

Section 5: Finding/Buying Land

While it's true, building a small home is generally less complicated than planning and constructing a larger sized home, there are a few challenges presented with embracing the tiny life. Aside from downsizing, simplifying and the logistical aspects of living in a tiny house, one of the main questions has to do with where you put your tiny house.

The Challenges of Buying Land for Your Tiny House

When you decide it's time to find and buy land for your tiny house, you may be faced with a big challenge and that is that it may be more difficult trying to find an appropriately-sized and cost-effective piece of land for tiny homes than it is for larger-sized homes. Most tiny house builders aren't looking to pay full price for open plots of land since tiny houses are more economical to build. At the same time, small lots are difficult to find and come by. Landowners often aren't eager to split up their property to sell, especially in rural areas. This can present a major challenge for people who are ready to take the tiny house plunge. How then do you find the right-sized piece of land to buy for your tiny house? If you are ready to take the leap to small house living, you'll want to consider the following tips for finding and buying land for a tiny house.

1. Look for the Right Location, Size, and Price

The good news is that tiny homes can be built anywhere as long as the construction follows state and local building codes. Some states and provinces even allow homeowners to build tiny homes in their backyards also known as an accessory dwelling unit (ADUs) or laneway houses. However, a lot of people considering building tiny homes don't have preowned properties to use for a construction or to park their tiny house on wheels. After all, trying to save money is usually a big reason that people look towards smaller spaces. Land is expensive, and chances are, you'll need to find a plot of land that fits your lifestyle, needs, and budget. It's important to have the size, location, and price in mind before you begin your search.

You can use sites like Zillow, LandWatch or Land And Farm to help find land-based on location. To use, search within a designated city under home type such as lots/land. You can also search for land-based on size or price if any of these factors are negotiable. Of course, regardless of the size of land, prices will vary by location, accessibility, and other factors. Potential tiny house owners tend to stay away from city centers, as the land is more expensive and prone to complicated zoning laws and building codes. If you're trying to figure out exactly how much space you'll need, you can also check out sites such as Try It Tiny or Airbnb to rent a tiny house for a short amount of time. This is a great idea before

you take the plunge to a tiny house purchase, as it will give you a taste of small house living. The following are some of the sites you can find available land.

BC Farm and Ranch
Land and Farm
LandFlip and LotFlip
Lands of America
LandWatch
Rural Vacant Land
Zillow

2. Consider Zoning Laws and Building Codes

Zoning Laws

Zoning laws and building codes are two of the biggest considerations that need to go into your land setup for your tiny house. Especially if you plan to connect your tiny house to city water (or if you plan to be on the grid). It's important that your tiny house is up to code because each of these connections will require a building inspector to come to your tiny house and see it in person. Zoning is a set of rules about how the land can be used, somewhat of a set of rules that help neighbors get along. Zoning will dictate the type of building, its function, and its placement, while the building codes regulate how it should be built safely. Zoning and other land regulations can be accessed through public records at your local zoning office or city hall (many also offer zoning maps online).

For every piece of land, you consider purchasing you want to ask how the property is zoned and what building standards are required. Zoning laws govern the use of the property in a particular area, and what can be built on it. The building codes regulate the specific rules for constructing a structure and are enacted by the state, county, and city governments. While municipal or county governments create zoning ordinances. There are counties with no zoning or building laws, but basic health and safety regulations will likely still be needed. If you find property free of restrictions, there are probably no building code requirements. This situation can vary. Deed and easement restrictions may still apply. Always check with the county to find out what regulations and inspections are required, including water and sanitation.

There are some cities who encourage building and will even offer building lots for free to interested parties. Some of these cities include Marne, Iowa, Portland, Oregon and Spur, Texas, Portland, Oregon and Marne, Iowa. These incentives encourage city development and boost revenue. That said, it's important to review the zoning restrictions for tiny house building even on free lots. An example is the city of Marne, Iowa where the dwellings on these free building lots must be at least 1,200 square feet. There are opportunities for free and very

inexpensive building lots available throughout the U.S. but you want to be sure and research the restrictions thoroughly.

It's also worth checking out government auctions. There is a lot of lands out there and the government holds auctions where you can buy it for dirt cheap. Some of this land is seized for tax reasons while some are surplus land.

Building Codes

Tiny house builders sometimes find that the building codes will require them to build a larger home than they originally thought, and the zoning might require you to park your tiny house in a campground or trailer park because it is on wheels (and is considered close to being a camper). When considering your tiny house you should start with a basic plan and have a conversation with the local municipal building code enforcement office. From there, you'll be able to understand some of the requirements of your local town hall, identify any issues that need to be addressed, and get a realistic picture of what can and cannot be done when it comes to your tiny house.

3. Networking

There is so much to be learned from networking with people who live in your community. One of the best ways to help yourself on your tiny house land search is to network with other tiny house owners in your community. Connecting and sharing with other tiny homeowners is a wonderful way to share common experiences and find out what to do and not do when it comes to small house living.

Realtors

If you decide to purchase land, whether it is large or small, it's important you search for a real estate professional who will help in your tiny land search. This is another part of networking that will aid your search and point you in the right direction. There are real estate agents who specialize in niche markets, tiny homes included. You want to make sure to check up on a real estate agent's qualifications before hiring them to ensure they are the best fit for your tiny house land search. A well-versed agent will lead you through the process without a lot of stress.

You may wish to search for land online first, once you have a piece of property selected, you can check with the listing agent. If the land is for sale by owner, you may still wish to get a buyer's agent to help you through the process. It might be tempting to forgo a real estate agent (and avoid paying the commission) but you'll face fewer problems down the road if you have someone with the right experience.

It's important to remember land often can't be leveraged in a loan with the bank. For most land purchases, the property will need to be paid for outright and paid in full. A real estate agent can walk you through the process and help you navigate. While these steps won't guarantee the perfect piece of land for tiny house construction, they can definitely help to get you started. Leasing property is another option you can consider. There are considerations to be made when you are leasing property too, but in many ways, the pros may outweigh the cons.

4. Tools For Planning Your Land

Even in the early stages when you are just looking at the land, you need to start to imagine how things will layout. This is especially fun because you can start to think about what the land could one day be. The planning starts to feel real when you are thinking about where you will put things and how it will all come together. The following are just a couple of the things you will find useful when looking at potential pieces of land.

Measuring Wheel

This lets you measure distances easily and will help with planning where things will go. A larger wheel is a good idea because it can bridge the bumps in the land and make it a bit easier when you are going over logs and more. It is good to note that when you are planning your land, you want to make sure you know where the property lines are and that most places require at least a 15-foot setback from any property line. A good tip is to figure out what it is and double that just in case you are off on your property line.

Marking Flags

Marking flags are helpful once you have an idea where you want to put things, you can start marking them out with these little flags. The flags will give you a better sense of space and let you understand where things are going to be in relation to other things like solar, storage, patio space, and parking areas.

Waterproof Notepad

Writing everything down is always a good idea, and a waterproof notepad is useful rain or shine. Whatever you use, you want to make sure you write stuff down because so many numbers will be going through your head.

5. Some Things to Consider

The Drawbacks of Buying Land

If you are building your tiny house, it may be difficult to find a skilled craftsman who is willing to travel to your location. Those who are willing to travel will probably charge more to compensate for driving the distance. Transporting building materials and paying for delivery will likely cost more than if you built your home in the city as well.

Although modern conveniences are usually available, they aren't always reliable in remote locations. Many homeowners in the country keep generators as back up for those times when utilities fail. Going into town for groceries and other needs generally require some planning and long trips. And if it snows and the roads aren't promptly and properly plowed, you could be stuck at your home for days.

Renting Before Buying

It might be a good idea to rent a home first before buying land and beginning construction, especially if you are unfamiliar with the area. You can get to know the community and hear stories from local owners that you wouldn't find out if you just drove to the area for a day with the MLS listing in hand. This approach may also have downsides as not all of your neighbors may be overjoyed to hear that you are going to buy up that land beside their homes and build your own place there. You might even meet up with some resistance.

Access From the Street

Unless you plan on parking your car on the side of the road and walking to your home, your property must be accessible from a street or road. If the lot is landlocked, you will need to get an easement across a neighboring property, which means you get permission to pass through the neighbor's land to get to yours. Every municipality has different building, land use, inspection laws, and zoning. Whatever you do, make sure to go by the jurisdiction's rules. Rural areas usually have more lenient laws, so choosing rural areas may save you money. But what you save in rural areas might get eaten up when connecting to the utilities' grid.

Consider Which Utilities You Want to Install

Chances are you'll want your tiny home to have electricity, water, and other modern-day conveniences. And these things can get expensive. One major installation where the condition of the land is critical is a septic system, which is a series of pipes that empty wastewater deep into the ground, where bacteria then break it down. While most existing homes are connected to a municipal sewer system, for a new home you can go either way. But not all land can sustain a septic system. To determine this, you'll need to perform a percolation test, this means that the ground must be able to absorb water at a specified minimum rate otherwise the lot will not support a septic system.

Utility Considerations

So you found a beautiful piece of land to park your tiny house, but does it have power and water access? No available power means you need to create your own or pay to bring it to your property. Costs will vary depending on location. The

further you are from utility connections, the pricier it will be to connect your property. In some areas, if you are close enough, there may be minimal. Same goes for water. If city water isn't available, you will need to truck it in, as Alan does. Or you can also drill a well, which can cost anywhere from \$1,500 to as much \$10,000, plus permitting fees.

In most cases, to hook up both water and power, it will cost between \$10,000 to \$30,000. The most affordable route is to find undeveloped land that already has utility connections. Weigh the costs of all options to make the best decision for you. It's also important to keep in mind the upfront costs and required maintenance for off-grid power options, such as solar power or wind turbine.

A new septic system can cost upwards of \$5,000. Tiny houses require smaller systems and the good news is that means significant cost savings. Another popular option for tiny houses is a composting toilet. The byproduct can become actual humanure compost. For household water and urine management, you can create a grey water filtration system. Be aware, as your municipality or county may not allow this kind of water and waste management. Check your local regulations to know for sure.

Financing

Getting a raw land loan is different from getting a mortgage loan for a home. Since there's no building on the property yet, it's easier for a buyer to simply walk away, leaving the lender holding the balance. Due to this risk, some lenders may require a higher down payment on a piece of land, anywhere from 20percent to 50percent. The loan may also have more stringent credit score requirements and a higher interest rate. The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers loans called Section 502 direct loans, which can help low-income people purchase plots in rural areas and prepare them for a new house from scratch.

Setbacks

This refers to how far from a property line a structure must be situated. If you have 20-foot structure setbacks from either side, but your lot is only 50 feet wide, that means your home can be no greater than 10 feet wide! Odds are that won't work.

Development Costs Can Add Up Quickly

If you are looking to purchase a piece of undeveloped or raw land, you will need to consider what human made improvements may be desired and required. Most importantly you want to think about how you will move your tiny house onto the property. An access road and/or a driveway is a necessity, if this is the case you will need to get some work done and this will be at a cost. The total cost of any

land purchase, depending on where it is and the local regulations, could also include the following:

- engineering services
- permit fees
- property survey
- soil and water tests
- tree removal
- utility hookups

Be sure to research what expenses will be required to develop your land to prepare it for your tiny house RV. A good rule of thumb is to add a couple of thousand dollars to cushion to your tiny house budget for any unexpected problems or fees.