

Evaluating the Effectiveness of State and Local Policies Adopted Since 2010 in Supporting Tiny Home Communities as Permanent Housing Solutions in the Pacific States

Agastya Raja
agastyaraja@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Since 2010, tiny house villages (THVs) have grown rapidly across the Pacific states in response to two interconnected crises: record homelessness and deepening housing unaffordability. This literature review observes how existing research evaluates the effectiveness of state- and local-level policy in supporting THVs as permanent housing solutions in California, Oregon, and Washington, rather than as a temporary measure. It argues that permanence rests on three factors typically viewed as individual entities by the existing literature: the policy environment surrounding zoning, land tenure, and funding streams; the structural and mechanical engineering that determines whether a unit can physically last; and the architectural design choices that determine whether a unit functions as an actual home for its occupants. In reviewing sources on affordability, homelessness policy, engineering, architectural design, and measurable outcomes, this paper finds that Washington, Oregon, and California have pursued meaningful yet different legislative strategies. Foundation-based units face inconsistent regulatory and engineering standards, and the stigma tiny homes and THVs face can be reversed through thoughtful design choices and community involvement. It also finds that architectural quality, not just initial design intent, is heavily dependent on stable funding during construction, implementation, and operation. Evidence is strongest for permanence and zoning outcomes and weakest for health and accessibility outcomes, reflecting a research base that remains dominated by single-site case studies. Ultimately, successful villages share a specific combination of secure land tenure, resident self-governance, and code-compliant construction, suggesting that durable policy solutions require a coordinated, simultaneous approach across engineering, architecture, and policy reform rather than treating any single factor as sufficient on its own.

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness in the United States reached its highest recorded level in 2024, with an estimated 770,000 individuals on the street on any given night, an 18 percent increase from the previous year (Kpeebe & Evans, 2025). The homelessness crisis has grown alongside a rapidly deepening affordability problem: a record 43.5 million U.S. households were cost-burdened in 2024, spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing, with the number of cost-burdened households rising by 6.4 million since 2019 alone

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(Whitney, 2026). These twin pressures of insufficient shelter and a progressively unaffordable nation have become the engines powering the rapid growth of tiny house villages (THVs) since 2010. Beginning as scattered encampments, such as Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon, THVs have become one of the fastest-growing responses to precarious housing situations in the country, expanding from 34 documented villages in 2019 to over 123 by early 2024 (Kpeebe & Evans, 2025). At the epicenter of this growth are the Pacific states of California, Oregon, and Washington. This concentration seems to mirror the elevated cost of living and the elevated homelessness rates found across these states.

A tiny home is generally defined as a structure under 400 to 500 square feet, built on either a permanent foundation or on a wheeled chassis (known as a tiny house on wheels, or THOW). Despite similar goals, the two constructions are regulated differently: foundation-based units typically fall under Appendix Q of the International Residential Code. In contrast, wheeled units are often treated as recreational vehicles and regulated under separate state and industry standards. This regulatory split is especially important because it directly affects which tiny homes can plausibly become permanent, code-compliant housing and which remain closer to transitional shelter. The split also intersects with a less tangible barrier: stigma. Tiny Homes and the villages that house them are frequently viewed as separate entities, visually and physically distinct from their surrounding neighborhoods, as makeshift, or as an unwelcome sign of poverty nearby. This perception fuels not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) opposition, which research consistently identifies as the leading obstacle in siting new villages (Evans, 2021, 2022).

Growth in the number of THVs, however, is not the same as success. For the purposes of this review, permanence refers to a THV's capacity to function as a stable, long-term housing solution rather than a temporary or emergency shelter. Permanence has two related facets. Institutional permanence includes secure land tenure, residential status, and stable funding and governing structures; and physical permanence, which constitutes sufficiency in durability and code compliance for long term residential use. This definition is distinct from the success of a resident transitioning from a THV into other forms of permanent housing, which is viewed as a separate resident outcome rather than evidence that the village itself is permanent. A village's ability to persist and achieve permanence depends on three factors that the literature often looks at individually: the policy environment that determines a tiny home's legal footing, the structural and mechanical engineering choices that determine the longevity of the building itself, and the architectural design choices that determine whether it can respond to the individual needs of its occupants. On the policy side, permanence is shaped by zoning classifications, land use and tenure, and funding structures; villages permitted as "transitional encampments" or built on land they do not own or control face a higher risk of displacement and instability than villages with secure legal status (Sandoval, 2022). On the engineering side, permanence depends on whether structural and thermal requirements are engineered to residential standards or improvised, a distinction the literature has only recently begun to look at (Stratton & Corneal, 2023). Lastly, on the architectural side, permanence and dignity depend on choices that engineering alone cannot determine: unit layout, privacy, autonomy over the space, and trauma-sensitive design, factors which a small but growing body of research links directly to residents' mental health and sense of ownership over their housing (Rollings & Bollo, 2021).

This paper asks how the existing literature evaluates the effectiveness of state and local policy adopted since 2010 in supporting THVs as permanent housing solutions in the Pacific states, and pursues that question along two coupled tracks. The first is a question of durability: what policy engineering and architectural choices make tiny homes and THVs viable, code-compliant, and actually permanent rather than a stopgap measure that simply displaces its residents a few years down the road? The second is a question of acceptance: what policy reform and physical design choices, both structural and architectural, can reduce the stigma that keeps tiny homes and THVs out of communities in the first place?

Since research focused specifically on THVs in the Pacific states remains limited, this review also utilizes select studies from outside California, Oregon, and Washington when they provide relevant evidence on engineering, architectural design, resident outcomes, or community acceptance. These studies bring to light design and implementation questions and solutions not constrained by location. Comparisons of state and local policy are impacted by location and so remain focused on California, Oregon, and Washington.

The following sections take up affordability, homelessness, engineering, architectural design, and outcomes in turn, before closing with gaps and disagreements that remain unresolved in the current literature.

METHODS

This paper uses a structured literature review to examine research on THVs, with a primary focus on California, Oregon, and Washington. Literature was identified primarily through Google Scholar utilizing combinations of keywords related to “tiny homes,” “tiny house villages,” “homelessness,” “affordable housing,” “zoning,” “permanence,” “engineering,” “architecture,” “design,” “NIMBYism,” “stigma,” “residential,” and the individual Pacific states. Searches regarding THVs as a response to homelessness were also conducted separately from broader searches on tiny homes and housing policy. For questions involving engineering, architecture, design, combatting stigma, and community acceptance, the geographic scope was widened to include research from across the United States when the findings were relevant to Pacific States.

Approximately 45 sources were examined as part of the research process. The sources were evaluated on their relevance to the research question and the contribution they made to the formation of an answer through policy, engineering, architectural design, affordability, homelessness, or THV outcomes. Annotated bibliographies were created for potential sources to assist in identifying their central arguments, methods, findings, and relevance before determining whether they would be incorporated into the review. The review prioritizes academic research, including peer-reviewed articles, academic case studies, theses, and research reports. Opinion-based sources were excluded, while government documents, legislation, and court decisions were included when necessary to evaluate specific state and local policies or changes in the legal environment.

RESULTS

Affordability

The rise in THVs since 2010 has resulted from the broader housing and affordability crisis unfolding over the same period. As of 2024, 43.5 million U.S. households were cost-burdened, an increase of 6.4 million over 5 years (Whitney, 2026). That burden has fallen primarily on renters and prospective first-time homebuyers, a group that has watched homeownership, historically the primary method of building household and generational wealth, become steadily unattainable over the past decade. While homeownership offers housing cost stability, long-term security, and equity accumulation, renting leaves families exposed to rising costs and without the gains that come with homeownership. This dynamic compounds for lower-income renters, who now need to spend a disproportionate share of their income on housing, leaving little left over to save for a down payment. That gap between the security of homeownership and the instability renting leaves behind is exactly the space tiny homes are ready to fill: a lower-cost entry point into the stability and equity-building that have continually slid further out of reach for cost-burdened households over the last decade.

The case for affordability that tiny homes make is not purely financial; it also depends on how residents themselves relate to housing that is subsidized rather than owned. Jang et al. (2025) introduce the concept of “decommodified housing,” describing housing that is deliberately held outside of commodity markets and the pricing pressures associated with them. Through their fieldwork with Nickelsville villages, they found that low-cost housing sustained by grants and donations often produces a complicated relationship between residents and their homes. Some residents expressed discomfort with living in homes financed by others, while others expressed gratitude given the harsher conditions they had previously endured. That finding is a much-needed balance to the purely cost-driven affordability narrative, as it suggests that low construction and resident costs alone do not automatically translate into housing that feels secure or dignified to the people living in it. The financing structures behind THVs affect residents’ sense of ownership and stability just as much as the price tag itself.

Tiny homes have been marketed as a way to interrupt that cycle. Kpeebe and Evans (2025) find that the average tiny home costs approximately \$32,765 to construct, a fraction of the costs associated with conventional new construction. They view the fourfold growth in operational THVs between 2019 and 2024 as further evidence that the model is viewed increasingly as a credible response to both homelessness and the affordability crisis. Alexander (2022) makes a parallel legal argument: tiny homes and THVs represent an understudied but significant tool for addressing housing insecurity, given that the localities they are based in have built the supporting infrastructure of building codes, zoning designations, and approval processes that currently make “living tiny” legally burdensome in most jurisdictions.

Unfortunately, regulatory infrastructure has not caught up with the model’s theoretical viability. Sandoval (2022) argues that outdated zoning ordinances and minimum square footage requirements, written for

conventional housing, effectively exclude tiny homes from even being in contention for mainstream affordable housing grant programs and financial pathways. This forces THVs to be overly reliant on private donations over public investment. In practice, this has led to a slower and more fragile adoption process: villages that depend on private donations and short-term land agreements are intrinsically less stable than villages built on land with secure, long-term status and stable funding streams.

While zoning reform is the obvious remedy, the literature cautions against reform without the necessary safeguards, as such reforms can produce outcomes that run counter to the affordability goals they were meant to serve. Cameron's (2022) case study of Seattle's inclusionary upzoning and Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) policy demonstrates the risk: tying increased density to affordability requirements increased construction, but did not provide the expected benefits to first-time buyers and renters. Instead, displacement pressures increased even as unit counts rose. Brotman (2020) documents a related tension in Portland: easing tiny-home permitting in 2014 was associated with increased applications for tiny-home construction, while the city's short-term-rental market created incentives for some tiny homes to be used as visitor accommodations rather than long-term housing. Her study therefore illustrates how permitting reforms can expand legal tiny-home construction while still leaving unresolved whether newly permitted units will serve long-term housing needs. These reforms measurably increased the ratio of local housing prices to income instead of reducing it. When read together, these findings complicate the seemingly straightforward case for zoning reform: low construction costs, eased permitting, and reformed funding streams are necessary conditions for tiny homes to function as affordable housing, but without protections that direct the resulting supply towards the people that need them most, the same reforms that unlock tiny home construction can just as easily be captured by high-income buyers and investors. A durable policy solution, in short, needs to reform zoning and simultaneously direct the housing it produces for the community members who actually need it.

Homelessness

The proliferation of THVs since 2010 is equally connected to the scale of the homelessness crisis itself, and the largely disciplinary policy landscape that unhoused individuals navigate. An estimated 770,000 people experience homelessness nationally on any given night, a record high, and an 18% increase over the prior year (Kpeebe & Evans, 2025). That crisis is especially acute in the Pacific states: the 2024 Point-in-Time counts estimated 75,312 people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County and 16,868 in King County, Washington (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, 2024; King County Regional Homelessness Authority, 2024). This distribution tracks closely with the concentration of THVs, with California, Oregon, and Washington home to a disproportionate share of the nation's THVs (Kpeebe & Evans, 2025). That clustering indicates the same underlying driver: the elevated cost of living across the region, which is driving up homelessness rates. This is exactly why the Pacific states now take center stage in both the broader housing crisis and as a proving ground for alternative housing innovations.

Washington, Oregon, and California have taken visibly different legislative approaches towards accommodating THVs, and the contrast is especially instructive. Washington's approach has evolved

through both homelessness policy and housing legislation. In 2017, the State Advisory Council on Homelessness recommended that tiny shelters could serve as temporary emergency or interim housing within local homeless-crisis response systems, while explicitly distinguishing them from permanent housing (Washington State Department of Commerce, 2017). In 2019, Washington enacted legislation allowing local governments to regulate tiny-house communities and expanding legal pathways for tiny houses and tiny houses with wheels (Washington State Legislature, 2019). House Bill 1337 (2023) subsequently expanded statewide allowances for accessory dwelling units.

Oregon, meanwhile, has combined state-level shelter policy with local zoning reform. House Bill 2006 (2021) resulted in the reduction of certain local land use barriers for emergency shelters. Portland's Shelter to Housing Continuum reforms local pathways to account for outdoor shelters and certain THOWs (Oregon State Legislature, 2021; City of Portland, 2021).

California's approach has instead worked through statewide planning mandates over direct incorporation. Assembly Bill 2339 (2022) requires local governments to identify and plan for emergency shelter sites as a part of their state-mandated housing elements, a strategy Fulton et al. (2023) places within a more encompassing wave of California legislation aimed at limiting local governments' ability to block or delay shelter and housing development. These different approaches expand the legal pathways available for shelter and alternative housing, but do not by themselves guarantee that THVs function as permanent housing.

Neither of these approaches fully resolved the tension between Housing First policies and the criminalization of homelessness, especially within major cities. For the majority of the period examined in this review, *Martin v. City of Boise* (2019) significantly shaped that tension. In *Martin*, the Ninth Circuit specified that the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment prevented criminal penalties from being imposed on individuals sleeping outdoors on public property, as people experiencing homelessness typically had no alternative available shelter. This prevented cities within the Ninth Circuit from relying solely on enforcement when resident homeless populations exceeded local shelter capacities. This legal framework turned shelter availability into an important consideration in local encampment policy, and formed an intrinsic part of the policy environment which allowed THVs to expand across the Pacific states.

In 2024, that framework changed dramatically. In *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the prior Eighth Amendment reasoning underlying the Ninth Circuit's approach and stated that generally applicable laws regulating camping on public property don't constitute cruel and unusual punishment just because they are enforced against people experiencing homelessness. The result: availability of shelter can no longer be treated as a constitutional prerequisite to enforcing public-camping laws. This change weakens any claim legally necessitating the creation of THVs or other "adequate shelter" alternatives before encampments can be cleared, although it does not erase the historical influence that *Martin* had on West Coast homelessness policy before 2024.

The tense relationship between criminalization and alternative shelter also predates *Martin*. Herring and Lutz (2015) place it within a broader West Coast History in which homeless encampments transformed through pressures of enforcement and negotiation into semi-permanent settlements. Margier (2023) documents a similar transition in Portland, where informally organized encampments increasingly became institutionalized THVs supported by local government. As a result of these findings, THVs should be understood not just as a response to court-imposed legal requirements, but as part of a broader evolution in how Pacific states have responded to homelessness over time.

That institutionalization has produced real gains and real costs. On the positive side, formal sponsorship by cities and states has secured land tenure and funding streams that informal encampments never had. On the negative side, Jang et al. (2025) find that THV residents are typically categorized as temporary emergency occupants, meaning they possess neither the ownership rights of homeowners nor the legal protections afforded to tenants, leaving them exposed even in well-established, well-managed villages. That legal vacuum, more than a simple shortage of housing units, is what much of the Pacific States' recent legislative activity has been attempting to fill. Whether that activity has been a genuine driving force for broader zoning and permitting reform, or simply a narrow accommodation for THVs specifically, remains an open question the literature has not fully resolved; what is clear is that legislative attention to THVs has grown substantially since 2010, even as the underlying tension between Housing First policy and continued criminalization has not disappeared.

Design and engineering for longevity

If policy is responsible for determining whether a THV is allowed to persist, engineering determines whether the structures within a village are capable of persisting, and architecture determines whether those structures actually serve the functions their residents require. That three-way distinction has received far less attention in the literature than zoning and funding, but the evidence suggests that each layer matters independently. Stratton and Corneal (2023) developed a configurable structural and thermal design tool for wheeled tiny homes, using finite element analysis to calculate structural support, stability, and heating and cooling requirements across 12 U.S. cities with varying climates. The broader point of their studies is that these technical details-structural loading, stability during transit, and climate-appropriate thermal performance-are rarely addressed with the rigor applied to conventional housing, despite being precisely the factors that determine whether a THOW is safe and durable enough to serve as a long-term residence and achieve permanence.

Part of why the engineering rigor across the tiny home movement varies so much is that wheeled and foundation-based units are not regulated in the same way, even while both are often grouped under the label "tiny home." Foundation-based units are increasingly built to conform to residential building codes, bringing them under the same umbrella of structural and safety regulations as conventional houses and making them eligible for the long-term financing and insurance that help a village persist. Wheeled units, by contrast, are frequently viewed as recreational vehicles for regulatory purposes, which means the specific standards applied to them focus on fire and transit safety rather than the structural and thermal

benchmarks that apply to permanent dwellings. This split has ramifications for permanence: a wheeled unit that was never engineered or inspected to meet residential standards may face greater limitations in durability, safety, financing, or long-term siting than a foundation-based dwelling. Stratton and Corneal (2023) address this technical gap by examining structural stability, weight, and thermal requirements in tiny-house design, while Wilson et al. (2025) provide a case study of foundation-based, code-compliant units designed as permanent housing. However, these studies do not establish that foundation-based units consistently outperform wheeled units across all measures of permanence.

Foundation-based construction tells a more encouraging story on the engineering side, at least when it has been prioritized. Wilson et al. (2025) describe a 15-unit THV built specifically for people with severe mental illness, in which each tiny home was constructed on a permanent foundation to the same code-compliant floor plan, with 416 square feet of heated interior space, a full bathroom, and a covered porch. Using a rapid “Blitz Build” model, all 15 units were completed in 90 business days. The project’s vertical construction cost totaled \$690,773, or approximately \$46,051 per home, below the original \$50,000-per-home target. Siegner et al. (2021) offer a similar counterpoint on the performance side. Through their three-year study of UC Berkeley’s tiny house in my backyard (THIMBY) project, they found that a single carefully engineered unit could maintain energy and water performance well beyond its initial construction, reducing site energy use by 88 percent relative to a minimally code-compliant conventional home. Engineering quality, however, is no guarantee that a unit functions well as a home for the person living in it, which is where the architecture-specific literature picks up.

Rollings and Bollo’s (2021) integrative review provides the clearest available evidence on this distinction. Through a synthesis of seventeen peer-reviewed studies on permanent supportive housing design, they identified three architectural domains that were pivotal in shaping formerly unhoused residents’ mental health independently of structural soundness: a sense of home and trauma sensitivity; dwelling unit type, privacy, personal control, and access to amenities; and the design of common spaces. Their central finding is that architecture and design remain significantly understudied relative to the weight of their influence on outcomes, even as the supply of permanent supportive housing has expanded rapidly, a gap that can be directly placed onto the tendency of THV literature to focus on land tenure and funding while treating the architectural experience as an afterthought. Jackson et al.’s (2020) case study of Tallahassee’s “The Dwellings” project shows what happens when the afterthought becomes reality on the ground. Despite the planners’ and architects’ deliberate design intentions, funding challenges and not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY)-driven compromises during implementation left the completed community short of its own design goals for privacy, dignity, and responsiveness to individual needs. As a counterpoint to Rollings and Bollo (2021), Jackson et al.’s (2020) case suggests that architectural intent and architectural outcome are not the same thing, and that the damage caused by the gap between them is a result of policy and funding constraints, not a lack of design knowledge.

That disparity between what is technically possible and what ends up being built points to the recurring tension in the THV literature between providing basic shelter quickly and creating housing designed for

long-term residential use. Emergency and interim models tend to prioritize speed, cost, and minimum habitability, while more permanent solutions require more care with regard to durability, privacy, accessibility, and long-term residential quality. Abarbanel et al.'s (2016) study on the feasibility of scaling THV construction in Lane County, Oregon, is instructive here, as it treats engineering and financial feasibility as intertwined constraints from the start, rather than treating design quality as a disposable variable once a site and funding source are secured. Rollings and Bollo (2021) suggest that architectural quality deserves the same treatment, since privacy, personal control, and trauma sensitivity are not incidental amenities but design variables with documented mental health consequences. The reforms suggested through a synthesis of this literature point in a consistent direction across both engineering and architecture: adopting building code uniformity between THVs for the homeless and other forms of permanent supportive or market-rate housing on the engineering side, whether that means broader state adoption of Appendix Q-style standards for foundation-based units, or clearer, safety-focused standards for wheeled units. On the architectural side, treating privacy, resident control over personal space, and trauma-sensitive layout as baseline design requirements rather than budget-dependent extras, as the model Wilson et al. (2025) demonstrates, is achievable even at low per-unit cost.

Design against stigma, Design for dignity

While engineering can solve the durability side of the permanence problem, it cannot do much to solve the problem of acceptance. Even a perfectly engineered THV will struggle to be built or remain built if it faces significant or sustained community opposition. Evans's (2021, 2022) research across THVs in Missouri consistently identifies NIMBY sentiment as the single largest barrier to siting and integrating villages for people experiencing homelessness, a finding that holds even when the villages are well managed and well regarded by their own residents. In her earlier visual preference survey (Evans, 2019), she suggests one lever for addressing that opposition directly: general public support for tiny and small houses shifts based on specific and controllable design choices, including architectural style that complements or matches the surrounding neighborhood, and how units are sited relative to existing homes, instead of focusing on being constrained by size alone. That finding is important beyond just the homeless-specific context, because it suggests the same principle that helps site a THV- designing units to integrate with their surroundings visually- can also help make tiny homes and ADUs a more broadly accepted housing option for the general public, not just a homelessness intervention.

Evans's 2022 stakeholder survey of two Missouri THVs extends that finding with more specificity. Stakeholders held distinct and identifiable preferences for particular physical and social characteristics of tiny house villages. Communities that took these preferences into account and acted on them through site layout, unit design, and visible community management experienced significantly higher community support than villages that did not. This result implies that stigma is not a fixed and unaddressable obstacle, but a variable that specific design choices can cause measurable shifts in. Anderson et al. (2025) reach a complementary conclusion through a different path. Their experimental "ask tell" intervention, which corrects specific misperceptions about affordable housing rather than changing anything regarding the

housing itself, produced a significant reduction in NIMBY attitudes, with the effect holding even when projects were sited closer to the respondents' homes. When taken together, the Evans and Anderson findings point to a two-pronged strategy for removing stigma: pairing physical design choices that visually integrate tiny homes into their surroundings with targeted public communication that corrects the specific misperceptions driving opposition.

Designing for dignity is equally important as designing against stigma, and it converges with the anti-stigma literature more than it diverges from it. Jang et al. (2025) provide a cautionary tale of what happens when dignity is not designed for. Their fieldwork found that residents with hearing loss faced real difficulty participating in village decision-making, which is conducted primarily through spoken discussion, and that NIMBYism itself discourages villages from installing accessibility accommodations in the first place, since visible modifications can draw the same negative attention that opposition groups already direct towards THVs. Wilson et al.'s (2025) permanent foundation project for people experiencing severe mental illness offers a working counterexample. A private full bathroom, genuine heated living space, and a covered porch are deliberate design choices aimed at restoring a sense of ownership within the residents, a population whose prior unstable housing situation was compounded by inadequate shelter.

Rollings and Bollo's (2021) architectural findings suggest why dignity-oriented design and stigma reduction are more connected than they first appear. A unit that visibly signals privacy, personal control, and permanence makes use of features such as private entrances, full bathrooms, and porches that carry a domestic connotation rather than an institutional one. These features support the resident's own sense of self and security, while presenting differently to a skeptical neighbor than a row of identical, minimally furnished cabins. Jackson et al.'s (2020) Tallahassee case illustrates the reverse dynamic in action and serves as a valuable cautionary example. NIMBY-driven funding cuts during the implementation of "The Dwellings" forced planners to scale back precisely the architectural features, privacy, individualized unit design, and access to amenities that Rollings and Bollo (2021) identified as pivotal to residents' sense of home. The result was a village that appeared and functioned more like a barracks than the dignified, individually responsive community it was originally envisioned as. This, in turn, further reinforced the derogatory perception of THVs that fuel NIMBY opposition in the first place. That continuous feedback loop of stigma driving funding cuts, funding cuts degrading architecture, and degraded architecture reinforcing stigma is arguably the central design and policy problem that today's literature has yet to solve.

Synthesizing across this design-focused literature suggests a viable design guide for Pacific State THVs going forward: site units to visually integrate with their surroundings (Evans, 2019); build for dignity, through measures that create genuine privacy, plumbing, and living space amenities over the bare minimum (Wilson et al., 2025); treat trauma-sensitive layout, personal control, and dwelling unit type as baseline design requirements, rather than the first things put on the chopping block as a result of tight budgets (Rollings & Bollo, 2021); design with accessibility in mind over treating it as an optional add-on vulnerable to NIMBY pushback (Jang et al., 2025); and pair every design intervention with public

communication that addresses the specific misperceptions driving local opposition (Anderson et al., 2025). No single design choice can remove stigma on its own. However, the literature concludes that stigma responds measurably to deliberate design, in a way that policy reform alone cannot fully reach, and that protecting architectural quality during implementation, not just at the proposal stage, is what determines whether that design actually reaches residents.

It is worth noting that most of the stigma-focused literature reviewed here, Evans's (2021, 2022) surveys in particular, studies stigma directed at tiny house villages for people experiencing homelessness specifically, rather than stigma against tiny homes as a mainstream housing choice for the general public. Evans's (2019) visual-preference work is the clearest exception, since it surveys ordinary residents on tiny and small houses generally rather than homelessness-specific villages, and its central finding, that architectural style and neighborhood-consistent siting substantially shift public support, plausibly generalizes to non-homeless applications like accessory dwelling units or market-rate tiny homes on individual lots. However, the literature has not yet directly tested whether the same NIMBY dynamics documented around homeless THVs, and the same interventions shown to reduce them, operate identically when the tiny home in question belongs to a market-rate owner rather than a formerly homeless resident. That is a meaningful gap for the second half of this paper's charge, removing stigma so tiny homes become a viable option for regular citizens as well as the unhoused, since a policy or design intervention validated only in the homelessness context cannot be assumed to transfer cleanly to a different stigma dynamic, one more likely rooted in property-value concerns and unfamiliarity than in the specific anxieties that homeless-specific NIMBYism tends to invoke.

OUTCOMES

A single statistic, the growing number of THVs, is not by itself evidence that those villages are succeeding. Evaluating outcomes properly requires looking across several dimensions at once: health, accessibility, scalability, permanence (including governance), and zoning, treating each as embedded in the others rather than as an isolated success metric.

Health and accessibility

The broader evidence on housing-based interventions for homeless populations is more mixed than THV-specific sources tend to suggest. A 2018 consensus report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, convened specifically to evaluate whether permanent supportive housing improves health outcomes, found no substantial published evidence that it does (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). A subsequent systematic review by Aubry et al. (2020) in *The Lancet Public Health* offers a more optimistic but narrower finding: permanent supportive housing is effective in maintaining stable housing across age groups and levels of support need, while evidence for specific health improvements beyond housing stability itself remains limited. Read together, these two sources suggest that "housing works" is a well-supported claim about housing stability specifically, and a

considerably less certain claim about health outcomes more broadly, a distinction that much of the THV-specific literature does not clearly draw. On accessibility, Jang et al. (2025) found that people with disabilities are statistically overrepresented among homeless populations. However, residents with hearing loss faced concrete barriers to participating in spoken-discussion-based governance, and NIMBYism itself discourages villages from installing accessibility accommodations at all, connecting the accessibility outcome directly back to the stigma dynamics discussed above.

It is worth pausing on how uneven the evidence base is across these five dimensions before treating any of them as settled. Permanence and zoning are comparatively well-documented, largely because land tenure and legal status are directly verifiable from public records and site visits. Health and accessibility outcomes are far less documented, in part because they require longitudinal data on individual residents that most THV studies, being single-site case studies, are simply not designed to collect. That imbalance matters for how the outcomes below should be read: a strong permanence finding or a strong zoning finding for Washington's statute says relatively little, on its own, about whether the same village or the same statute is producing good health or accessibility outcomes for the people actually living there.

Scalability

Kpeebe and Evans's (2025) spatial analysis finds THVs have grown in both number and geographic reach, with clustering concentrated in the Pacific states but expansion increasingly visible nationwide (see also Evans, 2020, for the earlier national inventory this growth builds on). That growth raises a question the policy literature is not well positioned to answer on its own: as villages scale, does unit quality stay consistent? Siegner et al.'s (2021) three-year performance study of a single, carefully engineered THIMBY unit offers a partial, encouraging answer, showing that a well-engineered unit can sustain its performance targets well beyond initial construction. However, the finding is based on single-unit performance rather than village-wide data. Abarbanel et al. (2016) approach the same question from the feasibility side, treating engineering quality and financing as jointly binding constraints on how far a village model can scale in a given county.

Zoning

Zoning reform has expanded legal pathways for tiny homes and shelters across the three Pacific states, but through different mechanisms and with different implications for permanence. Washington has created statutory avenues for tiny homes and THOWs, while still separating temporary tiny shelters used for homelessness response from permanent housing (Washington State Department of Commerce, 2017; Washington State Legislature, 2019). Oregon has implemented a combination of state-level regulation and local experimentation. Legislation adopted in 2021 reduced certain local land-use barriers for qualifying emergency shelters, while Portland's 2021 Shelter to Housing Continuum reforms expanded local channels for outdoor shelters and the residential applications of certain THOWs (Oregon State Legislature, 2021; City of Portland, 2021). California has pursued a different approach through sweeping statewide planning requirements. AB 2339 (2022) requires local governments to include emergency

shelter sites as part of their housing elements, within a broader set of state reforms aimed at reducing local regulatory barriers to housing and shelter development (Fulton et al., 2023).

These statewide and local reforms do not guarantee permanence at the village level, though. Jang et al. (2025) demonstrate this through two Nickelsville villages in Seattle. The first, Northlake, sits on land owned by Seattle's public electric utility within an industrial zone where no ground disturbance is permitted. The second, CD Village, operates through a municipal provision for traditional encampments or land owned by religious organizations. Oregon provides a similar caution at the policy level: relaxation of zoning and siting regulations do not automatically result in the creation of permanent housing with secure tenure. For all 3 states, the distinction between legal permission to establish a shelter and the physical conditions required of permanent housing remains central to evaluating policy effectiveness.

Taken together across all five dimensions, the outcomes literature suggests that THVs in the Pacific states have made clear, measurable progress on housing stability and geographic scale, but have made far less consistent progress on health, accessibility, and quality-consistent scalability, and remain structurally dependent on governance and zoning arrangements that vary too much from village to village to be called reliable. The villages held up as success stories in this literature share a specific combination of secure land tenure, resident self-governance, and either code-compliant or carefully engineered construction; that combination, rather than any single policy or design choice in isolation, appears to be what separates a genuinely permanent THV from one that functions as a longer-lived but still ultimately temporary encampment.

Gaps and disagreements

The clearest disagreement in this literature concerns health outcomes. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2018) found no substantial evidence that permanent supportive housing improves health outcomes among people experiencing homelessness, while Aubry et al. (2020) found robust evidence of housing stability but only limited evidence of health improvements. Both conclusions can be true simultaneously, but much of the THV-specific literature does not carefully distinguish between the two, often citing "housing works" evidence in ways that imply health benefits that the underlying research does not actually establish.

A second disagreement concerns zoning reform itself. Kpeebe and Evans (2025) treat the growing gap between THV demand and public funding as evidence that policymakers should expand public investment and further streamline zoning. Sandoval (2022), Brotman (2020), and Cameron (2022), by contrast, each document cases in which zoning liberalization, absent complementary protections, produced outcomes that ran counter to affordability goals: short-term rental conversion in Portland, uneven displacement pressure in Seattle, and continued exclusion from mainstream funding streams despite eased permitting. The literature has not reconciled these positions into a single recommended policy sequence; it remains genuinely unresolved whether zoning reform should precede funding expansion, follow it, or be paired with specific anti-displacement or anti-conversion protections from the outset.

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A third tension runs through the governance literature. Jang et al. (2025) find that resident self-governance fosters trust and ownership, while Margier (2023) finds that the formal institutionalization required to secure land tenure and public funding tends to erode exactly that self-governance. These are not strictly contradictory findings; both can be simultaneously true, but the literature has not yet produced a model for reconciling the tenure security that institutionalization provides with the resident autonomy that self-governance provides, leaving practitioners without clear guidance on how to sequence or balance the two.

Finally, the stigma-reduction literature is split on which lever matters more. Evans (2019, 2021, 2022) locates the primary lever in physical design and siting choices, while Anderson et al. (2025) locate it in directly correcting public misperceptions, independent of the housing's physical characteristics. Neither study directly tests the other's mechanism against its own, so it remains unclear whether a design change, an informational intervention, or some combination of the two yields the largest and most durable reduction in NIMBY opposition. Marshall et al.'s (2026) recent scoping review of tiny homes and sleeping cabins as a homelessness response makes a related point at a broader level: much of this literature remains thin, unevenly distributed across outcome categories, and weighted toward description of individual villages rather than comparative evaluation across sites, a gap that limits how confidently any of the disagreements above can currently be resolved.

CONCLUSION

This review set out to answer the question: How effectively have state and local policies since 2010 supported tiny home communities as permanent rather than merely temporary stopgap housing across the Pacific states? The answer that has emerged from the literature is as complex as the question itself, neither fully optimistic nor pessimistic, but conditional. Permanence is achievable, but only where three factors—policy, engineering, and architecture—are addressed together rather than treated as separable problems solved individually.

On the policy side, Washington, Oregon, and California demonstrate viable but distinct approaches to expanding the pathways for shelter and alternative housing. Neither approach has fully overcome the deeper tension between housing first principles and the continued enforcement of laws regulating homelessness in public spaces. That specific legal environment changed significantly in 2024. For several years, *Martin v. City of Boise* limited the enforcement of public-camping restrictions in the Ninth Circuit when practically available shelter was lacking. However, *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* removed that Eighth Amendment restriction by declaring that generally applicable public-camping laws may be enforced without shelter availability. This shift makes clear an important distinction when evaluating THVs: their long-term value cannot be primarily dependent on their usefulness as legally sufficient alternatives to encampments. Instead, their effectiveness is now reliant on whether state and local policy enables them to function as stable, durable, and ultimately permanent housing. On the engineering side, the regulatory split between wheeled and foundation-based units has produced uneven outcomes, with

code-compliant, foundation-based projects consistently outperforming improvised wheeled construction on both durability and livability. On the architectural side of the equation, the literature makes a case that is easy to declare but hard to execute: privacy, personal control, and trauma-sensitive design are not optional amenities but factors with a measurable impact on residents' mental health and sense of ownership. However, these factors are also frequently the first features to be on the chopping block when funding is constrained, or NIMBY pressure increases during implementation. NIMBY pressure requires specific emphasis, because it reframes the central problem identified in this review. The gap between architectural intent and the actual outcome is not a knowledge gap. Designers already know what dignified and stigma-resistant housing looks like. It is a funding and willpower gap, one that shows up as a continuous feedback loop in which stigma drives funding cuts, funding cuts degrade design, and degraded design reinforces the stigma that drove the cuts in the first place.

The outcomes literature reinforces this conditional picture. Evidence is comparatively strong and well-documented regarding permanence and zoning, largely because land tenure and legal status are easy to verify in public records. It is considerably weaker on health and accessibility, in part because the field remains dominated by single-site case studies rather than the kind of longitudinal, comparative research that could establish outcomes with confidence. The villages most consistently cited as successes do not owe their success to any single policy or design choice, but to the simultaneous presence of secure land tenure, resident self-governance, and either code-compliant or carefully engineered construction.

Several disagreements remain genuinely unresolved: whether zoning reform should precede or follow funding expansion, whether formal institutionalization is worth the self-governance it tends to erode, and whether stigma responds more to design change or to direct correction of public misperception. These are not failures of the literature so much as evidence of a field still young enough that its practitioners are actively working out the answers in real time, often faster than academic research can formally document them. Future work would benefit from longitudinal, multi-site studies capable of addressing health and accessibility outcomes with the same confidence the field already has for permanence and zoning, and from closer engagement with practitioners who are testing these policy and design trade-offs directly rather than relying solely on published case studies after the fact. Until then, the clearest lesson from the existing literature is that permanence is not something policy, engineering, or architecture can deliver alone; it is what happens when all three are treated as a single, coordinated design problem rather than three separate ones.

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