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Tiny Houses—The Truth

Can I build a Tiny House in Lancaster County?

You have seen them on TV. Build a Tiny House for \$25,000 and save lots of money. But is it legal? Will code allow it? Will County ordinances allow it? No, No and No ! Why?

1. Most tiny houses are built on a rolling frame which makes them a camper. If you can pull it behind your car or truck and set it up at different location, it is a camper. In Lancaster County, you cannot live in a camper. Section 11-15 of the UDO reads” *Not more than one travel or camping trailer per family living on the premises shall be permitted on a lot in any residential district; and the trailer shall not be occupied temporarily or permanently while it is parked or stored.*”
2. The International Residential Code requires that rooms be a minimum size. One room must be 120 sq ft.. That might be the living room. Other rooms must be minimum 70 sq ft. So a bedroom and bathroom would add 140 sq ft. Kitchens must have a minimum dimension of seven feet,
3. Ceilings must have a minimum height of 7 feet for all usable spaces other than closets. That loft bedroom may not have enough ceiling clearance.
4. Hallways must be 3 feet wide.
5. One exterior exit door is required to be 3 feet wide. Both sides of the door must be provided with a landing of at least 36 inches by 36 inches.
6. Windows in bedrooms must have 5.7 sq ft openable area if more than 44 inches above grade to the sill.
7. Smoke alarms are required in every bedroom, outside every sleeping area and on every level. If fuel fired appliances or furnace are used, a carbon monoxide detector is required.
8. You must have a heating system capable of maintaining a temperature of 68*.F
9. You must have at least one water closet (toilet) , one lavatory and a bath tub or shower. The shower must be a minimum 30 inches by 30 inches or 1,300 sq. inches if a narrower shower is chosen.

10. Showers must have a nonabsorbent surface up to a height of 6 feet above the floor.
11. Unless there is an openable window, bathrooms require mechanical exhaust fans to remove moisture.
12. A permanent, approved water supply is required for each residence.
13. An approved sanitary sewer system is required.
14. See the handout entitled “Residential Electrical Requirements” for an extensive list of residential requirements which include two kitchen GFCI circuits, a separate GFCI circuit for bathrooms, receptacles front and rear on the house, receptacles spaced no more than 12 feet apart, switches at top and bottom of all stairs.
15. Houses are required to have R-30 insulation overhead, R-19 in the floors and R-13 in the walls. All openings are to be draftstopped with caulk or foam.

Ok, How about a Metal Shipping Container? Or a Straw House?

Or a House made of Bottles? Or Plastic jugs? Or Dirt filled Bags?

None of the above are mentioned in the code as standard materials. They would fall under the alternate methods and would have to meet all the requirements listed above and be designed by an architect or engineer licensed in SC. Can they be done? YES ! But not built on a trailer.