

# Go Tiny

A PROJECT  
ON TINY HOUSES

ORGANIZED  
BY



BC tiny house collective

IN PARTNERSHIP  
WITH



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# Go Tiny

## GO TINY IS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY, MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PROJECT

organized by the BC Tiny House Collective and in collaboration with its partners (see Appendix A) aimed at legalizing and legitimizing tiny houses<sup>1</sup> as an affordable and sustainable housing option in the City of Vancouver, Metro Vancouver region and beyond. This project involves three parts—research, piloting, and public/municipal engagement—and aims to:

- » legalize and legitimize tiny houses as an affordable, safe and sustainable residential housing stock in the Metro Vancouver area and across British Columbia
- » include tiny houses in our national, provincial and municipal housing strategies
- » incorporate tiny houses in new and existing neighbourhoods within Metro Vancouver and across BC
- » normalize and codify ecologically sustainable and community-centric design and construction methods (passive design, deconstruction<sup>2</sup> and renewable energy sources) in tiny house builds

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<sup>1</sup> The BC Tiny House Collective defines a *tiny house* as a single contained unit on wheels or a temporary foundation that is less than 500 square feet but has all the amenities of a permanent home. Furthermore, tiny houses are customizable in design and budget, and proposed to be built on the principles of affordability, flexibility, simplicity of lifestyle, ecological sustainability and community. This definition sets it apart from other small dwellings, including modular, micro suites and laneways. See page 3 for more on what is tiny.

<sup>2</sup> *Deconstruction* is the gentle practice of disassembling a home by hand and with care to salvage and recycle reusable building materials over a more expedient process by mechanical means (demolition).

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“There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenges facing our cities or to the housing crisis, but the two issues need to be considered together. From an urban design and planning point of view, the well-connected open city is a powerful paradigm and an engine for integration and inclusivity.”

—RICHARD ROGERS, ARCHITECT



01

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# Background & tiny houses

Canada's housing crisis is in full swing. Insufficient supply and skyrocketing prices<sup>3</sup>, along with municipal commitments to health and sustainability (including green building)<sup>4</sup>, necessitate creative housing options. These options must also be affordable, equitable, ecologically sustainable, and conducive to long-term health. Tiny houses may be one opportunity to address these diverse needs.

Around the world, tiny houses are gaining in popularity as an alternative model of affordable and inclusionary housing for diverse populations (elderly, students, lone parents, couples, singles).<sup>5</sup> In growing urban centres, vacant, irregular or undeveloped lots could accommodate temporary tiny houses as a means of gentle densification. Tiny houses could also be used as small-scale infill housing that fits within the Vancouver residential neighbourhood context, or as laneway alternatives on single-family residentially zoned lots, creating space for intergenerational living.

Currently, Metro Vancouver is taking steps towards sustainable management and living. In 2011, the City of Vancouver released its *Greenest City 2020 Action Plan*. Within it, zero waste was among its top ten initiatives, with the goal of exploring deconstruction as a means of reducing solid waste from construction and demolition being sent to landfill and incinerator. Then in 2014, the City of Vancouver's city council approved the creation of the Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency (VAHA), an independent arm of the city that "leverages city and partner owned land to create new housing projects that offer both, a greater diversity of home options and greater affordability than what is currently offered by the private market."<sup>6</sup> The aim of the VAHA is to produce 2500 new houses by 2021. The City of Vancouver has also enacted a creative advisory group to explore affordable and innovative housing designs; modular is now being piloted. And lastly, the Metro Vancouver's *Regional Affordable Housing Strategy* (May 2016) calls for an exploration of diverse models for affordable homeownership and tenure in our region.

*Go Tiny* aims to address these green initiatives and housing strategy goals.

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<sup>3</sup> References include: *Housing Market Outlook: Vancouver and Abbotsford CMAs* (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2016); *Greater Vancouver Economic Scorecard: Indicators* (Greater Vancouver Board of Trade, 2016); *Getting Serious About Affordable Housing: Towards a Plan for Metro Vancouver* (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Lee, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Sustainability plans include the City of Vancouver's *Healthy City Strategy* and *Greenest City 2020 Action Plan*, the City of Surrey's *Sustainability Charter* and the City of North Vancouver's *Living City* initiative.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/07/25/lets-get-small>.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.vaha.ca>.



## Background & tiny houses (continued)

In August 2016, the BC Tiny House Collective held an engagement session at the City of Vancouver's innovation hub, CityStudio. Over forty city staff, councillors and representatives from non-profit organizations, local initiatives and universities attended from across the Lower Mainland. It was the collective's chance to identify the barriers to tiny houses through the eyes and ears of planners, designers, policy makers and engaged citizens. Since then, the collective continues to meet with key members and stakeholders within our community. These discussions have fed into our research focus and themes.

While tiny houses may offer an innovative opportunity to increase the number of affordable and sustainable housing units in the region, questions remain about their compliance to building codes, potential models for tenure and deconstruction, zoning and financing, public appeal and how they may impact surrounding neighbourhoods. **There is a need to understand the classification, barriers, and opportunities of tiny houses as a viable and sustainable housing stock and built form in the City of Vancouver, and across Metro Vancouver.** The BC Tiny House Collective's *Go Tiny* project, along with its partners and the support of the City of Vancouver, is doing just that.

# What is tiny?

There is no formal tiny house definition. According to *The Tiny Life*, "tiny houses come in all shapes, sizes, and forms, but they all enable simpler living in a smaller, more efficient space."<sup>7</sup> For the sake of this project, **the BC Tiny House Collective has positioned a tiny house as:**

- » less than 500 square feet
- » a mobile unit, built on wheels/flat deck or a temporary foundation
- » a fully functional housing unit that includes all the basic amenities of a permanent house
- » customizable and tailored to individual taste and budget, which may include green building methods and renewable energy technologies

This working definition allows the *tiny house* to be seen as a unique housing stock, and differentiate it from other small dwellings, such as laneway homes, RVs and mobile homes, modular units and micro suites. In this light, tiny houses are more than their size—the collective proposes that tiny houses be built on the following principles:



A mobile tiny house  
(Google images).

- » affordability
- » flexibility and simplicity of lifestyle—tiny houses are mobile and can be self-contained for ease of transport and management
- » ecological sustainability—tiny house builders often use renewables, deconstructed materials and passive in their designs and building methods
- » community—multiple tiny houses can be configured on a shared plot of land to create a larger development (also known as *pocket neighbourhood*) with a common space which can lend itself to greater community building and sociability<sup>8</sup>



<sup>7</sup> *The Tiny Life*, <http://thetinylife.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.pocket-neighborhoods.net/whatisaPN.html>.

# The BC Tiny House Collective

## Who we are

Based out of Vancouver, the BC Tiny House Collective (BCTHC) is a provincial network of individuals who want to see tiny houses legalized and normalized as a viable and sustainable housing stock in the City of Vancouver, Metro Vancouver and across British Columbia. BCTHC volunteers and supporters work collaboratively, leveraging diverse skill sets and relationships with municipal, corporate, non-profit, academic and community groups. Founded in July 2016, the collective and its projects are spearheaded and managed by Samantha Gambling and Anastasia Koutalianos.

Samantha is a community animator and consults on sustainable food and housing projects; she holds a master of science in integrated studies in land and food systems from the University of British Columbia. She is also currently building her own tiny house while navigating regulatory pathways to park her tiny house on a lot in the City of Vancouver.

Anastasia is a writer and editor, project manager and communications strategist. She owns and operates her own communications firm, nadatodo Communications Inc., and is a former director of communications with Habitat for Humanity Greater Vancouver. Anastasia is also a board member of the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation, and hosts *Talkin' Trash*, a radio show on waste on Vancouver's Co-op Radio. She is passionate about tiny houses as a model for sustainable practices using reclaimed building materials.

Currently, the BCTHC is engaging with the City of Vancouver and its staff to use this municipality as a testing ground for tiny houses locally and across BC. For a full list of our partners, see *Appendix A*.

## Go Tiny, in detail

*Go Tiny* is comprised of three parts: research, piloting and engagement. The BC Tiny House Collective is overseeing all of these components, which are occurring simultaneously.

### PART 1—RESEARCH

The BC Tiny House Collective is coordinating research and gathering information from diverse sources on the role, benefits, limitations, and opportunities to incorporate tiny houses as an additional housing stock in Metro Vancouver's neighbourhoods. We are currently working with several research partners, including local universities, organizations, consulting firms, academic advisors, graduate students and working groups to explore tiny through several lenses, including planning, zoning, building codes, tenure/land, financing, policy, health, and public engagement. For a full list of our partners and their research focus, see *Appendix A*.

BCTHC will collect all of its findings into one or several high-level reports, along with a feasibility study on the demand and need for tiny homes in the City of Vancouver and surrounding areas. Final reports will be presented to local community members, city planners and decision makers—and shared with municipalities across BC and Canada. Reports will also be available online for free download.



## PART 2—PILOTING

Pilot projects will showcase tiny houses in the City of Vancouver and across Metro Vancouver. The pilots will be used to inform research opportunities, explore regulatory pathways for legalization, demonstrate sustainable design and building practices (such as the use of reclaimed building materials, renewable energy sources and passive building standards), collect data on neighbourhood feedback on tiny houses, and host open houses and educational activities for the public.

Samantha Gambling will manage the first pilot in collaboration with Tomo Spaces Inc., a local developer and owner of the proposed pilot project site in the City of Vancouver (at Main and 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue). Samantha is also working with city staff to identify opportunities to use her own tiny home as a demonstration piece.

The BCTHC is also exploring additional tiny house pilots and larger tiny house developments (also known as *pocket neighbourhoods*) with local developers and non-profit housing organizations in Metro Vancouver. A network of backyard and pocket neighbourhood pilots would offer tiny homeowners the opportunity for greater mobility and let municipalities work together in addressing the needs of tiny homeowners.



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### PROPOSED TINY HOUSE FOR PILOT (SAMANTHA GAMBLING)

Designer: TinyTecture  
Builder: Westcoast Outbuildings  
(Built to CSA Z240 RV Code)  
Floor area: 320 ft<sup>2</sup> including washroom, kitchen area, sleeping area, and loft  
ToiletTech waterless toilet  
Equipped with electrical, plumbing, and gas fixtures  
Water hookup through standard hose  
Solar panel-ready

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## PART 3—ENGAGEMENT

The BC Tiny House Collective aims to engage with public education and municipal advocacy through:

- » events—open houses, showcasing the pilot at various expos and locations
- » outreach and communication—surveys, videos, written material, canvassing
- » training—classes and workshops related to tiny living, green building and deconstruction practices

Educational and advocacy activities will take place in conjunction with research and pilot projects; for example, the tiny house pilot project will include educational open houses and data collection of community feedback for research purposes.

Through education, advocacy, research and pilot testing, the BCTHC aims to simultaneously engage public and policy-making bodies with an innovative model for affordable and sustainable homeownership for diverse populations, while providing the resources necessary to establish tiny houses as a legitimate and legal form of housing stock in British Columbia.



# Contact

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General inquiries can be sent to [bctinyhousecollective@gmail.com](mailto:bctinyhousecollective@gmail.com).  
For more on the BC Tiny House Collective, please visit  
[bctinyhousecollective.com](http://bctinyhousecollective.com).





# Appendix A

## Research partners

As of November 2016, our research partners include:

- » **British Columbia Institute of Technology's High Performance Building Lab**
- » **CityStudio**
- » **Emily Carr University of Art + Design industrial design undergraduate student—directed study** | This student will explore our waste systems using deconstruction/salvaged building materials and wood waste through various built forms, including a tiny house
- » **Habitat for Humanity Canada**, in partnership with *Think Big Live Little*, a tiny house design and build contest using salvaged building materials
- » **Light House Sustainable Building Centre**
- » **University of British Columbia undergraduate engineering students—CIVL 498A, Environmental Stewardship and Engineering** | These students are studying how tiny house developments can improve ecosystem functions and provide ecosystem services
- » **University of British Columbia Masters of Engineering students—research methodology** | These students are conducting a partial built-form comparison of tiny houses and other housing stock from an ecological, social, or economic lens (TBD)
- » **University of British Columbia undergraduate anthropology student—honours thesis** | This student will be conducting an ethnographic study on the legal dimensions of Vancouver's tiny house movement
- » **University of British Columbia School of Community and Regional Planning master student—directed studies** | This student will study zoning bylaws and municipal regulations to answer the question “where can tiny houses go?”
- » **University of British Columbia undergraduate student—directed studies** | This student will be addressing and analyzing the policies impacting tiny houses in Vancouver
- » **Vancouver Community College nursing students—population health promotion practicum** | These students are studying the impact of the dimensions of housing (size, mobility, ownership, ecologically friendly, social connectedness) on health outcomes

## Advisors & supporters

A big thank you to our advisors and supporters who have shared their time and expertise with us along the way. These include:

- » Brad Badelt, senior sustainability specialist at the City of Vancouver
- » Brendan Hurley, senior city planner and urban designer
- » Erick Villagomez, architect, professor at SCARP, UBC & interior design, KPU
- » Mukhtar Latif, chief housing officer at the City of Vancouver
- » Peer-Daniel Krause, housing planner and community planning consultant
- » Sarah Marty, grant writer
- » Sean Ruthen, senior architect and project manager, VIA Architecture
- » Shari Laliberte, registered nurse, faculty member at Vancouver Community College
- » Wilmer Lau, housing developer

