



April 2018

Useful Community Development... quick notes

Inside: Summer Festival Checklist, Policing Survey, Is Your Community Missing Something?

Visit us and explore at <https://www.useful-community-development.org>.



Above: A four-plex in a new urbanist development, using materials, window and door patterns, columns, and colors compatible with development. In the feature article below, we explore missing middle housing. This photo example might suit your locale.

Ingredient Checklist for Summer Festivals and Events

With summer just around the corner and planning underway for some autumn events, we just want to remind you that a successful fair weather festival often includes all or most of these elements:

- good quality food
- shade
- children's activities
- celebrities
- cold beverages
- live music
- convenient parking and/or transit service
- stellar organization of volunteers
- careful selection of dates, hours, and venues
- comfort, in the form of clean restrooms, good signage or maps where people may need directions, and places to sit down
- the right mix of social media, newsletter, television, and print marketing for intended audience
- partner organizations for promotion, funding, tables or booths, and collaborative activities

And do send us a description and photos of your festival so that we can add your event as a page in our [street parties section](#). Then use the resulting page in your social media.

Help Us Gear Up for New Articles on Police Culture

Police behavior, especially toward minorities, has become an explosive issue in almost all major U.S. cities and in many smaller cities as well. We decided not to devote major newsletter space to this issue, but will be incorporating your opinions, our experience, and research findings on this topic into future website articles.

Today we are posting an [online survey](#) of your opinions on the subject and hope to hear from many of you. If you click the above link to the Survey Monkey platform, you can indicate how much you agree or disagree with these statements, which seem to express the range of potential solutions we are hearing:

1. Every city needs a civilian oversight board to conduct investigations of alleged police misconduct.
2. Police recruitment needs to cast a wide net, promoting inclusion of minorities of all kinds and supporting their training.
3. Police evaluations need to be revamped to place emphasis on getting out of police cars to get to know the community and its residents well.
4. Our communities need to be more diligent about providing officers with better mental health support and breaks from especially stressful assignments and after a traumatic event.
5. Elected officials should be more forceful in providing and enforcing clear expectations for police interaction with residents and visitors.
6. Requiring the use of body cameras with audio at all times is part of the solution.

7. Schools and youth organizations need to do a better job of conveying a positive image of police to children and youth and creating opportunities for positive interaction between police and youth.

8. We just need to abolish the police and establish a whole new way of providing for public safety.

If you think we've overlooked another important option, which is entirely possible, please feel free to [contact us](#). Oh, and if you hate surveys, just talk to your family and friends about these ideas.

Many Of Your Communities Are Missing a Certain Type of Housing

Recently a new phrase has been added to our vocabulary--"missing middle housing." While there's a [website of that name](#), we aren't going to be as strict in our definition as those who originated the term. In brief, we use missing middle to mean both "medium" income housing that is in short supply and a "medium" building size that is between single-family homes and an apartment building of six or more units.

Why is this topic important? 1) A wide mix of income categories living in your community has many social benefits, as explained in more detail on our [mixed-income housing](#) page of our website, 2) A range of building types will permit people to rent in your neighborhood in small buildings, providing you a steady pipeline of potential home buyers who grow to love your neighborhood, and 3) To the extent possible, all of our neighborhoods need to accommodate a fair proportion of housing for modest income folks in our entire region.

Some places such as California anticipate a major shortfall of housing in the next couple of decades. Making sure that there is an adequate supply of rentals in architecturally compatible buildings not vastly larger than single-family homes will be the key to meeting the housing demand.

But cities with weak housing markets also may have a missing middle problem. To find out, you'll need to dig into whether the rents of existing housing can meet the demand in every income group.

The "missing middle" rent category in your community might mean housing affordable to households with incomes between \$25,000 and \$60,000. In other markets, it could mean housing that households with incomes from \$50,000 to \$100,000 can afford. The precise income brackets will be different in every city, but every city can recognize its own "missing middle" demographics. Do this by comparing the number of available housing units in different price ranges to the amounts that the community's households can afford while not exceeding 30% of income for housing expenses.

The "missing middle" also usually refers to a medium size and mass of residential building--a size between detached single-family dwellings and mid-rise apartment

buildings that can be acceptable in predominantly single-family neighborhoods. Usually included in these discussions are duplexes, as well as the tri-plex and four-plex, some of which may look like large houses. (These have been dubbed as mansion apartments.) Other places may find appropriate places to add small courtyard apartment buildings, small townhouse buildings, or other small apartment buildings not more than two or three stories high.

Obviously thoughtful design requirements are essential. More about that in a moment.

If you find a considerable gap between the number of available units and the number of households needing units in a particular price range, begin now to create incentives for developers to close that gap. In smaller communities, simply publicizing the gap may result in responsive new project proposals. In larger cities, you should consider advanced zoning techniques that can allow missing middle building types previously excluded.

We especially recommend allowing duplexes, triplexes, and four-family buildings in the single-family district that allows the highest number of units per acre. If that seems unsuitable, even after you rein in community change resistance, you may need to consider applying overlay zones in a few locations with single-family zoning where these smaller apartment types would not be disruptive.

An overlay zone is a map designation that does not change the underlying zoning district. State law may make the creation of overlays a bit easier than an outright rezoning.

Alternatively you could require a special use permit for missing middle housing in certain single-family districts. In this technique the city would change the zoning ordinance to specify requirements for missing middle buildings, but do so in a way that provides certainty for developers meeting those requirements.

If these approaches don't yield any possibilities for you, you might want to create a new zoning district for these smaller missing middle building types, and allow single-family homes as permitted uses in that district as well. Just exclude larger and taller apartment buildings or complexes. Map this new district appropriately. Certainly this zoning district would be appropriate for many vacant land situations.

If you amend your zoning ordinance, consider limiting the repetition of a particular design within a block. Four identical new four-family buildings in a row won't make a typical infill site sing with joy.

Don't ignore the design challenges that this topic presents. As part of the debate the city might consider hiring an architect to produce some illustrative sketches of appropriate and inappropriate building facades and characteristics.

Design guidelines could and probably should be attached to the overlay zone, special use permit, new zoning district, or expanded list of permitted uses.

Below we give you just a tiny taste of what the design challenges might be.



Above: While the building at the left is compatible with its neighbors in terms of materials, the height difference is accentuated because the taller building is on a hill. Its Georgian feature front door also feels a little out of place.



Above: Here the topography makes the three-story missing middle building seem entirely appropriate in terms of height. This photo also illustrates that blocks and neighborhoods with a somewhat eclectic housing stock may be better candidates for missing middle infill than blocks with highly uniform architectural style. But be careful: it's easy to turn eclectic into haphazard too.



Above: While this duplex is compatible with its neighbors in materials, brickwork detailing, mass, and scale, if you are trying to introduce missing middle housing into a completely single-family neighborhood, you may want to beef up landscaping requirements and implement design guidelines that prohibit an obvious faux pas such as the window air conditioners.

We know that political acceptability might be tricky. But as the inventors and proponents of the missing middle housing theory correctly point out, this terminology may be much more acceptable in neighborhoods than talking about density or multi-family housing.

Don't let this conversation become polarized by talking about housing for the lowest income groups, unless that is where your lack of supply truly resides. By the way, our thought is that the lower the income of prospective tenants, the more important high-quality design creativity becomes! Don't let low cost become an excuse for ugliness.

For a graphic that may be helpful in introducing this topic in your community, study the [diagram provided by Opticos Design](#).

Related pages on our own site include [infill housing](#), [accessory dwelling units](#), [local design guidelines](#), [mixed-income housing](#), and [affordable housing](#).

New Website Content This Month: New question and answer pages included [should family farm zoning have been revealed](#), [conditional use](#)

[permit not stating hours of operation](#), [do big streetscape projects bring maintenance headaches](#). We also heard from a site visitor about a large stream clean-up campaign in northwest Ohio, [Clean Your Streams Day](#).
21. Check it out.

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