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The High Price of Housing in Lamorinda

By Cathy Tyson



Photo courtesy Tumbleweed Tiny House Company

space on wheels that can be self-built or delivered, ranging from 18 to 24 feet long. It's an interesting new type of dwelling for people who want to simplify and downsize, or perhaps for boomerang kids who come back home. Foster says the city will be working on guidelines in the near future.

Don't even think about renting out a recreational vehicle in Moraga or Orinda. Moraga's Municipal Code is straight forward, "It is unlawful for a person to maintain or use for human habitation or a living quarters including sleeping, a mobile home, trailer coach, camp car, boat or vehicle on public or private property in the town."

Orinda also has rules on prohibited dwellings, "A vehicle or trailer may not be used for habitation, for keeping animals, or for any other residential use," according to their Municipal Code.

For long term homeowners who have been diligently paying off their mortgages, that presumably were a semi-reasonable dollar amount to begin with, the going rate for rentals, as well as to purchase a dwelling, is eye popping. Aside from the "cozy" Lafayette RV, the most economical place to rent in Lamorinda is in Moraga, where a 400 square foot studio is available for \$900 per month, but it does boast a big yard with a rose garden.

On a budget? Recently listings in Lafayette ranged from a low of \$1,650 for a studio "plus" to a whopping \$7,500 per month for a spectacular five bedroom, three bathroom home in Happy Valley. While that may seem expensive, it does come with pool service, a gardener and regular professional house cleaning.

In Orinda the rental scene is about the same as Lafayette and Moraga - a very basic unfurnished one bedroom, one bath unit in Orinda goes for \$1,600 per month; a three bedroom, three bath home with an office is \$7,500.

Perhaps due to Saint Mary's College there are a number of two and three bedroom apartments available in Moraga, but they are in roughly the same price range as Lafayette and Orinda. In an unscientific review, the average price for a two bedroom, two bathroom rental in late November in Lamorinda is \$2,226 per month, working out to over \$1,100 per person if two roommates share the cost. For those who would like to turn the lights on, eat, get a haircut, purchase gas for a car, or go crazy on a movie ticket, balancing a budget is truly all about allocating resources in an environment of scarcity.

A recent ad on Craigslist extolled the virtues of life in a "cozy" 240 square foot recreational vehicle behind a home in Lafayette, with a price tag of \$675 per month. Seemed rather unusual, but given the high price of housing locally, maybe an option for a person on a very limited budget. It was rented quickly, said the homeowner/landlord who wished to remain anonymous.

According to Lafayette's code enforcement officer, Adam Foster, the Municipal Code has language regarding living in recreational vehicles on private property that is very clear, "No person shall use any vehicle for living or sleeping purposes." Vehicles shouldn't be confused with the smattering of guest cottages and in-law units in Lamorinda that can be found on craigslist.

There is, however, a new gray area that Lafayette is grappling with - tiny houses, really small homes, around 177 square feet of usable

Prospective buyers will find no bargains in our zip codes. According to Dean Okamura of Pacific Union in Orinda, the most economical dwelling for sale in Lamorinda was listed at \$285,000, and sold for \$310,000, for a two bedroom, two bathroom, 964 square foot condominium on Ascot Drive in Moraga; keep in mind that homeowners association dues run \$370 a month in addition to the mortgage payment, along with taxes and insurance. The next most economic home with endless potential, according to the agent, sold for more than twice that price, closing at \$765,000 for a 1,950 square foot home on Janet Lane in Lafayette.

Don't expect the situation to improve anytime soon. According to Okamura, the prediction from the National Association of Realtors is that prices will remain flat locally in the near term. "It's very difficult for a young family or a couple starting out."

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