

GREEN TECH THE SERIES COLUMN FOR JUNE 22, 2016  
HEADLINE: THE TINY HOUSE DILEMMA: PART TWO

Some weeks ago I wrote on the rapidly growing popularity of the tiny house movement if it can be called that. I received a larger than average number of e-mails asking me to expand on these homes.

While still a fringe life style, tiny home living is growing and has crossed the border into Canada where some issues are similar to our American neighbors; some are considerably different, the largest being our climate. There is also some argument as to the real value of a tiny home vs. a recreational vehicle. The arguments on both sides are mostly from personal preferences. Tiny Home supporters say they feel more like a real home, they can be moved if need be and you can design and build as you want with materials that are toxin free. The other side of the discussion is tiny homes weigh more, a lot more and fact and are not fun to tow, nor is the cost of fuel moving something that is not aerodynamic in most cases. One study I have said that an average tiny home weighs 10,000 lbs. or more. You do not move this with a half-ton truck or even some  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton rigs. Finding a place to locate a tiny home is a grey area at best in most municipalities. RV supporters can claim, rightfully so that most RV's are in fact homes and many four season trailer parks have large RV's permanently located on site. RV's are aerodynamic and towing is a lot easier and far less costly.

Let's expand on the "home feel" of a tiny home. They are just that, tiny and for some the aesthetics are a huge factor citing the home can feel more solid, well built, spacious and permanent whereas an RV has the connotation that it's still camping, all be it a very upscale camping. Tiny homes are usually better insulated and winter-proof which is a factor here in Canada. The better tiny homes are spray foamed and this adds a substantial structural benefit. If the owner has any allergy issues, then selection of assembly materials that are non-toxic can be a major factor for the air quality of the home. The other tiny home argument is the floor plan can be designed for the owner's personal needs. RVs and even Park models usually have a set floor plan with some choices as these are built on an assembly line.

I have been in a couple of tiny homes and this current craze, while it has merit from an environmental footprint I think it's going to come where some manner of regulations will have to happen, if the popularity continues. Tiny houses are not for everyone other than a bachelor or a very devoted environmentally couple.

Any sort of privacy is questionable, socializing is limited unless you have a good outdoor space and that is seasonal. Most of them use a composting toilet. On this subject I can weigh in, we lived in a home with one for over a year. Composting toilets are work, they take up a lot of space and must be kept up, you have to deal with the actual compost residue and the smell is always a factor. The next issue is water and I have not seen a tiny home with any sort of water storage tank, they are usually designed to be hooked up to some type of pressurized municipal or well system.

There are two major stumbling blocks right now, tiny homes are not cheap. I saw a recent resale of one in the USA with a footprint of 240 sq. ft.; it sold for just under \$50,000.00 CDN. A similar sized RV with a winter insulation package, Yes I agree it's not as well insulated, can be bought for almost half of that. You can finance an RV or Park Model home, getting financing for a tiny home may be difficult or as one banker I asked, not from his institution. One insurance agent I contacted said they were "reviewing" these homes and as yet no home insurance was available to his knowledge.

The other major stumbling block is where do you locate it once it is built? I am going to quote from the website for the "Tiny Homes Construction Company" a Canadian business building and selling these homes. "First off, we strongly advise that everyone do their own due diligence and consult municipality and local building inspectors in regards to housing regulations" They go on to say " In most municipalities a tiny house, just like an RV or camping trailer, is a temporary shelter" In other words, these homes are in a grey area for permanency. I am aware that recently one municipality did dramatically lower their requirements for a size of a home. Hastings Highlands, located north of Belleville now allows homes that are 348 sq. feet. They must however sit on a concrete slab or code compliant piers, not a trailer frame. They must also meet all health and occupancy standards, in other words, a potable water system and a septic system or connected to the local municipal infrastructure. They also have to meet the Ontario Building Code.

My comments here have been hard on tiny homes and right now until there is some standard with respect to assembly methods, uniform grey and black water regulations and some permanency to their location they have a ways to go for acceptance as a main stream alternative housing. I have to wonder how long their values will hold as a trailered home, RV's lose their value over time.

On the plus side, we don't need 3000 sq. ft. homes and I still feel that a home with a footprint of 400-800 square feet can be very comfortable. One look as

some of the loft or single bedroom condominiums now sold in the major cities within this square footage attests to that.

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