

# THE PLANNING POST



## FEATURED TOPIC:

*How Missing Middle Housing Creates More Vibrant Neighborhoods: Higher-density housing may be the key to increasingly dynamic and varied neighborhoods*

The attached article from AIA Architect discusses examples of missing middle housing and being more flexible on how it is built with options for mixed density and mixed-use.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS:

*County PC:*

March 13th @ 8:30 am

*City PC:*

March 13th @ 4:00 pm

*County BZA:*

March 25th @ 7:00 pm

*City BZA:*

March 26th @ 6:30 pm

## January Plan Commission Results

No City of Columbus or Bartholomew County meeting due to a lack of agenda items.

## PLANNING DEPARTMENT REPORTS:

### Transportation Planning

The staff facilitated a special Policy Board meeting in January related to transportation construction projects that will begin in the next few years. Board members voted to make adjustments in funding and/or phasing of the projects. Talley Road improvements, a Columbus project, will begin in 2026. Lowell Road Phase 1, a Bartholomew County project, will begin in 2027. As typical with planning and construction costs through the MPO, 80% of the amount is covered by federal agencies, and 20% is paid with local funds.

ColumBUS transit improvements are also being considered in the near future. In January, the MPO Director participated in a process to select a consultant to conduct a study of transit services, and make recommendations for improvements. The fee for this study will be approximately \$50,000, covered by CAMPO.

A Travel Demand Model (TDM) is an important computer-based transportation planning tool developed to evaluate transportation systems in a community through an integrated demand-capacity analysis. It is used to predict future travel patterns, including those for roads, transit, and bicycle and pedestrian traffic. CAMPO's first TDM was developed in 2014 and has been updated several times. CAMPO has contracted with a consulting firm to update the Columbus-area TDM to meet Federal requirements and account for software updates (the cost of the update will be \$60,000, covered by CAMPO).

### Floodplain Management

This month both the City of Columbus and Bartholomew County received notice that their Community Rating System (CRS) Program Rankings were maintained. Both the city and the county participate in the CRS system, which awards flood insurance policy discounts in exchange for communities going beyond the minimum federal standards in Floodplain Management.

Both the city and the county completed their 5-year programmatic review from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), called a cycle visit, in May of 2023. The City of Columbus maintained a Class 7 Rating resulting in a 15% annual discount in premiums and Bartholomew County maintained a Class 8 Rating resulting in a 10% annual discount in premiums.

In addition, the Floodplain Manager also completed the FEMA annual review process of all Elevation Certificates (ECs), which are required to verify that new structures in the floodplain are built with adequate flood protection. There were no completed new/substantially improved residential or non-residential structures built in the floodplain in Columbus or Bartholomew County in 2023, and therefore no Elevation Certificates to include.

## Development Review

Construction for the NexusPark Fieldhouse was recently completed. The Zoning Compliance Certificate authorizing its construction was approved on August 11, 2022. The fieldhouse is 153,012 square feet in size and sits on a parcel that is 9.76 acres that was once an anchor store and parking for the former Fair Oaks Mall. A total of 242 parking spaces will be provided at NexusPark, but overall parking will be shared by the Fieldhouse with CRH medical offices, the Parks and Recreation offices, and commercial tenant spaces, which occupy the remaining portions of the former Mall. *Construction Photo Source: nexuspark.org*

**During Construction**



**Completed**



## Long Range Planning

Planning staff has been busy working on new housing typology definitions to potentially incorporate into the zoning ordinance. The proposed definitions expand the general housing type definitions of single family and multifamily; and define specific housing types. The intent of these definitions is to enhance the overall understanding of “missing middle” housing typologies, and to provide context and encouragement for “missing middle” housing types to be constructed in the City of Columbus. For context, please see a few of the possible, draft definitions below with associated illustrative images:

**Cottage Court:** Detached structures arranged around a shared court visible from the street. The shared court is an important community-enhancing element and unit entrances typically are oriented towards the shared court. *Photo Source: austin.towers.net*



**Dwelling, Patio Home/Cluster Home:** Small freestanding structure close to the neighbor or part of a unit of several houses attached to each other, typically with shared walls between units, and with exterior maintenance and landscaping provided through an association fee. *Photo Source: www.smithwilson-group.com*

**Dwelling, Live-Work:** Properties that combine residential and non-residential uses in either commercial or residentially zoned areas, providing living quarters for the business owner on the property. *Photo Source: www.kronbergua.com*



**Dwelling, Medium Scale Multi-Family:** A structure designed for and occupied by 11, but no more than 50 families, with the number of families in residence not exceeding the number of dwelling units provided. The term dwelling, small scale multi-family may also include multiple buildings on one site. Typically utilizes on premise surface parking, and surrounding on-street parking.

**Dwelling, Fourplex:** A multifamily home designed to house four separate families under one roof. Units can be side by side or stacked on top of each other.



**JOKE OF THE MONTH:** Q: What do lawyers wear to court? A: Lawsuits.



**CITY OF COLUMBUS - BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT**

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# How Missing Middle Housing Creates More Vibrant Neighborhoods

## Higher-density housing may be the key to increasingly dynamic and varied neighborhoods.

By KATHERINE FLYNN FOR AIA ARCHITECT



*Torti Gallas + Partners Torti Gallas's Church Hill North development in Richmond, Virginia*

From the curb, “missing middle” housing might not look much different from its single-family counterparts—and that’s the point. However, its ability to contain multitudes is what makes it such an innovative option in today’s cost-prohibitive and space-strapped housing market. This typology enlivens neighborhoods and communities without sacrificing single-family scale or the convenience of neighborhood walkability. It’s also what Brian O’Looney, AIA, of Washington, D.C.-based Torti Gallas + Partners, specializes in designing. O’Looney credits Dan Parolek, AIA, an urban designer and architect at California-based Opticos Design, with coining the term.

O’Looney spoke to attendees on this topic at AIA’s 2023 Conference on Architecture, held in June in San Francisco, in a session titled “Enriching Neighborhoods: Building Types for Community Beyond the ‘Missing Middle.’” He encouraged AIA and its members to take a stand for better design in missing middle housing, which, he believes, can support more varied and dynamic neighborhoods.

We chatted with O’Looney about why this typology is becoming increasingly necessary.

### **First of all, why is missing middle housing important?**

Our current housing stock—and its accompanying economic system—is improperly oriented to single-family housing. Younger generations are struggling to afford and access this type of housing, making the innovation of alternative housing types essential. Compounding the issue is the fact that within the last decade, increasing numbers of single-family homes have been built and/or purchased by institutional investors—making wealth accumulation out of reach for millions of Americans.

At the beginning of the pandemic, I released a book [Increments of Neighborhood: A Compendium of Built Types for Walkable and Vibrant Communities] of 140 building types that make good walkable communities. It’s broader than what is typically defined as the “missing middle.” There are a lot of housing types that allow for multifamily living aside from a large, institutional, multifamily building. So, there are scales of residential buildings that are below institutional, but there are also a lot of types that aren’t in the conversation—residential over ground-floor retail, for example.

At one point, according to urbanist Christopher Leinberger, there were 19 types of structures that were built (and financed) in a typical suburban development, all of them served by surface parking lots. None of them allowed for any type of mixed density or mixed-use development: for example, building types that mix residential and retail—or what I call “live-work”—or structures that are served by stacked parking garages or public transit. In the last 10 to 15 years, innovations in this type of housing have gained traction in and around major metropolitan areas. However, just because you loosen the definition for “missing middle,” it doesn’t mean you’re going to get good buildings. There’s a lot of crappiness out there.

### **What are some bad examples of missing middle?**

A few examples include the Bayonne box, named after the area in New Jersey where it originated, which is top-heavy and vehicle-oriented, so it doesn't look great from the sidewalk. The "snout house" features an unwelcoming front wall, and "pop-up" row houses in Washington, D.C., tower several stories above their neighbors on either side.

### **What are some good examples of this type of housing?**

There's a great project called the Cotton District in Starkville, Miss., which is a student neighborhood built by someone who just kept adding rental buildings to an existing student housing development. Some are one-room studios, others are lofted units with a kitchen on the ground floor and a bathroom above. It's a very clever mix of types.

Other good examples include the two-over-two town house, basically a row house divided into two two-story units, and Charlestons, which offer balcony access. A variety of mixed-type master plans allow for flex space between retail and residential spaces, like several projects I've worked on with the grocery store chain Safeway in Washington, D.C., featuring a grocery store on the bottom and housing on the floors above. In the Lightsview development of Adelaide, Australia, even with front-loaded homes, the pedestrian scale still has primacy.

Other types are more complex self-park types: so alley-loaded types that have three units in them and are very dense, but on the street side feel like houses.

Some of the projects we've worked on go a little bit beyond our typical live-work typology. The conventional live-work building usually has about 900 square feet on the ground floor. If you can combine the buildings side-to-side, you're able to get tenant sizes that work for other types of tenants besides hair salons and nail salons, which are typically found in this type of structure.

Some other good neighborhood types that supplement this kind of development type are full-service grocers on the second level, so you can park below. There are some wood office buildings that people don't realize you can do as long as you stay below height restrictions. These allow for neighborhoods that are less homogeneous.



*Torti Gallas + Partners Milwaukee's Westlawn Gardens is a high-density project conceptualized to meet the needs of a variety of individuals and families.*

**There have been a lot of conversations recently about converting underused office buildings into housing. What's your experience with this?**

I call certain areas “stagnation zones” when they’re not living up to their potential for housing as a result of unnecessary zoning distinction and regulation between office and residential uses.

Design issues like “buried bedrooms”—bedrooms on interior walls that don’t have windows—are easily solved by utilizing elements like frosted-glass pocket doors to allow more light in. The greatest challenges for these types of conversions are regulatory, not design-centric. I’m in favor of eliminating regulatory red tape to make these types of conversions easier for building owners to complete.

So much of this is about mobility. One of the things that we talk about in the firm is how, if we provide surface parking for a project, privatized mobility hurts the yield of the site.

**There's a preconception that it can be tough to get these types of projects financed. Is that the case?**

The typical finance mechanism that's being used is an FHA loan. Most people don't know this, but the single-family lenders can lend [for development up to and including] fourplexes. So that's an easy loan mechanism that's out there. When you talk about missing middle and getting it financed easily and quickly and empowering folks to do it, that's the No. 1 way. I'm not the expert on that. I would point anyone to the [Incremental Development Alliance]. Accessory dwelling unit allowances are a second mechanism. You can easily get your home refinanced and build an ADU.

Jurisdictions like Bryan, Texas, have predesigned unit types. They've hired architects to do some designs for multiunit buildings that look like houses. You can just go to the city and pick up the set of plans, and if you're a landowner, you'll have a preapproved set of contract documents that allows you to build.

There's definitely a lot of passion for this type of growth. There's been a proliferation of ADUs in California and in cities like Portland, Ore. Getting involved in master planning preapproved ADUs and other missing middle housing types can give architects an opportunity to carve out a niche for themselves in a space where they've previously been excluded.

If there are new financing streams that come into play for these buildings, you'll start to see them happen. There are organized YIMBY communities that are going to push for this, which I'm very hopeful and excited about.