

Analysis of Tiny Homes

Recommendation

That Administration prepare amendments to Zoning Bylaw 12800, as outlined in Attachment 3 of the September 3, 2019, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development report CR_6599, and return to a future City Council Public Hearing.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the October 30, 2018, Urban Planning Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide a report with an analysis of the tiny homes industry including tiny homes on wheels.

Executive Summary

Recent work on garden suite regulations and the Infill Roadmap 2018 have highlighted the potential for creating opportunities for tiny homes in Edmonton. Through discussions with tiny home builders in Alberta, alongside Action 3 of the Infill Roadmap 2018 “Investigate opportunities for tiny homes and find multiple ways to accommodate them,” Administration has found a growing interest in tiny homes. Administration has identified a number of regulatory barriers that have prevented the tiny homes market from becoming established in Edmonton especially for tiny homes on wheels. Administration has prepared amendments to further enable tiny homes on a foundation to be developed in Edmonton and is encouraging the Province of Alberta and Safety Codes Council to establish a policy to address tiny homes through the Alberta Building Code.

Report

Tiny homes are a form of housing with a small footprint that is designed to be self-contained and usually has a floor area less than 40 square metres. Tiny homes can be divided into two types, ‘tiny homes’ and ‘tiny homes on wheels.’ Tiny homes are placed or constructed on a foundation, whereas tiny homes on wheels are portable dwellings constructed on a metal frame and trailer, or chassis, which facilitates towing.

In conversations with the tiny home industry, Administration heard that the tiny home movement has recently gained interest from those seeking a smaller living space, whether it be a lifestyle choice, an effort to reduce their environmental footprint, for affordability, mobility, independence, or a combination of these factors. Tiny home

builders highlighted that despite this interest, navigating the regulatory context can be challenging without clear regulations and has stifled the market. More details on what Administration heard from the tiny homes industry can be found in Attachment 1 - Tiny Home Industry in Alberta.

Regulatory Context

To better understand existing constraints to tiny homes, Administration looked at zoning, safety, and traffic regulations as well as other considerations like utility connections.

Zoning Regulations

Currently, Edmonton's Zoning Bylaw 12800 provides some allowance for site-built tiny homes to be considered garden suites or single detached housing, but does not contemplate tiny homes on wheels. The closest set of regulations relates to mobile homes and these regulations create limited opportunities for these forms of housing throughout Edmonton.

Administration conducted a jurisdictional scan of how other municipalities regulate tiny homes through zoning. While several smaller jurisdictions in Canada have begun to regulate tiny homes, no large city in Canada has begun regulating tiny homes on wheels. Municipalities identified that it is unclear how to apply building code regulations to tiny homes on wheels.

Administration found inconsistent zoning regulations and that tiny homes are frequently required to be on permanent foundations and developed as accessory dwellings or in separate zones. For more information on how tiny homes are regulated through zoning in Edmonton and other municipalities, refer to Attachment 2 - Zoning Bylaw Regulations for Tiny Homes.

Administration has drafted amendments for Zoning Bylaw 12800, included in Attachment 3 - Mark-up of Proposed Changes for Stationary Tiny Homes. The mark-up proposes changes that would allow the development of tiny homes and smaller mobile homes as Single Detached Housing and Garden Suites, and includes performance standards to ensure the materials used are similar to surrounding development.

Clusters of tiny homes would be allowed in the RF5 - Row Housing Zone, as proposed in amendments contained in *CR_7387 Charter Bylaw 18967 Text Amendment to Enable Missing Middle Housing*. Clustered Tiny Homes would require a minimum spacing of 2.4m and would be required to follow setback regulations of the zones and overlays that apply to the site.

The changes also propose to create a definition for recreational vehicles to provide a distinction between tiny homes suitable to be used as a dwelling from recreational vehicles and structures intended for seasonal accommodation. Administration also prepared a mark-up for changes that could allow for tiny homes on wheels, should building and safety codes be developed for this form of housing, included in Attachment 4 - Mark-up of Proposed Changes for Tiny Homes on Wheels.

Building and Safety Codes

While amendments to Zoning Bylaw 12800 could create opportunities for tiny homes on wheels to receive development permits, Administration wanted to ensure that these dwellings would provide safe, all-weather appropriate housing for Edmontonians. Administration looked to the Alberta Building Code and its source document the National Building Code of Canada, and found that it does not address buildings constructed off-site outside of a factory or on a chassis, which is the case for many tiny homes on wheels. This creates uncertainty around what codes or standards apply to tiny homes on wheels and thus how they should be constructed.

To address this regulatory gap, Administration is working with the Province of Alberta and the Safety Codes Council to develop a policy and guidelines on building code requirements for tiny homes, so that building permits may be efficiently and consistently issued for these structures in Edmonton. The intent is to ensure safe and habitable dwellings, while still accommodating the unique designs of tiny homes. For further information on building code considerations related to tiny homes, refer to Attachment 5 - Building and Safety Codes and Tiny Homes.

Transporting Tiny Homes

Another factor to consider for tiny homes on wheels is how the structure is transported to its intended location. In Edmonton, permits from the City's Traffic Operations Section as well as Alberta Transportation are needed for moving oversized loads. In addition to issuing permits, Traffic Operations provides valuable information such as route planning, temporary parking bans, and aerial and power line raising that may be required. A tiny home that falls below the size requirements for a permit may not obtain this information unless they contact Traffic Operations.

Utilities and Servicing

Although there are opportunities for tiny homes to go 'off-grid' through renewable energy sources, there are some utilities and services that residents in Edmonton cannot opt-out of, such as sanitary and sewer drainage services.

Conclusion

Currently, tiny homes constructed on site, on a foundation, can be permitted as Single Detached Housing and as Garden Suites. Proceeding with the proposed amendments in Attachment 3 will enable smaller mobile homes, including manufactured tiny homes

not on wheels, to be developed as Single Detached Housing and Garden Suites. The proposed mark-up in Attachment 4 would enable development permits for tiny homes on wheels through Zoning Bylaw 12800. Due to uncertainty about how to apply the building code to this type of dwelling, Administration is currently unable to issue building permits for tiny homes on wheels and recommends delaying changes for this housing form until clarity from the Province of Alberta is provided.

Public Engagement

This project builds on the extensive engagement work of Infill Roadmap 2018, which led to Action 3: “Investigate opportunities for tiny homes and find multiple ways to accommodate them.” Engagement on tiny homes was also undertaken as part of the October 30, 2018, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development report CR_5113 - Zoning Bylaw Amendment - Garden Suites. The presentation of this report included the results of an Insight Survey that found 67 percent of respondents supported tiny homes on wheels, with 22 percent not supporting tiny homes on wheels. When asked if recreational vehicles should be considered tiny homes on wheels, 40 percent of respondents supported this approach and 48 percent did not support this approach.

In addition to this earlier engagement, a working draft version of this report was circulated to external stakeholders on May 28, 2019, for four weeks. External stakeholders circulated to include:

- Edmonton Federation of Community League Planning Committee
- Individual Community Leagues
- Canadian Home Builders’ Association - Edmonton Region
- YEG Garden Suites
- Infill Development in Edmonton Association
- Urban Development Institute
- Community and industry stakeholders from the Garden Suites project.

A summary of the comments are found in Attachment 6 - Public Engagement Comments.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmonton is attractive and compact.			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Neighbourhoods have a range of housing choices.	Residential Housing Diversity Index (Simpson Diversity Index)	0.68 (2016) Growth Monitoring report	Increase

Risk Assessment

Risk Element	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Score (with current mitigations)	Current Mitigations	Potential Future Mitigations
Public perception	Members of the public are opposed to adjustments to develop regulations to allow tiny homes on wheels and expand opportunities for smaller mobile homes.	3 - possible	1 - minor	3 - low	Providing opportunities for feedback on the draft regulations.	Sharing information and developing a 'Tiny Home How-to Guide' as part of educational campaigns.

Attachments

1. Tiny Home Industry in Alberta
2. Zoning Bylaw Regulations for Tiny Homes
3. Mark-up of Proposed Changes for Stationary Tiny Homes
4. Mark-up of Proposed Changes for Tiny Homes on Wheels
5. Building and Safety Codes and Tiny Homes
6. Public Engagement Comments

Others Reviewing this Report

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- R. Smyth, Deputy City Manager, Citizen Services
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