



By Kathleen Maynard

Where Do Tiny Houses Fit?

In recent months, not a week has gone by in the office without an inquiry about tiny houses. Whether generated by reality television, environmental concern or housing affordability, there is no question that the “tiny house movement” has captured the imagination of more than one potential home buyer.

The big question seems to be about where tiny houses fit in the regulatory context. Not surprisingly, there is a whole lot more to consider besides “how small we can build and still meet code?” But although an array of technical and administrative requirements come into play, getting to the answer is possible. A discussion paper being prepared for the Provincial-Territorial Policy Advisory Committee on Codes by staff at the Canadian Manufactured Housing Institute has identified several factors to consider.

No matter where you build a house in Canada, and no matter its size, you need to meet the regulations in force where the home is placed. Technical requirements based on the National Building Code (NBC) are essentially the same across Canada. There are some exceptions, such as less-stringent requirements for cottages and park model trailers for seasonal housing in Ontario.

Many small homes are built in factories, so discussions about tiny houses often explore CSA standards. Factory-built homes certified in accordance with **CSA A277 Procedure for Certification of Prefabricated Buildings, Modules and Panels** are recognized as compliant, by reference or policy, in most provinces and territories. Alberta and Quebec require CSA A277 certification for factory-constructed buildings. Factory-built tiny houses can be certified in accordance with CSA A277.

- **CSA Z240 MH Series Manufactured Homes** defines a manufactured home as a “transportable, single- or multiple-section, one-storey dwelling ready for occupancy on completion of set-up in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions.” Where referenced or accepted by local regulation, CSA Z240 MH-certified tiny houses comply, whether they are constructed with or without a chassis.
- **CSA Z241 Park Model Trailers** defines these as recreational units that in addition to other criteria, are “designed as living quarters for seasonal camping.”



COURTESY GUILDCREST HOMES



Certified in accordance with CSA A277, Guildcrest Homes' Eldorado complies with the Ontario Building Code for year-round occupancy. Set on a permanent foundation, it has a gross area of 486 sq. ft.; 621 sq. ft. including patio.

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The standard does not apply to houses intended for year-round use. Tiny houses can be constructed in accordance with CSA Z241, but then cannot be used as a permanent residence.

- **The CSA Z240 RV Series** defines a recreational vehicle as “a vehicular-type unit that is primarily designed as temporary living quarters for recreational, camping, or seasonal use.” Recreational vehicles are considered to be vehicles rather than buildings. Tiny houses can be constructed in accordance with **CSA Z240 RV Series**, but then cannot be used as a permanent residence.

The one aberrant case is a site-built tiny house for year-round use, constructed on a chassis and not placed on a permanent foundation. In order to comply with building regulations, these houses would need to be installed on permanent foundations; and may also need to pass the deformation-resistance test provided in CSA Z240.2.1. They may also need to meet the most stringent requirements to ensure they will comply with local requirements wherever they move.

How Small Can You Go?

Except for the Ontario Building Code, building regulations do not specify minimum areas for dwelling units, rooms or spaces. Other requirements may raise compliance questions, such as those for ceiling heights and lofts; hallway and doorway widths; stairs, handrails and guards; egress windows; smoke alarms; foundations and anchorage; ventilation and energy efficiency.

The Biggest Barrier

In the end, it turns out that zoning bylaws present the biggest regulatory hurdle. Minimum specifications for lot size or building area, outdated terminology, or a failure to recognize non-typical land use such as land-lease or condominium developments all present barriers to tiny houses.

Tiny houses offer housing choice and affordability. While the idea is not new, there is new interest in the idea. If you're looking to answer demand for tiny houses, check with local officials on the requirements that apply in your market, and be sure to get clear interpretation of the requirements.