

SMALL HOUSE (“TINY HOUSE”) CODE REGULATIONS

This guide is intended to provide the registered design professional, future homeowner, and/or contractor with basic information about certain zoning ordinance, building code, property maintenance code (housing code), and contractor licensing regulations pertinent to the design and construction of very small houses, commonly called “Tiny Houses”, intended to be used as a dwelling unit.

“Tiny Houses” intended to be used as a dwelling unit must be constructed on-site on a foundation in order to be located within a residential area in Unincorporated St. Louis County. Manufactured (prefabricated/modular type) “Tiny Houses” are also permitted provided they have the affixed seal of the Missouri Public Service Commission (MPSC) as a prefabricated/modular home and are set on an “approved foundation”. Prefabricated/modular homes are generally transported to the site on flatbed trucks or on a temporary axle with wheels that is removed at the destination site so that the home can be set on a permanent foundation. “Tiny Houses” constructed on a permanent chassis with wheels by either a manufacturer or owner are not permitted within residential areas in Unincorporated County by the County’s Zoning Ordinance. Manufactured “Tiny House” homes on wheels that have an affixed HUD or FHA certification tag may be located in a designated “House-Trailer Park” for mobile homes. Generally all other “Tiny Houses” constructed on wheels, either by a manufacturer or owner, would be considered as, or similar to, RV’s intended for occasional recreational use and thus not allowed to be used within Unincorporated County as a dwelling unit or house trailer (mobile home) for living purposes.

Construction codes require that the electrical, plumbing, and mechanical work for houses built on-site be performed by contractors licensed by the County to do such work. On-site utility hookups for MPSC labeled prefabricated/modular homes must also be done by licensed contractors.

The following is a user-friendly version of the minimum room and space square footage and ceiling height requirements, including overcrowding regulations, applicable to the design and occupancy of “Tiny Houses” from the 2009 International Residential Code (IRC) and 2009 International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC), as amended and adopted by County Ordinances. Compliance with the most restrictive provisions of both codes is required in order to construct and occupy, as well as, to eventually sell and re-occupy a “Tiny House” as a dwelling unit.

In addition to the information provided herein it is recommended that the design professional (Missouri Licensed Architect or Professional Engineer) also obtain and review a copy of St. Louis County’s “Single-Family Dwelling Checklist” to aid in the design and preparation of the plans required for submittal with the application for building permit for a “Tiny House”.

MINIMUM ROOM AREA, SPACE, AND CEILING HEIGHT REQUIREMENTS

The aggregate area of the rooms and spaces, and ceiling heights within, shall meet the minimum code requirements listed below except that the design may include combined use of spaces in an economical or “efficient” manner provided the design complies with the requirements listed below for

an “efficiency living unit” and the occupancy is limited to 2 or 3 occupants depending on the floor area provided.

Minimum living room area. Every dwelling unit shall have at least one habitable room that shall have not less than 120 square feet of gross floor area. *(Reference IRC R304.1 and IPMC 404.4.1)*

Note: The IPMC identifies this room as a living room *(Reference IPMC 404.4.1)*.

Bedroom(s). Bedrooms shall not be less than 7 feet in any horizontal dimension and shall have a floor area of not less than 70 square feet when occupied by one person and every bedroom occupied by more than one person shall contain at least 50 square feet of floor area for each occupant thereof. *(Reference IRC Sections 304.2 and 304.3 and IPMC Sections 404.2 & 404.5 as amended)*

Kitchen. Each dwelling unit shall be provided with a kitchen area and every kitchen area shall be provided with a sink. Kitchens shall have a minimum area of 50 square feet and have a clear passageway of not less than 3 feet between counter fronts and appliances or counter fronts and walls. *(Reference IRC Section R306.2 and IPMC Sections 404.2, 404.5 as amended & 502.1)*

Other habitable rooms. Other habitable rooms shall not be less than 7 feet in any horizontal dimension and shall have a floor area of not less than 70 square feet. *(Reference IRC Sections 304.2 and 304.3 and IPMC Sections 404.2)*

Note: A separate dining room is required when the dwelling unit is intended for more than 2 occupants. For 3-5 occupants the dining room is required to be a minimum of 80 square feet. *(Reference IPMC Section 404.5 as amended)*

Bathroom. Every dwelling unit shall be provided with a partitioned off bathroom having a water closet, lavatory, and a bathtub or shower. The water closet and lavatory shall not be set closer than 15 inches from their centerline to any side wall, partition, vanity, tub, or shower or set closer than 30 inches between the centerlines of adjacent fixtures. At least 21 inches clearance shall be provided in front of the fixtures except that at least 24 inches is required in front of a shower opening. The lavatory shall be located in close proximity to the water closet. The kitchen sink shall not substitute for the lavatory. *(Reference IRC Sections R306.1 & R307.1, Uniform Plumbing Code Section 405.3.1, and IPMC Section 502.1.)*

Note: While no specific minimum room size is indicated the bathroom needs to be approximately 30 square feet in area to comply with the fixture spacing and clearance requirements.

Vertical egress & hallways. Vertical egress from habitable levels shall be by a 36 inch wide stairway having a maximum riser height of 8¼ inches, minimum tread depth of 9 inches, and minimum 6 feet 8 inches headroom. Winder treads and spiral stairs complying with the IRC are permitted. Ladders are not permitted. Hallways, if provided, shall be not less than 36 inches wide. *(Reference IRC Sections R311.4 as amended & R311.6)*

Mechanical equipment & appliances. Heat and hot water must be provided. Sufficient space shall be provided for mechanical equipment and hot water appliances to maintain minimum clearances to combustible materials and provide access for maintenance. A minimum of 30 inches of clearance is required at the front of the appliance for service. *(Reference IPMC Sections 602 & 603 and pertinent*

IRC and Plumbing Code requirements along with the manufacturer's installation instructions depending on type of heating system and hot water appliance selected)

Electrical panel. An electrical system connected to a public utility must be provided. Circuit breaker panels shall not be concealed and are not permitted in a bedroom or within bathrooms or clothes closets. A minimum 36 inch deep by 30 inch wide, having a minimum 6 feet 6 inches headroom, unobstructed clearance area is required in front of electrical panels. Doors cannot open towards a panel. Counters and cabinets cannot be installed under the electrical panel. A communication outlet is required cabled to the service provider demarcation point. *(Reference IPMC Section 604 and National Electrical Code Sections 240-24, 110-26 and 800.156)*

Ceiling height. Habitable space (living/dining areas, bedrooms, kitchen area, etc.), hallways, bathrooms, toilet rooms, laundry rooms and portions of basements containing these spaces shall have a ceiling height of not less than 7 feet.

Exceptions:

- For rooms with sloped ceilings, at least 50 percent of the required floor area of the room must have a ceiling height of at least 7 feet and no portion of the required floor area may have a ceiling height of less than 5 feet. Note: The IPMC indicates these rooms are to be used exclusively for sleeping, study, or similar purposes.
- Bathrooms shall have a minimum ceiling height of 6 feet 8 inches at the center of the front clearance area for fixtures as shown in IRC Figure 307.1. The ceiling height above fixtures shall be such that the fixture is capable of being used for its intended purpose. A shower or tub equipped with a showerhead shall have a minimum ceiling height of 6 feet 8 inches above a minimum area 30 inches by 30 inches at the showerhead.

(Reference IRC Section 305.1 as amended and IPMC Section 404.3)

Efficiency living unit. A unit occupied by not more than 2 occupants shall have a clear floor area of not less than 220 square feet and when occupied by 3 occupants shall have a clear floor area of not less than 320 square feet. These required areas are exclusive of a kitchen area which shall include a kitchen sink, cooking appliance, and refrigeration facilities (each having a clear working space of 30 inches in front) and a separate bathroom containing a water closet, lavatory, and bathtub or shower. *(Reference IPMC Section 404.6)*

Note: While no specific minimum floor area is indicated for the kitchen and bathroom they would increase the above minimum square footages by approximately 80 square feet thus a unit for 1-2 occupants would need to have a clear floor area of around 300 square feet and a unit for 3 occupants would need to have a clear floor area of around 400 square feet. This required clear floor area is exclusive of the space needed for vertical egress on designs having a habitable loft or second level.

Utility hookups. All plumbing fixtures must be connected either to a public water system or to an approved private water system (well) and connected to a public sanitary sewer or approved private sewage disposal system such as a septic system. An electrical system connected to a public utility is required. *(Reference IRC Section R306, National Electrical Code, and IPMC Sections 505, 506, & 604)*

KEY WORD AND TERM DEFINITIONS

The codes provide the following definitions and meanings for the words and terms used above.

Bathroom. A room containing plumbing fixtures including a bathtub or shower. *(Reference IPMC Section 202)*

Bedroom. Any room or space used or intended to be used for sleeping purposes in either a dwelling or sleeping unit. *(Reference IPMC Section 202)*

Dwelling. Any building that contains one or two dwelling units used, intended, or designed to be built, used, rented, leased, let or hired out to be occupied, or that are occupied for living purposes. *(Reference IRC Section R202 and IPMC Section 202)*

Dwelling Unit. A single unit providing complete independent living facilities for one or more persons, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation. *(Reference IRC Section R202 and IPMC Section 202)*

Habitable Space. A space in a building for living, sleeping, eating or cooking. Bathrooms, toilet rooms, closets, halls, storage or utility spaces and similar areas are not considered habitable spaces. *(Reference IRC Section R202 and IPMC Section 202)*

Room. A partitioned part of the inside of a building. *(Reference IRC Section R201.4 and IPMC Section 201.4 – Webster Dictionary definition)*

Approved Foundation. For prefabricated/modular homes located within residential subdivisions, a concrete or masonry perimeter enclosure that creates a basement or crawl space area below the dwelling unit. Attached porches and decks may be supported on the ends by piers. *(Reference zoning ordinance and IRC Section R104.1 & R201.4 – Code Enforcement Policy)*