

# Turning A Blighted Trailer Park Into A Tiny Home Subdivision

Housing has been a complex issue for most communities in recent years. Demand has outpaced supply, especially in rural communities such as Kirksville, Missouri. Traditionally, city governments have not served as home developers. But with no clear solutions emerging, the City decided it was time to try something outside the box.

Several years of brainstorming, analyzing and planning culminated in a bold effort: the city of Kirksville oversaw the dramatic transformation of a dilapidated trailer park into a brand-new subdivision of “tiny” homes.

“The condition of the trailer park or our housing issues didn’t just happen; it occurred over time, and we knew this



**Aerial view of the clearing of an old trailer park and a new tiny home subdivision being constructed.**

project wasn’t going to be easy, but if we were able to make it work, it would be well worth the investment,” said City Manager Mari Macomber.

Over the last few years, the city of Kirksville took a comprehensive look at residential housing. This included conducting a Housing Needs Assessment in 2022 that found that the rate of new

housing development lagged behind the rate of people moving into the community. While housing demand exists at all price points, there is a notable shortage of lower-priced options. The study also identified substantial blight in multiple areas. On paper, some of those units seemed to fit the price range for low- to moderate-income buyers, but they needed so

much rehabilitation that they effectively became unaffordable. Many of the most blighted areas were trailer parks.

City staff began exploring ways to tackle these overlapping issues. Their research sparked conversations with local partners to identify shared goals. One idea emerged early: Could the City acquire a blighted trailer park and partner with a local organization to build new homes on the site?

The Construction Trades program at the Kirksville Area Technical Center has a long history of building homes in Kirksville while serving as a hands-on learning opportunity for students. The program includes both high school-aged and adult students, giving them valuable construction experience. The program had already developed homes on all the remaining buildable land owned by the school district.

The school district needed new sites for construction, and the City needed a developer. It was a perfect match.

One of the original goals was to expand housing diversity. The “tiny homes” concept emerged to create something new and more affordable. The school district embraced the idea, seeing it as an opportunity for students to gain experience in all aspects of construction.



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**Left: Caption Staff with the City of Kirksville's Public Works Department level and prepare the ground for construction at Dogwood Subdivision. Middle: Members of the Kirksville Area Technical Center's Construction Trades Program begin construction on the homes.**

"This opportunity for the students is priceless," said Jesse Wolf, director of the Kirksville Area Technical Center. "When building one large home, there are tasks that students miss out on or lose interest in because of the volume of work. With this project, we have four houses that allow the groups to compete, get experience in all facets of building a home, and receive quick gratification from a job well done."

City staff then identified the most suitable location. They evaluated several blighted trailer parks and contacted

property owners to assess their interest in selling. The Dogwood Trailer Court at 909 W. Gardner St. stood out. Nearby new home construction made it an ideal spot, and improving this site would uplift the whole neighborhood. Since the park had only a few residents, the project would cause minimal displacement. The City reached an agreement with the owner, relocated a few trailers, and demolished the rest.

To fund the estimated \$1 million project, the City applied for grants. The Missouri Department of Economic

Development awarded \$396,240 through its Community Revitalization Grant Program. The balance of the funds came from the City's transportation, capital and utility funds.

After the land was transferred in the summer of 2024, public works staff prepared the site for development.

The school district committed to constructing four tiny homes, each between 700 and 800 square feet. These homes include two bedrooms, one bathroom, a living room, and a kitchen



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Construction equipment in place to begin work on Tiny Home Subdivision.

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– modest in size but comparable to homes built in the 1950s. They include low-maintenance yards with room for add-ons, such as a shed.

The school district poured the four foundations that summer and began construction in September 2024. Vince McQueen, the Construction Trades instructor since 2009, led the effort – his final project before retiring at the end of the school year. His classes, with 32 students split between morning and afternoon sessions, began by framing the homes and continued through each phase of construction.

After completion, the school district will sell the homes. Since the crux of this project was the creation of affordable homes for purchase, covenants will be created to ensure they are owner-occupied and not converted into rental units. Interest from the public has been strong, both in the project and in purchasing the homes.

Additional utility work will begin soon, along with neighborhood beautification efforts, including the planting of street trees and the installation of sidewalks. The subdivision was named “Dogwood Subdivision” in honor of the original trailer park name and Missouri’s state tree that will be planted throughout the area. It is a new beginning for land that urgently needed revitalization.

As for what comes next, future development in the subdivision remains open. The City plans to continue building more homes and is seeking interested partners to help make this happen.

Overall, this has been a transformative project for the community. It serves as a strong example of how local entities, such as city governments and school districts, can collaborate to create meaningful change. It also highlights the valuable role state support can play in helping small Missouri communities and how fresh ideas can pave the way to real solutions. 🌱

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