



Missing Middle Housing 101

What is Missing Middle Housing?

Missing Middle Housing is housing that contains more than one unit, but less than 20 units, approximately. New missing middle can be either renter or owner-occupied and is smaller by square foot.

Building types include duplexes, fourplexes and other small apartment buildings, townhouses, condominiums, and accessory dwelling units, and are located within residential areas. Missing Middle is similar in scale to detached single-family homes, but provides more housing units within the same amount of land.

Dane County is experiencing a severe housing shortage. Missing Middle is an important solution that can help add much needed housing stock.

Benefits of Missing Middle Housing

More housing choice for various household types

Missing middle housing provides a range of housing options to fit the needs of different household sizes during various stages of life. For example, missing middle housing can be more accessible to seniors looking to downsize and stay in their community. Townhomes can offer first time homebuyers, young professionals, families, single parents, etc., a less expensive homeownership opportunity, and without the maintenance of a yard or driveway.

More sustainable and less expensive for municipalities

Missing middle is a more efficient use of land because it has more units on less land than single-family only development. If you build 15 townhomes and a 10-unit apartment building there may be two driveways, or an alley way with rear entry, and less curb, gutter and sidewalk - as well as fewer miles of road to plow and maintain vs. building 25 single-family homes with 25 driveways, sidewalk, curb, gutter and road maintenance for those 25 homes. There is also less impervious surface (road and sidewalks), with missing middle housing.

A variety of price points

Although missing middle housing is not traditionally subsidized, it can be more "affordable by design" because the units are often smaller than most single-family homes. It is also more cost effective to build because land and development costs are split among multiple units, decreasing per unit cost and lowering housing prices.

Key characteristics of New Missing Middle Housing

- 1 Buildings similar in scale to single-family homes, or adjacent development
- 2 Contains more than one residential unit
- 3 Units range in size from 1,250 SF - to 600 SF¹

Why is it missing?

Missing middle housing was a common residential housing type and can be found in many older neighborhoods with single-family homes, but has significantly declined since the 1940s. The decline coincided with the rise in single-family zoning during the second half of the 20th century which prohibited development of missing middle housing in new neighborhoods.

The focus on lower density single family housing development has contributed to the national housing shortage by not producing enough units to keep up with population growth and the demand for housing.



¹ Making Missing Middle Pencil: The Math Behind Small-Scale Housing Development, Turner Center. June 2024.

Benefits of Missing Middle Housing

Infill development

Missing middle housing is a good choice for infill development and a way to add more housing supply to your community. Infill refers to parcels of land in or adjacent to residential areas that are either vacant, underutilized, have run down buildings, are odd shaped, and can be used for townhomes, a duplex, or a small apartment building.

Compatibility with residential neighborhoods

New construction of missing middle housing can be designed and scaled to fit the existing neighborhood character through adjusting regulations based on neighborhood context.

Types of Missing Middle Housing

There are many different types of missing middle housing developments that vary by scale, size, and design. The most common types include ADUs, duplexes, fourplexes, small apartments with less than 20 units, townhomes, condominiums, etc.



Duplex (stacked)



Accessory Dwelling Unit



Fourplex



Townhomes



Small Multifamily Courtyard



Condos

Obstacles to Missing Middle Development

A variety of challenges prevent construction of new missing middle housing:

Lack of awareness about what missing middle is, what it looks like, and why it's needed

Development and residential zoning regulations prohibit smaller apartment buildings, ADUs, and townhomes

Density caps, large minimum lot sizes, setbacks, or lot coverage and parking requirements

How to Increase Missing Middle

Update housing chapter of your municipality's Comprehensive Plan and prioritize expansion of a variety of missing middle housing types by name

Issue an RFP for planned development areas, or land that is municipally owned that requires missing middle

Adopt zoning changes such as:

- a. Allow missing middle housing in residential districts by-right (conditional use adds extra costs to the development)
- b. Reduce setbacks and lot sizes; reduce or eliminate parking minimums
- c. Regulate scale instead of density



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