

## [Editorial: L.A.'s village of tiny homes comes with a giant price tag](#)



*Karen Morea, 62, hugs her dog Jack-Jack inside her tiny village home in Riverside on Nov. 30. (Los Angeles Times) By [THE TIMES EDITORIAL BOARD](#) DEC. 24, 2020 11:57AM*

One of the most innovative ways to shelter homeless people is to set up so-called tiny homes or houses. Constructed of aluminum and composite materials and built to be lived in, they generally measure a miniscule 64 square feet.

In L.A., the hope is to make them a workable if temporary solution under a bleak set of circumstances: a dearth of housing and shelter for the city's estimated 41,000 homeless people; a raging pandemic; and pressure from U.S. District Court Judge David O. Carter to move thousands of homeless people into shelter as soon as possible. Villages of tiny homes in empty lots would appear to be a quick and inexpensive alternative to conventional shelters and scarce temporary housing.

But it turns out, they're not so cheap — at least not in Los Angeles, where a soon-to-open village of 39 tiny homes on an empty city lot in North Hollywood cost a stunning \$5.2 million to set up. By contrast, the city of Riverside set up a village of 30 tiny homes last year for a total cost of about \$514,000.

Why the order-of-magnitude difference? It's not the houses themselves. Both cities bought [64-square-foot shelters](#) from Pallet, an Everett, Wash.-based company that constructs the prefabricated homes — featuring built-in beds, shelving, heat and air conditioning — for roughly \$4,900 to \$8,600 apiece.

Both cities hooked up showers and toilets to plumbing. (All these villages rely on communal bathrooms.) The North Hollywood site also has laundry facilities. Riverside does not. Both cities had to run electrical power to the sites for lighting. Both had to hook their villages into sewer systems.

L.A. city officials say their work was expensive because they started with less infrastructure. The Riverside site was already a parking lot (though it was repaved). The North Hollywood site — shaped like a narrow sideways triangle — was a weed-strewn dirt lot between the Orange Line busway and Chandler Boulevard. The city cleared, graded and paved it, while also putting in walkways and a 20-foot-wide access road through the property for emergency vehicles. It spent \$651,000 to run a sewer line to the lot and \$253,000 to build concrete pads for each unit. And it set up an administrative office for service providers, a booth for a security guard (requested by service providers), tables and chairs where residents can visit with each other or their case managers, and a small fenced-in area where dogs can play.

It's nice but pricey. Even city officials would agree that, in retrospect, they could have cut back. They insist that subsequent sites will be cheaper to build on because they won't need as much work as this one did. And we'd be hard-pressed to scold them for using the North Hollywood site, difficult as it was, when we have repeatedly berated them for not looking hard enough for city properties where they can build housing or shelter.

Getting homeless people housed is challenging. No matter how cheap or expensive a shelter project is, if homeless people won't agree to live there, then it's a failure. Tiny homes offer something that even the nicer transitional shelters lack: true privacy and a sense that the units *belong* to the people who live there. Ken Craft, chief executive of Hope of the Valley, the nonprofit that will offer services to residents on the site, insists that the amenities — the walkways, the outdoor tables, the area for dogs to romp — also play a big part in convincing homeless people to live there and, just as important, to stay and work with case managers and counselors toward moving into permanent housing.

But the city can't keep building multimillion-dollar villages of temporary housing if it wants to shelter and house most of its homeless population. So it's imperative that it find a way to cut back on the costs. The city has bought 466 tiny homes for a total of seven sites. The North Hollywood site was the first one. Officials have six more chances to bring the costs down to a level that makes the program sensible and sustainable

<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-12-24/editorial-l-a-s-village-of-tiny-homes-comes-with-a-giant-price-tag>