

TINY HOUSES ON WHEELS COMMUNITIES GENERAL INFORMATION

Starting on July 1, 2023, per Ordinance 3306, passed by City Council on March 27, 2023, Tiny Houses on Wheels (THOW) are permitted as communities of four to twelve units. THOW Communities are to the requirements of Port Townsend Municipal Code 17.58.050.

This document is specific to THOWs in communities. For information on how to establish a Tiny House on Wheels as an accessory dwelling unit to an existing residence, please see our THOW ADU handout. For general information about ADUs, please see our ADU handout.

Buyer beware: Many structures advertised as a “tiny house” or “home on wheels” do not meet the standards required by the City of Port Townsend. Structures that do not meet the required THOW standards are prohibited from being used as ADUs in the City of Port Townsend.

What is a THOW Community?

THOW is shorthand for a “Tiny House on Wheels.” Depending on who you talk to, THOW can refer to a variety of structures so it is important to know what types of structures are permitted as THOWs in Port Townsend.

Per PTMC 17.58, a THOW is defined as a structure no larger than 400 square feet, excluding loft space, that meets the following conditions:

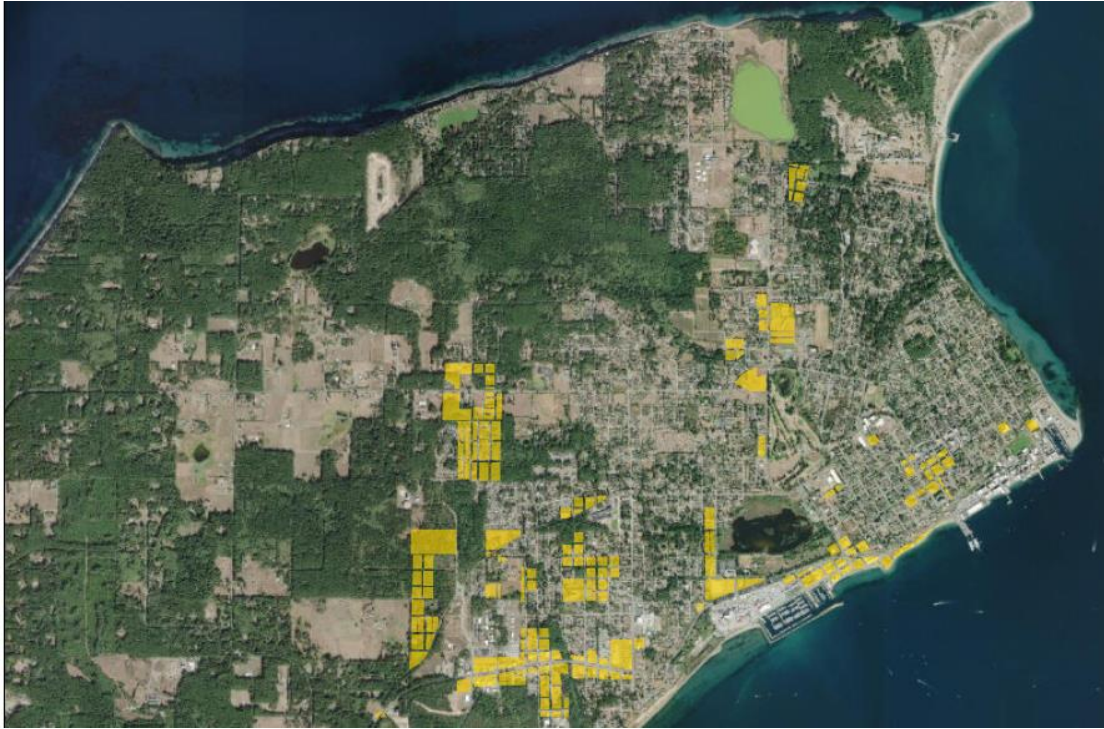
- Is licensed and registered with the Department of Motor Vehicles;
- Is constructed and certified to building and inspections standards in PTMC 17.58.030;
- Is no larger than allowed for movement on public highways;
- Has at least 150 square feet of first floor living space and does not exceed 16 feet in height;
- Is a detached self-contained unit which includes areas for cooking, sleeping, and sanitation.

A THOW as described above is technically a **Park Model Recreational Vehicle**, which is a factory-built structure or dwelling constructed to ANSI standards (not State Building Codes) and is certified through the Washington Department of Labor and Industries (L&I). Since Park Models are typically designed for temporary or recreational use, THOWs in Port Townsend will be required to meet additional construction standards on top of Park Model standards to increase energy efficiency and be suitable for all-year, day-to-day use as a dwelling. More information is available in the Tiny House on Wheels information handout.

A **tiny houses on wheels community (THOW community)** means real property for the placement of tiny houses on wheels utilizing the binding site plan process in RCW [58.17.035](#), or the unit lot subdivision process.

Where are THOW Communities permitted in the City of Port Townsend?

THOW Communities are permitted on properties zoned R-III, C-II, and C-II(S). Those zones are shown in yellow on this map:

**What are THOW Communities Development Standards?**

Each individual THOW must meet the design standards of PTMC 17.58.030. and must meet national standards as a Park Model (ANSI 119.5) and the National Electrical Code, NFPA 70, Article 552) as evidenced by a label from the State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I). For more information, see the THOW ADU handout.

Intensity: Four to twelve tiny houses per THOW community.

Location: Minimum setback of 50 feet from major arterial road frontage (State Route 20 / West Sims Way).

Centralized Common Area: All THOWs must have access to usable common space such as lawns, gardens, patios, plazas, or scenic viewing areas.

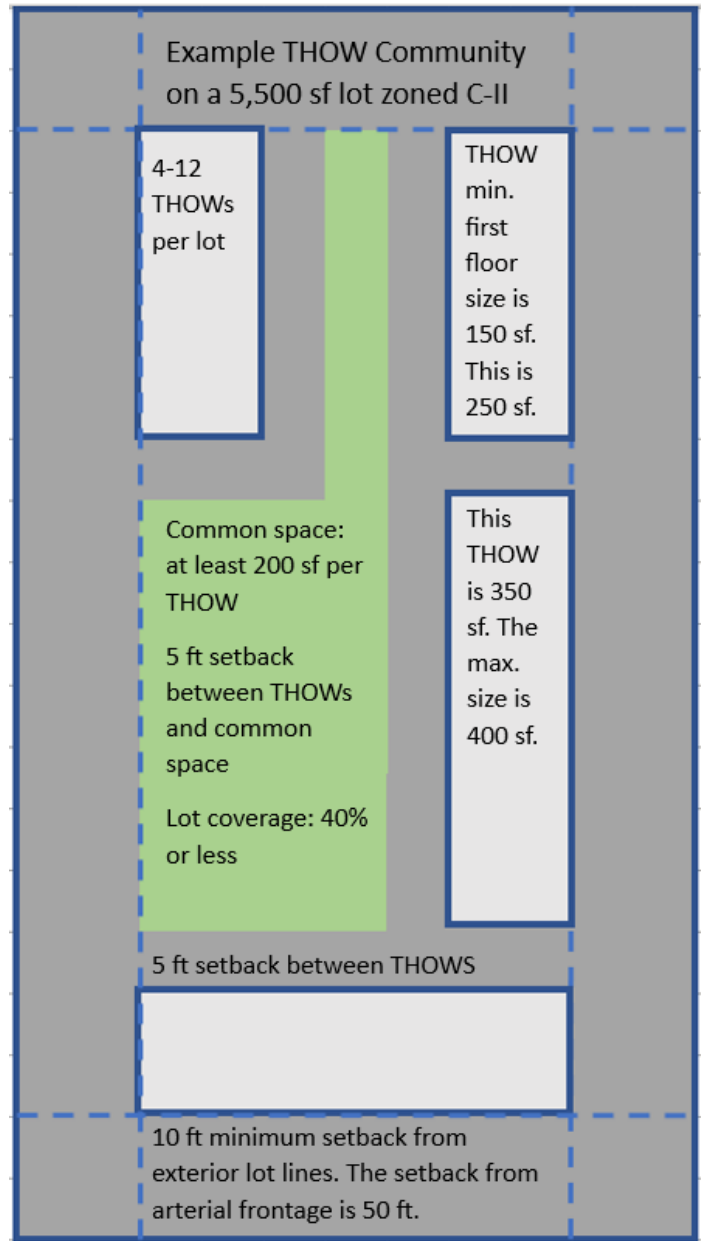
1. Two hundred square feet of usable common space per unit.
2. 50% of units shall have their main entry on the common space.
3. Setbacks do not count towards common space.
4. Must be located centrally to the THOW community.
5. Community buildings or clubhouses may be counted towards common space.
6. Tiny houses shall surround the common space on at least two sides.
7. Common space cannot be in stormwater/detention ponds, critical areas or their buffers, or greater than 10%.

Standards: THOW communities shall comply with applicable bulk, dimensional, and density requirements for the underlying district(s) in addition to the standards below:

1. Minimum lot area per THOW is 1,250 square feet. The community cannot exceed the base density of the underlying zone.
2. Maximum lot area per THOW is 3,000 square feet.
3. Maximum lot coverage shall not exceed 40%.
4. Minimum setbacks from exterior property lines are 10 feet.
5. Minimum setback from THOWs and porches to common open space is 5 feet.
6. Minimum setback between structures is 5 feet.
7. Maintenance of Open Space and Utilities. Before approval is granted, the applicant shall submit covenants, deeds and homeowners' association bylaws or other documents guaranteeing maintenance and common fee ownership of public open space, community facilities, private roads and drives, and all other commonly owned and operated property. These documents shall be reviewed and accompanied by a certificate from an attorney that they comply with the requirements of this chapter prior to approval.

Such documents and conveyances shall be accomplished and be recorded, as applicable, with the county auditor as a condition precedent to the granting of occupancy or the filing of any final plat of the property or division thereof, except that the conveyance of land to a homeowners' association may be recorded simultaneously with the filing of a final plat.

8. Tiny houses on wheels (THOW) in tiny house on wheels communities must comply with the following:
 - a. THOWs shall be placed in a designated area in the approved site plan of the pocket neighborhood.
 - b. At least 50 percent of the units shall abut a common open space, and all of the units shall be within 60 feet walking distance, measured from the nearest entrance of the



unit, along the shortest safe walking route to the nearest point of the common open space.

9. All THOWs shall meet the tie-down and skirting requirements of the applicable building codes. The building official may require additional standards to ensure the porches hide any hitches.

What Permits are Required to Establish a THOW Community?

The first step of creating a THOW Community is a pre-application conference to review the proposal, site, and each stage of establishing the community. The pre-application conference will detail the requirements for permitting the THOW Community. Request a pre-application conference by filling out the pre-application form and submitting it online via the permit portal.

The next step of creating a THOW Community is a binding site plan or unit lot subdivision. The binding site plan makes sure the community would be able to meet the development requirements. Apply for a binding site plan by filling out the application and submitting it to PCD on the 3rd floor of City Hall.

The unit lot subdivision also makes sure the community would be able to meet development requirements and allows the property under each THOW be sold to the THOW's owner. Apply for a unit lot subdivision by filling out the application and submitting it to PCD on the 3rd floor of City Hall.

THOW Communities are processed as a Type III Conditional Use Permit. Type III Conditional Use Permits include a notice of application and a public hearing before the hearing examiner. The hearing examiner makes the final decision to approve or deny the THOW Community. Apply for a Type III Conditional Use Permit by filling out the application and submitting it to PCD on the 3rd floor of City Hall.