

These professionals and your builder can help you get all the necessary approvals, building permits and arrange for construction inspections.

You can check the qualifications of a provincially registered Building Code designer at <https://www.quarts.mah.gov.on.ca/BCINSearchWeb/search.html>

Before you start

The idea of tiny home living is not new. Over the last few years, tiny homes have been getting a lot of attention as a housing choice for people to live in or rent out.

Adding or building a tiny home to your property can sometimes be a challenge. Unlike the regular-sized houses we have been building for decades, tiny homes are an emerging trend. As such, getting successfully through approvals and meeting requirements to build a tiny home can be difficult.

Below are three things you should check before you go any further with your project:

1. Is your property suitable?

Some lots will not work for a tiny home. There are several reasons why this may be the case:

- a. Local zoning by-laws may not permit adding a tiny home without further municipal approval (see section on Municipal zoning and other by-laws).
- b. The lot may be too small to meet setbacks or other local requirements without further municipal approval (see section on Municipal zoning and other by-laws).
- c. The lot may not have adequate access for emergency services such as firefighting and Emergency Medical Services (see section on Emergency access).

2. If you're buying a factory-built tiny home, does it meet the necessary Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standards?

The Building Code requires all buildings to be inspected during construction. In the case of factory-built buildings, quality control inspections and monitoring occur during the assembly of buildings and building components. A tiny home built off-site without CSA certification will likely not have had the appropriate inspections. This may become an issue as you apply for a building permit to locate your tiny home on your property. (See section on Factory-built tiny homes)

3. Will your tiny home have warranty protection under the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan administered by Tarion?

In Ontario, all new home builders must be registered with Tarion. Tarion maintains an [Ontario Builder Directory](#) of all new home builders. New home buyers are encouraged to check the Ontario Builder Directory to ensure their builder is registered with Tarion. Tarion's website outlines the types of homes [covered](#) and [not covered](#) by their warranties and protections.

To check these three things, you are strongly advised to talk with officials at your local municipality and seek assistance from experts in this area before you go further with your project.

Municipal zoning and other by-laws

Before building your tiny home, it is important to get information about your municipality's zoning by-laws. Zoning by-laws set out the kind of buildings that can be built, the sizes they can be and where they can be located on your property. As a result, they may control whether a tiny home is permitted in your case. Ask your local planning department about:

- zoning rules that apply to your property
- whether these rules let you build a tiny home without further municipal permissions
- services to your property such as water, sewage and electricity
- any other useful information you need to know to build your tiny home

Even though tiny homes are small, they must still meet the local rules for building in your area, including zoning by-laws. Complying with your municipality's by-laws is important so that you can build a tiny home if you choose to proceed.

Depending on where your tiny home is located (rural, suburban or urban areas), municipal zoning by-laws and standards will vary.

Zoning requirements that could impact building your tiny home without further municipal permissions may include:

- permitted land uses
- minimum lot sizes

- minimum size for residential buildings
- minimum or maximum lot coverage by built structures
- lot frontage and setback requirements from lot lines and the public street
- massing and height requirements
- parking requirements (including tandem parking)

Other requirements that could impact building your tiny home may include:

- streetscape and architectural design
- location of exits and entrances
- appropriate municipal or private servicing (water, sewage, electricity etc.)
- whether new residential development can occur in existing settlement areas
- restrictions on lot severance
- access for emergency services

You need to learn about how these things apply specifically to your property. Knowing these rules can make building or buying a tiny home go quicker and smoother.

If you can't meet some of the zoning by-laws

Planning laws in Ontario give property owners options if their project does not meet all the applicable zoning requirements without further municipal permissions.

Two of the most common ways you can seek to change the zoning requirements on your property are through an application for a "zoning by-law amendment" (also known as a rezoning) or for a "minor variance".

You will generally need to apply to your municipality to change the specific rules that apply to your property.

Below are typical examples of circumstances where a rezoning or a minor variance may be needed so that you can proceed with your tiny home project. In cases like these, you should speak to planning staff in your municipality. You may also wish to seek the help of a professional planner.

1. Zoning by-law amendment/rezoning

A rezoning is needed when you want to use or develop your property in a way that is not allowed by the existing zoning by-law. It will be needed when you are proposing to change some of the basic rules about how a property is used, such as changing from a single dwelling unit to multiple dwelling units.

A rezoning is also often needed when the change you want is a fairly major change to the zoning by-law, such as adding another use on your property or significantly altering the proposed size, height and location of a building from what the rules currently allow.

A rezoning example: Your property is currently zoned to permit only one detached dwelling unit. By constructing a tiny home, you would be adding another dwelling unit as a separate building on your property. If this is the case, you will generally need to get a rezoning.

2. Minor variance

A minor variance is needed when you are proposing to build something that does not conform exactly to the zoning requirements. It is used for changes that are minor in nature.

Minor variance example: Your zoning allows you to build a tiny home on your property, except that the setback from your rear property line cannot quite be met. In this case, a minor variance may be appropriate (see Figure 4 below).

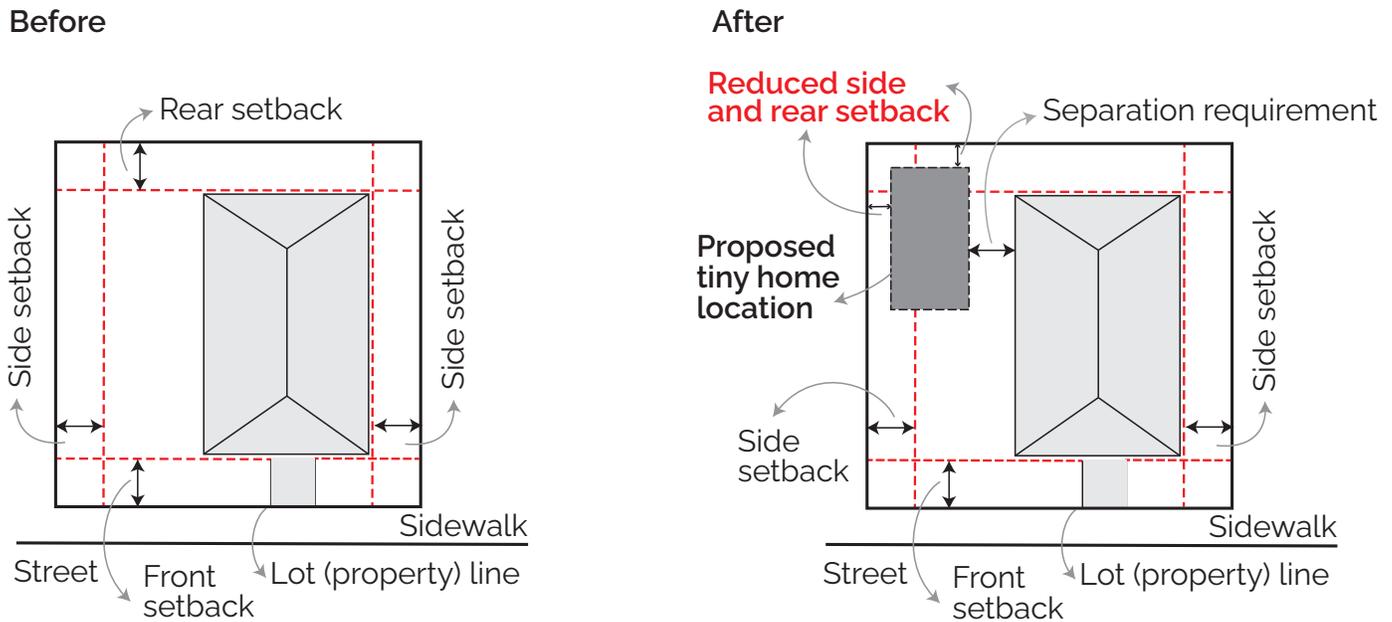


Figure 4: Minor variance

Apply for rezoning or minor variance

Building and development projects that trigger the need for a rezoning or minor variance can sometimes have an effect on your neighbours and other surrounding properties. As part of both the rezoning and minor variance processes, your neighbours will receive a notice from your municipality about your proposed change and they will be able to comment on it. They can also file an appeal from any decisions made about your application.

Being able to get a rezoning or a minor variance could be the key thing that allows you to build or locate your tiny home.

Before you apply for a rezoning or a minor variance, you should talk to your municipal planning staff to determine whether the city staff will support it and for advice and information. If you choose to apply, you must complete an application and pay a fee (if applicable). You may want to get your own professional planning advice in preparing an application.

Did You Know?

The *Planning Act* was changed to make building additional residential units on your property easier. Subsection 16(3) of the *Planning Act* requires municipalities to adopt official plan policies that authorize the use of additional residential units (ARUs) in both the primary residential unit and in another building on the same property (for example, above garages or in coach houses).

Municipalities may also permit the use of tiny homes on the same property as other residential units. Your municipality's official plan and zoning by-laws may not have been updated yet to reflect these recent *Planning Act* changes. Talk to your local planning department to find out the status of additional residential unit updates and the potential for adding a tiny home.

To remove certain zoning barriers to the creation of ARUs, Ontario Regulation 299/19 made under the *Planning Act* establishes the following requirements and standards across Ontario:

- an ARU, where permitted in a zoning by-law, may be occupied by any person regardless of whether the primary residential unit is occupied by the owner of the property
- an ARU, where permitted in a zoning by-law, would be permitted without regard to the date of construction of the primary or ancillary building
- one parking space for each ARU, which may be provided through tandem parking as defined
- where a municipal zoning by-law requires no parking spaces for the primary residential unit, no parking spaces would be required for the ARUs
- where a municipal zoning by-law is passed that sets a parking standard lower than a standard of one parking space for each ARU, the municipal zoning by-law parking standard would prevail

Building Code, permits and inspections

Types of tiny homes

Tiny homes come in many different shapes and sizes, and all use creative design techniques to achieve compact and efficient living spaces. Despite their size or uniqueness, tiny homes are required to meet the Building Code.

The Building Code contains requirements for tiny homes built on-site, and those that are factory-built (on a chassis or not) and shipped to the site.

You will need a building permit or permits for both situations.

Tiny homes built on-site

Many tiny homes, like regular-sized houses, are built on the site where they will be located. The construction requirements for this type of tiny home are the same as the requirements for building a full-sized single-detached house but there are some obvious design differences.

The differences involve the size of rooms and spaces, and if it will have more than one storey, which would require stairs.

Other design considerations include installing a heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) system that is appropriate for heating and cooling a smaller space.

Factory-built tiny homes

If you are thinking about buying a factory-built tiny home to be shipped to your property, there are a few very important considerations

that you should know about before buying the factory-built home:

- check with your municipality to see if a tiny home is allowed on your property and if there are other requirements that may apply
- make sure the factory-built home meets the Building Code. You will not be able to install your tiny home on your property if it does not meet the Building Code
- if you are thinking of buying a factory-built tiny home, read the "Factory-built tiny homes" section of this guide for more detailed information

Get a building permit

You will need a building permit or permits to build a tiny home. This applies whether you build your tiny home on-site or if it is factory-built and shipped to your property. Two of the main things you need to do to get a building permit are to:

- design your home so that it meets the technical requirements of the Building Code
- show that your project meets other "applicable laws" listed in the Building Code to allow your tiny home to be built. An example of applicable law is the municipal zoning by-law

If you have not met the local zoning requirements, you will not be able to get a building permit.



Figure 5: A tiny home on wheels

Can my tiny home be on wheels?

Yes, a tiny home can be on wheels. In fact, any structure on wheels can be considered a building if it is located on the same spot for a period of time, especially if it is connected to services such as water, sewage and electricity, has exterior stairs to get in and out, and is fixed or anchored to the site.

In this case, you may need a building permit and your tiny home must meet certain Building Code requirements. This generally does not apply to recreational vehicles and campers that are towed. In short, if you can drive it or if it needs a licence plate, then it is likely not a building.

How to apply for a building permit

You or your agent can apply for a building permit at your municipal building department. You will need to submit:

- a complete application form and any other forms and supporting documents required by the municipality
- construction drawings (most municipalities require at least two sets of drawings)
- payment of the building permit fee, if applicable

You should also check with your municipality to find out if:

- you need to hire a licensed contractor to do the work
- they accept electronic building permit applications, as this can speed up processing time

Once your complete application has been submitted, you will hear back within 10 business days if it has been approved or not.

Incomplete applications or improper design may mean your building permit will be delayed or denied.

Building inspections

After your building permit has been issued and construction has begun, municipal building inspectors must review the work at various stages during construction.

Inspectors will need to check framing, insulation, plumbing, interior finishes and other items contained in the Building Code. Confirm with your inspector about what needs to be inspected.

Factory-built tiny homes undergo quality control and quality assurance checks as they are assembled. These inspection and verification processes help ensure these buildings meet the Building Code.

Once on-site, a municipal building inspector will need to inspect your factory-built tiny home when it is located on your property. They will inspect for things like foundations or anchoring to the ground, outside stairs and services such as water and sewage.

You or your agent are responsible for informing your municipal building department when different stages of construction are ready for inspection.

Building Code requirements

Tiny homes built on-site

It is important to meet Building Code requirements as they will help ensure that your tiny home is a safe and healthy place to live. The following sets out some of the applicable Building Code requirements that your tiny home must meet.

Room sizes and floor area

The Building Code sets out minimum room sizes in dwelling units. Room sizes vary

depending on whether the rooms and spaces are separated by walls or if the unit is open-concept. Total floor areas of rooms/spaces can be smaller when using an open-concept design.

For example, a tiny home with an open-concept design can be as small as 17.5 m².

See Table 1 for an example of open-concept minimum space requirements.

Table 1: Minimum space requirements for open-concept design

Room or space:	Minimum required floor area:
Combined sleeping, living and dining areas and kitchen space	13.5 m ² (145 ft ²)
Bathroom	Enough space for sink, toilet and shower stall or bath. Could be as little as 3.0 m ² (32 ft ²)
Laundry	1.0 m ² (11 ft ²)

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Subsections 9.5.4. to 9.5.9. and 9.31.4.2.

Table 2 outlines the general minimum sizes for rooms and spaces separated by walls.

Table 2: Minimum sizes for separated spaces

Living area	13.5 m ² (145 ft ²)
Dining area	7.0 m ² (75 ft ²)
Kitchen	4.2 m ² (45.2 ft ²)
Combined living, dining and kitchen areas in a one-bedroom unit	11 m ² (118.4 ft ²)
Master bedroom (without built-in closet)	9.8 m ² (95 ft ²)
Other bedrooms (without built-in closets)	7 m ² (75 ft ²)
Bathroom	Enough space for sink, toilet and shower stall or bath

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Subsections 9.5.4. to 9.5.9. and 9.31.4.2.

Stairs, guards and handrails

Designing a tiny home with more than one storey means you will need stairs. Stairs that meet Building Code requirements can take up a lot of the limited space in a tiny home. Ladders to a second storey do not comply with the Building Code requirements. You

should carefully consider whether you want your tiny home to have more than one storey.

Be sure to check with your local building department to understand the requirements for stairs, guards and handrails in tiny homes.

Relevant Building Code provisions - Division B, Subsections 9.8.3 and 9.8.4.

Good to know

If you want to install stairs in your tiny home, it's a good idea to plan the space underneath wisely. Think about locating storage, utilities or appliances such as a washing machine under your stairs. It is also useful to know that the Building Code does not regulate furniture. This means that your tiny home could contain a bunk bed or a murphy bed.

Mezzanines

Instead of building a full second storey in your tiny home, another option is to build a loft or a partial second floor. The Building Code calls these spaces “mezzanines”. In a tiny home these spaces would consist of a raised floor area and are often intended as a sleeping space.

Here are the Building Code rules for mezzanines:

- if the mezzanine is open to below, then the size of the mezzanine cannot be greater than 40% of the floor area of the

tiny home, and it must have a guard/handrail to prevent falls

- if the mezzanine has walls all around it, then the size of the mezzanine cannot be greater than 10% of the tiny home
- mezzanine must have stairs, guards and handrails that meet the Building Code

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Article 9.10.4.1.

Ceiling heights

You are required to meet minimum ceiling heights in your rooms. The Building Code minimum ceiling height requirements are shown below:

Table 3: Minimum ceiling heights

Room or space:	Minimum heights
Living room or space, dining room or space, kitchen or kitchen space	2300 mm (7'6.5") over at least 75% of the required floor area with a clear height of 2100 mm (6'10.5") at any point over the required area
Bedroom or bedroom space	2300 mm (7'6.5") over at least 50% of the required area or 2100 mm (6'10.5") over all the required floor area. Any part of the floor having a clear height of less than 1400 mm (4'7") shall not be considered in computing the required floor area
Mezzanine	2100 mm (6'10.5") above and below a mezzanine
Bathroom, water closet room or laundry area above grade	2100 mm (6'10.5") in any area where a person would normally be in a standing position
Passage, hall or main entrance vestibule and finished rooms not specifically mentioned above	2100 mm (6'10.5")

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Articles 9.5.3.1. and 9.5.3.2.

Hallway widths

The Building Code requires most hallways in houses to be 860 mm (2'10") wide. Many tiny homes will not have hallways because they will be open-concept. An 860 mm (2'10") wide hallway would only be needed if a tiny home has two spaces, such as a living room and bedroom, separated by a hallway with walls on both sides.

A hallway can be 710 mm (2'4") wide if it leads to a bedroom or bathroom. If this is the case, these rooms must be served by a separate exit door.

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Subsection 9.5.10.

Door width requirements

The exterior door of a tiny home must be at least 810 mm (2'8") wide and be a swing-type door (not sliding).

Bathrooms must have doors at least 610 mm (24") wide. These can be folding, swinging-type or sliding doors.

Relevant Building Code provision – Division B, Article 9.5.11.1.

Good to know

In most houses, the exit (or main) door swings inwards, but to save space in your tiny home you may consider having the main door swing outwards.

Windows

Windows are required in tiny homes. The size of windows you need is determined by the size of

the unit. Larger units will require more or bigger windows. Window sizes are also based on what type of room they are in. The minimum window sizes are:

Table 4: Minimum window area

Room or space:	Minimum required window area
Living room or dining room	10% of the floor area
Bedroom	5% of the floor area
Laundry room, kitchen, bathroom	Windows not required

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Article 9.7.2.3.

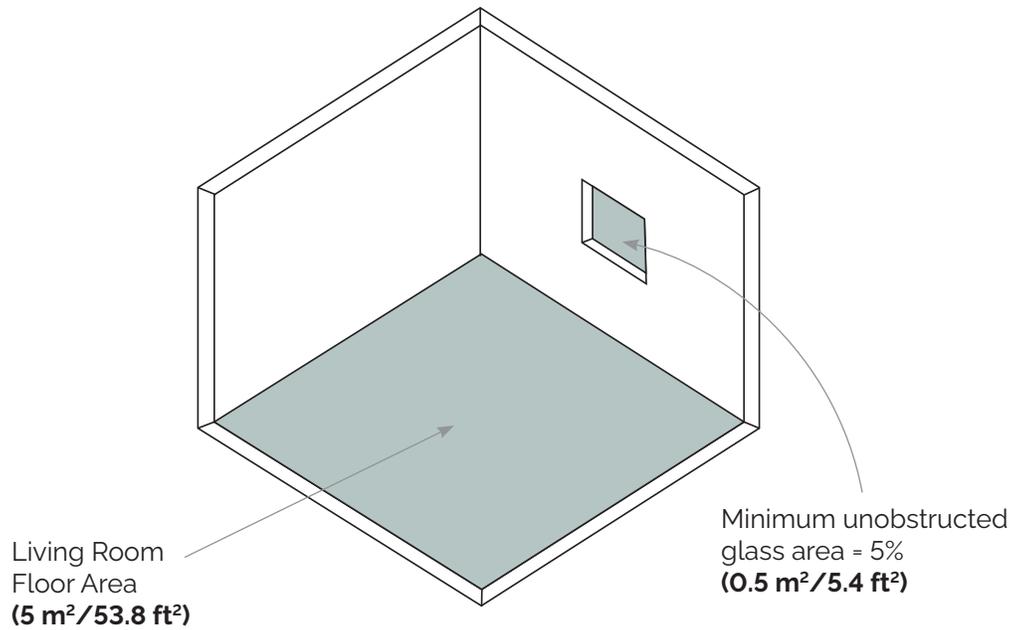


Figure 6: Minimum window area

For example, if you are planning to have a dining area of 4 m² (43.1 ft²), the minimum size of the window(s) must be 0.4 m² (4.3 ft²). Figure 6 above shows another example.



Figure 7: Windows in a tiny home

Plumbing

Your tiny home will have to meet plumbing requirements. At minimum you will need:

- a hot and cold water supply
- a sink, bathtub or shower, toilet or drainless composting toilet in the bathroom
- a kitchen sink

You will need a qualified plumber to do this work. Depending on the type of tiny home you have, you will also want to contact the municipal planning and building department about the servicing for your tiny home, including water supply and sewage.

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Articles 9.31.4.1. to 9.31.4.3.

Energy efficiency

Your tiny home will have to meet the energy efficiency requirements in the Building Code. This means that the exterior walls will have to be designed with the right amount of insulation and be able to keep moisture and drafts outside of your home.

There are different energy efficiency requirements depending on where you live in Ontario. For example, if you live in northern Ontario your home will require more insulation.

We recommend that you work with an expert designer who knows these requirements. The good news is that an energy efficient tiny home will not cost a lot to heat.

Heating, ventilation and air conditioning

Tiny homes must have heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) that conforms with the Building Code. Tiny homes have much less space to heat and cool. A typical furnace for a regular size house will be too large. You may want to consider alternatives such as:

- a ductless split system
- a baseboard heating system

Regardless of the HVAC system you select, the Building Code requires the installation of a heat recovery ventilator which reduces energy demand and increases energy efficiency by recovering heat or conditioned air.

In addition, installing a fireplace or wood-burning stove in your tiny home is not recommended. While such heat sources can comply with the Building Code, using a

fireplace or wood-burning stove in such a small space may reduce your fire and life safety.

You should consider getting help from a professional in designing the HVAC system for your tiny home.

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Sections 9.32. and 9.33.

Electrical facilities and lighting

Tiny homes must meet the same Electrical Safety Code requirements as those for a regular home.

We recommend that you hire a licensed electrical contractor to do the work. They can also get the electrical permit and arrange inspections for you. To ensure adequate lighting in rooms and spaces, the Building Code requires that your tiny home must have:

- a light at the entrance to your tiny home
- a light and switch in every room and space of your tiny home

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Articles 9.34.2.1. and 9.34.2.2.

The Electrical Safety Code, produced by Ontario's Electrical Safety Authority (ESA), has further requirements when building a house, including a tiny home. You will need:

- a separate electrical permit to do the electrical work
- an ESA inspection of the electrical work

For further information you can contact [ESA](#) directly at 1-877-ESA-SAFE or 1-877-372-7233.

Foundation, anchorage and grading

Like a regular house, a tiny home must be attached securely to the ground. The Building Code has detailed requirements for footings and foundations.

The Building Code also requires that the land on your property be graded so that it slopes away from your tiny home. This is to help keep surface water out of your house and reduce damage in case of flooding.

Relevant Building Code provision – Division B, Section 9.15. and Article 9.14.6.1.

Fire safety

Many of the same fire safety requirements for regular houses apply to tiny homes.

Emergency access

An important safety aspect of your tiny home is providing access to it if there is a fire or medical emergency. Fire fighters with portable equipment and EMS personnel with a stretcher or gurney need to be able to access all dwelling units.

To provide this access, municipalities typically require an unobstructed access route on the property containing the dwelling unit. The City of Toronto, for example, requires a 1.0 m (3'3") wide clear access route to rear-yard dwelling units for emergency purposes. Finding out your municipality's emergency access requirements is something you must do early on as you consider building your tiny home.

In addition, the Building Code has access requirements for fire fighting vehicles, including fire trucks. The Building Code requires that each building have access for fire department

vehicles by a public street, a private road, or a yard. Private roads or yards are only acceptable as a means of fire service access if certain conditions are met, such as connection to a public thoroughfare, location of hydrants, and overhead clearance.

Relevant Building Code provision – Division B, Article 9.10.20.3.

Exiting

Getting out of a building quickly in an emergency is another important element of fire safety. For most tiny homes, based on a one-storey open-concept design, a single exit door is likely acceptable to meet the Building Code requirements for safe exiting.

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Article 9.9.7.4.

If the sleeping area of your tiny home is located on a different level, the Building Code requires a second exit to provide a separate means of escape in an emergency. In such cases, you can use a window as a second way to exit instead of a door if it:

- is openable from the inside
- does not need a tool, key or special knowledge to open
- will stay open on its own without supports or levers
- has a clear opening of 0.35 m² (3.8 ft²)
- is not smaller than 380 mm (15") measured in any direction
- has a window sill not higher than 1 m (39.5") above the floor

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Article 9.9.10.1.

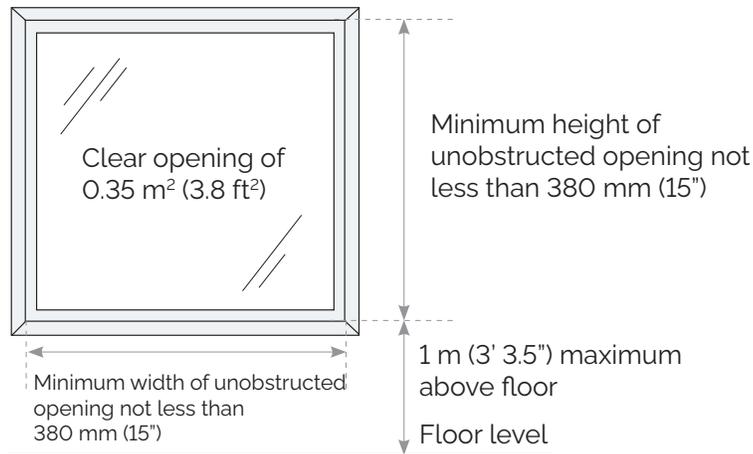


Figure 8: Escape window for upper floors

Smoke alarms

You will need smoke alarms (sometimes known as smoke detectors) in your tiny home that must meet the CAN/ULC S531 standard.

A label on the alarm will indicate whether it meets this standard. Smoke alarms are widely available at hardware and home renovation stores.

Your smoke alarms must also have a flashing light when they are activated and be connected to an electrical circuit.

Proper placement of smoke alarms is important. They must be located:

- on every level of a house (if adding a second storey)
- outside of sleeping areas (depending on the layout of a floor, it can also count as the smoke alarm for that level)
- in each bedroom (if more than one and not open-concept)

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Subsection 9.10.19.

Carbon monoxide alarms

You may also have to install carbon monoxide alarms. They are required if your tiny home has an appliance (for example, furnace, water heater or boiler) that uses natural gas, propane, other similar fuels or a wood burning appliance.

Carbon monoxide alarms must be connected to an electrical circuit, but if the tiny home is not serviced with electricity, then the alarms may be battery-operated. Carbon monoxide alarms must be located near bedrooms and sleeping areas in tiny homes.

Given the small size and likely open-concept design of a tiny home, installing a single combined smoke and carbon monoxide alarm may be sufficient to meet Building Code requirements.

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Articles 9.33.4.1. and 9.33.4.2.

Factory-built tiny homes

Factory-built homes can be an excellent housing choice. Since they are built in a factory, these types of homes can often provide greater quality and precision than site-built homes.

As they are assembled indoors, they are not exposed to sun, rain, wind or snow that regular houses are as they are built.

If you plan to buy a factory-built tiny home that will be shipped to your property, there are very important considerations that you should know about before you buy a manufactured tiny home.

Zoning

Check with your local municipality to make sure a tiny home is allowed on your property. If the zoning of your property does not allow for a tiny home, you could apply for a rezoning or minor variance from your municipality.

If you cannot obtain the appropriate zoning for your property, the municipality may prevent you from having a tiny home even if you have already purchased one.

Meet the Building Code

Your factory-built tiny home must meet one of the two key CSA certification standards in the Building Code for factory-built buildings. These standards are:

- CSA-Z240.2.1-09 Structural Requirements for Manufactured Homes
- CSA A277-08 Procedure for Factory Certification of Buildings

A tiny home built to these standards will have a label on the inside of the electrical panel door indicating which certification it complies with. Your local building inspector will check for these certificates.

Confirm that a tiny home manufactured or purchased from a supplier outside Ontario meets Ontario's Building Code. Just because it is sold in Ontario, it does not mean the tiny home meets Ontario's Building Code.

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Articles 9.1.1.9.

Buying for your weather conditions

Factory-built homes are made for different regions. These regional variations include climate conditions such as temperature, wind, snow and rain. They may also include different structural standards for resistance to earthquakes. You must make sure that the factory-built tiny home you buy is appropriate for the region you live in.

Do not buy a tiny home that meets the CAN/CSA-Z241 Series-03 Park Model Trailers standard if your plan is to live in it year-round. This is a standard that applies to seasonal buildings such as cottages. A home built to this standard cannot be used as a permanent year-round dwelling.

Important to know

Homes that comply with either the CSA A277 or CSA Z240.2.1 standards are built in factories that must also be certified to these standards. To make sure that the factories meet the applicable CSA standards, they must be accredited by one of three certification organizations:

- Canadian Standards Association (CSA)
- Intertek
- Quality Auditing Institute

These organizations are accredited by the Standards Council of Canada to perform compliance inspections within the manufacturing facility. The label on the inside of the electrical panel door will be issued by one of these three organizations.



Figure 9: A municipal building inspector

Foundation and anchorage

Just like a tiny home built on-site, a factory-built tiny home can be placed on footings or a foundation built according to the Building Code. It can also be secured to its site by complying with the standard: CSA-Z240.10.1-08 "Site Preparation, Foundation and Anchorage of Manufactured Homes". This standard is referenced in the Building Code and it has requirements for installing a manufactured tiny home on a property.

A municipal building inspector will need to inspect your factory-built tiny home when it is located on your property. They will inspect for things like foundations or anchoring to the ground, outside stairs and services such as water and sewage.

Relevant Building Code provisions – Division B, Articles 9.15.1.3. and 9.23.6.3.

Municipal rules and requirements

This section covers some common concerns about building tiny homes. For more help and advice, consult your municipality or other relevant authorities (for example, planning or zoning departments, utility companies).

Essential services (water, sewer and utilities)

The type of servicing depends on where your tiny home will be located. You should talk to your municipality about the types of water, sewage and utility services that are available.

For example, if municipal water and sewage services are not available, you may be able to connect to a well with sufficient water supply and have an on-site septic system.

If you plan to locate a tiny home far away from any existing electrical services, it can be quite costly to run distribution wires to your home. In areas where there is no electrical service the Building Code allows buildings to be “off-grid.” The Building Code contains requirements for installing solar panels or geo-thermal systems.

Parking requirements

Parking requirements vary greatly around the province, and the rules depend on where you live. Generally, municipal zoning sets out residential parking requirements, which will also apply to tiny homes.

Zoning by-law requirements

Municipal zoning by-laws set out requirements for your property and impact your planning for a tiny home. Zoning by-laws provide important information such as whether tiny homes are permitted in the area in which you live.

Zoning by-laws may also set out specific requirements for buildings on a property such as lot area, lot frontage, lot coverage, yard setbacks (front, rear, interior, exterior) and maximum building height. Knowing these requirements is critical and will help you determine whether your property can accommodate a tiny home or whether you need to apply for permission.

Contact your local planning department for further information about how your local zoning by-law impacts your plans for a tiny home on your property.

Municipal rules about design of tiny homes

Municipalities may have rules about the design of new buildings and how those buildings fit with the rest of the buildings on the street. These rules would set out design standards that must be met. For example, there could be rules related to building size and height that deal with how big and how high a tiny home can be.

Rules for locating a tiny home on my property

Most municipalities have rules for the use of your property, building design requirements (for example, height, length and depth, and floor area), setbacks for buildings, access requirements, parking, and landscaping that apply to buildings. It is important to know these rules when considering where to locate a tiny home on a property.

Renting out my tiny home

If your tiny home meets your municipality's by-laws and building regulations, either you or a tenant can live in it.

Lot severance

A lot severance is when one property is legally divided into two or more properties. Approval for a severance (called a "consent to sever") from your municipality is required if you want to sell a piece of your land, including selling part of your property that has a tiny home on it.

Check with your municipality to determine if severances are permitted in your area and how to apply for one.

If services are connected through the existing dwelling unit

If you plan to sell the land that your tiny home is located on, find out what is required to get approval for a severance by contacting your local planning department.

Your local official plan and zoning by-laws along with the way in which your tiny home is serviced, may have an impact on your ability

to divide your property. This information is important to know before your tiny home is built so you can make decisions that will help you with getting a severance.

Development charges

When constructing a new building, municipalities typically require payment of a fee known as a "development charge." This is a fee that municipalities use to pay for infrastructure (for example, water and sewage) to support new development.

The Ontario government is currently considering changing the rules so that these charges would not apply if you are adding a tiny home and you already have an existing house on your property. You should ask your local municipality about the status of these rules.

Home insurance

Contact a registered insurance broker for information about home insurance.

Transport a tiny home

Due to their small size, some tiny home owners may want to transport their homes if they move to another city or town. If you are moving and want to transport your tiny home, you should investigate if:

- you will need to obtain any special transportation permits to move your house
- the roads leading to your new location are suitable
- your house is structurally able to withstand being moved

In addition, you will need to check with:

- the municipality that you are moving to about what they require (for example, building permits, zoning approvals, etc.)
- other relevant authorities, such as the Ministry of Transportation

Rural, suburban or urban locations

This section of the guide covers constructing a tiny home in a rural, suburban or urban location.

The information provided is for illustrative purposes only and may not apply to your particular area or cover all possible scenarios. It is important to check with your local municipal planning and building department to make sure you are meeting their requirements.

Rural Servicing

Depending on the municipality, there will be different options for servicing a tiny home in a rural area. One way is to use municipal water

and sewage services, if they are available. If not, you may be able to connect to a well with sufficient water supply and have an on-site sewage system. The sewage system could be either a septic tank and leaching bed or a composting toilet.

Some municipalities rely on regional health units or conservation authorities to enforce the septic system requirements of the Building Code. Your local building department will advise you if that is the case.

While electrical services are typically available in most of rural Ontario, if you build your tiny home far away from existing service it can be



Figure 10: Off-grid tiny home

quite costly to run the wiring to your home. It is important to consider this when deciding on a location for your tiny home.

In areas where there is no electrical service, the Building Code allows houses to be “off-grid” with no electric service. In such cases, the Building Code contains requirements for installing solar panels or geo-thermal systems.

Rural by-law considerations

Lot severance

Local rural planning policies may not permit lot severances without further municipal permission. If the plan for building your tiny home includes a severance, make sure you have checked that your municipality allows lot severance in its by-law.

Urban settlement areas

Some rural municipalities require new permanent residential development to be built in locations known as “urban settlement areas.” You need to know whether your municipality has requirements about urban settlement areas before you decide where to locate your tiny home.

Waterfront development

In some parts of Ontario, building and development has the potential to impact lakes and rivers, in particular water quality and shoreline ecosystems. In these areas, municipalities restrict waterfront developments. This is another important consideration as you choose the location for your tiny home.

Did you know?

The [Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands amended its zoning by-law](#) to accommodate tiny homes by removing the minimum floor area size for all dwellings, including tiny homes.

The [Township of Edwardsburgh-Cardinal has a draft Official Plan](#) that would address permitting tiny homes as a dwelling.

According to Policy 6.14.2: Council will provide for affordable housing by enabling a full range of housing types and densities, including tiny houses, to meet projected demographic and market requirements of current and future residents of the Township by:

- making provision for alternative housing types such as accessory dwelling units
- encouraging cost-effective development standards and densities for new residential development to reduce the cost of housing
- ensuring that the zoning by-law does not require standards which preclude the development of affordable housing, especially as it relates to house and lot size

Suburban Servicing

In suburban areas, the range of options to provide servicing to your tiny home are often greater than in rural areas, including connecting your tiny home to the local utility grid.

Municipal water and sewage services are also likely readily available. In some places, especially outlying suburban areas, water service may be available, but a municipal sewage connection may not be. In these cases, an on-site system may be needed to provide sewage service.

Some suburban areas have communal sewage services where several properties are served by a jointly owned common sewage system.

Suburban by-law considerations

Lot frontage and setback requirements

Most suburban municipalities have setback requirements from the street and rear and side yard lot lines. These requirements need to be carefully considered as you think about where to place your tiny home. Since houses are generally spaced more closely together in suburban neighbourhoods, setback requirements often become more of an issue than in rural municipalities.

Make sure that when planning the location of your tiny home you know how close or far your tiny home is required to be from lot lines and public streets. We recommend you check with



Figure 11: Tiny home interior

your local planning department about the setback requirements for your particular area and whether you may need to apply for an amendment to the zoning by-law or for a minor variance.

Lot coverage

Lot coverage by-laws set out how much of your property can be occupied by a building or buildings. Lot coverage requirements are usually based on the total area of buildings on the lot as a percentage of the total property area. Some municipalities may require minimum or maximum coverage of buildings or other structures on a lot.

Building size requirements

While the Building Code sets out the absolute minimum sizes for a dwelling unit, many municipal zoning by-laws also have minimum size requirements that are often larger than those in the Building Code. Make sure you know what the minimum size for residential buildings are in your municipality as you design your tiny home.

Did you know?

Oshawa allows for tiny homes in its [Zoning By-law 60-94](#). In this by-law, a tiny home is considered a single detached dwelling, although the term tiny home is not explicitly stated. Single detached dwellings are permitted in a variety of residential zones where they meet Ontario's Building Code and all applicable Zoning By-law 60-94 regulations for a single detached dwelling.

According to Oshawa's zoning requirements, tiny homes must comply with all provisions related to a single detached dwelling. This includes but is not limited to, two 2.75 metres wide by 5.75 metres long parking spaces, one located in the front yard, the second in a side yard, rear yard or garage, minimum of 50% landscaping in the front yard, minimum front, side and rear yard depths etc. For the full list of provisions, please refer to Zoning By-law 60-94 under the appropriate zoning.

Urban Servicing

In urban municipalities, full services for water, sewage and electrical are nearly always available. If you are planning to build your tiny home on a lot that already has an existing house, the main thing you will need to determine is whether you will be allowed to:

- connect to the services of the existing building
- provide separate services to your tiny home

While it is generally better that each house has its own services, it will likely cost less to connect the services of the tiny home to the existing one.

Some municipalities may have concerns about whether there is sufficient water and sewage capacity to allow new development in a particular area. Your municipality will likely have

rules about water and sewage servicing and whether you can connect to the existing ones.

Electrical services may be above or below ground. Check with your local electrical utility company for this information.

Urban by-law considerations

Setbacks, access and frontage

Urban municipalities tend to have more restrictive rules about where a tiny home can be placed on a property. These rules deal with things like setbacks from the street and property lines, frontage requirements, and access on the lot to your tiny home including for emergencies.

It is important to know these rules as you consider where to locate your tiny home. We recommend you check with your local planning department so that you are fully aware of all the requirements for your particular area.

Parking requirements

In some areas within a municipality, parking on-site may be prohibited, and street parking may be necessary.

Sometimes street parking is limited, and parking permits may be required. Your municipality will be able to tell you about the parking requirements you need to know about.

Streetscape and architectural design

Urban municipalities often have rules about the design of new buildings and how those buildings fit with the rest of the buildings on the street.

Your municipality may require your tiny home to meet a set of design standards, such as the colour or look of your tiny home. These rules

are intended to ensure that the architectural character of neighbourhoods are protected, especially older ones.

Massing and height

Massing and height zoning by-laws deal with how big and how high a building can be. Most often these rules are intended to prevent houses that are too big and too high from being built.

Sometimes massing and height by-laws have minimum requirements which may prevent buildings that are too small from being built.

These rules often require a certain size of housing in an area. This can be a challenge to tiny home construction that does not meet these size requirements.

Next steps and checklist

For best results with your tiny home project, we highly recommend you:

- contact your local municipality early in your planning and design process
- hire qualified professionals to help you

You can generally find a contact number for your local building and planning departments on your [municipality's website](#). You can also

find information online or at your local municipal offices.

You can check [Ontario's Building Code online](#). You should also check out the following land use planning resources:

- [Planning Act](#)
- [Citizen's guides to land use planning](#)

Tiny home checklist

Here is a checklist summarizing the important things to consider when planning and building your tiny home:

- Building permits**
- Site inspection**
- Tarion warranty**
- Municipal zoning and other by-laws**
 - Permitted land uses
 - Minimum lot sizes
 - Minimum size for residential buildings
 - Minimum or maximum lot coverage by built structures
 - Lot frontage, setback and egress requirements from lot line and public street
 - Massing and height requirements
 - Parking requirements
 - Streetscape and architectural design
 - Exits and entrances
 - Servicing: municipal or private (water, sewage, electricity etc.)
 - Development in existing settlement areas
 - Waterfront development
 - Restrictions on lot severance
 - Development charges

- Ontario's Building Code (built on-site)**
 - Rooms and floor sizes
 - Stairs, guards and handrails
 - Mezzanines
 - Ceiling heights
 - Hallway widths
 - Door width requirements
 - Windows
 - Plumbing
 - Energy efficiency
 - Heating, ventilation and air-conditioning
 - Electrical facilities and lighting
 - Foundation, anchorage and grading
 - Fire safety
 - Emergency access
 - Exiting
 - Smoke alarm
 - Carbon monoxide alarm
- Ontario's Building Code (factory-built)**
 - CSA-Z240.2.1-09 Structural Requirements for Manufactured Homes
 - CSA A277-08 Procedure for Factory Certification of Buildings

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