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## Findings for the Placement of Tiny Houses in New Orleans

Michelle M. Thompson PhD, GISP  
*University of New Orleans, mmthomp1@uno.edu*

Jennie Garcia  
*University of New Orleans, New Orleans*

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## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Tim and Erin  
*Preservation Tiny House Company (PTHC)*  
**From:** Jennie Garcia (JG)  
**Date:** May 8, 2017  
**Re:** Findings for the Placement of Tiny Houses in New Orleans



### I. Purpose

This memorandum serves as report on the findings of Tiny Houses in the City of New Orleans. This project looks at the issues related to how and/or if ‘prefabricated’ housing is defined by housing type, conforms to zoning and is valued (by the assessor and private banks) in the New Orleans market. The case study will summarize existing and proposed ordinances that relate to the design and siting requirements for houses on wheels and without. The definition of tiny houses built by Preservation Tiny House Company falls into the category of ‘mobile homes’ or ‘trailers’ which many manufactured houses are considered. (Manufactured Homes and Parks- Definitions, Municipal Code City of New Orleans) The study will identify potential development city-wide sites that have been returned to commerce (formerly blighted). The issues related to nonconforming sites and housing developments are those which the Louisiana Manufactured Housing Association (LMHA) are interested in beyond Louisiana. We may be able to provide literature which focuses on zoning and building definitions.

### II. Methods of Analysis or Project Overview

The first step in understanding tiny house types an analysis of small house types was conducted. It was discovered that New Orleans has two traditional small house types, the Creole Cottage and the Shotgun House (Ferguson, 2013). Small homes are not a new phenomenon to the city of New Orleans. Smaller house types can be found in just about every neighborhood in this city starting with the early French settlement and the construction of the Creole Cottage. Traditionally, a Creole Cottage was constructed to have two rooms wide and two rooms deep set on top of a minimal foundation right along property lines with no front setback or yard. Another typical small house found in New Orleans is the Shotgun house type. These were built from the 1830s all the way up to the 1950s and were built in response to the standard lot dimension of the times, 30 by 120 feet. These long narrow lots shaped the linear form of Shotgun houses that are traditionally one room wide and three to five rooms deep, of course there are many variations to these house types. (Ferguson, 2017)



*Exterior view of a traditional shotgun house.  
Retrieved from: [www.knowlouisiana.org/entry/shotgun-house](http://www.knowlouisiana.org/entry/shotgun-house)*

By the 1930s to the 1940s, another small house type was introduced on the national level. While the Creole Cottage and Shotgun House can be easily recognized in the Gulf Coast Region, small houses can be found all over the United States. Small houses became prevalent after the Great Depression and post-World War II, 1930s-1940s. At this time in history, the U.S. was the only country to respond to a targeted approach to single-family houses. With a large need for low-cost housing during a succession of desperate economic times, unprecedented collaboration by the federal government, the building industry, architectural and engineering professions, building trades, university “extension” programs, building code officials, and home-loan finance

institutions. There was also a clear national goal of providing well-designed, well-built, affordable, small single family houses. (Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 2008) This housing crisis set into effect the 1934 National Housing Act, created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and strengthened the private home-mortgage market by establishing the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, a federalized regional “banker’s bank” system and the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae), which was authorized to buy and sell privately issued mortgages. By the mid-1930s the federal government led the way in building some of the first American Small Houses through its federally funded public works projects. (Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 2008)



American Small House. Retrieved from: [http://georgiashpo.org/sites/uploads/bpd/pdf/American\\_Small\\_House.pdf](http://georgiashpo.org/sites/uploads/bpd/pdf/American_Small_House.pdf)

The house type that was a response to the economic times of the 1930s-1940s is called by many names such as Victory Cottage, Minimal Traditional House, Depression Era Cottage, the FHA House, or American Small House. American Small Houses unlike current Tiny Houses, had a set standard that they had to follow in order for purchasers to qualify for home loans. American Small Houses had to have a minimum of three major rooms, a living room, bedroom, kitchen, and with a bathroom and utility closet. The smallest of Small Houses had to have a minimum of two bedrooms in order for a prospective home buyer to qualify for a mortgage. One of the greatest capacities for American Small Houses was the ability to expand for future needs by either having the ability to add an upper one-story, or to extend

horizontally in either direction by enclosing a sunporch. These house types were always two rooms across the front and hallways were non-existent or very small. The interior configuration was not as important as the distinctive compact character. American Small Houses also displayed various architectural styles that reflected the owners or builders taste and some were even mass produced. (Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 2008)

The next step in understanding tiny houses was to find a concrete definition that defines a tiny house. In October 2016, the Colorado Legislative Council Staff defined tiny houses as:

*“A tiny house is typically defined as a residential dwelling that has between 100 and 400 total square feet of living space. There are two main types of tiny houses — on-foundation and off-foundation (built on trailers with wheels), which determines the regulations applicable to a specific tiny house.”*

This definition serves as a concrete understanding of size dimensions of tiny houses and can help Preservation Tiny House to set forth defining characteristics for their tiny houses.

The next step in the analysis process was to identify a city that allows tiny houses. Currently Fresno, California has been successful in gaining city approval for tiny houses. At first this seems like a success for those who support the tiny house movement, but it is only a minor success after one reads the new zoning ordinance.

In November 2015 the City of Fresno enacted a new Development Code that favors tiny house and tiny homes on wheels. Despite the favorable ruling, there is one stipulation that may keep homeownership out of the hands of those living in the tiny homes. This stipulation states that ‘Second Dwelling Units as an accessory to Single-Unit Dwellings...’<sup>1</sup> In Fresno’s Code of Ordinances a Single-Unit Dwelling is defined as a ‘dwelling unit designed for the occupancy by one household, located on a single lot and typically grouped together in a row of similar units. They may be attached through common vertical party wall(s) to one or more dwellings on abutting lots, or may appear to be attached, but are structurally independent.’<sup>2</sup> If a tiny house must be a secondary unit to a single unit dwelling, then this code falls short of allowing homeownership for those wanting to live and own a tiny house.

1 SEC 15-2754.-Second Dwelling Units, Backyard Cottages, and Accessory Living Quarters, Municipal Code City of Fresno, California

2 SEC. 15-6702.-Residential Use Classifications, Municipal Code City of Fresno, California

Despite having to be part of a Single-Unit Dwelling, Fresno does lay out clear rules and regulations on defining tiny houses. Under Section 15-2754, Type of Unit, Backyard Cottage it states that ‘a Tiny House may be considered a Backyard Cottage if it meets all the requirements of this section.’<sup>3</sup> Below are some excerpts that outline the requirements for Tiny Houses in Fresno.

### E. Type of Unit.

1. Second Dwelling Unit. May provide separate, independent living quarters for one household. Units may be attached, detached, or located within the living areas of the primary dwelling unit on the lot, subject to the standards of this subsection. Kitchens, including cooking devices are permitted.

2. Backyard Cottage. May provide separate, independent living quarters for one household. Units may be attached, detached, or located within the living areas of the primary dwelling unit on the lot, subject to the standards of this subsection. Kitchens, including cooking devices are permitted. Backyard Cottages shall be located behind the primary dwelling unit, unless attached and integral to the primary dwelling unit.

a. Tiny House may be considered a Backyard Cottage if it meets all the requirements of this section.

b. The Director shall review the design of the Tiny House to insure that the structure is compatible with the main home and the neighborhood.

**F. Maximum Floor Area.** The following are the maximum square footages of habitable area. The following calculations only include habitable floor space. Minor Deviations and/or Variances are not permitted to increase the maximum floor areas.

1. Second Dwelling Units. 1,250 square feet.
2. Backyard Cottages. 440 square feet.
3. Accessory Living Quarters. 500 square feet or 30 percent of the primary single-family dwelling, whichever is less.

The next step was to identify a company in Louisiana that sold a type of house similar in size as those PTH wants to build. A manufactured housing company by the name of Cappaert Manufactured Housing, Inc. (<https://cappaert.biz/>) was found with the nearest dealer to New Orleans in Arabi, Louisiana. The name of the dealer is Courtesy and their address is 7777 W. St. Bernard Hwy with a phone number of (504) 277-8106. A phone call was quickly made to inquire about size, price, and placement of the manufactured home in New Orleans. It was soon discovered that their smallest model is called “The Cottage” and is approximately 720 sq. ft with two bedrooms and one bathroom. This model is priced from 25k-30k depending on the finishes the buyer requests. It was also asked if the term tiny house appropriately describes “The Cottage.” The dealer quickly stated that this model is not a tiny house but is technically called a mobile home and in order to place a model in New Orleans, the lot must meet Zone 3 regulations.



*The Cottage. Retrieved from: <https://cappaert.biz/>*

### III. Findings

After an analysis was conducted to understand the definition of tiny houses and to see how a city such as Fresno allowed for tiny houses, the next step was to look into New Orleans' zoning regulations. A look into defining key terms was first conducted to understand how the Preservation Tiny Houses could fit inside of the local zoning ordinance. Since their tiny houses are set on wheels it was quickly deduced that these tiny houses are defined as mobile homes.

*“Mobile home or trailer means any vehicles, covered or uncovered, used for living, sleeping, business or storage purposes, having no foundation other than wheels, blocks, skids, jacks, horses, or skirtings and which is, has been, or reasonably may be equipped with wheels or other devices for transporting the vehicle from place to place, whether by motive power or other means.”<sup>4</sup>*

Once Preservation Tiny House's (PTH) homes were defined, the next step was to identify where mobile homes can be placed in New Orleans. This was done by placing a call with the New Orleans Planning Department. Since PTH uses wheels on their tiny houses, they fall under the category of a mobile home or RV. Due to this definition, the only place to put a tiny house would be in a trailer park, or more specifically a Recreational Vehicle Park.

In New Orleans, trailer parks are titled recreational vehicle park. There are only three zoned areas to place these in, C-3, LI-HI, or in a non-conforming use where recreational vehicles (trailers) existed prior to the new CZO. LI-HI refers to Light Industrial or High Industrial use.

According to the CZO 20.3.XX recreational vehicle (RV) Park:

1. An RV park shall be located on a site a minimum of one (1) city square in all districts except the Rural Residential Districts. In the Rural Residential Districts, an RV park shall be located on a site of a minimum of two and one-half (2.5) acres.
2. Minimum rental space size for spaces having utility connections shall be fifteen hundred (1,500) square feet. Minimum rental space size for those spaces not having utility connections shall be nine hundred (900) square feet. Minimum rental space size does not include any area required for access roads, off-street parking, service buildings, recreation areas, office, and similar RV park needs.
3. All spaces shall be equipped with a surfaced pad of asphalt or concrete, or an approved permeable paving surface, of not less than ten (10) feet by forty (40) feet, containing connections for water, sewer, and electricity. Each RV unit shall be parked entirely on the surfaced area so that no part of the vehicle obstructs any roadway or walkway within the RV Park.
4. An RV park shall meet the following yard and distancing requirements:
  - a. An RV park shall maintain a perimeter yard of twenty (20) feet.
  - b. A minimum of ten (10) feet is required between RV units parked side by side or end to end.
  - c. A minimum of twenty (20) feet is required between any RV space and any structure.
  - d. Each vehicle space shall be a minimum width of twenty (20) feet.
5. Every RV park shall provide one (1) or more service buildings equipped with flush toilets, lavatories, showers, and laundry facilities meeting minimum state health department standards. These facilities shall be located no more than three hundred (300) feet from each vehicle space.

6. Every RV park shall provide a minimum of one (1) sanitary disposal station for the purpose of removing and disposing of wastes from holding tanks in a clean, efficient, and convenient manner.
  - a. Each sanitary station shall consist of a drainage basin constructed of impervious material, containing a disposal hatch and self-closing cover, and related washing facilities.
  - b. The disposal hatch of sanitary station units shall be connected to the sewage disposal system. Related facilities required to wash holding tanks and the general area of the sanitary station shall be connected to the RV park water supply system.
  - c. Each sanitary station shall have a sign posted stating “Danger - Not to be used for drinking or domestic purposes.”
7. An RV park shall meet the following utility requirements:
  - a. All utilities shall be placed underground.
  - b. An accessible, adequate, safe, and potable supply of water under pressure shall be provided in every RV park. Each vehicle space equipped with sewer and electrical connections shall be equipped with two (2) water outlets to provide connection for the RV and a garden hose. All other spaces shall be equipped with one (1) water outlet.
  - c. All refuse shall be stored in durable, washable, and nonabsorbent metal or plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. Such containers are required at a rate of one (1) thirty (30) gallon container for each rental space or an equivalent storage capacity in centralized storage facilities. All refuse storage areas must be screened in accordance with Section 23.13.A. Adequate refuse collection and removal is the responsibility of the park owner.
8. Ten percent (10%) of the gross area of the RV park shall be maintained as common open space for playgrounds, picnic areas, and other recreational uses. Open space does not include any area designated as a roadway, RV rental space, storage area, yard area surrounding a caretakers residence, or any area required for setbacks.
9. Temporary structures, such as canvas awnings, screened enclosures or platforms, which are normal camping equipment, may be erected but shall be removed when the rental space is vacated. No other structural additions shall be built onto or become a part of any RV. Storage sheds and other accessory structures are prohibited.
10. No open fires are allowed.

According to Article 16 Centers for Industry 16.4.B Uses (<http://czo.nola.gov/article-16/#16-4-B>)

The following uses are allowed as permitted uses within this sub-district, subject to the design standards of Paragraph C below:

1. Boat launch

2. Commercial marinas
3. Recreational marinas
4. Recreational vehicle park
5. Short term rentals, Commercial
6. Timeshare

Knowing that PTH uses wheels, it was then asked about the placement of a tiny house without wheels. This question was answered with the statement that the city does not discriminate against the size of a house as long as it conforms to building codes and is attached to a permanent foundation at the base flood elevation.

While the city of New Orleans does not discriminate against the size of house, they do utilize the International Building Code, International Residential Code, International Mechanical Code, International Fuel Gas Code, and the National Electrical Code with local amendments. Inside of the International Residential Code, there are minimum requirements for certain room areas. It states that rooms have a floor area of less than 70 square feet, be no less than 7 feet in any direction among other stipulations. With this knowledge in mind, it is advised that PTH work alongside the New Orleans Planning Department to ensure that their tiny houses meet all building standards.

#### **IV. Conclusion & Next Steps**

Continuing to look at how other areas are defining tiny houses and the way this house type is used in other cities is recommended. It is also recommended to take another look at the aesthetics of using wheels. It seems to be a simple fix for PTH to simply take their houses off of wheels and follow local building codes that require all houses to be attached to a permanent foundation. While placing their houses on wheels is part of their design efforts, New Orleans does not seem to be the place for this type of house. Re- working PTH's houses to meet building codes would open up their houses for the New Orleans area even though the idea of a moveable unit is part of the original design, it might be a possibility for other areas. Below is a list of names and contact info for people in the New Orleans Planning Department that can help craft PTH's tiny houses to meet the requirements set forth by building codes and local governing ordinances.

- Zachary Smith, Chief Building Official City of New Orleans [zrsmith@nola.gov](mailto:zrsmith@nola.gov)
- Brooke Perry, Senior City Planner, New Orleans City Planning Commission, [BTTPerry@nola.gov](mailto:BTTPerry@nola.gov)

Participation, and support from, the Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance (GNOHA) would benefit PTHC since this organization can serve to advocate for Tiny House legislation and get support in redefining the zoning by-laws to increase housing access.

- Andreanecia Morris, GNOHA, [amorris@gnoha.org](mailto:amorris@gnoha.org), (504)224-8300

## V. Data Sources

City of Fresno. (2017). Fresno, California- Code of Ordinances. Retrieved from Municipal Code City of Fresno, California: [https://www.municode.com/library/ca/fresno/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances](https://www.municode.com/library/ca/fresno/codes/code_of_ordinances)

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New Orleans Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. (n.d.) Article 16 Centers for Industry. Retrieved from: <https://czo.nola.gov/article-16/#16-4-B>

New Orleans Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. (n.d.) Article 20 Use Standards. 20.3.XX Recreational Vehicle (RV) Park. Retrieved from: <https://czo.nola.gov/article-20/#20-3-XX>



V. Appendices

Locations for Recreational Vehicle (RV) Placement in New Orleans

