

Are Tiny Homes a Viable Solution to Fight Homelessness? Ulster County Says Yes.

The county will evaluate its surplus properties as sites for tiny homes for veterans and unhoused individuals

By [Sarah Trafton](#), Staff Writer

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Beloved Community Village, a tiny-home community for homeless people is seen in Denver. Ulster County passed a resolution this month to explore a similar approach on vacant county property.

Hyoung Chang/The Denver Post via Getty Images

KINGSTON — After spending millions to place unhoused individuals in motels every year, Ulster County is exploring a new alternative: tiny homes.

The County Legislature approved [a resolution this month](#) to evaluate the county’s surplus properties for the potential construction of tiny home developments. The approach promises a more sustainable alternative to the county’s temporary housing system, which cost \$13.3 million in 2024.

Inspiration for the resolution came from a “60 Minutes” episode, Legislator Herbert Litts III said.

“I’m not an extremely emotional guy, but I had tears in my eyes,” Litts said, recalling the episode, which featured an interview with a homeless veteran who was able to turn his life

around in a tiny home development. "It gave him dignity, it gave him hope. Right then and there, it came to me. Why can't we do this for our homeless and our vulnerable and our veterans in Ulster County?"

The initiative took a while to gain traction, Litts said, but eventually passed 20-0 at the Legislature's Nov. 18 meeting. In addition, several community members offered their support.

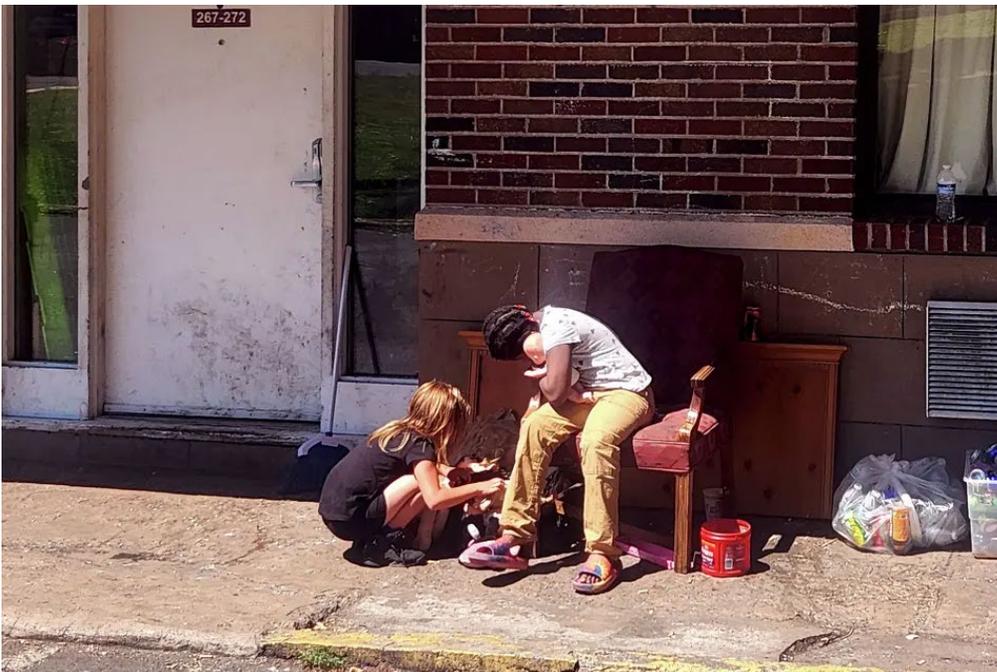
Craig Kelly, an Ulster County resident who has previously faced homelessness, brought a petition of over 300 signatures in support of the resolution.

"Beyond just a room, (tiny homes) give something that's invaluable — a sense of pride," Kelly said, noting that the number of homeless families in Ulster County increased 54% from 2022 to 2024.

The county recently announced the completion of Golden Hill Apartments, a 164-unit affordable housing development. Michael Berg, executive director of Family of Woodstock, noted that the project was a great step forward but not nearly enough.

"We have great need," Berg said. "Last month, we placed over 700 people in motels."

Ulster County currently places unhoused individuals in motels in four different counties. That approach can be costly: since the county is obligated to ensure children can get to school, it pays for transportation for any child not on their district's bus route. And any homeless families placed in a motel must be relocated every 30 days to avoid creating a tenant-landlord relationship.



Children play outside the motel rooms at Kingston Motel. The motel is Ulster County's primary placement site for homeless families.

The county's primary placement site is the Kingston Motel, which recently received at least 70 violations for its deplorable conditions. Litts said the county has spent \$2 million to place unhoused individuals there.

Tom Denton, a member of Ulster Activists Housing Committee and New Paltz's Smart Housing Communities Initiative Committee, said both groups supported the tiny homes resolution.

"The county should take any and all approaches to address our housing crisis," Denton said. "Tiny homes can work where they are feasible and when they are conceived as a piece of a carefully planned use of property."

Ulster County is not the only community in the area looking to tiny homes to solve housing needs. The city of Troy approved a development of 86 tiny homes for seniors over 55 earlier this year, and in 2022, the city of Kingston launched a pilot project with the Family of Woodstock to build four tiny homes on vacant city-owned lots. Nationally, the tiny-home solution has been tried in many cities experiencing affordable housing crises, including Los Angeles; Seattle; St. Louis; Austin, Texas; Portland, Ore., and Madison, Wis.

Possible locations for tiny home developments in Ulster County include the 57-acre parcel where the county's new Emergency Communications Center is being constructed and a 57-acre parcel that SUNY Ulster would like to surplus to the county, Litts said.

The groundwork for constructing the homes has already been laid. Ulster BOCES partners with The Mount Bruderhof Community to build homes for Habitat for Humanity so that students can learn essential skills, and both groups have indicated they would be willing to assist with the initiative, Litts said. The legislator has also been in contact with Lowe's and Home Depot to inquire about possible discounts or material donations.

The resolution requires the county's planning director to develop a method for evaluating the properties and submit a report of their findings to the Legislature within six months. The report will be updated at least every two years, according to the resolution.

"If we give people permanent housing, it would raise their self-esteem, give them hope and hopefully turn their life around," Litts said. "And the bonus is, the county doesn't have to pay \$13.3 million a year."