

Tiny apartments in S.F. worth a try

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San Francisco's lopsided housing market - sky-high rents and an invasion of young workers - has experts thinking: Why not drop the minimum size of new apartments to the equivalent of a one-car garage?

It's an idea worth exploring and encouraging, but the results will hinge on the appeal and convenience of the finished product. Financing, the job market and even housing politics could all play a role in a helping or hurting a promising idea.

Initial designs feature a foldaway bed, galley kitchen and bench seats along a window for a grand total of 220 square feet, below the city minimum of 290 square feet. In theory, there's a ready market since 41 percent of the city's residents live alone.

Putting more apartments into the same building space could lower costs and possibly rents or sales prices. As new construction, the mini-me apartments would be exempt from rent control. The snug quarters might take pressure off existing multi-bedroom housing that families and couples now compete for.

The city is already nipping at conventional housing rules via building loft apartments in industrial areas and dropping parking requirements. The next frontier could be super-small apartments for singles or very well-adjusted couples looking to live inside an Ikea catalog.

San Francisco needs to experiment with unconventional housing such as the mini apartment. It's worth seeing if buyers and renters are willing to do the same.



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