

Our View: Don't over-regulate tiny houses

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Communities faced with the need to house homeless people are looking to tiny houses as a partial solution. State lawmakers should help with a streamlined permitting process and simpler code requirements, not throw up obstacles.

A pair of bills now under consideration in the House Committee on Business and Labor would establish new standards for tiny houses, which are not defined or regulated under existing rules.

House Bill 2737 would allow narrow ladders or stairways for lofts and eliminate minimum ceiling height and room size in dwellings 250 square feet or less, and the small homes would not be required to have electrical service or water supply. House Bill 2165 would apply standards for recreational vehicles to tiny homes that are not permanently sited.

Local building code officials testified against the changes last week, complaining that the state usually inspects RVs, and local inspectors are not prepared to do so.

It doesn't seem unreasonable for professional inspectors to learn about RV standards and apply them. But the real head-scratcher was the testimony from Eric Schmidt, Gresham's community development director and president of the board of the Oregon Building Officials Association.

Schmidt said lower standards for tiny houses would somehow demean those living in them because it would send the message that it's acceptable for those people to have a lower "standard of life safety" than someone living in a conventional home.

Living in a tiny house would make a person a second-class citizen, but sleeping under a bridge or under a tarp along Bear Creek doesn't?

Medford has approved a cluster of tiny houses in west Medford for people who are presently homeless. We suspect those folks will not find it insulting to live under a roof.

Housing the homeless is challenging enough without the government setting standards that make a simple solution too complicated to be workable. One builder of tiny houses, who says his units are built to national RV standards, told the committee in writing that he is moving his manufacturing to Idaho because he doesn't want to fight the state over what he sees as unreasonable regulations.

Lawmakers should listen to that message, and get the state out of the way.

[Comments:](#)

3.8.17 A key issue in the discussion of Oregon's treatment of tiny houses is that while Oregon does use the International Building Code (IBC) as its platform for the Oregon Residential Specialty Code, our state building codes agency has elected to eliminate the existing use of ladders or ship-stairs to lofts of habitable spaces which otherwise exists in the IBC. As it is specified in Oregon code, a loft of a tiny house would require a conventional stairway which could take up in excess of half the floor area of the ground floor. The Oregon stated logic is that ladders or steep ships-stairs are unsafe, although they are permissible on recreational vehicles and boats subject to rolling seas. The unstated logic could be a perverse logic opposed to tiny houses used to house homeless or as a suitable aux. guest house. So, my view isn't that the State should get out of the way, per se, but that the State should get on board with the IBC code instead of putting up artificial barriers to solutions to high quality low cost housing. Most housing advocates support quality, but we challenge the interpretation the Oregon agency has applied to the process the IBC has already gone through supporting a different set of solutions for very small houses.