



# MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

BROADENING THE ECONOMIC DIVERSITY OF DECATUR'S NEIGHBORHOODS



## NEW TERM, TIMELESS IDEA

An inclusive community includes housing tailored to all stages of life — recent graduates, young professionals, working couples building careers, growing families, or those divorced or retired. Housing serving those for whom a single family home is impractical, unaffordable or unwanted has been termed the *Missing Middle*.

It may be a new and unfamiliar name but you're already familiar with what it is because it's prevalent in Decatur's existing neighborhoods. Every time you see a small-scaled multi-family building — a duplex, triplex or quad, for instance — you're seeing the Missing Middle. From the outside, they're comparable or compatible in size to single-family homes and yet they offer a place in our neighborhoods for middle income and workforce individuals and families who don't qualify for mortgages that start well above their pay range.

**Why did Decatur outlaw such units in 1988?** Communities go through stages, like a life-cycle: distressed/ deteriorating, stabilizing, revitalizing, and gentrifying. Different stages require different approaches. In the late 80s Decatur was struggling with deteriorating units and absentee owners and the code was changed to increase owner-occupied, single-family housing to stabilize our local housing market.

**What has been the impact?** The transition to only single-family homes has had unintended consequences of decreasing racial and economic diversity in Decatur. Decatur has lost over 400 missing middle 2-4 unit homes, incomes over \$150,000 have increased by 307%, the number of homes with 5+ bedrooms has increased by 300%, and the number of residents age 18-34 has decreased by over 2,600 people in this time period. Population is projected to grow by over 10,000 by 2040, giving increased urgency to create housing for a diversity of people and stages of life. (data: U.S. Census Bureau, Atlanta Regional Commission). From October 2010-2022, home sale prices increased in the City of Decatur from just over \$300k to over \$800k.\*

**Why did the Affordable Housing Taskforce recommend to re-allow duplexes, triplexes and quads in Decatur's neighborhoods?** The actions taken in the 80s were responsive and pragmatic at the time, but they were also rooted in racism and even classism. Today, we find ourselves in a wholly different scenario where the disinvestment of the past has been replaced by widespread gentrification.

There's presently no meaningful way to address this problem. The vast majority (70%) of Decatur's land is zoned for single-family only. Without rethinking our notion of what a neighborhood is and who it's for, we'll continue to become a community defined solely by its affluence. Economic diversity is only possible through housing diversity.

\*Adams Realtors Intown Market Report



Renovated quadplex, Decatur, Georgia



Historic Single Family Conversion, Decatur, Georgia



New construction duplexes, Reynoldstown, Atlanta

**How would this recommendation broaden economic diversity?** The Task Force's recommendation would expand compatible options in how homebuilders and affordable housing providers like the Decatur Land Trust can meet demand. In turn, it would diversify the home types and prices available where people want to live and thus restore the broader income diversity that was once the hallmark of our neighborhoods. This will increase the number of more *attainable*, middle-income homes at market rate, and increase the ability of *affordable* housing providers to create smaller affordable units.

The recommendations increase choice and flexibility for Decatur homeowners as well by allowing existing homes to be subdivided into additional units. This creates downsizing and additional income opportunities for the homeowner and rental or home ownership possibilities for middle income and workforce earners.

**Why is Decatur considering this zoning change?** The need for workforce housing, a diversity of price points for all stages of life, smaller homes, and housing for young professionals and downsizing seniors is a central theme in Decatur's comprehensive and strategic plans in 2008, 2010, 2014 (community forum on the missing middle), and 2020. **The missing middle zoning policy proposal is a way to put years of community input into action.**

In addition to community input, city staff has researched **best practices** in many cities which have re-allowed missing middle housing types and have seen success incrementally from this policy change. Staff has also looked to the **experts**, including the **American Planning Association** and the **AARP**, who enthusiastically support ending exclusionary zoning and removing barriers to missing middle housing types. Missing middle is considered a type of "urban infill" - projected to be one of the most important **climate initiatives** to curb greenhouse gas emissions - by densifying and creating inclusion in walkable, connected, amenity-rich cities (U.N. Report "The Weight of Cities" [www.resourcepanel.org/reports/weight-cities](http://www.resourcepanel.org/reports/weight-cities)).

### Decatur's Community Outreach

City of Decatur Staff began a two-year outreach program in January of 2021. Past recordings of information sessions as well as q&a can be found at [www.decaturga.com/affordablehousing](http://www.decaturga.com/affordablehousing).

**What's next?** The Decatur City Commission will vote on the proposed missing middle ordinance on **Tuesday, January 17th** at their 7:30PM Commission Meeting. A second vote will be held on February 6th.

**What can I do?** Attend the City Commission meeting (1/17 at 7:30PM). Location: City Hall rear entrance, 509 N. McDonough St. A work session on Short Term Rentals will begin at 6:30PM. Email your Commissioners [www.decaturga.com/citycommission/page/meet-commissioners](http://www.decaturga.com/citycommission/page/meet-commissioners).

If you have questions about the proposal, contact [Kristin.Allin@decaturga.com](mailto:Kristin.Allin@decaturga.com).

**81%**

**Percent of residents who see a strong connection between housing choices available in our neighborhoods and the diversity of our community.\***

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *Will my property values decrease?*

Studies show that unless affordable housing is concentrated in a declining area, it has no effect on nearby property values. Mixed-income neighborhoods have been found to maintain value and be attractive to residents. We know this to be true, given the historic Missing Middle units that already exist within Decatur's highly desirable areas.

### *What about traffic impacts?*

With their modest size and density, Missing Middle housing types present minor, if not negligible, traffic impacts. In many cases, duplexes, triplexes and quads produce a similar number of vehicles as surrounding homes which, given working families with teenage children, can often have their own multiple associated drivers and vehicles.

### *What about large institutional investor concerns?*

Due to the high cost of land, Decatur has not seen significant impacts from investor home purchases. Large investors purchase single family homes, typically in need of repair and in areas with a low median household income, at a price point not found in Decatur.

### *Will single-family homes still be allowed?*

Yes, the ability to build a single-family home will not change.

### *What about impacts to the City Schools of Decatur?*

In addition to the data from the City Schools of Decatur that shows a gradual decline in enrollment, data shows that duplex/triplex/quadplexes are typically smaller and have fewer bedrooms than new single-family construction, attracting more diverse residents: empty nesters, singles, and younger couples with fewer or no school age children. Consider the historic examples of these types scattered around the city which, in the majority of cases, house fewer children than the single family homes that surround them.

### *What about parking?*

Regardless of housing type, Decatur typically requires the availability of one space per individual dwelling unit which is not expected to change. As with single-family homes, developers will also have the option of providing additional parking at their discretion. On street parking serves as a traffic calming measure in neighborhoods.

### *Will this increase gentrification?*

Decatur is considered a city in "late stage" gentrification. The strategy for cities that are already gentrified is to provide more inclusive housing types to "bring people in" as well as to assist the legacy residents who remain.

### *How many are projected to be built or converted per year?*

Based on data from cities that have re-allowed missing middle, the estimate is 3-10 units built or converted per year in Decatur.

### *What about short-term rentals (STRs) such as VRBO and AirBNB?*

The city will address community concerns with a new STR policy.

\* As demonstrated on the Decatur Missing Middle Housing Survey, conducted 2021.