

TINY HOUSES IN THE CITY OF NEWARK

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CASS COMMUNITY SOCIAL
SERVICES

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In 2016 tiny homes were targeted in Detroit Michigan to provide permanent housing to individuals, couples, college students, senior citizens, formerly homeless people and members of the social services staff. The main goal was to provide a tiny house community that was architecturally distinctive and made up of 25 tiny homes ranging from 250 to 400 square feet on 30 x 100 foot lots. Overseen by Reverend Faith Fowler, the Executive Director of Cass Community Social Services who described it as an anti-poverty campaign that will transform the residents of the Detroit neighborhood. Building these tiny houses will also have a positive impact on the environment by reducing the overall carbon footprint that comes from living in a smaller home. (Ford, 2016; Laughling, 2017, Fowler, 2018)

Ford Motor Company has always been a supporter of Cass Community Social Services so it only seemed natural that they work with Reverend Fowler on the tiny home initiative. Ford ended up contributing \$400,000 towards the construction of the 25 tiny houses for low and moderate income residents. Members of the Ford Volunteer Corps also volunteered their time which made Ford the leading funder and supporter of the \$1.5 million dollar project. Ford used finances from its philanthropic fund to make good on its commitment to local community service which it has been doing for over 100 years. The Ford Motor Company has a long history of giving back to Detroit and the Southeast part of Michigan, which also aligns with its mission of making people's lives better through innovation (Ford, 2016; Laughling, 2017, Fowler, 2018).

By August of 2017 the first six tiny houses were built and it was projected as homes for low-income individuals to follow a rent-to-own model. The houses are located on vacant land near the Lodge and Woodrow Wilson Drive with the goal to build 25 houses overall. Each house is built just a little bit differently. Some are studios, some have lofts and some have a separate bedroom. Similar to the City of Newark, people asked questions about building tiny houses in

Detroit: Why don't you just renovate some of the abandoned houses that are already in the city? The cost of renovation is high as is the cost of maintaining a larger home. Gas heat and electric are estimated to cost \$32 a month in a tiny home. A tiny home can give a low-income individual or couple a chance to own an asset which also gives them opportunities to borrow money in the future. The Cass Community Services tiny home program is the only homeownership program for people earning as little as \$10,000 per year in this country. At least half of the renters will be formerly homeless people and the rest will be low-income seniors and students who have aged out of foster care. Anyone who wants to qualify for this program must have a steady income (Ford, 2016; Laughling, 2017, Fowler, 2018).

How much does it cost to build a tiny home?

A 300 square foot house is estimated to cost \$48,000.00 to build which is based on professional trades and purchased materials. Because these tiny homes are being built by volunteers and through donation money, the costs vary depending on size, donated materials and volunteer hours, however, the entire project is privately funded (Ford, 2016; Laughling, 2017, Fowler, 2018).

How many people can live in a tiny home?

Each tiny house is built for 1 single individual or a couple, however each home has a kitchen, bathroom and sleeping area and each home is allowed 2 small pets (Ford, 2016; Laughling, 2017, Fowler, 2018).

Residents will be responsible for maintaining the home and yard. Cass Community Services will loan residents tools such as lawnmowers, rakes, shovels, ladders etc. The exteriors of the homes are also very low maintenance (Ford, 2016; Laughling, 2017, Fowler, 2018).

Interior of one of the Cass Community Tiny Houses (below)



An exterior Tiny House Design





Another Tiny Home built in the Cass Community (above)



Three hundred square foot Tudor style home (above) features a fireplace, large front window and spacious back deck for outdoor living space.

Each residence is totally different because most of the residents are coming from institutions like homeless shelters or senior apartment buildings where everything looks exactly

the same. By making each home different they instill pride in homeownership and the fact that no one else has a house like theirs.

House designs were chosen through Houseplans.com some of the other house plans are:



A cozy 310 square foot cottage with an appealing front stoop and a bump-out with several antique style paned windows



A 356 square foot shingled bungalow with a neighborly front porch, an open feeling and lots of light.



A 320 square foot modern style cottage with a nice front porch, an L shaped kitchenette and clearstory windows for added light.



A classic clapboard cottage with a welcoming front porch, plenty of windows and a fireplace.

Pinnacle Construction built the first home and the other four are being built by Hudson Interiors; Cass's volunteer corps is doing the interior construction. In one month Cass Community Social Services received 122 applications to rent the first 25 tiny houses. Once tenants move in, they pay minimal rent and utilities (e.g. \$300 a month rent for a 300-square-foot home and an estimated electric bill of less than \$35 per month). After three years, tenants are offered a contract to rent to own their homes within four years. This lengthy process is designed to help residents become disciplined about bill paying and the responsibilities of home ownership (Ford, 2016; Laughling, 2017, Fowler, 2018).

After a conversation with Nathaly Agosto Filion, Chief Sustainability Officer for the City of Newark regarding tiny houses, she stated that if you are building 30 residential units, 20% of them need to be designated as affordable housing. In the City of Newark, 40 percent to 80 percent of the median income must be spent on housing to be considered low income, which is based on what you earn compared to the area median income which is about \$35,000 per year. Therefore, in order to qualify for low income housing you must earn between \$13,000 and \$25,500 per year to be considered for affordable housing and 20 percent of the units being built must fit into that category.

When discussing tiny houses, we spoke to the fact that tiny homes leave a smaller carbon footprint in terms of heat, electricity and waste. People are currently paying more than their share for gas and electricity to the city itself based on different home sizes. The department of energy has a report where you can categorize buildings by heating type as well as with other fuels: Area median income 0-30% of 0 -10k per year = 1,700 homes heated by gas, 66 homes heated by propane, 253 homes heated by electric, 388 heated by oil and 4 have no heat at all.

Another reason to advocate for tiny houses is that we are in a region that is susceptible to disaster, or close proximity to disaster (ie: Hurricane Sandy, 911) or man made disaster (ie: lead paint); so Tiny Houses are also a key factor as transitional houses in terms of emergency response and what are best practices. We are in close proximity to New York City, so the City of Newark should be prepared to provide housing for anywhere from 60 days to 18 months. This can also speak to the needs of the homeless population. Home repair that leads to lead paint abatement can displace a lot of people. If we double down and add in displacement of veterans, there is further support for the need for tiny housing.

Tiny home living is not for everyone, however those who are interested in living in a tiny house can join the Tiny House Association and educate others on ways to legalize tiny homes. Tiny houses can also be supported through social media, online, blogs, videos etc. Attending city council meetings to obtain tiny houses and verbalize support can also be done to advocate for tiny house living in your area.

References

- Laughling, Joyanna (2017, January 17) *Tiny Homes for the Homeless* (Blog post) Retrieved from <https://blog.houseplans.com/article/tiny-homes-for-the-homeless>
- Ford Media Center (2016, September 6) *Ford Goes Big to Support First-Ever Detroit Tiny Homes Neighborhood Led by Cass Community Social Services* [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://media.ford.com/content/fordmedia/fna/us/en/news/2016/09/08/Ford-supports-detroit-tiny-homes-neighborhood.html>
- Fowler, Faith (2018, November 14) Cass Community Social Services, Tiny Homes Detroit. Retrieved from: <https://casscommunity.org/tinyhomes>