

**The Morning Line**Your Daily Dispatch
From the NewsHour
Politics Team

REPORT AIR DATE: Sept. 22, 2013

Living Micro: Single Residents Embrace Tiny Apartments

SUMMARY

As more people across the country are living alone, the costs of rent and real estate are soaring in many urban areas. Cities like New York and Vancouver are trying to get the most out of available apartment space by creating "micro" apartments. Many of these apartments are smaller than what was previously allowed under the law.

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Transcript

SHAWN GROFF: It's about 260 square feet... and everything is really compact, it's gotta be multifunctional...

MONA ISKANDER: Shawn Groff is a 26-year-old employee at Whole Foods, who lives in a building that consists solely of what are known as micro-apartments.

SHAWN GROFF: We're standing in every room, we're standing in my kitchen, living room, dining room and my bathroom is just around the corner.

The table comes up....

MONA ISKANDER: His dining room table is also... his bed. For about \$950 a month, he learns to make do with his 260 square foot space.

SHAWN GROFF: If I have company and I need another chair, I can use my coffee table again and maybe even pat it down and they can enjoy as well.

SHAWN GROFF: This is a solution for people like myself, perhaps in the stage of my life where I don't have that many things and don't need that much space. I'm not really home that often. You ask yourself what you really need and if you're honest about that, a lot of things become unnecessary.



Take a tour of a micro-apartment

MONA ISKANDER: He happens to live in Vancouver, Canada one of the first North American cities to embrace the tiny living concept. But the idea is catching on in a number of cities in the United States as well... like Seattle, San Francisco, New York, Boston, Washington DC, Providence and Cleveland... they've all been pursuing projects to develop this new model. It's an idea may be new to North America but countries like Japan have for years looked to micro apartments as a solution to high urban density.

SARAH WATSON: There's very little-- housing restrictions in Tokyo. So, the housing really does correspond with the population need.

MONA ISKANDER: Sarah Watson is the deputy director of a non-profit research group in New York: the Citizens Housing and Planning Council. For the last five years, the organization has been studying new concepts in housing. Watson says the number of people living by themselves in the United States has increased dramatically --- In the 40s and 50s it was less than 10%. Today, that population is closer to 30%. ...people are getting married later, getting divorced at higher rates than they once did and are living longer. And Watson says the supply of housing for single people hasn't kept up with this changing demographic.

SARAH WATSON: If the population changes but there's not housing supply to follow, what happens is people start going underground and living informally. And that's why you see this huge growth in the Craigslist market, people trying to make room in housing stock that's not designed for it.

MONA ISKANDER: And the problem is only going to get worse. For instance, New York's population is expected to rise by approximately 600,000 people by the year 2030. That's about an eight percent increase.

SARAH WATSON: We can't just keep building taller buildings. So, there has to be some new ways to accommodate these people within it.

So this whole space is 325 square feet...

MONA ISKANDER: So her organization lobbied to convince Mayor Michael Bloomberg's administration to consider new types of housing in New York, including micro-apartments, like this one on display at a recent exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York.

MAYOR MICHAEL BLOOMBERG: This is for big cities—particularly cities that attract young people—going to be a very big problem coming down the road, and this is the first step that we're taking to try to find a solution.

MONA ISKANDER: In a city where space is at a premium, Mayor Bloomberg launched a pilot project to be developed on city-owned land on Manhattan's east side. Each of the 55 prefab units will be housed in a single building. And each will be less than 400-square-feet. In order to do that, Mayor Bloomberg said he would waive zoning regulations put in place in the 1980s to protect against overcrowding. Construction is set to begin this December or January.

MONA ISKANDER: So, it's basically an experiment.

SARAH WATSON: Right. It's an experiment. And the city's using it to-- to properly test what happens if you just relieve a few elements, a few controls, really to see what-- the options could be.

MONA ISKANDER: New York's micro-unit building will require that 40% of the units are rented at an "affordable" rate... This being New York, the word "affordable" is relative. The rent for those tiny subsidized apartments will be between 940 and 1800 dollars a month. That's actually quite low for the neighborhood.

JOHN INFRANCA: This for many cities this is actually a selling point.

MONA ISKANDER: John Infranca is a law professor at Suffolk University in Boston who studies affordable housing and land use policy.

JOHN INFRANCA: I think it's good for cities in terms of being able to retain-- young professionals, recent college graduates who might otherwise be priced out of the city. You know, that'll add a certain, you know, dynamism to the city. Boston, for instance, is really pushing that front, that they want to retain their recent graduates who otherwise can't afford to live there. And-- and those graduates are gonna be important for the city's-- broader economy to grow.

MONA ISKANDER: But there has been backlash. In Seattle, community groups have voiced concerns that these units crowd too many people together and that they make neighborhoods less stable as young people come and go. In Vancouver, critics worry that micro-apartments will replace housing for the poor. For example, the apartment building where Shawn Groff lives, used to be a single room occupancy building. Locals complained its residents were being forced onto the street.

MONA ISKANDER: I mean, critics say that these are really geared towards young-- high-income people who are moving to the city for the first time. It's not really addressing the needs of-- lower-middle-income, workers who also need the housing--

SARAH WATSON: A lot of these pilots that are happening in cities are definitely on the higher end-- because they're happening in high value areas, but-- but we believe if you could really think through the design concepts of these small spaces and situate them in other locations, you know, you can-- you're really changing the price point for that. And you can target different populations.

SARAH WATSON: We have a small one drawer dishwasher...

MONA ISKANDER: And Watson believes micro-units make sense for the way many people live today.

SARAH WATSON: There's a reason why this is catching on in the country because, you know, you can live quite comfortably now with your music collection and your-- you know, your books all on-- a very tiny laptop. I mean, it's actually transformed our need for space in the last five years, technology. So, you couple that with new transformable furniture and you can really maximize a small space in a positive way.

*Credits: Renderings of New York micro-apartments courtesy of **nARCHITECTS**.*

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56 comments



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AgentGG • 13 days ago

Just enough room for the human exercise wheel and you can attach a tray of bachelor chow to the window sill.

1 ^ | ▾ Reply Share ▾



Calipenguin • 14 days ago

There's no need to make these ridiculous tiny apartments. Just limit immigration, both legal and illegal. Most of America's population growth comes from immigrants and their children.

1 ^ | ▾ Reply Share ▾



Ann Scott-Arnold • 14 days ago

Absolutely ghastly.

No place for the vacuum, the mop, winter coats and boots out of season....

A foaling stall for a mare is bigger.

Gotta love Bloomberg - we are going to waive the rules on size which were created to prevent over-crowding so we can build itsy-bisty shoeboxes and have over-crowding. (And do it without increasing the capacity of water, sewer, roads,,,)

This is simply stuffing people into small claustrophobic spaces - use to call them tenements in the 19th century and nearly 20th.,

^ | ▾ Reply Share ▾



Sage Blackthorn • 16 days ago

I have often thought about living in a "tiny home" just to save money, so that someday I could purchase a plot of land and build a "green home" to my liking without having to get a loan/mortgage from a bank. I don't even want credit cards or any sort of debt. I want to pay for what I need for my life upfront. I've seen to many people rack up impossibly high credit debts through student loans, mortgages, and credit cards that they never get out from under. But if I can't save money living in a tiny home, then there is no point.

I've also considered building a Tumbleweed house (I think the Tumbleweed Tiny House Co.'s "Fencl" or "Cypress20" designs might suit be best) if I had a place to park it. I could then live there with my girlfriend while we save our money. Sadly, zoning laws in my area prohibit living in such a home full time.... although people do it. I have friends who live in their parent's RV in the backyard, but there is always the threat of fines and possible jail time hanging over their heads. They just can't afford to rent or buy a home in this area, and like me, they don't want to get saddled with a large credit/loan/mortgage debt that they will struggle to pay off.

I've always said there are a lot of things people can do to make their lives easier, it's just that quite a few of their are prohibited by old, out-dated building codes and zoning laws.

2 ^ | ▾ Reply Share ▾



K O • 16 days ago

<http://inhabitat.com/chinese-h...>

hmm... makes me think of this.

2 ^ | ▾ Reply Share ▾



donna • 16 days ago



expensive too ..

[^](#) | [v](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) ›**2guns** • 16 days ago

Form Facebook mob & strategically flood Sal Lake City, UT.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S...>

Rent for \$1/ft

<http://saltlakecity.craigslist...>

Afraid of the polygamist? Don't. There are only about 200,000 residents (whole state only has 3M). With 800,000,000 Facebook members, mob should have their own private US Senator after 1st year!

[1](#) [^](#) | [v](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) ›**DAVID ALAN JONES RIDGE** • 16 days ago

You all could also visit the issues surrounding Tiny Houses. Tiny Houses have been in development since the middle 1970's, and some of them can even be built off of the grid.

[1](#) [^](#) | [v](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) ›**Guest** • 16 days ago

My wife inherited a huge house that used to belong to an enormously rich family. Seven bedrooms, three bathrooms, a humongous kitchen and chef's pantry plus an attached dining room, four balconies ... absolutely breathtakingly beautiful. It also has an attached outbuilding with two servant's quarters. After trying to maintain and keep clean that huge mansion, we've gradually just moved into one of the tiny efficiency apartments. Big houses are for rich people with maids and properties management groups. We're not rich, just the recipients of a house that fell into someone's eyes-bigger-than-stomach restoration pipe dream. A small apartment is a lot easier to keep clean, have guests over to, and keep your head in.

[^](#) | [v](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) ›**Eddie Gatlin** • 16 days ago

Sigh, living micro makes more sense to me now, than it did years ago, but it is kind of hard to move around much in confined spaces. But yeah, a micro life is quite something.

[^](#) | [v](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) ›**Nick** • 16 days ago

My place is about 300 square feet, or maybe a little less. I enjoy it, and I have no difficulty fitting all my stuff in there, or having half a dozen people over for a visit. I look at it as "How small can I go and still be comfortable," rather than "What's the biggest place I can afford?" The smaller, the better. It's just easier that way, I think.

[6](#) [^](#) | [v](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) ›**happyindc** • 16 days ago

I own an approx 350 square-foot apartment in Washington DC. It's perfect. Bed that folds up into wall. Stacked washer and drier. High ceilings, plenty of light. Very low utility bill. It doesn't feel small. In exchange for giving up some space, I have an affordable unit in an area next to plenty of mass transit options. I no longer need to own a car. Stores and restaurants are close by. I mostly walk and bike.

I'm sure small apartments aren't for everyone. For what I paid for my unit, about \$200K, I could have bought a spacious house in another community. My mortgage cost is nonetheless about one third to one fourth below the rental cost of a similar unit in this area. But this isn't about judging housing choices and lifestyles. To each his own. It is about providing options, and, for some, small units are a good one.

[8](#) [^](#) | [v](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) ›**Melete** • 16 days ago

Is "embrace" what one would call le mot juste for "forced to it"? Living in a great city is a grand cultural experience, no question of it. But I wonder if it's worth having to live in a shoebox. A better life is to be had in the fly-over cities.

[11](#) [^](#) | [v](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) ›**Shawn Smith** • 16 days ago

if landlords are worried about the quality of the tenant, then make sure thorough checks are done on potential residents.

[^](#) | [v](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) ›**welingkar** • 17 days ago

At the risk of bringing up those pointless, third world-first world comparisons, I just want to bring to your notice that there are millions of families- not individuals- across the globe who still live in 260 sq ft, 325 sq ft apartments. I grew up in a family of 7, excluding visiting grandparents, who lived in a 225 sq ft apartment, then as we shifted to a 450 sq ft apartment; like many others, in Mumbai.

I know, for Americans who grow up in big houses in suburban sprawls, it seems like a difficult situation. For many families across the globe this is, and will be, a reality for a very long time.

6 ^ | 1 v Reply Share ›



marathag • 17 days ago

For \$950 a month, you can get a 1200sq ft 3 BR house in the midwest, and 15 minute commute to a job that pays better than Whole Foods. Or work at the Whole Foods there

But it's not *trendy*

19 ^ | 2 v Reply Share ›



bigg_brother → marathag • 16 days ago

Why do you automatically assume that he lives there because it is 'trendy?' Could also be selfish motivations like 'family' or 'friends' or perhaps Whole Foods is just a job while he pursues another dream there.

Why did you have to intentionally insult and minimize someone else like that? There was no reason, no reason at all except for your own personal prejudices....

3 ^ | v Reply Share ›



marathag → bigg_brother • 16 days ago

t 250 square for nearly a grand a month, he would be better off living with friends or family in a house, and chip in on their rent.

And if going for that less is more over material possessions, live out of a car, or under a bridge.
Why settle for half measures.

1 ^ | v Reply Share ›



CharlesKGim → marathag • 16 days ago

Not everyone can work in the midwest. There are population and geographic limitations on how many people can work in a certain area.

6 ^ | 2 v Reply Share ›



marathag → CharlesKGim • 16 days ago

And not everyone can live on the West Coast. Population and geographic limits, as well.

That's proved by paying \$950 for an 'apartment' the size of a Midwestern 3br Ranch walk in closet.

8 ^ | 1 v Reply Share ›



bigg_brother → marathag • 16 days ago

You seem threatened by people that do not choose to live in the midwest, I wonder why that is

2 ^ | v Reply Share ›



marathag → bigg_brother • 16 days ago

Wasting money, living out of a box.

But there are good housing deals in areas not just in flyover country.

1 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Henry Major → marathag • 17 days ago

Young people are paying for mating opportunities. One has to avoid making babies with conservatives at all costs, now that it is known that there is a gene for it.

14 ^ | 1 v Reply Share ›



Xira → Henry Major • 16 days ago

It's this liberal feminist propaganda that says that women should wait for prince charming that's going to doom the white race.

He has to be good looking and fit.

He has to have an 'alpha dog' personality (but feminists push all men to act like betas)

He has to make more money (something that's rarer today than ever).

He has to have an acceptable education (at least as much as she does).

He has to be totally 100% nonviolent, not even yelling is allowed (meanwhile, women commit the majority of domestic violence and get away with it).

He has to be willing to do the household chores (in addition to all the yardwork).

He has to be willing to be a servant to his wife (and mother-in-law).

Feminist requirements are higher than ever. Unrealistic in most cases. Women are told they shouldn't settle, so they don't, until they start to get really scared then they jump in bed with the first man who they think will be able to pay child support.

Meanwhile, you have 4 times as many genetic mutations at 35 as at 14. Even if they aren't obvious in the baby you produce they are still there, like genetic landmines waiting to cause problems in future generations.

llltexas.com

2 ^ | 2 v Reply Share ›



JeanSC • 17 days ago

This is a dreadful example to set. There are those of us who have a more normal volume of "stuff," and can't use it if it's stacked up and crammed into something the size of a small public-storage locker. Many people make things like clothing and other home-sewn items; we prefer having a dedicated workshop space where we can leave a project out - and out of the way - overnight for as long as it takes.

Aside from the high rent which, as others here have pointed out, excludes people with both low incomes and little personal property, these micro-apartments tempt people in power to try to impose a caste system on the downtrodden even worse than what already exists in housing. The message is, if your income is too low now, you're not allowed to own much "stuff" because on average, the more square feet you want in your home, the more you have to pay, all other things being equal. There are millions of Americans of good moral character and education who have been beaten down by involuntary unemployment and underemployment, and consider it a type of theft to be expected to shed personal property due to lack of income to secure it somewhere. Homelessness is the worst kind of 'theft' of this kind. We're angry about this. We need a solution which doesn't force us to get rid of stuff unless we really want to.

11 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Henry Major → JeanSC • 17 days ago

What are you talking about? Your beat-up old electronics and your CD collection?

1 ^ | 5 v Reply Share ›



JeanSC → Henry Major • 16 days ago

You're attacking me personally with this slanted question. I'm not going to share my inventory of personal property. FYI any "beat-up old electronics" get properly recycled. My CD collection is tiny; most of the discs I have are DVDs in the field I seek a career in.

I did talk about my home-sewing needs. I make some of my own clothing. I also make leather goods, for other as well as myself. Most of my books aren't available on digital. This takes up space.

3 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Melete → Henry Major • 16 days ago

Read what the OP wrote: this person apparently makes clothes or some similar craft and wants a dedicated space in which to do it. That's a) not unreasonable and b) not storing useless junk.

While it's true that "stuff" takes over our lives, it's also true that jamming people into rabbit warrens does nothing to make their lives good.

12 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Beth • 17 days ago

In the late 60's when I married we lived in a small place like that shown, which had a murphy bed and it was great.

Now as a widow I would appreciate living in that same place again, within walking distance to everything. And it sure was less expensive energywise.

Have loved the small places we saw in Paris, Rome and Japan. Americans became spoiled and wasteful and we should return to smaller wiser living.

And had anyone listened to what the young man said, it works great for him because he isn't at home all the time. Most folks who live in cities are not home a lot, unlike suburban folks who have big homes, and sit and watch tv when they get home from work.

11 ^ | 2 v Reply Share ›



walter17 • 17 days ago

sarah watson is irritating. she's trying to make the viewer think she's lying by purposely looking to the left and right.

^ | 2 v Reply Share ›



walter17 → walter17 • 17 days ago



so please don't give me a thumbs down unless you know my reasons. i do have a psychology degree.

^ | v Reply Share ›



walter17 → walter17 • 15 days ago

my point is that i can spot a liar. especially one that's purposely being deceitful as an expert to justify renting to fools who will pay 900 dollars to live in a cardboard box. that's laughable!

^ | v Reply Share ›



Melete → walter17 • 16 days ago

LOL! So a psychology degree teaches you to be judgmental? That's quite a credential!

7 ^ | 2 v Reply Share ›



walter17 → Melete • 15 days ago

no one cares about your worthless uneducated opinion. how's that for judgemental. lol. and what kind of a stupid name is that?

^ | v Reply Share ›



watermelonpunch → walter17 • 17 days ago

Why do you think she would want to do that?

2 ^ | v Reply Share ›



walter17 → watermelonpunch • 17 days ago

i don't know why? but her non verbal communication tells me she is purposely trying to make herself to look as a liar. no one looks to the left and right that often after every comment. if she's telling the truth she'd looking straight at the interviewer but she's not. she's purposely is looking away to the left and right as though she is forcing herself to do.

1 ^ | 1 v Reply Share ›



walter17 • 17 days ago

micro apartments are for those that can't afford a regular apartment, yet 900 dollars a month is still a lot.

5 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Candid One → walter17 • 17 days ago

That's the "'affordable' is relative" comment in the video. This is the typical example of the true disparity of costs of living across the nation. What passes as "affordable" in one region is "unaffordable" in other regions. In NYC and in San Francisco or Palo Alto, those examples are cheap. An hour's drive away, those rents are too expensive but you use two expensive tanks of gas per week to commute.

Is there something about the American Dream in any of this?

1 ^ | v Reply Share ›



MadSat → Candid One • 17 days ago

That dream died in the 80's. Reagan strangled it by killing the unions, then Bush stomped on it with the S&L bailout, and then Clinton signed NAFTA, which buried it in an unmarked grave. The new American dream is just to stay off food stamps, and it's not possible for a lot of us.

22 ^ | 3 v Reply Share ›



Candid One → MadSat • 17 days ago

Reagan came from California where the Dream began to die in the early Sixties. The neo-Reaganites are currently trying to make it easier to do without food stamps by defunding them. The end became inevitable when people decided that they didn't want to pay full price for it, so they started to reduce the income taxes that pay for the flagship educational systems and the nation's civil infrastructure. We've been not getting what we didn't pay for ever since.

8 ^ | 3 v Reply Share ›



walter17 • 17 days ago

little restrictions needed in Tokyo? that lady is either lying or giving an opinion.

^ | v Reply Share ›



punstress → walter17 • 17 days ago

"There's very little housing restrictions in Tokyo." She didn't say whether they were needed or not. Maybe it's an opinion as to whether the restrictions are "little" or "very little" but I'd guess most people would assume she means very little, compared to US cities.

2 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Christopher R Weiss • 17 days ago

I suppose this is one way to try and keep unwed pregnancies down...

2 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Candid One → Christopher R Weiss • 17 days ago

It's working for all pregnancies.

4 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Mr Lizard • 17 days ago

I don't know why y'all insist on living on top of each other in those giant cities.

9 ^ | v Reply Share ›



bama82 → Mr Lizard • 16 days ago

Both have there perks, cities are the center of culture, great events, jobs, it contains many other interesting people, etc. As a likely adult, you should have the capacity to understand everyone may not like the same things you do.

2 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Henry Major → Mr Lizard • 17 days ago

I dunno, why don't you ask all your friends under the age of 30? They've all moved to the cities.

5 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Candid One → Mr Lizard • 17 days ago

You must live in a small town. Big cities are high-density job centers. After the suburbs are full and commutes begin to exceed two hours one-way, the trade-offs of location versus costs become measurable. Southern California is a prime example of the penalties of suburban sprawl. In the Fifties, some commutes were already exceeding 3 hours (Palmdale to Los Angeles). By the Seventies that quandary was being realized in Silicon Valley as housing was built for 1-hour commutes and then 2-hour commutes, one-way. California's Central Valley offered cost respite from escalating home prices that many middle and working class couldn't afford. When this Great Recession hit, the Central Valley became the home foreclosure capitol of the world. Paradise lost.

BTW, the majority of the US population lives in the nation's megalopolises.

12 ^ | v Reply Share ›



agamemnus • 17 days ago

Because it is pointless to rent a large apartment, and much worse to purchase one as tomorrow your new neighbor might make your apartment unlivable due to noise or other issues. Better to own a mansion and have servants, really.

3 ^ | 2 v Reply Share ›



Candid One → agamemnus • 17 days ago

...on each coast.

2 ^ | v Reply Share ›

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Eric Robertson — Academia has value, but so do other ideas like this one. I for one see employees every day with more education then they need to do the job they are currently doing. I look ...

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16 comments • 21 hours ago



moodpost — I don't think what that means. The tourist money that flows to Co. comes with PEOPLE that bring it, and with no roads, the people cannot come. The money doesn't float in by ...

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2 comments • 2 days ago



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7 comments • 4 days ago



Hodg40 — So 20 % = 800,000 furloughed is deception? That means 16,000,000 for a full shutdown? Is potentially not meaningful to you or maybe remains a deception. I don't care ...



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