

➤ **CASE STUDY**

TINY TIMBERS AGRIHOOD

ST. CROIX FALLS



BACKGROUND

Tiny Timbers Agrihood is a community of 16 tiny homes on a 31-acre wooded site at the north edge of

St. Croix Falls. Residents bring their own certified tiny homes—no bigger than 400 square feet—and lease space for them within the community. Each site is equipped with utilities, a parking pad, and a shed. The agrihood also shares facilities that include raised garden beds, a pavilion with an outdoor kitchen, a greenhouse, a chicken coop, and beehives. The goal: connecting residents with community, nature, and healthy food they can grow themselves.

The city of St. Croix Falls, with a population of about 2,200, sits along the bluffs that line the picturesque St. Croix River. Located an hour northeast of Minneapolis/St. Paul, St. Croix Falls is a historic river town known for its hiking and biking trails—including the western end of the Ice Age Trail and the Gandy Dancer Trail—and the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, which is part of the U.S. National Park System.

According to the Tiny Home Industry Association, the tiny homes movement was born in response to rising housing costs, environmental concerns, and a desire for simpler, minimalist living. In the 1990s, architect Sarah Susanka popularized the idea of smaller, well-designed homes with her book *The Not So Big House*. Typically under 400 square feet, tiny homes became symbols of financial freedom and sustainability, appealing to people looking to downsize, embrace eco-friendly lifestyles, or live off the grid, especially after the 2008 financial crisis.



An aerial view of Tiny Timbers Agrihood shows nearby St. Croix Falls in the upper right.

APPROACH

In February 2022, when developers Melissa and Shane Jones casually raised the idea of a tiny home community, city officials were open to the concept but said it would require a new zoning designation. At the time, no city zoning laws allowed for multiple homes, each less than 400 square feet and movable, on a single parcel.

While the city drafted zoning regulations, the Joneses worked with an artist to create realistic renderings of their vision, with homesites set in a horseshoe shape around the community's joint amenities.

The City Planning Commission held a public meeting on the project in early August 2022, and the St. Croix Falls City Council approved it later that month.

Ultimately, the property was rezoned from residential to rural development, with the definition adjusted to allow for year-round living in homes under 400 square feet in size.

➤ CASE STUDY

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BUDGET

Excavating for water, sewer, and stormwater drainage was a big-ticket item. With rising inflation and the need to meet the requirements of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), costs kept climbing. Along with all of the utilities they would have to bring in—electricity, city water and sewer extensions, natural gas, and fiber internet—the Joneses spent about \$70,000 per home site, including the joint facilities.

Melissa and Shane had purchased the property in 2017 as an investment. In order to develop the site and create Tiny Timbers, they invested savings and sold two rental homes they had owned. They took no grants or loans from government or private sources.

DETAILED PROCESS AND FINDINGS

Melissa and Shane contacted city officials early on, before they got too far into the planning process, to make sure local leaders would be receptive to the idea of a tiny home community. **They were surprised to hear city leaders say they had contemplated the concept in the past but had not been presented a workable plan until then.**

To publicize the project and attract dwellers, the Joneses advertised on tiny-home Facebook groups and attracted several potential occupants even before breaking ground. When the plan came up for city council approval, some of the future residents—who now include teachers, a therapist, and a physician—were among the speakers eager to let the community know who their neighbors would be. **As part of an agreement with the city, Melissa and Shane also designed the Tiny Timbers Agrihood with utilities that meet standards for regular**

housing, so it can easily be converted into a community of traditional homes years from now if the demand for tiny homes diminishes.

ADJUSTMENTS

The Joneses worked with engineers to design the tiny house community in a way that would meet DNR requirements for water and sewer extensions and a stormwater drainage pond. When crews dug into the first site chosen for the stormwater pond, the soil was thick with clay. Engineers said they would have to remove two football fields worth of old-growth sugar maple trees to make room for the retention pond—a far cry from the scenery Melissa and Shane had envisioned. Another site had a sandier, more suitable composition but it slanted uphill. Soil had to be moved and regraded, which added to the cost but saved the forest.



Each tiny home site comes with a shed, a parking pad, and utilities provided by Tiny Timbers Agrihood.

With the rainy 2024 summer, the community garden and blueberry bushes were getting swamped by the rush of stormwater. To correct the problem, dry creeks were built around those areas to catch any overflow.

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Teachers, a therapist, and a physician are among the owners of the 16 tiny homes that make up Tiny Timbers Agrihood.



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KEY INSIGHTS

The vision for Tiny Timbers Agrihood was to create a community with shared values, including an interest by residents in growing their own food and leaving a smaller footprint.

LESSON #1

Start conversations with your community and municipality early to build buy-in from stakeholders. Learn what the challenges will be and who can help solve them.

LESSON #2

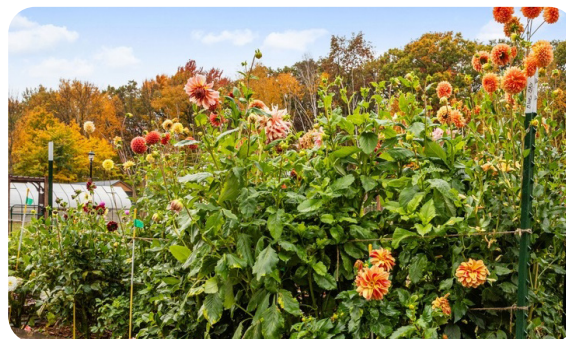
Develop a concept with community in mind. Gather input on design from potential residents early to create thoughtfully designed gathering spaces, recreational trails, and gardening spaces.

LESSON #3

Tiny homes can be solutions for people wanting to make a smaller environmental impact, a vehicle to retire without debt by selling their larger family home, and a way to reduce monthly utility overhead with a smaller footprint.



The community includes raised garden beds where residents can grow their own food.



Residents can grow food or flowers in the community's raised garden beds. There's also a greenhouse available for their use.



A resident harvests honey from the community beehive.