

II. What Prospective FAITH Collaborators Need to Know About Starting a Tiny House Project

A lot of help is available for faith based groups interested in building Tiny Houses but it is important to know some of the necessary planning details in moving forward. The following notes can help avoid some, but not all, of the inevitable delays and frustrations involved in this worthwhile endeavor.

1. Know the landscape. The City of Olympia and the Faith Alliance have done a great deal of preparation for this initiative by collaborating to provide workshops and by publishing support materials online.

-Go to the FAITH website (faithtinyhouses.com) for a good project history, overview, participant list, as well as a list of contacts and on-line resources resulting from the November 2018 FAITH workshop.

-Each year a “Point in Time” (PIT) survey is conducted statewide with each county counting the number and characteristics of homeless residents. This year’s PIT survey was conducted January 24 2019 but its results are not yet available. PIT survey results from past years are available on the State of Washington Department of Commerce website.

-Washington homeless student data is available at the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) website.

2. Know the rules and protocols. The City of Olympia is working diligently to address homelessness and recognizes the vital role the faith community can play as a partner.

-Go to the City of Olympia website for a description of the City-FAITH partnership as well as a description of the City-FAITH Partnership application process and application form. Make special note of the recommended “code of conduct.”

-In 2010 a state law was passed to enable religious organizations to host temporary encampments for the homeless without local interference. Find it on the ACCESS WASHINGTON website by finding RCW 36.01.290.

-The City of Olympia has promulgated an Emergency Housing Facilities ordinance. Find it on the City website in Chapter 18.50. Take special note of 18.50.060 section “H” which allows a 6 month waiver of requirements under a “public health emergency.”

-Appendix Q of the 2018 revision of the International Residential Code contains special guidance for Tiny Homes. While this is not yet incorporated into this States guidance it makes for interesting reading for those interested in details.

3. Identify your team members and consultants. While creating a team to move a project like this may seem like common sense its important to make sure the team contains the right mix of experience, connections, and knowledge. Here are a few thoughts:

-Appoint a lead person to coordinate with the FAITH Alliance, attend scheduled planning meetings and work with the Faith Alliance leadership to create consultative relationships with the appropriate support organizations:

-The Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI) has agreed to provide consultation and guidance to local FAITH groups at all stages of the development process. The local LIHI resource person for the Plumb Street project is John Brown. John may be able to help coordinate local resources associated with that project. LIHI's manager for all special projects is Brad Gerber. Brad can help with broader coordination issues as well as training development.

-If your group decides to develop a "Conestoga Hut" instead of the more traditional "Tiny House", Community Support Services of Eugene Ore. is the best consultative resource. Charles Castle, who is in charge of construction operations, is an excellent resource.

-Engage the City of Olympia as soon as you know your group wants to move forward. The City's role seems to be evolving and early coordination and consultation is essential. The Faith Alliance leadership can help establish the necessary contacts.

-Look for the right skill sets. With regard to actual construction, carpentry and other construction skills are needed whether the preferred model is a Conestoga Hut or a Traditional Tiny House,. Ideally, a work group would include someone with both construction and supervisory skills.

-Look for planning team members with a variety of community connections and interests. Architects, engineers, shop teachers, service club and trade association members, retailers, social workers, community organizers and others can all something to the table.

4. Make sure your group appreciates the social support implications. While the housing arrangements for each participant may be temporary, the effects, if successful, are enduring. Each homeless person participating needs to be engaged in one or more direct relationships with helpers. This help may need to exist in addition to the role of an assigned "case manager." The success of the Eugene Ore. Project has been based on faith groups taking a direct interest in each homeless participant. This may mean assigning a mentor, guide, navigator or other helper from your congregation in addition to the case management services provided by the City.

5 Be aware of "barrier" issues and decide how to address them. Everyone would probably agree that violent offenders and sexual predators should not be housed with those who are most vulnerable. On the other hand, most would acknowledge that if all individuals with substance abuse, mental health, and criminal issues were ineligible for homeless housing there would be few homeless people qualified to live in Tiny Houses. Somewhere between these extremes is a "reasonable" position. Such a position would find a way to accommodate those most in need without causing the vulnerable to be at risk and without creating undue risk in the larger community. Guidance is available from the City of Olympia and from the Faith Alliance.