

Topics of Interest

MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING: There is a great deal of interest – nationwide and in local communities – in the concept of missing middle housing and its role in meeting community needs for housing affordable to a wide range of households. The term refers to a housing type, characterized by its appearance, density, size, location, and other physical characteristics.

The term often is mistakenly used to describe housing occupied by a certain demographic group, i.e., households with middle incomes who find it difficult to afford housing on the private market. These households do not qualify for federal and state subsidized housing, with incomes just above maximum income limits for such housing. They constitute a growing portion of the country's middle class that finds housing increasingly unaffordable.

Missing middle housing actually is a type of housing which in the past did serve as housing affordable to middle-income households but which, over the last several decades, has become increasingly rare in most U.S. communities. There are numerous factors that have caused this trend of decreasing lack of diversity of housing types available to meet the full range of community housing needs.

Q. What is Missing Middle Housing?

A. The term was first coined by *Opticos Design* founder Daniel Parolek in 2010 to define a range of multi-unit or clustered housing types -- compatible in scale with detached single-family homes -- located in walkable neighborhoods, which help meet the growing demand for walkable urban living. (See website at <https://missingmiddlehousing.com/>). The types of housing are illustrated in the figure below. The term is used without regard to the income of the households occupying the housing.



“Missing middle” refers to the range of housing types that fit between single-family detached homes and mid-to-high-rise apartment buildings. Examples include duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, townhouses, and more. Used in this context, “middle” refers to the size and type of a home, relative to its location – in the middle – on a housing scale spectrum. These homes may be housing units that are rented or owner-occupied. The cost of these homes may vary widely based on style, size, location, supply, and market forces.

There are many benefits to this type of housing. Missing middle homes can:

- Bridge between low- and high-density areas.
- Support walkable neighborhoods and locate enough residents nearby needed to support neighborhood retail and transit options.
- Appeal to a broad range of residents and meet the needs of a diverse and inclusive cross-section of our community, such as:
 - Young adults, who are just starting their careers and families;
 - Growing families who may need an additional bedroom for a child, or an on-site dwelling unit for an older parent;
 - Older adults who wish to age in their current community, near family and friends, and close to shopping and other services;
 - Empty nesters who wish to downsize;
 - Public servants, such as teachers, police officers and firefighters, and support staff, in search of mid-scale homes near where they work;
 - Employees of area businesses who need rental housing nearer to their places of employment.

Q. How would “missing middle housing” help with affordable/attainable housing?

A. There is a growing body of literature concerning Missing Middle Housing. The following discussion is taken from AARP’s Livable Communities initiative (<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/housing/info-2020/missing-middle-housing.html>) and from the publication *Discovering and Developing Missing Middle Housing*. In too many places, walkable, small- to mid-sized housing that's affordable for middle income households can't be found because it no longer exists. Across the United States, there is a mismatch between the available housing stock and what the market wants and needs. Communities and builders are recognizing the need for a shift in the way American homes are designed, regulated and developed. So-called "Missing Middle Housing" is a critical part of the solution.

Missing Middle Housing is, ideally:

- located within a walkable area, close to amenities;
- does not exceed the scale of a house (height, width and depth);
- mixes well with other building types;
- features small but well-designed residences;
- can be for sale or rent;

- creates a sense of community within a building and in the neighborhood.

Such midsized, often moderately priced homes are referred to as missing because very few have been built in the U.S. since the early 1940s. The shortage is largely due to zoning constraints, the shift to car-centric patterns of development, and the challenges of financing multi-unit dwellings. That's a problem because the benefits of this largely missing housing type abound:

- Missing Middle Housing types (also referred to as Middle Housing) provide the size and affordability options that people of all ages — including older adults — very much need but often can't find.
- Since the dwellings are house-scale, the design and size of the buildings fit comfortably among detached single-family houses.
- When a classic but too-large historic home is converted into a multi-unit Missing Middle-style residence, the housing type can help preserve existing houses as well as an area's look and feel.
- The housing type can enable family members to live with or near one another while having their own space or residence.

Created by **AARP Livable Communities** and **Opticos Design**, the publication ***Discovering and Developing Missing Middle Housing*** provides local leaders, building and planning professionals, and involved community members with information about what Missing Middle Housing is, where it still exists, and why it's time for communities nationwide to return this versatile residence type to America's housing portfolio.

Q. What are the barriers to building missing middle housing?

A. With the growing national housing crisis around affordable housing, a number of strategies have been undertaken around the country in the last several years, particularly around zoning reform, to encourage the development of missing middle housing in the private market. It is not yet clear whether these changes will result in a significant number of new homes. The Turner Center for Housing Innovation developed a brief in December 2022 laying out the role of missing middle housing, reviewing notable recent state and local policy changes, and identifying other barriers. The conclusion was that “missing middle housing can be an important part of the overall housing solution, providing meaningful amounts of housing in existing single-family neighborhoods without significantly altering the look and feel of those places... However,... changing base zoning is unlikely to yield meaningful amounts of new housing without parallel policy changes.” (see “Unlocking the Potential of Missing Middle Housing,” David Garcia et al., Turner Center for Housing Innovation, University of California Berkeley, December 2022: <https://turnercenter.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Missing-Middle-Brief-December-2022.pdf>)

Q. Where can I learn more about missing middle housing?

A. The Missing Middle Housing Collection

FROM AARP

- Free Publication: [*Discovering and Developing Missing Middle Housing*](#)
- Free Publication: [*Re-Legalizing Middle Housing*](#)
- Book Excerpt: [*The 'Missing' Affordable Housing Solution*](#)
- Book Excerpt: [*12 Barriers to Missing Middle Housing*](#)
- Photo Gallery: [*Missing Middle Housing Types*](#)
- Article: [*Bring Back Missing Middle Housing*](#)
- Interview: [*5 Questions for ... Daniel Parolek*](#)
- Video: [*Missing Middle Housing: A Video Introduction*](#)
- Video: [*Watch a webinar about Missing Middle Housing*](#)

FROM OTHER SOURCES

- Website: [*MissingMiddleHousing.com*](#)
- Book: [*Missing Middle Housing: Thinking Big and Building Small to Respond to Today's Housing Crisis* \(Island Press, 2020\)](#)

Q. Where can missing middle housing go?

A. Missing Middle Housing types can fit in a variety of places and in a number of streetscape spots. Different types of missing middle housing can be ...

- distributed throughout a block with single-family detached houses;
- located at the end of an otherwise single-family detached block;
- built adjacent to a commercial area as a transition to single-family detached housing;
- placed in an area that transitions from single-family homes to higher-occupancy housing.



ILLUSTRATION: DANIEL PAROLEK/ISLAND PRESS

Q. What about missing middle housing on Cape Cod?

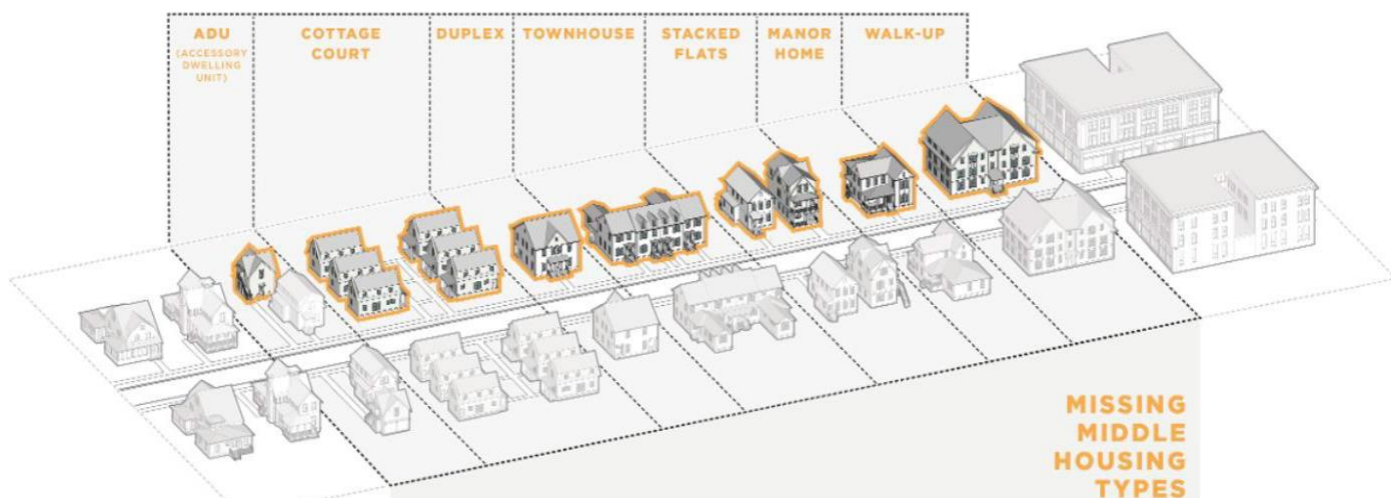
A. Much work has already been done to translate the concept of missing middle housing to the situation on Cape Cod.

- Creative Approaches to Moderate Density - Filling the Missing Middle on Cape Cod: Second Public Presentations, Eastham/Orleans November 8, 2018: As part of a Community Resilience by Design effort, Union Studio and the Cape Cod Commission, undertook a series of presentations and visual preference surveys in several towns on the Cape. The materials from the Eastham/Orleans second session can be found at: https://www.capecodcommission.org/resource-library/file?url=%2Fdept%2Fcommission%2Fteam%2FWebsite_Resources%2Fcrbd%2F18_1023-BCR-SecondPublicPresentations-compressed.pdf
- Cape Cod Multifamily Housing Design Guidelines Building Typologies: these Design Guidelines are meant to extend the unique cultural landscape of Cape Cod into the future, ensure healthy and vibrant spaces, make the Cape more resilient and a contributor to the State's carbon emissions reduction goals, and inspire more predictable built-form outcomes, helping to build support for new housing. https://www.capecodcommission.org/resource-library/file?url=%2Fdept%2Fcommission%2Fteam%2FWebsite_Resources%2Fhousing%2FDesignGuidelines%2FCape+Cod+Multifamily+Residential+Design+Guidelines.pdf
- A Framework for Form-Based Codes on Cape Cod (August 2019): This form-based code framework was developed as part of a larger effort known as Community Resiliency by Design, carried out by Union Studio, the Cape Cod Commission (CCC), and several towns on the Cape. The objective of this effort was to develop a

series of context-appropriate prototype designs that could deliver needed housing options at densities somewhere between the typical single-family, detached house and the large format, multi-family, corridor building that are the dominant forms of residential development today. In many cases these prototypes were based on existing building typologies, such as traditional Cape houses and cottage colonies, that can be found on the Cape, albeit in very limited numbers.

https://www.capecodcommission.org/resource-library/file?url=%2Fdept%2Fcommission%2Fteam%2FWebsite_Resources%2Fcbd%2FFBC-Framework-FINAL.pdf

Adapting building types common on the Cape results in a modification of the missing middle housing typology:



MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING TYPES IN CAPE COD CONTEXT

Source: *Missing Middle Housing Types*, Union Studio Architecture. *Community Resiliency by Design*, Cape Code Commission and Union Studio, September 2, 2022. Accessed July 2023

Q. Where could missing middle housing go in Orleans?

A. Orleans already has the basic physical and regulatory infrastructure in place to allow missing middle housing. In terms of zoning, the Village Center district permits mixed-use commercial and residential development at the densities of missing middle housing. Apartment developments with multi-family dwelling units are allowed in almost all business districts.

The major limitation to the increased density of missing middle housing often is the requirement related to nitrogen discharge from septic systems, which harms ground and surface waters in the area. The public sanitary sewer system currently under

construction has eliminated that limitation in the downtown business districts and will accommodate missing middle housing in additional areas over time.

Orleans' downtown (parts of Main Street, Route 6A and Route 28), currently served by the public sewer system and with the appropriate zoning in place, is in an excellent position to accommodate missing middle housing. A recent buildout analysis of the downtown indicates a capacity to accommodate approximately 1200 new housing units.

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs), which could be considered a type of missing middle housing, are allowed within limits wherever residences are allowed as long as they can be accommodated by sanitary sewer or approved septic systems. Recently ADUs have become increasingly popular locally and nationally to meet housing needs, both of homeowners interested in adding dwelling units to their homes and of renters looking for housing. Many states and localities are taking steps to remove or relax zoning limitations and encourage development of ADUs. Orleans already has taken many of those steps and is a welcoming environment for ADUs.

Q. What is Form-Based Code?

A. *(Discussion is from Form-Based Codes Institute at Smart Growth America: <https://formbasedcodes.org/definition/>).* A form-based code is a land development regulation that fosters predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the organizing principle for the code. A form-based code is a regulation, not a mere guideline, adopted into city, town, or county law. A form-based code offers a powerful alternative to conventional zoning regulation.

Form-based codes address the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. The regulations and standards in form-based codes are presented in both words and clearly drawn diagrams and other visuals. They are keyed to a regulating plan that designates the appropriate form and scale (and therefore, character) of development, rather than only distinctions in land-use types.

This approach contrasts with conventional zoning's focus on the micromanagement and segregation of land uses, and the control of development intensity through abstract and uncoordinated parameters (e.g., FAR, dwellings per acre, setbacks, parking ratios, traffic LOS), to the neglect of an integrated built form. Not to be confused with design guidelines or general statements of policy, form-based codes are regulatory, not advisory. They are drafted to implement a community plan. They try to achieve a community vision based on time-tested forms of urbanism. Ultimately, a form-based code is a tool; the quality of development outcomes depends on the quality and objectives of the community plan that a code implements.

Q. What is the relationship between Form-Based Code and Missing Middle Housing?

A. Housing options are expanded with form-based codes. Depending on the context, form-based zoning can enable communities to build everything from single-family detached housing to high-rise apartment buildings—and all types between. It’s this “in-between” [missing middle housing](#)—duplexes, cottage apartments, townhouses—that can respond to the financial constraints and lifestyle choices of working families today. Conventional zoning, with all its rigidity, often makes these types of housing illegal, hence the moniker “missing” middle. Overall, form-based codes are an excellent tool for facilitating mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhoods with a variety of job and housing opportunities that are universally accessible. (from “*Form-Based Codes: A Means to Equity in a Compassionate City*,” *Form-Based Codes Institute*, June 13, 2019; <https://formbasedcodes.org/form-based-codes-means-equity-compassionate-city/>).