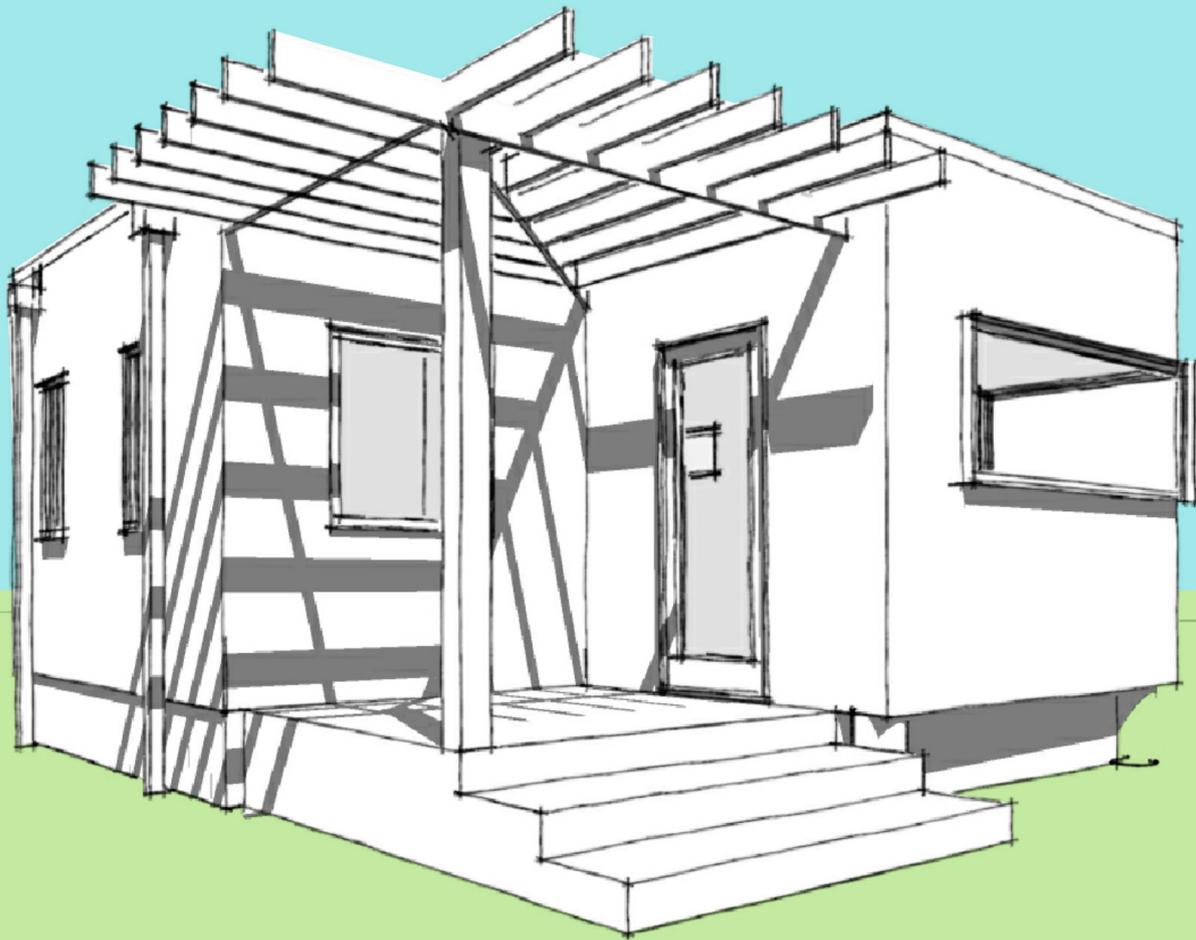


# SMALL WONDER



## THE FIRST TINY HOUSE IS GOING UP IN GARFIELD

STORY BY ANNA RASSHIVKIN

Local urban invigoration organization, cityLAB, is thinking big and going small: They're building Pittsburgh's first tiny house, on an accordingly little lot at 223 North Atlantic Avenue in Garfield.

What counts as tiny? A new American home averages 2,600 square feet. A house can be called "tiny" if it's less than 600 square feet, but that's a luxurious limit – the Garfield house is slated for 330 square feet.

The Garfield Tiny House design reflects the tiny movement ethos in clean, simple lines: The house is flat-roofed and L-shaped, a square porch filling in its missing corner. Above the porch, an open crosshatch roof casts sharp geometric shadows on the walls. The home, which will hug the back of its long, narrow land plot, will be fronted by a garden and topped, hopefully, with rooftop green trays.

Inside, a large wrap-around corner window floods the 266-square-foot main room with natural light. The sense of space is expanded by the lack of anything in it: cityLAB eliminated original architect Minim's cleverly designed but limiting built-in features like a bed and couch, opting to make the Garfield Tiny House a blank slate for its new owner. CityLAB hopes to add storage above the kitchen and bathroom, and a crawl space under the home. The kitchen, meanwhile, is designed with an avid chef's needs in mind, with a full-size range and plenty of counter space.

CityLAB is only building one house, but a key objective of the project is creating a detailed how-to manual to teach others the process. Garfield contains more than 500 vacant lots. CityLAB and its partner, the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, envision tiny houses as a great way to fill those spaces. They hope to entice people with the "quirkiness, sustainability, and thrift embodied in living small."

The location alone is a practice of sustainable living: "It's on an abandoned lot in the city; it's making use of what nobody else has bothered to make use of," says founder and CEO of

cityLAB, Eve Picker. "For me, sustainability means it's in the heart of the city. You can walk to the bus; you're reusing something." Incidentally, tiny homes also leave plenty of budget room for high-efficiency building materials and appliances.

Minim designer Brian Levy believes that "a contented life is independent from the scale of dwelling." Tiny living reflects a shifting focus, a new take on the American dream: from supersize to minimize, from added space and grandeur to added value and utility. "How much are all those tchotchkes contributing to your sense of life satisfaction?" asks the Tiny House. On average, new house size more than doubled between 1950 and 2002, while families decreased by one member. The tiny house movement reverses those trends, echoing a change in how we view the markers of happiness and success.

But Eve Picker says that, for cityLAB, this project really isn't about the tiny house movement—it's just another urban development tool. "We were trying to come up with an idea that would show people the value of the land and what could happen there, and also turn others on to Garfield. And so I think in that sense, even though we haven't broken ground yet, we've been wildly successful."

If Garfield seems like an unexpected location choice, then that's partly the point. Out of 400 ideas solicited during community meetings, tiny houses were one of 16 selected for cityLAB's "6% Place" initiative. The project is driven by the hypothesis that a six percent population of creative workers turns a neighborhood into a destination. Garfield – central, affordable, and "oddly forgotten," as Picker put it – was the perfect testing ground. Now, cityLAB is drawing creatives there in an attempt to make it a more visible, thriving, diverse and safe neighborhood.

CityLAB intends to start building the home this spring, and hopes to sell it for less than \$100,000. After this house is completed, Picker says she has more big tiny things in store for Garfield. A hint: what says community and sustainability like a ten-home tiny house village? We're paying attention.