

David A. Olson

From: DEBORAH J CROSSLEY
Sent: Sunday, January 3, 2021 6:08 PM
To: David A. Olson
Subject: Fwd: The Missing Middle, part I

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Please forward this email to the whole Council and Planning Board members.
Along with this note:

For folks wishing to learn more about “missing middle” housing and how this can be facilitated by rezoning in an already built community, see the Montgomery County Planning department’s 2018 publication: “Missing Middle Housing Study”

This was in our packets this past summer as #88-20 background reading materials. It provides a well written and illustrated overview including metrics, typical challenges, features and benefits, case studies and economic analysis.

Happy New Year
Deb

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Sean Roche
Date: January 3, 2021 at 11:08:34 AM EST
To: Pam Wright <pwright@newtonma.gov>
Cc: Alicia Bowman <abowman@newtonma.gov>, "Alison M. Leary" <aleary@newtonma.gov>, Brenda Noel <bnoel@newtonma.gov>, zlemel@newtonma.gov, Barney Heath <bheath@newtonma.gov>, Deb Crossley <dcrossley@newtonma.gov>, Holly Ryan <hryan@newtonma.gov>, Joshua Krintzman <jkrintzman@newtonma.gov>, Lisle Baker <lbaker@newtonma.gov>, Susan Albright <salbright@newtonma.gov>, Victoria Danberg <vdanberg@newtonma.gov>
Subject: The Missing Middle, part I

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Councilor Wright,

At the 9/14 meeting of the Zoning and Planning (ZAP) committee, you had some questions about the "Missing Middle." I would like to propose a way of applying the Missing Middle framework to Newton.

First, the Missing Middle framework, while it seems to be gaining some currency in planning circles, is basically a framework developed by an architect and planner, Dan Parolek, and used by his firm, Opticos Design. I'm a big fan of the thinking, but it's not a rigid planning system that we have to use in whole or reject in whole.

Rather, we should look at the problems Parolek is trying to solve with the Missing Middle framework and understand to what extent we have the same problems. And, we should look at the tools and constraints of the Missing Middle and understand how we can use the tools to make Newton better and decide which constraints should apply.

Having read much of the Missing Middle material, watched some webinars, and listened to some podcasts, I think it's safe to say that Parolek is trying to solve what he sees as the problem of neighborhoods within walking distance of amenities with only detached, single-family homes. Parolek has three key insights:

- We used to have a mix of housing types in those neighborhoods, but have not been building them since the advent of Euclidean zoning
- People genuinely enjoy living in these neighborhoods with mixed housing types
- These modestly scaled housing types -- duplexes, triplexes, garden apartments -- are entirely compatible with detached single-family homes

Without a mix of housing types, we do not meet the demand for housing in walkable neighborhoods. In particular, we need a mix of housing types because not everyone wants, needs, or can afford a single-family home. (I'll pick up on affordability in another email.) For instance, young professionals and seniors, in particular, do not need single-family homes. But, we want young professionals and seniors in our city and we know that they would like to live in walkable neighborhoods.

Back to Parolek's argument: there are a mix of housing types that nicely co-exist with single-family homes in the same neighborhood. I think that there is a fundamental misunderstanding about the Missing Middle types diagram.



The diagram suggests that we need zones *without* single-family homes, between more urban-like density and single-family-only zones. But, in other places Parolek and others make clear that the missing-middle housing types work *because they are compatible with* single-family homes.

Understood this way, I think that Parolek is spot on. We need to have more housing-type options within walking distance of amenities. In Newton, that should be within walking distance of commercial areas and within walking distance of transit. We don't talk about it much, but if we think about denser walkable neighborhoods as reducing the need to drive, we should also probably include within "amenities" other big trip drivers, like schools and parks.

A limitation of the Missing Middle framework is its focus on walkable neighborhoods. Parolek seems to accept that there will be neighborhoods of detached, single-family-only homes outside of walking distance to amenities. I would not have Newton accept that constraint. Arguably, what many on ZAP refer to as our more-suburban areas need a greater variety of housing types, too. If we are going to apply Missing Middle thinking to Newton, I suggest we expand its application to the entire city.

But, *pace* the decision to move to a more topic-based approach to Zoning Redesign, it is possible to first consider the Missing Middle in the context of neighborhoods near amenities and then consider it in the context of the rest of the city.

In sum, the important takeaways:

- **The Missing Middle is a useful framework that we should use to help solve Newton's problems**
- **The Missing Middle is not a rigid framework that we must apply in one certain way or another**
- **The Missing Middle should be thought of as housing types that we need to include with single-family homes near amenities, not necessarily as a transitional zone *to* single-family homes**

Thank you.

Sean Roche

When responding, please be aware that the Massachusetts Secretary of State has determined that most email is public record and therefore cannot be kept confidential.