

TINY LIVING

M A G A Z I N E



FEATURED LAND FOR LEASE

NEW SITE FOR LEASE
IN UPPER HUTT, WELLINGTON

NOT A LOOPHOLE. NOT A WORKAROUND.

Could this be a real compliance pathway for Tiny Homes on Wheels.

THE \$49,000 EXPANDABLE TINY HOME

And why the miracle bargain might not be the housing answer you think it is.

BRILLIANT OR MILDLY UNHINGED.

The Tiny House Expo is expanding into the South Island.



NOT A LOOPHOLE. NOT A WORKAROUND.

COULD THIS BECOME A REAL COMPLIANCE PATHWAY FOR TINY HOMES ON WHEELS?

There is a very particular type of conversation that happens whenever Tiny Homes on Wheels are mentioned in New Zealand. Someone says, “Oh, but are they even legal?” Someone else says, with great authority, “It depends.” Then everyone nods gravely, as though this has cleared things up. It hasn’t.

For years, tiny homes on wheels have lived in that uncomfortable space between “perfectly fine” and “we’re not quite sure what to do with you”. Not illegal. Not fully embraced. A bit like turning up to a dinner party in fabulous shoes and being told the dress code was slippers.

Which is why Karen Flett’s Master of Architecture thesis matters more than most people realise. Instead of writing an opinion piece. Instead of shaking her fist at councils. Instead of declaring the system broken and storming off dramatically, she did something far less theatrical and far more powerful.

She asked: how do we create, legalise and build tiny homes on wheels in New Zealand so they are safe, healthy and recognised and why should we? And then she worked through the answer properly. Not just “are they legal?” Properly.

She analysed the Land Transport Act. The Building Act 2004. The Resource Management Act. MBIE guidance. Determinations. Case law, including *Dall v MBIE*. She surveyed councils. She surveyed builders. She surveyed owners. She examined international precedents, including the United States’ formal integration of tiny houses into its building code.

Then she did the bit that makes architects sit up straighter. She tested Tiny Homes on Wheels against the New Zealand Building Code. Clause by clause. Structure. Durability. Fire safety. Access routes. Moisture management. Energy efficiency. Foundations. Ventilation in small volumes. Loft design. Internal stairs. Service connections. Transport constraints. In other words, this is not “I feel like they should be allowed”. This is “Let’s see if they actually meet performance requirements”. And here is the part that should make the entire sector pause. Her central finding is that Tiny Homes on Wheels are technically capable of meeting New Zealand Building Code performance requirements.

The issue is not that they are unsafe, flimsy, or architecturally inferior. The issue is that our regulatory system was written for buildings that stay put. Tiny homes on wheels do something deeply inconvenient. They are mobile and permanent at the same time. They sit across transport law, building law and planning law. Each system makes sense on its own. Together, they produce what can only politely be described as interpretive gymnastics.

So what does she propose? Not deregulation. Not loopholes. Not “just park it and hope nobody notices”. She proposes integration. Specifically, she argues for a nationally consistent Tiny Home on Wheels Acceptable Solution under the Building Code. A formal



Karen Flett

compliance pathway so councils are not left making case-by-case judgement calls based on how firmly something looks attached to the ground on a random Tuesday.

One of the most quietly revolutionary parts of her thesis is how she reframes the trailer itself. Instead of treating it as a slightly embarrassing technicality, she positions it as an engineered foundation system. She maps how a properly designed trailer superstructure assembly can meet B1 Structure and B2 Durability requirements, including wind, seismic and corrosion performance. She identifies CodeMark certification as a way to create national consistency and avoid endless alternative solution battles.



That is not rebellious thinking. It is disciplined thinking. She works through lofts and stairs not as cute Instagram features but as compliance questions. She examines how sleeping lofts can meet performance intent under D1 Access Routes, F4 Safety from Falling and fire provisions.

She looks at ventilation in compact volumes, moisture risk in tight envelopes, energy efficiency within transport height limits. Where the Acceptable Solutions do not quite fit, she identifies where evidence-based alternative solutions could sit.

What emerges is something the tiny house sector has lacked for a long time. A framework. Not a workaround. Not a shrug. A framework. And this matters because the people living in these homes are not hypothetical.

They are kiwi's who would quite like not to sign up to another 30-year mortgage. They are people downsizing after decades of maintenance and bills. They are individuals seeking autonomy without financial overexposure. Regulatory uncertainty affects insurance, lending, land-lease security and peace of mind. It is not an academic debate for them.

Karen's thesis positions Tiny Homes on Wheels as a legitimate housing typology that responds directly to structural unaffordability by separating dwelling ownership from land ownership while still meeting performance standards. It does not promise instant legislative reform. It does something more enduring. It provides a technically rigorous, academically grounded body of work that policymakers and industry cannot easily dismiss. Tiny homes on wheels are often treated as slightly mischievous. Clever, yes. A bit cheeky.

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Skirting the edges. This thesis suggests something else entirely. They are not the problem. Our categories are.

If this conversation matters to you, whether you are living in a Tiny Home on Wheels, building one, leasing land, you can read Karen's full thesis and follow her ongoing work at www.karenflett.com.

The thesis itself is publicly available to read in full. It is detailed, technical and deeply considered. Not light bedtime reading, unless you enjoy structural load paths and Building Code clauses, but profoundly important if you care about where this sector is heading.

Karen is continuing to develop this research, publish insights and contribute to the regulatory conversation. If Tiny Homes on Wheels are part of your future, or your present, this is the kind of work worth keeping an eye on.

Because sometimes progress in housing doesn't arrive with a grand announcement. Sometimes it arrives quietly, in 80-plus pages of footnotes and structural diagrams, calmly pointing out that the house in question was sound all along.



The \$49,000 Expandable Tiny Home

And why the miracle bargain might not be the housing answer you think it is.

Article by Sharla May

It always happens at night. You're not house-hunting. You're "just scrolling". Perhaps in bed. Perhaps meant to be asleep. And then, like a financially seductive mirage, it appears: A fully fitted expandable tiny home for \$49,000. It folds out. It has a bathroom. It has a kitchen. It looks crisp, white and efficient. The kind of home that seems to whisper, "You're smarter than everyone else. You found me." Forty-nine thousand dollars.

If you've been researching New Zealand-built tiny houses, you may feel mildly betrayed at this point. Because those tend to sit somewhere north of \$150,000. So how, exactly, is this one less than half the price? Have local builders been dramatically overcharging? Have you uncovered a housing loophole the rest of us somehow missed? It feels like you've cracked a code.

The thing about property, though, is that they usually involve actual codes. These fold-out dwellings, often called expandable container homes, are typically manufactured overseas and shipped here folded in like a very large steel suitcase. A crane places them on site, the sides slide out, and suddenly you have a small dwelling ready to connect. They are not on wheels. They are not caravans. They are designed to sit on land and stay there. And in New Zealand, that detail matters more than most people realise.

Once something is fixed to land and intended for long-term living, it is treated as a building. Not a clever sidestep. A building. And buildings must comply with the New Zealand Building Code. That means structural engineering. Wind zone compliance. Moisture control. Electrical certification. Plumbing sign-off. In many cases, full building consent.

Recently, the new granny flat reforms have added another layer of hopeful confusion. From 2026, standalone dwellings up to 70 square metres can, in certain circumstances, be built without a full building consent. Which sounds like excellent news. And it is, if the dwelling genuinely complies with the Building Code and is constructed using recognised methods under licensed supervision. The exemption isn't triggered by size alone.

An imported expandable container home does not automatically qualify just because it's under 70 square metres. If it hasn't been specifically engineered and certified for New Zealand conditions, councils can still require full consent. "No consent required" has been doing some very ambitious marketing lately.

Compare that with a New Zealand-built tiny house on wheels. Those are typically treated as vehicles under transport law.

Different compliance pathway. Or a locally built granny flat constructed to recognised standards under LBP supervision. The difference isn't just cost. It's the regulatory lane you're driving in.

Then there's the quieter stuff behind the walls. Electrical systems installed overseas are not automatically compliant here. Plumbing installed overseas isn't automatically compliant either. Gas work must be certified by licensed New Zealand professionals. Without certification, you can't legally connect services. Without legal connection, insurance becomes complicated.

Insurance companies prefer certainty. They like paperwork. They enjoy documentation. They do not love, "It arrived folded and we're fairly sure it's fine." Without insurance, banks are reluctant to lend. Which means many buyers pay cash. Which means limited leverage, limited equity growth, and a resale market that can be... interpretive.

A well-built New Zealand tiny house, by contrast, often comes with a known builder, a track record, and a resale market that understands what it's looking at. There's familiarity there. Confidence. Predictability. And in homes, predictability is currency.

Clearly made for each other

Protect your tiny home and stop bathroom condensation, mould, mildew and steam at the source with a Showerdome® shower top.

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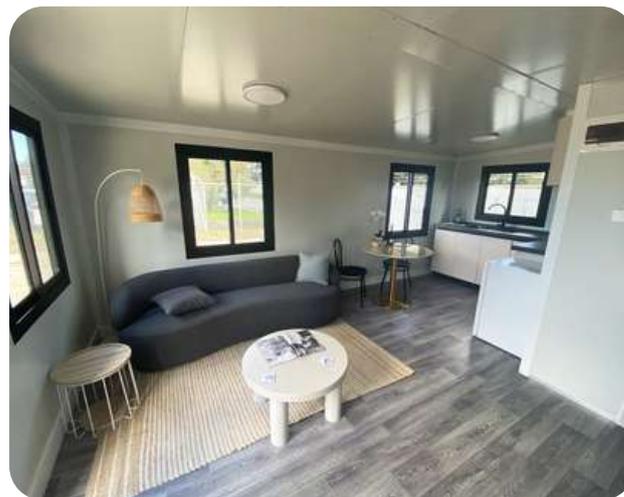
showerdome



There's a temptation to just skip the consent process, especially when the price looks tempting, to think "I'll just install it quietly and hope nobody notices." It's a legal gamble. Under New Zealand's Building Act 2004, it's an offence to carry out building work without the necessary consent. That includes structures intended for long-term living that have not been properly consented. If building work is done without consent when one is required, you can be liable for substantial fines up to \$200,000, with additional penalties for ongoing non-compliance. Councils don't just hope you get it right. If they have reasonable grounds to believe building work has been done without consent, they are required to issue what's called a Notice to Fix. This is a written order telling you to remedy the breach by a deadline, usually by applying for a building consent or taking corrective action to disestablish the dwelling.

A Notice to Fix lays out the problem and sets a timeframe. It's not a gentle suggestion; it's a statutory requirement. If you don't address it, councils can follow up with further notices and fines. Some authorities also use building infringement systems where instant penalties, from hundreds to thousands of dollars, can be applied.

If a Notice to Fix is repeatedly ignored, councils can escalate the situation. In serious cases, they can ask the courts for authority to carry out or order removal of non-compliant work and recover their costs. There have been instances where councils have been granted orders to demolish buildings and then place a charge on the land so the owner can't sell until those costs are repaid.



So skipping the consent process doesn't just mean "living quietly and hoping for the best." Once council becomes aware, they will act, and the consequences can follow you for years, through fines, legal notices, and potential remedial or removal costs.

If you're planning to House Staff or Rent It out Long Term There's another incorrect assumption. Some buyers look at these units and think, "It's fine, I'll use it for worker accommodation. Farms and orchards do it all the time." But if someone is living there as their home and paying rent (even if that rent is deducted from wages), the arrangement is likely covered by the Residential Tenancies Act. And if that Act applies, the Healthy Homes Standards apply too.

That means minimum insulation levels. A compliant fixed heater in the main living area. Adequate ventilation. Proper moisture ingress and drainage management. Draught stopping. Landlords must be able to demonstrate compliance. In writing. Worker housing is not automatically exempt. If the unit struggles with condensation, dampness or insufficient insulation, you may need upgrades before it is legally compliant as a long-term rental.

So if your plan involves rental income or housing staff make sure you're not just asking, "Can I put it there?" Also ask, "Can I legally rent it?" They are not the same question.

All of that is manageable in theory. It's admin. It's upgrades. It's cost. But here's the part that isn't theoretical. I didn't just visit one of these homes. I lived in one for three months over a Northland winter while house sitting. It looked fine. It functioned. I opened the windows every single day. I ventilated diligently. I did all the sensible things. And still, the moisture was relentless. The steel frame would get cold. Warm indoor air would meet it. Condensation would form. The floor and walls would feel damp. Wet enough that I couldn't walk around in socks indoors without feeling them soak through. There is something deeply unsettling about slightly wet socks in your own home. It erodes your confidence in ways no brochure can repair.

Northland winters aren't brutal. But they are humid. And steel conducts temperature beautifully. Which is excellent in engineering. Less excellent at 7 am when your house feels faintly clammy despite your best efforts. Some owners retrofit ventilation systems. Some build secondary roofs over the top. Some report no issues at all. Experiences vary. But it reminded me why New Zealand's building standards are strict, particularly

around moisture control. We are a damp country. We have learned the hard way what happens when we cut corners.

None of this makes expandable container homes inherently terrible. They can suit certain situations. Temporary accommodation. Short-term use.

Sites where compliance is clearly mapped out and upgrades are budgeted for. But they are not a magical bypass around building law. They are not automatically covered by the granny flat exemption. And they are not, in my experience, the cosy long-term solution that \$49,000 suggests at 11.47 pm on your phone. If they truly delivered permanent, insurable, consent-free housing at half the cost of local builds, the country would look very different by now. Housing decisions deserve daylight. They deserve written confirmation from councils and insurers. They deserve clarity around total installed cost, not just the headline price.

If you're still scrolling listings and quietly thinking, "I hear you... but it's still \$49,000," I understand.

Just promise yourself one thing: you won't transfer a deposit without seeing the right documentation. This isn't about being difficult. It's about being protected. Check out our minimum checklist on the next page before handing over any cash.

What's It REALLY Going to Cost?

Before you spend \$150k- \$250k on a granny flat or tiny home... understand the costs no one warns you about.

Live Budgeting Workshop with Rebecca McLean

- A working Excel budget template you can use immediately
- How to source real numbers for your site, not guesses

Get clarity before
you build

26 Feb · 12PM NZT
Live on MS Teams · \$29

Tiny House Mastery
BY REBECCA MCLEAN



Before You Pay a Deposit

Here's our recommended Minimum Checklist.

If the seller can't provide this information clearly and in writing, pause. You're not being awkward. You're being sensible.

NZ Structural Engineering

- NZ-specific structural calculations
- Wind zone design confirmation (for your site)
- Seismic design confirmation
- Snow load rating (if relevant)
- Producer Statement (PS1) from a NZ

Chartered Professional Engineer "Engineered overseas" is not the same as engineered for New Zealand.

NZ Building Code Evidence

- Written confirmation the model complies with the NZ Building Code
- Evidence the exact model has been consented in NZ before
- A copy of an approved consent (if available), If you're the first person attempting to consent it, expect delays and extra cost.

Electrical Certification (NZ)

- Certificate of Compliance (CoC) from a NZ-registered electrician
- Confirmation switchboard meets NZ standards
- Confirmation wiring complies with AS/NZS 3000

Factory wiring must still be certified here.

Plumbing Sign-Off (NZ)

- Sign-off from a licensed NZ plumber
- Confirmation plumbing complies with AS/NZS 3500
- Backflow prevention details
- Venting compliance confirmation

If it can't be signed off locally, it can't be legally connected.

Gas Certification (If Gas Is Installed)

- Gas Safety Certificate
- Installation by a NZ-licensed gasfitter
- Appliance compliance confirmation

Gas work is tightly regulated. This is non-negotiable.

Foundation & Anchorage Details

- Engineered foundation drawings
- Anchorage details
- Moisture barrier details
- Clarity on who is responsible for design and installation

The box itself is only part of the structure.

Insulation & Moisture Management

- R-values for roof, walls and floor
- Condensation management strategy
- Thermal break details

New Zealand is damp. Moisture control matters more than you think.

Written Warranty Information

- Structural warranty
- Weather-tightness warranty
- Electrical warranty
- Plumbing warranty
- Clear statement of who holds liability
- And ask what happens if parts fail in five years.

Insurance Confirmation (Before You Buy)

Call your insurer. Provide documentation. Get written confirmation they will insure it once installed.

Council Confirmation (If Relying on the 70m² Exemption)

If you believe it qualifies under the new granny flat rules, get written confirmation from your council that:

- The structure qualifies
- No building consent is required, (never rely solely on a salesperson's interpretation of legislation).

If the answer to your paperwork request is, "It'll be fine," or "No one else asks for that," That's not reassurance, it's a red flag.



THIS IS EITHER BRILLIANT OR MILDLY UNHINGED.

The Tiny House Expo is expanding into the South Island.

Oh. My. Gosh. We're finally doing it. From 2027, we'll be running two shows a year. One in the North Island, which you already know and love (Hamilton, we see you). And one in the South Island, happening in Christchurch. It never felt quite right that the Expo only happened up north. So we're fixing that. We're currently finalising venue dates and contracts, but pencil this in: March 2027, Christchurch. That's the plan. You can already register your interest on the website so you're first to know when dates are confirmed, tickets open and exhibitors are

announced. Pop your name down and we'll keep you in the loop as this baby grows. It means South Island builders can showcase their work without hauling houses 1,000+ kilometres. It means better access to legal, council and finance advice at a time when granny flat reforms and tiny house rules are shifting. And it means more connection, more education and more real-life, been-there-done-that advice. If you've been before, you'll know the Expo isn't just a wander-through-and-have-a-look situation. It's six to

twelve months of research packed into one weekend. It's learning from people who've already made the mistakes. It's standing inside a tiny house and thinking, "Oh. This actually works." We're locking in the venue, mapping layouts and talking to South Island exhibitors. The behind-the-scenes logistics dance is well underway. It's exciting. If you've ever thought, "I'd go... but it's a mission to get there," now you won't have to. Two shows. Two islands. One very determined Expo team. And yes, we're thrilled!

[Register your interest](#)



LAND FOR LEASE



Upper Hutt, Wellington



Tucked into the bush, this flat 324m² rural site offers privacy without isolation. Currently in grass with concrete and shingle drive access, it's ideal for a mature person with a self-contained Tiny House on Wheels (6–8m driveway access suitable). There's space for a garden, and a small storage shed of approximately 10m² can be made available. Plenty of water on site. Enjoy peaceful surroundings while still being just 7 minutes from a supermarket, pharmacy and everyday amenities. The owner is open to discussing options to make the setup work for the right person.

[View Listing](#)



Find land to lease for your tiny house or motorhome

[Landshare.nz](https://www.landshare.nz)



LOOKING FOR LAND



Auckland



Professional female seeking a quiet, serene long-term parking spot for my Tiny House on Wheels. My home is a high-quality professional build by Cocoon Tiny Homes, measuring 10m x 3m and 4.5m high. It will only be me living in it. I am a non-smoker, quiet, respectful and tidy. I'm looking for a peaceful setting with access to power and water. Ideally suited to rural or semi-rural land where privacy and calm are valued. Happy to discuss options and find a setup that works well for both of us. Thank you.

[View Listing](#)



Find land to lease for your tiny house or motorhome

[Landshare.nz](https://www.landshare.nz)



Tiny living is simple. The rules around it aren't.

Which is why we created these sites, resources and events to make it just a little bit easier.



It's where the builders are, the guides are, and the "oh right, that's how that works" moments happen, leaving things feeling less dreamy and more doable.

[Check it out](#)



It's the event where all the advice, builders and real-world answers end up in the same room, so you can finally make sense of it.

[Check it out](#)



Think Tinder, but for people with land and people with tiny houses. Ideally with better long-term outcomes.

[Check it out](#)



It's the event where all the advice, builders and real-world answers end up in the same room, so you can finally make sense of it.

[Check it out](#)

