Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University,

Nicki Donnelson: Financial freedom, a smaller footprint, real ownership, less maintenance and minimalism. These are some of the drivers for the tiny house movement.

Nicki Donnelson: I'm Nicki Donnelson. Today on the Missouri State Journal, I have Dr. Krista Evans, Assistant Professor of Geography and Planning at Missouri State University. She's here to talk about her interest and research on the subject. This is the first in a two part series of Evans.

Krista Evans: So I've been interested in tiny houses for a long time. I've always thought it would be cool to have one just because of how much freedom they offer, fiscal freedom, and for the ones on wheels you can just move wherever you want. So that's what gotten me into it. Then during my PhD, I started learning and therefore studying why the movement was growing and yet they're essentially illegal and a lot of places. So a lot of people build an entire tiny house and then realize it's illegal to have it in their driveway or in their yard.

Nicki Donnelson: So she began to investigate the land use law to understand the best way individuals could integrate them legally. When she moved to Missouri State, Springfield was in the early development of Eden Village, so Evans turned her focus more specifically onto tiny house villages for the homeless. She found some states had several, well others had none. And she continued to dig to see what amenities they offered to residents.

Krista Evans: So some tiny house villages for the homeless offer social amenities such as counseling or have doctor's visit. Other ones don't. Some have full kitchens in them, they have bathrooms and showers, and others are essentially just a roof over one's head. So what was surprising to me is I found of all the tiny house villages that we were able to locate, 59% of them don't have plumbing. So to me that was somewhat of an eye opener. Some may argue that it's better to have a roof over one's head than not, and so that's a step in the right direction. But I don't think many of us would be comfortable with living in units without plumbing as the general population. So that asks the question, is that okay for us to have that kind of housing and for the most vulnerable people in our society?

Nicki Donnelson: While she studied these tiny house communities for the homeless, she also assessed what made them successful and how they were accepted by the community as a whole.

Krista Evans: Some of these places are successful as far as lots of community input and community involvement, community support. In other ones, there's a lot of what we would call Nimbyism, not in my backyard. And so perhaps, or I'm guessing, that the ones that don't offer adequate amenities to residents or perhaps don't help resonance very much because they don't offer social services, those may not be successful in the long run. So all of these are efforts to try to help the homeless, but it'd be interesting to develop a better understanding of what works and what doesn't.

Nicki Donnelson: She wondered if there were specific types of tiny houses that could be more accepted either for integration into an average neighborhood or for the development of a tiny house village for the homeless, so she conducted a visual preference survey across the country.

Krista Evans: I had images of all types of different tiny houses and asked people to rate the houses on how much they like them, and then there's also a time where they could put comments about why they like something or why they didn't. And I found that those ones on wheels, the ones that are on the reality shows and stuff, in two different studies, I found that people are very apprehensive about those. They don't rate them very highly. And I also found the reason behind that is because they are concerned about property values because if this is my neighbors and they have a tiny house on wheels, what is that? Is that an RV? Is that a trailer? Is that going to diminish my property values? And they also are concerned about residents that are always on the go. People like neighborhoods where there's stability, and so there's concern about that.

Krista Evans: That was one finding. I also found that people like more traditional or vernacular type of architecture for tiny houses than modernist styles. So you'll see these tiny houses that are made out of shipping containers or look like domes, things like that. People don't like those very much. They like the ones that look like quaint little cottages, the traditional cabin, things like that.

Krista Evans: One of my suggestions for communities that want to integrate tiny houses or tiny house villages for the homeless is that they should take those considerations into account. Maybe they want to build units that look like traditional cottages rather than ones that have wheels or domes and things like that, and that may be a way to fight Nimbyism.

Nicki Donnelson: Tune in next week as Dr. Krista Evans joins me again to talk about Springfield's own tiny house community for the homeless, Eden Village. I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.