

The term “Tiny House” means different things to different people. Some people use the term to refer to a “Tiny House on Wheels” while others refer to a smaller version of a detached single-family residence. There are even more definitions of the term – but these are the two we hear about most frequently at the city for permanent residential uses. This causes confusion because the two examples given above are treated very differently under state codes.

### **Tiny House on Wheels**

A “Tiny House on Wheels” is considered a recreational vehicle and in Washington State would be licensed by the Department of Labor and Industries. The City cannot issue a building permit for a Tiny House on Wheels or approve it as a permanent residence.

### **A Tiny House**

The City can approve a building permit for a small house of any size that meets all minimum state and local code requirements. This includes building and fire code requirements for things like having sleeping, sanitation, and cooking facilities; appropriate ingress and egress from sleeping areas; stairs and railings to lofts or upstairs areas that meet code requirements for height and width; appropriate plumbing and electrical provisions, etc. In the City of Olympia it also means having a residential fire sprinkler system installed. The house must be permanently anchored to the ground (on a foundation) and be connected to approved domestic water and sanitary sewer systems. It must meet the state energy code and be constructed for the wind and seismic requirements for our area. The provision of the International Residential Code apply to these type structures.



## Based on the currently adopted 2015 International Residential Code (IRC)

This list includes many specific and general code compliance regulations including State of Washington Code revisions found in the 2015 Washington Residential Code regulating one and two family dwellings. This list is not intended to be all-inclusive and does not represent all code compliance considerations; consult with your registered professional or designer and/or the building department to ensure other code provisions are understood and addressed:

### ***What is a Dwelling Unit?***

(Washington State Amendment)

- **Dwelling:**

A single unit providing complete independent living facilities for one or more persons, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation. Dwelling units may also include the following uses:

1. Adult family homes foster family care homes and family day care homes licensed by the Washington State department of social and health services.
2. Offices, mercantile, food preparation for off-site consumption, personal care salons or similar uses which are conducted primarily by the occupants of the dwelling unit and are secondary to the use of the unit for the dwelling purposes, and which do not exceed 500 square feet.
3. One accessory dwelling unit, which need not be considered a separated dwelling unit, provided:
  - a. The accessory dwelling unit is constructed within an existing dwelling unit.
  - b. Either the accessory dwelling unit or the primary dwelling unit is owner occupied.
  - c. All required smoke alarms in the accessory dwelling unit and the primary dwelling unit are interconnected in such a manner that the actuation of one alarm will activate all alarms in both the primary dwelling unit and the accessory dwelling unit.

- **R301.1 Application.** Buildings and structures shall be constructed to safely support all loads, including dead loads, live loads, roof loads, flood loads, snow loads, wind loads and seismic loads prescribed in this code. The construction of buildings and structures in this code shall result in a structure that transfers all loads from their point of origin to the foundation.

- **R303 Light, ventilation and heating**

R303.1 – Habitable rooms shall have 8 percent of the floor area as natural light and 4 percent of the floor area as natural ventilation (see exceptions for mechanical ventilation).

R303.2 – Adjoining rooms. See adjoining rooms for using natural light when at least ½ of the wall adjoin is open. (*Washington State amendment*)

R303.3 – Bathrooms shall have 3 square feet of natural light and 1.5 square feet of natural ventilation (see exception for artificial light and mechanical exhaust).

R303.4 – Mechanical ventilation requirements. (*Washington State Amendment*; no requirement for whole house fan under 500 sq. ft.).

R303.5 – Intake and exhaust openings requirements. (*Washington State Amendment*) Ref Code Section 303.5.1- 303.5.2.1.

R303.7– Interior Stairway illumination (*Washington State Amendment*).

R308.8– Exterior Stairway Illumination (*Washington State Amendment*).

R303.9 – Dwelling must be capable of maintaining a minimum room temperature of 68 degrees at three feet above the floor and two feet from the exterior walls (excludes use of portable heaters).

- **R304.1** Every dwelling unit shall have **at least one habitable room** that shall have not less than 70 square feet of gross floor area.
- **R304.2 When provided**; other habitable rooms shall have a floor area of not less than 70 square feet.  
**Note:** Bathrooms are not considered habitable rooms per IRC.
- **R304.3** Habitable rooms shall not be less than 7 feet in any horizontal dimension  
**Note:** Bathrooms are not considered habitable rooms per IRC.

#### ***What is habitable Space?***

- **Habitable Space:**  
A space in a building for living, sleeping, eating, or cooking. Bathrooms, toilet rooms, closets, halls, storage or utility spaces and similar areas are not considered habitable spaces.

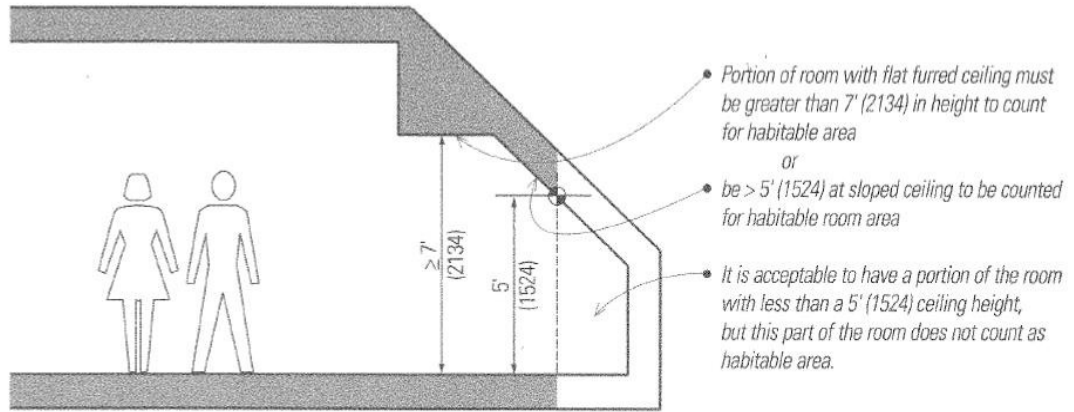
#### ***What is Living Space?***

- **Living Space**  
Space within a dwelling unit utilized for living, sleeping, eating, cooking, bathing, washing and sanitation purposes.

#### ***What is a Mezzanine or Loft?***

- **Mezzanine or Loft**  
An intermediate level or levels between the floor and ceiling of any story.

- **R304.4** Portions of a room with a sloping ceiling measuring less than 5 feet between floor and ceiling shall not be considered as contributing to the minimum required habitable area for that room.



When an attic or Loft is used this becomes a consideration for the label placed onto the room such as loft or sleeping room when considering the height of the ceiling.

- **R305 – Ceiling height**

R305.1 – Habitable space must have a ceiling height of 7 feet (see exceptions above for measuring sloped ceilings).

- **R306 – Sanitation**

R306.1 - Requires that every dwelling have a water closet, lavatory, and bathtub or shower.

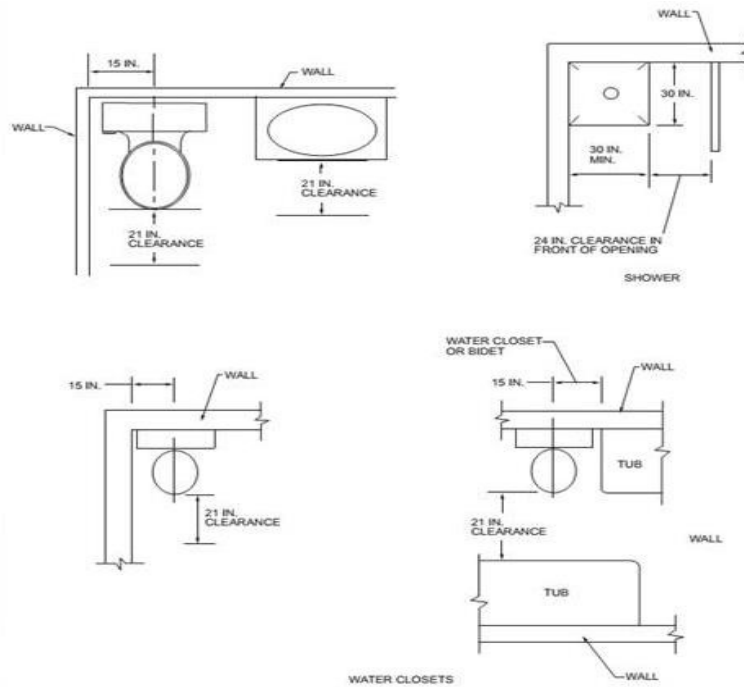
R306.2 Requires that every *dwelling* have a kitchen area with a sink

R306.3 – **All plumbing fixtures** must be connected to a sanitary sewer or approved private sewage system.

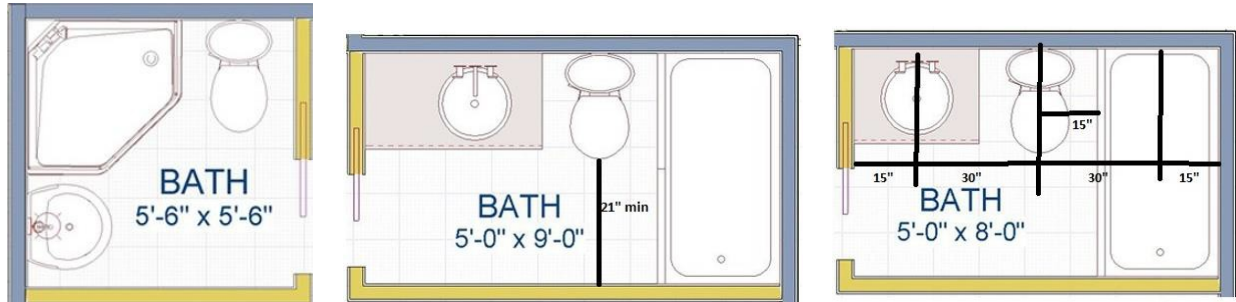
R306.4 – All plumbing fixtures must be connected to an approved water supply.

Note: Kitchen sink/s, lavatories, bathtubs, showers, bidets, laundry tubs, and washing machines must have hot and cold water.

- **R307** Bathroom Spacing requirements in IRC Section, P2705.1)



**FIGURE R307.1  
MINIMUM FIXTURE CLEARANCES**



- 21" in front of toilet (water closet) to wall per IRC P2705.1 item 5
- 15" center of sink to wall or vanity per IRC P2705.1 item 5
- 30" center to center per IRC P2705.1 item 5 (to center to center of other fixtures)

Example: 7.5 feet long at fixture line and 4.5 wide with the use of a 30"X30" shower unit.  
(Approx. 34 sq. ft.)

- **R307.2** – Bathtub and shower floors and walls (bathtubs installed with showerheads and in shower compartments) must have a nonabsorbent surface a minimum of six feet above the floor.

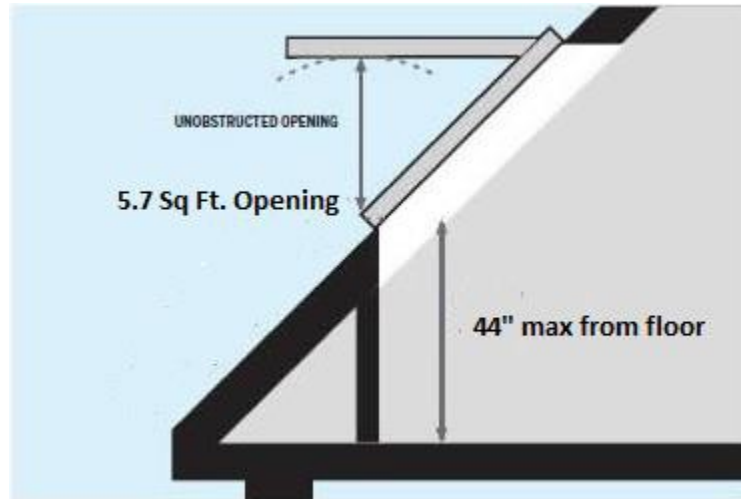
- **R310 – Emergency escape and rescue openings**

R310.1 – Basements, habitable attics and every sleeping room must have at

least one operable emergency escape and rescue opening (door or window)

R310.1.1 – Minimum opening area must be 5.7 square feet (see full code text for minimum height and width dimensions 20" width X 24" high with one or both dimensions being bigger to make the 5.7 sq. ft. openable area dimension)

(Loft Condition Example)



- **R311 – Means of egress**

R311.1 – All dwellings must have a means of egress.

R311.2 – The egress door must have a clear width of 32 inches and a clear height of 78 inches.

R311.3 – A floor or landing is required on each side of exterior doors (see R311.3.1 through R311.3.3).

R311.5.1 – Exterior landings must be positively attached to the primary structure.

R311.6 – Hallway must have a minimum width of 36 inches.

R311.7 – Stairways must have a minimum width of 36 inches. R311.7.5 – Stair treads must be 10 inch minimum and stair risers 7.75 inch maximum.

R311.7.5.3 – Stair nosing must be provided and compliant with this section.

R311.7.5.4 – Composite wood or plastic stair treads must comply with R507.3.

R311.7.6 – A floor or landing is required at the top and bottom of each stairway.

R311.7.8 – A handrail is required at stairs having four or more risers (see all railing requirements).

- **R311.4** The State of Washington has amended the vertical egress requirements for areas 200 square feet or less in dwelling units to use alternate means of access.

- **R314 – Smoke alarms**

R314.3 – Smoke alarms are required in each sleeping room, in the immediate vicinity of the bedroom/s and on each additional story of the dwelling including basements and habitable attics.

- **R315 – Carbon monoxide alarms**

R315.1 – A carbon monoxide alarm is required in every dwelling unit having fuel fired appliances or an attached garage.

- **Fire Protection Requirements**

The City of Olympia requires the installation of fire sprinklers in all new dwellings.