

Downsizing lives: tiny houses in Flagstaff

BY MEGAN TROUTMAN

For the upcoming school year, most students plan to live in dorms, apartments or houses. What many do not consider is the possibility of living in a tiny house.

The name is self-explanatory; tiny houses are small, portable homes that are placed on private land owner's property in exchange for money or various services. Tiny house owners can offer to tend to gardens, cook meals or buy food to ultimately cover the cost of rent.

Undeclared sophomore and photography enthusiast Will Carter has been interested in tiny houses and plans to build one himself in the near future.

"I travel a fair amount now," Carter said. "I like being in different places so it's perfect for my lifestyle."

Built using the shell of trailer homes, tiny houses can easily be relocated. Most people choose to renovate or build their own tiny house, which is what Carter plans to do next summer.

"It's a great way to live cheaply and sustainably [without] having any worries about rent," Carter said.

As for parking the tiny houses, there are several ways to go about finding a lot, including websites, Facebook pages, Craigslist posts and bulletin boards.

"I imagine people are pretty accepting if they have a decent amount of land, so it ends up being an easy thing to do from what I've read," Carter said.

Flagstaff resident Armand Ignelzi and his fiancé Sarah Axelrod recently downsized to a portable house this past September. They bought an old, rotting trailer and took time to renovate both the inside and outside.

"It's nice in that sense that you can move it wherever," Ignelzi said. "We were quite surprised about how much we love living in a small space."

Originally from Florida, the couple decided to move to Flagstaff in the renewed portable home.

"We ended up in a spot that we probably wouldn't have ended up in if we had to buy or pay large rent," Axelrod said.



This converted travel trailer owned by Armand Ignelzi and his fiancé, Sarah Axelrod, is one of a few instances (and categories) of tiny homes around Flagstaff. (Photo by Nick Humphries)

"We like the mountains and coming from Florida, we were interested in change."

They contacted landowners around Flagstaff and settled down on a lot while paying minimal rent to the main house.

"We get to live downtown with very reasonable rent and we have great neighbors, so we're really happy," Ignelzi said. "Flagstaff is a great location with a lot of great places to travel to, so that's mainly why we decided to settle here."

While saving money on reasonable rent is one of the most attractive elements to living in a tiny house, it can be rather costly to build from scratch. The average cost to build a tiny house can be anywhere from \$15,000 to \$80,000, depending on the builder's previous experience and available resources.

In terms of rent, the cost of building one tiny house is equivalent to two and a

half years of rent for the average cost of a small apartment in Flagstaff.

"Due to the fact that I will build a tiny house, it starts to not make sense to pay for rent," Carter said. "And I'm really indecisive so I can move my house to any city I want to."

Not only are tiny houses portable and cost-efficient, but they are compact, leaving room for only the necessities.

"With the tiny house, you can't fit that many things, so at some point if you want to get something, you have to get rid of something else," Carter said. "Your priorities get pretty clear."

While the small space may be seen as a negative quality, it can also be another benefit to portable houses.

"I wanted to live in a space that was cheap as possible so we could live a life that we wanted to live," Axelrod said. "We love

it!"

In terms of space, tiny houses will range anywhere from 120 to 500 square feet.

"Everything serves double duty so there's no wasted space or wasted objects," Ignelzi said. "If we bring something in we take something out. Everything has a purpose and intention so it feels good."

While the tiny house movement began in 1987, it has blossomed to a more popular lifestyle in the last few years and has continued to grow.

"We even begin to question normal bedrooms again," Ignelzi said. "Why would you have a room with a bed in it? It makes no sense anymore and seems like such a waste of space to us now. It's a great thing and I think a lot of people would be surprised about how comfortable portable houses are."